

Scottish Child

February/March 1991

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Women Poets



**tears
and protest**

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THAT DIE EVERY
TWO MONTHS
IS THE SAME
NUMBER YOU
USE TO STOP IT.**



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Scottish Child

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The promised feature on Taking Charge - how we learn to participate in the political process has proved not possible for this issue. Apologies. Next time certainly.

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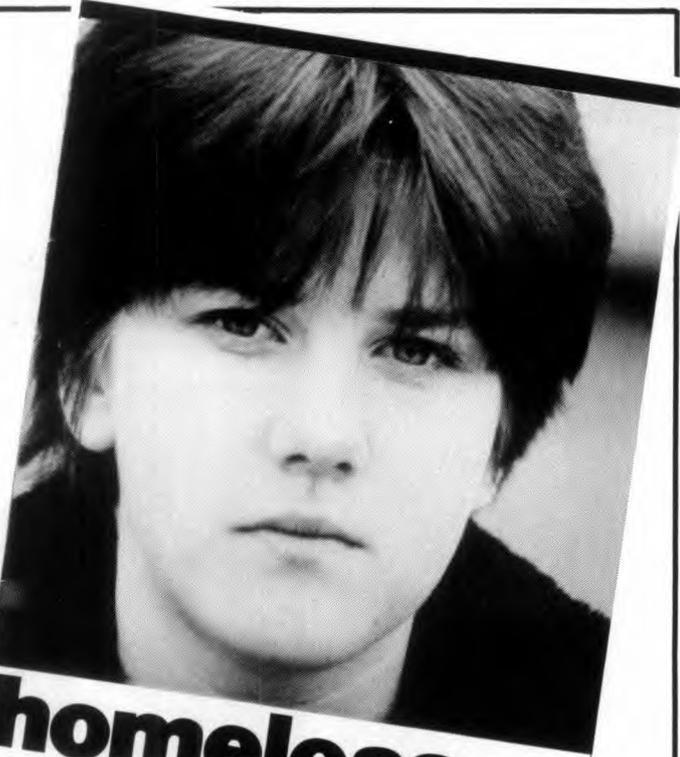
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Colin Chalmers



homeless voices

the experience of homeless teenagers in Scotland **Scottish Child**

'It's not because I'm spoilt or I'm immature that I won't go back, it's because I can't live in that house'.

In HOMELESS VOICES teenagers tell us directly about their experience of homelessness. How hard it can be leaving home, even when home meant violence or abuse; the difficulty of getting somewhere to stay, when no one seems to care; how friends help each other out, and make it all bearable. And they tell us of their hopes - simple hopes that society seems unable, or unwilling, to meet.

This large, A3 format, well-illustrated report offers a unique, and deeply moving insight into youth homelessness in the 90s - the homeless teenagers speaking here represent thousands more throughout the country. Their voices are ones that should be heard by anyone who wants to understand the reality behind the myths of youth homelessness.

'The voices of young homeless people in this report bear witness to the real horror of youth homelessness.'
Sheila McKechnie, Director of Shelter

Please send me _____ copies of HOMELESS VOICES, price £2.50 (plus £1 p&p) each.

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The Waiting Game

There's no telling whether, when you read this, we'll have been through hell in the Gulf, we'll still be in it, or we'll still be waiting for something to happen.

And it's this last five or six months of waiting, perhaps more than any other aspect of the new post-Cold War uncertainty, that evokes the political spirit of the age. The population waits; the leaders make the decisions. The people watch; and events, as if independent of - and unreachable by - the popular will, happen.

The waiting/watching mode is increasingly all that is required of the citizenry these days. It is a passivity that has its costs. Be it in economic activity, in local government, or in organisational day-to-day life, the cost of distance from decision-making is widespread demoralisation - 'what I say won't make any difference'.

And the cost in terms of a depressed citizenry for the leadership of our institutions of state, commerce, and public life is the slide into even greater centralised control, the denial of the democratic voice.

If this aura of depression is the state of the public mind across the board, then it's as well to acknowledge it. Because without acknowledging the despair, there is no real possibility of getting in touch with the obverse emotion of anger.

So while even the official opposition and of course the mainstream media invite us to 'accept the inevitable', SCOTTISH CHILD, free of the suffocating constraints of vested interests, has no such intention.

editorial

Writing in this issue on the theme of Tears and Protest, Kay Carmichael traces passivity and despair to their early origins in cultures like our own where we have such an aversion to tears - they're embarrassing; they're upsetting; they're whinging. The point is that tears are the beginning of not accepting the world as we find it; they can be the first stage of any process of change. Hence authority, be it parental, institutional, or political, often feels it has to stop people crying. Kay Carmichael argues for the importance of counting our tears, and we announce a Tears and Protest event to take place this Spring.

As well as more pieces of new writing, - always a source of uncensored truth - our 'new voices, new writing' series includes in this issue an essay by Glasgow author James Kelman which examines the context, after the Year of Culture, in which writing and other forms of expression takes place. The version here appeared in the recently published collection, THE RECKONING, compiled by the Workers City group.

This grouping questions the concept of the City of Culture, and draws attention, among other things, to the public costs. For such an initiative, they have been angrily rejected by the City's ruling Labour administration, and all of the press, as 'anarchists and misfits'. Which suggests they're probably onto something!

But whether we agree with a view or not, we have to defend the right of people to express it. And in any case you won't find a stronger analysis in Scotland or in Britain of the commercialisation of ideas than James Kelman's published here.

Our own efforts in December to enable some young people to have a say about their plight - though widely applauded - didn't suit some people in the housing sector. And Colin Chalmers, the report's editor, reflects on this. SCOTTISH CHILD will not be intimidated by efforts to get us to toe a party line. Young homeless people, many of whom have nothing to learn about expressing their anger, deserve that at least some members of adult society take their feelings seriously.

They have learned too that in the passive waiting game, we are all losers.

Derek Rodgers



A Problem Shared...

PARENTS

"You learn the sort of skills everyone should have - skills that should really be taught in schools." One of the fathers enrolled in the new Parent-Link group in Edinburgh talks highly of the experience. And the significance of the skills learned in these parent support meetings, he feels, stretches well beyond parenthood.

"They don't just apply to children. They're as valuable in the office as they are in the home. Once you've got them no-one can take them away because they come from you having a better understanding of yourself. To me, these are what I'd call skills for life."

'Parent-Link' is a network of self-help groups for parents or any adults living or working with children. Until last autumn

there were no such groups in Scotland. Now there are two, both based in Edinburgh but drawing their membership from across the country.

The main instigator of this development in Scotland has been Vivien Brett, who came to live in Scotland four years ago, leaving behind her in St Albans the experience of being part of a Parent-Link group and feeling that it was a source of support she wanted to recreate.

Parent-Link groups form initially under the guidance of a trained coordinator, also a parent, to do twelve sessions of work on all aspects of parenting. A great deal of emphasis is placed on learning the skills of listening and acknowledging and understanding feelings. There is a fee for the start-up course but thereafter groups can continue to meet in a range of different ways, to give continuing support to each other.

So far in Edinburgh Vivien Brett admits that the groups are composed of adults drawn from the 'professional' classes. But in defence of that, she also points out that middle class people are frequently taught to conceal their feelings of inadequacy, to hide their uncertainties and to project an image of caring competence. Parent-Link is a place where that myth of the 'super-parent' can be blown away and with it the feelings of isolation which afflict parents regardless of class or income.

She emphasises that this is not just a group for people managing the demands of the toddler or the anxieties of a first baby. Parents with children at widely different stages of development attend and many who come along with older children express a wish that they could have had this support long before. Group members are quick to describe the improvement in their relationships with children,

often because they have become clearer about the status of their own needs in relation to those of their child. Boundaries are drawn by the parent in a calmer, more rational way and the child responds positively to the tone set by the adult.

The Scottish movement is as yet barely established but there are hopes of forming another group after Easter and beginning the training of Scottish coordinators before the end of the year.

The Parent Network has its headquarters at 44 Caversham Road, London. Anyone wishing to know more about Parent-Link or interested in joining a group should contact Vivien Brett on 031-556 4743. Further north, Irene Jamieson is looking to start a group in Inverness. She can be contacted on 0667-53815. ■

Rosemary Milne

Anybody Listening?

HOMELESS VOICES

The launch of **Homeless Voices**, **Scottish Child's** report in which homeless teenagers talk about their experiences, was a great success. The report - produced in conjunction with Scotland's emergency hostels for homeless young people - brought the media out in force. It also brought along the young people who had made the report possible - about 40 teenagers from throughout Scotland turned up to make their demands for a better future crystal clear.

In many ways it was a unique event, bringing together homeless young people, workers in the field and journalists to discuss the realities of youth homelessness - and dispel a few myths. And it was the young people themselves who set the agenda. As one of the teenagers who opened the main discussion put it,

"We're not interested in charity, we don't want people to feel sorry for us. I'm angry because of the way I've been treated, I'm angry that so many young people haven't got homes, and I want something done about it. We want our rights, not charity".

The message from homeless young people, clearly voiced in the report and at the launch, is that they want to be taken seriously, not patronised by fair-weather, charitably-minded friends; that they are asserting their right to food, clothing and shelter, and do not want to be treated as freeloaders for doing so; that things are tough, and adults are responsible.

It was a message taken on board by the Glasgow **Evening Times** which, in an editorial accompanying two pages of extracts from the report, accepted that these young people had been "failed by everyone" and that "official attitudes, to say the least, border on the complacent".

But this is not a view universally held. For many, it is more comforting to see these young people as objects of pity, rather than individuals who have often shown enormous courage in the face of domestic terror and bureaucratic abuse. And when young people get a chance to voice their frustration and anger at the adults and institutions that have let them down time and time again, many adults and institutions get positively indignant. They seem more concerned with playing down the

problems, or blaming young people for them, than accepting the grim reality that our society is not meeting many young people's basic needs.

So it's probably not surprising that some people didn't like **Homeless Voices**. One campaigning agency objected to our "slants towards significant criticism" of their particular local authority, and major funder. Another agency - criticised in the report by a teenager - phoned us up to complain about us publishing the comment, asking us why we insisted on using agencies' real names. They told us that they 'knew' the young person was not telling the truth - their staff were well-trained, and would not act in such a way. They didn't like the language, and "we had thought of subscribing to **Scottish Child**, but we don't think we will now". Blame the messenger...

Unfortunately, it's a familiar theme. 'Our big city has the best policy'; 'our small town doesn't have the same problems as the big cities'; 'our social work department is enlightened'. Of course many people are working hard, in difficult situations and with few resources, to 'manage' an enormous problem. But why is it so shameful to admit the en-

ormity of the problem, and our inability to cope with it? For it is only by accepting the reality that we will be able to begin to change it. Instead, too often, it is easier to see the kids themselves as being the problem.

Not that much different from home for a lot of them, I bet.

Even **Shelter (Scotland)** appears to be missing the target. In their 1990 Progress Report they blame young people's lack of knowledge for the fact that there are no houses for them - "There is a crying need to educate young Scots about all aspects of housing and homelessness, to allow them to make informed and intelligent choices and to prevent them from reaching crisis point... Too often young people are becoming homeless because they do not know what to do to prevent the situation".

It's not more facts - for ourselves, with endless surveys, or for teenagers, with videos about how to avoid becoming homeless - that are needed - it's action, to provide the basic housing and support that our young people need. And it's not **Scottish Child** that's saying that: it's Scottish children. ■

Colin Chalmers



Meeting to launch the Homeless Voices report, Glasgow, December 1990

Oliver Brookes



Shiel Yule

Taming Mr. Toad

OUT-LINE

Remember Mr. Toad, Kenneth Grahame's megalomaniac, who was never the same again after he'd heard the 'poop-poop' of a motor horn? *The Wind in the Willows* was written when the car was something new in British society, and not much liked. Raising dust, blighting cottage gardens, killing chickens, scaring children, the early motorists were loathed as an arrogant and overprivileged minority. Hence 'Mr. Toad'.

Things have of course changed in the last eighty years, with the growth in private transport. Mr. Toad rules; and if you get in his way, Mr. Toad kills.

As a society we don't like the car quite so much as we once did. Air pollution, accidents, the threat to the ozone-layer: the disadvantages of motorisation are now such that even the present government, which drools over 'the great car economy' admits that the problem has to be brought under control. Yet any such action has always to be accompanied by a litany to the effect that such disadvantages are purely marginal, the car has created new dimensions of personal mobility, etc., etc.

I was brought up in the Scottish Borders and my father bought his first car when I was ten. At that time there were about 350,000 cars on Scottish roads, about the same as before World War II. At age five and six my sister and I were free to wander round the village, in and out of the schoolyard. Cars were few, slow and noisy. The arrival of a bus was an event.

My experience at this and age and those of my daughter, now eight, could not be more different. Where I live in London, the streets are packed with vehicles in the rush-hour. When they empty a bit, they are used as racetracks by big fast cars en route to and from the City. No way am I going to let Alison out on her own.

That is the line taken by practically all the parents at her primary school. Lollipop men/women are as much a part of the past as the Tufty Club - or that *Picture Post* photograph showing an elderly policeman, rigid with grief and shock, holding the bent frame of a trike of a little girl killed by a car. That was taken in 1954, the same year as my father bought his 1937 Wolseley.

I am not a motorist. I suppose

I could, in an emergency, drive, but I hated it when I tried to learn. I sat uncomfortably at the wheel, became aggressive, and was always worried by other traffic. And that was in 1966! I even find being a passenger on a motorway journey a terrifying experience, with the ordinary car scarcely coming up to the hubcaps of the ordinary juggernaut. And if this is bad in Britain it's even worse in Germany, where a polite and considerate people revert to some of their more atavistic instincts when put behind the wheel of a big car on a no speed-limit Autobahn.

There are now 1.4 million cars on Scottish roads, against 800,000 Scottish children between the ages of five and seventeen, and the relation between the two groups often seems like that between the sheep that invaded the Highlands in the nineteenth century and the crofters they displaced. In general, British towns are not child-friendly: cars have priority, then dogs. Such spaces as are not dominated by moving traffic tend to be strewn with dog-turds. Danger is a constant companion - directly, from the threat of traffic accidents; indirectly from a society grown over-

individualised, encased in the carapaces of house and car.

In a car-bound society, the child loses protection when out-with the family, yet the 'family travel' that the car requires subjects its members to pretty intolerable stresses. Outside this particular mould of socialisation, the 'marginal' loner, living in a publicity-atmosphere which enjoins power, mobility and sexuality (think about the eternal 'action'-cars-and-girls formula of the 'men's magazines') is more at risk than ever before. Carless these days can mean being reduced to the pathetic/repellent immobility of the drunk in the park. And a society where women need cars as protection, and where women who don't have them, don't go out on their own, is a very sick society.

In comparison with the billions spent promoting speed, aggression and individual mobility, that part of the transport system which serves the majority of the population which is female, or under seventeen, or over sixty-five receives peanuts. It's all too obvious that women, children and the elderly are to be catered for as charity cases by a motorised adult population, not to have rights to adequate transport provision.

Think about the following: in Germany tramcars, buses and suburban trains have plenty of space for mothers to push their prams and buggies on board without dismantling them; expresses have mother and baby compartments where young children can be changed or fed; stations have restrooms run by church organisations. In the last couple of years express trains running to holiday resorts have a whole coach modified to act as a nursery car, in which the kids can play. This project was sponsored by Lego, but what the hell!

In comparison there isn't much sense to be got from the British government. Yet a lot can be done on a voluntary and agitational basis to turn the argument so that the onus of proof is always on the motorist. Pedestrianisation is only in its infancy - each street closure being accompanied by shrieks about impending catastrophe from Chambers of Commerce and the road lobby. But there is no evidence from continental experience that pedestrianisation does anything but increase trade.

The maintenance of bus-shelters, timetables, toilets and seats has to be given greater priority: for instance by compelling motoring offenders to put in community service in this area. Our taxation system favours private transport at the expense of public transport. No other government in Western Europe throws so much money at the company car. Yet a fraction of such subsidy could dramatically improve public transport provision. The paradox is that a very wealthy society like Switzerland, puts the car in its place. The Swiss (who hold the record for public transport journeys) are well enough off to keep their cars in the garage and only use them on special occasions.

Everyone has to make compromises with this situation, and mine is that I'll find myself using taxis two or three times a week. But I want to see Mr. Toad off the road; otherwise he'll do for us all. ■

Chris Harvie

OUT-LINE is a regular feature where readers can contribute on any aspect of Scotland growing up. Send suggestions to the editor.

IN BRIEF

New Year, new directions, new hopes? It doesn't take long for the glow to fade. On Friday January 4th, Scottish newspapers ran headlines like **BOY KILLER SENTENCED**. At the previous day's Edinburgh High Court hearing, an unnamed 12 year old boy, said to be "in every sense backward for his age" was sentenced to **detention** without limit of time on the reduced charge of the culpable homicide of 3 year old Jamie Campbell of Drumchapel.

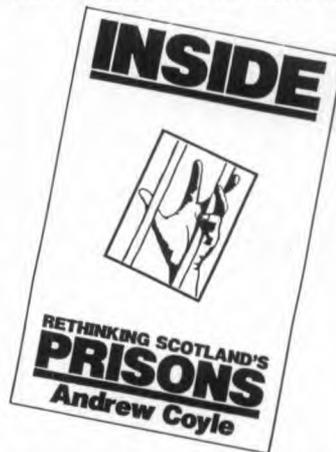
Apart from considerations of where a 12 year old will be detained in Scotland, and the apparent difference in sentencing if the boy had been an adult, the feeling that things remain the same arise from the sentencing Judge Lord Sutherland's reported remarks.

No doubt the court was party to reports as to how the boy could be said to be "in every sense backward" and full background reasons as to why this might be the case.

Yet Lord Sutherland was widely quoted as saying that the boy acted from no discernible motive "except out of sheer wickedness". The New Year glow doesn't fade so much from the occurrence of such sad events as the violent death of a toddler, as the inclination of the judiciary to reach for ancient notions of the demonic in explaining human behaviour. It's wickedness that does it. That's wot it is! ■

It's perhaps the readiness of sentencers to think in tabloid headlines that has meant that **prisons** have bulged in modern times. Readers of **Scottish Child** will be aware of the recent troubled histories of the country's prisons, as we await the likely Spring publication of the Woolf Committee of Enquiry into Prison Disturbances in England & Wales set up after the riots in Strangeways and elsewhere last year.

You may be interested to know that as an extension of **Scottish Child's** interest in social and political affairs generally we are publishing a paperback book - **INSIDE - Rethinking Scotland's Prisons** by Andrew Coyle, the widely respected governor of Shotts prison. The book sets recent troubles in their historical



and organisational context, and, as the first book on the modern system, it will be essential reading for anyone interested in what's going on in our prisons.

To coincide with the publication of the book, Andrew Coyle will speak at a launch seminar in Edinburgh. For further details, contact **Scottish Child**. ■

Still on a custodial theme, crisis point can be reached in families when a member is sentenced to prison. And basic information is at a premium when this happens and during the sentence - visiting times, travel arrangements, and facilities.

A Consultative Group on the health, educational and social needs of parents and children affected by **imprisonment** was set up to devise ways to help families where a member has been jailed. The Group operates under the auspices of the Scottish Health Education Group, and also includes staff from the Scottish Home and Health Department, the Scottish Prison Service, and the various voluntary organisations concerned with prisoners and their families.

The Group has just prepared and distributed a set of leaflets

for each individual prison. Information can be had from the Scottish Health Education Group, Canaan Lane, Edinburgh. ■

Yes it's true! As revealed in last month's issue, people who are employed to look after other people's children, get paid peanuts. As part of our item on childminders, we featured the childminding jobs done by Elizabeth Murdoch of Barrhead, and Sandra Currie of Alloa.

For looking after two infants full time 5 days a week plus four after school children, Sandra clears £25 a week. As Anne McNellan, development officer of the Scottish Childminding Association confirmed, the average take-home pay of the full-time childminder is between £50 and £70 a week.

We mention this because, as careful readers would have noticed, the signs had dropped out of the text, so it might have been a bit confusing. The reason is that we changed typesetters and this was one of the computer interfacing problems we had. Apologies. ■

Scottish Child has moved office in Edinburgh. From January we've moved into larger **premises** at 40 Shandwick Place. The full address, phone and fax number are on the contents page. If you weren't invited to the office warming at the end of January, please don't be offended - it's impossible to phone round everyone. Shandwick Place is a very central location at the west end of Princes Street - 600 yards from Haymarket Station. Readers and supporters will find it easier to drop in - we hope you will! Our Glasgow address remains the same at Garrioch Drive.

We have greatly appreciated the last 16 months at Pilton Avenue in Ainslie Park school, and offer Colin Finlayson and every one else there our gratitude and best wishes for an uncertain future. ■



tea

Some years ago I visited a transit camp for refugees from Vietnam in Hong Kong. To reach it we had driven through a raucous, lively area of that town which vibrates with vitality. Suddenly turning into a narrow dusty lane we arrived in a different world. An old army barracks, cut off from the town by a fence topped with barbed wire, lay ahead. It was a massive four storey, grey, rectangular building surrounded by a concrete pathway and divided along its length by fetid drains. Two hundred families lived here in primitive conditions, looked after by a tiny group of devoted but often helpless paid staff and some voluntary workers. The Vietnamese waited patiently but often unrealistically for opportunities to enter countries which would give them the chance to work and make new lives for themselves and their children.

There were few adults about, most of them officials, and some apparently aimless children. One small girl was standing by herself outside the security guard's hut, weeping bitterly. She looked to be about three years of age. Her nose was running; her mouth was open; deep sobs racked her body; and no one took the slightest notice of her. She was a scrap of humanity in deepest misery and as far as the adults in her environment were concerned, she might as well not have existed. Yet her whole self was in despair and no one moved towards her.

rs and protest

Scottish Child's forthcoming Tears and Protest event will look at the place of crying in our society. Here Kay Carmichael - one of the speakers at the event - explores, through personal experience, the ways we educate our emotions, and examines the consequences for how we think and act - personally and politically - as adults.

I found her pain intolerable, and moved towards her while asking our guide to explain why she was crying. At which she was picked up and hurried off. When I next saw her she was still weeping, though more quietly now and being dragged along reluctantly by a small boy of about six who had clearly been charged with the care of her.

That night I woke up weeping and was forced to confront yet again the pain I had carried with me for over half a century... the pain of the uncomforted child. I was crying for myself and not for her. I had known, looking at her, exactly what she was feeling. The difference in our ages, the different colour of our skins, or the shape of our eyes, our different interpretations of the sounds that make words, all these were irrelevant. We were two creatures linked by a special kind of pain. Not only us. Everyone for whom that experience has gone on too long knows exactly what I mean. For them, what in most people's lives is a temporary hurt has developed into a wound, a wound for which there is no healing other than its acceptance.

In that child, and other children I saw in the hours I spent in the camp, that wound was just in the process of being formed. They needed what I too had needed, a person of one's own to ward off fear and to give comfort, a place with that person that they

can take for granted, that they don't need always to be fighting for, that is theirs without question or resentment.

For some of them it was already too late to heal their wounds. The pain had been so great that they had turned away from it, covered it over with thick layers of assumed indifference, latent anger, cynicism, toughness, survival skills. There were remnants of it in the tension around their eyes, the same tension you can spot in some of the children in any children's home in this country. Others were still in touch with their pain, still able to weep, still alive, and therefore still open to the possibility of being healed.

In any High Street, where a child has been in a pram and wakened to find herself alone surrounded by strange images you can see the face of terror. It is flushed and contorted into an expression of agony; the screaming if allowed to go on becomes choked and hysterical. Children can look and sound as if they are in the third layer of hell. If an adult stood in the street and screamed with that degree of terror everyone would be halted in their tracks and a doctor or ambulance would be called. But when a baby screams in distress, most people don't even notice. We develop selective blindness and deafness.

One or two experiences like that are not going to damage a fundamentally healthy relationship between a child and its parents but a steady diet of learning that you cannot command loving care and relief from distress, that the adult world is not there for you, wears away all confidence in the world.

Each of us carries our own memories of tears: tears of panic, tears of terror, tears of anxiety, grief and betrayal. For each of us who have outgrown childhood, the triggers that move us to tears are different. Different things have power over us. My house could burn down and I could walk away without a tear but if I stumble and fall in the street I have to fight back tears.

A complex story lies behind my fear of helplessness and having no one to comfort me. I used to think there was a child within me, crying all the time, waiting to be seen and heard.

I had been sent as a pupil to the convent of St. Joseph of Cluny, in Ayrshire. All the nuns had to be called 'Mother', with the exception of the 'Reverend Mother', a charming but remote figure. I had no idea where my own mother had disappeared to when she left me there. One of the nuns, Mother Stanislaus took a particular interest in me. Now aged four and a half, I was the smallest child. Whenever visitors were being shown around the school, she would send for me.

tears and protest

**Saturday 13 April 1991 10am
Royal Scottish Museum
Chambers Street
Edinburgh**

What is our culture's attitude to displays of emotion? Does crying, even by the very young, represent something unacceptable? Must childhood pain always be repressed? Or can we learn to face, and take charge of, our collective lives?

A day of talks, discussion and interchange organised by Scottish Child.

speakers include

KAY CARMICHAEL, author and broadcaster, whose new book Ceremony of Innocence traces the connections between tears, power and protest.

COLIN CHALMERS, writer and member of the Scottish Child editorial group.

The programme of talks, workshops and discussion groups will be chaired by DEREK RODGER, editor of Scottish Child.



This event is part of the programme of the Edinburgh International Science Festival 1991. The day will extend into a late afternoon/evening session of informal discussion, readings and music.

early booking is advised

creche available

**for more details phone
031 220 6502**

workshop suggestions and discussion group leaders are invited from those attending

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I enclose a cheque for £15 per person made payable to **Scottish Child** (some concessions available at a reduced rate, please enquire). Your ticket covers the cost of tea, coffee and a buffet lunch. Optional food and bar in the late afternoon and evening is chargeable. Please give the names of everyone wanting to attend. Return to: **Scottish Child**, 40 Shandwick Place, Edinburgh EH2 4RT.



'It is in early childhood that we first learn if we have the right to protest against pain and injustice'

▶ Standing me in front of her she would say to the visitors, 'Watch this', hold her forefinger up in front of my nose and I would burst into tears like a performing monkey. I remember so clearly how I used to try not to do what she wanted but always the tears and misery overflowed. I have often wondered what it was about me that fuelled her sadism.

For many children, childhood is a nightmare from which they never recover. Children are constantly betrayed. Sometimes in the dramatic forms of being abandoned permanently but sometimes in simpler ways. Children are lied to, bullied, roughly handled as their clothes are impatiently put on and taken off, shouted at and shaken. And all this is done by people the child loves with every fibre of her body. If that is not betrayal, what is?

It is not surprising then that betrayal is a recurring theme for many people, which invokes tears but often tears mixed with anger and the desire for revenge. Being beaten by someone you love is an act of betrayal which makes the beaten child - from Hitler to the abused child next door - stalk the world seeking revenge.

The deepest sense of betrayal does not inspire revenge but withdrawal. The desire for revenge implies a continuing link with the one who has betrayed you and sometimes the pain is too great for that. This is the difference between those who commit murder and those who kill themselves. Those who commit murder are still seeking love and connection. The others have given up hope. Themes of death, suicide and murder stalk through every childhood and wait to flower in adult life.

The key to heal these wounds lies in the ability to comfort the child. No one is more generous than a young child, no one has a greater capacity to forgive and respond to comfort if it is offered quickly after the insult. My experience, and the experience of many others, of being comforted while crying is not a happy one. As adults we are very unsure about accepting comfort. It may be because it was not given to us when we needed it, or because it was given to us erratically and inconsistently. For myself I prefer to go off like a wounded animal and cry alone and simply see myself through experiences of distress. I have learned from some people that it doesn't need to be like that but find it hard to believe.

The ability to comfort each other is insufficiently understood as a human function. It may need to be taught. Lucky children learn it from their mother or father but some parents have never been comforted themselves and don't know how to offer

'Being beaten by someone you love is an act of betrayal which makes the beaten child... stalk the world seeking revenge'

► it to their own children. My memory of my own mother was that she could not comfort me because whatever happened to me was never as bad as what was happening to her. But my grandmother comforted me and from her I learnt enough to be able to comfort my mother when she asked that of me, and in the course of time, my own child too.

But we can only give to others what we were given ourselves. We all know spouses or parents who, if you complain of not feeling well, immediately find that they too have something wrong with them. Competitiveness for attention and comfort within the family leads to desperate conflict and misunderstanding.

It is perhaps not surprising that the child in the Hong Kong camp was left to cry un-comforted. Her parents, living in their crowded cages, had probably little to offer. But while we can understand her parents' problems, while we may even forgive them for their neglect, I'm not sure if we should forgive those of us who turn our faces aside and collude with the conditions which create that camp and all the other camps in the world through which children wander un-comforted.

In his short story, *Nocturne/one*, Carl McDougall describes how a writer, working through the night, hears his son crying and goes to comfort him.

"He is standing, holding onto the cot rails, trampolining up and down to the rhythm of his sobs. He sees you and cries louder... so you pick him up. and immediately you lean forward to grab him under the arms he stops crying. He stops crying and rests a soft teary cheek on your lips and something is born inside as you kiss the wee face. And when a memory jolt of his bad dream flings his head back, he gets ready to bawl, but instead of crying he smiles and replaces, snuggles, his cheek beside your mouth to be kissed again. And you kiss it again!"

But equally there are few more frustrating experiences than failing to pacify a distressed child. If the cry goes on and on despite one's best efforts, it arouses sensations ranging from despair and helplessness to murderous rage.

As a defence, most adults who encounter children in intimate situations develop a set of attitudes and responses to help them cope. They develop a personal philosophy that gives them a framework to understand what crying is about and what it entitles the child to in the way of attention. Either from this or from their own earlier experiences of being a crying child (which all of us have been) attitudes and feelings about the public display of grief, distress and suffering evolve.

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Each of us, whether born in a high flat in Glasgow, a penthouse in the Barbican, or a mud hut in a jungle has to conform to the social rules of living in that community. Our willingness to obey the rules can only be taught to us through love of the adults caring for us, or through fear of these same people. Each of us has been through this process of learning what is considered tolerable behaviour, and what is intolerable. By and large we hold onto this mental structure for most of our lives, shifting our attitudes only when a majority of our fellow citizens shift theirs. We use roughly the same ways of communicating our ideas of how to behave and how not to behave to our children, as were used for us.

Exactly how this is done is decided in ways that bear little relationship to the primary needs of the children but much to do with the economic network in which the family functions. Melvin Konner studied the !Kung society of the Kalahari region, where the simplicity of the life made it natural for babies in the first year of their lives never to be out of their mother's sight if not her arms. He tells us how the !Kung mother and child, living in total interdependence for the first year, deal with the child's distress. The nipple is always available to the baby. His research showed that there was only an average of six seconds between an infant beginning to be fretful and the mother responding. The mother is, of course, with the infant 24 hours a day - an idea that would fill most mothers in the 'advanced' world with horror.

Such a regime is in stark contradiction to the highly individualistic society in which Europeans and Americans live, where parents claim their rights to space, freedom and privacy even during the infancy of their children. Those who can will return to work in the world of male values and delegate the most intimate tasks of parenting to other young women.

Where the parent has no alternative but to work and use public child care services, even if suitable day care can be found, it is unlikely that the child will have the individual attention that ensures a comfortable infancy. Staff are frequently under stress, particularly in inner city areas and their training seldom equips them to cope with the handling of tears, crying and distress. Like parents, they use their own rough and ready philosophy.

It is in early childhood that we first learn if we have the right to protest against pain and injustice. If that was not wholly denied us - and to have it fully denied us is rare - if we secured even a modest acceptance of our feelings, we can be given a

second chance. We can be lucky and have a grannie or grandad who gives us bits of loving and with that keep alive our energy and courage. We can have a social worker or a teacher who treats us as if we were a bit special and reinforces tiny bits of self-esteem. We may find someone who can see past our defences, and love nurture and heal the hurt bits. We may find through a child of our own the opportunity to break into the cycle of deadness of feeling and offer some of what we would have wanted for ourselves. We may, in a variety of ways, find the core of our pain, transform our use of it and find hope.

We can take out pain into the world and ask those who also suffer to join us in transforming it. The very act of sharing pain, of weeping together, can bring a shift of energy.

It is not possible to move directly from apathy to creativity. There is a series of steps in the path that have to be worked through. If one is blocked, if opportunities to express feelings are denied, then the person involved immediately retreats to an earlier position. The feeling and the behaviour associated with it does not go away.

The crucial point comes in the move from covert to open protest. Will the world allow us to express anger and sorrow? If that right was denied to us in the tears of our infancy and childhood, will we be given a second chance by the people with whom we now live? Each is meaningless without the other, the sorrow of depression holds glowing anger at its heart; the blaze of anger covers the pain of tears. Irritation and delinquency are simply ways of distracting us from unremitting pain.

Wherever people come together to share problems and help each other, this pattern is seen. All groups where people take action to deal with problems in their own communities will be familiar with the process. Members of the group join at different stages in their personal emotional journey. They may have been dragged reluctantly to a meeting by a friend, but unless they had a spark of hope they wouldn't have gone at all. They may continue to go, express a sense of helplessness which if it is acknowledged and respected will help them move onto a grieving for their own sadness taking the form of depression and, with luck, tears to bring relief.

Tears linked to depression are always an encouraging sign that there is energy. At a later stage it becomes the energy of our anger. If the depression and tears are also

'the preservation and nurturance of creative protest is crucial for all our futures'

respected and supported by the group without the need to rush off to a doctor and get tranquillisers which will suppress the grieving and pitch them back into helplessness, they emerge to a tiny gleam of hope.

But hope is dangerous; it can be betrayed. The next stage of growing energy is the testing out by covert anger of that energy. Covert anger is anger seen as dangerous, which cannot be openly expressed and has to be acted out. There are many opportunities.

The leap from covert to open protest can be frightening. We need to have confidence that our feelings as well as our words will be heard. The ability to protest openly is always linked with hope. This is true at a communal as well as a personal level. The more hierarchical and authoritarian the institution, the greater the level of covert protest, delinquency and irritability among the staff and customers. The same thing happens in whole countries.

In Eastern Europe we saw how open protest and hope are linked. The less hope, the less protest; the more hope, the greater the protest. The more totalitarian the society, the higher the level of covert process; the more democratic the society, the more open the protest. The more open the protest, the more realistic and less paranoid it is likely to be.

Individuals, groups and governments do not normally oppress by dramatic threats against life and freedom. They use a seemingly more fragile web which winds round us in childhood. It is a web of shame, embarrassment and uneasy guilt which controls us as surely as did our parents. It's a web that discourages curiosity and protest. It's a web that encourages people to take the easy way out rather than to confront issues head on. It holds us in ways that leave decisions to others, persuades us to respect authority without questioning its provenance. It chokes us if we seek to explore feelings that lie behind the face we learn to turn to the world. It inhibits the energy that makes us want to change the world and makes us say, 'What's the point? Nothing I do will make any difference.'

By understanding these patterns of restriction and ways of overcoming them, we can enable ourselves, other individuals, groups and communities to claim a fair share of power. In a world which increasingly emphasises conformity in all but the most trivial issues, the preservation and nurturance of creative protest is crucial for all our futures. ■

Kay Carmichael's book CEREMONY OF INNOCENCE - tears, power and protest, from which the above has been extracted, is published by Macmillan this April.

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who's special?

Provision for children's special educational needs is the responsibility of local education authorities - parents are required by law to be involved in the decisions made. **Graham Atherton** reviews the issues in meeting special needs. Case material researched by **Meg Henderson**.

Janet has been officially told that her son Edward has eye-hand coordination problems and will need specialist support with his education. What should she have over the sort of help her child receives?

Harry and Olga are concerned that their hyperactive daughter Vera is not getting enough individual tuition at school. How can they get the authorities to listen to and act upon their concerns?

Anthony wants his daughter Helena, who needs a lot of medical attention to be moved from a special to an ordinary school to be nearer her friends. What case should he put to the authorities?

In these fictional, but not unreal examples, parents are faced with having to present their point of view to officialdom about their child's special educational needs. It was in 1978 that the Warnock Committee of Enquiry reported on estimates of about one in five children at school having special educational needs calling for some kind of additional or specialist support beyond what the school normally provided.

The Warnock committee saw parents and professionals working in equal partnership for the successful education of children with special educational needs:

"No assessment of a child's needs can be complete without the information which his parents can supply and no educational programme prescribed to meet his needs can be complete without their co-operation." (para 4.99)



Julia Morris

Graham...

who's 9 was Recorded just before the age of 5. His physical and mental disabilities had been obvious since birth, and he was placed in the one school for cerebral palsied children in Central Region.

The School refused to teach life skills that his parents thought were important for his future independence, and asked that he attend the Scottish Council of Spastics West-erlea School in Edinburgh, where such skills as self-feeding and toileting are high on the agenda. Central Region, reluctant to pay for a place outwith their area, refused.

In the ensuing legal battle the Sheriff ruled in favour of the parents and awarded costs against Central.

One qualified remedial teacher in Central also commented, "There is no attempt at meaningful integration. In Central, children are only Recorded when the decision to place them in a special school has been taken, and that is not how it should work". ■

And later:

"Parents can be effective partners only if professionals take notice of what they say and how they express their needs, and treat their contributions as intrinsically important... Parents will often be able to point to an aspect that the professional has overlooked or insufficiently considered." (para 9.6)

The **Education (Scotland) Act 1981** (and the parallel legislation for England & Wales) attempted to put this and other principles of Warnock into practice by instituting a system of assessment and 'recording' of a child's special educational needs, in which parents were given statutory rights to make their points of view and preferences known to the official decision-makers.

How then, has this legislation been working? A research team at Edinburgh University reported in 1989 that while the Act had indeed facilitated parental involvement, there was still "some considerable way to go before the achievement of full involvement of parents as partners in decision making about their children's education as envisaged by the Warnock and Fish reports."

Recognising that legislation alone was not sufficient to achieve partnership, the research team headed by George Thomson in the Department of Education called on education authorities to develop a clear set of procedures which "should respect parents as equals rather than patronising or protecting them as passive consumers..."

More than half of the enquiries from parents handled by the Advisory Centre for Education are to do with special educational needs, with many arising from alleged insensitivity,

David...

shows severe emotional disturbance and has shown violence to younger children. Like many disturbed children he has learning difficulties, but requests by his Strathclyde teacher to open a Record were ignored until he refused to teach David.

The law says that children adjudged to have special educational needs have to be formally recorded. Strathclyde Region has a policy of not recording children with emotional difficulties, even though it currently has over 2000 children in special schools. Without a Record there is no duty on the local authority to provide for youngsters when they reach sixteen.

In David's case it took two years for him to be recorded. One of the recommendations was that David should have access to a computer beyond the hours available on the class computer. Though the Record is legally binding, no computer was forthcoming, and his teacher eventually borrowed one. Another measure proposed was specialised Physical Education, to be taught by a specialist, but that too fizzled out. David is now 12 and about to enter the more demanding world of the secondary school. ■

mishandling or obstructiveness by officials. A major source of difficulty is that parents often have nobody to assist or represent them in dealings with authority. The Named Person, for example, whom parents can approach for advice or information, is often not in fact appointed until the key decisions have been taken. Even then, the Named Person may be an inappropriate person to represent them if he or she, as may well be the case, is an employee of the education authority.

Voluntary organisations can and do provide advice, information and support for parents, particularly in the traditional categories of disability, such as blindness,

'Parents at the bottom rung of the social ladder... face the hardest task of all in communicating with officials'

deafness and other physical disabilities. Many children with special educational needs fall outwith this categories however, and they and their parents are often without an organisation to provide support or represent their interests.

About one in ten children, for example, are estimated to suffer from social and emotional problems affecting schoolwork, brought about by family breakdown, unemployment, homelessness and so on. Their difficulties may go undetected for a long time, and because they do not fall into an established category of need (abolished under the Act) parents may have difficulty in convincing the authorities that their child does indeed have a problem.

John...

spent his entire school life in Lothian without help for severe dyslexia. Though of above average intelligence, in his teens he was still unable to read or write. Says his mother, Jean, "He was made to feel worthless, stupid and a failure".

When his younger brother Jamie showed the same signs his parents pushed Lothian to Record him, in an attempt to force help. It took two years to produce a Record, during which time Jamie was left out of normal classwork and of course made no progress.

Among measures proposed to help him was the provision of an extra teacher, but this turned out to be one with no training in teaching dyslexic children. There was also to be special audio equipment, which two years into secondary school has amounted to two tapes.

"We attend meetings and are given promises", says Jean, "but we get nowhere. We don't qualify for Legal Aid, but we can't afford a prolonged legal battle. Recording has meant nothing to Jamie. He's no better off than his brother who wasn't Recorded. It's too easy for the authorities to ignore a Record of Needs". ■

Variations in recording practice between local authorities may mean that some parents may have to press harder than others to secure the additional help they think their child needs. Many parents may be too overwhelmed by their own problems to pursue the matter further.

Parents at the bottom rung of the social ladder, with limited awareness of or ability to work the system, face the hardest task of all in communicating with officials. And even when the local authority is accommodating, parents may have to come to terms with the fact that resources (extra money or staff) may limit the availability of specialist support for their child.

The Scottish Child & Family Alliance (SCAFA), with the support of bodies like the Scottish Consumer Council, has started to explore ways in which parents might be given more of a helping hand in functioning as partners with the professionals in planning provision for children with special needs. Much of the support that already exists in the voluntary sector might be worth consolidating and extending in some way. The development of a national support network might be one way in which parents might channel their needs and interests.

National testing, school boards, teacher appraisal and other issues have stolen much of the political limelight in recent years. The difficulties faced by a fifth or more children at school and the support these children and their parents needs have taken a back seat. ■

*For a useful general guide to special needs provision and useful advice see **In Special Need: A Handbook for Parents and Young People in Scotland with Special Educational Needs** (HMSO 1989).*



the great creche debate

In the last of our series **Childcare: urgent need for the 90s**,
Alison Meik looks at the controversial relationship
 between working for a wage and parenting. **Derek Rodger**
 looks back at this series of articles, and hopes for better
 things to come.

Society may have changed. Women want and often need to work and have every right to do so. Yet as report after report bears out, in Britain as a whole pre-school facilities exist for only a small minority of under-fives. Young children are denied opportunities for important early learning and stimulation, and mothers have the problem of finding suitable carers for their child if they want to assert themselves in the world outside the home.

But the question arises through all this, is it fair to put a small child into daycare? Should mothers leaving for work really feel
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just a bit guilty about abandoning their child?

Professor Bengt-Erik Andersson, a Swedish psychologist, recently put working mothers' hearts at rest with his claim that children placed in creches from an early age may grow up more academically and socially successful than those raised at home. Yet though she may have since passed from high office, we know that Mrs Thatcher's words touched the guilt button when she said, "a whole generation of creche children is not right for the next generation or for each individual".

So who do we believe?

Professor Andersson claims that feelings of guilt for "abandoning" children are not necessary. Infants learn increased social skills from the stimulus provided by other adults and children. His views are based on a study of the achievements of 128 children with different early backgrounds, and found that those children entered in day care before the age of one performed better at thirteen than any of the other groups -

"They were judged to be more creative, more confident, more popular, less anxious and more independent. Their verbal facility... their ability to make themselves understood and express themselves, was better."

Childcare: Urgent Need for the 90s

The experience over the last six issues of SCOTTISH CHILD where we have run features over the whole range of pre-five provision - or more strictly the general lack of it! - has been one of running round in ever decreasing circles.

There do seem to be a number of points of common agreement among parents, voluntary organisations and local authorities. And reports, statistics and opinions on childcare and education do proliferate and repeat much the same messages:

Young children need and thrive on stimulation outside the home. The early years are vital for later learning. Services to the under-fives should involve parents in their children's development. Nursery/creche/daycare places are not nearly adequate to the level of need for them - especially when the Scottish and British rates of provision are compared with our close neighbours in Europe.

Not that there isn't a lot happening. In these pages in recent months, we've featured much to be proud of. It is true to say though, that much of the activity on the ground fights for existence against the odds, and there isn't nearly enough of the kind of services that people actually need. But the work that we've seen in nursery schools, in playgroups, in

family centres, and with childminders is encouraging. The fact that training initiatives for workers with the pre-fives are being developed is also a plus.

Interesting mould-breaking initiatives are taking place in the private sector, and across the boundaries of private and public bodies, notably in Fife and Strathclyde. We know of four examples of childcare co-ops getting off the ground. The locally-managed community nursery initiatives - featured in SCOTTISH CHILD - in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen seem particularly designed to meet people's real childcare needs. For a number of reasons, both practical and political, it is these kinds of locally initiated and managed services that seem the best bet for development.

But the fact remains that behind all the grand generalisations about the "importance of the early years", "the demographic time-bomb" and "the needs of employers to recruit women", or even "the needs of women to work", some inescapable realities prevail.

To the casual journalist visitor to the pre-five organisations and networks in Scotland, the most glaringly obvious fact is that looking after the weans is, practically without exception, women's work. Even at the organisational/executive level of all the main

bodies, you'd be hard pressed to find one male member. In a replication of so-called traditional gender roles in the family, the men are in the senior jobs in the grant-giving local and central government departments, and they predominate in elected office. And they all, of course, are very supportive of what the womenfolk are doing! So everything remains much the same.

If we set aside the issue of whether public or private financing, or some combination of the two, is 'best', this gender differentiation in running such pre-five services as do exist points to the low value given to children in our society. Tied up with the position of women who, of course, still do most of the caring, there is something deeply conservative in our culture which acts as a block on the genuine expansion of childcare. It is the deep-seated view in government, and in society among men and women alike, that the place for young children, and consequently the mothers and other women who look after them, is safely in the home.

Ever decreasing circles? That's where we started the CHILDCARE: URGENT NEED FOR THE 90s series in April last year. Time, perhaps, to break the circle. ■

Derek Rodger



However, as Andersson acknowledges, his study was carried out in Sweden, a country with very high quality day care - "If that situation differs, the findings may not be applicable".

Former research in this country by Barbara Tizard and Martin Hughes has shown that a "normally adequate home" cannot be equalled as a provider of early intellectual stimulation. The amount of adult/child communication and information seeking which prevails in a normal home environment, they say, stimulates a great deal of development in the child. In contrast, in the nursery or playgroup/creche setting, for obvious practical reasons, the

child has to share the available adults with other children and the adults may be able to spend relatively small amounts of time with each child.

The "normally adequate home" that Tizard and Hughes speak of is, however, something of an ideal. There has been a dramatic rise in the number of single parents and even in the two parent family, high costs of living have created financial stresses, particularly when children are very young, which often necessitate the mother returning to work.

It is true, too, that many women seek the social, if not the intellectual, stimulation of a job. And if the social status of the role of

'housewife' or 'mother' is generally so low, this is hardly surprising.

It's possible for this reason that playgroups, creches and the like fulfill a significant role, whether mother works or not. It isn't only the children who can benefit from the independence.

So the major remaining problem might be - where do we find the places? The Plowden Report of 1967 concluded that part-time nursery education was highly recommended for children over two. A White Paper in 1972 (Education Secretary M. Thatcher!) envisaged the provision of nursery school places for 90% of four year olds by the year 1981. In 1991 we still find that demand greatly exceeds supply. ■

new voices, new writing

We continue our new voices, new writing series with work from four new writers. Over the page, James Kelman looks back on Glasgow's Year of Culture and, in a challenging new essay, explores the context in which writers and other artists operate today.

4 poems

Wallace Monument

From the tower
You could see
The clever
River coiling in
Its arms the remains
Of Scotland's history
And dumping it
Out at the Bass
Rock in great brown
Heaps.

And if you were small
You had to stand
On tip-toe or be
In your father's arms
To see the sword
Longer than yourself.

A series of minor hills
Brooded with you
Over the landscape
And the passing of the years.

Alistair Mackinnon

Kitchen Sink

At the kitchen sink
(when I still loved her)
my mother led her
white porcelain, scoured existence,
council housed in the early fifties.
Every day my mother cleaned the sink.

On the bleached wooden draining board
stood my father's daily offerings,
greaseproof papered
inside the oily scratched sandwich tin
and the corked Thermos piping tea.
My father cycled every day to work.

My first day at school,
painting splodges on sugar paper.
They spelt my name wrong
and gave me a seat by the window.
The day that dysentery broke out
we were entrenched in our homes for a week.
And every day my mother cleaned the sink.

Through the strands of my
hair-slicked, Brylcreme jarred childhood,
I learned geography from souvenir teatowels,
poetry from birthday cards
and history from the Hotspur and the Rover.
I swung the days away
on the rusty garden gate.
Everyone was emigrating to Australia
and we were never having it so good.
And my father cycled every day to work.

My father cycled every day to work
and every day my mother cleaned the sink.
Each day he pedalled further from my affection,
she scoured out another stubborn spot of love.

Peter Whiteley

Non-Accidental

1 Danny

Everybody's very careful
and he's being good.
It hurts,
and he looks to the mirror
for pity.
Doctors,
police, and people
he doesn't know
who call him Danny,
keep shutting doors.

There's a bird
on his da's hand,
beside his thumb.
He'd like to trace
round it with his finger
again.
"Did it hurt
when ye got it done, da?"
"Naw, pal. It tickled. Like
this. An' this."
It says
Josie on his arm,
that hit him,
that's shaking
like the window
when the bus, is at the stop,
now Granda's finished
shouting at them all.

2 Hard to reach

The bruises you left on your son
marked a rage fermented
and soured in drips down
the dwindling choices as you grew
into the hard expectations grafted on to men.
Your wife's world had its own hardnesses,
and she moulded herself with bleak
grace and no thanks to accommodate
the investigation's intimate probe,
my eye enlarged against your window.
"And, by the way, this is a nonsense",
you told me after the Hearing,
taking a vow of silence and resentment;
how could you begin to speak the futile
fist you swung at walls and paper
chains, at the work that wanted
to be done by someone else;
the fragments of marriage caught
on your skin; the boy who had learned
the need for silence and indifference?
The words had risen like rockets
to splutter in your throat again
and again, trying to make clear
the unique intimate distance between
you and her. You saw where you stood
in the world, I was afraid
and could not name you; desperate
and strong, or incomplete?

Not incomplete.
You gathered wife and children
in the same strong arms,
a hero,
led them from the burning house,
a giant, returned to try to save her parents:
died with them. You flew by me, and a dozen
years on I carry that space.
My touch now is tentative.

3 Neat

She accepted me with frozen
relief, negotiating funerals,
benefits, housing. Others
gave comfort, or numbed
by the enormity of her grief,
drifted.
I was paid to stay.
She was required to trust me,
who had come along with so much pain.
The daughter watched me,
resentment soldered
in her ten-year eyes, accelerated
into adulthood. Careful of the fragile
mother, she didn't want to trust
her to my necessary, measured,
rival care. She never answered
me, or said "hello". When I was gone,
she'd have her mother back.

Even Morris Travellers on their last wheels
were fair game to the lads in Barrowfield.
The girl ran into the kitchen:
"the boys are at your motor!"
and as I rushed downstairs
she raced back to the window:
"the man's comin doon!"
When I reached the street,
the innocent stares challenged
from the corner.
Saved the day,
like her dad.

John Duffy

First Death

Seeing a chiropodist
With his travelling tin box,
Well-equipped, compact
Reminded me of Gran.
Those wafer-thin instruments against the parched skin;
Glinting eels against a sun-baked soil crust.
The seventy year old toenails hard-curved and yellow,
Little turtles, I'd think, waiting with my twelve year old pink corns.

Praying round the coffin,
I couldn't kiss her
But I wanted to lay my hand
On her cold feet, protruding from the gown.

All the way to church
In my best, hard, leather shoes,
I curled my toes tightly.

Liz Niven

ART AND SUBSIDY

**and some politics
of culture city**

James Kelman

Arguments against public funding of the arts in this society might well be logical but they aren't rational; and decisions to cut or withdraw subsidy are always political. Greed is the ultimate motivation. This is illustrated by the national government which pretends to various philosophic absurdities while doling out massive sums of public money to private enterprise. It applies also to local government. And in Scotland local government where it matters is not Tory, it is Labour.

What is happening in the arts is happening in every field where public funding is paramount, especially in those very rare instances where actual 'profit' remains with the public. In our society profit is supposed to be private; the ordinary public is left with the loss: thus questions to do with art and subsidy move rapidly into other areas, and 'profit' can be defined in any number of ways, eg good health, a pleasant environment, efficient transport, a just legal system, a high standard of general education, and so on.

An integral part of the 'City of Culture' concept is crucial to anybody with the slightest interest in art, and I'm talking generally, not just about painting but literature, theatre, music: anything. It's the assumption that a partnership already exists between the arts and big business and that such a partnership is 'healthy'. It suggests a heady mixture of high principles coupled with 'sound' business sense. Business sense equates with common sense. It is implicit that left to their own devices those already engaged in the field are not quite up to the more mundane practicalities. Art doesn't just need the money it needs the thinking behind the money. Folk already engaged in the field might hold lofty ideas to do with

morality, aesthetics, the human condition, and so on and so forth, but when it comes to making a thing 'work' they need help from more down-to-earth sort of chaps. Art is all very well but out there in the 'real' world it's a fight for survival.

The battle has been on for years, people struggling for private funding, trying to tempt open the sponsor's purse; competing with each other, some winning, some losing. The evaluative criteria employed by those in control of this purse are not known to myself. Predicting motivation is more straightforward. But it seems safe to suggest that the art most likely 'to win the money' will conform to certain precepts deriving from these criteria and will be decorative rather than challenging. The work of

**'The art most likely to 'win
the money'... will be
decorative rather than
challenging'**

an unknown sculptor, poet, painter, playwright or whatever begins with a handicap, as does anything too radical or experimental or in some other sense 'geared to a minority audience'. Like any successful product, a work of art should be acceptable to as wide-ranging a market as possible. 'Market' here means media-response as much as potential audience. If a subsidised theatre company or gallery or publishing house is doing its job properly - that is acting in line with current philosophy - then 'sponsor-appeal' exercises an influence on how it commissions plays, events, novels, exhibitions and so on. In the case of theatre, for example, a company no longer approaches a variety of local businessfolk for various bits and pieces connected with

the production itself; an initial cash injection is nowadays essential. Therefore the criteria of the market-place will come to form part of the company's own criteria for judging the worth of new work. Not the merit, the worth. Its value is determined by its potential 'sale' to the private sector. A 'difficult' play - or novel, or painting - is no longer a challenging piece of original work, it is one deemed worthwhile but thought unlikely to find major funding from private sponsors.

What it comes down to is imposition, the imposition of external value on criteria that should be the province of art. The folk with the money hold the power. This is true to the point of banality for those writers, directors, actors and others engaged in dramatic artforms within film and television; and a short answer to the depressing state of affairs in either medium, where to describe current output as second-rate is generally taken as a compliment. The artists there have long since ceded control.

The one obvious, though seldom acknowledged, correlate of the shift from public into private sector arts subsidy is the increase in suppression and censorship. It's very hard to imagine a dramatisation of the offshore oil workers' fight for improved safety conditions being sponsored by one or other of the major oil corporations; as hard as it is to imagine U.S. corporate funding for a realistic portrayal of its entrepreneurial activity in Central America or the Middle East.

And oppression leads to repression; the situation where writers and artists stop creating their own work. They no longer see what they do as an end in itself; they too adopt the criteria of the 'market-place'; they begin producing what they think the customer wants. The customer is no longer



Colin Chalmers

even the audience, nor is it the commissioning agent of the theatre company, or gallery, or publisher; the customer has become the potential sponsor, the person holding the purse strings on behalf of private business interests. What the artist is now producing has ceased to be art; it has become something else, perhaps a form of decoration, or worse, just another sell-out.

People engaged in creating art continually make decisions on whether or not to continue working at what they do. Even where it becomes possible to survive economically at it. This is because the vast bulk of the work on offer is geared to the needs of private sector money. Such work is not only meaningless but often in direct conflict with the artist's own motivation, I mean political, moral, aesthetic, the lot. Some hold out by entering extended periods of 'rest'; others try for a compromise; they do the hack stuff and trust the money earned 'buys time' for more meaningful work in the future. But anyone who relies on the private sector for the economic means to create art, and continues to believe they are in control of the situation is very naive indeed.

Within the higher income bracket in this country many people express concern at the hardship endured by artists. They assume the group is part of their own and therefore empathise with them. 'That could be me', they think. Others from the same income bracket are not depressed, they take the more aggressively romantic line and accept the necessity of suffering for art's sake. They do not for one minute think 'that could be them' but believe in the freedom to starve. Members of either faction assume artists receive their just reward at some indefinable point in the future, in the form of cash or glory, perhaps posthumously. If some artists never succeed in 'winning a reward' from society at all then they couldn't have been worth rewarding in the first place. Perhaps the work they produced wasn't very good. Perhaps it was 'wrong'. Maybe it just wasn't Art at all: for within these circles of conventional left as well as right wing thought the myth that art with a capital 'A' is both product and property of society's upper orders is taken for granted. They're always surprised at the idea of 'working-class' people reading a book or listening to a piece of classical music. The possibility had never occurred to them.

And there's another line springs from the same mentality, the opposite side of the coin, often thought to derive from a 'class position'. This one accepts the elitist myth wholeheartedly, and therefore denounces Art for that very reason, it is elitist; and all those engaged in its creation are self-indulgent time-wasters, dillitentantis.

Those who take this line will make a case for Agit-Prop, or so-called Social Realism, or revues where every song, joke or dance is followed by some polemic or other, working on the same principle as the Band of Hope when I was a boy; they gave you a biscuit and a cup of milk but insisted you watch the slideshow about the missionaries in exchange. It never crosses the mind of the vanguard that people living in Castlemilk or Drumchapel or Easterhouse or

Craigmillar might prefer a play by Chekhov or a painting by Cezanne to whatever else is being forced on them. A case will be advanced by those and others for what is euphemistically termed 'community art', i.e. art of the 'workshop' variety; apart from administrative and basic material costs it is produced for virtually nothing, and helps keep idle hands at work - thus groups of teenagers trying to survive on no-money per week are given a tin of dulux and told to paint their face, or maybe pensioners are asked to write their memoirs which are eventually photocopied and stapled together, then dumped into the shredder when the next administration takes over.

In this past year in Glasgow conventional myths to do with art and culture and public funding and private funding have been given full rein. The concept itself, 'City of Culture', was always hazy, extremely dubious indeed. It had more to do with etiquette than anything else. But if boldness is one essential ingredient of entrepreneurial activity then those who decided to 'go for it' are champions of the new realism which nowadays seems to cross not only national but party political boundaries. What becomes clearer by the day is that both the adoption and application of the concept derived from another heady mixture: intellectual poverty, moral bankruptcy and political cowardice.

It might appear contradictory to describe such a bold and grandiose scheme as cowardice. We are talking about an outlay of some £50 millions after all, given in the name of art and culture, to entice private investment to the place.

But it was an act of cowardice. At national level Scotland is ruled by a minority party. The holders of municipal and regional office are elected by the people to offer some sort of local challenge to the Tory government. Instead of offering such a challenge our politicians have capitulated in an embarrassing, quite shameful manner. Instead of attacking the national government they attack the people. They are presently implementing policies of a sort no Tory administration would dare attempt this side of the border.

Over the coming years the cost of this one P.R. exercise will have grave repercussions for the ordinary cultural life of the city. The money must come from somewhere. Major cuts will take place in those areas precisely concerned with art and culture. The public funding of libraries, art galleries and museums, swimming baths, public parks and public halls; all will be cut drastically. In many cases such services to the community will be closed down and sold off altogether, to private developers, to big business. What has been presented as a celebration of art in all its diversity has become an actual assault on the artistic and cultural life of the city.

After 1990, beyond the servicing of visitors to the cultural complexes, there must be some sort of 'reward' for the people of Glasgow. No one can spend that amount of money and fail to buy something. But authentic benefit for the many

rather than the few seems destined to concern art itself. And art is the product of artists. And so-called 'community art' is also the product of artists, that is if so-called 'community art' is anything other than a necessary part of that foregoing elitist myth.

Art is not the product of 'the cultural workforce', a term I first discovered in the summer of 1990 and which seems to refer to those who administer public funding and/or private sponsorship for 'arts initiatives', and gives rise to the peculiar notion that without such a workforce culture would not exist properly, that without such a team of administrative experts who operate on behalf of that heady mixture of public and private enterprise, art itself might not exist, not 'out there', in the real world, where life is a war, and poor old Art, with all its high principles and quaint ideals, would simply wither away and vanish altogether.

In that so-called 'real' world the only real terms are cash terms. And the only real criteria are the criteria that set the conditions for real cash profit. Those who are not in some way or another funded by the Festivals Unit or District Council and insist on defending the 'Year of Culture' must face up to the fact that within the terms of

'The most straightforward way of punishment is the slow withdrawal of public funding'

their own argument they are defending such glaring blunders as the **Glasgow's Glasgow** temporary exhibition. It is a measure of the repressed nature of this country that people who align themselves on the left are still trying to do exactly that. They find it possible to accept the misconceived farce as an 'aberration', a phenomenon, somehow managing to ignore what has been public knowledge for at least six months, that Ms Elspeth King and Mr Michael Donnelly predicted the outcome more than a year ago. They are further forced to defend inefficiency, humbug, hypocrisy, diverse victimisation and misrepresentation, not to mention financial dealings verging on wilful negligence if not fraud. They can accept all of this in some kind of half-embarrassed, patriotic high-dive towards a mythical general good, which if it doesn't exist has at least found a name, 'Culture'.

If there is an air of familiarity about the logic of their argument, recollect Lord Denning's suggestion that it was for the common good that innocent people be incarcerated for life - better a miscarriage of justice than that the fact itself should be admitted: nothing is more damaging to the Law than when it is not only wrong but shown to be wrong, not only wrong but confesses itself wrong.

The architects of the adoption of the concept 'City of Culture' were politicians and entrepreneurs; the politicians represent

themselves as the public and the entrepreneurs represent themselves period. Cash investment in the city and environs was the primary motivation, as the politicians have confirmed publicly. There is nothing wrong in that as far as their view of the 'real' world is concerned; it is perfectly consistent. And also quite consistent to assume, given the criteria, that profit in real cash terms from the investment will remain private, that the costs and any ultimate loss will once again belong to the public. It is important at this point to distinguish between politicians and those whom they are elected to represent.

Folk who defend or justify the expense in terms of art and the cultural benefits to the public have no valid argument at all. If they manage to rid themselves of the criteria of the so-called 'real' world then they are left with millions of pounds of public money to spend on the arts and culture in this world. This world is different from that other world. In that other world there is only one set of criteria, designed to set the conditions for monetary gain: in this world - the one where art and culture exist - there are a variety of sets of criteria; they include the one mentioned, but also others such as the moral, the aesthetic, the humanitarian and so on. In Glasgow there are a great many artists and others already engaged in the field itself who could have made a job of that £50 million.

No one has to be opposed to art 'dirtying its fingers in the market-place'. Nor does anyone have to be in favour of it. The question is irrelevant. What is at issue is value; the criteria by which we determine merit. In the world of the 'European Cities of Culture' a work of art is judged by the financial expediency of big business.

The people of Glasgow - artists and everybody else - were presented with a *fait accompli*, by a partnership supposedly there to represent public and private interests. But in reality the interests were always private. The only surprising thing about the fact is that people are surprised by it. Meaningful debate on the subject was never allowed.

This too should not be surprising. Secrecy, censorship and suppression are essential ingredients of the 'real' world of private profit and public loss. Nowadays this is achieved by open decree. Taking its lead from the Tory national government local officials of the Labour-controlled District Council tried to suppress and censor voices of dissent. And when that failed they succeeded, to their eternal shame, in punishing those who dared speak out.

Contemporary government, municipal, regional and national, is rooted firmly in the structure of U.S. corporate business management. Those who should be our elected representatives and custodians are transformed into chief executives. At the highest level their power is centralised to the point of autonomy. They are no longer accountable to anyone. Our artistic and cultural assets, in common with our economic resources, have become their property, not to keep for themselves but to dispose of, and to dispose of entirely, as they see fit, to whomsoever they see fit.

The mainstream media and the problems faced by those who attempt to work within them while retaining a degree of integrity is much too large an issue to discuss fully here. But it makes no difference how good a journalist is if the work cannot be done in the way it should be done, if the values of the journalist are not only an irrelevance but a positive hindrance in the face of those who own or control the purse strings. Unfortunately many of those engaged in the field are so far repressed they have lost sight of the reality. When confronted by folk who persist in criticising certain aspects of society they cannot get beyond the criteria within which they themselves are forced to operate and thus, intentionally or otherwise, are forced to seek ulterior motive or personal interest where none exist. It has been interesting to observe the response - or lack of response - of the media in general to the welter of controversy surrounding 'Culture City', and how in some cases blame for the many disasters has been shifted from the actual culprits onto the people who have directed the criticism.

It is always easier to focus attention on a victim rather than seek out the cause of the violation. It is further true in this society that we make victims of people and then punish them for being victims, frequently by transforming them into objects of ridicule or even criminals. Those who attempt to defend the victims are then punished themselves; sometimes they too are 'criminalised'.

But whether we attack victims or defend victims, in a repressed society, we will do so

by ignoring the context. If we go through the list of oppressed groups and communities of people in this country we see that our institutions are geared to punish them, and are being refined constantly to that purpose. We can attack black people or defend black people and somehow manage to ignore our actual institutions which are, quite simply, racist; they are designed to victimise black people. And whenever somebody excavates a hole in some oppressive legislation or other a government expert is sitting about waiting to pour in a ton of concrete. The current situation in Southall, London is a prime example; here a body of folk - the local Monitoring Group - exist solely to aid and support victims of racist violation, which includes murder; they themselves are being punished and criminalised. Their public subsidy has now been withdrawn; they are repeatedly harassed and intimidated in one form or another, by the Forces of that Law and Order so beloved by the likes of Lord Denning. Their aims and objectives have been distorted and misrepresented in one way or another by a majority of the mainstream media.

We can attack or defend folk claiming Income Support and ignore the institutions of the country which are designed to punish them further. And we can then find ways of attacking those who go to their aid, whether individuals or even official organisations connected to the social services. Anyone who signally highlights the plight of society's victims is guilty, in the eyes of those who control society; they are guilty of implying a cause of the violation.

The most straightforward method of punishment is the slow withdrawal of public funding. The cost-cutting exercises then begin. The service provided to the victims is eroded until eventually the entire edifice collapses. As with subsidised theatre companies and other arts' bodies this can lead to the drive for private funding - which at this stage is classified as 'charity' within the criteria of the 'real' world; in the event of a total sell-out it may be described as 'privatisation'. But if we are talking about a service for the people then normally it just becomes absent, it ceases to exist.

A few older, liberal-minded folk still maintain that An Age of Liberalism existed from a point in the mid 1960's until a point in the early 1970's. I'm speaking of the arts in particular although some might want to generalise. In either case it may or may not be true. It probably is true for those who assume that the British Broadcasting Corporation was once an authentic instrument for freedom. But in present day Scotland, as elsewhere in Britain and most of the so-called 'free world', it isn't art and big business that are close allies, it's art and subversion; the notion that creative endeavour has a right to a public - let alone private - subsidy is not a paradox, it is a straightforward contradiction. ■

A version of this essay appeared in THE RECKONING, published by Clydeside Press, December 1990, and it derives from the introduction to James Kelman's forthcoming collection of plays HARDIE AND BAIRD: THE LAST DAYS to be published by Secker and Warburg.

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The Sisterhood School

SLEEPING WITH MONSTERS

Conversations with Scottish
and Irish Women Poets

Rebecca Wilson

Polygon £8.95

Rosemary Milne

Sleeping With Monsters is a collection of interviews, carried out by Rebecca Wilson, with twenty five Scottish and Irish poets, all of them women. Each explores broadly similar themes and questions: the task of the woman poet, the source of her poetic inspiration, the methods she employs in writing, the particular challenges of writing out of a 'minority' culture and, for those poets writing in Irish or Gaelic, in a minority language. Each interview is followed by two or sometimes three poems written by the interviewee.

With such a tiny example of the poets' work, you'd hardly buy this book for their poetry. Indeed on the poetry side, you'll

suffer some frustration owing to the fact that Rebecca Wilson occasionally makes quite detailed reference to poems which do not then appear in the poetry sections.

So if the poetry itself is not a reason for the purchase, why else might you buy it? Well, if your feminism drew you in that direction, you might buy it as a gesture of support or solidarity with the little known or published contemporary woman poet. Except that a good number from among these poets are known, celebrated and respected. And many of them explain in their discussion with Rebecca Wilson, that the question of their 'women-ness' as poet is not what drives them to create. Just as important for them is their Irishness, their Scottishness, their religion, their family background.

So, the most compelling reason to buy it must be that you hope to share in these 'conversations' and gain from them fresh insights into poetic creativity. If that is so, you will not be wholly disappointed. There are one or two tantalising passages, some intriguing comments and observations. But you'll have to search for them because Rebecca Wilson keeps her interviewees on a very tight rein. Time and again you're just getting interested in what the poet has to say and Rebecca moves her and you on.

Take this passage from her interview with Tessa Ransford:

RW: *I was interested in your fascination with Dido and Aeneas.*

TR: *Yes, that seems to me a marvellous parable for what happens to women.*

RW: *How do you mean?*

TR: *Well, you pour out your riches and then some duty always comes first with men. With women love comes first. I think duty is a very evil thing in many ways. If it's going to cut across personal relationships, then what sort of duty is it? There is a conflict, there's no doubt about it. Men are very scared of women. And many women, I think, have not written because of this, or have written under pen names, or have written and not published... Novels can be projected into another age, another place and time, but poetry has to come from the power of our experience and our own mental fight. It's a fight all the time to believe in ourselves and to keep our thoughts clear when people are telling us we're wrong or stupid.*

RW: *You use a lot of rhyme and metre. How do you make the decision about what form goes with what metre?*

This sudden change of direction is typical of the interviews. It may be partly explained



by the interviewer's own lack of confidence or ability to use the rich material laid before her or, in other instances, by her apparent wish to establish her own credentials as a poet among poets. But the staccato-like leaps from question to question seem to arise principally from the fact that - contrary to the claims made in the introductory essay - this is a book about **an idea** - the idea of the woman poet in a minority culture - rather than about the poets **as they reveal themselves to be**. Someone should have told Rebecca Wilson that you don't eliminate the rigidity of a predetermined framework simply by supplying a good dose of cosy detail about the domestic circumstances, emotional etc state of your interviewee.

Overall, in terms of learning about poetic creativity, this seems to me to be a book to confirm you in the belief that poets are best left to write poetry and not expected to theorise, analyse and generally unpack what is essentially a solitary and unknowable creative process.

In terms of its feminist stance, it has the worst fault of all: it belongs in the 'sisterhood' mode of feminist writing. That is the one which denies the female reader the affirmation of the importance of conflict and disagreement among women as a means to extend ourselves and our art. ■

Poetry doesn't pay

People keep telling me
Your poems, you know,
you've really got something there,
I mean really.

When the rent man calls, I go
down on my knees, and through
the conscience box I tell him.

This is somebody speaking,
short distance, did you know
I have something here with my poems?
People keep telling me.

'All I want is fourteen pounds
and ten pence, hold the poesy.'

But you don't realise
I've got something here.

'If you don't come across
with fourteen pounds and ten pence soon
you'll have something at the side of the road,
made colourful by a little snow.'

But.

'But nothing,
you can't pay me in poems or prayers
or with your husband's jokes,
or with photographs of your children
in lucky lemon sweaters
hand-made by your dead Grand Aunt
who had amnesia and the croup.

'I'm from the Corporation,
what do we know or care about poesy,
much less grand amnostic dead aunts.'

But people keep telling me.

'They lie.
If you don't have fourteen pounds
and ten pence, you have nothing
but the light of the penurious moon.'

Rita Ann Higgins

Arrival in the New World: Early 20s



Migrant Minds

ON THE CROFTERS' TRAIL

In Search of the Clearance Highlanders

David Craig

Jonathan Cape £14.99

Derek Rodger

You don't need to have relatives in Canada, or New Zealand or Australia, or such places as London where Scots have traditionally moved. You don't need to lament the passing of Gaelic, or of the Scots tongue and regret you don't carry your elders' language. You don't need even to be the quiet reflective type who stares into your beer pondering the national psyche.

You certainly don't need to live, like I do, in a glen which one hundred and fifty years ago boasted a population of some 2500 souls - their houses though broken and ruined, are still on the hillsides. Now there are 100 of us and most of those are, like me, migrant incomers.

You don't need to be any of this to know - to really know - what *On the Crofters' Trail* is about. Anyone who has any connection with Scottish life, whether in this generation or before, just knows of the dark passage that was the nineteenth century. Most Scots make decisions on the major personal question early on in life - whether to stay or go.

David Craig left Aberdeen thirty years ago but it's not hard to work out where his

heart lies. He has combined his love of walking hills and mountains, with his deeply insightful touch as a writer to produce a book that the reader simply cannot walk away from.

Sutherland, Shetland, Orkney, Perthshire, the Inner and Outer Hebrides, Cape Breton Island, Prince Edward Island, Ontario and Manitoba are the places that Craig has tramped on his mission to hear about the experiences of the people who were cleared from the land in Scotland in the name of economic progress. To give the people their voice. And to get beyond the historical events themselves to the emotional dimension of Clearance as it was experienced.

Many of the people that Craig talks to in the course of his own and the crofters' trail, are quite old. So some are only one or two generations away from the lived events. The day of eviction one hundred and fifty years ago can be brought painfully and movingly alive.

What more universally precious symbol for life than milk? Especially precious perhaps when life in the Highlands and Islands was always economically precarious. The elemental symbol of fire is especially strong too in a rural world, and physical and spiritual life seem to draw strength from the light in the hearth. In some communities today, the fire is never allowed to go out.

What literal and metaphorical brutality, when stories survive over generations of the day the factors' men poured the milk over the fire to get the people out! Out of the house before they torched the wood and turf roof. The first nights out in the open are recounted; the journey to the

coast to take up a living on narrow strips of shore the landowners didn't need for grazing the sheep.

Or to the coast to emigrate in conditions that many did not survive. Alistair MacKinnon of Sleat recounts his grandfather's two brothers 'who were forced to emigrate with their wives but they died on the voyage to North America, both widowed and each with babes in their arms born on the voyage'.

The most compelling thing about this catalogue of inhumanity is how the ancestors cope with it now. 'I read half way through Alexander MacKenzie's book about the Clearances, but I had to stop - it was too painful'. The enduring response of despair.

People sought religion and became otherworldly, though there was a good deal of distaste for the role of the institutional Church - 'I think the minister had much to do with that (the lack of organised resistance)'. And there was spiritual solace in the dispensing of the curse - 'the black poetry of the Clearances' as Craig writes. These curses he heard are, 'the heart of a heartless situation, the sigh of the oppressed, since they enact a symbolic revenge on those who because of their legal power over property are beyond the reach of more practical retaliation or resistance'.

It was common too, to repress the trauma of eviction - 'Mother forbade us to ask about it, when we came home from school and started asking'. And many voices, with the attendant sucking in of air, wore the cloak of resignation - 'aye, that was how it was'.

So convincing and authentic are the voices *On the Crofters' Trail*, that questions start to emerge - none of them remotely comforting. With page upon page of oral record, chapter on chapter of inhumanity, tale up on tale of heartless landlordism, this becomes a book so captivating in its humanity, that it contains the deep unease of enquiry attaching to the cultural, and political, direction of a people.

Was the quality of fatalistic passivity that has been attached to the Scots, particularly to the Highland and Islanders, a cause of their plight of oppression, eviction, and emigration? Heresy. Or was it the effect of a politically and economically bankrupt set of political circumstances, the consequences of which - depopulation, marginality, economic depression - stretch down to the present day?

No doubt many of the migrants who survived the trauma of clearance, the hardships of the voyage to North America, and the problems of arriving destitute in a foreign land were 'better off' than they probably ever were under thecrofting system as existed. But whether Scots decide to stay or go, it's the migration in the mind that's the thing to manage. This is a national treasure of a book which, deeply rooted in our forbears' experience, gives us a berthing place to sail away from or to land. ■



Companies giving in excess of

City for Sale

THE RECKONING

Edited by Farquar McLay

Clydeside Press £3.95

Sean Bradley

It could only happen in Glasgow.

Only in Glasgow could a Labour administration so totally embrace the notion of the City of Culture. And only there could it have met with such eloquent and sustained resistance.

While the Culture City enters possibly its most creative phase yet - the accounting - the Workers City group have succeeded in publishing a remarkable book of essays, reminiscence, stories and poems. It marks a compelling close to a year of debate and direct action by the group but continues the war of words on what the City of Culture meant, and will continue to mean, for the people of Glasgow.

What happened in Glasgow in 1990 made this book happen, but the last year alone does not dominate its content. Social and political policy on industry, development, the economy, land use, not to mention the arts, brought the city to be European City of Culture.

Under the oddly erroneous title 'Glasgow's Not For Sale', Brendan McLaughlin provides a fascinating account of the city's policies in relation to property, notably housing. McLaughlin outlines the consequences for the city's population of changes arising from the New Town Act of 1946, which marked the beginning of the relocation of the inner city population to new housing on the periphery.

It began the process of breaking up the old system of private factoring, where young people got houses to rent next to their parents. This caused the first signs of breakdown in the complex matrilocal system of social relations, causing many young families to become isolated in their new homes. It breached the integrity of the collective consciousness which tolerated the

diverse human characteristics within the community and gave it a sense of solidarity. Perhaps the most striking consequence, however, was the corrosion of the cohesiveness of an industrial proletariat which had always demonstrated the potential to be a major political challenge.

What the urban population got and continued to get was substandard housing with no proper infrastructure to nourish real communities, culminating in the monstrous high-rise developments of the 1960s. When regeneration came to the inner city in the 80s it resulted in profit for private enterprise and the loss of many public assets. The result, according to McLaughlin, is a ghost town.

Who would want to live there anymore? Most Glaswegians have refused to be taken in by it all, what with the new City Centre houses next to dark and unpopulated no-go areas around the huge shopping malls and car-parks, where it is getting more and more dangerous to be after dark.

The growing partnership of the Town Hall with private enterprise coupled with the distaste for democratic accountability sets the scene for what was to unfold in the shape of the 1990 City of Culture.

There are other historical contributions from Ned Donaldson and Michael Donnelly, and contemporary pieces from, among others, Alasdair Gray, Freddy Anderson, Hugh Savage and Norman Bissell. What becomes clear is that, contrary to the title of Brendan McLaughlin's essay, Glasgow **IS** for sale; what is not for sale is the Glasgow spirit of resistance or that of the Workers City group.

Farquhar McLay, the editor, makes it clear that the Workers City group is not a political party, that its members would likely disagree on many topics. It can be assumed however, that all or nearly all are on the left and share the common purpose of confronting the Culture City juggernaut by standing in its path.

The problems, however, of organising and making effective such a group are not often aired. In this connection, the 'Subjective Account' by James Kelman is, to my mind, the most significant piece in the book.

It describes some of the action surrounding one of the most scandalous side-shows of Culture City, the proposed sale of part of

Glasgow Green. Kelman wrote an account of a demonstration at a Council Committee meeting which was due to make a decision on the sale. His account is produced without correction -

About 200 folk turned up. Mostly individuals unconnected to any grouping. Very few young folk. We took it to them by moving into the Chambers en masse.

In his brief account, Kelman raises some very significant issues, particularly how the group had empowered itself and how it had maintained a sense of integrity.

This was a body of people representing nobody but themselves, it was not a formal grouping of any kind. That point was missed by every official there. They could not seem to comprehend the possibility of individual members of the public coming together to act as they were acting. The idea that nobody was empowered to 'represent' folk seemed totally alien to any of them.

Kelman makes notes for future consideration and discussion: the issue of spokespersons; the usefulness or not of knowing committee procedures; the need to spread workloads, the sharing of information, the make-up of the group - does it matter if there are so few young people and women?

What is at work in this piece is a critical intelligence seeking to understand and to take responsibility for the outcome of direct action. It suggests a sense of direction and purpose that is often lacking.

Planning and organisation, according to Ewan Davidson in a recent **Edinburgh Review** article, are essential to the success of radical groups. To fail to organise leads to the exploitation of members and the inevitable 'drifting away' of all but the most committed members.

It strikes me that the failure to organise is in part the product of failure itself, or the sense of failure. It's the middle-aged unemployed man in Farquhar McLay's story protesting by pissing on the new floor of the Labour Exchange. It's worse than that, it's more polite:

I took two steps back, unbuttoned myself and peed - peed all over the shiny new floor.

This is not to condemn those who fail, or the victims of failure. **The Reckoning** seeks to take responsibility for how we work for success. ■



Un Happy Families

We've all seen them - those adverts asking us to consider adopting or fostering a child. They tug at the heartstrings as they are designed to do. These days even deprived children are a marketable commodity.

After all, what could be more appealing than an innocent, bright-eyed child asking for what your own have by right - a normal happy family? What isn't so readily available however is news of how adoption of children (as opposed to babies) actually works out - apart from the carefully chosen success stories for the next campaign. Yet UK adoption figures show a breakdown rate of around 10% for children up to the age of 10; and anything between 10 and

A review of adoption law has already begun. Some questions arise, such as the one of 'open adoption', which are central to the rights of children and adults. In the first of a series of features, Meg Henderson reports on the findings of Strathclyde research into what happens to adopted children and their parents.

50% breakdown for adoptions involving children over the age of 10.

The most recent survey has just been completed by Strathclyde Region Social Work Dep-

artment, Europe's biggest, and the results of the three year study are even less cheering. From ages 2 to 4 the breakdown rate is 20%; from age 5 to 11 it is 30%; and for adoptions involving children aged 12 and over

breakdowns occur in a staggering 60% of cases.

The whole adoption picture changed some fifteen years ago, partly because the supply of healthy white babies dried up, but partly also because of an attitude-driven conviction that all institutional care was a bad thing. Following the American lead, social work in this country, acting on research that criticised the residential care then available, started to place greater numbers of children with foster/adoptive parents. There was an immediate move to close children's homes which became something of a Cause. The idea that any family was better than life in an institution took a firm hold, and though some in the seventies had the feeling that the

'All placements where the children did not agree with what was happening to them failed'

baby was being thrown out with the bathwater, to say so was regarded as heresy.

According to Sandy Jamieson, Strathclyde's Assistant Director of Social Work in Child Care, the training of social workers did not change to take account of the placing of older children with families, or the very precise skills that would be required by adoptive parents. Mr. Jamieson, who admits to being "not surprised" by the findings of his Department's survey, maintains that specific training isn't necessary. "Social work training provides a background in a whole range of human development and growth", he says. "Social workers are not trained to deal with individual situations".

Each breakdown means a child returning to a children's home, or where possible a foster home until the next attempt. But the Strathclyde survey suggests that one failed placement does not necessarily lead to another. Children who have had six or more carers prior to adoption are understandably more likely to experience a breakdown.

All placements where the children did not agree with what was happening to them failed, adding strength to the oft-repeated complaint from children who have grown up in local authority care that no one listens to them. The highest incidence of breakdown apparently comes from families who act out of altruism, like saying they want to 'give a child a better life'. And the lowest breakdown rate happens with those who adopt for 'selfish' reasons, like being childless and wanting a family.

Mentally handicapped children and those with health problems are less likely to suffer disruption because their difficulties are obvious and easily understood. The hidden handicap of emotional disturbance produces a high rate of breakdown because it cannot be seen. Children with the most horrifying damage caused by early abuse invariably look entirely normal, but their behaviour can and often does devastate the best intentioned families. An

added difficulty is that abuse may not surface until the child has been placed with a new family.

Worse still, some social workers do not tell prospective parents all that is known about a child they are trying to place. Though Sandy Jamieson stresses that this should not happen, he is realistic enough to admit that it does.

The survey discloses that almost half of these new families are not warned that they will face resentment at some stage from the public for taking such a child. Nor were they given an alternative name or number to contact out of office hours in case of a crisis.

Where social workers had unexpressed reservations about families the disruption rate climbed, but as any foster/adoptive parent will testify, a great deal of damage can occur when social workers and parents do not like each other. In this country, unlike some others, all the power lies in the social worker's hands, and it is not unusual for parents to feel that their expertise, knowledge and commitment are only respected as long as they remain in total agreement with the social worker.

Even specialist workers who work exclusively in fostering/adoption have been known to descend without warning, removing a child without discussion or consultation. This vexed question is touched on by Isabel Freeman, Principal Officer for Information and Research in Strathclyde:

"I was depressed that social workers tended to blame parents for breakdowns, whereas parents would blame the behaviour of the child, for instance", she says. "Social workers would complain that their work had been wasted, but for the child and the family it was more personal. They had put in a lot of work too, and ended up distressed by the failure, but that wasn't always acknowledged".

Sandy Jamieson also recognises the difficulties involved. "How can it be an open, co-operative partnership when one parent holds all the power?

Yes, I know there's conflict there", he says. Indeed one of the frustrations expressed by parents was the inability to make decisions about and for the children who were part of their families.

From November, Strathclyde has appointed basic grade social workers in six of its twelve districts, whose responsibility will be the recruitment, training and support of new parents. Another six such posts will be filled in the Spring. These workers will not be given any extra training. Strathclyde, like many other social work departments across the country, prefer to rely on in-service training, and on knowledge gained by experience.

The only service in the UK providing specialist clinical input to foster/adoptive families, and the social workers supporting them, is run by Dr. John Sharp, Director of Clinical Psychology at Glasgow's Royal Hospital for Sick Children. Dr. Sharp has run a Foster/Adoption clinic for the last 15 years, the last 8 years single-handed. While any parent will confirm 'the breaking point' can be reached in a day, at the moment his waiting list is 3 months long. His quality of expertise cannot realistically be provided by social workers alone, who carry heavy caseloads containing every category of need. With pressures on the NHS, however, it is now certain that Dr. Sharp's service will cease completely within the next few months.

Sandy Jamieson advocates specialisation as the way ahead, freeing social workers to deal only with fostering/adoption. It is an opinion that must make sound sense to all families dealing with disturbed children, and one that is nevertheless resisted in many areas by social work hierarchies. For good or ill the move has been made firmly away from residential care, and specialisation seems the next logical step. But when the rate of adoption breakdowns seems to be soaring, it cannot be ethically or morally right to place ever more difficult children with families without providing the necessary quality of support to keep them there. ■

Among the Contributors in this issue...

Graham Atherton is a senior researcher with the Scottish Consumer Council on Glasgow. He writes here in a personal capacity.

Sean Bradley is a member of the **Scottish Child** editorial group.

Kay Carmichael is an author and broadcaster.

Colin Chalmers is a writer and member of the **Scottish Child** editorial group. He edited the **Scottish Child** report **Homeless Voices**.

John Duffy is from Glasgow and worked there as a social worker. He has lived in England for the last twelve years where spends his time doing community work, housework and writing.

Chris Harvie has been since 1980 Professor of British and Irish Studies at Tubingen University in Germany. He was born in Motherwell in 1944, and grew up there and in Boswell, Kelso and Edinburgh. He is the author of **Scotland and Nationalism** (1977) and **No Gods & Precious Few Heroes** (1981).

Meg Henderson is a freelance journalist.

Rita Ann Higgins was born in Galway where she has lived all her life. She published her first collection *Goddess on the Mervue Bus* in 1986.

James Kelman's new collection of stories will be published by Secker & Warburg this spring.

Alistair Mackinnon is 36, a father, lives in Kilbarchan and is discovering himself in his children.

Alison Meik is a mother of young children who lives in Middlesex.

Rosemary Milne is a member of the **Scottish Child** editorial group.

Liz Niven runs writers' groups in Dumfries-shire.

Alison Prince is an artist and writer and lives on Arran.

Peter Whiteley is a teacher and lives in Tain.



Great Publicity

Dear Editor,

I was at the launch about the homeless young people at the Glasgow town hall. I thought the launch was very good, the young people being able to tell the people that homelessness is a problem - that it isn't the fault of the child, but the fault of the parents.

When we broke up into groups we had to answer questions - it was alright because

we're all in the same boat. I thought it was good to meet more people that were homeless. Something should be done to help the young people with the problems caused mainly by parents.

Angela Livingston

Dear Editor,

The launch of the **Scottish Child**

Homeless Voices report in Glasgow was great publicity, something that was needed for a long time. It made people realise how serious homelessness really is.

It gave us a chance to give our opinions to people who were actually willing to listen, and to let them know that we are the ones who know best, so we're the ones they should be listening to.

Everyone agrees that something has to be done about it.

It was hard to believe that there were so many people in the same distress and predicament as myself. Everyone seemed to be aware that homelessness is a large problem, but no one seems to be doing anything about it.

Jane Redmund Livingston

Steiner Schools

Dear Editor,

I have read **Scottish Child** with interest over the last couple of years and have noted the feeling of concern about the welfare of today's children, emotionally, physically, socially, etc. I have also with each issue expected to read something about Rudolph Steiner and his educational system, which encompasses all aspects of childhood and child development and in my view, counters some of the effects of

being a child in the late twentieth century.

Several of your articles have left me feeling 'if only they were aware of Waldorf Education'. So it was with great pleasure that I read Sybille Alexander's article in *Out-line*.

There are Waldorf schools in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Forres. These are independent schools to which parents are asked to make contributions

towards their children's education. The schools are sometimes confused with the Camphill Movement which is actually a separate entity catering for handicapped people, although both Camphill and Waldorf establishments share the tenets of Steiner's Anthroposophy as their *raison d'être*.

Waldorf education has been in Scotland for 50 years and is gaining in popularity. Each school can supply its own pros-

pectus and general information can be obtained from the Steiner Schools Fellowship, Orlingbury House, Lewes Road, Forest Row, Sussex RH18 5AA. Tel. 0342 82 2115.

**Terry Cooney
Moray Steiner School
Forres IV36 ORD**

SCOTTISH CHILD welcomes readers' letters. Please send your letters to The Editor, **Scottish Child**, 40 Shandwick Place, Edinburgh EH2 4RT.

Early Entry

Dear Editor,

I read *Exceptional Early Entry* (*Scottish Child* December/January 1990) with some interest and no little disappointment. There is every likelihood that the issue of early entry to school may become one of the political hot potatoes of the nineties. Should this be the case, the content of Eileen Cook's article will do little to clarify matters.

The evidence from education research would indicate that it is not usually in the interests of a young child to be granted early entry. Further, the research indicates that boys suffer more than girls - emotionally, academically and socially. These facts should be considered in every case.

It was sad to see the argument reduced to statements like early entry is required to meet "my own needs as a working mother". While sympathising with the practical difficulties that Ms Cook may find in her personal life, education authorities cannot be expected to arrange an early entry system to school on these grounds. By all means let us look at early entry to school but only on the grounds of well-researched evidence into the effects on children and let us not confuse the argument about inadequate child care facilities with one about early entry.

Ian McEwan
Senior Educational Psychologist
Dumfries and Galloway Regional Council

No Smacking

Dear Editor,

The comment in your editorial regarding EPOCH's launch of No Smacking week was vitriolic.

You may dislike the approach taken by EPOCH in the leaflet promoting the week, but the priority is to appeal to a wide audience and what you describe as a 'promotions manager approach' is more likely to be successful in achieving that priority.

The leaflet, written by Penelope Leach, also included practical advice which most readers find sensible rather than sensational.

Having read *Homeless Voices* in the same issue, I am struck by the inconsistency of your attitude. In the extracts published under the names of Margaret and Andrew you draw attention to widespread and often brutal use of physical punishment, yet in your editorial you have disparaged the first attempt to encourage the public to think about other ways of relating to their children.

Marion Martin
Scottish Co-ordinator
EPOCH (End Physical Punishment of Children)
1 Melrose Street
Glasgow G4 9BJ



NEXT ISSUE - APRIL/MAY 1991

CHILDREN'S HOMES - what does society require of residential homes for children? These institutions have been steeped in controversy in recent years. Sheila Ramsay examines institutional care.

WHO'S SPECIAL? - Policies and provision for special educational needs at school and post-school level - George Thomson of Edinburgh University Department of Education reports of new research.

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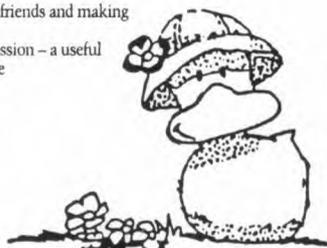
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they do? And where can the local authorities stand in a system which has a closed circle of education-for-industry and industry-for-education? According to Strathclyde's public relations man, they will stand outside it, content to oil the works of the merry-go-round with a squirt of advice on how to achieve a marketable "image".

I cannot think of the word without the inverted commas. Stripped of them the OED defines Image as an "imitation or representation of the external form of any object, esp. of a person".

The difference begins to emerge. To represent or imitate is to be engaged in the pursuit of truth, but "image" is intent on the subtle twist which presents only the desired part of the truth. What's more it's a conscious process, a very deliberate holding up of the smiling mask behind which the actor may yawn or sneer. "Image" is manufactured in order to produce a response of compassion or desire or envy, resulting in the spending of money.

The cynicism of the thing is bottomless, for it is based on the assumption that the reality of our lives has no value except as raw material for the parallel, artificial "reality" which it so intriguingly constructs.

I suspect that it is in fact a war-substitute. The struggle for power through battles has only become distasteful since it has invaded common reality instead of remaining within a theatrical setting of armour and weapons, plumed helmets, fluttering pennants, war-horses and the tight structure of rank which characterises all games of combat but which the ordinary citizenry (particularly its females) resists so anarchically. Wars were never much fun for the foot soldiers, but that didn't matter. They were not the planners of the game - very often they were not even given a choice about whether to take part or not. They were the material of it; they were, like the children of Carnbooth School, a "product" to be deployed.

Games are after all, a delight. Specially the pretending kind. After watching *The Cruel Sea*, my brother and I were the crew of the *Compass Rose* for weeks. A bit of battiness livens things up no end - hence my addiction to newspapers. But the pursuit of "image" is no more than a game of charades, and most of us are not playing. ■

Alison Prince
Scottish Child February/March 1991 35

Images of War?



lyde's Press and Public Relations Officer. He gave the a bracing talk as part of their ...-service training, emphasising the need for good media coverage of the school's activities. This, he explained, was because, as Jane Lynch put it "Whether we liked it or not and regardless of what might happen politically, industry was eventually going to finance education".

Mr. Dougherty is reported as having gone on to insist that the school must achieve a positive "image", together with a "plan" for regular publicity - all this studded with other buzzwords such as "key dates" and "targets". The teachers were finally encouraged to bear in mind that they had a "special product".

Right enough, Carnbooth School is the only one of its kind in Scotland - it is for deaf/blind children. Now there's a nice profitable little tear-jerker, specially if the darlings can be trained to operate some simple machine. A photo of the managing director smiling down at the wee groping fingers would boost the image of Megabiz and make a few quid for the school as well. Great.

A couple more snippets? Peter Morgan, Director General of the Institute of Directors said on June 28th 1990 that it was time to discard the idea that education was "to humanise our inner nature". He called for work-experience to begin as early as seven years old. Scottish Office Education Minister, Michael Forsyth in September 1990 said, "We must make sure

our children are as well educated as those in Germany or Japan, to give us a skilled workforce".

Thank you, gentlemen. That puts the thing in a nutshell: humans are a useful commodity, and let's have no nonsense about the immortal soul. Children supply the workforce and the workforce supplies industry, so industry supplies the education which supplies the children... the self-feeding circle is complete.

At a meeting in a deprived area of Glasgow recently, I found myself flanked by gentlemen in smart suits. This is not usual when the occasion involves a lot of kids. Any men present tend to be in shabbyish sports jackets; librarians and teachers tend not to be in the well-tailored league. However the captains of industry had chipped in some cash for a writing project, so there they were, handing out certificates and smiling broadly.

Under cover of the applause, one of them confided his displeasure with a particular school where the teachers persisted in putting "all this English" on the timetable despite his insistence that his future workforce needed maths and physics. I asked how many jobs he was likely to provide.

"Not a lot", he admitted. Times, after all, were hard. But the principle remained intact - those who pay the workforce feel that they should call the educational tune.

How long will it be before

I am addicted to newspapers - not to news, for that is a thoroughly unpleasant commodity, but to newspapers. They are jumble sales, full of smelly old rubbish but charged with potential treasure. A fellow-rummager unearthed this the other day, from Tunbridge Wells, home of the legendary, "Disgusted of":

MINDER WANTED

Person who is fond of animals wanted to look after 'Henry' (Rhodesian Ridgeback dog) at his home in Broadwater Down... Duties include 'walkies' and changing TV channels for him. £2.50 per hour.

Hey, missus. I know some kids who'd be happy to share his kennel, let alone his TV.

Nearer home (and nearer to the bone) was a letter from Jane Lynch in the Glasgow Herald, reporting on a visit to her school by Mr. Hugh Dougherty, Strath-

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