



ICS BOOKS

THE BEST OF 25
YEARS OF
**THE SCOTTISH
REVIEW**
ISSUE 10

INTERNATIONAL
HEALTH
FOOD
AND
FARMING



The Best of 25 Years of the Scottish Review

Issue 10

International
Health
Food and Farming

Edited by
Islay McLeod

ICS Books

To

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

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INTERNATIONAL

Outside my window: a personal account of 9/11

Rosalind Galt

2001

I was in love with New York at first sight, with a view as iconic as it was clichéd, and utterly breathtaking. It was 1994 and I was being driven to the city by a friend. You can get surprisingly close to Manhattan without seeing it, and just as dusk was falling we turned a corner in Queens and the whole midtown skyline appeared as if by magic.

Right in front of me, across the water, was the Empire State Building, silhouetted by the enormous, deep red sun that was setting in self-consciously picturesque fashion behind it. It was a long shot worthy of a Woody Allen film, but with a sheer material presence that made the composition all the more audacious. I was gone.

And the thing about that 'as if by magic' moment is that it keeps happening; the sudden postcard image of vast skyscrapers emerging from behind a more everyday view is an appearing trick that the city never quite stops playing on you, even when you know it's there. Take the B or D train to Brooklyn and all of a sudden you're over the water, with all of downtown on one side of you and the Brooklyn Bridge spanning on the other. Or look behind you as you escape midtown traffic onto the Queensborough Bridge. Or, best of all, drive along the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway towards the Manhattan Bridge. Do it at night. You'll come out from downtown Brooklyn onto the road under the Promenade, and in an instant all the lights of lower Manhattan appear in a dizzying rush of skyscrapers and water. It might just be the most beautiful view of the city. At least it used to be.

Tuesday 11 September

The sky in New York City is a shade of blue that doesn't exist in Scotland. It's deep and bright and completely cloudless. On 11 September, it was perfect, an insanely beautiful day. I was having breakfast when we got a phone call from the street: 'Look out of the window'.

I did so, at first looking north and seeing nothing of any interest. Then I looked downtown and started yelling. I was living in Greenwich Village and the living room window looked directly down the west side of Manhattan. I could see World Trade Center 1 billowing with smoke, what looked at the time like a terrible accident, a huge fire cutting across the building. As I was watching, the second plane hit, and a cloud of orange fire exploded from the near side of World Trade Center 2. For those who saw it later, on television, this was the moment at which it became clear what was happening, but at the time, my brain was not yet processing cause and effect, motivation and politics. All that we could understand was the impossible reality of what we were seeing, right there, outside the window.

In the hours that followed, the reality outside the window and that inside made occasional attempt to connect. My boyfriend took off on his bike with a camera, shooting

off reels of film, while I walked to the West Side Highway where thousands of downtown office workers were making their way uptown in an unending column. Locals mingled on the street, mostly not approaching those walking past. They were quiet for the most part, shocked, but some were talkative and many were trying unsuccessfully to get cellphone signals.

Feeling a bit ghoulish, I went back inside, where the security guard told me the Pentagon had been hit. A group of us went to the roof, and when we got there, the first tower had gone. Another guard chased us off the roof, so I went back downstairs where the television was on. On the screen, a tower began to buckle and waver. A replay, I thought, of the collapse I didn't see. Then I realised the picture was live, and rushed back to the window. I saw the second tower fall, both from my window and on television. It is uncanny when what you can see on television is identical to what you can see from your window. Score one for reality.

Later that morning, a friend who had been at work in Manhattan and couldn't get home to Brooklyn came over with her brother. My boyfriend's father, who had lived through the war in Germany, went to the supermarket and bought enough food to last through a siege.

I spent the day trying to get an outside line to phone home, but there was no service outside Manhattan, much less to Scotland. We all sat in front of the television until we couldn't take any more, and then we wandered the streets with no real purpose. Since we were below 14th Street, the area was sealed and the streets were completely empty of traffic. Most businesses were closed, though a few remained open, presumably those whose staff lived in the neighbourhood.

I sat for an hour or so in an Italian cafe in the Village with my boyfriend's mother, drinking gin and tonics and eating calamari. The cafe was packed. I heard my name called and saw a colleague from work. We don't know each other very well, but we greeted each other like long-lost friends. It was good to see a familiar face. That night, we heard military planes flying low along the Hudson River. Even though I knew they were US Air Force planes, I flinched each time I heard one.

Wednesday 12 September

My boyfriend decided to look for a newspaper and so we set off north to find a store that was open. When we reached 14th Street, we realised just how separate our neighbourhood was: the downtown avenue was closed off with a large police roadblock and a dozen or so state officials were checking IDs at the barrier. We asked if we would be able to get back in, and were told that we needed some document that proved we lived there.

Above 14th Street, things looked relatively normal, although only relatively. We accosted anyone we saw with a *New York Times*, asking where they had found it. One woman had walked from 80th Street down to the newspaper's office in Times Square, and then just kept walking to 23rd Street. Did she have any actual reason to be this far downtown? Or did she just set course south and keep going? Who knows, but she found her paper. We got one

more easily, finding a kiosk in Chelsea with a fresh consignment and a lengthy queue. We bought three newspapers: two for us and one for a homeless woman who had got in line but had no money for a paper.

Later in the afternoon, I went with a group of friends down the West Side Highway, which is where the various rescue workers' vehicles were coming back from Ground Zero. A large and straggly crowd had gathered. As police, firefighters, EMS people, doctors, nurses and construction workers drove by, we cheered and clapped. This was a typical West Village crowd, with a lot of younger people, and many gay men.

As one woman commented wryly, this is the first time you'll see people cheering the cops on Christopher Street. New York cops have not enjoyed a good reputation in the last few years, and many of those applauding them that day had probably walked with me the year before on anti-police brutality demonstrations. In fact, this crowd felt a little like a demo, with the same sense of camaraderie. What was different was the outpouring of positive emotion. While some of the vans drove by us, others slowed right down, allowing people to shout individual thanks to the workers inside. At one point, a fire engine came by, and in front of it a single fire-fighter in a wheelchair. Injured, but apparently not badly, he wheeled the chair slowly up the highway, to rapturous applause and heartfelt thanks. By this time, we knew how many firefighters had not made it out.

That week, everyone was buying postcards of the World Trade Center. Of course they won't run out in the long term, since more can be printed, but people were behaving as if the pictures, too, would never be seen again. Every postcard and poster shop had placed their World Trade Center images in the window, and some had raised the prices. I looked in one popular store on Bleecker Street, only to overhear a woman haranguing the owner for doubling his prices on those pictures. I left. In another shop down the block, I ran into a couple of women also searching for images. I told them not to go inside the price-gouging place and we compared the pictures available.

On Houston Street, a market stall was selling black and white framed art prints, almost all World Trade Centre views. Some fashionable girls held the photographs up, deciding on a panoramic night view. I looked in vain for a photograph taken from Brooklyn, and in the end bought only a few colour postcards, holding off on the framed print until I found the right point of view. That night, my boyfriend's brother turned up with a bag full of postcards that he had impulsively decided to buy. The whole city seems to have been seized by the desire to own an image of the buildings.

Walter Benjamin described the mechanically reproduced image as an attempt on the part of the masses to bring things closer, in the way that, for example, prints of paintings make the world of high art available to all but remove in the process the unique aura felt in the experience of the original object. The fierce desire to hold close the most degraded touristic images of the lost buildings certainly attests to the popular appeal of the reproduction, in which New Yorkers *en masse* experienced a need for proximity, but it also implies something further about the power of this kind of image. Benjamin describes the

aura of an object as a question of presence: the experience of theatre in which the audience shares the same actual space as the actor, or the original artwork, seen face to face. But there is also an aura in photography, in which it is the missed encounter with the original object that compels the viewer. Here, it is the absence rather than the presence of the object seen that is powerful.

For Roland Barthes, this temporality defines the photograph. He points out that the photographic image always comes from the past, physically recording a moment in time that is gone. The most basic element of photography, he says, is the 'that-has-been': in other words, the temporality of loss.

Speaking of a 19th-century photograph of a condemned criminal, he describes the strange situation for the modern viewer, whereby the subject of the image is at once already dead and is going to die. It is this doubled temporality that makes the cheery picture postcards of the World Trade Center at once so painful and so desirable. The aura of the buildings, once experienced only in the awe of standing beneath the sheer scale of their physical presence, has now become a function of their absence, and the photographic image of what once was has been transformed from a mere copy into a precise index of this loss. For New Yorkers, the World Trade Center was above all an image; the view that orientated us, that told us which way was downtown, the view from the airport that told us we were home. In buying a postcard image, we are exchanging the aura of the original for the aura of the photograph, and in doing so we are able to experience mourning for what has so quickly become the past.

Thursday 13 September

My first day back at work: by that point, I was desperate to get out of the house. Two days of sitting in front of the television, hardly seeing any people, had made me feel worse rather than better. I walked across town, staying below 14th Street for as long as possible. I couldn't explain why, but somehow the cordoned-off, deserted streets of lower Manhattan felt easier to manage than the bustle that continues further uptown. The Village has never been better named than in those days without cars, where only those who lived and worked there were on the streets, smiling at each other as they passed. The lack of traffic was astonishing: I could walk across Fifth Avenue without even looking. It would have been beautiful if you could forget why there were no cars. When I reached Sixth Avenue, I carefully avoided looking downtown. It was the first of many un-views to be navigated.

Friday 14 September

The wind changed direction, and the air outside began to be filled with the smell of the World Trade Center. It's a hard smell to define, like burning rubber mixed with plastic dust, but quite distinctive. Once you have smelled it, it is instantly recognisable. Some people wore face masks on the street. Near my work, it was bearable, but further downtown it became oppressive, choking.

I went to work again, but couldn't have done anything constructive even if I had wanted to. We had no long-distance phone lines and no internet connection. We could have phoned film production companies within New York City but none of them were working either, and besides, it just felt wrong. After half an hour, our boss told us to go home, and so my department went to the pub, where drinks were half price. It seemed by far the healthiest thing to do.

Afterwards, I passed a vigil in Union Square park, where sheets of butchers' paper had been laid out for people to write messages on. Prayers and expressions of grief mixed with a disturbing number of violent anti-Arab comments. In the park, the dominant mood was peaceful, with old-style hippies singing *Give Peace a Chance*, and alternative kids playing bongo drums and dancing, while others draped in American flags lit candles. The vigil was a sincere expression of pain, but the pious expressions of political pacifism struck me as somewhat glib under the circumstances. A more disturbing response of belligerent patriotism was also visible on the streets. Right after the vigil, I chanced to be walking with another non-American when a large SUV drove past, draped in flags, with patriotic slogans painted on the windscreens. Beefy white men hung out of the windows.

One of them yelled 'God bless America!' in our general direction, followed by the vaguely threatening query, 'Are you American?' I think he meant it rhetorically in the sense of 'join in – aren't you American after all?', but it felt distinctly uncomfortable. We responded: 'No, we're not American actually, you have a problem with that?' But we did it quietly.

In the weeks after the attacks, patriotism appeared to triumph over protest, with American flags ubiquitous, every second person on the street sporting a flag, badge, sweater or ribbon. Unattributed posters appeared on bus shelters and walls, with images of the Statue of Liberty, reading 'God Bless America'. To a foreigner, and to many Americans too, it quickly became oppressive, this constant semiotic demand for a political solidarity and a sense of national identity that we didn't feel. At my office, red, white and blue ribbons were handed out. Only a few of us didn't wear them, and we felt under surveillance, anxious that we were being noted as unpatriotic. But if the American flags carried unappealing ideological implications, everyone could stand behind the other symbol that appeared across the city: the 'I love New York' poster. Soon, businesses were displaying its new incarnation: 'I love New York more than ever'.

But more than the overt symbols of solidarity, what really touched New Yorkers were the missing posters, pinned to walls all over the city, and remaining long after it became clear that none of these people were missing, all were simply dead.

Many writers have commented on these posters – they are the most striking way in which the enormous loss of life has been understood on a recognisable level by those who live here. These posters were everywhere, pinned to every lamp-post, every bus stop. I saw the same faces repeatedly: Roger Mark Rasweiler, Stacey Cho, Sneha Ann Philip, and I came to recognise them from a distance, like acquaintances.

The other recurring moment of pain is to come across a fire station. Our local fire station

lost nine men in the attack, but every station I have seen in the last weeks has become a memorial, a focus for public appreciation and grief. Their forecourts are filled with flowers, children's drawings, letters and candles. In my Little Italy neighbourhood, there are also many Virgins and saints. On one downtown station, there hangs a banner, several storeys high, covered in messages of support from the state of Alaska.

Everyone has a World Trade Center story, and everyone you talk to tells you their story, or the stories of their friends. By degrees of separation you hear so many narratives, spread across the city, and it doesn't matter any more whose they are. It was one friend's wedding anniversary. Another friend was on the subway when it happened, going to Brooklyn, and was probably underneath the World Trade Center moments before it was hit, although she didn't find out until halfway through the class she went on to teach.

Someone else, working in midtown, heard when her mother called her office from Turkey, checking that she was alive. An acquaintance was, like many of my colleagues in the New York film community, in Toronto for the film festival there. He heard by email, in a hotel room, and didn't believe it until he turned on the television. One relative of a friend worked on Wall Street and was held in his building when the planes hit the towers, not allowed to leave. He looked out of the window and saw people jumping, one after the other and then too many to count. Eventually, he had to turn away. 'It's not like it was on TV,' he said.

By October, life in New York was returning to normality, or at least making a pretty good show of it. I worked at a conference for independent filmmakers, went to restaurants, shopped. The New York Film Festival went ahead, although some of the European directors scheduled to attend cancelled at the last minute. Even more encouragingly, pockets of resistance appeared: some of the 'Giuliani for Mayor' posters were graffitied, with a 'not' added. Everyone agrees that the mayor has done an astonishing job, and his popularity is deserved, but these anonymous acts of political refusal reassure me that the city retains its spirit.

This new normality is also characterised by moments of utter strangeness. One evening, while I was sitting with friends outside a restaurant, waiting for our table, a man walked by carrying gas masks for sale. They were obviously very old, Korean War perhaps or even Second World War era, and by all accounts utterly useless in the event of a gas attack. My friend told us how scared she was of biological terrorism. Then we got our table and went inside for pisco sours and margaritas. That weekend, I was unpacking boxes, having moved house in the midst of all this madness, when I checked my email and read that the US and UK had bombed Afghanistan. Great. Now my friends don't seem quite so paranoid; perhaps we are all going to die.

Mid-October

The bombing having escalated, people were getting nastier. The anthrax cases in Florida, Washington and New York were causing alarm and the news media were gearing up for full scaremongering mode. Here, there seem to be more sirens in the streets than before,

but I suspect we are just noticing them more, as New York has always been a noisy place. This alertness to potential danger, even just potential events, is a new and apparently more lasting effect of the attacks. Sirens, lorries rumbling, helicopters: all the city sounds that barely registered before are now keenly felt, if only as Pavlovian twinges of fear.

By late October, the anthrax panic had started in earnest. People started talking about little else and anthrax became both a verb and an adjective (he got anthraxed, anthrax this, I'm feeling anthractic). At work, the new routine became clear: the receptionist sorts the mail wearing latex gloves, distributes it to individual pigeon-holes, whereupon all the rest of the staff pick it up with their bare hands and open it as usual. Everyone in New York seemed to have a cold this week and those suffering have described it as 'just a touch of anthrax'.

A lot of people are talking about moving away from New York. Most of them probably will do no such thing; talk of moving away is a way to cope, a reaction to feeling trapped and scared. A few are actually following through. I can't imagine leaving here though. New York feels like home, in a way that nowhere else outside of Glasgow does.

In fact, New Yorkers are a lot like Glaswegians – they're rude and sarcastic, and they swear a lot. They are also incredibly friendly and talkative. People who live far from New York have told me that I am brave for staying here and carrying on with life as usual but I don't think bravery is the issue. For the first time, I understand why so few people moved away from British cities to avoid the Blitz. We are far from experiencing such ongoing trauma here but these events remind us similarly of why we choose to live where we do.

I chose to be here because of everything that makes this city unique. One Saturday night in September, I was walking home late when I heard a very drunk man in the street shouting 'I love New York'. I couldn't help adding 'me too' under my breath.

After the fall: the need for hope

Ian Mackenzie

2001

This was the text of a lecture given by Ian Mackenzie on 10 November 2001 to ICS's Assembly of Scotland

As my mother bore into the large dining room a tray of snacks and beverages, what met her eye was an array of male bottoms. What filled her ear was an astonishingly loud noise. The two were causally linked. The Army had just exploded a large land-mine dropped by the Luftwaffe not far from our home, and for urgent technical reasons had been forced to detonate it nearer than planned. For blackout reasons, the kirk session was meeting in the manse which was my home. My minister father was normally a mild man, but having moved from private to captain in the attrition of the First World War trenches, he had, hearing the bang, bellowed, 'under the table'. Thus my mother's vision. Later she said she'd been vouchsafed a miracle: to see a kirk session on its knees.

This is what war is like: the gruesome and the bizarre in random counterpoise. The gruesome usually dominates, however. Three streets away, around that time, I'd stood, aged 10, looking aghast at a house which had had its front sliced off by a bomb the night before, killing a boy I sat next to at school. Since I was spending most nights sheltering in the gas meter cupboard under the stairs, the obscenity of a naked house did not reassure me. Nor did the rubble of the pub beside the church where 30 men were killed by a direct hit and so many wounded that my mother and older sister spent 24 hours accompanying bleeding bodies to hospital and corpses to the morgue. But my most direct contact with the terror of war was on a Saturday morning. I was going for some messages when without warning something roared up behind me. I turned my head to see a huge black shape in the sky banking sharply in my direction. At rooftop level, the swastika Heinkel drove straight at me, machine gun bullets rattling on the road. If I hadn't dashed into a close, I probably wouldn't be here to write this.

Yet because these were dramatically defined moments of actuality, they did not create the depth of unease built up over a two-year period by being woken up night after night by wailing sirens. Dredged out of sleep, the brain always registered three existential questions: will we be hit tonight? Will this never end? Will I be alive tomorrow? Amplified by the subsequent oom-oom-oom of the Dornier or Heinkel overhead, this was a form of terror waged on one Christian child by fathers, uncles, brothers or sons of other Christians. And to put it mildly, our Christian culture repaid it in spades over Dresden, to mention but the most obvious fellow European victim of our terror bombing campaign.

Terror is not new.

But are 'terrorists'?

The Second World War attacks on civilians were by sovereign states, as a matter of policy. And Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Cambodia – those were the *Apocalypse Now* terrorist-type means to an allegedly ethical end – an end to terror and the preservation of Christian values.

Non-state terror is not new, either. It preceded modern state warfare. Merciless cruelty has been perpetrated by men individually and *en masse* throughout recorded history.

It is therefore a reckless distortion of both language and history to allow contemporary brigands to corner the terror vocabulary. Of course they are terrorists. But so is everyone else when the cause deems it expedient. The Christian church itself across centuries used terror, torture and death to 'save' sinners. The phrase 'Christian civilisation', rearing its head with some complacency in recent weeks, has been deafening my brain with the clanging of multitudinous pots and kettles.

And that is why, for the first time in my life, I declined to say anything about an 'ishoo'. I was on the rota to do 'Thought For the Day' for *Good Morning Scotland* on Wednesday 12 September. On the afternoon of the 11th, I phoned Johnston McKay, editor of religious programmes at BBC Scotland, and begged to be excused. As a Christian, I was sandbagged. I had absolutely nothing to say. Or at least I'd nothing to say that would be appropriate on air in the ears of people still in the slipstream of trauma. In the event, Johnston McKay filled the two minute 'Thought' slot himself and spoke a religious truth with precision, namely that the division between Cain and Abel runs not between people but through every person. He couldn't say at that sensitive moment what I hope I am now free to say: we are all terrorists – potentially. Terrorism lurks, under greater or lesser control, in every brain. Church leaders have called us to pray for a better world. But how do I achieve a better me?

That is a personal problem each person has to work at, but perhaps we would not be wasting our time if we considered an aspect of a general problem: until the world has better people, how do we limit the damage? The pacifist answer may address the long-term adaptation of the human species to non-violence, but it doesn't address the immediate problem of damage limitation. That, to be fair to politicians, is the dilemma we dump on them. And then, when they fail to find perfect solutions for problems we haven't solved, we, being irrational, blame them.

On the basic moral dilemma, I don't claim to have any great insights, or indeed any new insights at all. It has taken us thousands of years to get where we are, by painful and terrible trial and error; there's no reason to believe we can solve these matters by a quick moral fix in our time. But since the 11th of September, I've been made aware of areas where we can maybe exercise some limited choice and might consider altering direction. These choices might seem marginal, even trivial, in the context of great events; yet for want of a nail, the battle can be lost.

First, the media. In one way or another I've been involved with media activities for a sizeable part of my life; and have valued many friendships among media people; so I am

wary of armchair criticism of professionals working hard to cover fast-moving events with dynamic implications. But the armchair is actually the point. It is people in their own environments, at home, work or travelling, that the media are serving. It is round the domestic or office chair that the battle for minds is fought. Two specific issues can illustrate the point, the first from television news where the problem of image overkill arises. The word overkill may seem unfortunate but actually goes to the heart of the dilemma. Anyone viewing rolling news for the first 48 hours after the New York attack had to watch thousands of people being killed hundreds of times. Hour after hour, pictures of the planes impacting on the towers were replayed, and replayed, and replayed, and then replayed again. Not only that, they were improved on. As fresh video footage became available, the horror was finessed. Better (sic) camera angles revealed more graphically the nightmare moments. The same process was then applied to the aftermath, the towers collapsing, the raw panic of the people running, the debris pursuing them, the burial of the living. And then, for days, footage of the struggle to find survivors in the rubble and the procession of body bags was replayed and replayed in our homes.

All that is difficult enough, but it can be defended. What is indefensible is the routine filler shot, weeks later, on virtually every news bulletin to cover any scripted reference: the same shots of the towers, the rubble. This is an endemic problem in TV news – convention dictates that the screen must be filled with images other than a man or woman reporter, so the video library is used with unthinking repetitiveness. Technically, it's an understandable procedure for hard-pressed editors and directors; but moral problems are raised by these techniques. They're big moral problems, concerning the mental and physical health of individuals and the balance of the social and political climate. It's bad enough that many adults in the northern hemisphere are approaching the strains of winter with poor morale, anxiety and depression, leading to weakened immune systems. More potentially devastating is the effect on children. My wife works with children and for days they talked about what they had seen. Some were hyped up with excitement. Others were depressively worried. I read of one boy who drew the fluttering falling figures throwing themselves out of tower windows. Three weeks on from 11 September, a nursing sister told me that the day before she had been giving a talk in a primary school. One little girl was crying. Weeks after the event she was still haunted by the TV images.

Radio doesn't have this problem. Not only is it free of the responsibility of handing hypnotic visual images which can bypass thought and reach into the subconscious; but also the usually excellent radio presenters offer the human interface of an intimate voice. Driving a 100-mile journey on 3 October, I listened to the Lesley Riddoch programme on Radio Scotland. Minding the shop for her was Keith Aitken, a practised hand. The subject was whether Tony Blair's 'visionary' speech at the Labour Party Conference the day before was a further indication of a presidential form of leadership, at the expense of parliamentary democracy. It's a live phone-in programme, in this case bolstered by a panel including the Scottish Labour MP Rosemary McKenna. When one listener said we should

not just be following one man's vision of a just war but having a real debate in parliament followed by a vote, McKenna dismissed out of hand the idea of a vote. In a time of crisis, she dogmatised, we all stand together. Keith Aitken sounded incredulous: was it not that very right of democratic debate and dissent we're defending? Debate, even dissent, yes, she allowed, but in wartime parliament never votes. I nearly crashed the car. What brought Churchill to power, ousting Chamberlain during the Second World War? A famous vote in Westminster, which Chamberlain won by such a narrow majority as to rob him of his authority. Without frills, this was a radio programme which with straightforward transparency flushed out a complacency in the engine-room of democracy. The listener's brain was engaged by a forward-moving debate, not trapped in a mindless conveyor belt of visual impressions.

Am I suggesting that TV news is a terrorist organisation? Not in the normal sense of the term. But it is a medium that can create terror. However, before a lynch mob of broadcasters arrives at my front door, I hasten to add that we, the consumers of news, willingly wage terror on ourselves. There is a switch-off facility on every TV set and radio; and nobody is compelled to buy a newspaper. For once, I practised what I preach. A few days after 11 September, I stopped watching TV news and, for the first time in my adult life, eschewed newspapers. It wasn't a permanent abstinence. I resumed normal consumption within the week; but the break sure cleared my mind and lifted my spirit. I recommend it. I don't rubbish the normal instinct to want to know what is going on, an instinct combining reflexes of curiosity, compassion, and concern in varying combinations; but I also recognise, at least in myself, elements of self-importance, fear, self-indulgent fascination with horror, even a perverted gratification in the entertainment of violence. If a democracy is to work, it is vital that we are informed. But where we can have no effect on great events beyond our control, perhaps we owe it to ourselves, our friends, our colleagues, and family, and to the health of society, to retain our emotional stability and lead normal cheerful lives.

As for politicians, one is sympathetic to the pressures on them, but they really should discipline their rhetoric. After a week of working the public into a war psychosis, it was gratuitously condescending to turn round and urge us to get back to normal life; even if this was a transparent effort to steady the economy, it smelled too strongly of manipulation.

At this point, I rested my wrist and read the above. Oh dear – how dull. Much more entertaining to watch a violent video than read my limp attack on TV news violence. Surely one doesn't want to, even if one could, anaesthetise reality into the anodyne. But is that the choice – between incontinent and corseted TV?

I got an answer the very next day. Visiting a friend with a very large video library, I was invited to choose a video to accompany a tray meal and a glass of wine. Scouring the drawers of eclectic material, I saw *Gulliver's Travels*. Without making any conscious connection with current events, my onboard computer flashed yes. So Jonathan Swift it was – more or less. More, perhaps; the entertainment value of Swift's prose was diversified into

the visual entertainment values of beautiful design and direction, and wickedly brilliant acting. Having only seen parts of it before, I was transfixed, for not only was I being hugely entertained, but in speech after speech was rapiered by points relevant to our present rhetoric. This 280-year-old *Hitch-hiker's Guide to the Globe* was identifying just about every false note in public language that has reverberated uneasily in recent weeks. As well as being lethal polemic, it was as knowingly amusing as anything from *TW3* to Rory Bremner, a fact threaded into the script. In the scene where Gulliver recalls his defence of civilised English values, one of the examining doctors protests that he is making a fool of what he defends. Quite so.

I immediately realised what had been missing in the political solemnities of the current crisis. Who was taking the mickey out of the pomposity of inflated language? Of course, *Private Eye*. But on TV? In speeches? On the street? One hapless Celtic fan caught on camera miming the falling tower hardly competes with Swift.

As the great fleet sailed from Portsmouth for the Falklands, bands playing, crowds cheering and waving flags, my 90-year-old mother looked bleakly at the TV screen. She was a nurse in the First World War, and in the Second, ran our first aid post which dealt with hundreds of dead and maimed bodies. A Highland fatalist, she shook her head. 'Mrs Thatcher will get her glory and mothers will lose their sons.' When the *Belgrano* was sunk with 300 men and Thatcher in Downing Street shouted 'Rejoice', my mother said nothing. She bit her lip, and knitted on.

I said I'm not a pacifist. I never had to choose. In this case, my armchair credentials are unconvincing. As a child being bombed, I just wanted the grown-ups to sort it and deliver peace. They did. The horrendous human cost didn't at that age give me a moment of moral scruple. To decide in retrospect that it would have been more noble to endure Nazi occupation would be hypocrisy. Having then willed the end, I can't now cavil at the means. And if I who have a benign view of creation and support Albert Schweitzer's *Reverence for Life*, am prepared occasionally to squash a spider because it is too large for my peace of mind or a wasp because it is interfering with my breakfast, what are my moral credentials for indicting Churchill for firestorming Dresden, Truman for atomising Hiroshima, bin Laden for crucifying New York or Bush and Blair for whatever collateral damage afflicts Afghanistan? These are all decisions about ends and means. I would, if it seemed necessary, squash bin Laden. But I wouldn't claim it to be a moral crusade. It is realpolitik. It's the survival of the fittest.

So where does religion come in? Nowhere. At least I have the theological decency not to pray that God will enable me to win against the spider and the wasp. True religion has nothing whatever to do with any of this. True religion is nearer the pacifist. But religious language comes in. O jings, it comes in! It is a cherished rhetorical weapon, a powerful propaganda support, for realpolitik.

Having enabled me to watch *Gulliver's Travels*, my friend pressed the digital control buttons and there on BBC Knowledge were some strong pictures and a voice it is no exaggeration to say that I came to love – that of the creator and presenter of the greatest artifact television has ever produced: *The Ascent of Man*. Kenneth Clark's *Civilisation* ranks second, but Jacob Bronowski's love of humanity in the whole panoply of its science, art and spirituality went wider even than Clark's patrician love of the beautiful. Yet they both had this in common: hope.

Hope of improvement. Hope of reform. Hope of change. Change normally by a thousand small steps; but every now and then, as this episode on the Industrial Revolution demonstrated, change on an epoch-making scale. For a long time I've interpreted Jesus, Paul and every true reformer, visionary, creator or benign thinker, as revealing that hope is not something you feel but something you do. In the Industrial Revolution, it was often the inventors, of new ideas, machines, and methods, who themselves turned into engineers, builders, owners, workers, managers and sometimes reformers. They changed the future by inventing it. And in managing change, they themselves changed. Perhaps – it is a perhaps riddled with holes, but it's the best perhaps I see on offer – some of those managing the geopolitical change of the present crisis may themselves be changed. Perhaps even all our perspectives and uses of language might reform a little. Perhaps the human species might learn some new tricks, acquire extended lateral vision about means and ends, transcend more of our crude reflexes of fear and aggression. Perhaps there is still time and space for Man to Ascend a bit higher.

Israel Prime Minister Sharon, once a terrorist, has accused the USA of treating Israel as Czechoslovakia was treated in 1938. (The USA had spoken about the reality of a Palestine State.) Anyone who knows anything of the 1930s knows the comparison to be ludicrous. This is not a Jewish question, merely a matter of getting your facts right. On R4's *Any Answers* (phone-in follow up to *Any Questions*), only two callers support Israel. All the rest, including a Rabbi, support Palestine. These callers are calm, cogent and well informed. The population at large cannot be assumed to be stupid. People can think, and discern fact from rhetoric.

As a representative of the Edinburgh University Union, after a stormy crossing of the Irish Sea I was plunged into a stormy debate in the Union of Queen's University, Belfast. Except that debate it was not. It was scarcely controlled pandemonium. The president, an ebullient Oscar Wilde figure, surfed waves of boisterous sectarianism, climaxing in Border songs sung against each other by Republicans and Unionists *en masse*. All-night parties followed. One was held in the offices of a United Nations welfare organisation which militant Protestant students were pretending to operate as a front for their anti-Republican activities. In the early hours, they unlocked cupboards and showed me the guns they were stockpiling. This was 45 years ago. Two years later, as a theological student, I met Ulster theological students training in Scotland for the Presbyterian ministry. I got to know one of

them very well. He was dreading returning to minister in Ulster. He did not know how he could fulfil his call to preach about love and practise it in a situation of rabid bigotry. For him, it was plain as a pikestaff that the responsibility for the situation lay with a failure of spiritual leadership on both sides. Hatred was not sufficiently condemned. Love was not sufficiently preached. Justice was not sufficiently urged. An insane irreligious fanaticism was out of control, under cover of religious devotion.

The first time I heard Ian Paisley preach, I saw what he meant and shivered for my rational friend. In much of his textual exegesis, Paisley was intellectually brilliant. But then his turbo-emotionalism kicked in, his power-drive took over, and from the cauldron of his twisted theology he spewed out hate.

What I'm saying is: religious madness is not new, and the responsibility for testosterone-driven male aggression can't be pinned on Osama bin Laden, let alone on Islam.

And shouldn't the practical effects of such madness to some extent be pinned on those who sell arms for profit? Don't ask me to specify two nations which excel in this practice.

And shouldn't someone talk about love? (without being called a wimp, a weasel, or a reader of *The Guardian*?)

Someone did.

The arch which crowns Paul's famous passage in his letter to Christians in Corinth rests on the three pillars of Faith, Hope and Love. That arch is broken now, fragments of stone in the ruins of 2,000 years of despair, faithlessness and hatred. Specially hatred. We're good at that. But wasn't Paul himself good at hatred? Yes, actually, he was a brilliant hater, your born terrorist. In the name of religion, of course. He supported the fanatical stoning of Stephen to death, because *Stephen was a Christian*. Then Paul changed sides, and wrote about love.

Faith, hope, love. Fragments of the original arch. In the Bible, faith described people who were uncertain, who acted despite not being sure of things. Now we have corrupted the word, so that 'faith' is something so sure we'll kill for it. 'Hope' is not now what you do but what you fantasise about. And love is... love is... well, that miracle does survive, to haunt us. But isn't that the problem? We're a haunted, hunted species. It's the vacuum thing. Each of us is such a storm of undirected psychic energy that if we don't love, we *do* hate.

I parked opposite Seal Island on the West Coast of Kintyre. As the Atlantic waves rolled in from America, the sun was setting over the Paps of Jura. On Jura, George Orwell had written about hatred. The Animals, under the yoke of evil owners, threw them out and created a new world order. But the badness does not run between species, between civilisations, between systems, it runs through them all. So the new animal order collapsed in hatred and fear into the old. In 1984, the population is programmed by Central Control to hate the other lot.

Sunday 7th October

I am writing this in real, not contrived, time sequence. An hour after writing the above about Orwell, TV programmes are interrupted. The bombing of Afghanistan has begun.

But it isn't enough to be told. Big Brother must motivate us. Bush plays the soft cop. In that curiously calming robotic style, he advises us that the military have begun strikes. Hard cop Blair comes on to wave the Apocalyptic big stick. Tensely he says: 'This is a moment of utmost gravity for the world'.

Is that all? Forget the whole canvas of history. In the small part of it that is my lifetime, there have been a good number of moments of gravity. If this gravity extends beyond the routinely grave into the realm of the utmost, then I should be afraid. Either language is being used here with the conscious intention of ratcheting up anxiety, or it is being used without awareness, which is almost more worrying. But now it's time for a villain to hiss at. An obviously prerecorded video has bin Laden warning Westerners not to feel safe. The conjunction of Blair and bin Laden has the mark not so much as Cain and Abel as of a 1930s B movie or a low budget animated cartoon of the *Star Wars* genre. For millions of refugees, of course, this is no cartoon. But for those of us who are not yet refugees, it is necessary that our stomachs should be further churned. In a summary of 'the events leading up to' the strikes, News 24 shows *yet again* the planes crashing into the towers and the building collapsing. Thanks, we needed that: it's so forgettable.

How, then, does one love, in a world organised by power and motivated by fear and hatred? With difficulty. Jesus was, after all, crucified.

I don't think one can have a policy of loving, not directly. To look into the sun invites blindness. We are gifted with powers of reason. Let us reason, then. And then let us have the faith to do what little we can that might be the doing of hope.

I suggest three modest steps.

Firstly, politicians and media calm down, and moderate language and image. Far from limiting information, it will enhance it.

Secondly, separate religion from the conduct of affairs. That was the intention of the Founding Fathers. It is still worth pursuing.

Thirdly, in our personal lives, limit the expenditure of emotional energy where it can't be applied usefully. In the interstices of our many preoccupations, that might leave more room for kindness.

All are saying – politicians, military, commentators – that the campaign against terrorism will be a long one. No surprise. It has already lasted thousands of years. They say to eradicate it will take much effort, patience and resolve. So it will, until we are all changed.

In *The Ascent of Man*, the heroic efforts of those who worked the Industrial Revolution into existence, labouring for long hours in dreadful conditions of darkness, grime, noise and fire, was caught on the soundtrack by Beethoven's *Eroica Symphony*; while at the end of the programme was the whirling climax of the Leonora music from Beethoven's epic opera *Fidelio* about the struggle from darkness to light. And the hinge of the Kenneth Clark *Civilisation* series was when, Mozart music playing, Clark walked across a baroque room. He stopped at the door, then flung it open. Raging on the other side was a wild sea in ferment and wildly crashing with it the sound of Beethoven – I forget what, perhaps the

Fifth Symphony. The order of the Classical was confronted by the convulsive heights and depths, catastrophes and visions of the Romantic in its surge into the unknown.

It was some years ago that I had parked by the Atlantic and looked across Seal Island at the sun setting over Jura. The waves which earlier in the day had roared and surged, now lapped. A couple of seals lay serene on a rock. Cirrus cloud drifted into the coming night. Yet, just to the south of Jura, I could see distinct on the horizon a stretch of land which was at that moment one of the killing fields of the world. On the car stereo, the tape was playing the finale of Mahler's *Resurrection Symphony*, next to Beethoven's *Ode to Joy*, the most overwhelming affirmation of hope that I know.

Hope is what we do, we who are of the human race.

After the fall: enigmas of America

R D Kernohan

2001

I keep reading that we shall always remember what we were doing on 11 September. I also read that nothing in America will ever be again the same as it was before then, in what Alistair Cooke has called 'the olden time'.

The first proposition is almost certainly true. I was sleeping off the jet lag of a home flight from Chicago when the phone rang and someone said: 'Have you seen the television?' But I have my doubts about the second proposition. Whatever may change, and however the situation may evolve or erupt again, some very constant factors in American life will remain, despite the certain controversies, probable frustrations and possible calamities. Among these constant factors are strengths, weaknesses and enigmas of America.

One of the greatest enigmas is that the country which has inherited the greatest international opportunity and responsibility can seem surprisingly insular. Maybe 'insular' isn't the best word in discussing a country so vast and varied, both in geography and population, but often even college-educated Americans can still seem surprisingly self-contained and none too well informed. Even the smug media people who once in that 'olden time' sneered at George W Bush for not knowing the difference between Slovenia and Slovakia (an error also made by Scotland's leading newspaper, *The Herald*, 12 October, page 15) gave the impression that *they* were so sure of their facts because they had just looked them up.

When I first toured America coast-to-coast in the days of Kennedy and Kruschev, studying the ways of its newspapers, I got back to Washington and New York with a clear memory of only one newspaper westward of the *Atlanta Constitution* which seemed to put a fair proportion of its effort into world coverage. It was the Mormon daily in Salt Lake City, whose readers retained a friendly interest in countries where they had once knocked on doors. Things haven't changed all that much since, except for the impact that CNN has made on the up-market minority of TV viewers. *The New York Times* was and is remarkable but it is even less typical of American journalism than Manhattan is of American life.

Of course it's easy to be patronising – even very tempting when Americans praise the wit and grace of cable-channel British TV sit-coms and you discover that they mean *Are You Being Served?* My own most grievous temptation that way came on one enchanted Southern evening when someone in a very Caledonian-minded company produced a Lorimer New Testament in Scots and asked me to do readings from it. It wasn't the request which worried me but the later insistence that the performance had been both understandable and enjoyable.

British visitors have been infuriating Americans with patronising tones since the days of Dickens, Captain Marryat and Frances Trollope, sometimes earning an unenviable reputation for soaking up the kindly abundance of American hospitality and then being rude about it when they got home. And sometimes I fear that these old reactionary cultural attitudes are blended with the anti-Americanism which, even after the coming of Blair and passing of communism, seem to linger under the skin of the British left, some of whom still wish the Cold War had ended in a draw or worse. Similar continental forms, neo-Gaullist as well as neo-communist, help to breed a healthy Euroscpticism among some of us who spoke up for the Common Market when old Labour and the SNP were against it.

This American insularity isn't the same thing as isolationism, which probably died in the year or two before Pearl Harbour, and it didn't prevent America being a decisive force for good in the world crises of the 20th century, among them the two great wars, the Marshall Plan rehabilitation of Europe, the Cold War, and the decline and fall of Soviet communism. Even the greatest American misjudgment of recent times, plunging into the Vietnam War without the national political will to win it, was misdirected internationalism. But, like the other great post-war failure of American policy, the collapse of the Kuomintang before Chinese communism, it was a reminder of what even pro-Americans like myself sometimes get wrong or tend to forget. We tend to judge American involvement in world affairs and the American public's knowledge of them from a very Eurocentric point of view. If you live in California, even Denver and Omaha, Europe feels even further away than it looks on the map, about as far as Afghanistan. That shouldn't surprise us Europeans but it does, just as we're surprised to discover that the most powerful American folk-memory from the 20th century is probably not the Second World War, enormous though the American commitment became, but the Great Depression. Americans of my age speak of its impact on their families in the way I might recall the great Clydebank Cunarders or the Blitz.

Another surprise for the British – it shouldn't be but it is – is to find when we visit the great American tourist sites, from the Grand Canyon to the Smithsonian, that most of our fellow visitors are Americans. Sometimes they're just getting round to seeing their own country at an age when we might think our travelling days were done. One of the many things that rang true in the admirable Mayor Giuliani's attempt to restore New York's morale after the massacre was his claim to hear from Americans coming to see New York for the first time and showing solidarity by going up the elevators for a first-time experience of the Empire State Building.

Maybe I should have said that America remains more self-contained in many of its attitudes than Europe. 'Insular' conveys a frame of mind but not the continental scale or the federal and ethnic diversity of the United States. It is hardly surprising that such a country, unscarred at home by the wars of the 20th century and for so long so self-contained in politics and economy – in the days before Middle Eastern oil and Japanese cars – should still reflect attitudes, over simplifications and political mythology from a very different world. Perhaps the problems are made more difficult by the contrast between the vast range

of economic, diplomatic and military expertise available to Presidents in policy-making and the superficial level on which a good deal of American politicking and editorialising about international affairs was conducted before 11 September.

Things have been rather different since. Yet even in a new mood of realism and relative restraint, with appreciation of the difficulties when cunning, ruthless and fanatical enemies exploit simple faith, simple minds and ancient resentments, another of the great American enigmas of the 20th century reappears in the new age. As in the times of Woodrow Wilson, Roosevelt, Dulles and Kennedy, there is still a compelling American urge to set essentially pragmatic policies in an ideological context. It seems not enough to tackle terrorism and restrain evil-doers. It's not even enough to give moral, tacit or practical support when especially nasty governments or 'evil empires' can be replaced with something better – marvellously better in Prague, say, or a bit better in Moscow, Manila, Haiti, and perhaps Kabul. Americans still feel urges and duties to export democracy; even to people without the cultural conditions, civil society or internal cohesion to sustain it within an accepted rule of law. Hence the need for a necessary war, or whatever you call it, against terrorism, has to go with the rhetoric of extending democracy and slogans about 'enduring freedom'. The Statue of Liberty and the American Dream keep turning up in speeches.

Yet America's own history now owes more to evolution than to the original revolution of Washington and the slippery spin-doctor Jefferson, for it was nearly a century before the noblest of Presidents emancipated slaves and carried conviction in coining a phrase about 'government of the people, by the people, for the people'. However, the American view of the world still hankers for the idea of a benevolent revolution and everyone living happily ever after. It lends itself to simplistic views about Bosnia or the Balkans (where the rhetoric of freedom has gone with a very pro-Muslim bias) and even of Ireland.

I do not write this to criticise American policies or reactions since 11 September. The reactions have been relatively restrained, considering the enormity of the outrage. The policies have been as reasoned and rational a response as could have been made by a new administration facing a sudden crisis, given the nature of the enemy and such burdens – inherited not just from previous Presidents but from the British Empire – as the intractable conflict between Israelis and Arabs. To blame the United States for bin Laden's network or the other fanaticisms on the fringe of Islam is as absurd as to blame the Jews for the dementia of Hitler and rise of Nazism. But support for the United States means understanding Americans and sometimes agreeing to differ from them on where the strengths lie in their constitution and their American ways of life. I put the last phrase in a very necessary plural.

Perhaps all nations need their myths and canonise their Bravehearts. Most have their wars of independence. Several have their 'glorious revolutions'. Almost all have also at times had to subordinate both their rhetoric and their preferences for the sake of expedient alliances, whether between Churchill and Stalin, King Billy and the Pope, or the original American revolutionaries and the Bourbons of France's *ancien régime*.

What makes modern America different is the way in which this not uncommon dilemma or necessity for expedient alliance goes both with an emotional and ideological approach to world affairs and unprecedented military power, economic success and international responsibility. The temptation is to write off these ideological and moralistic American motives and urges as hypocritical, but that would be a mistake. They no more stem from hypocrisy than does the support for them from Tony Blair. The mood is America's tradition and Blair's inclination. Woodrow Wilson did believe he was on a higher moral place than the European peacemakers of 1919 and he probably was. That devious friend of Britain, Franklin D Roosevelt, did believe in the 'Four Freedoms'. Kennedy, even Clinton, believed in much of the rhetoric their speech-writers provided.

And very similar scripts, with a few deletions and changes of emphasis, could suit more straightforward souls like Eisenhower, Reagan and the Bushes. Even a pragmatist like Nixon had to use the same vocabulary. If Henry Kissinger didn't go in for it so much, it was because he was appointed and not elected. Colin Powell sounds a similar case. Had he wanted to be President, his style would be very different.

This revolutionary inheritance of universal aspiration and occasional over-simplification has been diluted over two centuries and the best of it has been consolidated into institutions and attitudes towards the rule of law, the ways of politics, and the power of business, which make America seem a conservative society. Yet the mixture can seem a puzzling one for a Tory like myself, especially after promotion in a recent issue of the *Scottish Review* to the vacant post of 'Conservative thinker'. I don't just mean life's little ironies, like joining the Appalachian Rotarians in singing *God Save the Queen* to the words of *My Country 'tis of Thee*, but the apparent enigma of a society of revolutionary political origins which still reflects radical political impulses, but more in social and cultural areas than economic ones.

That may seem to match much in New Labour Britain and devolutionary Scotland, but the background is utterly different. Except for a brief period when the lower reaches of the New Deal were influenced by fashionable Marxism, American socialism has never had to be taken seriously. And, although America in its day had plenty of industrial conflict, it never mobilised for the class war as the European left and even much of the British Labour Party once did. There might be hard times and much unfairness for the latest waves of immigrants, or black people, or the poor white people of Appalachia, but they all found their way into the American mainstream and a place in its political pluralism.

But we British are so conditioned by our assumption that the gap between Republicans and Democrats is, was, and will be a narrow one that we can be disconcerted by the radicalism and reaction which are both present in American society. Sometimes it is apparent in constructions which are put on the constitution or the Bill of Rights, whether advocating complete freedom for gunslingers or pornographers or distorting the idea of separation of Church and State into a campaign against any public recognition of religion.

The British, and perhaps especially the Scots, can be taken aback by the fury with which

both sides launch themselves into such arguments, and by the intolerance shown in some areas of media and academic life by the zealots of 'political correctness', which happily is becoming a dirty pair of words or an exercise in pedantry. (The worst example I encountered was a claim that the splendidly traditional and purely American term for Ulster Protestants, 'the Scotch-Irish', should be replaced by 'Scots-Irish' to respect alleged Scottish sensitivities.)

I even wonder whether the historic vagueness of American party lines and the absence of fundamental divisions on economic policy encourages the innate human capacity for ill-natured controversy and misplaced fanaticism to find expression elsewhere. I think not only of the tiny lunatic fringe of 'militias' but of the stridency with which extreme feminism verbally assaults the English language and the opposite sex, the lack of charity on both sides in the abortion wrangle, and the fashionable assertiveness of the homosexual lobby, in such diverse areas as Hollywood films and American Presbyterianism.

A few nights before the awful catastrophe of 11 September concentrated minds and closed ranks, I sat in as an embarrassed observer at a Presbyterian congregational meeting discussing the grassroots initiative for a 'confessing Church movement', two of whose principles involved rather fine points of Trinitarian and Incarnational theology but whose focus for both support and hostility seemed to be its affirmation of heterosexual monogamy. It is easy to call such movements 'reactionary', but they are in the literal sense a reaction against the cultural dominance, in the American media and even large parts of the Church, of that strange but recurring paradox, intolerant liberalism.

It also takes time in dealing with Americans – in my case nearly 40 years – to grasp some of the subtleties of their institutions. Perhaps the most notable is the way the Supreme Court can be both guardian of traditions and a driving force for change, sometimes riding roughly over the hesitations of traditionalists, sometimes (as in the belated ending of racial segregation) doing what needs to be done but cannot be easily done in a system of checks and balances so rich in federal and local diversity. The only parallel I think of is that other great conservative institution, which I trust is in partial eclipse and not terminal decline, the British Tory Party.

All democracies have their weaknesses. An obvious one in the American system is that the President, a party leader whose policies and personality may be divisive, is also the head and symbol of State. Yet one of the strengths of American democracy is the absence of that concentrated executive power and domination of the legislature which a British Prime Minister can deploy, and sometimes does. In day-to-day politics, that usually encourages government with more consent and compromise than is usual at Westminster. One of the tests which America now faces is whether the system can mobilise its strengths and minimise its weaknesses in changing conditions while coping with the conflict of unpredictable duration which took so new and dramatic a form on 11 September.

Had I been writing this article before then, I would have ended it with reflections on whether the American nation, so marvellously successful for so long in mixing and even

fusing its component parts, can bear the strains of an age when it has become fashionable to assert and preserve ethnic identities than to subordinate them in a common patriotism. In public debate, if not in private conversation, it is expedient to wonder if the proliferation of professors of African-American studies or theses on 'gender issues' has been good for America or even for the people they are supposed to help. It is considered reactionary to hope that the recent and current waves of Hispanic immigrants will be assimilated culturally and linguistically to the extent that Germans were in the 19th century and Italians in the 20th. It is probably bad form to wonder whether the new image of native Americans as environmentalists ahead of their time is any sounder than old ones of noble savages. Even a Republican administration has to present itself as a kind of rainbow coalition and not just a good team for the job which happened to reflect some variety in pigmentation and religious background.

Historically, the United States has attempted to purify and synthesise the main elements of European culture, adapting and developing them to the geography, climates and conditions of the New World, and firmly setting them in a context determined by the English language and the founding fathers' view of the British constitution and legal system. The best hope for the future may be that the process can continue, integrating large numbers of Hispanics and Asians as successfully as it has done with a relatively small Jewish population – and since about 1960 has hoped to do with African Americans. America is a land of tribes but it needs to avoid a new tribalism.

However, people must define and describe their own identity, and express it in their attitudes to the rest of the world. That is why questions of the future harmony of America cannot be entirely separated from the long-term effect of the shattering physical and emotional blow of 11 September.

It would be naive to think that the impressive national solidarity which followed the terrorist offensive can be sustained indefinitely in the same mood or that George W Bush and Colin Powell can always avoid (as they have done up to the time of writing) making serious misjudgments in assessing a range of unattractive options, as first Kennedy and then Johnson did over Vietnam. They left Nixon to try to clear up the mess, first by intensifying the war and then by leaving America's friends in the lurch. But the new situation differs in one vital respect from Vietnam. The Vietcong were not attacking America by trying to impose communism on their own people. While there will almost certainly be mistakes and frustrations, it is possible that difficulties and even ordeals ahead may not only concentrate American minds but consolidate national unity and refocus American patriotism.

That will certainly be the reaction in the face of new terrorist attacks, even if it goes with much more criticism than the Bush administration has yet had to take. It may also be the reaction if the length and complexity of the troubles stimulates criticism of America's economic power and success. Americans want to be liked, and worry too much when they aren't. They are likely to bind together in face of the totally irrational hatred which inspired

the outrages of 11 September and the much more widespread range of resentments and envy which the fanatics expect to exploit.

In some ways, they may become even more 'self-contained'. But they will also have more understanding of the world's complexities and inter-dependence, Whatever their rhetoric, they will learn more about the practical difficulties of making democracy work in Pakistan or Indonesia or Algeria, never mind Afghanistan. They will accept more readily that the simplistic division into good and bad systems which the Cold War confrontation with Soviet communism encouraged, for it *was* an evil empire, doesn't suit modern conditions.

And while they will rightly resent some of the nonsense from the European left – the kind that sees bin Laden's millionaire fanaticism as a protest against Third World debt or global warming – the need to seek allies, maintain alliances, and win goodwill may shape future policy. It isn't good for America to be seen as stingy or hostile towards the United Nations. It's bad for all of us that Israelis and Palestinians cannot be steered toward the kind of settlement that seemed conceivable in the summer of 2000.

The harsh probability is that terrorism might thrive despite such policy successes or as a protest to prevent their becoming effective. But it has never been easy either to secure or to define life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, as Mr Jefferson's script for the Declaration of Independence made out. There are too many enigmas. Not just in the American ways of life and thought but in the human heart.

Some things will never be the same again after 11 September. The destruction in Manhattan and the attacks by anthrax, whether by the same terrorist network or some other source of evil, mark the end of an assumption from 'the olden-time'. The assumption was that war means sending Americans to France, or the South Pacific, or Vietnam, while things stay nearly normal at home. We lost a similar notion in 1940. But I doubt whether there will be a new American revolution in the way people from Oregon to Maine see themselves and view the world.

Running out of zeros in Zimbabwe

Una Bartley

2006

A country descending into chaos, claim the *Mail* and *Guardian*. I glance up from the paper, and look out over beautifully manicured lawns to spray roaring up into the blue sky, and think, 'if this is chaos, chaos isn't all that bad'.

Ensnared in the colonial splendour of the Victoria Falls Hotel, the economic crisis in Zimbabwe was remarkably easy to ignore. However, the way things were turning out, I was going to have to divert my attention from the high tea tray and give it more thought. The plan had always been that once my partner, Grasian, had finished his degree, we would rent out our Edinburgh flat and seek adventure in Africa. Zimbabwe, Grasian's home, had been our original destination, but by 2005, with the economy spiralling out of control, his family had warned us to stay clear. With reluctance, we looked at other possibilities, and finally settled for Livingstone, Zambia, a stone's throw from Zimbabwe.

To ease me into life in Africa, we decided to treat ourselves to three nights at the Victoria Falls Hotel before crossing into Zambia. But, as fate would have it, a week before we left Scotland, our CVs were picked up by an NGO working in Victoria Falls, and it was agreed we would talk further once we had arrived. Over tea, the director told us more about the Africa Centre for Holistic Management and we learnt that the organisation operated under a larger international set-up, with a focus to reverse land degradation and encourage sustainable use of natural resources. Convinced by his chat, we cut a deal, whereby we would get free accommodation plus a food allowance, in return for churning out fundraising applications.

By day four, we had moved to Livingstone Lodge rather than Livingstone, Zambia, and were marvelling at our good fortune as we wandered through the garden for a dip in the pool. In time, we learn more about the Africa Centre and meet its engaging founder, Allan Savory. Allan splits his time between Zimbabwe and the United States, where he was forced into exile as leader of the opposition in the dying days of Rhodesia. Grasian later finds reference to him as 'a young man who entered politics with a bee in his bonnet about ecology'. Although driven by a desire to understand land degradation, in the process he fingered conventional decision-making as the barrier to understanding complex situations. The result was the development of an alliterative decision-making framework ('holistic management') which has since been promoted to governments, companies and communities to help build sustainable policies.

As we settle into our new job, life takes on a healthy new routine: up at 6.30 for a jog, followed by a swim and meditation before breakfast. In the evening, we take a stroll through the suburbs or walk to one of the hotels for a drink. Victoria Falls is set in a

national park and at times it feels like we've stepped into one of those surreal scenes from a Jehovah's Witness pamphlet. Against a background of lush growth, an abundance of butterflies, baboons and velvet monkeys chase each other through gardens, while families of warthogs trot anxiously through the streets.

Victoria Falls, though, like all Southern African towns, is starkly divided between the leafy suburbs – once the preserve of whites, though now mixed – and the townships, which remain exclusively black. In the townships, the children greet my peely-wally appearance with a curious stare or some vigorous waving. Some pluck up the courage to shout, 'How are you?' and collapse into giggles when I shout back, 'Fine. How are you?' The townships are a hive of activity, the small yards busy with food preparation, hairdressing and washing while the dusty streets host impromptu stalls selling local produce. The largest building is the beer hall, owned by the city council, as the theory goes that the profits from the beer are ploughed back into the community. I can't help contemplating the vast improvements in public services if the idea caught on in Scotland.

As beer halls are not the places where good girls drink, we frequent one of the many luxurious hotels in the vicinity. Here, the British tourists, like myself, are particularly effusive in their dealings with hotel staff, as if to apologise for previous colonial misdemeanours, or to reassure that this time we don't mean any harm. However, tourism has slowed to a trickle and we marvel at how these establishments keep going, though we do our bit to keep them in business. The Safari Lodge, a wood and thatch complex, becomes our favourite as the bar's elevated terrace provides a panoramic view over the national park and allows us to observe elephants stroll to the nearby waterhole as we sip our G&Ts.

Our foreign currency allows us to enjoy these luxuries and cushions us against an inflation rate of 900%. The only minor inconvenience is having to carry around wads of cash, as even a few groceries will set you back 10 million Zim dollars. As the highest denomination is 20,000, you need to bring a lot of notes for the weekly shop. A knock-on effect is the queues that build up as cashiers count and recount bills.

These absurdities aside, signs of an economic crisis are not immediately obvious; people are well-dressed and there are few beggars on the streets, though talk often focuses on spiralling costs and the stress caused by increasingly inadequate incomes.

Living in a hyper inflationary environment has encouraged me to take an interest in macro-economics. I learn that the government has banned any agency other than the central bank from changing foreign currency and has set the official exchange rate at half that of the black market. Consequently, most money is changed on the black market and the upshot is there is little foreign currency circulating through official channels, leading to difficulties in importing goods.

The economic crisis also has more subtle effects such as the challenge for the accountant in working with a software package that lacks sufficient zeros to deal in billions and the anomaly discovered by a friend that his son is being taught to count in cents. 'We haven't

used cents for years – why are they teaching him about cents? I need him to count in millions! I need to send him to the shop for bread and know he'll be able to count out 70,000 dollars.'

In March, we took the opportunity of a lift to Harare to visit family. (The familiarity of place names along the way, Blantyre, Galloway, Argyll, belie any claims that Scotland didn't benefit from empire.) Besides his siblings, Grasian had arranged to meet his cousin, a junior minister in the government. Although not great pals, they were keen to catch up, both having spent a lot of time in the UK and both being married to British women. I was expecting Dr Evil, but found an affable young man who, ironically, seemed nervous around me. It became apparent he felt the need to address the image of his government I was likely to have and spent some time justifying the land reform programme. Having got the politics out of the way, we moved on to safer topics though he cracked a few wry jokes about being banned from the UK and seemed genuinely upset about the ban as he fondly reminisced over *EastEnders*, pints of beer and Indian takeaways.

As if to illustrate the benefits of land reform, we were invited to his farm, a huge commercial enterprise which he had recently been 'allocated'. His wife, who had been vilified by the UK tabloids ('Essex girl takes Zimbabwe farm'), was particularly robust in her defence of their new acquisition. The justification ran along the lines that the previous owner had seven such farms, and therefore he should share one with them. However, this line of reasoning didn't extend to some local lads whose own amateur attempts to address social injustice through taking oranges from the vast orchard had only landed them a beating.

Our response to these tales (told without a hint of irony) was restrained because of the respect traditionally shown to family, compounded by the presence of armed guards outside the house. We left the next morning, feeling perturbed, not so much by the 'occupation', but by the minister's apparent limited grasp of the depth of the country's crisis.

The exponential unemployment rate (80%) generated by the economic crisis not only results in hardship for those without jobs, but also leads to employees, desperate to keep their jobs, tolerating abuse. I have witnessed this on a few occasions and find it particularly disturbing when, more often than not, these instances demonstrate the ongoing power dynamic between blacks and whites. In one such case, at the upmarket Italian bakery in Harare, I found myself unable to contain my outrage. It was a Sunday morning and as the cafe looked like it was yet to open, I followed the staff in to make enquiries. A young waitress walked ahead of me, passed her boss and started to enter the staff quarters. She was halfway through the door when the (Greek? Italian?) boss screamed at her, pulled her back and made her re-enter the cafeteria. It was not apparent what crime she had committed but I was appalled. I marched over to the owner, and trying to keep my voice even, hissed, 'I don't like the way you just spoke to that young woman, you have humiliated her for no good reason, you have abused your position and I will never eat here again'.

To my amazement, as I marched out, the owner followed me, shouting, 'You call me asshole? Hey, you call me asshole?' I turned around and squared up to him. 'No, I didn't call you an asshole, I said that you humiliated that young woman.' 'You know this girl? You call me asshole?' By this point, the guy had seriously invaded my space, so I threw my pacifist principles to the wind and provoked him. 'So I called you an asshole. What are you going to do now – hit me?' Thankfully Grasian intervened at that point and firmly told the guy to back off. I half regretted my outburst as there was no chance of ever sneaking back to the cafe – we are so conspicuous as a mixed race couple.

Getting back to Victoria Falls is a long haul (900km) and choices are limited. We started with a 'combi', one of the private minibuses that plough the major routes. To maximise profit, four people are squeezed into rows that are only meant to hold three, so we buy an extra seat to get some level of comfort during the five-hour trip to Bulawayo. From Bulawayo, we took an overnight train to Victoria Falls and arrived home exhausted, only to hear that Grasian's aunt had died and he needed to go back to Harare.

Death and disease seem so much closer here. In the space of a month, a colleague's sister-in-law also dies, aged 25, leaving behind seven children and Grasian's cousin dies, a week after giving birth, leaving the father (with TB) struggling to afford formula milk. These incidents are sobering and force us to reflect on how much we take for granted. Though never publicly expressed, with every death there is always a suspicion of AIDS. We learn with alarm that the incidence of HIV in Victoria Falls is 52%, twice the national average, due to the epidemic coinciding with the tourist boom.

The journeys to Harare persuade Grasian that we need our own vehicle but I am not convinced a car will solve our transport problems. With the foreign currency crisis, fuel is in short supply and the forecourts of most service stations lie empty. To procure fuel, people queue for hours when petrol is available at government stations, cross the border to fill up in South Africa or Botswana, or pay black market prices (though, admittedly, the black market prices are still cheaper than UK prices).

The linked electricity crisis has led to the introduction of 'loadshedding'. Under this practice, whole areas are deprived of electricity for several hours at a time to save the nation's available energy. Generally, it is only the townships that suffer this deprivation, and though the times of loadshedding are meant to be advertised in advance, people complain that this rarely happens. Even when it does, unless you have friends in the suburbs to help out, loadshedding will ruin the contents of your fridge and freezer.

It's hard not to feel such draconian methods could be avoided if more energy awareness was promoted – starting with a campaign to switch off TVs when not in use. Here, people are keen to demonstrate they have a working TV and will leave the TV on regardless of whether anyone is watching it or actively switch it on if guests arrive. We were relieved one evening when we went to a colleague's for dinner to discover that the satellite dish wasn't working which allowed us to converse without the background blare of the TV. However, as we sat down to eat, their daughter had the bright idea of putting on a video. Though

done without malice, her choice could not have been more offensive to two vegetarians – a home video of her father on a working trip with professional hunters proudly showing off their slaughtered trophies.

Almost paradoxically, one of the most striking cultural differences I've encountered in Zimbabwe is the prominence of Christianity. Youths proudly wear baseball caps with the slogan 'I love Jesus'; letters in the press regularly incorporate phrases like 'God willing' or 'with God's blessing'; and public meetings begin and end with prayers. I have yet to meet a Zimbabwean who does not regularly attend a Christian service and there is an unnerving choice of denominations to choose from, ranging from the familiar Catholic, Presbyterian and Salvation Army, to the more obscure African Apostolic, Brethren of Christ and Seven Day Adventists.

Keen to understand the attraction, I took up an invitation to attend a Pentecostal service one Sunday. We were warmly greeted by the ushers on arrival and had barely sat down when we were up with the congregation swaying and clapping along to the band at the front. In a scene reminiscent of *Saturday Night Fever*, those with the funkier steps went to the front to show off their moves to the applause of the congregation. After 30 minutes, the music started to abate to allow individuals to praise the Lord in their own way. The room filled with whispers which grew and built into a frenzy until it sounded like we were in the midst of a swarm of bees. The pastor brought the crowd back to their senses with several shouts of 'hallelujah!' and then asked for a show of hands from those there for the first time. Cringing, we raised our hands, and then found ourselves showered with handshakes and hugs as the congregation was asked to welcome us and the pastor confirmed that we were in 'the right place'.

It was all a far cry from the staid services I'd attended as a child, but just as I was beginning to see the appeal, things started to go downhill. The music gave way for some readings, a healing session and a firebrand sermon. As the room heated up and the sermon showed no sign of ending, Grasian lost his patience and we left. Grasian is still bitter about these churches from his experience as a member when he first left his village for Harare. He says the emphasis on God rewarding the holy with material possessions made him feel cursed in his menial job, while the pressure to pay tithes to the pastor left him struggling to find the rent out of his meagre wages.

Like their counterparts the world over, taxi drivers here are keen to comment on current affairs and one criticises the churches for distracting people from the country's crisis. I encourage these discussions as I am baffled by the fact most people agree Zimbabwe's fortunes will only be reversed once Mugabe has gone, but seem to be waiting for 'regime change' rather than actively pursuing it. I have also been given the following explanations for the ongoing reign of Comrade Mugabe: people have been cowed by the violent response to anti-government demonstrations; the opposition is split; the crisis has yet to hit the middle classes; and Zimbabweans are a patient people and it isn't in their nature to fight. All of these are probably valid, though it's hard not to side strongly with the latter view.

Since I have been in Zimbabwe, I have rarely witnessed any anger and no longer expect any 'attitude' in my transactions. Most people are simply incredibly pleasant and very patient. In fact, it is remarkably refreshing to be in an environment where you can greet and ask after complete strangers, whether you meet them in the street or at the bank, without coming across as a nutter.

By the beginning of May, Grasian is offered a part-time job with a project to help local communities harvest and market a wild plant in high demand by complementary medicine practitioners. The project is European Union funded, with the consequence that his salary loses half its value as soon as it hits the organisation's bank account. The job is a step in the right direction but without more income, our long-term position in Zimbabwe is uncertain. However, Zimbabwe has been good to us so far and is not the chaotic country the international media is so keen to portray. We know the economic situation is unsustainable but, like the rest of the population, for the time being we are optimistic and prepared to wait.

My friend Barack

Kenneth Roy

2008

Britain may be facing the worst recession in Europe, with the possible exception of Latvia, but the habits of dress-down Friday die hard. It is impossible to do business beyond lunchtime and by the middle of the afternoon the mighty fax is silent, the phone never rings and the email has ceased to ping; around four, our neighbours in the building start drifting off for an unhappy weekend of worrying about Christmas. Last Friday, however, was different. At 5.40pm, I was slumped at my desk in the usual fashion when, lo and behold, the email did ping – a strange sound in the pervasive silence of 66 John Finnie Street – and I found myself muttering aloud: 'Who on earth can that be, this late on a Friday?'

Of course: I should have guessed. It was Barack.

'Kenneth –,' he began in his characteristically direct manner. He just wanted to let me know how the week had gone: nothing too drastic; all more or less according to plan; and wondering if I'd be able to join him in Grant Park for the election night party. True to form, he ended by asking me for five dollars. He's a bit like that, Barack – quite upfront about money matters; all part of his irresistible charm. As a foreigner, I am unable to help financially – he should know that by now. But I can still lend a bit of moral support, spreading the word to the lazy Brits who work here in John Finnie Street, or writing relatively nice things about him in the *Scottish Review*. Even when I write relatively nasty things, he doesn't seem to mind.

For the last 11 months, Barack has been my most frequent and faithful email correspondent. Scarcely a week has gone by without a friendly electronic missive. When he's been away, or exceptionally busy, I invariably hear from one of the team – David, his inexhaustible campaign manager, or Joe Biden (remember him? perhaps not), or the lovely Michelle.

How did this beautiful friendship come about? Like a lot of people, I was curious about the man who was then a virtually unknown outsider for the Democratic nomination and anxious to know what he stood for, so I logged on to the Barack Obama website and clicked a few boxes. I was still finding it difficult to discover what he stood for, so I clicked a few more boxes, adding my email address. An odd thing then happened: a notice came up thanking me for my interest and enrolling me as one of his supporters. Like so many things in life, it was all just a happy accident.

I have been with Barack ever since. It feels almost like man and boy. To be perfectly frank, I still don't have a clue what he stands for – though he does bang on about the need for change and, depending on the nature of the change, I'm with him there, theoretically. But if I haven't learned much about Barack Obama's policies, I *have* learned a lot about the most brilliant campaign in electoral history – a campaign whose success owes so much to its exploitation of the internet.

It is often pointed out that Obama has succeeded in raising unthinkable amounts of money from modest donations on the web. This is true, although it is only part of the story. Most of his emails have ended with an invitation to hit the 'Donate' box and the amount requested is almost absurdly small – rarely more than 10 dollars – just about enough to finance the downpayment on a glass of dry white wine in your average British four-star hotel. What is less often pointed out is that the accumulation of requests for absurdly small donations adds up, over the course of a year, to a tidy sum.

But even that is only part of the story. The genius of the marketing lies in the perfection of the pitch – informal without being irritating; personal without being ingratiating; serious without being hectoring; graceful under the severest pressure. It is amusing to hear that the political parties in Britain are hoping to learn from the supreme professionalism of these techniques. Dream on, chaps. At the heart of the Obama campaign was the seductive appeal of the candidate himself. We may now have to ditch the once reliable adage that politics is showbiz for ugly people; whatever Obama is (and I'm still far from sure), ugly he ain't. Our lot? Hug-a-hoodie Dave and non-flash Gordon just don't have what it takes to fight an effective internet campaign. When Vince Cable is the most admired man in British politics, you know you have a charisma problem.

I left the house this morning thinking: well, Barack has got what he wanted; the great prize is his; I suppose the last person he'll be thinking about at the moment is me.

How wrong could I be?

At 5.58am the first e-mail of the day arrived:

Kenneth --

I'm about to head to Grant Park to talk to everyone gathered there, but I wanted to write to you first.

We just made history.

And I don't want you to forget how we did it.

You made history every single day during this campaign – every day you knocked on doors, made a donation, or talked to your family, friends and neighbors about why you believe it's time for change.

I want to thank all of you who gave your time, talent and passion to this campaign.

We have a lot of work to do to get our country back on track, and I'll be in touch soon about what comes next.

But I want to be very clear about one thing...

All of this happened because of you.

Thank you,

Barack

Now, that's what I call customer care.

Return to Pristina

Alan Fisher

2008

Monday 28 January

The Pakistani President, Pervez Musharraf, is in London. He's going to meet Gordon Brown. The former general inspires a real mixture of emotions at home and here in London. Outside Downing Street, on one side of the street, his supporters. There are many who think he has been great for Pakistan, not least because of his economic reforms.

I was in Karachi over New Year covering the assassination of the woman who was likely to be his next Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto. Many people were happy to offer unprompted that they were fully behind the President. Is it a coincidence that those who wanted to tell me this were driving big cars and appeared to be doing well financially?

On the other side of the street, in the much larger group, those who see him as a dictator, a tyrant and worse. Among them, Imran Khan. A hero to many Pakistanis when he captained the cricket team, but he can't turn that support into votes for his political party. He criticises Gordon Brown for rolling out the red carpet for a man who sacked judges for not doing what he told them, put political opponents under house arrest and cracked down on Pakistan's influential media. 'Where's Britain's ethical foreign policy?', he asks. There are those who would argue that's more likely filed under history than current affairs.

A joint news conference is held in Number 10, and Gordon Brown insists that full, free and credible elections must go ahead as scheduled. The President says they will.

President Musharraf often ties his future in with that of Pakistan, insisting that he is the only man who can bring order. It's important that he works closely with whoever the people give victory in next month's elections.

Tuesday 29 January

I don't often make trips to Downing Street, but I'm here again. Gordon Brown has called a mini summit to discuss the global financial crisis. Chancellor Merkel, President Sarkozy and acting Premier Prodi are there, the top four European economies. Other EU nations are not happy at being excluded.

Sarkozy swings into Whitehall half an hour after the others. A French cameraman gives a Gallic shrug – no really, he does. 'He's making the point he's a head of state – the others are just heads of government.' Maybe he's been delayed dealing with the huge losses at the revered French institution, Society General, or Soc Gen as every journalist seems to be calling it.

The leaders will issue a *communiqué* insisting the European economy is fundamentally strong. I know because I've seen the draft. It's hardly a shock they feel like that and

everyone is obviously meant to be reassured. I can't help thinking this is political hand-holding. A sign it's not just individual countries that are suffering but we're all in this together. Well – all the ones that are here.

I dash back to the office to put together a package for our bulletins after the news conference where everyone was on message. I know there'll be very little appetite later in the evening as the US moves towards Super Tuesday results. McCain is expected to do well. The Democrats will continue to beat each other's brains out. I saw Barack Obama on TV speak at the last Democratic convention and told everyone he was a star of the future. I just wasn't expecting the future to be now. I read that one side of his family has Irish roots – truly Barack O'Bama.

Friday 1 February

To Pristina with the possibility of landing in one European state and leaving from another yet while staying in the same city. The Serbs are going to vote for a new President. Both candidates believe that Kosovo should always be a part of Serbia, but the reality is that the province is going to declare independence with the full support of the US and most of the EU. The election result will only dictate how soon.

A vote for the current President, Boris Tadic, will mean the announcement will follow possibly another round of talks, and some diplomatic niceties and so be delayed until the end of this month. But a victory for Tomislav Nikolic, the heir to Slobodan Milosevic's rampant nationalism, will see it happen within weeks.

This is my first time back in Pristina in about eight years, when inter-ethnic rivalries blew up in the north and peacekeepers had to keep Serbs and ethnic Albanians apart. There's obviously more money around and the city's not as grey or as cold as I remember. There are no election posters here, even though Kosovo is still technically part of Serbia. This is a vote boycotted by the Albanian majority. They see this as an election in a foreign country and so will have nothing to do with it. The Serb enclaves will vote. It will make little difference, though.

Saturday 2 February

In 1989, Slobodan Milosevic went to the Field of Blackbirds in Kosovo to proclaim his Serb nationalism. Many believe that signalled the break-up of Yugoslavia and the subsequent bloody wars in the Balkans. It was a defining moment.

It takes 20 minutes to drive to the scene from Pristina. It's windswept and desolate but for the Serbs this is the place where their national identity was forged. They lost the battle here in the 1300s. To them, this is sacred ground and they'll never accept the land being part of another country. The Slovak soldiers guarding the place are very edgy and suddenly appear to move us on as we film. We get back to town to interview one of the Kosovan Prime Minister's top aides, Dugagjin Gorani. He runs a journalism school and provides excellent analysis of what's likely to happen. He believes a Tadic victory will delay the

announcement as the EU tries to bolster support for him in Serbia. He knows they'll lose Kosovo but he has to be able to sell it without turning people against the EU. A Milosevic win and then Kosovo has nothing to lose. We should expect the announcement in weeks.

We then film with an artist considered to be one of the favourites to design the new Kosovo flag. Artan Balaj shows us the original artwork of his 12 designs and we pick out two which are immediately striking. One is white on top of blue with eight stars in an open c with an elongated tail. The eight stars representing each of the ethnic groups in Kosovo. The other is red with two thin white stripes and a large black eight-point star. I get a copy of each and ask him to sign. Obviously I think of eBay but if either is picked it would be great to have one framed as a little piece of history.

Sunday 3 February

Election day. We head out to Gracinica, which is a Serb enclave near Pristina. The posters for the election are all over the streets and the Swedish troops with the UN force here are keeping a discreet eye on things. Officials at a polling station in the local school give us permission to film. There is a high turnout and at one point it looks as if central casting is getting involved with an old lady covered in a traditional scarf, an orthodox priest in full regalia and a young couple with their children all voting. All are happy to speak but won't reveal who they supported. Our local producer suspects they are all Milosevic supporters. It's going to be a close-run thing.

We visit the offices of one of the main papers in Pristina. The editor believes independence is just weeks away and warns that a vote for Milosevic is a 'vote for the past, for the nationalism of Milosevic, for genocide'. Many people suffered when the Serbs decided to ethnically cleanse this area in the dying days of the 20th century. It still amazes me that the West stood by so long before taking action against it. We saw it in the Second World War and said lessons had to be learned, we watched it for years in Bosnia and did next to nothing, and here it was happening again.

I was there when a huge line of humanity snaked across the border from Kosovo into Macedonia after hundreds of people were 'expelled' from their own country on the orders of Milosevic. I remember seeing children crying, women passing out and men weary with worry and fear. And still it took weeks before Britain, America and others acted. It was not as if we could argue we didn't know. It was happening in Europe's backyard, just a three-hour flight from London. The people of Kosovo deserved better, and, to be honest, so did we.

We got to the Grand Hotel. It used to be the best place to stay in Pristina but never was a hotel more badly named. The Serbs used to torture people in the basement. In the intervening years, a number of smaller, nicer places have sprung up. We're there to do lives into our bulletins as the results become clear. The night is clear and it's cold. The first results look as if it's a narrow victory for Tadic and soon his opponent concedes defeat. One Kosovo Government source tells us: 'A good result for the Serbs and for us'.

Monday 4 February

We're filming outside the government buildings in Pristina. On the fence there is a gallery of faces, people who disappeared during the Serb operation in Kosovo in 1999 and have never been found. A reminder to and from the people of why Kosovo's future will be determined by its past. The Prime Minister, Hashim Thaci, is holding a news conference after a meeting with an Albanian politician from neighbouring Macedonia.

We negotiate our way in, knowing it's something we could never do in many European capitals, and manage to place ourselves close to the man who is about to lead his people to independence. There are many questions for the PM and apparently he's just said (in Albanian) he wonders why no-one wants to talk to him about his meeting when I ask in English when he's going to declare independence. His English isn't faultless but his message is clear: talks are ongoing and it's coming. 'Very soon, in a few days,' he insists.

We meet Mehmet Kraja, one of the men who set up the Democratic League of Kosovo, the forerunner of the current independence movement. This quiet professor spent some time in exile in Albania because of his views. He says people have to realise that declaring independence is the easy part – the real struggle to create a nation starts after that.

Tuesday 5 February

I want to do a piece asking if Kosovo can afford independence. This is an area which last year exported around 100 million dollars' worth of goods, but imported 1.9 billion dollars' worth. It has no real natural resources and brings in almost everything it uses. Agriculture is virtually non-existent on any real scale, industry is struggling.

But I interview Agim Dushi. A Harvard-educated economist, he turned his back on the six-figure sums being offered by companies in the US to return to Kosovo to use his knowledge and expertise. It's a deeply noble goal and this impressive man speaks with passion and sense. Many Kosovars have become reliant on employment with the huge international community which flooded into the area after the war, but he believes with the majority of its young population under 25, Kosovo can afford to go it alone. He speaks with a passion about a breakaway which makes Alex Salmond look like a doubting Thomas.

I end the piece on the hilltop overlooking the city. And it's clear with the EU and US backing independence, this is something that won't be allowed to fail.

Wednesday 6 February

Back to London on a direct flight from Pristina. When I first came here, everything had to go through Macedonia. Two-hour drive to Skopje and then a long wait at the airport. The flight is not even half-full. I guess someone somewhere is making sure this flight continues for its political value as much as anything else. It's clear we will be back soon. A contact tells me that the big announcement will come before the end of the month. I suspect the world's newest state will be created on the 17th or the 21st.

Tuesday 12 February

Confined to the office. A stupid injury playing football leaves me with a badly swollen ankle. It means I have to become an instant expert on the row between Ukraine and Russia over gas. I make a few calls and speak to experts and read all the available wires so I can speak with authority when our Doha headquarters does a live with me on the issue in our midday bulletin.

Gazprom tells Ukraine it has to pay its gas bill. It's 1.5 billion dollars. Gazprom is Russia's state-owned gas provider. It cut off supplies to Kiev two years ago causing problems across Europe, so everyone wants to make sure this doesn't happen again.

The Ukrainian President has gone to Moscow to discuss the situation, or is it that President Putin wants to see him plead not to turn the taps off? A quick reminder perhaps of who the boss is in that area. Four hours of talks bring a last-minute deal which ensures no-one in Kiev will freeze, but President Putin warns his 'friend' that if they press ahead with plans to join NATO, Moscow will point its missiles at them. One crisis averted, another teed up. Putin believes he's put the power back in Russia and he's not afraid to use it.

We're also planning for our return to Kosovo. All indications are the independence announcement is coming on Sunday. I'll be in Pristina, which will be exciting and interesting, but I'm sure Mitrovica in the north could be where the real story is. The bridge separates the two communities there: Serbs in the north and Albanians in the south. The Serbs don't want to be part of any new nation – and might cause problems for the peacekeepers there.

Farewell to Serbia

Alan Fisher

2008

On the edge of the Serbian capital lies a suburb known as New Belgrade. It's an area of new apartment blocks and of the biggest shopping mall in the Balkans. It's also the place a man called Dragan Dabic called home. The genial doctor of alternative medicine was a regular at The Crazy House, a small bar on a corner of one of the poorer parts of this sprawling estate. Quietly he would talk about music and books, sipping on his red wine or coffee. He was well liked by the other regulars. No-one knew that the man sitting there beside them was the world's most wanted war criminal, Radovan Karadzic.

Last Thursday, they set chairs outside The Crazy House to observe the events in The Hague. The crowd watched intently as Dragan Dabic stood in court accused of mass murder and atrocity. For them, the man on the screen was a stranger – yet someone they all recognised. Above the TV, a portrait – still wet – of a face they knew better.

Tomas Kovijanic, the bar owner, often served Dragan Dabic. Watching the man he's proud to call a friend appear in the dock, he told me: 'Like every true Serb patriot, I am sad and unhappy. Radovan is not with us now and he is in a place he does not deserve to be. But I am proud because in my bar he spent the last couple of years enjoying freedom while the whole world was searching for him'.

One man seemed to be following events more closely than the others. He confided in me that he had been a Serb soldier. Shaking with anger, close to tears, he said he witnessed many horrors during the war in the early 1990s. 'I saw the massacre of Serbs, many bodies of dead children. It is unjust to accuse one side all the time and not do anything about the other.'

Across Serbia there are still sharp divisions about what has happened to Radovan Karadzic – those who believe he should face the court, others like those in The Crazy House who regard him as a Serb hero. But for one man it's personal – Luka Karadzic.

In the days following the arrest, Luka rarely spoke at length to the media, preferring to pass just a few comments outside the court in Belgrade where his brother was being held. But at the edge of one protest, he stopped to speak to me. Everyone wanted to know how Karadzic had managed to evade the authorities for so long. Luka suggested that it took more than a good disguise for his brother to remain free. 'He is a smart and skilful man. He knows the spirit of the people. I don't know how he fell after so many years. It was probably an act of treason. What happened is still unclear to me and to him.'

The brothers have discussed the charges Karadzic faces. Luka believes the court will see that it has no basis to proceed. 'I don't think anything positive about the tribunal. All the worst things that could be put into the indictment have been put there, but there is no link

to my brother. People who know him, they know that Radovan is not a murderer. He is a doctor, a humanist, a poet, an intellectual, a man who helped many Muslims and Croats and Serbs. And even in his second identity as Dr Dabic he treated members of every nationality.'

Luka plans to continue his daily protests. But he accepts that while he is on the streets of Belgrade, his brother will be thousands of miles away, in a cell in The Hague.

Copenhagen ghost

Alan Fisher

2009

We meet near a railway station close to the centre of Copenhagen. He has thick black hair swept back and a jacket that looks too thin in the biting cold of the late afternoon.

Ahmed, it's not his real name, has been in Denmark for a long time – he doesn't want to say how long. He came from Turkey. His father was a member of the PKK, a group fighting to create a Kurdish homeland. But he was killed by Turkish Army special forces. Ahmed was then served his conscription papers for the Turkish Army, but he didn't want anything to do with the people who killed his father. He was worried he too would be killed. So he ran. First to Germany, then on to Denmark.

He applied for asylum and waited three years for a decision. His lawyer argued that his life was at risk and that because of his family connections he simply couldn't return. The Danish panel listened carefully, and then ruled against him. At the asylum centre, he waited and wondered when they would come to deport him. At that point, Ahmed decided he couldn't let that happen, and so he disappeared. He walked out of the camp and became a ghost.

He lives in an apartment, he works sometimes, he even has a family but to the Danish authorities he doesn't exist.

'I cannot get sick. If I went to a doctor or a hospital, that would let people know where I am. I rarely go out. Even being here with you is a risk. I try to be invisible.'

He helps with the cost of running his home by taking odd jobs for cash where he can. In his faltering English he tells me: 'I know the pay is poor. I know it's much less than they would pay normally but what else can I do? I cannot complain. I need the money'.

As we walk by the river, we talk about the life he left behind. 'I love my land. I love the people there, my family. I have not spoken to them for years. I cannot come to the surface.' I ask what the hardest thing is about staying hidden. His head drops and he speaks slowly and quietly: 'I have to lie, it seems all the time. And I have to remember what lies I have told. What names, what stories, what places. It is very stressful but I do not like to lie. Every day I worry I will slip up on one little thing and that will be enough. They will come, there will be a knock on the door and I will be taken away'.

Michala Clante Bendixen helps run the Underground Committee for Refugees in Copenhagen. A graphic artist, she does what she can to help those who have lost their cases and melted away to join the faces in the crowd. 'There are many like Ahmed. If he returns, he could be killed because of his family connections. Under EU rules, he could apply for asylum again because his country is considered dangerous but if he filed papers, they would know where he was and deport him before the case could be heard. He cannot win so has to live the way he does.'

Ahmed says that maybe one day it will be safe for him to return to his homeland but for the moment Denmark is where he lives – in full sight, but invisible.

Arrested in Israel

Alan Fisher

2009

Thursday 1 January 2009

A new year, but the conflict which has dominated world events for the past 60 years goes on with the same intensity and bitterness. It's a bad start to the day when our attempts to film Israeli tanks close to the Erez border crossing are blocked again by Israeli police. They are polite but insistent – this is a closed military area and we have to go.

So we head to a point on the main road, close to a place signposted 'Armistice House'. This was a place used for meetings between Israelis and Egyptians to discuss a ceasefire after the war in 1948. Here we can see Gaza in the distance. And throughout the day, explosions cut through the air and huge plumes of smoke follow.

At one point, a grey streak of smoke shoots upwards – a missile fired out of Gaza, heading towards Be'er Sheva. Within two minutes, from the spot where the trail appeared to start, there's an explosion and a huge ball of smoke as the Israelis strike back immediately.

Throughout the afternoon, there is a series of loud explosions after a number of attacks from the air. It's thought that the Israelis are targeting the minefields and booby traps laid by the Palestinians, literally preparing the ground for a land offensive. It's a gamble and the international community has a very small window to forge a deal which will stop it happening.

Friday 2 January 2009

Just before 8am, the sirens suddenly sound at our hotel in Ashkelon. Two loud droning noises followed by a voice in Hebrew then in English – 'Will all guests please make their way to a secure place'. Rockets from Gaza are on their way. Within seconds, there are two loud explosions. Ashkelon is the target. I'm told seven have landed in the city. There is some damage to one house and minor scratches to one resident. It's a reminder of how notoriously inaccurate these rockets are, and how they are indiscriminate in their targeting.

As a matter of curiosity, I go to check out the secure room on my floor. It is essentially a windowless conference room with chairs arranged around makeshift tables and a steel ladder which leads to the floor above. It provides more than adequate protection because the chances of a direct strike are so small.

Kissufim is a border crossing between Israel and Gaza. It's deserted. As we drive towards it, it's eerie just how quiet it is. As I stand looking into Gaza, the silence is broken by the call to Friday prayer carried in the wind. It's suddenly drowned out by three loud explosions to my right, somewhere in the distance. As I try to find out what has been hit, another three echo around the area. Suddenly the drone of aircraft is also noticeable as Israeli spotter aircraft do their job in the skies above me. I walk past the yellow permanent roadblocks and

make my way to the border. It's marked by a fence which is possibly electrified and heavy concrete blocks. This is the very edge of Israel.

Our presence is suddenly the subject of attention from the Israeli Army. Three vehicles surround us and ask what we're doing. We explain and they insist we hand over the tapes. Our local producer, Yossi, tries to tell them we have nothing that shows the army, but we're reminded that we are filming in a closed military zone and co-operation is not optional. They take our camera.

I'm writing this in the back of our car. We've asked the soldiers to refer the matter higher, and they've agreed. I suspect we've lost our morning's work. Our encounter on the border is perhaps an example of how edgy everyone is. If a ground assault is to go ahead, and all the signs are that it is, it's going to happen in the next 48 to 72 hours.

Later that day

We're detained by the Israeli Army while filming close to the border with Gaza. They tell us that we are in a closed military area despite having passed two police patrols on the way there. The army holds us for four hours before passing us into police custody. Our vehicle is ordered to follow the police to the base at Ofa Kim. I'm taken into a small room where I'm questioned by a detective, who shows me a notice in Hebrew which he says is an order stopping unauthorised people entering the area where we were detained. I point out I don't read Hebrew. He then asks several questions which results in the same answer: 'I don't read Hebrew'.

I have discovered that another news team had been in the area yesterday and I point this out. I tell the police that they aired footage from the so-called closed area and wonder why it is just an Al Jazeera team which has run into problems when there are hundreds of journalists doing what we've just done. The bespectacled shaven-headed officer has the decency to look slightly uncomfortable before insisting that our detention is nothing to do with who we work for. My cameraman is offered coffee. I'm asked if I want anything and request 'our tapes and to leave'. There is no smile. I'm told that we can't leave. We have to be 'processed', which sounds ominous.

After two hours with the police, an army team show up to view the material we have filmed. They tell us that we can't have the discs back as they show something that is restricted. I ask what, and the young male officer is about to answer when he realises what he's about to do and says he can't say. Almost.

I'm then asked to sign a statement in Hebrew which will release me on bail. I tell the clerk that I don't read Hebrew so our producer is called who checks over the wording and nods. I'm agreeing to stay out of the closed military zone. I sign to end this seven-hour drag of pain and inconvenience. The soldiers and police have been professional rather than friendly, but we've lost a whole day.

My producer smiles at me as we get into the car. 'They are embarrassed. We should never have gotten so far.' It doesn't make me feel any better.

Women without faces

Alan Fisher

2010

When Bushra goes out she wears the full naqab, it covers her face. She says it stops people staring. If they do catch sight of her, she has a story prepared. She tells them her injuries were caused by hot milk being spilled. It's not true. Bushra looks the way she does because of greed, because of anger, because of the evil in some people's hearts.

Fifteen years ago, she went to the wedding of her brother. It was a happy occasion and there was music and laughter. When she returned to her husband, her in-laws demanded money. They told her it was tradition to bring money back after a wedding. They wanted 50,000 rupees – around £360. She told them: 'I don't have that kind of money. My brothers don't have this kind of money either'. It wasn't what they wanted to hear – they called her a liar and beat her repeatedly. Then they tied her up. Her mother-in-law grabbed her hair and yanked her head back. 'I was terrified,' said Bushra.

Her voice quivers, remembering the moment. She gulps hard, choking back the tears. 'Then they put a cloth on a stick, soaked it in acid and her husband rubbed it over the side of my face.' She remembers the pain, but this is not where her ordeal ended. 'His uncle snatched the stick and rubbed it across the other side of my face. He forced open my mouth and dripped it on my tongue. It burned.'

Bushra doesn't remember what happened next. She passed out from the pain. She only knows what happened from what people tell her. Her family tied her body to a ceiling fan and set the house on fire. They told people in the village on the outskirts of Lahore that Bushra had tried to commit suicide. But people didn't just stand around. They burst their way into the house and grabbed her limp body. They took her to hospital.

For a year, she stayed in hospital. She drifted in and out of consciousness. She couldn't see, couldn't open her eyes, but she could hear. And she heard people express their disgust at how she looked. Those who stayed with her made her worried and tense. She went to live with her sister. When some of her family saw her, they fainted. Her body was skinny but her head was massive. She heard them say: 'This is a woman but it doesn't look like a woman because she had no face'. She cried.

That was 15 years ago. Bushra has gone through 28 operations. 'Slowly my face has got better,' she tells me. 'Maybe if they could fix my nose it would be better.' She would like to be a beautician and now she's training in a salon in Lahore. It's run by Musarat Misbah. This elegant, articulate woman decided to help Pakistan's acid burns victims after a chance encounter five and a half years ago. A woman walked into her office late one evening and asked for her help. She asked her to return in the morning.

'The woman was very insistent and said no, you must help me now. She removed her

scarf and I saw a woman without a face. I saw a girl, there was no nose, no eyes and she had a contraction from her chin to her chest which meant she could not move her neck. I sat down. There was no life in my legs. I asked her "What happened?" She told me that her own family members – her husband and in-laws – had thrown acid at her. She said she wanted me to help her look beautiful. No make up could change her features or bring back the eyes, so I told her that I would help her.'

And she did. Using her own money, she paid for surgery. Word spread, and now almost 400 women and girls have asked Misbah and her Smile Again Foundation for help.

Doctors from Italy and the UK have given their services to help with medical treatment. She tries to direct many of those she helps into jobs. 'Employers say: "We can't have someone who looks like that working in our place, it is too upsetting for everyone else", so I tell them to use them as telephone operators.' Her pushiness and determination means that 98 women have found work.

Each case brings new heartache, a story worse than the last. There's 17-year-old Naseera with her flawless skin and long blonde hair. He took revenge because she rejected his proposal. She says: 'It was like burning in hell'. Acid burned through her upper body melting away the skin. Then there is Shamim who was verbally abused by a street gang. When she rejected their advances, they kidnapped her, raped her and poured acid on her face, trying to silence her forever. She was just 17.

Bushra doesn't preach forgiveness. Her pain has been too long and too great. 'People are cruel towards young girls and the innocent. If someone doesn't get along with someone else then it's fine, get a divorce and move on. But to ruin someone's face, to set fire to someone or to pour acid on someone's face, people who do this, 20 or 25 of them should be hanged in public at once to strike fear into the hearts of people so that men realise that you cannot do this to a woman. I've even learned how to drive so that if I see my husband walking on the street I can kill him with my car.'

There are no accurate figures for the number of acid attacks in Pakistan each year, but it's thought that few are actually reported to police. Even those cases are sometimes hard to pursue. Misbah tells me: 'I took one girl who had been attacked to the police station. The first question the officer asked was "What did you do to deserve this?"'

An uncounted victim

Alan Fisher

2011

In the middle of a roundabout, outside Atocha railway station in Madrid, there is a memorial to the dead and to the victims of bin Laden. It marks the day, 11 March 2004, when death arrived at the station.

Bombs planted on an early morning commuter train exploded. The moment the flames and the horror ripped through the station was captured on CCTV, the scene made more chilling by the absence of sound. There were three trains attacked that day.

The blasts from 10 backpacks filled with dynamite and nails killed 192 people and injured more than 1,800. The police slowly made the connections and it became clear to them that those responsible for the attacks were supporters and followers of Osama bin Laden.

Monica Sanchez Garcia was on the train to Atocha. She saw the dead, the dying and the injured before she lapsed into a coma. It was 28 days before she regained consciousness. It took her three years to recover from the physical injuries she suffered. And even today, in her left ear she wears a discreet little device to help her with the hearing she lost in the explosion. She also lost the baby she was carrying, an uncounted victim of the bombing.

We meet at the station. She is content to return to the scene of her worst moment. She wants to talk about the news she heard this morning about the death of Osama bin Laden, the man she believes ordered the attack which almost killed her.

Small and animated, she smiles more than she should given what she's been through. Monica believes the events from seven years ago changed Spain and perhaps the world: 'In some countries they are used to this sort of thing – but not in Spain. Now it is impossible to go on a train without thinking someone may put a bomb on it, impossible to build a tall building without thinking that someone may fly a plane into it'.

And she hopes that the death of bin Laden will not mean people begin to forget what happened in Madrid. 'This is not the end to this chapter in my life, no it is not. There are still a lot of things to be done with the victims. Bin Laden is not the only terrorist. They have many cells with long tentacles that reach every country as has been demonstrated. And I am frightened that there will be reprisals.'

The bombing of Madrid was the most significant attack on the West since 9/11. In the immediate aftermath, it changed Spanish Government policy. It also changed the way people felt about their security. Travellers around Atocha believe the death of Osama bin Laden won't change it back.

One young woman says: 'If it's not bin Laden it'll be someone else. Religious fundamentalism is widespread. So if it's not him...'. Her voice trails off before she adds:

'Generally I'm not happy about the death of anyone but this is good news'. A man on his way home after arriving at the station says: 'If you accept that Bin Laden was responsible for 50% of the insecurity in the world – then the other 50% is the responsibility of European governments and the government of the United States'.

The large glass cylinder which marks the overground part of the memorial leads to a subterranean chamber which is quiet and relaxed, and which fills with natural light. On the wall, there are the names of those killed in the Atocha bombings, all 192 of them. There are other memorials to the day back in March 2004. And most of them now go almost unnoticed by those who pass. But the worries and fears that came that day are never far from the surface. This touching monument is also a permanent reminder of Osama bin Laden and of what his words and thoughts and deeds brought to Spain.

Love, death and Cowdenbeath

Bob Cant

2013

I was planning to visit Chile in the summer of 1973. My partner was Chilean and we intended to fly to Argentina and then take a bus over the Andes before descending on his family. They belonged to the wealthy middle class and they had been less than pleased that their son had made the time to go and vote for Allende on the very day he set off for Europe. I was just a wee bit anxious about meeting them. But the relationship came to an end before I got the chance to set off on what I had been assured would have been an unforgettable holiday.

I had to be back at work at the beginning of September; so we would not have been around at the time of the coup on the 11th of September that overthrew the Allende Government. Among the 'unforgettable' events that I missed were a strike of copper miners against the government, seizure of land by members of the peasantry, the use of tear gas against demonstrators and the emergence of armed gangs on the streets.

In the midst of all this conflict and tension, the Chamber of Deputies passed a resolution which invited the armed forces to impose law and order, if Allende was unwilling to do so. I spoke no Spanish in those days although it would have been a surreal way of learning the language: watching the build up to the overthrow of the government in South America's most democratic country, as well as hearing the arguments between my partner and his family.

It soon became clear from the news reports that reached this country that the coup was much more than a change of personnel in the seats of power. After the presidential palace (La Moneda) had been stormed and Allende had died, the army set out to terrorise the whole country. Thousands of government supporters were rounded up and taken to a football stadium in Santiago where they were tortured and many were murdered. The folk singer, Victor Jara, was among those who never came out of the stadium alive. While he was there, however, he was able to write a poem about his perception of the horror that was going on around him. It was smuggled out by a friend and is now known by the name of *Estadio Chile*. This is a translated extract from it:

*How hard it is to sing
When I must sing of horror,
Horror which I am living,
Horror which I am dying.
To see myself among so much
And so many moments of infinity
In which silence and screams
Are the end of my song.*

The terror went much further than the stadium. Throughout October 1973, an army death squad, known as the Caravan of Death, travelled the length and breadth of the country and executed over 70 mainstream political activists held in military custody; in some cases these people had placed themselves in the hands of what they mistakenly believed was a professional army. The military also developed the practice of throwing pregnant women who were deemed to have opposed the coup out of aeroplanes.

Many hundreds of people simply disappeared, following contact with the armed forces. As many as 200,000 people (out of a population of two million) may have gone into exile following the coup. Operation Condor was an alliance among South American dictatorships to eliminate political opponents, particularly those in exile. General Carlos Prats, a constitutionalist soldier, who had gone into exile in Argentina was blown up by a car bomb there in 1974. Oscar Letelier, a former Foreign Minister under Allende, was similarly blown up by a car bomb in Washington DC in 1976. The intimidation of anyone believed to be a political supporter of Allende was a systematic feature of the Pinochet regime and it did not respect national boundaries.

Many Chilean refugees came to Scotland. While most of those settled in the cities, some went to areas such as west Fife where the internationalist traditions of the miners' union were still strong. When a group of Chileans reached Cowdenbeath just three months after the coup, they were piped into the town by the miners' brass band and provided with accommodation and Christmas gifts. The welcome they were given represented an expression of solidarity by members of a still strong working-class movement to members of another working-class movement whose very existence had been threatened.

It is unclear what role the US Government, then led by Richard Nixon, had in the actual coup but the CIA had been financing the protests against Allende from the time he took office. Weeks after the coup, the American Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, was awarded the Nobel peace prize to the delight of satirists all over the world.

In any event, the US Government welcomed the way that Pinochet turned Chile into a testing ground for the policies of neo-conservatism. Free enterprise was allowed to flourish unhindered by any sense of social responsibility; public services were destroyed or neglected; unemployment soared and the wages, especially those paid by the returning multi-nationals, fell; the main role of the State was to enforce security. Pinochet and his family became so embarrassingly rich that they sent over \$20m abroad in a money-laundering scam.

It seems that international pressure led to Pinochet calling a referendum in 1988, to approve an extension of his presidential term. Almost everyone assumed it would be a shoo-in for him but, against the odds, almost everyone proved to be wrong. The film, *NO*, which appeared last year, is a fictionalised version of the referendum campaign but the tactics used in the film are an accurate reflection of the tactics used to persuade people to vote against Pinochet. Despite the climate of fear induced by 15 years of dictatorship, a majority voted No and a rather timid democracy was restored the following year. Enormous

inequalities remain and conflicts continue between those who still admire the Pinochet regime and those who resisted it, but the terror came to an end.

What I will remember on the 40th anniversary of Chile's 9/11 is not just the coup and the atrocities that followed it but also the referendum that removed Pinochet. The courage of the people of Chile in voting against the dictatorship showed that the coup really had not been 'the end of the song'.

A night when we were too busy to weep

R D Kernohan

2013

Once upon a time, not so long since, we all remembered what we were doing when we heard that Kennedy had been shot. But time hurtles on. Fresh generations remain fascinated by his life and the way it ended, but they didn't feel the impact of his life or the thud of his death.

It was my night off that Friday. As was the custom in these olden times, I was watching TV. The phone rang for my recall just as the BBC programme was interrupted for a news flash. For the next quarter of an hour I was out of touch – car radios were an expensive extra then – but by the time I reached the *Glasgow Herald* office in Buchanan Street, the leader had written itself, mainly at the pauses for traffic lights.

Never before or since did any piece I've written take such a finished form before a key was typed. Even the flourish about 'the last full measure of devotion' had probably occurred to me, and I certainly didn't bother to check the Gettysburg quotation from Abraham Lincoln in the race to catch the first edition. In those days before the internet, checking took longer, yet papers made fewer mistakes.

The other thing I remember best from that clattering time of tapes, tobacco-smoke, teletype and linotype is the marvellous calm with which everyone, whether in the sub-editors' room or upstairs among compositors and upmakers, handled the story of the decade. James Holburn, an underrated *Herald* editor whose greatest strength was in international matters, was in authoritative charge.

But was it George Fraser, of later Flashman fame, with whom I liaised as the tapes accumulated on the foreign desk or had Aubrey McDowall, another great sub, taken over by then? Or had both been mustered for the emergency? I wish memory could be as precise about people as it is in recalling the atmosphere of that extraordinary night of tragedy and efficiency.

Much that I knew of Kennedy's America I owed to Holburn. The previous year, he had let me off the *Herald* for two months to take the chance of a coast-to-coast tour of American politics, newspapers and universities. It was Kennedy's golden time, in charge and apparently at ease. The prospect of a second term looked good but campaigning for it was not urgent. His close-run victory in the Cuban missile crisis had all but banished the memory of the Bay of Pigs and obscured the confused drift of policy that was already drawing the USA into the swamps of Vietnam.

I only saw him once at close quarters but he made a great occasion even of a routine press conference in the State Department building. The press corps appeared at the same time to be vassals paying homage, a little too eager to laugh at his well-scripted jokes, and

buddies having a free and easy chat. I find from a dusty file that I wrote home to my wife that Kennedy was 'enjoying having got what he wanted' and had 'a rather un-American wit and sense of irony'.

As I travelled far from Washington, I found the Americans rather less deferential to their President and in Minneapolis I was told he was handicapped 'by his English accent'. But the Democrats were happy and most of the Republicans I met were mildly critical rather than really hostile. After nearly 20 years, with worthy but rather dull Presidents, they were taken – in retrospect one might say taken in – by the change of style. Even then, however, they had picked up gossip about the love life of the court at Camelot, although it came in unsubstantial form. 'Do you want to know the scuttlebutt?' they would ask. 'They say he's got two "secretaries" alternately available, one called Fiddle and the other Faddle.' The name Marilyn was never mentioned and nobody I met then realised how serious his health problems were.

But a minority of real Kennedy-haters were diverted from exploiting JFK's private vulnerability and sexual enthusiasms by their pursuit of two other 'scandals', one based on fact and the other on fantasy. The true story was the allegation that Teddy Kennedy, then already campaigning for the Senate, had cheated at Harvard. He had. But when I stopped off at Boston on the way home, the editor of the *Christian Science Monitor*, then an influential broadsheet, assured me that the tale had been leaked early by the Kennedy clan themselves, knowing that it would come out anyway and might be more dangerous nearer polling day.

The fantasy, which I encountered several times on my coast-to-coast-and-back travels, was that the President was a bigamist, or just conceivably a divorcee. Let no-one think that there were no social media channels to spread fads and fancies in those pre-internet times. I was even shown what purported to be an extract from a Florida marriage register recording the wedding of John Fitzgerald Kennedy to someone whose name I've forgotten. Was it all made up? Was it some obscurer JFK?

All I know is that those who spread the story actually believed it and that it cropped up several times and thousands of miles apart on a trip when almost all my encounters were with journalists, academics, local politicians and business people, many of them on the State Department lists of sober citizens eager to give friendly visitors a good impression of America.

But Kennedy himself was also doing that. Maybe for my generation in the early 1960s – in Britain and Berlin as well as in the USA – impressions were everything. But for me, he had overcome both an innate aversion to much that hyphenated Irish-Americans were supposed to represent and my suspicion of a clan whose patriarch had been so ill-disposed to Britain in its darkest, finest hour after the fall of France in 1940. J F Kennedy had become a symbol, almost an idol. I think he probably was also, as *The Herald* leader claimed and I must have believed at the time, 'a true friend of Britain'.

Yet, on the night he was shot, I think journalists everywhere had no time for tears. We

maybe wondered afterwards at the detachment achieved in getting a sad job done, maybe straying into Wordsworthian thoughts of things 'too deep for tears'. But we hadn't really the information or insights at the time for any assessment of Kennedy in depth, and on the night we were just too busy to weep. I'm glad all the same that I managed that emotional flourish from Lincoln, the greatest of presidential martyrs, about 'the last full measure of devotion'.

Forgetting Riga: the disaster that didn't happen

Hamish Scott

2013

The BBC's coverage of the helicopter crash at the Clutha bar in Glasgow has been extensive beyond criticism. However, a week prior to that tragedy, when the roof of a supermarket collapsed in Riga, the BBC's response was very different.

That difference was in part due to the Clutha accident taking place within the UK, but it was also due to a fundamental social, political and cultural divergence between many Scots and a British establishment that has important social, political and cultural consequences.

It's a divergence that was brought into further relief in the sphere of broadcasting by a train crash in New York shortly after the Clutha helicopter crash. It is also a divergence unlikely to be satisfactorily addressed in broadcasting without independence.

The roof collapse in Riga took place at approximately 4pm GMT on Thursday 21 November. It soon became clear that there were significant casualties. By the time the BBC's flagship evening news programme on BBC1 began at 10pm GMT, six hours had elapsed since the collapse. It was still 'breaking news' but there had also been more than enough time to

appreciate the scale of the tragedy and to provide comprehensive coverage of the incident as the lead story, or at least one of the lead stories.

So what coverage was there? Incredibly, there was no coverage at all. In a programme lasting 25 minutes, and one that contained 10 separate news items, not a single second was devoted to the building collapse in Riga.

Although some mention would be expected, at the very least, perhaps six hours wasn't enough time for that comprehensive report. Perhaps the same news programme the following day would provide what was missing in Thursday's edition. Perhaps, also, the full scale of the disaster would be more evident. In fact, by the time BBC1's Friday 10pm news programme aired, the death toll stood at 49 and the missing were estimated at 30. Moreover, with rescue efforts continuing through Thursday night and throughout Friday, there was also more to report.

There could be no doubt of the importance of the disaster as a major news item. The building collapse was, at last, reported by BBC1's evening news. However, the report from Riga came fourth in order of reporting and lasted a mere 73 seconds.

The BBC's Saturday evening news programme at 10.10pm on BBC 1 continued the extremely limited coverage, with just 21 seconds out of a programme lasting over 16 and a half minutes. This was the last evening news programme on BBC1 to cover the tragedy; no further mention was made at all after that. Yet this was an ongoing news story with much still to report in order to cover it satisfactorily, not least the changing casualty figures. On

Sunday, it was confirmed that 54 people were dead and seven more still thought to be trapped in the rubble, their condition unknown. Nineteen of the 39 admitted to hospital remained there. Messages were sent by world leaders.

Monday was another newsworthy day that went unreported on BBC1's 10pm news. Search and rescue efforts came to an end with no more bodies found. The final death toll – barring any deaths of those hospitalised – was now known for certain. A three-minute silence was observed across Latvia. The funerals of the three firefighters who died in the tragedy were scheduled for Wednesday 27 November.

The tragedy took a dramatic turn on that Wednesday when it led to the resignation of the Latvian Prime Minister, and thus his government. The funerals of the three firefighters also took place. None of this was reported on that evening's BBC1 news at 10pm.

On Sunday 1 December, a train derailed in New York City. Four people were killed and it was quickly known this was the full extent of the fatalities. Yet this accident was given two minutes, 10 seconds of coverage on that evening's BBC1 evening news programme at 10pm, a programme lasting less than 19 minutes. This was considerably more than the one minute, 34 seconds given in total on BBC1's evening news programmes to the Riga disaster in which 54 people died. There was a clear and significant imbalance in the coverage given to the tragedies in Riga and New York, particularly given the very different scale of casualties.

The BBC is the British state media. In that role, it reflects the concerns and attitudes of the establishment which controls the United Kingdom. In 1938, when the UK played a crucial role in the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia under the terms of the Munich agreement, the mentality of that establishment in its treatment of Czechoslovakia was reflected in a radio address given by the then British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain. The future of Czechoslovakia, he said, was 'a quarrel in a far-away country between people of whom we know nothing'.

Yet Prague is roughly the same distance from London as Lerwick is – and the ignorance acknowledged by Chamberlain did not stop Britain (along with Germany, France and Italy) from agreeing to the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia in the Munich agreement, without Czechoslovakia being represented at Munich, far less a party to the agreement.

It seems that little has changed since in terms of attitude. Latvia is a fellow European country, a fellow member state of the European Union, and its citizens our fellow EU citizens. Yet the BBC evidently did not consider a major disaster with many casualties occurring in Latvia worthy of significant coverage. There was also a lack of a certain empathy that failed to engage with the impact of such a major tragedy in a country of only two million people.

The lack of coverage of the Riga tragedy illustrates an insularity towards, and a lack of social, political and cultural engagement with, Europe that isolates the UK – and therefore Scotland – from the rest of our continent. It's an isolationism with a long history and deep roots. It's not going to change. If Scots want to end that isolation in the broadcasting sphere, we must do it ourselves.

However, despite the aspirations of many Scots, broadcasting was not devolved to Scotland in 1999. There is little or no appetite at Westminster or within Scottish unionism for that to change. If Scots want a broadcasting service, including news reporting, that treats us as Europeans and engages fully with Europe socially, politically and culturally, only independence can provide it. The white paper on independence proposes a Scottish broadcasting service which can be the vehicle for that provision.

The day the wire came down

James Wilkie

2014

It hardly seems like a quarter of a century has passed, so much has happened in the meantime. The 27th of June 1989 dawned a gloriously sunny day as a group of us headed out from the Ballhausplatz in Vienna in the direction of the Hungarian border – or frontier, as it was more appropriately describable even at that late stage in the Cold War.

I was present with Foreign Minister, Alois Mock, in my capacity as editor of Austria's diplomatic magazine *Austria Today*, and also as compiler and editor of the official statement of foreign policy, the *Austrian Foreign Policy Yearbook*.

The signs of thaw had been increasing for several years. Gorbachev was heading a far more liberal regime in Moscow, where glasnost and perestroika were the order of the day. In Poland, the mighty humorist Lech Walesa, with the forces of Polish Catholicism at his back, was leading his Solidarnosc movement to final victory over doctrinaire Leninism.

The young bloods of the Hungarian communist party had been agitating for a long time for an end to their isolation from the West, and like the Poles they were beginning to assert their emancipation from Moscow. In a one-party state, the single party can encompass a wide range of views and aspirations.

The softening-up had already begun, as when a group of us from Vienna were invited to spend a weekend in Hungary at government expense, and were entertained at the country 'dacha' that had belonged to former communist party leader Janos Kadar, with the involvement of a huge cauldron of goulash over a log fire and considerable quantities of aged Tokayer. It was also my introduction to dancing the czardas, when I was 'lifted' by one of the girls from the display team in their gorgeous Hungarian national costumes.

The Iron Curtain in its physical (as distinct from ideological) manifestation was a line of barriers, including the Berlin Wall, which stretched for 1,000 miles through Europe from the Baltic to the Adriatic. Its purpose was not to keep out the wicked capitalists, but to keep in those ungrateful citizens of the socialist paradise in the east who were just waiting for half a chance to fly the coop.

The barbed wire and watchtowers along the actual frontiers of East Germany, Czechoslovakia and Hungary were only the outposts of the real barriers, which lay several miles further to the east behind a no man's land that was cultivated by carefully screened farmers under strict military supervision. There were actually plenty of ways through it for those with local knowledge, as bears and wolves regularly found out, but the obstacle was nevertheless formidable.

The Hungarian stretch of the Iron Curtain that we were now about to demolish consisted of the original rusted barbed wire fence, separated by a three-metre gap from a

newer fence about five metres in height, high-tension electrified in its lower strands, and with T-pieces at the top carrying wire loops, with wires carrying a 24-volt current running through the middle of them. The general idea was that anyone throwing a sack or similar insulator over the wires would close the electrical circuit, which would alarm the guards, switch on the floodlights and arm the booby traps.

Anyone who succeeded in overcoming this barrier was then faced with 20 metres of finely raked sand that would show footprints, and in any case was mined. Further unlikely progress to the west was blocked by a third barbed wire fence so overgrown with thorn bushes that not even a rabbit could have got through.

The Hungarians had begun to realise that this sort of thing was not exactly in tune with the times, and the army had in fact started to dismantle some parts of the barrier in early May 1989. This was too slow for the energetic Hungarian Foreign Minister (and later Prime Minister) Gyula Horn, a sentiment echoed by his equally enterprising Austrian counterpart, Foreign Minister Alois Mock. And so the two of them decided to make a show of it – a deliberate, ostentatious demonstration of intent to ensure that there would be no repetition of the crushing of the 1956 Hungarian uprising, as well as underlining their determination that the abolition of the division between east and west was now going to be permanent. This time, nobody asked Moscow's permission.

With a small group of diplomats, military, some journalists, Austrian and Hungarian television teams and a company of the Hungarian Army, we assembled at a stretch of the barrier near the frontier town of Sopron.

There was not much in the way of speech-making; the two Foreign Ministers simply took wire cutters in their hands and demonstratively sliced through the main fence in front of the cameras. The cut ends were then attached to Hungarian Army lorries, ripped from the uprights, and cut into pieces for disposal. Not to be upstaged, I borrowed a wire cutter from one of the soldiers to have a go at the barrier myself, and have kept a piece of the true Iron Curtain as a souvenir of an historic occasion.

After the meal, I travelled back to Vienna with one of the senior diplomats from the Soviet Embassy, who would be reporting the event to Gorbachev in Moscow. He was treating it as a day out with his wife, and in fact there was not a cheep of criticism from Moscow afterwards.

The subsequent developments were spectacular. The event was reported in the East European media, and within a week 80,000 East Germans had taken their holidays in Hungary, left their Trabants and Polski Fiats standing, and flooded over the now open border on foot into Austria. Very few of them stayed there, for most travelled on to their relatives in West Germany. I published photos of the exodus in *Austria Today*.

After that, with a route to the west now open, the Berlin Wall lost any remaining function it might have had. It took five months to overcome the resistance of the doctrinaire East German authorities, but in November 1989 the Wall was breached for good, and the way was opened for the unification of Germany.

Even after all this, the barrier was still up between Czechoslovakia and the west. (The East German and Czech apparatchiks were generally more fanatical communists than the Russians, although some of their Hungarian counterparts were not far behind, as the Museum of Terror in Budapest shows.) And so Alois Mock organised another Iron Curtain party near Laa an der Thaya, this time in collaboration with his Czechoslovakian colleague, Foreign Minister Jiri Dienstbier, who four years previously had smuggled his own daughter out of the socialist paradise to study in Vienna University.

The weather in December was lousy, but this time there was an enormous crowd of spectators – mainly diplomats, military and the media – to watch the final act in the division of Europe between east and west. Alois Mock's talent for the theatrical was shown again this time when we brought Monika Dienstbier from Vienna, gave her the wire cutters, and let her snip her way through the Iron Curtain to give her father a big hug on the other side, to rapturous applause.

It could not have been more symbolic. There were some sour remarks in left-wing circles about Mock's ostentatious and high-profile diplomacy, but from this point on there was no turning the clock back. The Cold War and the bipolar world system were both definitively at an end, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Scots: the most hated ethnic group in America

Andrew Hook

2014

So the biggest celebrity of them all has chosen to speak out. President Obama, inured no doubt by years of vilification and abuse from brainless and vindictive political opponents, seems to have decided – unlike celebrities nearer home – that ruffling a few feathers among supporters of Scottish independence was no great matter. Agreeing that it is for the Scottish people to decide, the President made it clear that he hopes the United Kingdom will remain just that.

Mr Salmond was for once rather at a loss for words. He suggested that the President had been wise to recognise that this was a Scottish decision; however, an independent Scotland would mean that 'America has two great friends and allies here rather than one'. America, he noted, had to fight a war to gain its independence; Scotland would gain hers 'in a deeply democratic way'.

For the historically-minded at least, the reference in this context to the American revolution and Scotland's 'deep' democracy was perhaps not entirely wise. One suspects that the First Minister was relying here on the acceptance of the popular, cosy version of the Scottish-American historical relationship – the version which from the beginning has underpinned the celebration in America of National Tartan Day/Week which Mr Salmond was recently in America supporting.

In this account, Scotland is not only the source of the Declaration of Independence (based, it is alleged, on the Declaration of Arbroath) but more or less of everything that is good in the American way of life. No nation has done more than the Scots, we gather, to make the USA the great country it is. The greatest of Americans, from Presidents to golfers, invariably turn out to have Scottish blood. From colonial days on, Scots and Americans have always been the best of friends.

The problem with this account is simply that it isn't true. In the period leading up to the American revolution, and during the war itself, the Scots in colonial America, far from being the original opponents of the oppressive policies of the British Government, and successful defenders of American liberty, were easily the most hated ethnic group around. Why? Because Scottish-born patriots such as John Paul Jones, Generals Hugh Mercer and Arthur St Clair, John Witherspoon and James Wilson were very much the exception not the rule. The majority of Scots in colonial America – including even recently arrived immigrants driven out of the Highlands – actually chose the loyalist side in the revolutionary war.

Scottish loyalism was evident in the very different contexts of New England and Virginia. 'A free exportation to Scotchmen and Tories' soon became a popular revolutionary toast everywhere. In 1775, a patriot in Virginia wrote that 'the Scotchmen are worse than I

thought them,' while the British Government's colonial governor in Boston announced that the Scots in Boston 'were almost without exception good Subjects'.

The literature of the period provides excellent evidence of the wave of anti-Scottish feeling emerging in the colonies. Robert Munford's play *The Patriots* concerns the unwarranted persecution in Virginia of three Scots merchants – M'Flint, M'Squeeze, and M'Gripe – by a patriotic Committee of Safety. At their mock trial, the question is finally put: 'Is All Scotchmen enemies, gentlemen?' The committee's answer is 'Ay, ay'.

John Trumbull's satire *M'Fingal* provides further evidence of hostility towards the Scots – and significantly of its actual political origins. The poem's opening suggests that George III, aided by such ministers as Lords Mansfield and Bute, has devised a plan to abandon the traditional constitutional rights of church and state in order to enslave America. Bute and Mansfield of course are both Scots, and the reference here is to what is the second major source of anti-Scots feeling in revolutionary America.

Many patriotic Americans came to believe that the policies of the North administration represented a tyrannical overthrow of the English tradition of constitutional liberty founded on Whiggish principles. What had caused this reactionary step? The answer was undue Scottish influence. In April 1776, Ezra Stiles, soon to be president of Yale University, wrote in his diary about the possibility of an end to the conflict between the UK and her American colonies. He concludes: 'The Ministry and Parliament have no intention of accommodation – the Scotch influence blinds the Parliament and Nation'.

A little earlier, having just received a copy of the Declaration of Independence, he wrote as follows: 'And have I lived to see such an important and astonishing Revolution? Scotch policy transfused thro' the collective body of the ruling powers in Great Britain... Cursed be that arbitrary policy! Let it never poison the United States of America!'

Stiles is articulating here a widely-held view. Writing in Maryland at the outbreak of the war, Thomas Johnson suggests its aim should be to 'preserve the empire entire, and the constitutional liberty – handed down to us by our ancestors'. Americans should help 'English Whigs' to overthrow the 'cunning Scotchmen' in the ministry.

Before the Declaration of Independence and the war that followed, the American Congress itself had argued that Americans had become the victims of a plot to deprive them of their traditional liberties. In a letter to the people of Great Britain in 1774, Congress maintained that that plan – aimed at 'enslaving your fellow-subjects in America' – originated in the machinations in the 1760s of Lord Bute, the Scot who, even after he ceased to be Prime Minister, allegedly continued to influence the policies of George III and his government.

Just such a plot is described for us in yet another American play produced at this time. John Leacock's *The Fall of British Tyranny* was published in Philadelphia in 1776. The play's anti-Scottish tone is established in its mock dedication to – among others – 'the innumerable and never-ending clan of Macs and Donalds upon Donalds in America'.

Lord Paramount (Bute) early on describes his political aims: 'Now, by St Andrew! I'll

strike a stroke that shall surprise all Europe... Scotch politics, Scotch intrigues, Scotch influence, and Scotch impudence (as they have termed it) they shall see ere long shine with unheard of splendour...'. (The plan is to foster war with America, leave Britain defenceless by dispatching its army to America, and thus with the aid of France and Spain, restore the Stuarts to the British throne – Bute's family name happened to be Stuart!)

Absurd as all this sounds, radical attacks on George III's administration, from the 1760s onwards, often deployed material of exactly this kind. But in reality was there any justification at all for the idea that the British Government's oppressive policy towards the American colonists had Scottish origins? Lord North's cabinet did contain two Scots who were powerful advocates of active prosecution of the war: Alexander Wedderburn, Solicitor General, and Robert Dundas, Lord Advocate. Another Scot, Lord Mansfield, was the chief spokesman for the government in the House of Lords.

More important, perhaps, was the behaviour of Scotland's representatives in both Houses of Parliament. In 1769, Benjamin Rush of Philadelphia reported from London that 'all the Scotch members of parliament, in both houses, are against America'. He was right. Throughout the entire dispute with America, no group of members could be relied upon to support the royal government and its party line more confidently than the Scots in parliament. So there was at least some plausibility to the view that Scottish loyalism within the colonies was matched by Scottish support for undemocratic tyranny at home.

In 1776, John Witherspoon, the Scottish president of Princeton's College of New Jersey, an ardent patriot and a member of the continental congress, felt obliged to try to defend Scotland and the Scots from the sweeping denunciations they were subject to in America. His *Address to the natives of Scotland residing in America* was widely circulated – and reprinted in both Glasgow and London.

He begins by recognising that 'the word Scotch' has become 'a term of reproach in the American controversy,' with the implication that 'strangers of that country are more universally opposed to the liberties of America, than those who were born in South-Britain or Ireland'. But in truth, 'there are many natives of Scotland in this country, whose opposition to the unjust claims of Great Britain has been as early and uniform, founded upon as rational and liberal principles... as that of any set of men whatever'.

However, he is forced to concede that 'in some provinces especially, the natives of Scotland have been too much inclined to support the usurpations of the parent state...'. The main reason for this behaviour, he suggests, is that too many American writers and newspapers have seen in the English radical John Wilkes a major ally – while for all Scots, Wilkes is known only for his 'contempt and hatred of the Scots nation'.

Wilkes was in truth a figure of some importance in the American controversy – but he cannot be seen as the only reason for Scottish hostility to the patriotic cause in the colonies. If he had known of them, Witherspoon might have pointed to some examples of Scottish sympathy for the patriotic side.

Many members of the Popular Party in the Church of Scotland were certainly opposed to

the policies of George III's government. The powerful merchant class in both Glasgow and Edinburgh did all it could to oppose war with America: in the period immediately before the war's beginning, traditional addresses to the King in support of government policy were not forthcoming.

And finally, major luminaries of the Scottish Enlightenment did not agree with the hardline policies of the North administration. David Hume was deeply hostile; Adam Smith was for colonial representation in parliament; Lord Kames proposed 'a consolidating union with America'; John Millar was consistently a powerful advocate of the rights of the colonists. Despite the existence of such dissenting – North British – voices, there is little to suggest that Scotland and the Scots in general ever showed much enthusiasm for the cause of American liberty.

Still, there is no evidence that anti-Scottish feeling in the new United States was long lasting. But it was Scottish writers rather than politicians who made the difference. In the long-term, Burns and Scott proved more enduring than Bute or Mansfield, and Scottish unpopularity in America was soon airbrushed out of the historical narrative. It deserves to be remembered all the same.

In particular, those who argue today that the Scottish people – unlike South Britons – are somehow natural democrats, instinctive supporters of liberty and the rights of man, need to take account of this whole episode and its perhaps troubling implications.

We are trampling our forefathers' heritage

Rebecca Gebauer

2014

If we fail to show courage now, we will leave revolution, civil war or subjugation to our children and children's children.

Would you agree with this statement? Do you think it is a bit radical but that it has a point? The statement is taken from the website of the English Defence League (EDL). It shows how extremism enters into our societies like a wolf in lamb's clothing.

Extremism is found everywhere in the world – the EDL in Britain or neo-Nazis in Germany frequently march European streets promoting dread and hatred against the different. In Hungary, the radical far-right party Jobbik is about to become second in parliament while actively campaigning against gypsies and Jews. Boko Haram in Nigeria, the Taliban in Pakistan and al Shabaab in Somalia, attack innocent citizens to spread fear and to make way for their agendas which they hide in religious reasoning.

These right-wing and religious extremists surely would oppose the thought of having anything in common, but they do share a similar strategy. They all claim to work for the greater good.

The EDL calls itself a human rights organisation, neo-Nazis and Jobbik claim to protect their nations, and Islamist groups aim to follow the demands of their religion. However, extremism is not automatically a bad thing. Martin Luther King once said: 'The question is not if we will be extremists, but what kind of extremists we will be'. King also was confronted with violent extremism but he demanded a better, peaceful and progressive extremism.

Recently, I came across a forum post of a 16-year-old EDL member of good education. He passionately defended the values of the EDL and asked people not to believe what media and government spread about them. Reading through the young man's words, it was obvious that the education he got had not sensitised him for what human rights really are. The EDL presents 'Human Rights' and 'Democracy and Rule of Law' as their key aims and objectives – but this young man was not able to see the deceitful nature of their mission statement.

So what is it that people so overlook or ignore that they become part of violent extremism? What do they find in it? Why can they not distance themselves and see the real picture? Partially, it is the amazing ability of extremist groups to value their members. Hitler knew how to manipulate masses by giving them a sense of fellowship and purpose. But much more

– and this might come as a surprise – it is the huge lack of education as much in the West as in developing countries.

Education is far more than learning how to read and write. It is here to equip people with the capacity to value and understand things and to find their own judgement about them. In the West, people have to be educated to realise what a blessing it is to live in peace with widely-secured human rights. We are trampling our forefathers' heritage with heavy boots because we take for granted what they fought for even with their lives. We take our freedom so much for granted that we even get bored and search for meaning in our lives and often get unsatisfied – a gap which extremists are much too willing to fill.

People in developing countries probably have little clue what human rights are. Even if they can read, circumstances never allow them to further their education because they are too busy tackling the challenges of daily life – and they take injustices as part of it. If extremists then offer a way out of the treadmills – who could simply resist? The European Union has issued guidelines to fight extremism through 'Education for Citizenship'. It is part of curricula in all EU-countries – but sadly as an 'additional over all content' rather than being prioritised as an individual subject. Human rights have to have their own room in all educational systems worldwide.

Our modern world offers many opportunities of communication and interaction – it has never been so easy to come together. We need to use these opportunities and we need to take responsibility for those who do not have an easy access to them. Yearly programmes where people come together – literally or virtually – and actively debate the meaning and value of human rights need to be mandatory in our schools and universities. Governments should put the good intentions they express in their curricula into progressive action rather than cutting education budgets.

If we learn to value each other and what we have, and out of that see our responsibility to actively help those who are still denied their human rights, then violent extremism will be deprived of its grounds to stand on.

We have to be human rights extremists.

Too bored to vote. Old enough to emigrate

Anne-Marie Pollock

2014

'I want a political dialogue. I want to criticise. I want democracy. I want the people to have power.' I doubt that anyone, even for a split second, mistook that for a modern Irish quote or even a modern Western quote. They were the words of Mr Khlifi, one of the many young voices of the Arab Spring.

Over the last decade, discussions have circulated over the often inflammatory idea of an irredeemable 'clash of civilisations'. While many of these discussions serve to uphold more radical expressions of opinion, it cannot be mistaken, in the light of the last three years, just how differently the Arab world and the West have come to see the importance of the democratic vote.

My brother recently turned 18 and apparently I couldn't have asked him a more boring question: 'Have you signed up to the electoral register?' Upcoming local and European elections are hardly clogging up Irish Facebook and Twitter newsfeeds. Indeed, it is not just the young who are failing to exercise their democratic right; all across the Western world voting numbers have been dwindling, membership of political parties continues to fall, cynical sighs accompany any public utterances of politicians, with a sceptical media never too far behind.

Voter apathy in Ireland, however, has broader implications rather than just being a worrying statistic. The Irish political terrain is undergoing a muted evolution, but it will bear no fruit if Ireland's youth fail to rouse themselves from their political dormancy. To the outsider, Irish politics must seem exceedingly dull, lacking the overt diversities of other European party systems. A growing left voice persists and a nascent far right is attempting to bubble to the surface, but the Irish are generally a conservative bunch. Until the last General Election in 2011, Ireland was the only European country where the two main parties, Fianna Fail and Fine Gael, fell on the same pinpoint of the political spectrum: centre right. Since Ireland's civil war, politics has been predominately split between these two parties.

The Labour Party, Ireland's centre left voice, has managed to rattle this voting stronghold but has never accumulated the power to topple it. Sinn Fein, also left of centre, is happily enjoying an electoral growth spurt, but again, not enough to dominate. Smaller parties come and go, some retaining a loyal base yet never unsettling established lines. It took a banking crisis and a total loss of faith in the political establishment to knock the longest serving party, Fianna Fail, from power in 2011, when the party lost a staggering 58 seats.

According to research in Ireland's 2002 General Election, just 50% of young people used their vote. Ireland's 2007 General Election saw the lowest youth turnout across the entirety

of Europe at a mere 25%. Media and youth advocates exulted when in 2011 the young Irish 'stampeded' to the ballot boxes, marking a 12% increase in voting when compared with 2002. A rise in itself calls for applause yet the same research found that 45% of 18-34 year olds were not even registered to vote. Unfortunately, for the optimists, this is not a glass half-full: it is almost empty.

In 2012, Ireland had the highest proportion of young people (0-14) in the EU. Ireland's birth-rate is the also the highest in Europe: over 5% above average. The Emerald Isle is swarming with young people. Yet the average age of Irish politicians is 48.5. That is a considerable under-representation for the fastest growing group in the country. Ireland is not only youthful, it's on the move. Rural areas are losing their young to emigration and employment in the major cities. These demographic changes pose a serious challenge to traditional Irish politics.

For decades, Irish voting has remained largely dynastical; the average person is usually part of a Fine Gael family or a Fianna Fail family. At 18, you're handed the electoral baton of your family heritage. The two traditional parties rely on two things: popularity in rural regions and older voters. Urban areas, on the other hand, have a distinctly left footprint. Traditional Irish politics should be under siege, but Ireland's youth are asleep. As Ireland becomes a more liberal country, voting along family lineage is becoming outdated. Irish politics is changing; the 2011 Election demonstrated this. However, unless young people start registering to vote and making their way to the polling booths, the reality of Irish politics will become further alien to the augmenting youth population it is meant to represent.

There are various measures which could heighten youth voter turnout. Technology is now second nature to young people. Internet voting, once various security issues are addressed, would make the voting process more accessible and easier for many people. As hundreds of young people leave the country every month, they don't necessarily need to leave Irish political life behind them. Allowing Irish emigrants to vote would heighten voter turnout. Australia, amongst others, has compulsory voting. If voting numbers continue to slide, this could be an option. The onus, however, lies with young people to register.

Imagine if Ireland witnessed the same euphoria for Irish politics as we do for Ireland winning an Olympian gold medal or a place in the European football championship. It seems impossible to see the Irish public blushing with pride for their own politicians as they do with Irish Hollywood stars or gifted sportsmen and women. The constant barrage of negative media detaches Ireland's youth further. Young people complain about a lack of an Obama in

Irish politics. Politics isn't about to become 'sexy' any time soon but it is up to the youth, not only to vote for their Obama, but to put an Obama forward in the first place and make Irish politics more representative of its people.

It is hardly an exhilarating time to be a young person in Ireland. Unemployment is high, emigration continues to sky rocket, and it seems many will be saddled with heavy debts and

excessive taxation as a result of a previous generation's mistakes. The reality is unfair. But, as the political tapestry is slowly unwoven, Ireland's youth should be the strongest determining factor in Irish politics. They must create the change rather than complain when it doesn't happen. The power lies with them. The change lies with their vote.

The Scots who were victimised for fighting fascism

Bob Cant

2014

Individual human identity is a complex beast. Speaking for myself, I am Scottish, I am gay, I am a humanist, I am a trade unionist among other things but there is no one single part of my identity which always takes priority. Sometimes, human beings prioritise one part of their identity, sometimes another; most of the time we try to balance the different parts of ourselves so as to make sense of the world we live in.

There is currently some concern among European governments about those of their citizens who choose to prioritise their Muslim faith over other parts of their lives to go and fight in wars in Syria or Iraq. In 1936, the UK Government was similarly concerned about young people who were leaving this country to fight in solidarity with working-class people in Spain against a military, near-fascist coup.

More precisely, they were prioritising their working-class politics over the political line taken by their national government, which had decided not to intervene in support of the democratically-elected government of Spain. The UK Government went so far as to try to prevent volunteers from going to Spain by invoking the Foreign Enlistment Act of 1870, but it acted really as a frightener more than a serious deterrent.

The politics of the 1930s was, in some ways, very fluid; major social change seemed possible but across Europe everything seemed under threat from fascist and authoritarian forces. There was, in the UK, widespread unemployment and a ferocious system of means testing for anyone applying for welfare benefits.

Something like 35,000 volunteers went from all over the world to join the International Brigade in their fight to support their Spanish brothers and sisters. Around 2,500 volunteers (mostly men) went from Britain, Ireland and the Commonwealth, and most of them joined the British Battalion, which was part of the larger English-speaking 15th International Brigade; 500 of them died in Spain. Many of them knew little of Spanish politics but they all knew that the struggle against fascism was an international one. John 'Patsy' McEwan, a Dundonian timber yard worker, summed up a widely held view when he said: 'If I don't go and fight fascism, I'll just have to wait and fight it here'.

Those who went to fight came mostly from working-class communities in places such as Fife, Dundee, East London and Manchester. Despite – or perhaps because of – the dire poverty in these communities, there was a strong body of support for the Spanish Republic and the reforms it was trying to introduce in the fields of education, healthcare and land reform. Those who were in no position to go to Spain were willing to offer financial support for ambulances and medical aid. Janet Murray, a socialist speaker from Edinburgh, explained that 'there was so much obvious poverty in the audience [in Dundee] that I felt

ashamed to ask for money'. But ask she did and was able to raise £12 (the equivalent of £700 today) towards the evacuation of Basque children to Montrose.

Those who went to Spain were driven by a vision of a socialist future; they included members of the Communist Party, the Independent Labour Party and the Scottish Prohibitionist Party. They had to overcome many obstacles to get there and, for some, arriving in Republican Spain was a wonderful achievement in itself.

John Dunlop, an accountant from Edinburgh, recalled later: 'The singing started, such singing as I had never heard the like of, each nation singing its own workers' song of protest till the building became filled with a volume of sound that gradually swelled into one glorious chorale – the *Internationale* – sung together in a dozen different tongues. Words cannot express the exaltation that surged in our hearts. This was the greatest moment of our lives'. The reality of the war, unsurprisingly, was much less romantic. Early in 1937, when Franco's troops were trying to cut off Madrid from other Republican areas, a three-day battle ensued in the Jarama valley. Of the 600 British Battalion troops there, 375 died, partly because of military inexperience; so vicious and badly organised was the fighting in one section that the British volunteers named it Suicide Hill.

The discipline required to belong to the International Brigade was tough; this was, after all, an army rather than a gap year project and punishments were harsh, sometimes leading to execution. Franco was supported, as the volunteers had predicted, by the superior armed power of Nazi Germany and fascist Italy. In 1938, the Republican Government asked the Brigade to leave, as part of an attempt to negotiate some kind of settlement, and their departure was an emotionally-charged event. But Franco was determined to drive the 'Rojos' off the face of the earth and fought on for total victory.

The return home was not straightforward. Although there were some local celebrations to welcome brigaders, the road to employment, if it was available, was sometimes problematic. Roderick McFarquhar found that he 'was regarded with some horror by some of the more sedate members of my union, the Railway Clerks Association'.

Tommy Bloomfield was convinced that his time in Spain led to him being blacklisted. 'As I had been a rigger in the Royal Navy, I applied for a job of work in Rosyth dockyard. Three times I applied and was informed there were no vacancies. Yet the man living next door to me was given work there.'

There were mixed experiences for those who tried to volunteer for military service in 1939. John Longstaff, an ex-brigader, was told: 'We are under instruction not to recruit any person who fought with the International Brigade'. They were all aware that prospects for Spanish Republicans were much worse. Tommy Bloomfield explained: 'My heart goes to the workers of Spain for when Franco was victorious I can imagine the countless men and women who were slaughtered throughout the country simply for being anti-fascist.'

Although most international brigaders remained proud of the part they had played in resisting fascism in Spain, it is rather more difficult to assess their impact on the war itself. The Republic was defeated but there is a case for saying that the presence of the Brigade

raised international awareness about the way in which fascist governments were likely to act. The role of the Communist party, during the war itself and in relation to the way that the narrative of the civil war was told during the cold war years, has also been difficult to evaluate. More recently, there has been an increase in valuable scholarly work by historians, such as Richard Baxell, and the Imperial War Museum; there have also been local accounts like the one compiled by the Dundee Trades Union Council.

It is worthwhile reflecting on the views of two former brigaders. Frank McCusker, a Dundonian who had been active in the National Unemployed Workers Movement, took a long view when he said during an interview in 1986: 'Looking back now on the Spanish Civil War, I say it was well worthwhile because even though Franco won, he never won – in the sense that they've got a Socialist Government now in Spain. So I think the International Brigade did one little thing anyway in helping to get a real democratic government later on'. Writer John Sommerfield took a simpler, more general line when he said: 'There are things worth fighting for and things that *must* be fought against'.

There was, unquestionably, a wonderful dignity about the way in which members of the International Brigade ignored the threats of their own governments and went from all over the world to support the Spanish working class. The memory of such dignity helped many people to prepare to live to fight another day.

Shoeless in Burma

Jill Stephenson

2014

Burma – Myanmar – is a fast modernising country that remains steeped in religious and national tradition. Tourists have visited in modest numbers since the 1980s, but the boom in tourism is now getting under way, following the installation in 2010 of a new, somewhat more democratic political regime than that of the generals.

Many tourists survey the country by ship, as I have done, sailing down the Ayeyarwady (Irrawaddy) river from Mandalay to Yangon. We do not see the forests and wild and endangered animals that feature on TV nature programmes. There seems to be nothing like the orangutan rehabilitation centre at the Gunung Leuser National Park on Sumatra that is such a wonderful experience to visit and which is under threat from palm oil plantation owners.

Along the banks of the Irrawaddy, we saw village life and larger and historic towns such as Mandalay, Bagan and Yangon. Some villages have seen more tourists than others, and sellers of necklaces, bracelets and earrings made with colourful local stones, postcards, fans, sun hats and carved wooden items, among much else, are prominently in evidence in those that have already seen several boatloads of Westerners.

The arrival of a ship or a coach is met by a horde of eager vendors who are good-natured but unwilling to take 'no' for an answer when the tourist does not want to buy a particular item. Nevertheless, trade is lively. Tourists support enterprises such as the dozens of horse-drawn carts that convey them over rough dust paths from the little River Myitnge to Ava and the nearby teak-built monastery of Bagaya Kyaung, and back again. They also support the trishaw drivers: in two villages we set off in convoy on our trishaws, returning the greetings of villagers who waved to us.

Although it was the dry season, there was much greenery, even in cities such as Yangon and Mandalay; at the same time, the earth in the fields was parched. Dust was ubiquitous and in the countryside abundant. One of the less comprehensible features was that cows were tied to trees in areas where there was little or no vegetation to eat while a few yards away, beyond their reach, there was lush greenery.

Different villages specialise in the production of different crops and utensils. Yandabo, where the peace agreement at the end of the first Anglo-Burmese war was signed in 1826, is home to families who make pots for the surrounding area, using a turntable powered by a rope operated by a youngster's foot. Yandabo's niche in this market is secured by the stocks of the best clay in their area. Yandabo also produces castor oil beans and peanuts.

The countryside around Ava is heavily populated by banana trees, with some corn also. The neighbouring village to Yandabo produces other foodstuffs, including cabbages, which

are traded for Yandabo's pots. The primary characteristic of the country is Buddhism. This looms large in both town and country, although not everywhere has as many pagodas as Sagaing, where the golden spires sprout from the earth as if they had life and were growing. In the streets one finds monks, in deep russet robes, and nuns in pink robes. Both sexes have shaved heads, something alien to those of us who are aware that shaving the head of a woman has been used in Europe, not least in the era of the Second World War, as a punishment and a deliberately visible humiliation.

In Myanmar, it is a badge of honour. There are in this country of 60 million people 250,000 monks and 40,000 nuns. Their presence in the towns is for the purpose of collecting rice and money from the populace, items which they collect in shiny black lacquered vessels.

The village at Ava, near the ruins of the ancient capital of Burma, supplies all of southern Myanmar with these round pots. We were able to observe the manufacturing process, which is done entirely by hand. It is possible to become 'temped out', especially if one has visited four historic pagodas before lunch and another four after lunch. We were told that, if we remembered no other, we should remember the Ananda pagoda at Bagan. It glowed a warm reddish brown in the afternoon sun, but it was the interior that was special.

Using torches, we were able to follow intricately painted murals depicting the life of Buddha. These date from the 12th century and are remarkably well-preserved. We left our shoes or sandals in the coach and walked barefoot over a scorching brick concourse to reach the pagoda. On the day of the eight pagodas, we took our footwear off eight times. Apparently, this is 'to show respect'. I asked our guide where in Buddha's writings it stipulated that worshippers (or visitors) should remove their footwear. The answer was that Buddha himself had always gone barefoot and that monks went barefoot in temple precincts. Bagan has perhaps the largest number and highest density of pagodas (temples) and stupas (solid devotional monuments in similar style to the pagodas).

There remain approximately 2,000 out of an estimated 13,000 in former times. Archaeological investigators search for the remains of other such buildings, as is also the case elsewhere in Myanmar. In the larger pagodas, it is often possible to climb steep staircases (some of them very narrow) to reach upper floors which give spectacular views of the countryside and the many red brick roofs and spires of pagodas and stupas – although in the mornings there tended to be a haze which rendered the view less than perfectly clear.

We scaled the heights of the Myat Thalon pagoda in Magwe late in the afternoon to sit on the upper wall and observe the large round red sun setting over distant hills. More characteristic of urban areas is the gilded pagoda or stupa, such as the Schwedagon Pagoda in Yangon. The River Irrawaddy itself is a rather unappetising opaque green/brown colour.

This does not deter local people from bathing in it – for recreation as well as ablution – while local women wash clothes in the river, rubbing them on stones and beating them ferociously with wooden implements. The river is also an important commercial waterway, with loads of long teak beams shipped southwards on ultra-long flat-bed boats which, like

smaller vessels (and like those on the Mekong, as I had forgotten) are powered by extremely noisy two-stroke engines. These seem mostly to be silent between midnight and 6am, but are pretty constant in some stretches of the river.

There are no fixed jetties or docking points on the river. We moored at any point where the ship's gangway could be placed onto a flat spot, usually where there was a steep hill of sand and/or rock to negotiate before we reached a level path. Sometimes there was also a steep and long flight of steps. Our excellent guide had flawless English and was endlessly informative. As a devout Buddhist, and like pretty much all Burmese children, our guide spent time in a Buddhist institution (nunnery for girls, and, for boys, a monastery) on three different short occasions.

Orphans and sometimes children from poor families can spend years in the cloister. These institutions provide much of the welfare on offer, funded by voluntary donations from the devout. We were advised before our visit that we should not try to engage local people in political discussion. Given the language barrier, that would in any case have been difficult.

I managed to master only *mingalarbar*, the all-purpose greeting, and *kyeizu tin ba de* (thank you), which there was much opportunity to use. It was our guide who introduced politics into discussion and was very enthusiastic about the new turn in the political life of Myanmar since 2010.

A favourite joke from the previous era was about the Burmese man who travelled to Bangkok to visit a dentist. 'Why have you come here?' asked the dentist. 'Do you not have dentists in Myanmar?' The man replied: 'Yes we do, but in Myanmar I am not allowed to open my mouth'.

The recent arrest of inquiring journalists demonstrates that the new democratic system is partial and perhaps also provisional. On our final day, we drove past Aung San Suu Kyi's residence. There is a fence and an impenetrable gate. Nevertheless, we disembarked the coach to photograph the gate. We also had lunch in a restaurant on whose upper floor 'the Lady' had had a study in former times. Her NLD party has posters in some places, including one village that we visited. She is the most prominent of those who suffered under the generals.

Our guide had been a university lecturer. But when the order came, in the 1990s, that staff must write reports about their students' attitudes, our guide refused and in the end resigned, turning to a career in tourism instead. People who demand 'freedom' here might consider the difficulties of people living under such systems.

Myanmar is exotic, charming, noisy and beautiful. The noise on the river, mostly of boat engines, was sometimes hard to bear, especially near and in Yangon. We were told that the Burmese like to speak and to sing loudly. This was true. Since 2012, some villages have installed huge solar panels which seemed to be used primarily to power machines playing loud popular music. They will presumably also replace the youngsters whose feet-power the turntables used by pot-makers.

The charm of the people is natural and universal. Perhaps the absence of evidence of the kind of poverty that there is in parts of Africa or the Indian sub-continent contributes to this, but I suspect that Buddhism does also. The sight of pagodas and stupas in profusion is breathtaking, as are the sunsets over lakes and rivers.

We were fortunate to visit Myanmar when we did: outside Yangon, Mandalay and Bagan, we scarcely saw a Westerner. But they are coming, and in a few years this will be a major tourist destination.

Land of milk and honey, but no wisdom

Michael Elcock

2014

The road from Beirut to Damascus climbs high over stone-scrabbled ridges to magnificent, ancient cedar trees like those with which King Solomon built his temple in Jerusalem. Up here, near the village of Bhamdoun, you can look down and see Lebanon laid out at your feet, lemon and olive groves to the south, and, through the haze, the triangular peninsula of Beirut reaching into the blue Mediterranean.

I thought it the most beautiful country I had ever seen; the biblical land of milk and honey. It is a country with an ancient and illustrious history. The Lebanese were early explorers of the Mediterranean basin. They were the travellers and traders that history knew as the Phoenicians, and they built ships from the strong, sweet-scented cedar wood of their mountains. Their descendants, the Carthaginians, who inhabited part of what we now call

Tunisia, nearly toppled Rome when it was at the height of its power.

But the Lebanese have rarely been a warlike people; they have long prided themselves on natural intelligence and negotiation to defuse conflicts. That is their character, and their history bears it out. These resourceful people have scattered across the world since prebiblical times. They are renowned and respected traders and shopkeepers in seaports all along the old trading routes – in Muscat, Madras, Gibraltar, and Zanzibar, in Accra, Lagos, Banjul and Casablanca. The Lebanese are tough, intelligent traders in countless communities in Europe, across South America, and around the Pacific basin. You will find them throughout the new world – just as respected in Toronto and Montreal as they are in Vancouver, Seattle and San Francisco.

My father was based in Lebanon and I lived there for a while when I was 14. The French exerted a strong cultural influence then, and Beirut was known as the Paris of the Middle East. Most people seemed to speak French and Arabic with equal facility, and many people spoke English as well. Beirut then was a cosmopolitan city with the vitality and energy of any city in Europe.

North of Beirut, rock strata rises to the surface of the land to make natural fences which snake across the landscape like giant, stone centipedes. Local landowners and farmers have cleverly adapted these to define their land and conserve the thin soil, and protect fragile moistures from the winds that blow off the sea.

But years of conflict, more often than not invoked by external influences, impoverished this once wealthy country. While trying to find its feet after the devastating wars of the 1970s and 80s, Lebanon has had to deal with political and military influences from Syria, with the emergence of Hezbollah, and with the political assassinations of the last 15 to 20 years.

In recent years, the World Bank has spearheaded a number of major projects as Lebanon has attempted to rebuild itself. They include the development of water supply and irrigation systems, power and hydro restructuring, the rebuilding of transport and communications infrastructure, tax and revenue enhancement, the development of fiscal management systems, health sector rehabilitation and enhancement, environmental and waste management systems, and community development projects. Unfortunately, many of these initiatives were blasted to bits when the Israeli Army invaded Lebanon in 2006 and the Israeli Air Force struck at Beirut.

Today, they are gradually getting underway again as the country tries once again to rebuild. But now Lebanon – a small country of fewer than four and a half million people – is faced with the desperate problems brought by a massive influx of refugees from the appalling messes in Iraq and Syria.

Almost half a million refugees are registered now in Lebanon with the various refugee agencies. But other estimates put the real number at around two million, which increases Lebanon's base population by about 40%. That would be a bit like the United Kingdom suddenly, and with little in the way of external assistance, trying to deal in a very short period of time with an influx of about 25 million impoverished, traumatised people. It's an almost unimaginable problem, and Lebanon is having to face it with little outside help.

Despite the efforts of its people and government to establish a stable, modern state, Lebanon is still viewed by Israel with great suspicion. This distrust often seems to permeate the halls of Western media outlets as well – especially in an age when few of them still carry locally-based foreign correspondents. In relation to Israel's current military offensive against Gaza, a recent lead-off item in a number of international media outlets – including Canada's respected CBC – stated, in response to a report that rockets had been fired into northern Israel from southern Lebanon, that 'Israel is now fighting a war on two fronts'.

Beirut's *Daily Star* newspaper had a slightly different take on the matter the next day, on 11 July. A usually responsible and middle-of-the-road newspaper, the *Star*, carried an article on its front page headlined: 'Calm returns to Lebanon border after rocket attack'. The piece went on to explain that a single rocket had been fired into northern Israel and that the Israelis had responded by shelling a nearby Lebanese village. The article went on to note that a total of six rockets had been discovered by Lebanese internal security personnel near the village of Hebbarieh, that two suspects had been arrested, and that the aggression had ceased.

No part of this outcome was reported in any Western media that I could find. We were simply left hanging with the notion that Israel was now faced with powerful aggressors on a second front. That was not true; this was an isolated incident. But what was interesting about the *Star's* detailed report was the suggestion that there might have been a degree of cooperation at some level – in what was ultimately a police operation rather than a military one – between the two states.

One can only hope that in the 21st century we might find such enlightened ways to deal

with all of this, although the scars run so deep that it is hard to imagine such a possibility in a part of the world where the participants in this continuing, never-ending madness are surely as doomed as each other.

Meanwhile, what remains of King Solomon's ancient cedar trees still look down on this loveliest of countries. Solomon, who we equate with the concept of wisdom; a commodity so tragically lacking in almost all the so-called leaders who now attend this part of the world.

Ireland's greatest export

Anne-Marie Pollock

2014

'Ireland's greatest export is its people'. These words are often quoted, sometimes in jest, but at other times and most recently in more of a despairing light. A recent study on emigration has made way for a morose and depressing litany. Although emigration within the last year overall has dropped, the numbers of people swarming out of the country remain alarmingly high. Between April 2013 and April 2014, it's been estimated that on average 112 people leave Ireland to move abroad every day.

The statistics, however, that appear to be arousing the loudest discussion are those highlighting the immense rate at which young people have left and are continuing to leave the country. With a small population of just 4.6 million people, over the last five years Ireland has seen the departure of a staggering net loss of 80,700 young adults. Since 2009, over 40,000 with third level qualifications have left the country. There's panic in medical circles; only 25% of trainee GPs have said they plan on remaining in Ireland after graduation. Ireland is in a paralytic state as the brain drain continues. The situation appears bleak.

Having read the sensational social commentary, the utter sense of despair it induces would make anyone want to pack up sticks and leave. Ireland apparently is doomed. Our best and brightest are shipping out, possibly gone forever. The 15-25 year olds have been hit the most. They're all leaving. And what of those decrepit late 20s and early 30s in the workforce? Some, only some, have been lucky enough to secure permanent employment. Others have given up on career ambition and are happy to stay mid-rung on the ladder. Ireland can't offer any more than that.

The impact on social development and progression of Irish society is critical. If all the young are flocking out, who is there to question the status quo? It is surely in our 20s that we feel the most empowered to challenge and defy convention. Cynicism hits in after that and we all just comply and get on with it. This damning picture illustrates an Ireland with its present and its future as miserable as its weather.

We don't need a report to confirm that there's a generation gap. The signs of Ireland's missing demographic are everywhere and have been for a while. Simply attend a local Gaelic football match and you'll see a mixture of young beardless teenagers playing alongside balding fathers in their late 20s and 30s. The early and mid 20-somethings are all missing. The same is true when you go into any pub. The barren demographic landscape is most obvious in the rural countryside where more men than women have emigrated in recent years.

What the report also demonstrates is that many young people who decide to emigrate are leaving employment to do so. Since 2008, vast swathes of young emigrants are leaving

jobs behind them. It is true that it is and has been hard to pin down a secure job with strong prospects and good pay, yet some do and still choose to leave. It is not always through lack of opportunity. Rather, it is choosing to take an opportunity to embark on a sense of adventure, travel to new places, meet new people, discover new cultures and, yes, if you're career-orientated, add to your CV along the way.

Ireland's crisis of exiting youth is due to the positives of globalisation as much as it is to a depressing recession. For many (not all), emigration has been a lifestyle choice. Living abroad now for someone in their 20s in Ireland almost seems like a rite of passage. Everyone knows at least one person who is living in Australia. Facebook newsfeeds can become reminders of the Irish rain and hail for the 20s-somethings who have chosen to stay behind. Social media has now become home to endless photos depicting sandy beaches and glittering seas or 'check-ins' in Sri Lanka because someone working in the Middle East had a few days off and hopped on a plane. South East Asia must be Ireland's busiest emigration thoroughfare. Life doesn't seem so bad.

We are no longer the Ireland of the 1960s, 70s and dismal 80s, where people were forced to leave in search of work with only a one-way ticket in their hand. Irish emigration has evolved. Today, we are more collectively educated than we ever have been. We have various qualifications in our back pockets and most can afford to come home. For some, emigrating may be a long-term decision, but for many there remains an intention to come back. Those who don't are adding to an ever-extending history of Irish diaspora, which has left an impressive legacy the world over.

And despite echoes of an impending social Armageddon, Irish society has not ground to a halt. The questioning of civil and human rights in Ireland has never been so strong. The status quo is being vigorously challenged and many of the poor choices of the past reflected and acted upon. Irish society is demanding progression.

Ireland's brain drain is a double-edged sword. Yes, you temporarily lose talent, but the rotating axis of emigration means many of these bright young people return while their younger counterparts simultaneously depart. The talented will also come back with broadened minds and outlooks that only travel can teach. That can only serve to develop Irish society further. Despite the heavy exodus of Ireland's young, all is not doomed. We have simply become a more global Irish where the opportunity to travel, work and learn has never been more open to us.

Return of the emigrants

Gillean Somerville-Arjat

2014

'All Moroccan families are the same,' says my niece's husband, a Moroccan-born, French-educated auditor from his base outside Paris. 'First off, there's always a banker who lives in Europe.' The month of August is the time they return to their roots, these bankers, closing up their businesses, packing family cars and *fourgons* with cases full of gifts and cartons of electrical and electronic goods. Stuff from Europe is considered to be of better quality and thus has more cachet.

From their adopted homes all over Europe they come, hurtling through sleepless nights, along featureless motorways, towards the nipple points of ferry crossings across the Med, and finally home to the extended family left behind. The Biblical phrase of the prodigal son falling upon his father's neck and weeping does not exaggerate the emotionalism of these reunions. For these emigrants, holidays are all about family, although those with means might manage a few days by the sea in Tangier, Saadia, Al Hoceima or Agadir, for the heat inland is close to unbearable.

But primarily there will be business to attend to: a new storey on a family house to construct, repairs to an old one to supervise, a sibling's debts to pay, or an expensive wedding to arrange and pay for.

So first the tears and laughter, an image of perfect harmony across the generations, everyone squashed side by side along the sofas that line the walls of the main sitting-room around the central table where the family will eat, drink and celebrate for the duration. The elderly tend to remain silent, respected, their hands kissed like royalty, but otherwise generally ignored. Small children are made much of, kissed, cuddled and passed around like parcels, then left to fizz and stomp about, trying to keep up with the older ones.

Clothes reflect the traditional and the contemporary. Older women, whether they live in Europe or have stayed behind, still conceal themselves beneath hijabs, full-length djellabahs and gandouras, but the young female Europeans wear what European girls wear anywhere in the sun, and when not giggling with each other scrutinise their smartphones. The older men wear loose traditional garb, the rest wear what they feel comfortable in, and there's always the adolescent would-be hiphop rapper with his baseball cap worn a *l'envers* or high on the crown of his head.

There is a particular joy this year as the exceptional rigours of the month of Ramadan ended on 29 July. The hostess dispenses small decorated glasses of hot sweet mint tea from a bired, the distinctive curved metal teapot engraved with Arabesque designs that sees daily use. There are plates piled high with sugary cakes and the Moroccan equivalent of our

scones and pancakes. A local buttermilk drink, sometimes taken on its own, sometimes mixed with cereal, is offered and gratefully enjoyed.

The smells and tastes evoke memories of childhood and absent faces. Tears are shed and wiped away, but next to the sombre references humorous anecdotes are recalled and chuckled over. The ardours of the journey south are embroidered and suffered anew in theatrically recounted moments of high drama. Children who have passed their annual exams are congratulated, those who have not have their long faces commiserated over. There's always next year. But jobs are scarce for school-leavers. Unemployment is rife. Education matters, though contacts matter more. Corruption is endemic. Who you know and a bribe is the way to go.

After the catching up, cases are unloaded and presents handed out: scarves, nightdresses, cheap perfume for the women; shirts for the old men, T-shirts for the young; toys, fun jewellery, cheap watches, sunglasses and sweets for the children. Outgrown clothes are passed on. Small financial handouts will be given to those in need, or those for whom you couldn't think what to get, or the ones you had simply forgotten and must quickly remember. Presents are important. Rumours of death threats against returning relatives who do not bring any, or who do not bring enough, are not unheard of.

Being greeted at the door of an extended family douar in the depths of the countryside by a greybeard with a musket, like Ebenezer Balfour with his blunderbuss at the House of Shaws, might seem a tad exaggerated but in the cities knives have been pulled, car engines smashed. Such stories relieve blander anecdotes. People like a good shiver. Here not much is read for entertainment. If they have any book at all it will be a Qu'ran. So a good raconteur is highly appreciated.

The other side of present-giving, however, is need. There are many who flourish in Morocco. Government cadres, civil servants, public sector teachers, local government functionaries with fixed salaries and perks do well enough. Businessmen may thrive as well as, or better than, their European counterparts. But for those less fortunate, struggling to get by on minimal wages, going to Europe is the ultimate dream. If you live and work there, whatever you are, care-worker, let's say, nursery school assistant, hotel waiter, factory worker, you are assumed to be rich.

The relatives left behind have no conception of immigrant life at the bottom of the economic food chain, the violence and squalor of ethnically-mixed big city suburbs, relentless casual racism, the struggles of their compatriots to establish respectable lives in countries which offer a potentially better standard of living and educational opportunities. In Morocco, if you lose your job there is no benefits safety-net.

When personal matters have been exhausted, talk will turn to wider issues. This year it was the tragic events in Gaza. The images of death and destruction left everyone speechless. Natural disasters are bad enough, but this? Why does no-one stop it? While other Arab countries seemed disengaged, the onus passed to the perceived power players. Why is the UN so powerless? Why do Europe and America do nothing? Especially

America. The Great Satan to some transmogrifies into the Great Champion for others.

The family I know will argue passionately, but is not radicalised, although several adolescent boys feel trapped between school and endemic unemployment, and religion still dominates. Friday prayers at the mosques are packed. The muezzin wakes you up in the small hours with its penetrating call. Pious hope is the only safety net. Otherwise, you turn your despair inward. If you know where to go there is hashish and alcohol, although public signs of addiction are rare.

As the month progresses emotions cool, and subliminally simmering personal and inter-family tensions resurface. Money runs out, the gloss wears off the presents, work or studies north of the Med beckon as this extended tribe starts to fragment and before the month is out the emigrants prepare to leave. But whatever the underlying conflicts, the bonds remain strong. Tears are shed again as the returnees load up with presents for friends and relatives in Europe, taking with them cakes lovingly baked, stocks of olives, dates and figs, containers of olive oil, and whatever other produce of the old country will survive the long drive home in the heat of the late August sun.

His hand on a plate

Alan McIntyre

2016

When 15-year-old Anwar Ali raised his hand in January at his local mosque in Pakistan, he made a mistake that we've all made at some point. Maybe he was thinking about what was for dinner, maybe he was daydreaming about playing cricket, but whatever the reason, he clearly wasn't giving his full attention to the present.

When the iman asked who didn't love the Prophet, Anwar's was the solitary hand that shot up from the crowd; a crowd that immediately turned on him and accused him of blasphemy. What followed may have been a pre-emptive act to escape a death sentence, or maybe it did arise spontaneously from pure religious devotion, but whatever the motivation, Anwar went home and hacked off his offending hand with a scythe. He then returned to the mosque with his bloody hand on a plate and presented it to the iman in an extravagant act of contrition.

Instead of being appalled by this remorseful self-mutilation, Anwar was lauded by both his iman and his parents as a shining example of a young man truly devoted to Allah. While Anwar briefly grabbed the headlines, he's hardly an isolated case of self-harm in the dark shadow of strict Sharia law. In an equally extreme example of religious masochism, an Egyptian Muslim self-amputated both his hands in 2013 by placing his wrists across a train track, believing that an absence of fingers would once and for all control his impulse to steal.

Back in Pakistan, when 19-year-old Saba Qaiser snuck off to marry her boyfriend in 2014, her father and uncle tracked her down, beat her senseless, shot her in the head, and threw her into a river. Amazingly she survived this ordeal, and a documentary about her experience may well win an Oscar this year. Saba's story has been captured for posterity, but she is just one of over 1,000 honour killings a year in Pakistan and maybe five or six times that number in the broader Muslim world. Behind each of these statistics is a close relative who felt compelled by a toxic combination of scripture and tradition to kill a family member in order to remove a stain on their collective honour.

When Saba had the bravery to pursue her father through the Pakistani courts, his defence was simply that 'he did the right thing' and 'was now much more respected in the community'. Often these family honour vigilantes are not prosecuted, because the families of the victims close ranks, forgive the culprit, and refuse to press charges. Despite the brutality she endured at his hands, even Saba was convinced by her new husband's family to drop the case against her father.

These two teenage tragedies are appalling in their own right, but they also highlight how the ongoing religious radicalisation of Muslims is undermining what in the West has been a

long journey towards greater tolerance and inclusion. When we read about the crowds of young Muslim men surrounding and sexually assaulting woman at Cologne train station, we don't equate it to the misogyny that takes over many British high streets on a Friday night after the pubs close.

Instead, we project onto these crowds of immigrants a radicalism that, when left unrestrained, morphs into self-righteous acts of mutilation, filicide and martyrdom. We've become used to looking around Scotland or the US and seeing Muslims integrate into Western society as generations of immigrants have done before them, and we're no longer shocked when a second or third generation Muslim Pakistani opens his mouth and a reassuringly broad Glaswegian accent emerges. But when we look at the penitent Anwar and at the savagery of Saba's father, we see something very different, and something that the vast majority of Western Europeans truly don't understand.

Masked to some degree by the strident voices of raw xenophobia and tribalism, this strong sense of otherness and the deep unease that comes with it, is what will ultimately undermine the efforts of Angela Merkel and others who are trying to respond to the European migrant crisis with humanity and a generosity of spirit.

Ironically, it's easier for many of us to understand the motivation of Muslim terrorists than it is to put ourselves in the heads of self-mutilators and child killers. We've been conditioned by decades of political terrorism to accept that strongly held beliefs often manifest themselves in violence against innocent strangers. So, while the self-proclaimed martyrs of 9/11 are justifiably condemned and vilified, conceptually their actions aren't that far away from every IRA car bomb that went off in a crowded Belfast shopping centre or Birmingham pub.

The barbarism of ISIS burning a Jordanian pilot alive in a cage horrified us all, but it doesn't take a comparative historian to point an accusing finger at Auschwitz and see similar evil at work. But in all of these cases we seek to find solace in them as the isolated acts of zealots and fanatics. What is truly scary about the stories of Anwar and Saba is the creeping radicalisation of the Muslim majority and with it the normalisation of what we would consider extreme behaviour.

The further irony is that despite the crusader propaganda of ISIS and Al Qaeda, this radicalisation has been nurtured and propagated from within the Muslim world itself for very familiar political and secular reasons. While Islam has always had a history of brutal punishment for moral infractions, until recently these punishments were largely a deterrent and convictions were rare.

In the first 38 years of Pakistan's existence as an Islamic state, the courts only prosecuted 14 cases of blasphemy, whereas in the last 30 years there have been well over 1,500. In 2015, Saudi Arabia executed 158 people, which was a 20-year record, but a record that 2016 is on track to beat. What started as a convenient way for the House of Saud, the Mullahs in Tehran, and the Pakistani generals to settle scores, cow the population, and whip up animosity against the Great Satan of America, has now spun out of control.

The relentless propaganda, the suppression of religious dissent, and the skewing of Islamic scripture to emphasise both jihad and strict Sharia law has created a psychological feedback loop. A feedback loop that is now causing large portions of the population to truly internalise the message. The result has been to take what had been minority fanaticism and bring it into the mainstream of Islam in a way that not only gives birth to the terrorists of Paris, but also to daily barbarous acts in the name of Allah within the Muslim community itself.

The challenge that Western politicians need to grapple with is that many otherwise moderate voters recognise that this is not about Muslims being different in the superficial sense of being allowed to wear a hijab in public, speaking the same language, or even having a tradition of slitting the throats of live animals. It's about the deeper cultural norms of behaviour that underpin the social contract and that allow a pluralistic and diverse society to also be a tolerant society.

As Adam Smith so eloquently pointed out in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, a moral society requires us to be able to walk a mile in another man's shoes and to understand their motives, even when we don't agree with them. The enemy of that empathy is the chasm that separates my worldview from one that would motivate me to hack off my own hand or brutally kill my own daughter for the sake of family honour.

As human beings, our psychology of revulsion and rejection spans a wide spectrum. At one end is the intellectualised fake outrage of extreme political correctness. At the other end of the spectrum you have the stuff that happens deep down in our reptilian brains – the instinctive reactions to rotting food and incestuous sexual relationships that have been hard-wired by evolutionary biology to protect us from real harm. Sitting between these two extremes is a layer of behavioural conditioning that comes not from evolution, but from our upbringing and our societal norms.

Despite being socially conditioned, many of these reactions feel just as instinctive and hard-wired as some of our baser reflexes. Having journeyed a long way to build more tolerant and inclusive societies that override those reflexes, the danger is that the rise of radical Islam is now triggering a conditioned response over which many of us have little control. I would argue that it is this deep-seated rejection of behaviour that we truly don't comprehend that is being harnessed by populists like Donald Trump and Marine Le Pen for their own political benefit.

Yes, the history of Christianity is filled with the burning of heretics and bloody self-flagellation, and the occasional maniac in the US will still kill an abortion doctor in the name of Jesus, but despite the rise of Ted Cruz, the US is not sliding towards a violent theocracy. The truth is that, for all its flaws, the recent social and moral trajectory of the US and Western Europe has been positive, while for many the high watermark of Muslim tolerance was when the Moors welcomed displaced Jews to Spain a millennium ago.

There are hundreds of thousands of desperate migrants clawing at the borders of Europe who would love their children to have the opportunity to develop broad Glaswegian

accents. But without some sort of true religious reformation in Islam, I'm afraid the prospects for a resolution of the short-term European migrant crisis and a return to medium-term political stability in the Middle East seem remote. While we are waiting for that reformation to occur, the Anwars and Sabas of the Muslim world will continue to suffer, and the danger is that the West will increasingly reject the belief system that promotes that suffering and will build walls in response.

In the camp

Nannie Sköld

2016

Nannie Sköld, who works for LIVED (www.livedprojects.org/) and is a former delegate of the International Young Scotland Programme organised by the SR team, is responsible with a colleague for running the school for children over the age of eight at France's first-ever internationally recognised refugee camp at Grande-Synthe.

Wednesday 17 August

Being in a refugee camp for an extended amount of time, there are certain absurd things you get used to, other absurd things you didn't realise were absurd until someone explains the meaning behind it to you, and other things that take you completely by surprise and make you doubt everything.

It is frightening how quickly you get used to hearing stories about people you see every day risking everything at night to get to the UK. You hear stories as you enter the camp and meet people on their way back from trying, stories as you are standing in line to get lunch, and stories as you are sitting down with friends in their homes and they tell you what really happened last night.

And then there are things you didn't understand at first, but come to realise the true extent of. When we first started working in the children centre, Alex and I were overwhelmed. It happened very quickly and unexpectedly, and everything was new. But we had never worked in children centres before, and had very little to compare it to. We were told that volunteers with a background in teaching often find the situation more shocking, because they can compare the children's behaviours to those of the children they have worked with before, and realise how big of a difference there often is.

For me, this realisation came from individual stories. Two art therapists came in to volunteer for a day and were taken aback when they saw how the children were painting. It's not normal for children to use so much red and black paint, they said. Children almost always choose bright colours. In the camp, they saw children using bright colours and painting happy pictures, then taking the red and black brushes and destroying what they had just painted. The first painting I saw a child make in the school was an A4 piece of paper, completely covered in thick, black paint.

Sunday 21 August

There has been more tension than usual in the past week. Things are changing, quickly, and often for the worse. It is difficult to know what is happening and why – there is a fine line between information and rumour. Through friends, we learned that there was a big fight

last Saturday evening. We learned that there was gunfire on Sunday night. We learned that more people were shot on Monday night.

We are told that it is fighting between smugglers and between the mafia. We are told that you are safe if you stay away from trouble, at least if you are a volunteer.

Yet, entering the camp, everyone you meet seems more on edge. There are more reports of men beating their wives. And for women living without a husband, it can be even worse. Families are scared to let their children out of sight when night approaches. Children realise the changes in behaviour, and the anxiety of people around them. Children become more agitated.

Coming into school on Monday morning, we found the glass from the window shattered and the whole building perfectly covered in a layer of fine, white powder. The kids' weekend adventure had been to break into the school and set off the fire extinguisher.

For most of the day, we were sweeping and dusting and washing, trying to restore the school to its former state. Many children wanted to help, and as two children, three and five years old, were soaking magnetic numbers and letters in soapy water, a girl a few years older insisted on helping us sweep up inside. Perhaps the mischievous adventurers realised the consequences as well, because six days have now passed without a break-in.

Saturday 27 August

The last few days have been above 30 degrees, sunny, and full of bubbles and water games. Tuesday was the first day of the heatwave. Probably entirely coincidentally, Tuesday was also when we started hearing about several of the children having successfully made it to the UK. All in all, this week has been a good one.

Thanks to a new volunteer, the school was given a water rocket. Although standing in line and taking turns can be a struggle, it has been immensely popular. We like to think that the children are learning about physics, but any excuse to play outside with water is welcome.

One afternoon, two girls pulled me away, saying: 'Come, my friend, come! Little black eat!' Confused but curious, I was led to a hidden corner of the camp full with blackberry bushes. We started picking and eating and trying to avoid the thorny branches.

One of the girls then found some cardboard and made an improvised box for us to put the blackberries in to bring them back to all the friends at school. (Side note: we found a beautiful shady spot on the way back to take a rest, and ended up coming back to school full but empty-handed.)

A wronged night

Andrew Hook

2016

Scotland has recently been remembering the day 20 years ago when Thomas Hamilton, carrying four loaded handguns, walked into the gymnasium of Dunblane primary school and proceeded to shoot 16 five-year-old children and their teacher, before killing himself. The reaction to that event in an appalled UK was swift. Two new laws were passed completely banning the private ownership of handguns.

In the year after Dunblane, there were 59 killings with such guns across the UK. In 2014, that figure fell to 29. An editorial in *The Guardian* goes on to point out that, by contrast, in the USA 20 years ago, 13,252 people died from firearms injuries; the figure for 2015 was 13,393. The writer then alludes to a recent incident in which a mother – who happens to be an ardent

believer in the right of American citizens to bear arms – was shot in the back while driving her car by her four-year-old son who found a loaded revolver on the seat beside him.

To my mind, it is patent that gun laws – meaning the absence of gun laws – represents a more despicable and terrifying blot on American democracy than racism, sexism or any other 'ism' you care to mention. Gun-related deaths are 32 times higher in the USA than in the rest of the civilised nations in the world. How has this situation come about? And why is a grief-stricken President Obama unable to do anything about it?

The key answer, as we all know, is the Second Amendment to the constitution of the United States. Not that you would guess it from the actual wording of that brief amendment which runs as follows: 'A well-regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed'. In 1792, amending the constitution of the new country they had just brought into being, the founding fathers of America, in the First Amendment, sought to guarantee its citizens' freedom of speech, religion and the press. What was their second overriding concern? Surely beyond question it was to protect the security of the nation they had created.

The new USA had no regular or standing army. And many of the founders were against the creation of one, believing that a federal army could easily become a source of tyrannical power in the land. Yet across the Atlantic Ocean, the war-torn world of the 1790s was a dangerous place. How was American freedom to be protected? The answer was by the maintenance of a militia – a people's army. The functions of the federal government, defined in Article 1, Section 8 of the American constitution, include the organising, arming and disciplining of the militia to execute the 'Laws of the Union, suppress Insurrections and repel Invasions'. The Second Amendment, with its specific reference to national security

and the role of the militia, seems largely to reinforce the meaning of the original article: the need to maintain the militia clearly remains the heart of the matter.

Today, however, America's politicians, commentators, lawyers and the public in general believe that the Second Amendment means something entirely different: the right of all Americans to keep and bear arms. This is the meaning that now is automatically and slavishly reiterated whenever the issue of guns in America is raised in any form. But the truth is that this interpretation became the orthodox one only in the very recent past. For over 200 years, the American legal system ultimately rejected the idea that the Second Amendment guaranteed the right of individual Americans to bear arms. It was only in 2008, in the case of the *District of Columbia v Heller*, that the Supreme Court, in a 5-4 vote, supported the opinion, written by the late judge Antonin Scalia, which overturned past legal history – 'two centuries of precedent' in the words of Michael Wardman in his 2014 book *The Second Amendment* – and set up the new orthodoxy concerning the right to bear arms.

As we shall see, the campaign in favour of this interpretation has a history of its own, but just how revolutionary it was in legal terms is suggested by a comment made by one of America's most illustrious Supreme Court chief justices back in 1991. In that year, Chief Justice Warren Burger suggested that the gun lobby's interpretation of the Second Amendment 'is one of the

greatest pieces of fraud, I repeat the word fraud, on the American people by special interest groups that I have ever seen in my lifetime. The real purpose of the Second Amendment was to ensure that state armies – the militia – would be maintained for the defence of the state. The very language of the Second Amendment refutes any argument that it was intended to guarantee every citizen an unfettered right to any kind of weapon he or she desires'.

So how could an interpretation of the Second Amendment, dismissed as rubbish by the chief justice of the Supreme Court in 1991, become accepted as the correct one by the Supreme Court in 2008?

A recent article in *The New York Times* provides a convincing answer. In the 1970s, members of America's National Rifle Association began to campaign in a range of states for changes in their constitution that would protect the right of individuals to keep and bear arms. Over the following years, these campaigns became more and more successful. The result was that by 2008 – when the Supreme Court had to rule on the meaning of the Second Amendment – most states had already legislated in favour of protecting gun ownership. In these circumstances, it seemed reasonable to argue that the federal government should endorse what was already happening in many states.

Then the NRA's strategy also involved the setting up of generous research grants and prizes available to scholars prepared to provide legal and academic arguments for the reinterpretation of the Second Amendment as protecting the right of individual Americans to keep and bear arms.

Finally the US Congress, and the presidency, had to be persuaded to endorse the same understanding. Just how successful this campaign was is indicated by the appointment of John Ashcroft as the country's Attorney-General in 2001. Ashcroft was a member of the NRA, and under him the Justice Department changed its position in favour of the association's interpretation of the Second Amendment. The verdict in the *Heller v the District of Columbia* case in 2008 thus was the result of a well-organised and well-funded campaign supported both by enthusiastic gun owners and gun manufacturers.

The question remains of how Judge Scalia was able to persuade another four Supreme Court judges that his revolutionary interpretation of the Second Amendment was the correct one. Appointed to the court in 1986, Scalia quickly emerged as a deeply conservative legal voice. He consistently opposed all laws that made distinctions on the basis of race or gender or sexual orientation. Above all, he rejected with considerable animus what he saw as politically liberal attempts to regard the American constitution as evolving alongside changes in society at large.

Rejecting any form of 'updating the constitution', Scalia adopted the view that the only valid interpretations of the constitution should be based on the notions of 'originalism' and 'textualism'. The only factors that mattered were the intentions of the original framers – and if it was impossible to be certain what those intentions were, then the original public meaning of the words used provided the only reliable source for interpreting the constitution's meaning. A 'nothing but the words on the page' approach became the defining characteristic of the legal philosophy of Scalia and all those who shared his views.

Antonin Scalia no doubt was convinced that his new and revolutionary reading of the Second Amendment – that it did after all guarantee the right of all individual Americans to keep and bear arms – was wholly consistent with his commitment to originalism and textualism. In fact, his opinion is nothing of the kind. 'Faux originalism' is how one senior judge described it. On the central issue of the relationship between the original sentence's two clauses – the state's security requiring a well-regulated militia and the right of the people to keep and bear arms – he has almost nothing to say. And what he claims to be the original, hyper-literal meanings of all the key words in the amendment are far from being self-evidently true. Ultimately, there is an element of intellectual incoherence in his opinion.

Towards its end, Scalia seems to forget about originalism altogether and writes as follows: 'nothing in our opinion should be taken to cast doubt on longstanding prohibitions on the possession of firearms by felons and the mentally ill, or laws forbidding the carrying of firearms in sensitive places such as schools and government buildings, or laws imposing conditions and qualifications on the commercial sale of arms'. If the right of the individual

to keep and bear arms can be denied in all such cases, why is it unconstitutional for the District of Columbia to deny *Heller* the right to keep an unlocked, loaded handgun in his home? In fact, the truly revolutionary impact of the Supreme Court's 2008 verdict is still emerging.

Despite Scalia's qualification, the carrying of firearms in such sensitive places as schools and university campuses and government buildings is becoming increasingly common in many states. Guns are now allowed in psychiatric hospitals in Texas; in Florida, hospitals have to put up signs saying the carrying of guns is forbidden. Deadly mass shootings, whether in the workplace, schools or colleges, cinemas, or anywhere else, seem to happen on so regular a basis, that they no longer take us by surprise. Of course, the Supreme Court decision in the case of the District of Columbia v Heller is not responsible for this situation. But the impact of that ruling on gun controls in general is surely a significant factor.

Writing on the Second Amendment a few years ago, I suggested that there was a neglected 'Scottish' dimension to the 1792 debate. In his 2008 opinion, Judge Scalia does make fleeting reference to the English Bill of Rights of 1689 which said that 'the Subjects which are Protestants may have Arms for their Defence suitable to their Conditions and allowed by Law'. But, inevitably, he makes no reference to the, in my view, much more relevant historical fact that, in 1792, Scotland was still denied the right to raise a militia.

In 1708, the post-Union parliament passed a Scottish Militia Bill. But on the advice of her ministers, Queen Anne vetoed the bill because of doubts over Scottish loyalty. Even more significantly, in 1757 the British Government's Militia Bill did not apply to Scotland. Scottish intellectuals deeply resented this decision: the Select Society in Edinburgh, to which nearly all the leading figures in the Scottish Enlightenment belonged, was renamed the Poker Club in order to promote the cause of a Scottish militia.

Key figures in the debate over the Second Amendment in America in 1792 would certainly have been familiar with this history. James Madison, for example, a major architect in the framing of the American constitution and deeply committed to the role the militia should play, had been educated at the College of New Jersey in Princeton by its president John Witherspoon, one of the two Scottish signers of the Declaration of Independence. Thomas

Jefferson, the original drafter of that declaration, had also been taught by a Scot. In his autobiography, he tells us that at the College of William and Mary, it was from William Small, a graduate of Aberdeen University, he got his 'first views of the expansion of science, and of the system of things in which we are placed'.

James Wilson, the other Scottish-born signer of the Declaration of Independence, taught law at the College of Philadelphia and went on to become a member of the very first American Supreme Court. Wilson too was an active participant in all the debates over the American constitution. All of these men would have been familiar with the fact that Scotland had been denied a militia. In passing the Second Amendment, they were declaring their commitment to America's maintaining its militia. That was the only reason why the people's right to bear arms should not be infringed.

So what can be done to restore some degree of sanity to the debate over gun controls in America? The death of Judge Scalia means that the remaining eight Supreme Court judges – assuming none of them have changed their minds – are split four against four over the

interpretation of the all-important Second Amendment. As the constitution empowers him to do, President Obama has nominated District of Columbia circuit judge Merrick Garland to fill the vacancy in the court. All observers agree that Garland is very much a middle-of-the-road non-partisan nominee. In normal times, his nomination would win Senate approval almost without opposition. But these are not normal times.

The current Republican-controlled Senate is choosing to renege on its constitutional duty to debate and vote on the President's nominee. Many of us will be hoping that this behaviour will only help the election of another Democratic President in November. Should that be the case, we can begin to hope that the 2008 ruling on the Second Amendment will in due course

be revised, and the long slow process of reimposing sensible gun controls over American society be set in motion. Would James Madison and the other 'originalists' who passed the Second Amendment approve? Of course they would.

The ring is closing

James Wilkie

2016

The Scots are not the only people in the world with an aversion to weapons of mass destruction. The classic WMDs are biological, chemical and nuclear weapons, two of which have actually been used in armed conflict. Radiological weapons have more recently been added to the list of horrors, but as far as is publicly known have never actually been manufactured. Not much is heard about the first two these days, probably because governments have realised that they are two-edged swords, that their use could trigger a cross-border holocaust that could hit the user as much as an enemy.

The 1975 United Nations Biological Weapons Convention (short title), which bans the possession and use of biological and toxin devices ('germ warfare') has been signed and ratified by 173 states. An additional nine states have signed the BWC, but have not yet ratified. Its effectiveness has been limited by the fact that no special organisation to enforce its implementation has been set up, although support for this was virtually unanimous, because the United States under George Bush walked out of the negotiations, silently hailed by Iran and Pakistan. Adherence to the convention is presently supervised from United Nations HQ Geneva. Further related biological research, for instance at Porton Down in England, is now directed mainly towards methods of defence against the use of such weapons, perhaps by terrorists, and biological dangers in general.

The 1997 UN Chemical Weapons Convention that outlaws the production, stockpiling and use of chemical weapons and their precursors has been signed by 192 UN member states (Israel has still to ratify, while Egypt, North Korea and South Sudan have not signed). Here, by contrast, the UN has set up an independent Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) that, from its headquarters in the Hague, is quietly supervising the

destruction of all such weapons worldwide, with the cooperation of stockholders.

This is not an overnight task – dismantling these weapons and disposing of their lethal contents is a lengthy and extremely hazardous business, and has to be taken slowly. Nonetheless, the success of the UN when it is allowed to work without obstruction is demonstrated by the fact that, by October 2015, about 90% of all the declared stockpile of chemical weapons in the world had been destroyed under supervision by the OPCW, and work is continuing to get rid of the remainder.

Radiological weapons are the latest horror scenario, eminently practical even although they exist only in theory at the moment. The most basic such radiological dispersion device is the so-called 'dirty bomb', with a core of conventional explosive surrounded by a mantle of radioactive material. This would be distributed far and wide by the force of the

explosion, which is itself of secondary importance, thereby poisoning a huge area and all life within it.

The Armageddon variant, known as a 'salted bomb', would use a nuclear core surrounded by a charge of material like cobalt (there are several other possibilities) that would be highly irradiated by the nuclear detonation. The radiation would be spread far more widely than by a dirty bomb, and could turn an entire country into an uninhabitable desert for all the foreseeable future, depending on the half-life of the fissile material used.

Radiological weapons are a spectre that is haunting defence and security authorities worldwide. The theory has been intensely studied but no action has been taken to date towards outlawing such weapons. The moment any concrete plan to construct such a weapon has come to light the international community will react swiftly and decisively, but for the meantime there is still work to be done on ordinary nuclear weapons.

The worldwide unanimous condemnation of biological and chemical weapons has almost – but not quite – been repeated in the case of their straight atomic counterparts, whether of the fission or fusion (hydrogen bomb) variety. There is considerable strength of feeling amongst governments worldwide on the subject of nuclear weapons, and resentment towards the handful of states that stubbornly retain them. The entire rest of the world wants to see them abolished.

Unfortunately, there are politico-diplomatic factors in play here. The nukes are militarily useless, the former Cold War adversaries are now on the same side, and any regime that actually used them would be signing its own death warrant, even without a nuclear retaliation.

Who is going to incinerate hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians in order to teach a lesson to a handful of members of an oppressive regime? To date, no terrorists have managed to get their hands on a nuclear warhead, and, if they did mount such an attack, who would deliver a nuclear response, where would it be aimed, and against whom?

It is not that such a danger does not exist, for instance in Pakistan, where Taliban and Al Qaeda forces have been steadily encroaching nearer to Pakistan's nuclear test facilities, but here again the uselessness of threatening nuclear revenge is evident, not least when the perpetrators are more than willing to die for their cause.

That leads to the only remaining uses of nuclear weapons, as diplomatic bargaining counters and as status symbols. The five permanent members of the UN Security Council are the 'official' nuclear-armed states – China, France, the Russian Federation, the UK and US. All of them have an obligation under the 1970 UN Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) to work for the abolition of nuclear weapons, including their own.

Another four states – India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea – have nuclear weapons technology (although test explosions are no proof of the existence of usable warheads let alone their ballistic delivery vehicles) and Iran had until recently been working towards such a status.

Here the purpose of nukes as status symbols is very evident – at least on the part of

politicians and the military, because one cannot imagine the ordinary people of Iran, let alone North Korea, clamouring for such devices. The element of fear of attack is still evident in Israel, and to a diminishing extent elsewhere.

To the North Korean regime, nuclear capacity is also a negotiating factor for other purposes, and that was probably also true for Iran before its recent agreement on nuclear research. With the UK and France, it is a prestige matter and a diplomatic lever for retaining their permanent seats on the UN Security Council, which have long since been overtaken by global developments.

The United Nations is still beavering away at the permanent Conference on Disarmament at UN Geneva. Progress is already evident, especially in the ongoing reduction of the massive Russian and US overkill stockpiles of warheads (dismantling is once again a slow business, this time mainly for political reasons), while massive pressure is being placed on Iran and others to call a halt to any further proliferation. These operations are policed by the International Atomic Energy Agency, based at United Nations HQ Vienna.

That is one side of United Nations policy. The other main effort at the moment is being directed towards stopping nuclear test explosions once and for all. Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton have stressed during the UN General Assembly in New York that the UN Comprehensive [Nuclear] Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) is of crucial importance, because a ban on test explosions on the surface, underground, in the air or in space, effectively puts an end to the further development of nuclear weapons, which is a gigantic step towards their ultimate abolition. It also eliminates further nuclear pollution of Earth's atmosphere.

The UN member governments enthusiastically share this view. There is no more popular organisation within the United Nations family than the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty Organisation (CTBTO). The CTBTO is the organisation that is being set up to police adherence to the treaty. It is one of a small number of international organisations that have fewer financial difficulties than most, such is the

massive level of support it enjoys worldwide.

The treaty has currently been signed by 183 states and ratified by 164. However, its demanding entry-into-force provision specifically requires it to be ratified by 44 named 'nuclear technology holder' states. The UK, France and Russia have ratified, but another eight 'listed state' ratifications (by China, Egypt, India, Iran, Israel, North Korea, Pakistan and the United States) are still needed before the treaty can finally enter into force. However, only India, Pakistan and North Korea have so far broken the otherwise universally observed *de facto* moratorium on test explosions.

The US signed the CTBT, but later, under the Bush Administration, declined to ratify it. However, the US remains a major financier of the CTBTO PrepComm, based at UN Vienna under its executive secretary, the eminently qualified scientist Lassina Zerbo. President Obama still has an uphill battle here to overcome the obstructive legacy of the

Bush era, because he has to obtain US ratification by a Republican-dominated Senate that has consistently dragged its feet over the matter. Meantime, a number of states like China are waiting on US ratification before making their own moves.

Meantime, the UN has gone ahead with developing its nuclear detection system in advance of final ratification. The CTBTO, even at its preliminary stage of a preparatory commission, is installing 337 sensor stations all round the world to ensure that no nuclear explosion can go undetected. These detectors fall into four main categories: primary and auxiliary seismic; infrasonic; hydro acoustic (sonar); and radionuclide, some with noble gas detection, and with a number of radionuclide laboratories.

One seismic station is located in Scotland, at Eskdalemuir in the Borders. This network, more than 90% of which is already in place and functioning, alerts the CTBTO at UN Vienna within seconds of a nuclear event occurring anywhere between the North and South Poles and all round the equator (one station is situated right at the South Pole itself). The Security Council can then decide on sanctions or other measures against the offending state.

The mind-blowing high-tech monitoring system, using the world's most advanced technologies, also has a number of secondary functions, like tsunami early warning and others. Scientists all round the world, who receive the results automatically in real time, are unanimously enthusiastic about having such a holistic view of the state of the planet that is available from no other source.

The status of the UK within this general scenario should be obvious. It has a treaty obligation to work for the abolition of nuclear weapons, including its own, and not to update them. It is the politico-diplomatic consequences of abandoning nuclear weapons that are uppermost in government minds in London, because from the military standpoint they are utterly useless and a waste of resources. As former Russian President Michael Gorbachev pointed out, they are deterring nobody, because they can never be used.

The UN continues to consolidate the advances that have been achieved to date by ensuring that there is no retreat from the progress that has already been made towards the final and irreversible extirpation of all these abominations. We are still some way off from complete abolition of CBRN weapons of mass destruction, but the ring is slowly closing around the fanatics.

The petrified tree of death

Michael Elcock

2016

In all of Canada, July the First is a national holiday. It's called Canada Day. In Newfoundland, which is part of Canada, July the First is called Memorial Day. That's because in 1916 Newfoundland was not part of Canada. As the Dominion of Newfoundland its troops came under the authority of the British Army. July the First in Newfoundland is the day everyone remembers the awful Battle at Beaumont Hamel, in the Somme.

I went to Beaumont Hamel one July day a few short years ago. Here is what I wrote:

Wounded at Beaumont Hamel

Canadian shrubbery is planted all around the car park at Beaumont Hamel in the valley of the Somme – salal, maple, some pine. A deep-chested caribou, cast in blackened bronze, stands on top of a mound at the crest of the slope, surrounded by neat, sub-alpine rockery plants. The sun is fierce.

The Newfoundland Regiment was destroyed here on 1 July 1916.

The killing field falls gently away to a small copse. Sheep are grazing. The sun beats down and the air is thick with flies, and no-see-ums which bite like tiny piranhas.

When the soldiers were here, the air buzzed with bullets. The Newfoundland Regiment was wiped out in less than 30 minutes.

The field is open. There is no cover. Two ravines fork into its base from a single stem at the foot of the slope. This was called 'Y' Ravine. Even an amateur soldier would see little profit in sending men over such ground to attack machine guns dug into the sides of the ravine.

It is hot. I take off my shoes and socks and listen to the gentle, tearing noise of sheep cropping the grass. It is peaceful, dreamy; on this high summer day, 70 years on, this place presents no dangers. Everything is forgiven, most of it forgotten. I walk down the hill to a lone tree. It is a skeleton, bare as midwinter, stuck with red poppies centred on small crosses made of lollipop sticks. Some of them carry messages.

'Never Forget'

'I'll always remember you Johnnie'

'I wish I'd known you Grandad. With love...'

This is the Tree of Death. Once it was an apple tree and bore fruit. Then this whole area was pulverised by shellfire and machine gun bullets. The tree died and became petrified.

A sharp lick of pain stabs through my foot: blood soaks onto the grass, my blood. I drop onto my knees and feel the wound with my fingers. The blood makes them sticky. Slowly,

carefully, I pull out a piece of ragged metal no bigger than a shirt button, but sharp around its edges like a scalpel. It is such a tiny piece to have caused so much pain, spilled so much blood.

All over this field thick, intertwined grasses cover old shell holes and disguise detritus, expired ordnance; the garbage of war. Shrapnel and barbed wire hide in the undergrowth. Screw pickets lie at angles, pitted and rusting. Once they held coils of impenetrable barbed wire and funnelled the Newfies into the muzzles of the guns.

My shoes are up at the caribou monument. I make my way gingerly back across the field, checking each footfall. The Newfie boys who crossed this place had no such latitude, forced to maintain a steady, prescribed military walk when their wits screamed at them to run, through flying razor shrapnel the size of dinner plates; red hot, jagged metal as big as roof slates, window panes, kitchen scales. More than anything else, the men who fought here needed generals who could read maps, understand the most elementary aspects of terrain, cover, camouflage, stealth.

It's said that 100 men died for every yard of ground in the Somme valley, which would mean that a mile cost roughly 176,000 men. The field at Beaumont Hamel is about 100 yards across. Seven hundred and thirty-three men were lost here in half an hour – less than that demented average – and they failed to take the objective, a ravine with no military value, in the Valley of the River Ancre. It was detached, careless slaughter engineered by generals who were decorated after the war with baronetcies and estates and medals; no mistakes admitted and no inquiries into the heedless carnage. Endless death was the accepted face of war.

My shoes are sitting between the hooves of the Newfoundlanders' caribou, which continues to gaze nobly across the battlefield. The handkerchief I tied round my foot is red with blood. There are band-aids (Elastoplast) in my bag but it seems churlish to apply them to my little wound. I fold the handkerchief and tie it on again.

The Newfoundland Regiment was under British command in the Great War. Newfoundland didn't become part of Canada until 1948. Ironically, Remembrance Day is observed in Newfoundland each year on 1 July in recognition of the slaughter at Beaumont Hamel. The rest of Canada celebrates Canada Day on that date – with fireworks and street parties.

Trump may have changed politics

Ronnie Smith

2016

The chief business of the American people is business – President Calvin Coolidge

As I write this, the 2016 US Presidential Election is one week away and many commentators seem to assume that Hillary Clinton will win. We shall shortly test the accuracy of their forecasting and perhaps the extent to which they indulged in simple projection, her opponent being profoundly unpopular among the mainstream media establishment.

Mrs Clinton's campaign has been generally orthodox in conception and execution. To obtain her party's nomination, she had to win the increasingly divisive primary campaign and then take steps to reunite all Democrats and build a national electoral coalition with which to defeat the Republican enemy at the General Election. This she has done to a greater or lesser extent, just as all presidential nominees have done throughout my lifetime.

Mrs Clinton's major problem is that she has become increasingly unpopular as her career in her husband's administration, in the Senate and in President Obama's cabinet, has become increasingly mired in political and financial scandal. Just as Mr Trump is far from the best candidate the Republicans could have chosen, Mrs Clinton is not the best of the Democratic Party and her greatest fear must be a low turnout of her own natural constituency.

The process of selecting a President is lengthy and noisy but has been generally stable since the end of the Second World War. However, during this electoral cycle things have changed and it remains to be seen whether

this is a temporary glitch in the system or a more profound adjustment.

Until now America's elected officials, whether at county, state or federal level, have generally measured their effectiveness and success against their relationships with business. Although many Americans work for local, state or federal government, the national political and economic culture remains overwhelmingly private. Hence the continuing large-scale opposition to what has become known as 'Obamacare'. It costs a lot of money to stand for public office in the USA and much of the necessary funding comes from business leaders who expect a return on their investment in candidates.

Just as there are no free lunches, there is no obligation-free funding from competitive business interests. That is why public policy conversion into legislation has changed surprisingly little in principle and execution over the past 50 years and the system has not

been effectively challenged. American business funds candidates, makes its priorities clear, and expects its representatives to look after its interests when they are in power.

Donald Trump, though, is not a politician. He is a businessman and his campaign for the presidency has been run as a corporate marketing operation.

For the primaries, Mr Trump identified his market and devoted all of his resources to maximising the impact of his brand on the segment/demographic known as 'angry white folks'. These people feel that their vision of America has been destroyed by the liberal elites who tend to inhabit the east and west coasts. They live in the vast interior of the country in the 'flyover states' and have seen their industrial and agricultural economy decimated by overseas trade deals and financial pressure from larger and larger federal banks. Mr Trump did the math, sold his brand entirely to his chosen market, became a mirror to their frustrations and anger, and won the Republican nomination relatively easily.

Along the way, his aggressive personality and daily bluster won him more free airtime on US national TV than any other candidate in US history. The question for political commentators, not only in the US, was how could Mr Trump now build the customary broad electoral coalition to win the presidency, having just insulted everyone outwith his targeted primary segment of voters? How could he diversify his business once he had saturated his initial target market?

The answer is that he didn't even try.

The standard narrative runs that, again, Mr Trump did the math and obviously calculated that he could secure enough angry white votes to gain victory through the Electoral College. Karl Rove, George W Bush's personal miracle worker, explained the strategy in an article a few months ago. Mr Trump never had any chance of winning the popular vote. But it was possible that he could accumulate votes in the flyover states and defeat the liberals in the larger coastal states through gaining just enough seats in the Electoral College. Mr Rove even set out a list of states that Mr Trump could win.

The Electoral College is the mechanism through which states' rights are protected during the election of a President. Let's not forget that we are talking about the United States of America, a federation not a unitary monolith. No President can be elected without a majority in the college even if he or she has a popular majority in the country. However, new information has come to light which may change Mr Trump's presidential narrative.

In the United States, a media institution has grown over the past 25 years known as 'talk radio'. Various individual commentators set up their own private radio stations and assail the airwaves with their mostly conservative and religious opinions. The most famous of these commentators is Rush Limbaugh who has a huge following that he enlivens with his continuous attacks on liberal America, the coastal elites, the corruption in Washington, the Clintons, the Obama Presidency and the general decline of the USA.

Mr Limbaugh is a staunch supporter of Donald Trump and speaks to exactly the same market segment identified by Mr Trump for his campaign. Mr Limbaugh's audience has made him a wealthy and very influential man, facts that have not gone unnoticed by Mr

Trump. It seems that the Trump organisation are seriously exploring the creation of a nationwide 'Trump TV' station, taking talk radio to the next level. This raises one important question and two possibly disturbing possibilities. The question: has Donald Trump's campaign for the White House been nothing more than a corporate business operation to build a market of subscribers for his proposed TV channel?

If that is the case, it raises the following scenarios. If Mr Trump becomes President, it seems likely that he will have to work with a Congress that is hostile to him. With the power and influence generated by his TV channel, he would be in a position to continually appeal directly to his many angry white supporters across the nation and continue to inflame the divisions that his campaign has exacerbated. There would be no post-election healing. This would be seen by many as a subversion of the constitutional process of government.

If he loses the election, Mr Trump could continue to thrash away at the Clinton Administration and all of the other enemies identified by his supporters. He could continue to challenge the legality of the election itself. In short, Mr Trump will simply not go away after the election. He and his followers will become a permanent and very active feature of America's political landscape.

As I said, Mr Trump is a businessman not a politician. He chose not to fund a candidate for President. Instead, he became the candidate himself and has vigorously pursued his own business objectives with the election reduced to the level of a viable marketplace, not a purely political event. In effect, Mr Trump has removed the middleman from American politics on this occasion.

Now we must see if he has also changed Western politics for good.

A warning from the future

Gerry Hassan

2016

America has shaken itself and the world. Something seismic has happened which has confounded experts, the political classes, and observers all round the world. But in this year of revolt and surprises – from Leicester City and the Cubs to Brexit and Trump – the question is why should we be surprised any more?

I spent the last three weeks in the States, attending rallies, speaking and listening to people, and trying to understand what was going on. It was clear this was a change election, one where people were losing patience with business as usual politics and Washington, and one where at least two Americas talked and shouted past each other – one conservative and angry, one liberal and conceited, both believing in their own moral superiority. All of this has produced one of the most electrifying electoral shocks in American history: a victory with no real comparison in recent times.

Trump ran an unprecedented campaign by any modern standards. It was terrible and offensive, giving voice to a ragged, confused anger and fury at the state of contemporary America and the world. That much was said all the time, but it represented much more in ways which should have been more obvious and discussed.

The Trump campaign with all that noise actually had a whole strand of understandable, popular themes and slogans. It stood for something obvious and tangible which voters could recognise and either embrace or reject, that they could feel they were part of or feel threatened. That is because it stood for something whether you like it or not.

All of this cannot be said for Clinton and her campaign. For all their millions, organisation, 'big data' and ground war, they ran a campaign bereft of real ideas, which failed to connect to people or anything meaningful. Compare its pitiful key slogan 'Stronger Together' with Trump's 'Make America Great Again' – one is abstract and vague; the other touches not only the American dream, but the palpable feeling of decline and a country going in the wrong direction.

The Clinton rally I attended was the one where Elizabeth Warren gave her electrifying 'nasty women' address which ignited the crowd in their anti- Trumpism. But it was a rare moment, for the ageing, white, middle-class audience seemed to be going through the motions, strangely detached for the whole rally, and unmoved by a Clinton address that had not one single rousing moment or message.

Clinton was the consummate professional politician and advocate for the globalised elite, Wall Street and insider class. Her platform was one which was inadequate for the times that the US and world faced. It was filled with micro-policy, technocratic details, mixed up with an attempt to sell the notion that America was in decent shape and progressing in the right direction.

Spending the last few weeks criss-crossing small town north-east America, on the eve of poll I listened to President Obama tell an adoring crowd in New Hampshire that the economy showed US employment at a record low of 4.9% for eight years with 15 million private sector jobs created after 73 consecutive months of growth. All a bit New Labouresque, and far removed from 'feeling your pain' which Bill Clinton stressed in 1992.

At a Donald Trump rally last week in the same state, the mood was more subdued and serious than the stereotypes suggested. For a start, in the last few weeks, Trump embraced a more disciplined set of messages. Even the Trump supporters I spoke to were much less incendiary and furious than often presented. There were even astute observations from some, one person commenting on the last days of the campaign: 'Trump is not giving any hostages to fortune now. We are ending with Clinton sounding mad, talking about Trump all the time'. There was truth in that comment last Friday; it looks even more penetrating nearly a week later.

There were points of rage and hatred in the Trump world I encountered. There were continual cries of 'Lock Her Up', even 'Kill Hillary', and at the worst moment, a solitary cry of 'Execute Hillary' from the body of the kirk which could be heard by everyone and made ripples in the national news. All the other over-the-top comments were ignored, but this was so out there that the then speaker John H Sununu, ex-governor of New Hampshire, had no choice but to confront it saying: 'You can't say that. There are limits'.

But elsewhere people showed unease at lots of the raging hatred. Thus, when one speaker invoked Anthony Weiner's sexting, several members of the audience said loudly: 'Do you mind. There are children here'. More importantly, Trump as a campaigner began morphing his message from his earlier, even more irresponsible days to believing that he was going to win. The older refrains of the Great Wall of Trump were passed over in tokenistic form, like an ageing popstar reprising by popular demand one of his biggest hits for the crowd.

He talked all the time of what a 'Trump Administration' would and wouldn't do: repealing Obamacare, the call of 'Drain the Swamp' (his slogan for cleaning up and clearing out the Washington political establishment) and reversing the human and political cost of what was continually presented as Obama and Hillary's wars – but was really the legacy of the neo-cons under George W Bush. He had by then convinced himself that he was going to win.

Many different emotions and voices fed the winning Trump coalition. It was a rage against the machine. A populist insurrection. Many of the open wounds of American society were exposed in public and became some of the key factors in a Trump victory – class, how the economy does and doesn't work for millions, and how working-class people struggle and have been so taken for granted by the Democrats (as well as Republicans) for at least a generation. In this long presidential campaign, Hillary Clinton did not visit the rustbelt state of Wisconsin once. The result was viewed as in the bag and Trump's threat to sweep through the rustbelt judged empty rhetoric. How wrong and damaging that proved.

The contours of the Trump victory are remarkable. Class seems to have in places trumped gender. White non-college educated women voted 62% Trump versus 34% for Clinton; while non-college educated men voted 72% Trump and 23% Clinton. The America that is increasingly diverse and multicultural wasn't enough for Clinton who won 88% of the black vote versus 8% for Trump, but she only won 65% of the Latino vote, compared to 29% for Trump; and in key battleground states he polled even better, winning 34% of the Latino Florida vote.

Many use the words 'cultural wars' to describe this divided America, but these are barely adequate. The fissures and lack of understandings run deep in so many directions. America's mixture of denial, fear and rage on race and racism scars much, from mass black incarceration to voter suppression of black and non-white voters, and anxieties over police shootings. Van Jones, a former Obama official, spoke for many in liberal America when he said on election night on CNN: 'How do I explain this to my children?' and spoke of an election which he described as more like a 'whitelash'.

Republicans are now unambiguously the political establishment. They are more dominant than at any time since 1928 and pre-FDR, controlling the presidency, House, Senate, and a majority of state governors. They will shape a Supreme Court which could become conservative for a generation, threatening *Roe v Wade* and other landmark liberal judgements.

Any political party and movement is, at the time of its greatest peril, at its biggest moment of strength. The tensions within the Republicans are not difficult to identify given that Trump isn't a casebook Republican, but a maverick populist. Large parts of the party establishment and organisation removed themselves from the election, and now have to deal with the Trump train and its resultant wreckage.

For the moment, the harder questions will be for the Democrats. The party let Hillary Clinton stand as if campaigning for the presidency was her entitlement; she scared off other contestants with the amount of corporate monies raised, reducing the race to her versus Bernie Sanders. Maybe Vice-President Joe Biden or Elizabeth Warren could have defeated Trump, but they stood aside and let Clinton win the nomination.

Liberalism and what passes for 'progressivism' is in trouble. The Democrats in the Bill Clinton and Obama presidencies, for all the rhetoric and charisma, have represented a liberalism of the rich and elites. In so doing, they have patronised the older labour and class traditions of the party, telling workers that they have to embrace change, and assuming they have got nowhere else to go. Sounds familiar in its conceit, doesn't it, because some of this has already happened here.

The left-liberal view of the world is increasingly part of the problem. A New York commentator dismissed Trump's decent polling pre-election with the words, '40% of Americans are racists'. Many in the US and UK hurled insults at Trump such as 'fascist' or 'far right', when he is clearly neither: echoes of all the insults thrown at UKIP and the Brexit vote.

Democrats and liberal-left-wingers need a wake-up call about how they do politics. The demographic determinism which assumed that the 'rainbow nation' of the US would produce a natural Democratic majority now and into the future, has been shown to be built on shaky foundations. Identity politics founded on race, ethnicity and gender has been outmanoeuvred by class, status and whether people feel like outsiders or insiders.

Then there is the more recent Democrat language – used by Obama and many others – of fusing the power of the civil rights movement with biblical imagery to continually remind black voters where they came from. Obama was at it, in an eve of poll rally, talking of the power of 'We' and declaring that: 'We the people, we shall overcome, yes we can'. Such words become empty versus the patchy records of Democrats in office, and there is even evidence that it turns off and reduces turnout with younger black voters. The Clinton and Obama generations can't keep replaying the same worn-out records.

The real Hillary believers I met were few and far between, present in the insider class, and amongst old-style feminists, who had reduced a previous generation's radicalism to the clarion call that now was the time for a US female President. Such opinion chose to blindside itself to the ever-lengthening charge sheet against Clinton, which wasn't invented by Trump. Many dismissed all the negative poll ratings against Clinton with sweeping comments such as 'all this is because she is a woman,' ignoring the criticisms made by Bernie Sanders earlier this year in the primaries.

Trump is clearly a phenomenon, widely portrayed in the US as an 'empty vessel' who ran at times a one-man show and campaign – with the only real back-up and ballast his extended family. This is not, as some Republicans have tried to claim in retrospect, a Ronald Reagan moment. When Reagan won the presidency in 1980, he had been a senior Republican since winning the California governorship in 1966, one of the leaders of the conservative movement, and had a kitchen cabinet of advisers.

However, where there are similarities is in their cross-cutting appeal. Reagan once famously was a public Democrat before converting to the Republicans, and Trump was once a liberal Democrat – something he spoke about in the campaign saying at last week's rally: 'I was on the other side, but we had to do this for the sake of the nation'. That is a populist language, giving a pretence of putting country before party, and it has resulted in a remaking of the Republican coalition in ways which could prefigure a wider realignment, of the scale of 1980, 1968 or 1932.

The Democrats have managed to blow the numerous advantages they had over the Republicans again. They may have just won the presidential vote (in the narrowest margin of a popular result since JFK beat Nixon in 1960) but they lost the presidency. Since 1992, they have lost only one out of seven presidential contests in the popular vote, but they have three times lost the battle to win the White House. That begins to look more than a little careless.

They assumed that because they had favourable demographics into the future, the politics would follow, but numbers never automatically go in one direction, and a

complacency set in at the heart of the Democrats. Combine that with cosmopolitan elitism and Clinton entitlement, and you have an unattractive brew. Voters have finally and belatedly called time on the Bill and Hillary Clinton era of the party, but it has cast a long shadow and trashed any real commitment to economic and social justice, leaving it unsure what it stands for.

There is the question of how Trump can convert his campaign rhetoric into government, and how effectively he can lead an administration, when all he has run is the Trump empire and a whole series of questionable business deals (including the embarrassment of his Menie golf estate in Aberdeenshire – the subject of Anthony Baxter's recent film *You've Been Trumped Too*). His victory will carry shockwaves across the world, and bring joy to the likes of Vladimir Putin, Julian Assange and Wikileaks.

But perhaps one of its consequences will be to give further permission to the pampered, bloated plutocrat class, who already see their own vested interests as the same as their respective countries. In Italy, there has already been Berlusconi, while Arron Banks has bankrolled UKIP and the Brexit vote, and has grand designs for future influence.

In a world where large parts of society and culture swan over the super rich, it is possible that Donald Trump, as well as seeming a very old-fashioned *Citizen Kane* story, is also a warning from a future which increasingly doesn't work for millions. It has been a long rocky road to the Trump Presidency but we really should have seen this coming. If we continue in denial, it will only be one in a future of many more unpleasant shocks as politics and the world get coarser and less civilised. This may be a crisis for centre-left politics, but it is also one of the myth of the republic and the American Dream. If we are unlucky, it could become one for the planet as well.

The weird new world of Trump

Alan McIntyre

2016

It's been a weird three weeks in America. My life goes on as normal, until a radio or TV voice intrudes with the words 'President-elect Trump', and I suddenly feel queasy, as if the floor just tilted a little beneath me. But then it passes, and I get back to worrying about whether the NY Giants can actually make the playoffs this year.

In the aftermath of 8 November, my mantra has become 'judge him by his actions, not his rhetoric' and I've adopted the worldview of journalist Salena Zito, whose analysis of Trump is that 'the press took him literally, but not seriously, while his supporters took him seriously, but not literally'. The hope she succinctly captures is that Trump wasn't in fact elected by a bunch of rabid gay-hating, misogynistic, neo-Nazi nutters, but instead by an overwhelmingly nihilist and disillusioned electorate that cared less about the specifics and more about the broader need for change; leaving Trump plenty of room to moderate his actual policy agenda. Rather than the 'hope and change' of the 2008 Obama transition, we now have change – and then we hope for the best.

To date, the Trump transition has mirrored his campaign; disorganised and improvised with a broad direction of travel just barely discernible within a chaotic and often contradictory set of public statements. Rather than private meetings, we've had a parade of potential 'finalists' for cabinet positions disappearing behind the golden lift doors of Trump Tower. Instead of the State Department briefing the President-elect before talking to foreign leaders, we've had the Australian Prime Minister getting Trump's personal cell phone number from golfer Greg Norman and just calling him up for a chat. What's clear is that, while we may get regular appearances by the Trump who 'will be so presidential that it will make your head spin', presidential Trump will continue to be joined on his reality show by his unpredictable and embarrassing doppelganger who works the night shift and suffers from Twitter Tourette's.

Beyond tone, the last three weeks have also given us real appointments and some policy statements to chew on. In the positive column, there's been a dialling back of some of the campaign rhetoric. In his first policy video, the campaign chant of 'build a wall' mutated into 'increased scrutiny of work visa compliance'. On climate change, we saw a pivot from 'a Chinese hoax' to 'I'm open minded'. Trump also backed off his promise to further investigate Clinton, although it shows how little he understands the US justice system that it wasn't his call to begin with.

Finally, despite her lack of foreign policy experience, the appointment of Governor Nikki Haley of South Carolina as UN Ambassador is good news. It will put the daughter of Indian immigrants in a key bridge role with the broader international community, although you

suspect that the majority of her time will be spent explaining that her boss didn't really mean it.

Squarely in the bad news column is Steve Bannon's appointment as White House Senior Strategist. Bannon built *Breitbart News* by peering into minds of angry white males and then feeding conspiracy-rich nutrients to the base instincts that live in their dark crevices. A man whose selection was applauded by the KKK and who embodies the worst rhetoric of the Trump campaign will now have unfettered access to the President and will help shape his agenda. The best case scenario is that Bannon proves to be just an economic nationalist, functioning as a populist conscience to ensure that billionaire Trump remains a tribune of the white working class.

Apart from Bannon, most of the other early appointments like Attorney General Jeff Sessions, National Security Adviser Michael Flynn, and CIA Director Mike Pompeo fall into the 'hard right but generally competent' category, although all of them have at least some history of racism or Islamophobia.

Also in the bad news column is the realisation that the next four years are likely to see a conveyor belt of corruption scandals. Accusations of self-dealing already hang like a toxic miasma over Trump Tower, amplified by Trump's brazen proclamation that 'Presidents can't have conflicts of interest'. It's all very well to say the kids will run the business, but when Ivanka shows up to a meeting with the Japanese Prime Minister, which Ivanka is it? Is it Ivanka the first daughter, or Ivanka head of international sales and marketing for Trump Hotels? Whichever Ivanka it was, her jewellery line wasted no time in sending out a promotional email marketing the bangle she was wearing at the meeting.

Without even getting into the craziness of Farage and the wind farms, we also had Trump's first conversation with the Argentinian President covering not only world affairs but also some permitting issues for a new development in Buenos Aires. This brass-necked conflation of business and politics isn't new in America, but it's been a long time since we've had such well-founded fears that the US Presidency will become a kleptocracy focused on self-aggrandisement and personal profit.

With a celebrity President, the adjective 'unprecedented' will quickly lose its potency over the next four years, so I'm trying to take a deep breath, ignore the noise, and separate the merely unfortunate from the truly dangerous. In the unfortunate category are things like a set of economic policies that owe more to the nationalism of Juan Peron in 1950's Argentina than they do to Ronald Reagan. The markets like the idea of deregulation and lower taxes, but the result is likely to be short-term gain leading to mid- to long-term pain. The same is true for his trade policy, where the ditching of the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the renegotiation of NAFTA will be red meat to economic populists, but you'll struggle to find an economist who believes import tariffs and a trade war with China will benefit the economy in the long-run.

In the truly dangerous category are attempts to curtail civil rights and reverse the trend towards a more tolerant and inclusive society. Bad things have already happened as a result

of Trump being elected, but they are on a local and personal level; ripples from the rock of the Trump Presidency being thrown into the national cultural pond. Hate crimes are up, with the perpetrators buoyed by what they see as an affirming voice in the White House. Swastikas have appeared on Jewish temples. Hijab-wearing Muslim women have been harassed in the streets, and immigrant kids are getting bullied in school. But while sad and reprehensible, none of these actions are (as yet) the result of any formal policy or legislative agenda.

However, it is worrying that Trump's 'sore winner' accusations of widespread voter fraud may presage federal action to raise the bar for voter registration, which in turn will suppress minority turnout in future elections. I doubt, however, that Trump will go as far as Bannon, who in a fit of nostalgia for the 18th century, has mulled over restricting voting rights to just property owners.

Also in the dangerous category are actions that could undermine NATO and embolden both China and Russia to test America's resolve in the Baltics or the South China Sea. That is why the still unfilled roles of Secretary of Defence and Secretary of State will be the most important decisions Trump takes between now and January. If we have experienced and moderate people like Mitt Romney and General David Petraeus in those roles, I'll feel a lot better about the next four years. If we have war hawks and loose cannons like Rudy Giuliani, then we could have a lot more to worry about during a Trump Presidency than government corruption and aggressive deportation policies. (After this piece was written late Thursday, General James Mattis – popularly known as 'Mad Dog' – was appointed Defence Secretary).

While I struggle to see how the next four years can be a positive for my adopted homeland, I do have faith in both the moderating effect of its public institutions and ultimately in the core values of the American people. The US Presidency is by design a weak executive branch that requires the consent of Congress to both pass legislation and approve treaties. While Congress remains Republican-controlled, the fact is that on many issues Trump is not a traditional Republican, and once his honeymoon is over, that inherent tension will undoubtedly create friction on policy specifics.

Without 60 votes in the Senate, the majority will also struggle to push through any truly divisive legislation like a Muslim registry. If the Democrats are smart, they won't just hunker down and attempt to block legislation, but instead will work to peel off the many moderate Republican senators who have already signalled their intent to be a bulwark against any extreme measures proposed by the new administration. We also have the bizarre sight of solidly Democratic states like California and New York talking up states' rights as a defence against federal overreach – a classic Republican script now appropriated by anxious liberals.

The Democrats must also accept that, although many Trump supporters voted against their own economic interests, the Democrats need to resist the temptation to petulantly punish them for it. For example, infrastructure spending has been on the Democrats' wish

list for years, so they should embrace Trump's enthusiasm for it, but then fight to ensure that it doesn't become a feeding frenzy of graft and corruption. Rather than try and block the repeal of Obamacare, Democrats should accept that it needs reform and try and shape the future solution.

Trump's pick for health and social services secretary is an ardent opponent of Obamacare, so the Democrats could be seduced by the idea of just standing back and letting healthcare reform unravel piecemeal. In places like Clay County Kentucky, 87% voted for Trump, but the uninsured population dropped from 27% to 10% in three years under Obamacare, so repeal will hurt, but Democrats need to help solve the problem not just gloat at the chaos. Come 20 January, the grieving needs to stop and the Democrats need to move beyond identity politics, and be humble enough to listen and react to the economic concerns of flyover country, their ignorance of which clearly cost them the election.

Finally, despite the events of the last few weeks, I still have faith in the American electorate. These are the same people who twice elected an African-American President, and national opinion polls still suggest we are trending towards a more tolerant and inclusive society. Ultimately, the swing states of the rustbelt elected Trump based on his economic message, and a lot of his anti-immigrant and anti-trade rhetoric was framed as contributing factors in the narrative of those states' economic decline. If he focuses on economic concerns, avoids serious international blunders, and moderates his rhetoric on social issues, the Trump Presidency could go down in history as an interesting experiment in economic nationalism, but not an unmitigated disaster.

If, instead, he seeks to govern as he campaigned, then I am confident he will eventually trigger the anti-bodies of American democracy, and some combination of the Congress, the Supreme Court, state governments, and ultimately public opinion will rein him in. As you can tell, I'm trying to view my glass as half-full, but maybe I'll top it up with a little more bourbon before I sit down to write a cheque to the American Civil Liberties Union.

Pounding hearts

Nannie Sköld

2016

Sunday 30 October

Today I wasn't in La Linière. Two friends and I borrowed another volunteer's car and drove to a sterile high-security building outside Lille's airport. We knew of four people from the camp who were detained in the centre, and today learned of many more.

In detention, many people have given a different name to the police than what they call themselves in camp, in order to protect their identity. Because of this, it is tricky to ask to see someone without being certain of what name they were arrested under. Of the four friends we were planning to visit, we only managed to get the name of one in the end.

The visiting rooms are small, beige, and have four chairs nailed into the floor. I found a small chocolate in my bag to give to the friend we were visiting. We hadn't got anything else – it is Sunday and it is France, and not even the massive supermarket beside the camp is open. We asked how he was. We joked about him and his friends forming a boy band in the camp. After an hour, at 5pm, visiting hours were over, and we were ushered outside by the police.

The experience of spending time in a detention centre, and what is at stake, varies greatly from person to person. For some, detention, with the possibility of deportation, is the likelihood of being sent back to Bulgaria or Hungary, where systematic abuse against refugees is talked about as a rule rather than as an exception. For others, deportation would mean being sent back to Germany or Belgium, from where it would take a couple of hours to get back to La Linière by bus. Detention can be a frustratingly long wait for bureaucratic procedures to be completed, or it can be the end to any hope of ever getting to the UK.

Walking back to the car, we heard someone yelling our names. In one of the windows, we saw the faces of the three friends we hadn't managed to visit. 'Chony bashi?', we all yelled to each other, 'How are you?', before getting into the car, and leaving to go back to the refugee camp where these men are trying to leave from, but at this moment wished they could return to.

Thursday 3 November

In La Linière, there are approximately 900 bodies. Some bodies are in a relatively healthy condition given the situation they're in, others are bruised by truck parts or Belgian police, and yet other bodies are extremely new and tiny. Refugee camps are not a normal environment for any of these bodies, and they are all – directly or indirectly – attempting to exist elsewhere.

For individuals trying to cross the border to the UK on lorries, the body can come to be

seen as an obstacle. The 37 degrees of a human body can be picked up by infrared cameras. The smell of a body can be smelled by police dogs. If the body is discovered, the body may then have to walk back for several hours to return to the camp.

More or less a quarter of the women in the camp are pregnant. For these bodies carrying other, smaller, bodies, so much more is at stake. Do they still risk everything on a lorry? Or does the husband make separate attempts to get to the UK, with the hope of one day reuniting there?

There are bodies that are constantly questioned. Individuals under the age of 18 are legally considered children and have the right to more protection than adults. However, many minors do not have documents proving their date of birth, and are therefore subjected to scrutiny by authorities trying to disprove their claims of being under 18. Often, this is based on little more than behaviour and appearance. In other words, bodies that look younger are likely to be given more protection than other bodies. Minors in bodies that appear older may be denied.

Two days ago, a six-year-old boy came up to me and shaped his fingers into a heart. I pointed at his heart and he took my hand to show me how his heart was pounding. I put two of my fingers together and held it against his neck to show him how to feel your own heartbeat.

The camp is full of bodies.

Wednesday 9 November

Maybe it's winter now, maybe it's just rainy, but, either way, it is a time of change and upheaval. Most obviously, Calais: the camp has during the last couple of weeks been completely demolished. The 10,000 people who were living in the camp have since been bussed to centres all over France, with only a ridiculously miniscule number of unaccompanied minors being taken to the UK, and many individuals and families having disappeared off the radar of humanitarian organisations.

A few days ago, a friend said that he was going to Calais to see if there was any information there about the possibility for unaccompanied minors to go to the UK through the schemes promised by the Home Office. Together with three other friends, we drove to Calais the next day. We were met by destruction, hundreds of birds, hostile but easily convinced police officers, a group of unhelpful officials, and another group of more helpful humanitarian workers.

Returning to our car after the unsuccessful attempt, we passed by the (former) bus that used to be the (unofficial) women's and children's centre in Calais. And a man who was looking for treasures in what was left of it. Meanwhile, in La Linière, the situation has become more volatile after the demolition of Calais. Rumours about the camp closing, which have always

circulated, are being taken more seriously. The efforts of Afeji, the state-sponsored organisation responsible for running the camp, to close the camp are becoming more

difficult to ignore. Individuals and families are coming back after having been in a lorry, or in detention, to find their shelters (together with all their possessions) having been taken away.

In August, Afeji decided to restrict entry to the camp to people who they consider to be 'vulnerable' – families, minors, and individuals with severe medical conditions. In October, the organisation decided to not allow any new individuals or families access to the camp (although many have found alternative ways to get in). Last week, in an effort to further regulate the camp, Afeji introduced wristbands. Although there had been rumours about the wristbands being individualised and users being forbidden to remove them, the wristbands now in place are flimsy rubber bracelets, which many choose to keep in their pockets.

Yet a friend of mine tugged at his wristband in disgust and told me: 'It is like we are sheep'. Another friend told me that she takes off the wristband and puts it in her pocket when she goes to the supermarket, fearing that she would be judged.

In Calais, the camp was completely demolished within the space of a few days. In La Linière, rules are tightening and everyone fears what winter will bring.

The women forced into exile

Ruth Morrissy

2016

On Saturday 20 August two women rose early and, with packed bags, headed to Dublin Airport. On a chilly morning, they queued to enter the plane knowing that they had a long journey ahead. One woman was travelling to have an abortion. The other, her friend, had come to support her. The women spent the next 48 hours sharing an incredibly personal and private experience with an ever increasing number of followers on Twitter.

They detailed their whole trip from the nervous wait in the clinic to the blood-stained sheets on the bed after the procedure. By the end of the day, 26,000 people had followed their journey and they had made headlines across the world. These women effectively showed the world that Irish abortion is a reality and that women should not be forced to go to foreign countries to acquire one.

I believe that Ireland is a good country but I believe Ireland could be a great country. In order to become great, we need to change our abortion laws. The current law does not afford citizens of Ireland the dignity and respect they deserve. Every day 12 women are temporarily exiled from Ireland for the basic medical procedure that is abortion. Think about that for a second. Twelve women are forced to leave Ireland every single day. That means that by the end of this week, this number will be close to 80. It means that by the end of the year, this number will have jumped to almost 4,500 women. I, for one, both as a woman and a human, find that statistic appalling. Whether you are anti-abortion or pro-choice, there is one thing that cannot be denied: Irish abortion is a reality.

The legislation that forbids abortion is enshrined in our constitution. The law gives an equal right to life of an unborn child and a mother. This literally means that as soon as cells start forming in a woman's womb, in week one of pregnancy, these cells have an equal right to life as that of the mother. It means that a foetus, which cannot live without feeding off a woman's body, has the same right to life that she does. And it is wrong.

This legislation goes against the basic human right of bodily autonomy. We have seen how this legislation fails women time and time again. In the last few years, we have seen a young Indian woman, Savita Halappanavar, die in agony from septicaemia because of a hospital's reluctance to provide her with an abortion for a baby. A baby that had 1% chance of living. We have seen Ms Y, an asylum seeker, who, having been raped in her native country and unable to travel because of her immigration status, was forced to give birth to her rapist's child. We have seen the macabre experiment of a brain dead woman being kept alive as an incubator for her unborn child against her family's wishes.

These examples show us that not only is the law unethical, but also that in practice the law does not work. It shows that, despite the constitution, a woman and the unborn do not

have the same right to life. It shows that the foetus has a greater right to life than the woman. This is anti-life. This is anti-women. And it neglects women their basic human rights.

The laws surrounding abortion in Ireland are archaic. And they no longer reflect the values of our society. A number of different independent polls have shown that the majority of people are in favour of widening access to abortion in Ireland. As it stands currently, no woman of childbearing age in Ireland has been given a chance to vote on the matter. Their fate has been decided for them. If we cannot trust women to make the right choices about their own body, how can we trust them with raising a child? The logic does not add up.

Anti-abortion advocates suggest that decriminalised abortion numbers in Ireland would increase significantly. But this is highly unlikely. The abortion rates in Ireland fall largely in line with our European counterparts. In countries where abortion has been legalised, such as the US and Australia, studies have shown that the number of abortions did not increase. What do we have to gain by keeping it illegal?

The fact is that Irish abortions exist. They are a reality. And they are not going to go away. This is an undeniable truth. We have seen these women's faces. We have listened to their stories. We have felt their heartbreak. It is time that we stood up as a nation and said this is not good enough. It is time that we trusted women to decide what is best for their lives and their bodies. It is time that we showed women the compassion and empathy that they deserve. I eagerly await the day that women will have control of their own bodies and won't have to fight for human rights in 140 characters or less.

The roots of populism

Alan McIntyre

2017

To quote Oscar winner Peter Finch in the movie *Network*, 'I'm as mad as hell, and I'm not going to take this anymore!' Not a bad summary of the anger that has dominated global politics over the last 18 months. There are at least three contributing factors to this groundswell of disaffection, each of which has been simmering for decades, but which seem to have simultaneously boiled over during this political cycle.

One is growing income inequality and the sense that the 1% has rigged the economy in their favour. From steelworkers in Ohio blaming a mill closure on US trade policy, to civil servants in Greece watching austerity destroy their pensions, the common refrain is that, although globalisation may have lifted tens of millions out of poverty in China and India, it's been at the cost of stagnating incomes in the developed world. The evidence suggests this anger is well-founded. In 1970s America, a 30-year-old had a 90% chance of making more than their parents at the same age. In 2016, that number had fallen to only 50%.

The second contributor is anger directed at cultural drift and the feeling that society is changing faster than people can adapt. From gay marriage, to aggressive political-correctness, to an embrace of multiculturalism, there are many people who've seen the certainties that anchored their worldview vanish before their eyes. This yearning for simpler, better times doesn't need to be rooted in overt racism, homophobia or xenophobia. Instead, it's the fear that the England John Major evoked in his famous quotation of Orwell as 'a country of long shadows on county grounds, warm beer, invincible green suburbs, dog lovers, pools fillers, and old maids bicycling to Holy Communion through the morning mist' has been replaced by something alien.

Further out on the spectrum of fear is the conviction that we're engaged in what Samuel Huntington called 'a clash of civilisations', in which the foundations of Christian Western society are under attack from radical Islam and other existential threats. This ground is occupied by a broad coalition of white supremacists, anti-Semites, and ultra-nationalists spewing vitriol and conspiracy theories. It's also the basis on which you see Steve Bannon and other members of the Trump Administration cosying up to Putin, because they view Russia as a natural ally in this global fight against Islamic Jihad.

One difficulty in understanding the prevailing sense of anger and fear is that specific policy issues like US immigration and the future of the EU can conflate all three factors. For some, an Arabic-speaking worker in New Jersey is just taking the job of a 'real American'. For others, his hijab-wearing wife is an affront to their *Brady Bunch* conception of American society, and the more paranoid may fear he could be part of an ISIS sleeper cell.

Likewise, a Romanian taxi driver in Leicester can personify everything from a loss of

sovereignty to rampant economic migration, to an explanation of why the English soccer team is a perennial disappointment. One clear failing of mainstream politicians over the last few years has been their instinct to lecture anyone who challenges the orthodoxies of globalisation and social liberalism and chide them for their prejudiced and retrograde views rather than trying to really understand their motivations.

We've also done a poor job of creating a taxonomy for explaining how this anger is manifesting itself in specific political movements. Words like 'fascist', 'authoritarian' and 'populist' get thrown around, but to lump Bernie Sanders in with Donald Trump as a populist is not only to be loose with language, but also to fail to identify where the real threat to our democracy lies.

Sanders's presidential campaign focused on only one of the factors identified above: the visceral sense of economic betrayal. While he did make common cause with Trump against both Wall Street and global trade, he was clearly on the opposite side of the debate on cultural and immigration issues. Sanders's European equivalents are Podemos in Spain and Syriza in Greece; political movements trying to address the inequality, structural unemployment and general sense of economic malaise in southern Europe, while trying not to demonise anyone, except maybe the German and Eurozone technocrats imposing austerity on them.

The far more dangerous response to the rejection of politics as usual is the emergence of true populism in the form of regimes that look a lot more like Hugo Chavez's Venezuela than typical Western democracies. For all his clown-like behaviour, this is the real danger of the Trump Administration. His campaign built a winning coalition by tapping into all three sources of anger. His 'Great Wall', his vilification of trade, his disdain for multilateral organisations, and his central promise that he would 'Make America Great Again', all became Rorschach tests for the diverse anxieties of primarily older white Americans. Once elected, the hope was that Trump would be normalised by the office. Instead he's now governing the way many feared he would – as a true populist.

Princeton politics professor Jan-Werner Muller has offered a clear definition of what populism actually means. His central thesis is that populism is by its nature anti-democratic and anti-pluralist. The populist claims that he and he alone represents the homogenous and always admirable 'real people' in their fight against corrupt elites.

In Trump's convention speech, he even used the phrase 'I alone can fix it'. Any opposition from other politicians or the press is therefore illegitimate, because it is by definition undermining the will of 'the people'. In contrast, true democracies are pluralist and founded on an ongoing debate between contrasting viewpoints. Policy choices are settled at the ballot box, but then relitigated at the next election. Disagreements get heated and personal, but they're legitimised by a system that protects dissenting views and within which there is a reasonable expectation of rotation of power.

On this definition, although Bernie Sanders was clearly anti-elitist and anti-establishment, he wasn't a true populist, in that he wasn't looking to subvert the democratic

process. Trump, on the other hand, has wasted no time in resorting to 'enemy of the people' rhetoric to try and marginalise the mainstream press. He even had one of his top aides Stephen Miller claim that 'the President's power is not to be questioned'. Quite a contrast to President Teddy Roosevelt who said that 'to announce that there must be no criticism of the President is not only unpatriotic and servile, but morally treasonable to the American public'.

By criticising the judiciary and targeting the administrative state for dismantling, Trump is also rejecting any bureaucratic or procedural barrier to implementing his change mandate. To burnish his populist credentials he's also brazenly claimed a majority mandate, tweeting in November that he had 'won the popular vote if you deduct the millions of people who voted illegally'. When challenged on these lies, his response is simply to invoke popular support, not facts: 'Let me just tell you what's important, it's that millions of people agree with me'. That is how populist power subverts truth.

In Britain, Brexit supporters also drew on all three sources of fear and anger, and then cloaked the result in populist rhetoric, with Nigel Farage calling it 'a victory for real people'. As Kenneth Roy has pointed out on these pages, we now have a situation where a relatively small minority of the British population has appropriated a mandate that can't be challenged by the courts, the press, or politicians, because doing so would constitute a subversion of the popular will.

In continental Europe, the most worrying example of rising populism is Hungary, a country that has been sliding towards a one-party state since 2010. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán now refuses to debate other politicians based on the logic that 'the alternatives in front of us are obvious. We all know what needs to be done'. He has also crafted an overtly racist constitution that talks about 'proper Christian Hungarians', yet felt no obligation to put that constitution to a referendum, because he alone embodies national sentiment.

Elections are still held in Hungary, but the apparatus of democracy has been compromised, with the cowed media adopting an obsequious tone and barely concealed graft buying off those who might have the power to resist. Unfortunately, Hungary is not an isolated case. A similar trend is emerging in Poland, where the Law and Justice Party has been targeting the judiciary as 'enemies of the people' and talking about opposition politicians having 'treason in their genes'.

It's important to clarify that populists are not the same as authoritarians, who dispense completely with the trappings of democracy like a constitution and elections. Instead, populists hijack and corrupt the machinery of democracy to suppress dissent. Often they don't even try to hide it. Trump's embrace of alternative facts, his brass neck regarding his tax returns, and his obvious conflicts of interest are tolerated by his supporters because he 'one of us' working against 'them'. Ultimately, the risk is that this type of democratic erosion gradually leads to the real authoritarianism we see in Putin's Russia and increasingly Erdogan's Turkey. Countries where populist rhetoric is combined with a concentration of all political, economic and cultural power, and the violent suppression of any opposition.

So what's to be done? The upside of Trump and Brexit may be that they force the traditional political establishments to think hard about why broad swathes of the population think politics is broken and, as a consequence, politicians might stop treating the disaffected as a bunch of angry nutters to be scolded and patronised.

One implication is that all three sources of anger need to be taken seriously. Income inequality is at historic highs and social mobility is declining in almost all developed countries, so we need to figure out whether the post-war economic consensus around things like free trade should in fact continue, and whether we need to start thinking seriously about redistributive mechanisms like a guaranteed minimum income for all citizens. It also means grappling with tough social issues like what it actually means to be British, American, Hungarian or even Scottish. Even left-wing utopians don't believe that the entire global population should be a single political entity, so lines do need to be drawn.

The hard question is whether those lines should have an ethnic or cultural dimension and touch on things like Islamic dress code or bilingual teaching in schools. Unless we are going to just dismiss the fears and anxieties that have characterised the last 18 months, ultimately many countries in the West are going to need to rethink their social and economic contracts in a way that can attract true majority support again.

Another clear lesson from the recent political earthquakes is that the 'basket of deplorables' demonisation doesn't work. Instead, it just stokes the anger and reinforces the sense that political elites are out of touch. Legitimate leaders like Trump with populist tendencies need to be replaced through traditional means before the system decays to the point where that becomes impossible. Resisting populism means hard work, inclusive representation, and a respect for ideas, even those ideas you find offensive and wrong. It also means being vigilant about protecting the machinery of democracy, such as voting rights, press freedom and judicial review.

It may seem alarmist to conjure the ghost of a political Christmas future in which the US, France and the UK look like Hungary or even Russia, but the signs are worrying. Recent research published in the *Journal of Democracy* showed that in America support for the statement that it would be good or very good for 'the Army to rule' rose from one-in-16 in 1995 to one-in-six in 2014. The uncomfortable truth is that true democracies around the world appear to be on a slippery slope. We may be in danger of losing our footing.

America: Remembrance of lost times part 1

R D Kernohan

2017

The press conferences in Kennedy's Camelot were not at all like Trump's. He held court and the journalists were courtiers who knew their place. My place, on a sort of State Department travelling fellowship, was at the back, with a good enough view to note that the President seemed more florid of face and stockier in build than he seemed on TV. But in an age when deference was still fashionable, even in the Great Democracy, those several rows in front also knew their rank in a media hierarchy.

The main body deferred quietly to a chosen few among them, and all deferred gladly to the President. We all laughed dutifully, I think, when he got the cue for a well-prepared joke which linked the pressures of the presidency to the Camel cigarette advertising aimed at those who were 'smoking more but enjoying it less'. It was 18 months before the US Surgeon-General's report that ended the illusions of tobacco advertising, a little less before the dreams of Camelot died at Dallas. But in that early summer of 1962, Kennedy, with the power of presidency and personality, was running the show and showing off. The most interesting political point I noted came when he told a questioner with a Texan drawl that he would be happy to keep Vice-President Johnson on the ticket for 1964.

It's difficult now, even in long retrospect, to decide how much that personal ascendancy owed to political affinity (for most east coast media people were Democrats even then) or power of personality, or to that respect for the office of President which was withdrawn under Nixon, never fully restored by the undistinguished decency of Jimmy Carter and, well before Trump's time, conspicuously absent in the lecherous reign of Bill Clinton. It was probably that respect which restrained media speculation about Kennedy's health problems, as well as his amorous enthusiasms, just as effectively as traditional deference maintained silence about aspects of Roosevelt's marriage and concealed the extent of his physical frailty. Kennedy seemed to be basking in the glowing prospect of a certain two-term presidency, still able to carry most of the south, with suggestions already that the office might stay in the family.

Things seemed more complicated once I set out into the hinterland of Camelot, going coast-to-coast and back, but Kennedy had an acceptance greater than his hair's-breadth victory in 1960 suggested. When I visited newspapers and university departments of politics or journalism – the main stopping-places on my travels – even people who hadn't been Kennedy enthusiasts seemed to have come round to him. When they talked about the Republicans, their main and usually hostile interest was in the phenomenon of Barry Goldwater, an able right-wing senator (eventually routed by Lyndon Johnson in 1964) whom the liberals professed to find as terrifying as Trump seems today to their

grandchildren, though he had two assets the present tenant of the White House lacks: practical experience of legislation and political compromise along with a coherent political philosophy. Only in upstate Indiana, in the high-tech university at Purdue, did I come across anyone who fancied Nixon for a comeback.

Happily my notes aren't all about politics. In Chicago, Billy Graham was leading a crusade and I had a chance to hear him in his prime and almost on his home ground, for the lakeside city was full of southern immigrants. His style there seemed not only even more vigorous than elsewhere but a very individual American eloquence blending the sonorous and the colloquial. I encountered a more sedate religiosity in Denver when my host told me that 'there's some sort of Presbyterian convention in the auditorium'. It was the general assembly of the northern Presbyterians, not yet reunited with the south and not yet redivided by new arguments over scripture and morals. I sent off a piece to the *Glasgow Herald* gushing with naïve ecumenical enthusiasm and some hints (never taken) that the Kirk might be interested in hustings and vigorously contested elections.

I was also on holy ground at Salt Lake City where a journalism professor at the university up the hill got a lecture out of me and then shared a couple of Cokes. He said he was a liberal Mormon. Later, I stood a whisky in my hotel room to another helpful and presumably ultra-liberal Mormon. But the Saints' press officer, who may have been a conservative Mormon, drove me nearly 50 miles in an opaque mountain downpour to Brigham Young University so that I could hear Eugene Ormandy conduct the Mormon Tabernacle Choir for Brahms's *German Requiem*. He also got me a friendly chat with the Mormons' supreme pontiff, a Caithness-descended McKay who had done a youthful missionary stint in Scotland. Strange theology. Fine people. Good Christians after their fashion. So I concluded then, and still believe.

But there was one point on which the Mormons, so confident in their faith, seemed uneasy. Their black members were deemed ineligible for the priesthood and were restricted in other privileges. The answer I got when questioning this was that 'we change as God's will is made known'. The process was clearly beginning but not ratified as a revelation until 1978.

Most of America could not be as patient or relaxed in these matters as Salt Lake City. Kennedy's Presidency may now seem to have been a lull between the two most turbulent phases of the civil rights campaigns, but at the time the continuing process of legal and social desegregation seemed to create a mixture of moods: a sense of incomplete achievement, nervousness, reluctance acceptance, resentment, uncertainty and hesitant adjustment.

The oddest uncertainty I encountered was at the Biltmore Hotel, then one of the grandest edifices in Atlanta but nowadays nestling modestly (and no longer as a hotel) beside the soaring symbols of a much-changed south. Also there were some other State Department guests, mainly from poor francophone countries in Africa. They ventured down into the hotel's nightclub (with dance floor) and were refused admission. Then

someone realised that they were not American black people and rushed to invite them back. I met them again later at a meeting downtown with student activists led by Robert Moses, soon to be a major civil rights campaigner, and watched them quietly slipping the hosts a few dollar bills from their meagre stock.

But it was the hesitancy that was most apparent on a long bus journey through the deep south from Atlanta to New Orleans. This was long after the end of segregation on interstate travel, six years after the Montgomery local bus boycott, and anyone could sit anywhere. It seemed that most black people still clustered towards the back, most white people further forward. But when we stopped, and headed for the lunch counters via the 'restrooms', we still split clearly into our two tribes, even though above the doors were empty panels with traces of recently removed segregating lettering.

The USA in the 1960s, like southern Africa, imposed a sense of tribal identity even on those who would rather not have asserted it. Maybe it still does today. I say tribal and not racial because my notes reflect some bafflement over American attitudes to 'colour' and some odd personal experiences. In a Washington suburban school, I was asked if I was a Turk and if my moosetash – I spell as pronounced – was some kind of national symbol. Later, I had a helpful briefing from a leading light in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People – so light in fact that I assumed at first that he was a white man, though someone later told me that I 'should have looked at his fingernails', as if that mattered.

Then in a black restaurant near the black Atlanta University I became a case of mistaken identity, much to the mirth of my hosts. The word was going round that their pale guest must be Adam Clayton Powell, a congressman many shades lighter than most of his Harlem constituents, a pioneer of civil rights campaigning who was later outpaced by younger leaders. The error seems not entirely unreasonable if one Googles for pictures of Powell and compares them with pictures with which the editor of the *Scottish Review* sometimes prefaces my contributions.

All of this was a very long time ago and the America I have often visited since has changed in many ways, often (though not always) for the better. I only wish that two of the apparently constant factors had proved inconstant. One is that tribal consciousness linked to various strange and sometimes absurd concepts, first of 'race' and now evident in the further-fetched identifications of 'racism'. Another is the venomous intensity that can poison the politics of a country where the major parties and strands of opinion have usually reflected more consensus than those of continental Europe or even Britain. Goldwater got a raw deal from the media and liberal establishment. More recently, Trump got his retaliation in first, as they say in rugby brawls, yet both he and his enemies now make the 1960s seem almost an era of good feeling in comparison.

But after browsing through my recently rediscovered notebooks from this olden time (dumped in a cupboard since a flitting that now seems almost as long ago) I began to realise what wasn't mentioned. Some of the omissions simply reflect changes in language. I never

heard the term 'African American' and my notes reflect widespread and interchangeable use of 'black' and 'Negro'. But it's evident I hadn't come across problems and controversies which were soon to convulse America. They had gone unmentioned in hours of conversations with journalists, politicians, local hosts, liberal academics and even arch-conservatives who thought most Republicans were dangerous liberals.

There's no mention of Vietnam. I must have read items about it in the few US newspapers that carried much foreign news but have no memory of them or any note of the subject coming up, though Kennedy had already sent hundreds of specialist troops as 'advisers'. It didn't even come up when, after minute checks on my ID, I met the Los Angeles leader of the John Birch Society, the once-feared right-wing pressure group whose name is sometimes wrongly attributed to 'the first American casualty of the Vietnam war'. (Birch was a Baptist missionary enrolled as a US officer but killed by Chinese communists.)

Nor did I hear any discussion of social controversies, soon to be argued with an urgency and ferocity which also took America by surprise and which still perplex and divide its people. I recall no mention of homosexuality, far less 'same-sex marriage', and no encounter with it in print except in a sub-plot of Allen Drury's political novel *Advise and Consent* with which (along with bundles of civil war centenary paperback history) I eased the tedium of long and not always direct flights. And, though I met many women involved in public life and civil society, I recall nothing that I could call 'feminism' – and no sign of abortion as a great political and legal issue. How quickly things changed, and how old-fashioned Kennedy's Camelot seems in retrospect.

There are other significant omissions in my notebooks. No-one was worked up about immigration. I heard no Spanish spoken, even in California, and no mention of Hispanics. I'm not even sure that at the time I knew the term, which seems to have got official status about 1970. I may possibly have heard in passing of 'Latinos' and knew about (without knowingly meeting) Mexicans and Puerto Ricans in the USA. I'd also been told to expect a lot of anti-Castro Cubans if I ever got to Miami, which I didn't.

Probably far more Hispanics than I or my hosts realised were already working among the scullions and grooms of Camelot but in demographic matters, as well as Vietnamese and social ones, America would soon be taken by surprise. I think the knights and ladies of its round tables knew that they still had great troubles ahead in integrating white America's old black and near-white servitors. They didn't know what else was coming and we shall never know what Camelot's king would have made of it if he had won his two terms and perhaps established a dynasty.

Czechoslovakia: Remembrance of lost times part 2

R D Kernohan

2017

The Czechoslovakia I toured in 1963 had been rather reluctantly de-Stalinised. I missed by a few months the destruction of the world's largest Stalin statue, which had been allowed to brood over the Vltava and dominate Prague for six years after Khrushchev had denounced the 'cult of personality'.

To all outward appearance communism was not merely dominant but permanent in a country which had declared itself no mere people's democracy but a socialist republic on the same ideological plane as its beloved Soviet ally and mentor. Its rulers, and the new elite that had emerged around them, appeared supremely confident, while on our side of the barriers, physical and intellectual, almost all our experts had decided that improvement must come from within the system. That was the guidance from the British Ambassador, Cecil Parrott, later the definitive translator of the bawdy and irreverent Czech classic, *The Good Soldier Švejk*, conveyed over tea in the embassy garden of the Thun Palace, amid the baroque splendours of Habsburg Prague.

These were the moods in which the British and Czechoslovak foreign offices had ventured into an exchange of journalistic delegations. I was one of our touring quartet, of whom the doyen was *The Economist's* foreign editor John Midgley, and presumably there because someone had realised that there was more to British journalism than Fleet Street, and more to Britain than England – and because the leading Scottish editors couldn't spare the time. The others were from Beaverbrook's *Daily Express* and Labour's *Daily Herald*.

When I came back, I wrote some decent pieces about quite 'good living under a bad system' and tried to convey the contrast between the glories of Prague or Kutná Hora and the shabbiness of communism, as well as the incongruity of the narrow dogmatism of Marxism-Leninism imposed on a people with significant democratic, liberal, artistic and religious national traditions.

But as I read my rediscovered diary of the trip now, I gain a new perspective. We did not dispute the merits of the Škoda works or Pilsen beer, or the horror of the Nazi atrocity site at Lidice, and kept an open mind about the organised welcome on a showpiece collective farm. We saw through a lot of what we were shown and were rightly sceptical about much that we were told. We recognised blatant distortions of history and sadly noted the way the regime still stoked up the anti-German feeling which is part of Czech history and was justifiably inflamed by the agony of 1938-45.

What was more remarkable was what we were able to see and hear, sometimes from our guides and minders themselves, sometimes in encounters which they may have monitored but did not prevent, much that went far beyond our agenda. They found it impossible (or

inexpedient) to fit in my wish to meet Protestant church leaders in this land of the martyred Jan Hus but they let me wander off in Brno to drop in on a Catholic service full of Saturday afternoon shoppers. Had we realised it, we were privy to the first stirring of what became the 'Prague Spring' of 1968, and reasserted itself more emphatically in the velvet revolution of 1989.

On the formal parts of the agenda our minders, young Foreign Office officials of impeccable communist credentials, stuck to the party line and showed predictable reflexes. They even betrayed a flurry of needless anxiety at a bookstall where I asked in phrasebook language for a Czech-English dictionary. Did one of these bourgeois journalists complicate their job by speaking Czech? They were quickly reassured. And at the Czech foreign ministry – where the surly hard-line minister, Václav David, told us he was learning English by reading the *Daily Worker* – one of our escorts grumbled about the 'morbid Cold War interest' of the Western visitors who asked to be shown the window from which Jan Masaryk fell to his death after the communist coup in 1948. (Even now, after years of free inquiry, Czechs themselves aren't sure if he jumped or was pushed.)

But in less formal matters we encountered, five years before the phrase became fashionable, 'socialism with a human face'. We were promised a night at the opera in the national theatre, the great temple of Czech national pride. We had hopes of *The Bartered Bride* or some Mozart but got Eugen Suchoň's sonorous *Svatopluk* in Slovak, described as a 'monumental dramatic fresco' set in the ninth-century Great Moravian empire. At the second interval, a concordat was concluded between the clique of reactionary journalists and the escorting vanguard of progressive humanity. We adjourned round the corner to Prague's most famous tavern, *U Flecků*, where the customers were singing as heartily but more tunefully. Thus, on one evening, we saw two of Prague's greatest institutions.

On more important matters, but in private, these proletarian diplomats – selected as politically sound for university and then career advancement – were thinking for themselves and even cautiously speaking their minds. Caution and privacy combined when our head minder came for drinks to my hotel room, for he turned on the radio to beat the bugging. They had made a lot of mistakes, he said, agreed that they had given bourgeois journalists and politicians a rough time but was proud they had only had three years of Stalinism. Now their role was to find a new road, suitable for the first developed country to adopt communism, for like many Czechs he implied that Russians had been forward in revolution but were backward in everything else: 'What the common man here really wants is the Western standard of living with the Russian alliance'. Even that seemed to reflect fear of Germany more than love for their Slav cousins.

Our minders also had the courage and confidence to set up a lunch for us at the writers' club. I have tried with some difficulty to trace how life worked out later for our hosts, but at least two of them came westwards in 1968, the novelist Arnošt Ludwig and a translator named in my notes with Czech phonetic spelling. But this *Jiří Tajner* must have been George Theiner, British-educated during wartime exile, cast out of journalism into the

Silesian mines after 1948, recalled as a masterly translator, and eventually well-known in Britain for his campaigning against censorship. He was my neighbour at lunch and I asked a question other Czechs had gently evaded: had there been any moderation of the virulently derogatory attitude to Czechoslovakia's founding father and first President, Thomas Masaryk? 'Do you mean the official line or the view of the people?' he replied. 'For the view of the man in the street never changed.'

There could also be a surprising freedom of speech from people we encountered casually on our travels. I don't count the chap in the Bratislava hotel who roared out denunciation of the system, for as soon as he started the barman made warning signals and left me wondering if this was some low-level agent provocateur on piece-work. But there was the hotel receptionist on Wenceslas Square who checked me out with happy memories of wartime service in the RAF. That in 1963 was as political a statement as the notice behind him which proclaimed the allegiance of hotel staff to the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, and possibly a more sincere one.

There was also the glass-worker at Karlovy Vary (Karlsbad) summoned to show us that a few 'anti-fascist' Germans had been allowed to stay on in the former Sudetenland but who insisted that he was no communist. There were others who confined themselves to caustic comment about the inefficiency of an ultra-regulated economy or smiled at the way Russian visitors, baffled or exhilarated, thought that they had come to the different civilisation 'in the West'. Many Czechs were also quite plain about their lack of enthusiasm for the supposed reconciliation with the Ulbricht East German regime, for they regarded the federal republic as the 'real Germany' with whom they had to live.

I perhaps shouldn't count either the only person who was frank about the problem which was to open up once the velvet revolution had done its work, and which was to turn Czechoslovakia into two countries, for he was an East German engineer working on some contract. After giving me an unfavourable character sketch of his own political masters, he assured me that Czechs and Slovaks were 'always at each other like cats and dogs'. But no Czech or Slovak we met casually even hinted at these tensions. The Slovak writers lined up for us played down their local nationalism, and there was no mention of it when we had some informal briefing at the British Embassy.

Nor did it worry our escorts, though part of their agenda was to emphasise the industrial development and cultural vigour of Slovakia. The Slovak writers seemed a dull lot compared to the Czech ones, but we were promised a frank discussion with a leading politician who turned out to be, I think, the newly appointed first secretary of the party in Slovakia. He was friendly, seemed slightly nervous, and waffled a bit in reply to questions about buying British goods. If I made a note of his name at the time I lost it, but not the memory of that sharp-featured thin face – unmistakable when I saw it many times again in coverage of the 1968 crisis and Russian invasion. In 1963, no one could have guessed what travails awaited Alexander Dubček.

The two constituent nations of Czechoslovakia seemed sufficiently at ease then for me to

risk a joke when it was my turn to make a short speech of thanks – it was at that writers' club in Prague. 'We Scots,' I said, 'are England's Slovaks'.

It went down well, but more than half a century later I hope I was wrong. For the Czechs found in Václav Havel (who, in 1963, had just managed to get his first play performed) a President with some of the qualities of Tomáš Masaryk and the Slovaks fell for opportunists, plausible or pugnacious, who had dubious political antecedents but shamelessly played the nationalist card. They got their independence, without even risking a referendum, because the Czechs didn't much mind.

They had tholed enough of the culture of grievance which was cultivated in Bratislava even after the creation of a federal republic, with every frustration and disappointment blamed on Prague. They decided instead to enjoy treating the Slovaks as sensitively independent but poor and prickly relations. They seem to get on tolerably well and they remain far closer to each other than to the Teutons, Poles and Magyars who surround them. They understand each other but claim to speak different tongues, though outsiders may reasonably treat these as variations on a common language.

I'm happy to have been back several times to see a very different political landscape from 1963 and wish them both well. But I still wonder if they would not have been better together.

Germany: Remembrance of lost times part 3

R D Kernohan

2017

Many of us were taught in troubled times to revere him as a great reformer, even if he was a German. Calvin thought he could be a pain but should be forgiven and richly honoured for taking his stand and affirming the truth. Spanish and Italian mothers used to frighten their children with his name but modern Roman Catholic theologians lament that he was allowed to go astray and they concede that he was maybe often right.

But to Germans, Martin Luther is two other things: a national hero and an excuse for a national celebration every few decades. There are birth and death centenaries and also dramatic events in his life to be commemorated, not only with innumerable academic or theological colloquies and strong doses of highbrow media coverage but with some clinking of glasses. The Protestants are understandably involved, the lapsed Protestants find something to cling to. The Catholics are caught between deploring and respecting him, and even the most dogmatic secularists recognise that he shaped both European history and the German language.

This year's festivities mark the 95 challenging theses which were attached to church doors in Wittenberg in 1517 and which, with some over-simplification, can be deemed the overture to the Reformation. I'm probably too old to go, and I don't think the BBC would pay my expenses as they did for the last great Luther festival in 1983, the 500th anniversary of his birth.

The licence-payers had then to pay twice over, for my modest documentary for Radio 3 became entangled in the frustrations of a divided Germany, with Luther's home ground around Eisleben, Erfurt and Wittenberg in the grip of a communist East German regime obsessed with 'security' and bureaucracy as well as Marxist ideology.

Covering the main West German festival in Worms, where Luther took his famous stand for 'conscience captive to the word of God', was no problem. All the professors from Flensburg to Freiburg seemed to have gathered to discuss whether Luther was ahead of his time, or a late medieval man, or even (I find the baffling phrase in my notes) 'the last real Catholic'. There were sonorous eulogies in an auditorium, including those from a team of Roman Catholic prelates who later sat in pious stolidity when the rest of us fanned out to the points in the main Protestant church where the Lord's Supper was being shared. It all yielded good, easily-handled material, especially when I later met a priest who had joined in the communion.

But we also wanted to get the view from East Germany. The obvious plan was that my producer and I should get in our hired car, heed an earlier police warning about driving too slowly on the autobahn, take in a great exhibition of Lutheriana in the Nuremberg national

museum, head for a border check-point, and tap the great store of Luther scholarship reputedly accumulated in Leipzig. Fond hopes. The visas hadn't come through.

When, three weeks later, we were told we could collect them in East Berlin it meant not only a new trip but a switch from the balmy Rhineland autumn to the early onset of a mid-European winter. There was slush as we submitted to the search-rituals at Checkpoint Charlie on the way to our compulsory five-star hotel by the Spree. Then the hard frost set in and it turned out the visas (needed to cross the city border into the old Soviet zone) were not quite ready. Maybe it was just slow-motion bureaucracy, maybe dislike of the BBC, maybe a minor symptom of the policy which had bullied a reluctant East German church into splitting with the West.

The hotel offered almost every comfort except Western newspapers, but payable only in foreign currency and thus barred to local people. Outside, East Berlin was bleak, though it yielded a good interview with a woman church leader who confessed it had taken her quite a long time to learn to love Luther and was all for modern Bible translations. For a few days I made the best of the galleries and museums, including one on the Unter den Linden where a Luther exhibition was thriving while the neighbouring galleries of Marxist history were deserted.

I also ventured on some chilly wandering round the drab city and was rewarded with a practical assurance that an old Prussian love of order survived under communism. As I stood awaiting a city S-Bahn train, two middle-aged ladies approached me. Did I know that my overcoat was not buttoned properly – I think *falsch geknöpft* was the expression – with the top button in the second-top buttonhole? I thanked them, adjusted my dress, and felt assured that even if our trip to Leipzig was to be heavily supervised by a 'liaison officer', it would be well ordered.

It wasn't. Our appointed minder, who eventually produced the visas, was not very orderly and his powers of liaison were limited by lack of any really serviceable language other than German and his school Russian. However he had come from his latest liaison minding the Scottish broadcasters covering a football international at Halle (we lost 2-1, 16 November 1983) and over lunch was anxious to explore the ideological implications of a rivalry his previous clients had mentioned between teams called Rangers and Celtic.

The next day he was to escort and guide us on our drive to Leipzig but didn't turn up. When we phoned his ministry, we learned he had taken the train instead, leaving a message at our hotel which never reached us. We were to catch up with him at Karl Marx University. We set off in pursuit, on a frosty autobahn and then over slippery tram lines, assured that we couldn't miss the university (since renamed) thanks to its vast tower block overshadowing the old city.

But at least our interviews with the university's foremost authorities on Luther had been confirmed. They were to introduce us to the complexities as well as the absurdities of East Germany, for one professor was a Frankfurt-born Marxist and party member, converted as a Russian prisoner-of-war, and the other a Lutheran minister. Both lived modestly, one in

what resembled a better-class council house, the other in Leipzig's equivalent of a Glasgow tenement with a tiled 'wally close'.

Max Steinmetz, a member of the East German state Luther commemoration committee, was presumably no believer but seemed an admirer of Luther and thought his influence still 'under the skin' of the Germans in the territories that became the DDR. The evolution of his own scholarly views seemed in parallel with the much cruder course of official East German attitudes to Luther, for he was also an authority on Thomas Müntzer, the more radical reformer who took the opposite side in the bloody peasant revolts of the 1520s. In the early DDR years, Müntzer was glorified and Luther denigrated. By 1983, the regime found it expedient to claim Luther as a local boy made good, and its propaganda followed where even Marxist scholars like Steinmetz led.

The enthusiasm of Helmar Junghans for Luther was more predictable – more predictable than the way the regime had allowed his fellow-scholars to confer the title of professor on him, even if he was to wait till communism collapsed to get full status and powers. He came across as conservative in a non-political way, both in his scholarship and devotion to Luther's Bible translation, which has the same standing and faces the same challenges as the authorised version in English. He seemed to accept St Paul's assurance that all things work together for good to them who love God. In that mood, he found the DDR's new enthusiasm for Luther both welcome and 'astounding'.

But one thing puzzled me about Junghans. I knew he had been allowed out (perhaps without his family) to lecture in the United States at Yale and elsewhere, and I've since learned that he had already an honorary doctorate from a university in Indiana. But he professed to have no English and the conversation as well as the interview had to be in German, which perhaps meant that his answers made more sense than some of my questions. Only afterwards was the puzzle's solution clear to me. Our almost monoglot minder had to know what was going on and being said. Maybe his report languishes somewhere in the files of the Stasi.

Before leaving, I encountered another of East Germany's many little complexities. The flat was solid, roomy and comfortable, but I was not, for in our belated pursuit of our minder I had not only missed lunch but had no suitable pause to go to the lavatory. I politely asked for directions and the professor got one of his children to fetch me the key. The facilities were on the stairway half-landing between floors, as in many of the Glasgow tenements of my youth – though not in west-end closes where professors lived. My guess is that Leipzig housing under 'socialism' had been municipalised and struggled hopelessly with maintenance costs, never mind improvements.

The installation of indoor professorial bathrooms will have been one of the many changes completed in Germany between the 1983 Luther commemoration and the 2017 one. Others are more important.

The most obvious change is that there is one Germany, even if the 40 years of division have left their mark. If 200,000 people gather (as is expected) for one of the celebrations on

the meadows between Wittenberg and the Elbe, the majority will be from the old west. But there will not be quite as many from the east as might have been expected after the 1989 church-centred demonstrations in Leipzig, under the shadow of that university tower-block, which fatally weakened the communist grip. Then the church was the one institution not controlled by the state and many East Germans who had ceased to adhere to it found themselves again associated with it.

But cooperation and good will were not enough either to undo the organised secularisation of the communists (and their Nazi predecessors) or reverse the drift from faith and practice evident across Western Europe. And in the rest of Germany, even though it accepted a daughter of an East German manse as Chancellor, that trend has been emphasised, perhaps exaggerated, by the massive opt-out of nominal Christians who had little involvement beyond paying church tax.

They will probably still find it easy to treat Luther as the national Titan, to be (according to whichever church they have lapsed from) admired or grudgingly respected. It will be more difficult for the national Luther celebrations to adjust to other changes in German society, evident even before the pastor's daughter opened the doors to large numbers of immigrants, many of them Syrian refugees and many from somewhere else.

Luther's truest admirers have always been embarrassed by some of what he wrote about Jews, though his anti-Semitism was theological and not racial, seeking conversion and not destruction. He also had a lot to say about Islam and the Turkish jihadism of his day which must be politically incorrect, but not necessarily unpopular, in contemporary Germany.

There may also be grumbles from some of the feminists who think Luther too patriarchal. But even they will have a consolation. They can also celebrate Katharina von Bora, the nun who became his wife, bore his children and his idiosyncrasies, managed his practical affairs, and shared his domestic happiness.

A lesson in world peace on the A9

Lucy Lyon

2018

Lucy Lyon, a diplomat's wife, has lived with the Syrian conflict ever since she and her husband moved to Jordan in 2013. Her children have grown used to the horror stories. Last month, back in Scotland, she brought two of them together with the children of a family who had escaped from Homs. What happened taught her a lesson about the resilience of the young and the stories that link them together.

Five years ago, I was standing in an apartment in Amman, the Jordanian capital, looking at my three-year-old son, stark naked but for a woolly hat, carrying a small orange suitcase. 'Where are you going?' I asked. 'I'm off to see the Syrian peoples,' he explained. Inside the case were a few pats of butter, some cans of tonic, and a packet of date rolls. I explained gently that now might not be quite the time for a one-child mercy mission to war-torn Damascus.

That boy is now eight, and we're just back from Jordan and Jerusalem – where we lived for my husband's most recent postings with the Foreign Office – and we're taking a three month sabbatical in Perthshire, where I was raised. We felt far removed from the Syrian conflict but anxious to keep in touch. As a diplomatic family, being rootless is something we've got used to; but completely powerless felt like a very new and uncomfortable thing.

Then a chink of light emerged in our diaries as we met up with a Syrian family in Perth, who fled Homs fearing for their lives after the war began. We had met them thanks to a local organisation, Pitlochry Refugee Support, and they kept encouraging us to bring our children (Laurie, eight, Hamish, six, and Petra, two) to their house one evening. Worried our boys would run riot in their small front room, we suggested the cinema. Abdulhai and Ruhiya were happy with my suggestion to take them to Perth Playhouse followed by a pizza.

Noura, 13, and Aya, 10, jumped into the car with our sons Laurie and Hamish, and the banter began there. 'Did you know,' asked Aya in perfect English with a slight Scots lilt, 'that a Megalodon shark could crush a colossal squid with its teeth?'

'We know about Megaladons!' our boys shouted. 'We watched all about them on YouTube.' And then the conversation drifted in an undersea detour to a creature called a Kraken ('How do you spell Kraken?' they all conferred and came up with some more YouTube films which explained another legend of the deep). Within five minutes, I realised the children had much more to talk about with each other than they did with me. So I stuck with my role as driver, and listened intently to their animated chat.

'So how did you escape Syria?' Hamish asked the girls. 'Did you have to run away from bombs and shooting?' asked Laurie. The girls couldn't remember exact details, but

explained their dad had been imprisoned by the Syrian Government for a year prior to their escape in 2012 and they had fled Homs after his release to Damascus. 'Do you mean Damascus Gate?' suggested Hamish, referring to one of the gates into Jerusalem's Old City which was a 10-minute walk from our previous house. 'No, Damascus, Damascus. The capital of Syria,' said Noura. 'Where's Damascus Gate anyways?'

We were the entire audience in the cinema and the children concentrated intently throughout *Coco*: an animated film set in Mexico, the theme of which touched on remembering the dead as a way of preserving them; I was perhaps the only one to notice the irony.

'I don't really like music but I love Spanish-style music, it makes me feel happy inside,' said Noura. 'Me too,' said Hamish, 'and I also love Chihuahuas'.

All juice bottles and popcorn boxes empty, they skipped out into the dark street. I wondered why we'd bothered with the cinema at all, as they seemed perfectly content with leaping over the enormous puddles we encountered everywhere on our way back to the car.

I'd promised Aya and Noura's father that we'd go to Al Racheed restaurant, as it was halal. But by the time we'd started choosing pizza toppings with one Mohammad from Sudan who was part of a group of Sudanese men running the restaurant, and another Mohammad (the girls' brother) from Syria, the chat was in full flow. The two Mohammads were happy to listen to the boys' and my elementary Arabic and reassured Noura that the pepperoni was certainly not from a pig as otherwise it would not have been anywhere near Al Racheed's counter.

The boys tucked into a large margarita pizza with pepperoni, the girls chose jalapeno topping – each extolling the merits of their own choices. And our boys looked suitably impressed that the girls could nibble on a jalapeno without wincing. And Syrian Mohammad offered us all our food for free.

As they were eating, Laurie noticed an engineer's van had parked outside, and was busy pointing at the man in the grimy orange overalls who had just entered the shop. 'Look, it says, *Engineering Company* on the van. He must be an engineer. And I want to be one of those.'

'I want to be an engineer too!' said Noura. Within a couple of seconds they were chatting with Craig, the engineer in the grubby overalls.

'A mechanical engineer. Wow! That would be so cool.'

'Don't do it,' said Craig, who looked tired and cold and ready for a fish supper. 'Stay at school.'

But they continued unperturbed. Aya asked: 'Is there something like you shouldn't mix the red with the blue cable?'

'That's right – never mix the blue with the red,' said Craig, 'red is the live, blue is the neutral. Red can go with brown...'. The children were transfixed and Craig looked pleased.

As we dropped the girls back home later, all four children pleaded to have more time together. I was the kill-joy as I trundled the boys back up the A9 to try and put them in bed before 8.30pm with the usual explanation of school the next day.

'That was really, really fun,' they said, as they kissed us goodnight – a whiff of halal pepperoni still noticeable, even under the toothpaste.

I still feel powerless and very far from being in a position to help the situation in Syria. But there are handfults of Syrians and refugees from other countries spread around the UK, and our children are ready to welcome theirs if we'll give them the chance.

What happened to male intimacy?

Rachel Sharp

2018

When I landed in Senegal, I took six taxis, one bus and a boat across the Gambia River before finally arriving in a little village in Ziguinchor to the south-west of the country. On the way there, one of the taxis I found myself in was stopped for carrying illegal goods. Nothing too scandalous, just some wiring that the driver required a permit to transport, but the discovery resulted in an hour-long delay in the back end of nowhere. As I sat cross-legged under a lonely tree on the side of the road, my eyes followed our taxi-driver and the policeman who pulled him over walking back and forth hand in hand.

That's right. Hand in hand. In a country where homosexuality is punishable by up to five years imprisonment, a man of the law and a man of the road were strolling down the highway holding hands like it was nobody's business.

The irony wasn't lost on me, but in Arab culture it's not uncommon to see heterosexual men holding hands. In Muslim-majority countries like Senegal, men hold hands to express their fraternity because gestures like this don't have the same homoerotic connotations as they do here. That's partly because the social illegitimacy of homosexuality is so strong that no-one would think to ascribe homosexual intent to any public act, and partly because in conservative Senegalese culture the sexes are still segregated in many respects, so men channel their cravings for affection and physical validation through each other.

Having been raised in a culture where physical intimacy is reserved for people with whom we are sexually or amorously involved, the sight of the taxi-driver and his new policeman friend was somewhat incongruous. But look at vintage photographs of ordinary men from the UK and the United States in the 19th and 20th centuries and you can see the same scenes of male intimacy: men embracing, sitting on one another's laps, resting their hands on one another's knees. It's actually quite nice to see them unabashedly express their affection without the fear of, God forbid, mistakenly being labelled 'gay'.

Evidence of this kind of casual intimacy dwindled around the 1950s and 60s, unsurprisingly about the same time as public discourses surrounding homosexuality crescendoed with the Sexual Offences Act of 1967. Once people started acknowledging the existence and rights of homophiles, it seems that men became more and more self-conscious about their behaviour and began creating distance between each other.

Thus was the birth of the modern unsentimental, hyper-masculine male. Hand-holding metamorphosed into a firm handshake; sitting on one another's laps was exchanged for a stiff pat on the back; and previously acceptable displays of affection became isolated to codified venues like the locker room. Don't get me wrong, I'm not reaching for the world's tiniest violin just yet. In many parts of the world, it is still far easier to be a man than a

woman, and Western, heteronormative white males in particular, arguably have it the easiest of any demographic, but I can't help feel a little sad for them.

Senegalese men share a beautiful sense of brotherhood and camaraderie that I don't think my male friends at home will ever experience, and they can freely profess it to the world without anyone making assumptions about their sexual agenda. Men in Senegal hold a pure and tangible warmth for one another that encourages them to treat perfect strangers as brothers, and enables them to be both strong and emotionally vulnerable – concepts that too often seem oxymoronic in a Western context. And that's not to say that we should be more like Senegal: sociocultural attitudes towards women and LGBT+ rights in many West African countries leave much to be desired, but we could learn a lot from one another if we were receptive to change.

When I finally arrived in Ziguinchor, I met a young man who explained to me that although homosexuality is still aggressively opposed in Senegal and rarely discussed openly, an ethos of acceptance was beginning to bud. 'Things are changing,' he said. I hope that if the LGBT+ movement gains momentum there as it has in the West, male intimacy isn't replaced with self-consciousness and paranoia. It doesn't seem right that one group should have to lose something for the advance of another, or that love and tenderness should be lost on the road to equality, but, I realised somewhere between my fourth taxi and the Gambia River, the journey is never easy.

A cornered Trump could just refuse to go

Alan McIntyre

2018

Predicting the end game of the Trump Presidency is clearly dangerous, as time after time, the ante has been upped on the outrageous and unprecedented with no real consequences. But it's tempting to see an inflection point last month, when like Nixon, the President became an unindicted co-conspirator in a federal crime. Thus far, his response has been to declare 'no collusion', but it's a weak argument to claim a win just because you've committed a different crime than the one people expected. Following that logic, 'crook not traitor' might be a good bumper sticker for Trump's 2020 re-election campaign.

Even without the added weight of the final Mueller report, the dragnet appears to be tightening, and assuming Democrats retake the House in November, the denouement could be impeachment, resignation, or less likely, a criminal indictment. If you're an optimist, the ship of American democracy then gradually rights itself, and the work begins to put this experiment in populism behind us.

I certainly hope that's the case, but it's worth considering a less likely but more pessimistic end game, in which Trump morphs into a true authoritarian simply to protect himself. Cornered, angry and desperate, he becomes a President who not only refuses to go quietly, but simply refuses to go at all. To judge whether this is scaremongering or a realistic threat to America's rule of law, you need to examine how the Trump phenomena has metastasised over the last three years.

In the beginning, Trump was just media catnip, and we became all too familiar with his incantations of 'make America great again', 'build the wall', and 'lock her up'. His victims were truth, civility, Hillary Clinton, and the egos of a slew of Republican presidential hopefuls. But like Bucky Barnes – the 'Winter Soldier' in the current Marvel movies – Trump's repetitive rhetorical conditioning succeeded in turning large swathes of the 'salt of the earth' American electorate into unquestioning, fervent, and incredibly resilient foot soldiers.

Once elected, Trump has continually fed red meat to that base of loyalists by engaging in what Fintan O'Toole in the *Irish Times* has called the 'test marketing of fascism'. The question that seems to preoccupy the Oval Office every morning is 'What can I get away with?' What about a blanket Muslim travel ban? What happens if I'm 'fair and balanced' regarding white nationalism? What about separating families at the Mexican border and putting the kids in cages?

Despite the media cacophony surrounding many of these policies, the result has been a core Teflon-coated national approval rating that, despite Cohen and Manafort, only dropped marginally from 44% to 42% over the last few weeks. In the perpetually-looping

soundbite world of Fox News, the President is doing a great job protecting the 'real America', and the existential danger to the republic is homicidal undocumented immigrants, not Russian election interference or a corrupt President. And to be clear, polling shows that Trump's base believes that Michael Cohen did pay off porn stars, they just don't think it matters, and that is what emboldens the President.

Despite being consistently morally reprehensible and chaotic, the last 20 months still has at least the vague outline of a recognisable political process at work; policy, execution, reaction and refinement. Sometimes the courts have been the restraint, other times the media and public opinion, and very occasionally Congress. But with the rising waters of corruption and criminality lapping at the door of the Oval Office, we need to consider – given the trajectory of the last three years – what will happen when Trump is truly backed into a corner. Maybe he'll gamble that the rule of law is there to be broken, and that it's time to test the theory behind his campaign boast that he could shoot someone on Fifth Avenue and get away with it. But if he does, it will take two to coup, so assessing the risk means gauging both the likely behaviour of Trump himself, and the hardcore of Americans who support him.

Looking at his loyal base, a worrying harbinger of where we could be heading is the rise of the QAnon meta-conspiracy theory. Over the last few months, it's become increasingly common to see prominent 'We are Q' T-shirts at Trump rallies. They're identifying with an online conspiracy theorist who claims to be a high-level government official. His bizarre central claim is that Trump is in fact working behind the scenes to take down a global paedophile ring whose members include past Presidents, actors and film directors. So far, Jimmy Saville hasn't got a mention in Q's posts, but nothing would surprise me.

In this alternate reality, the Mueller investigation will conclude with the arrest of Hillary Clinton and her imprisonment at Guantanamo Bay. Like the anti-Semitic 'Protocols of the Elders of Zion' from a century ago, this conspiracy theory is elastic enough to subsume everything, from the assassination of JFK to 9/11 being an inside job. Over the course of the last few months, as the conspiracy has propagated, QAnon has become a flourishing and self-reinforcing online community of wackjobs, generating reams of what amounts to Trump fan-fiction. For an unknown number of Trump loyalists, this spun confection of nonsense reassures them that, despite mounting evidence to the contrary, the great leader has a masterplan, and that at the appropriate moment, order and justice will be conjured from chaos.

The White House hasn't endorsed the Q theory, but it also hasn't denounced it, and this messianic characterisation of Trump has been supported by, among others, popular comedienne Roseanne Barr. The problem is that it doesn't need many people to take it seriously for it to be dangerous. One of the minor conspiracies subsumed by Q is 'Pizzagate', the claim that top Democrats were running a satanic child sex ring out of the basement of a pizza parlour in Washington DC. The online fervour around that particular lie led a vigilante from North Carolina to 'self-investigate', which involved him opening fire with an assault rifle in the restaurant to 'save the kids'.

It's easy to dismiss such incidents as the work of deranged loners, but it's worth remembering that it was a domestic terrorist, Timothy McVeigh, who killed 168 people and injured nearly 700 in the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing; an atrocity which he characterised as an act of resistance against the federal government. For the hard-core Trump supporters with this paranoid mindset, the stakes rise dramatically when he's threatened. If Republicans lose the House in November, it isn't just a normal political setback, it's the 'paedophiles' rigging the election to get back in charge and remove Trump; and that could seem like a cause worth fighting for.

As for Trump himself, one possible leading indicator of the trouble to come is his increasing productivity as a liar. The *Washington Post* reports that in his first year as President, Trump made 2,140 false claims, which doubled in the last six months to 4,229, and then hit a peak in early July, when a full 76% of the statements he made at a campaign rally were fact-checked as 'false, misleading or unsupported by evidence'. As the pressure on him mounts, the temptation is for a pathological liar to double down and adopt the Goebbels approach, that 'if you tell a big enough lie and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it'.

What if that big lie ends up being some watered-down version of the QAnon narrative that the 'deep state' is illegally forcing Trump from office? In that scenario, he might replace Jeff Sessions as Attorney General, instruct his successor to shut down the Mueller investigation, threaten any congressional Republican who resists with his signature 'fire and fury', call out the national guard to maintain order, and ultimately assume 'emergency powers' to remain in office.

I'm still firmly in the 'it can't happen here' camp, but polling suggests that if Trump decides to burn down the house rather than go quietly, his loyalists will listen to him. A recent CBS poll indicated that 91% of hardcore Trump supporters trusted him to tell them the truth, versus only 63% for their family and friends, and a paltry 11% for the 'fake news' mainstream media. There's also material support for him taking unmistakably authoritarian actions, with nearly half of self-identified Republicans agreeing that 'the President should have the authority to close down news outlets engaged in bad behaviour'; which in Trump's narcissistic world is obviously any outlet that disagrees with him.

So, what happens if a Democratic House starts impeachment proceedings on the back of a damning Mueller report, and Trump goes on live TV and asks 'real Americans' to stand with him and 'protect the country from this witch hunt'? The streets of Manhattan and San Francisco will remain quiet, but let's face it, that's not where most of the guns are. At best, we seem to be heading for a constitutional and political crisis, but if you take the measure of the current resident of the White House and his hard core of supporters, you can't dismiss the possibility that the next few months could get a lot worse than that.

Is this truly the age of the Ordinary Joe?

Keith Aitken

2018

Boutonnet, where we live, has a lot going for it. It is one of Montpellier's most sought-after neighbourhoods, with leafy streets, fine schools, elegant academic and monastic campuses, a choice of tramlines, and a walk of less than 10 minutes into the ancient city centre. It also has a hermit.

You could, I suppose, downgrade him to squatter, but he has the reclusive demeanour of the true hermit. I have only caught occasional glimpses: a startling facsimile of the late Charles Manson's manic stare, framed by the personal styling of the Michael Palin 'It's...' man from *Monty Python*. I think of him each week when my glacially-conveyed copy of *The Spectator* brings yet another triumphalist fanfare from the likes of Rod Liddle about how politics is being wrestled back from the Elite by, and for, the Ordinary Joe.

There has been a lot written about the Elite, a disdainful term that now seems to encompass anyone who's read a book that isn't about Harry Potter. But I've yet to see anything that defines exactly who all these Ordinary Joes are who have taken charge of the agenda. What are the entry requirements, and where do you go to join the club? Would Boutonnet's Ben Gunn qualify for membership?

Somehow I doubt it. I don't see many like him among the Brexit blowhards or the Trump rally fodder. Indeed, you see very few like him anywhere: which is, I suppose, the point of being a hermit. He inhabits a windowless concrete shack in the grounds of an old orphanage. This structure, which possibly once held a generator, fronts on one of the quarter's main thoroughfares. It means we all get to share the full benefit of his eccentricities, which are both aural and visual.

The aural quirks are musical. Behind his only doorway, which he blocks off with blinds and a padlocked grille that may have started life as a bedspring, he keeps an upright piano which he thumps on for hours on end. Though he can bang out major chords, his melodic feel is commensurate with an instrument that was last tuned when Chopin was in town. Occasionally, for versatility, he switches to trumpet, on which he can produce a competent, but rarely beguiling, stream of notes.

His visual aesthetic consists of a small mountain of salvaged junk piled on the bunker roof. Bits of air conditioning share roofspace with dormant refrigerators, gas tanks, wheel arches, amputee mannequins and aluminium sinks. Potted plants line the edges, presumably as camouflage. He seems to have no internal access to this collection, since I have twice spotted him at a late hour scuttling up a ladder to reach it.

I have no idea how long he's been there, but a quarter that generally takes pride in its respectability neither fears nor resents his presence. As far as I can gather, he is treated as a

little local colour. He keeps himself to himself, he does not seem in the least dangerous, and he does not beg.

This last quality sets him apart among the lower strata of Montpellier society. Here is a city where you get used to perpetually side-stepping hats and beakers. We have hundreds of beggars, in every shape and size, from the matted New Age clochards with their evil canine bodyguards to ancient little jazz bands, busking on street corners and selling home-made CDs from a saxophone case.

I doubt that the French are any more generous towards their mendicants than we are. Nobody has that much pity, or change. But they are more civil: the faint nod of acknowledgement, rather than the disgusted stalk past. The recession here was deeper and longer than elsewhere, and everyone has felt some pain... so there but for the grace. There too the test of the official faith that *liberté, égalité, fraternité* is for all the republic's citizens, not just the rich. Remember, the insurgency in this country is led by a politician whose establishment credentials could not be more impeccable.

France's beggars are, in this respect, Ordinary Joes – albeit Joes whose survival strategy is hard to envy (which might say something about the alternative choices available to them) but whom no-one will begrudge their share of a finally recovering economy. Emmanuel Macron will be judged on the ability of his reforms to deliver results that at least appear to promise universal improvement.

But our hermit and his importuning comrades are not exactly the kind of Joes you can envisage being welcomed to join Nigel Farage in the golf club bar, or mingling with the baseball caps at a Trump clambake. Some people, to borrow from Orwell, are more ordinary than others.

Much more importantly, you would have to doubt that their well-being looms very large in the political priorities of the Ordinary Joe insurgencies in Britain or America. Brexit's concern for the poor seems to begin and end with getting them to believe that immigrants are coming to squeeze their wages and steal their jobs. Trump's rhetoric about reviving the rustbelt sits awkwardly with the ethically undernourished Wall Street billionaires he gathers around him.

Harold Wilson, whose personal decency should be better remembered, used to rebuke ministers and officials for referring to 'ordinary people' or 'ordinary voters'. It was his way of keeping elitist attitudes (if not always policies) at bay. Everybody was ordinary. Everybody was extraordinary. No-one was lumpen.

The new populism is presumed to hold to the same belief. But it has yet to demonstrate that it means it. Neither the Brexiteers nor Trump have begun to offer any coherent policy agenda to deliver on the inflated bluster and fantasies that brought them to victory.

Macron has tried, and found it tough going. His approval rating recently dipped lower even than that of his lustreless predecessor, François Hollande, after a year in office. He ends a turbulent summer with an unplanned reshuffle following the resignation of three popular ministers. The charge is that his economic reforms, while widely seen as necessary

in principle, favour the better-off in implementation. It will be heard more in coming months as he shifts the focus to social spending.

Which poses the big question of how long the Ordinary Joes will wait for life to get better. Populism cannot long survive ceasing to be popular. American voters, it must be admitted, have a history of loyal infatuation with the corniest act on the bill; British voters much less so; and French voters hardly at all (they tholed Nicolas Sarkozy's bling-and-blondes presidency for a solitary term).

If this truly is the age of the Ordinary Joe, then those who have been persuaded to identify themselves as such are entitled to ask, and to keep asking, what is going to be in it for them. If no satisfactory answer comes, they will not take long to become disillusioned. Maybe the Boutonnet hermit just got there before them.

The French protests are far from over

Keith Aitken

2018

There is a scene in *The Godfather II* when Michael Corleone, in Cuba to do a deal with the Batista regime, sees a Castro rebel kill both himself and a police captain with a concealed grenade. Unlike the police, Corleone reflects, the rebels are unpaid. So, what does that tell him? 'They can win.'

I had something of a Corleone moment on Saturday, concerning the *gilets jaunes* protests. We were driving home to Montpellier from Pézenas, while the radio relayed accounts of pitched battles between protestors and police in the Champs Élysées. But it was not the scale of those distant ructions that struck a chord, nor the vocal knots of hi-vis tabard-wearers creating modest traffic delays around the main junctions into Montpellier. What it was, was the dashboards.

Our route ran along the landward shore of the Bassin de Thau, a coastal lagoon fringed with vast sandy beaches. People here are rarely roused, unless it is over prices for their famous Bouzigues oysters, Picpoul de Pinet wine or Noilly Prat vermouth. The docile traffic looked much as it does any other day...until you noticed how many dashboards had a yellow vest casually laid across them.

By my count it was around three in every five, maybe higher. You might wonder why this was remarkable. French law requires every car to carry one of these vests for nocturnal breakdowns. We have one in the boot, which is where everybody keeps them. But motorists had been urged to show support for the protests by displaying their *gilet* at the windscreen. The response was astonishing.

And this was miles from the nearest traffic pinch point. It gave the lie to government claims that the protests were the orchestrated work of far-right agitators, or that diminishing numbers turning out to disrupt the cities meant dissent had peaked. It showed how far the grievance had spread from its starting point of resentment among drivers who'd been persuaded to buy diesel cars when diesel was thought ecologically advantageous, then clobbered by punitive duties when science decided it wasn't. This wasn't just broken glass in the first arrondissement. Rural France was angry too.

Defiance comes easily in France, a country that debates its politics more vehemently than do the British. The challenge always is to work out whether the latest hoo-hah is in any way exceptional. There were initial reasons to think not. French fuel price protests come around with almost Olympic regularity: 1995, 2000, 2004, 2008. The UK suffered just as disruptive an outbreak in the early days of the Blair Government. Then, as now, mobile communications empowered activism behind the not unfamiliar distaste of the haulage industry for paying tax. And actually, formal marches in support of the *gilets jaunes*, at least

in this part of the country, have been smaller, cheerier and less destructive than the demonstrations earlier in the year against public sector reform.

For the same reasons of volatility, the old adage that opinion polls measure breadth better than depth is especially useful in France. For sure, polls show that Emmanuel Macron currently has a lower popularity rating than bubonic plague, and that three-quarters of voters broadly back the *gilets'* cause. But such numbers can change with the wind, and few yet imagine that a new presidential run-off between Macron and the far-right's Marine Le Pen would end differently from the last time.

Besides, most French presidencies run like this. It is the legacy of a republic forged in revolution. They begin with radical election plans to reboot an economy that everyone agrees needs it, then run into fury as the pain of reform manifests, becoming a trial of strength between state and vested interests which culminates in soggy compromises and resumed inertia. Macron was different only in the audacity, and early appeal, of his ideas. Turning ideas into public policy is always the hard part.

What the dashboards tell you is that the *gilet* has become a symbol of resentment about much more than diesel prices; and that feelings are raw even in quiet places like coastal Languedoc. These are not just the familiar mass demonstrations that interest groups like the public service unions or the farmers can whistle up at will. There were a lot of those this year, and they seemed to attract less public endorsement than usual. That is what makes the *gilets* so significant.

The French economy, which has never really regained momentum since the banking crisis, has responded more slowly and marginally to Macron's stringencies than he or anyone else had hoped. Modest GDP growth is making little headway against the torments people have endured for a decade: high unemployment, reduced purchasing power, and relentless carnage of the micro-businesses – restaurants, cafés, boutiques, artisan victuallers – that the French hold so dear.

Until now, the governmental response to the *gilets* has been to stand implacably firm: to deplore the violence of the front-line conflicts, blame right-wing provocateurs, highlight diminishing numbers turning out to make trouble, and insist with a shrug that good medicine always tastes sour. But something changed this past weekend. 'The current crisis goes far beyond just a question of fuel,' Economy Minister, Bruno Le Maire, acknowledged on Sunday. 'It is time to listen to the French.'

Yesterday (Tuesday) Macron delivered a speech hastily rebranded as a presidential reply to the protests. It seemed he had accepted the second part of Le Maire's comment, but not the first. Agreeing only to heed world energy price movements, he instead tried to shrink-wrap the debate by reconnecting it with the climate change agenda – where his credentials are consistent – and setting out a national clean energy strategy, including a programme of nuclear power station closures. 'We need to explain to people what their taxes are doing,' he said. The transition to greener energy was 'just, democratic and clear'.

Macron is nothing if not a conviction politician. Whether he has done enough to

convince critics that the fuel duties are an environmental imperative rather than a green fig leaf for a stealth tax must be doubtful. The contrasts with his earlier tax cuts for the privileged remain stark. But, if the policy has not greatly changed, the tone has. This thing isn't over yet.

It's not all Trump's fault

R D Kernohan

2018

Ever since I first visited the USA, in the days of Kennedy's cardboard Camelot, I've loved the country and hated a lot of its politics, including some of its politicians. Its self-styled conservatives are often radical fanatics of the right. Its noisiest liberals can be streaked with intolerant fanaticism, and were so long before Hillary Clinton listed many simpler souls as 'deplorables'.

I have no love for President Trump, though I have felt more disappointment than hatred ever since his inaugural address aggressively spurned the opportunity to bind up some of his nation's self-inflicted wounds. But there isn't enough recognition, whether within the United States or among critics and candid friends outside, that neither President Trump nor those who love to hate him created all the problems which his style of politics has aggravated.

Some of problems which intensify the 'culture wars' of American society have obvious solutions. The Democrats might find a candidate for 2020 with the potential of F D Roosevelt in 1932 – even though no such hero is yet in sight. Unlikely as it seems, the old-style Republicans (now reinforced by Mitt Romney in the Senate) might, if Trump's Presidency becomes untenable or unbearable, muster the strength and will which they conspicuously lacked in the 2016 primary season. Many of those who probably voted for him as the lesser evil – among them my conservative American friends – view him with a mixture of distress and perplexity. They are, as the Rodgers and Hart ballad once put it, 'bewitched, bothered, and bewildered'. And there is another faint hope: just possibly tactical judgement or weight of years might mellow Trump as he seeks, or even wins, a second term.

But there are deeper problems of American government and politics which are being both aggravated and obscured in the way that so many of the battle-sites in this 'culture war' are grouped around the president's policies and his abrasive style. They are problems largely overlooked or sidelined in liberal America's present obsession with the politics of racial and sexual resentments. For the USA remains trapped by the problems of its archaic constitution. Because it is a written constitution, written a long time ago, it needs to be creatively and continuously reinterpreted to serve as the fundamental law of a modern nation. It may even need to be distorted, because parts of it are precisely worded in response to late 18th-century conditions and arguments which are no longer relevant.

Freedom of religion (or irreligion) and the relation of the public powers to 'faith communities', have to be related to words stemming from the disestablishment of a denomination. Gun laws for urban jungles and suburban badlands are considered as if they

had constitutional relevance to the demands of mainly rural and often frontier communities in Rip Van Winkle's time. An ancient constitution and elderly amendments have to be bullied into giving guidance on modern disputes about the law on abortion, marriage, and equal opportunity.

One inevitable and obvious result, apparent long before Trump's time, is that the courts and judges, especially the immovable oracles of the Supreme Court, not only determine the law but define the course and limits of legislation. Over many years, there has been a judicial takeover on matters which would be more appropriately settled by congressional legislation, recurring elections and the less than absolute presidential power of veto.

A less obvious result is that the extreme politicisation of judicial appointments – evident both in nominations and obstruction of them – threatens to make nonsense of the vaunted theory of the 'separation of powers'. The threat is not mortal, for judges whose politics eased the way to the bench remain lawyers at heart and may like to assert their independence of previous patrons, but it is one of several warnings of the dangers of written constitutions and the strange devices required to keep them flexible: an ugly situation not yet out of hand.

The same could be said of the presidency itself. It is both the symbolic focus of national identity (as the Crown is for us) and the tool or target of political faction. It is questionable whether it is now fit for both purposes. The English writer Walter Bagehot once famously suggested that a constitution needed dignified and efficient parts, by which he meant the British monarchy and the government carried on in its name.

The obvious charge against Trump is that his style risks being both undignified and inefficient, and goads his opponents into a frenzy which does further damage to the country's harmony and reputation. But similar risks are inherent in the American system – evident from the time of Washington's successor, embarrassing in such different pre-Trump presidencies as those of Andrew Johnson and Bill Clinton, and overcome with some difficulty even in such notable reigns as those of Lincoln, Woodrow Wilson and F D Roosevelt.

When Democrats and Republicans admit to the occasional difficulty of respecting the presidency and loathing the President, they prefer to blame the tenants of the White House rather than the terms of the lease. Their attitude is understandable, given the difficult and ponderous process required to amend the constitution and the way American historians, political scientists and journalists have all tended to celebrate the growth of federal government, the strengthening of presidential executive authority, and the suppression of any tendencies towards cabinet government or for Secretaries of State to play Prime Minister. (It is perhaps a pity that the one who most spectacularly tried was W H Seward, who conspicuously underestimated the incoming President Lincoln.)

The young American Republic wanted an elected executive monarch on a fixed-term contract and its subsequent evolution seems to rule out not only a dignified above-politics presidency of the modern German style, but the French one, where even de Gaulle opted to

devolve much of the work and some of the blame on to a Prime Minister. It is too late to change now.

The one area where some Americans, especially currently frustrated Democrats, seem ready to acknowledge flaws in an archaic written constitution for the Trump era is a possibly irrepressible conflict between demands for simple majority rule and the needs of federalism. Mrs Clinton got more votes in 2016 than Donald Trump, but not in the 'electoral college.' The Democratic 'popular vote' in the midterm elections deserved (say Democrats) more gains than were actually achieved – grumbling as British parties do when feeling ill-used by the ways or anomalies of our parliamentary democracy.

Were they to be writing a new constitution, the modern Americans would doubtless drop those legal fictions of electoral collegians gravely pondering how to cast their votes and they might argue whether Nevada should count for as much in the Senate as California or Texas. Even then, they would probably conclude that a federal union demands that states' rights take some precedence over direct democracy. But a new constitution would surely only follow a new revolution, no more likely to be provoked by the eccentricities of Donald Trump than of Bernie Sanders.

If Trump becomes unbearable he will be disposed of, as the much more capable Richard Nixon was, by the forms of law and constitution. If there is a Democratic Administration after 2020 there may be some discussion and even initiative over direct election of the President but the process is likely to be slow and the outcome uncertain.

America has more immediate troubles to face. They are rooted in attitudes, divisions and resentments for which neither the Trump Presidency nor the straitjacket of the ancient constitution can be directly blamed. The sad fact is that, at a time when the country needs a great conciliator and a truce in its 'culture wars', it got a smooth-talker in Obama and then a provocative brawler in Trump.

We should pray for better times in the United States, softer words and more sense on all sides – assuming that the Supreme Court has never ruled that such prayers threaten the constitutional separation of church and state.

Happy Burns Night Mr President!

Alan McIntyre

2019

President Trump claims he's proud of his Scottish heritage, but his affection for his Motherland is clearly not reciprocated by many of the locals. So, in a week packed with Burns Suppers, it's fun to imagine Melania slipping a copy of *Burns' Collected Works* and Catherine Carswell's warts and all biography onto his nightstand in the hope that he might better understand what it takes to become a true Scottish icon. Given that what follows is pure speculation, we'll ignore the fact that Trump is a famous non-reader of everything from newspapers to top-secret national security briefings.

In Burns, Trump will immediately see a kindred spirit in his pursuit of the opposite sex and a history of not taking no for an answer. While Trump had to ride out the 'pussy tape' scandal to be elected President, Burns – in the pre-#MeToo era of the late 18th century – was a lot more open about his attempts to bed women over their objections, as shown again and again in the bawdy songs of the *Merry Muses of Caledonia*. Trump will also sympathise that neither man escaped their sexual appetites unscathed. Both have been publicly labelled 'fornicators', but Trump might be disappointed that Burns didn't utilise an ecclesiastical Cohen-type fixer to prevent him being harangued on the 'cutty stool' at the front of the Kirk. He might also have advised Burns to spend a few shillings to entice Jean Armour and others to sign ye olde non-disclosure agreements.

Trump might also be impressed by Burns' reverence for America. In his poem *Ode for General Washington's Birthday*, Burns lauds the ability of the Founding Fathers to cast off British imperial rule and contrasts their sense of purpose with the weakness of the 18th-century Scottish ruling class.

*But come, ye sons of Liberty,
Columbia's offspring, brave as free,
In danger's hour still flaming in the van:
Ye know, and dare maintain, the Royalty of Man.*

And as we all know, there's nothing Trump likes more than giving weak and feckless Europeans a hard time. You can easily see him transposing Burns' veneration of Washington as a God-like figure who represents strength, liberty and freedom straight onto his own populist, strongman persona. But Trump wouldn't be alone in recognising Burns as a natural American. In 1859, during the Burns centenary celebrations at the Cooper Union in New York, social reformer Henry Ward Beecher gave a toast to Burns in which he said:

It is fitting that the anniversaries of Burns should be celebrated in this land of freedom and democracy, for he sprung from the people, remained to the end one of the people, and his heart was ever with the democratic institutions of the United States.

Trump may even have the emotional intelligence to recognise that he and Burns share anxiety about the precarious nature of their stations in life. *To a Mouse* opens with the mundane act of Burns ploughing up a field mouse's nest but ends with Burns envying the mouse for living in the moment, unencumbered by the anxieties of the past and fears for the future. Trump might agree that 'the best-laid schemes o' mice an' men gang aft agley', even when those schemes have been carefully shaped via secret meetings in Prague with a bunch of Russians.

Like Burns, Trump worries about things he's done but cannot change, and is certainly fearful of things to come. Despite his bluster, he realises that Special Ploughman Robert Mueller is gunning his prosecutorial tractor in the parking lot of the Justice Department, while Speaker Nancy Pelosi is now making herself comfortable at the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue 'nursing her wrath to keep it warm'.

The President will certainly be gratified to learn that *Burns' Collected Works* doesn't actually include *A Scot's Lament fur her American Fellows (oan their election of a tangerine gabshite walloper)*. This poem recently won a competition organised by the Dunedin Burns Club in New Zealand and contains a particularly evocative Burns-like description of the current President:

His mooth wis pursed up like an arse, his Tangoed coupon glowin' like a skelped backside.

But as imaginary Trump reads deeper into the life and works of Scotland's true favourite son, his enthusiasm for Burns could begin to wane as he understands Burns' disdain for liars and hypocrites as expressed in poems like *Holy Willie's Prayer*. He'll also bristle at the patently absurd notion that 'Man to Man, the world o'er, shall brothers be for a' that', and conclude that this sort of international mutual respect can easily be snuffed out by withdrawing from international treaties and building a big beautiful wall with Mexico.

Increasingly annoyed by Burns' liberal rhetoric, Trump might pause temporarily to applaud the beginning of rule #10 of the Tarbolton Bachelors' Club (probably written by Burns himself), which states that every member 'must be a professed lover of one or more of the female sex'. But having gleefully ticked that box, Trump will then absolutely reject the constraint that:

No haughty, self-conceited person, who looks upon himself as superior to the rest of the Club, and especially no mean spirited, worldly mortal, whose only will is to heap up money shall be admitted.

So there goes the membership of Mar-a-Lago, Bedminster, and every other Trump club that betrays just a smidgen of self-conceit by having Trump's picture on every conceivable piece of wall space and golden taps in every bathroom.

Ultimately, our imaginary presidential reader is likely to identify with the aspects of Burns that he sees in himself, like the sexual pest and the nationalist. Subtly not being his strong suit, Trump won't embrace the contradictions of Burns also being an internationalist, an idealist and the type of true romantic that Melania probably dreamed of growing up in Slovenia. Trump certainly won't recognise himself in Burns' *Parcel of Rogues in a Nation*, which currently lends itself to an easy parody:

*What force or guile could not subdue through many Cold War ages
Is wrought now by a coward few, for hirling traitor's wages (and some attractive real estate opportunities in Moscow)
The Russian bombs we could disdain, secure in valour's station;
But Russian tweets have been our bane – such a parcel of rogues in a nation!*

Since this is fantasy, Trump might just pause to glance up at a portrait in the White House state dining room and vow to emulate another Republican President who took the time to truly understand and appreciate Burns. Although Abraham Lincoln was born 13 years after Burns' death, he was a true fanboy. His 1859 official presidential campaign biography includes a section that reads:

When practicing law before his election to Congress, a copy of Burns was his inseparable companion on the circuit; and this he read so constantly that it is said he now has by heart every line of his favourite poet.

In 1859, Lincoln himself proposed the Immortal Memory at the Burns Supper in Springfield Illinois, but unfortunately there's no record of what he said. In January 1865, as the civil war raged towards its conclusion, Lincoln was asked to once again propose a toast to Burns in Washington DC. This time he declined, but he responded to the invitation with a handwritten note that said:

I cannot frame a toast to Burns. I can say nothing worthy of his generous heart and transcendent genius. Thinking of what he has said, I cannot say anything that is worth saying.

Having taken his oath of office on the Lincoln Bible, Trump could benefit from going beyond that symbolism and immersing himself in how Lincoln's humanity, empathy, tolerance and general worldview were shaped by the writings of a humble farmer's son from Alloway.

So, as Trump skulks around the White House watching Fox News and hate tweeting his increasingly threadbare policy agenda, just maybe his gaze will fall on the books Melania has left for him. He'll start flicking through the pages and, inspired by the nationalist undertones of *Address to a Haggis*, he'll grab a pen and dash off his own *Address to a Big Mac*, to celebrate America's anti-elitist consumerism. He may even draft an executive order allowing real haggis to once again be consumed in the US, because for some bizarre reason, the Food and Drug Administration don't consider sheep's lungs fit for human consumption.

Beyond the fantasy, the reality is that the one thing Trump could do with a pen that would make him instantly popular in Scotland is sign his own resignation letter. In the absence of that, an ability to recite *Tam O' Shanter* from memory might at least ingratiate him a little more. But in the process, he might also recognise that, although he can still revel in his surprise election victory, when it comes to the day-to-day job of being President:

*But pleasures are like poppies spread,
You seize the flow'r, its bloom is shed;
Or like the snow falls in the river,
A moment white-then melts for ever.*

Happy Burns Night Mr President!

Truffles and terroir in France

Keith Aitken

2019

We have been to our first food festival of 2019. Perhaps I should clarify that. In France, any public event bigger than the opening of a new speed bump is hailed with an eruption of stalls selling fragrant foodstuffs and drink, and long tables at which to enjoy them al fresco in the company of friends, to the accompaniment of a ragged brass band and an unheeded speech from the mayor.

What I mean is something more specific: a festival staged to celebrate a particular local product. This one was a *Fête de la Truffe*, held in the seriously hyphenated village of St-Géniès-des-Mourges about 10 miles north-east of Montpellier. As the name suggests, it was a formal glorification of the truffle, that rare and expensive subterranean fungus that reminds foodies of heaven and the rest of us of goat turds. This, it turned out, was a very big deal in a very small village.

You could tell because most of the cars in south-west France seemed to be trying to park in a handful of vertiginous streets and two temporary car parks. In the village's venerable centre, many hundreds of people elbowed their way around close to 100 stalls. Most of the stalls had little obvious connection with truffles. The village's signature product afforded a showcase for all manner of local artisanship, loosely enough defined to encompass everything from hunting knives and olivewood carvings to patisserie, wines, and great sacks of seasonal walnuts and white onions.

Bar tents dispensed wines and beers, while others sold every kind of foodstuff from roast pig and boar burgers to meringues and the obligatory *beignets* (fritters). An oompah band inflicted grievous injury on old marching tunes, while diners ate, drank and conversed intently at communal tables.

Not that St-Géniès' prized distinction was entirely neglected. An auction of truffles had begun at an early hour, and appeared to have long exhausted available supplies by the time we arrived in mid-morning. But several stalls offered truffle-enhanced comestibles, some of them, like tapenades, already so potent on the palate that you would be hard-pressed to isolate the presence of truffle with chromatography. Sample fungi were buried in a demonstration sandpit, for trained hounds and sows to detect, to lively applause. Dog-owners were then invited to give their own mutts a try (the French always bring their dogs to crowded events, so that no-one need feel deprived of a frothy muzzle in the crotch and something vile to tread in).

It was a joyful occasion, as these events always are. No-one drinks too much, or gets too loud, or whinges without self-mockery. Everyone is welcome. We exchanged banter in our lamentable French with genial stall-holders. In due course, we lunched on delicious cartons

of truffle-laced *aligot* and sliced Toulouse sausage, bought a truffle-flavoured saucisson sec, and took our reluctant leave.

Festivals like this take place throughout the year and, it sometimes seems, in every hamlet in France. We once spent a delightful afternoon at a Grand Festival of the Chickpea in a tiny village near Uzès, where lunch consisted of more chickpea-based dishes than you would have thought possible, and stalls competed for ever more innovative associations with the commune's staple crop. We bought a pair of earrings, made from dyed dry chickpeas set in silver, to give to our daughter, who was conspicuously underwhelmed. Never mind: the village believed it produced the best chickpeas you could buy, and was proud to be identified with, and by, them.

Which reminds you of the serious purpose behind these festivals. Every settlement in France longs to be associated with a cherished comestible. For many, it is a distinctive wine or cheese, but it can be almost anything. Bouzigues, near Montpellier, announces itself with a road sign in the shape of a giant oyster, because the bivalves it grows on massive frames in the Bassin de Thau are said to be the best in France (and therefore the world). Along the shore in one direction is Sète, known for tielles à la Sètoise (octopus pies); in the other Marseillan, known for its Noilly Prat vermouth. Inland is Pézenas, home of the petit pâté, a tiny spiced lamb pasty, and further inland still is Castelnaudary, which tells anyone who will listen that it is the capital mondiale de cassoulet.

These associations are priceless marketing in a country that cares more about victuals than anything else. No wonder so much effort goes into the food festivals. But it is also about pride of place, and belonging: of 'terroir'. There is no adequate translation for terroir, but it has to do with the conditions of soil, climate, geography and heritage that give the place one comes from its unique character. The importance of terroir grows rather than diminishes as ever more of the rural population abandons ancient family holdings for urban salaries and apartments. Terroir, of which fine local produce is the badge, is politics as well as marketing.

In the case of Saint-Géniès and its truffles, the politics have sharp edges. Truffle-hunting is closely identified with Provence, and upstart prospectors in the Languedoc woods are not viewed entirely kindly from the east. More immediately, a British (naturellement) company wants to open a 370-hectare commercial truffle farm in scrubland near Ganges, a proposal that has provoked nearly 5,000 signatures on a hostile petition. The very idea of industrialised truffling is anathema here. Truffles are about an individual and his loyal, painstakingly-trained animal exerting generations of experience to wrest elusive treasures from secret places in the loam. That is what makes it an expression of the terroir... also what safeguards its value.

The conflict is a reminder that the French passion for ultra-niche foodstuffs is not readily transferrable to other cultures, and neither side would probably wish it transferred. Yet, it is hard not to envy the extraordinary pride that people in even the tiniest French communities take in celebrated local product. If the notion of terroir seems a tad romantic

to our tastes, redolent of kailyard sentiment about grannie and her Hielan' hame, the marketing benefits are altogether more hard-headed. And here, it seems to me, Scotland *does* miss a trick.

Some years ago, I was hired by the Shetland tourism people to write a report on visitor facilities, which I presented at a conference in Lerwick. One of the things that had struck me was how often I ate superb fish on the islands and, on asking, was told it had been locally caught, often that same day. The point was that I had to ask. Here was a world-class local product, which the menu didn't even mention as being local. Had it been France, every village on every island would have laid claim to a different species, and thrown itself into telling the world of its supremacy as a producer.

Though Scottish food production has gone a lot further down the road to corporate blandness than France's, we do still have fine products to boast about, many associated with specific locations. Yes, we've got a bit better at promoting brands like Loch Fyne seafood, but where are the festivals for the Forfar bridie, the Selkirk bannock, the Arbroath smokie? Why don't Scottish villages do more to tell us what's special about their local lamb or prawns or honey? After all, it needn't be anything as wildly exotic as a chickpea.

North Macedonia: sunshine in the darkness

George Robertson

2019

There's not a lot of good news about in Europe today. Brexit here, Yellow Vests in France, turmoil in Italy, Orbán misbehaving in Hungary, Poland in the human rights dock – all seems bleak on our continent. But suddenly there is a glimmer of light in the deep south-east. An old nation with a new name is about to join NATO and 27 years of disagreement in a troubled region has been resolved.

North Macedonia is the new name for what was known clumsily as The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and last week it signed the accession protocols for NATO membership. This ended a painful stand-off between Greece and its neighbour, which has prevented North Macedonia from taking its rightful place in the European mainstream. But it was not easy, and here is where there is real good news.

As North Macedonia's Foreign Minister Dimitrov said: 'This was not inevitable... or even likely'. It took remarkable political leadership and true courage on the part of two politicians – Prime Minister Tsipris of Greece and Prime Minister Zaev of Macedonia – to make 'the impossible do-able'. Facing down vehement and sometimes violent nationalist opposition, the two leaders risked everything to make the region more stable.

In 2001, before the events of 9/11 blew all other news away, the headlines were dominated by the insurgency and crisis in Macedonia. Albanian dissidents had attacked police officers and Macedonian forces had over-reacted. As provocation was followed by reaction, the country was on the brink of another Balkan bloodbath.

Enter the EU and NATO with the rotating chairman-in-office of the OSCE (the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe). Three of us, Javier Solana, myself and Romanian Foreign Minister, Mircea Geoana, shuttled back and forth to Skopje to dampen down the flames and eventually negotiate, with difficulty, a peace treaty. That treaty both stopped the violence and rebalanced the constitution which had festered the original grievance. Messy, prolonged and difficult talks had prevented another civil war – all aided by a brave Methodist preacher President, Boris Trajkovski, who was to tragically die in a plane crash not long afterwards.

The small nation of Macedonia was engraved on me. As the crisis unfolded, it dominated my life. Conscious of the history of neighbouring Kosovo and before it of the horrors of Bosnia, we had to control the crisis and find a solution. Shuttle diplomacy, weary hours of negotiation and phone-calling, appeals to reason where there was only emotion – it took every reserve of skill and patience by Javier Solana, myself and the courageous, beleaguered President to get a grip.

We spent hours and days balancing every twist and turn of events. On a brief holiday to

Islay during that summer, I had to brief the President and encourage the Foreign Minister, whilst lying prone on the Machrie Golf Course trying to get away from the wind and get a signal. Each fairway has a Macedonian memory for me. To break the impasse and stop the shooting, the insurgents had to hand over their weapons – and they would only do it to NATO. A multinational force was assembled in five days, and led by a British general, they received a mountain of guns – and the tank they had stolen from the Macedonian Army.

The headlines did not give a sense of optimism. Across the front page of *The Times* was columnist Simon Jenkins' quote 'Robertson will not be satisfied until the Balkans are aflame from the Adriatic to Istanbul'. Wrong again, Sir Simon, and we accomplished the disarmament mission in the promised timescale.

Eventually and painstakingly there was a peace agreement, the 'Ohrid Treaty'. It rebalanced the constitution between the various ethnic interests and we had a lasting deal. But then came 9/11 and the fickle media spotlight turned away from the newly peaceful part of the Balkans. In spite of the good news, the name spat with Greece was to still keep Macedonia away from its rightful place in the evolving European unification.

It took 16 years from that crisis to the election of Zoran Zaev as Prime Minister of his country. He was determined to solve the lingering dispute – and he had a willing partner in the former rebel Prime Minister of Greece, Alexis Tsipras. Against the odds and with nationalists in both countries orchestrating opposition to any compromise, the Prespa Treaty was signed. And North Macedonia was born.

The battle was not over. Zaev had to have a referendum and get more than 50% of the population to vote in it. I assembled a team of people with a background in the region and we were back in campaigning mode, this time saying Yes to the name change. The vote was 94% to 6% in favour, but due to the opposition irresponsibly calling a boycott, the turnout fell short of 50%. Zaev alone did not have the MPs to overcome the blockage. However, enough patriotic opposition MPs defied their own party instruction and parliament passed the new name.

In Greece, Tsipras faced formidable opposition from the northern Greek province of Macedonia. Violent nationalist demonstrations were called in Thessaloniki and in Athens to stop the deal. Hundreds of thousands of demonstrators attacked the parliament on two occasions but Tsipras and his colleagues stood firm. It was an act of profound political courage – to do the right thing for stability in the whole region.

I watched emotionally last week as the 29 members of NATO signed the membership protocol to make North Macedonia the 30th member state in the alliance. My heart sang as this small Balkan country with such a complicated background had made it to one of the world's most important top tables. South-east Europe saw something inspiring and uplifting amid other grim news: two leaders putting country before party, taking on irrational and heated nationalisms, and risking their own political futures to protect future generations. It was a remarkable example to a troubled world.

What are the *gilets jaunes* really about?

Keith Aitken

2019

Not for the first time, an Oval Office tweet missed the point by the sort of distance normally found only in astrophysics. Donald Trump had been watching TV reports of France's *gilets jaunes* disturbances. What had struck him, he announced, was that the protests 'don't take into account how badly the United States has been treated on trade by the European Union, or on fair and reasonable payments for our GREAT military protection'.

Well, you have to hand it to the Oaf of Office. He wasn't wrong. Indeed, he had chanced upon one of the very few topics that these protests are *not* about. They have nothing whatever to do with EU trade policy or NATO contributions. What is harder to say, four months into the *gilets jaunes* phenomenon, is what exactly they *are* now all about.

This lack, or rather dissolution, of focus is one reason why, at long last, the remarkable insurgency of the *gilets jaunes* is losing momentum. At first its great strength, having started with a narrow objection to fuel price rises, was the ability to accumulate and absorb other grievances and thereby mobilise an expansive coalition of discontent with President Macron and his reforms.

But now these multiple goals look more like weakness. A disparate agenda is reflected in increasing structural fragmentation and dissonance. There is no agreed leadership, and vituperative disagreement about strategy. Different factions accuse one another of hijacking and betrayal. This, plus the unwholesome nature of some of those dominating coverage of the protests, is chasing moderate supporters from the fray. When career idiots from the far extremes of left and right find common cause, it is usually time for sensible folk to be somewhere else. Once people told you: 'I don't approve of the violence, but...'. Now they say: 'I still support the cause, but ...'.

That it has taken so long for disillusion to set in bears testament to the breadth of dismay at the damage done to France's way of life by a decade of economic torpor, to the failure of Macron to engage with the dispossessed, and to a tacit acceptance of the well-timed riot as a legitimate means of capturing political attention. So, week after week, people find their thoroughfares blocked, their transport disrupted and, here and there, windows and heads being broken amid smoke, tear gas and flying missiles. Every Sunday they wake to the latest toll of injuries, arrests and deaths, and to fresh ministerial denunciations of the provocateurs said to be orchestrating the mayhem.

The fuel tax grievance was shelved long ago. The minimum wage has been raised, and austerity eased by some 10 billion euros. A 'national conversation', reminiscent of the street-by-street discourse that brought Macron's En Marche movement to power, has been

launched to show that the President has a receive mode as well as a transmit one, whatever his manner. It got off to a pitiful start when the committee set up to run it rebelled against ham-fisted government attempts to confine its curriculum, but the scale cannot be faulted. There are public meetings in every town, debate supplements in local newspapers, travelling trailers in marketplaces, letters to every home. Meanwhile, emergency laws target known agitators, and the riot police lay about them freely with all the unpleasant weapons in their arsenal. Prominent protestors have been arrested, like Eric Drouet, or wounded, like Jerome Rodrigues.

Until very recent weeks, none of it has seemed to be doing much good. Even when the violence was at its worst, public support for the underlying cause held remarkably firm. Adverse headlines seemed to make little impact on a movement welded together by social media. Two million people were said to be in touch in this way. One public poll in January showed that 85% deplored the violence but 72% continued to support the cause. Here in the Languedoc and elsewhere, a high proportion of drivers continued to show solidarity by displaying a *gilet* on their dashboard. They were especially ubiquitous in white vans, the lifeblood of an economy heavily dependent on small traders, growers, caterers and retailers.

Suddenly, though, one detects a distinct weariness. The numbers counted by the cops on the streets each Saturday have subsided to around a fifth of what they were. But it is the dashboard solidarity which, on my own unscientific count, has shown a much sharper recent decline, especially in the city. There is a deepening disconnect between the boisterous marchers who gather in Montpellier's Place de La Comedie, and those who show up later in face masks to goad *les flics* and smash ATMs in defiance of global capitalism. More and more citizens are ignoring the cabaret and getting on with their lives. In Paris, this has been amusingly encapsulated by foulards rouges (red scarf) marchers, asserting their right to get to Galeries Lafayette without impediment. More significantly, women *gilets* have marched to 'reclaim' their movement from the headbangers.

'Macron en va se fâcher', proclaims a bluntly unpunctuated banner at one Montpellier roundabout. 'Macron, we are getting angry.' But ask what they're angry about, and you'll hear as many answers as there are *gilets*. In rural areas, it is about the economic pull of the cities. In the cities, it is contempt for snooty elites. For some it is taxes, or wages, or purchasing power. For others, it is about migrants, or Europe, or corporatism, or the eternal arrogance of Paris. Besides which, there is a long tradition in France, dating right back to 1789, of simply poking la classe politique in the eye whenever opportunity presents.

The number of bandwagons in the caravan means that anyone who cares to can jump on. Jean-Luc Mélenchon, of the left-wing La France Insoumise, has been as supportive of the protests as Marine Le Pen of the far-right National Rally, both undoubtedly with an eye to the upcoming European elections. Every possible interest group has hastened to add its own pet grievances to the agenda. Even Italy's Deputy Premier, Luigi Di Maio of the right-wing Five-Star party, has provoked a full-scale diplomatic incident by cheering on the *gilets jaunes* as vanguard troops for Europe-wide 'populism'.

At the same time, fissures are increasingly apparent in matters of strategy. It is not just the chasm between peaceful protest and bottle-throwing bampots. One group of agitators has formed a party to contest the European elections, mortifying those who thought the whole point was to set up an alternative infrastructure to elective politics. Another faction favours citizen assemblies. There is disagreement about whether to talk to ministers. Some want a referendum on Macron's policies – an idea that the President himself has reportedly considered. The trade unions, as is their wont, demand a general strike, and the anarchists a revolution.

Most insurgencies end up arguing more vehemently among themselves than with their opponents. Pierre Poujade's 1950s Poujadist movement, of which the *gilets jaunes* are a conscious echo, was a case in point. It is not hard to imagine them dissolving into fractiousness, and thereby losing the one characteristic essential to a so-called populist movement: popularity. But it is also too soon to make that call with any certainty. Establishment incompetence or heavy-handedness, and there has been plenty of both, could yet reignite grassroots indignation. Or the movement could find a unifying grievance around which to regroup. All we can be sure of is that this grievance won't be EU trade discrimination against America.

Will the next US President be a woman?

Alan McIntyre

2019

Is America ready for a woman President? That might seem a strange question given that Hillary Clinton won the popular vote by nearly three million in 2016. But during that campaign it was often impossible to separate the impact of gender from the impact of her being 'Hillary Clinton', the liberal bugaboo with nearly 30 years of public service baggage from Whitewater to Benghazi, to missing email servers.

Refreshingly, the 2020 Democratic field already includes multiple women capable of securing the nomination, and while their gender could be an important factor, it's unlikely to be deterministic. Focusing just on the four female Democratic senators who are likely to contest the Iowa Caucuses in just under 12 months, while they all share both a gender and legal training, they are impressively diverse on almost every other dimension.

At nearly 70, Elizabeth Warren from Massachusetts is the oldest of the quartet by a decade and came to politics late in life via a high-profile academic career. Her public persona emphasises her hardscrabble roots in Oklahoma where her father was a janitor. She credits her circuitous rise to a Harvard professorship to the fortuitous intersection of hard work and opportunity, and while Republicans will undoubtedly label her a socialist, she identifies more as a communitarian, with 'hard-working American families' as her core constituency.

Warren's on the left of the party, and by instinct she's a combative and uncompromising picket-line agitator – not a policy triangulator. If Warren has political kryptonite, it's likely to be her long-standing claim to Native American heritage that's turned out to be family lore rather than genealogical fact.

In contrast to the late blooming Warren, Senator Kamala Harris from California has been an overachieving heat-seeking missile her entire life – to the point that her presidential announcement on Martin Luther King Day had long seemed inevitable. Despite her undoubted African-American bona fides, she shares President Obama's chameleon-like quality. Her parents were international graduate students at Berkeley (dad from Jamaica and mum from India), and her high school years were spent in Montreal, so she seems at ease from the slums of Oakland to the billionaire mansions of Silicon Valley.

Harris is to the political right of Warren, but her message is more personal than policy. Rather than *having* a vision, as a successful African-American second-generation female immigrant, *she* is the vision. What she lacks in Obama's natural empathy, she makes up for with a prosecutor's mindset that confidently discerns good from evil. If Harris has a weakness with the Democratic base, it's her consistent defence of the law enforcement community in California.

On the other side of the country is Senator Kirsten Gillibrand from New York, who grew up stuffing political campaign envelopes for her grandmother. Her 2009 appointment to Hillary Clinton's old Senate seat after only two years in the House was described as 'the random product of a mad science experiment'. Yet, she's held that seat in three subsequent elections.

Gillibrand won her rural congressional seat as a right-wing 'Blue Dog' Democrat with an 'A' rating from the NRA, but she's moved left as a senator, championing issues like gay rights and sexual assault in the military. She's also a ruthless political operator. She won her long-shot 2006 congressional campaign after the convenient leak of a 911 domestic abuse call from the wife of her opponent, and one of her aides has characterised Gillibrand's approach to politics as 'Option 1 is light and sunshine, and Option 2 is cut your nuts off'.

But her opportunism could also be her Achilles' heel. When she led calls for the resignation of her erstwhile Senate squash partner – Senator Al Franken – over groping allegations, many Democrats saw her eagerness to throw him overboard as transparently self-serving. She'll also face accusations that she not only inherited Clinton's seat, but also her fundraising links to Goldman Sachs and her soulless and robotic approach to politics. In 2013, the *New Yorker* magazine branded her 'strong vanilla', which may well be too bland to stand out in what is already a crowded field.

Finally, there is Minnesota Senator Amy Klobuchar, who announced her candidacy in a Minneapolis blizzard. She and Kamala Harris share a lot of backstory, with both coming from broken homes, excelling in their education, and then using stints as tough district attorneys to launch political careers. But what clearly sets Klobuchar apart are her Mid-Western roots. Her unique selling point is that, unlike the bicoastal liberal elites, she can carry the flyover states – the loss of which wrecked Clinton's Electoral College map.

In policy terms, she's a pragmatic centrist who understands that it takes 60 votes to get big stuff done in the Senate. She doesn't shy away from bipartisanship and has been one of Congress's most productive legislators by working across the aisle with moderate Republicans. Yet, as she's put her head above the parapet, the incoming fire has commenced, with recent reports that her 'Minnesota Nice' persona is only for public consumption, and that behind the mask she's a nasty piece of work who's abusive to her staff.

Even if no man was in this race, the ethnic, geographic and character diversity of these four women would still make for a fascinating primary battle. Of course, in an ideal world, gender and race would be irrelevant, and the Democratic primary would just be an extended policy debate to thrash out a winning platform. It's clear, even at this early stage in the process, that every candidate will need to respond to the 'democratic socialist' agenda being championed by a woman who isn't even old enough to run for President; freshman 29-year-old congresswoman and social-media phenomenon, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

Ocasio-Cortez won her place in Congress in spite of her party and she's already a powerful change agent backed by a fervent army of Twitter and Instagram followers. So, every candidate will need to carefully navigate the 'Green New Deal', 'Medicare for All', and

'Free College' litmus-test minefield that Ocasio-Cortez and the progressive wing of the party are sowing in front of them. But even if the primary is dominated by bracing policy debates, there's still an additional and unique challenge faced by the women in the race, and that is how they should respond to the backlash and righteous anger that many women in America feel because of what's happened over the last three years.

The confluence of the rise of Trump, the #MeToo movement, the Kavanaugh hearings, and myriad other issues have stirred a political awakening among American women. For many, the matrix has finally dissolved to reveal the full extent of the entitled patriarchy that protected predatory monsters like Harvey Weinstein. Indeed, you can make the broader argument that a common element in the populist movements that have come to power around the world, from Brazil to Poland, has been the disturbing renaissance of shameless chauvinism.

The organised resistance in the US to this type of female subjugation started with the countrywide 'Women's March' right after Trump's inauguration. The anger that many women felt then drew them into the formal political process, resulting in a record number of women being elected to congress in the 2018 midterms.

Throughout the country, there are many stories like that of New Jersey politician John Carman. In 2017, he made a joke about whether the women marching in Washington DC would be 'home in time to make dinner'. He was then promptly challenged and defeated by one of those marchers who was appalled by his condescension. Women's anger has clearly generated increased political engagement, but there's still the perilous question of how explicit female candidates should be in embracing that anger for political purposes.

One of the defining images of the 2016 presidential campaign was the second debate, during which Trump stalked Clinton around the stage, looming over her as she spoke. Instead of turning and confronting him, Clinton stuck to the playbook that in politics (as in many other aspects of life), female anger is counterproductive and disqualifying. Instead, you need to be calm and rational regardless of the provocation. This was also the attitude adopted by Christine Blasey Ford during the Kavanaugh hearings, which was in sharp contrast to the candidate himself who felt empowered to rage against the proceedings.

The counterpoint to this mantra of repress and control is once again Ocasio-Cortez, who is a young, articulate, passionate, non-white woman, who is clearly furious about the injustices she sees around her, and who you suspect would never stand for Trump pawing the ground in menace behind her.

So, the specific challenge for each of the female candidates for the Democratic presidential nomination is whether to ignore their gender as Clinton did, or instead weaponise the anger that many women currently feel as a legitimate and powerful force for political change. Channelling white working-class male anger clearly helped propel Trump to the presidency, and throughout American history women's righteous anger has regularly driven social change, from the abolition of slavery to universal suffrage to improved working conditions in factories.

Andrew Breitbart, the founder of *Breitbart News*, observed that 'politics is downstream from culture' and it's clear that in this cultural moment there are a lot of fired-up and engaged women in America. It's early days for the 2020 campaign, but maybe it's not too early to hope that we will mark the centennial of women's suffrage in the US in the most fitting of ways: by putting a woman – and maybe even an angry woman – in the Oval Office.

Celebrating 70 years of NATO: the alliance is still as vital as ever

George Robertson

2019

Another big anniversary for NATO. Another big opportunity for the critics and sceptics, be they in the White House, the Kremlin or in the media, to take to the megaphones. Millions of words will be written and broadcast – occasionally they will be helpful and positive – as they should be. Others will follow a cynical pattern typical of past anniversaries.

In 2003 Professor Sir Michael Howard at RUSI (Royal United Security Institute) catalogued the books on his shelf with titles like *NATO – the final crisis*; *NATO – The Impossible dilemma*; *NATO – The Troubled Partnership* (Henry Kissinger, no less, in 1965) and many others. He said his favourite was *The End of The Alliance* written by Robert Steel in 1962. Be ready then this year for more of the same. And yet the remarkable and durable alliance that is NATO deserves much better. In the history of the world, it is still unique and a triumph of inter-state cooperation.

The first Secretary General of NATO was Lord Ismay. In his autobiography, he recounts being strong-armed by Churchill (I know the feeling) to take on the infant alliance. After having a distinguished war and settling into a comfortable and interesting Cabinet position, he was persuaded to go to NATO HQ in Paris. But he took to it and tells of his feelings when he left after five years. 'We were utterly miserable. The council had been like a large family, and the international staff had seemed like our children.'

He made points then as relevant today as they were in his farewell speech in Bonn in May 1959. He spoke of the defensive shield which had been built up 'which, not yet as strong as might be wished, is an essential feature of the deterrent to aggression. Who would have thought that sovereign states would entrust their precious armed forces to the command of nationals other than their own in times of peace? But this is what has come to pass'.

Even more prophetically he said this: 'And, if at times we find the burden heavy, let us remember that the North Atlantic alliance is not only an obligation which sovereign states have undertaken of their own free will, but an insurance against the unspeakable horrors of a war which would destroy civilisation'.

As we contemplate a world wholly different from that of 1959, his words seem to echo what needs to be repeated as we commemorate NATO 60 years later. The unity still has to be ensured, the resolution has to be maintained, the capabilities have to be relevant and adequate, and the sense of purpose has to be appropriate to the new and novel threats we face today.

In the last few weeks, we are told that the present occupant of the White House, in NATO's strongest ally, has been reported as questioning US membership of the alliance. Worrying as that undoubtedly is, it may have reminded other allies of both the value of NATO and their own responsibilities to 'bear the burden' of its means. Nothing underlines the importance of American leadership in the world than the thought of losing it.

Burden sharing has long been a theme of American politicians, including the cheerleaders for the alliance – and with good reason. But a complacency that America will always be there with its clout and resources has held back the investment required for Europe's (and Canada's) contribution to the common effort. Donald Trump has shattered that complacency and for that, if for nothing else, we should be grateful.

The uphill task of getting close, not just to agreed figures because they are mere indications, but to having the right capabilities and attitude, will not be easy. But if European populations are to be kept safe in an uncertain future, the investment is not an optional extra.

So, what should be the checklist for NATO at 70? The time has come to go beyond publishing national gross spending figures on defence. Too often, the attempt to meet the 2% agreed target involves shady financial engineering. The composition has also to go public. What lasting value is 2% if it is made up of pensions and equipment for the last but one war?

Up to now, we have been reluctant to name and shame on the real military figures. It was claimed that it might give our adversaries details they would exploit. In the era of mass surveillance and data collection, this is an outdated view. Publics have the right to know what is being spent, on what and to what end.

Secretary General Stoltenberg has highlighted, in his words, the three Cs: 'cash, capabilities and contributions'. In other words, we need forces which can go far, go fast, hit hard, stay long. Much more emphasis has to be put on intelligence and cyber defences. Quantifying spending on this crucial arm of defence needs to be a priority. We need to know what is being spent on this new and vital front line. A cyber attack on a nation or a city cannot be responded to with a main battle tank. And we have far too many of them and too little of the other.

European contributions are starting to increase and the Wales Summit, by highlighting targets on readiness and equipment spending, has accelerated change. We need less talk now about 'European armies' and 'strategic autonomy'. These are empty buzz-words meaning little and we need more of an emphasis on ending duplication and inefficiency in defence budgets. Fancy wiring diagrams – as I often said – which are not connected to modern capabilities are for show not shooting.

NATO needs to reinforce its partnerships. So long as countries seek membership or a close relationship with all the facets of NATO, both military and civil, then they should be encouraged. Membership standards, however, must be maintained. Military compatibility and democratic credentials are fundamental. There should be no short-cut to membership

of such an elite organisation. And adherence to those standards does not end with accession – there is a continuing responsibility.

The alliance will only matter in the future if it has the same cohesion and common purpose which was envisaged 70 years ago. Its vital deterrent value – against new adversaries and new non-military threats – will only exist if all nations contribute equally.

NATO is a powerful military organisation and Article 5 has the respect of any potential adversary. Spending may still be short of ideal but it dwarfs all neighbours. That is why those who would challenge us look to the weak underbelly of our democracies. Splits are exploited, open elections can be affected, public debate can be hijacked, and electronic communications can be subverted. It is essential therefore that NATO's defences have to be much more than military.

And in that collective deterrence, which has kept the peace in the EuroAtlantic area for 70 years, is the crucial nuclear element. The American, British and French nuclear forces along with other weapons on European soil have been the backbone of a posture which has made conventional war unthinkable. They are as important today as they ever were.

Hard power is NATO's signature, but its soft power and political role is often underestimated. The Partnership For Peace has achieved small, quiet miracles in cajoling and encouraging nations to modernise militaries and build democratic institutions. It has prepared nations for full membership and provided for others a practical forum for cooperation and progress.

Relations with Russia matter. The NATO-Russia Council of which I was the first chairman should be an important venue for dialogue. It was created in a time of rare amity but was intended for tough times as well. The urgency of talking with the big Eastern neighbour is manifest. We should reinvigorate the council.

It is now 18 years since I stood at the old NATO HQ and invoked Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty on behalf of 19 nations. It was to be the first and only time in the history of the alliance and it was a clear signal to the enemies of our democratic assembly of free nations that we meant business.

As NATO turns 70, the unity and determination of Cyber 9/12 has to be a rallying point and reminder of what the alliance needs to be in its next several decades.

The old order is broken, but there's still everything to play for

Keith Aitken

2019

A friend of ours, a retired Parisian lady who staunchly refuses to treat advancing years as an excuse for mellowing, produced a noise suspiciously close to a genteel snort. How are we to know who to vote for, she demanded, when there are no fewer than 34 party lists on the ballot paper?

Well, all credit to France's voters, they managed to work it out, and in record numbers too. The end result made the election look like a two-horse race between Marine Le Pen's far-right National Rally (formerly the Front National) and Emmanuel Macron's centrist On the Move (La République en Marche) party, with 23.3% and 22.4% of the votes respectively. It didn't look that way back at the starting gate.

In the British media, the headline story has been Le Pen's victory: how it both conforms with the advance of the 'populist' right across the EU and reverses the failure of her run-off against Macron in the 2017 French Presidential Election. Considered from within France though, the picture is a long way from being quite that simple. In several respects, it feels altogether different.

Le Pen is entitled to savour her moment in the sun, but her win ('a victory for the people') is not the breakthrough she must have been hoping for. It follows seven long months of often violent rioting across the country against Macron's reform programme – disturbances that at their height occasionally looked capable of turning into an uprising against the young President, similar in nature and consequence to the 'events' of 1968 that brought the downfall of Charles de Gaulle.

Le Pen's posters urged the electorate to 'vote against Macron', while her top candidate, 23-year-old Jordan Bardella, presented the election unambiguously as 'a referendum on Macron'. Clearly, Le Pen's strategy was to seize ownership of the disaffection animated by the *gilets jaunes*, and since none of the other parties looking to work the same trick got very far with it, she must be presumed to have succeeded. Yet it brought only a slender victory over an undoubtedly unpopular President.

Here on the ground, this comes as no great surprise. Last Saturday, the day before France went to the polls, only 12,500 *gilets jaunes* were out on the streets – notably in Macron's home town of Amiens. It compares with 300,000 in the early weeks of the protest and also corroborates the virtual disappearance of DayGlo tabards from car dashboards – the symbol of passive endorsement visible back before Christmas in every second vehicle, in our region at least. A faction of the *gilets* contesting the election in its own right won just 0.5%.

Macron cannot infer from all this that his much-heralded 'grand national debate' and the significant concessions that flowed from it have won over the hearts and minds of French voters. Thirty-four competing parties are not the measure of a settled, contented politics. But it does look as though the protests against him are subsiding, at least in their current form.

Nor can Le Pen draw too much encouragement from her win in respect of future election prospects. French leaders are no more immune to mid-term kickings from the voters than their UK or US counterparts, and Macron must have been braced for much worse. His party fought a pretty wretched campaign, run so ham-fistedly by his former Europe Minister, Nathalie Loiseau, that the President himself was forced to take to the hustings in the latter stages, contrary to the norm of the Élysée Palace remaining aloof from vulgar vote-grubbing.

Le Pen has certainly reaffirmed the extent to which she has detoxified her party from the days when it was led by her immigrant-baiting father Jean-Marie. Yet, if she has advanced its standing at these elections, the progress is pretty marginal.

The comparison that tells us most is not with her defeat by Macron in the 2017 presidential vote, but with the performance of her party in the last European elections in 2014. She won that time too, and by a bigger margin than now: 24.85% against 20.8% for her nearest rivals, the old centre-right UMP (now Les Républicains) of Jacques Chirac and Nicolas Sarkozy. The then President, François Hollande, and his Socialist party were pushed into third place. Much good did it do her three years later against Macron.

This time, the turnout was bigger, rather countering the idea that she won by surfing a populist tide. Part of her problem is the EU itself. Where once she could float the prospect of a French withdrawal from the euro, even from membership of the union, she now does no more than grumble in a minor key about institutional structures and Macron's unswerving enthusiasm for the ideal of European unity. The awful example of Britain's Brexit humiliation has discouraged demands for Frexit, which were never all that popular in any case. Public buildings here invariably fly the EU flag beside the French tricolour, and very few people seem to take much issue with it.

Meanwhile, what of those other 32 runners and riders? The most startling performance among the smaller parties was that of the Greens, never before much of a force in French politics. They surged into third place, with nearly 13.5%, compared with less than 9% in 2014. Macron's tireless banging of the climate change drum seems to have benefited them more than him.

What this election does confirm is a politics still in flux. After all, Macron himself was elected Farage-like in 2017, at the head of a party that had emerged overnight from nowhere. Last Sunday, the Républicains and the Socialists, not so long ago the impregnable duopoly of French Government, scored a paltry 8.5% and 6.2% respectively.

It is a picture that has been replicated across much of continental Europe at this election. French voters have shown definitively that the old order is broken. But they have not answered the question of what is to take its place. There is still everything to play for.

Can the US live up to the ideals of the Statue of Liberty?

Alan McIntyre

2019

Immigration is now the lowest common denominator of politics and the connective tissue between Brexit, Trump and the surprise conservative election victory in Australia. The specifics vary from Victor Orban's explicit anti-Semitism in Hungary to Nigel Farage's subtler UK dog whistle of 'take back our country', but they all invoke the fear that someone who isn't like you is coming for your job, your daughter, and your sense of identity.

Trump's dehumanising 'infestation' rhetoric and the images of migrant kids lying drowned on European beaches and locked in Mexican border cages, makes it easy to slip into moral outrage mode and reflexively oppose anti-immigration policies. But unfortunately, the reality is that the developed world does need to have a proper and nuanced debate about immigration; and that debate is currently being swamped by a cacophony of inflammatory populist noise.

The facts are that both the US and the UK are increasingly diverse. America self-identifies as a nation of immigrants, but the Origins Act of 1924 severely restricted their flow, resulting in only 5% of US citizens being foreign born in 1960. Those were the good old days for those who object to the browning of America. With the repeal of the Origins Act in 1965, immigration gradually increased to the point that foreign borns now account for 15% of the US population.

With current immigration levels, the US will be a majority-minority country by the early 2040s and stopping immigration entirely only delays that milestone a few years because of birth rate differentials. That's why Trump could tap into the sentiment expressed by nearly 50% of white Americans in a 2016 poll that 'things have changed so much that I often feel like a stranger in my own country'. Populists like Trump don't get elected by talking about marginal issues, instead they exploit the things that matter the most, and increasingly, that's immigration.

The UK statistics tell an almost identical story. The UK's foreign-born population has risen from 5% in 1960 to over 14% in 2017. John Cleese's claim that London is no longer an English city had a whiff of hypocritical xenophobia about it, but factually he wasn't far off. If you look at the population of inner London, 43% are now foreign born and nearly 30% are foreign nationals, turning London, for better or worse, into a truly global city.

In a rational world, immigration policy would be treated as two distinct but connected issues, with the first being economic migration. UN projections show that, without immigration, by 2050, Germany's working-age population will drop by 17%, China's by 20%, and Japan's by 29%, with these demographic shifts putting immense pressure on social programmes. The US is slightly better off but would still experience a 5% drop over the next 30 years without immigration.

Stripped of political baggage, economic immigration policy should simply identify the level and mix of workers required to sustain economic growth. You then subtract the demographic trend line to determine target immigration levels. In this calculus, immigration doesn't just add units of labour capacity. There's plenty of evidence that US immigrants disproportionately create more companies and win more Nobel prizes, producing a positive multiplier effect; although those benefits do tend to accrue to either the immigrants themselves or the rich who profit from their cheap labour. The natural execution mechanism for a well-managed economic immigration policy is the type of points-based ranking system favoured by Canada and Australia.

It's not inherently immoral to restrict economic migration, but there's also an important cultural component to it. Although the Japanese population is rapidly ageing and shrinking, they've made the political decision to place a high value on a homogenous society, and hence are investing hugely in automation to moderate the need for immigration. You can call that racist, but it demonstrates that each country has its own absorption capacity that determines the level of immigration it believes it can tolerate without risking social unrest.

Where the moral aspect of immigration does come in is when you consider the second dimension; refugees from war and famine, and asylum seekers who fear for their personal safety. Of course, the two dimensions aren't completely independent. Syrians bombed out of their homes by Assad can have both a legitimate fear for their life and concerns about their future economic prospects. Dealing with the ebb and flow of these moral migrants raises the question of which countries will shoulder the burden. That can be a toxic political issue as Angela Merkel found out when she compassionately welcomed a million refugees to Germany in 2015 and then paid the electoral price, with over 70% of Germans wanting tougher restrictions on refugees and 40% saying that immigration is now their #1 voting issue.

Both economic and moral migrants need to be accommodated within the overall absorption rate, but it isn't an immutable constant. Historically, America has been able to integrate wave after wave of immigrants and have their new identity transcend ethnic and nationalist baggage. Within a generation, most new Americans are passing Norman Tebbit's cricket test. Indeed, you can make the case that the ability to assimilate increasing numbers of immigrants and make them productive without creating social unrest will be a key source of national competitive advantage in the mid-21st century.

But it's not easy. There's plenty of evidence that diverse teams produce better results in many areas of life from business to academia, but working in those teams is also less comfortable for their members. Assuming the same is true for nation states, strong persuasive political leadership is required to make the case that the disruption is worth it. On the flipside, diversity without assimilation creates its own long-term structural problems that can lower the absorption rate. Does anyone think we would still be talking about sectarian songs in Scottish football if we didn't have segregated Catholic schools in the West of Scotland to perpetuate centuries-old tribalism?

The 21st-century reality is that most immigrants are going to come from cultures that are distant and different, and that each country can only assimilate a finite number; so, we need to be able to debate that number without pointing fingers and screaming racist.

As if that debate wasn't hard enough, immigration – particularly in the US – gets further complicated by the issue of legality. Again, the facts don't lie. After a decade of declining illegal border crossings, Trump has created a self-fulfilling prophecy of border chaos by cutting aid to many unstable Central American countries. The result has been over 70,000 illegal crossings per month this year, with the majority being Central Americans rather than Mexicans. This surge has swamped the capacity of both the border patrol and the court system to deal with them.

The migrant caravans winding through Mexico have become political totems, but they're not just figments of Fox News' imagination. Asylum claims have also spiked to 30%, and while many are undoubtedly legitimate, others are economic migrants who have been coached by NGOs on what to say to minimise the risk of immediate deportation. The Trump Administration's reaction has been a marked shift from 'catch and release' to 'catch and hold', and that is why there are now a record 53,000 migrants being held in US detention centres.

The result of this policy shift has been political polarisation and the eradication of immigration as a bipartisan issue in the US. As Trump has amped up his rhetoric, many Democrats have radicalised in the opposite direction by rejecting any sort of enforcement as immoral, a change from the days when organised-labour ties made Democrats broadly anti-immigrant. Unfortunately, this radicalisation is playing straight into Trump's hands as a 2020 campaign issue. As journalist David Frum recently pointed out, 'if liberals insist that only fascists enforce borders, then voters will hire fascists to do the job liberals refuse to do'.

As a legal US immigrant, I believe we need stricter, but also more compassionate, enforcement. Because of the harsh nature of Trump's enforcement tactics, many on the left now claim a moral exemption that justifies ignoring the law and the default for Democratic presidential candidates is now to support 'sanctuary cities' that actively protect illegal immigrants. But what would their reaction be if a Democratic Congress passed strict gun control laws only to see Republican-controlled cities openly flout them because they disagreed? Yes, the enforcement tactics are reprehensible, but if you buy into the idea that every society has a natural absorption rate, then every illegal who is rewarded with the right to remain crowds out a well-educated tech worker from Bangalore or a stateless Rohingya refugee who wants to settle in America.

Comprehensive reform also needs to accept that the genie of illegal immigration can't be put back in the bottle. Rather than mass deportations, there needs to be a path to citizenship for the over 10 million illegals in the US, two-thirds of whom have been here for more than a decade. But in parallel, the Democrats need to accept that we should stop perpetuating the issue by actively preventing new arrivals, taking an aggressive approach to removing those who recently jumped the fence, and ending creeping naturalisation by not

issuing state driving licenses to undocumented immigrants. That is the only sort of two-sided reform deal that has a hope in hell of getting bipartisan support. If I ignore the mouth that the words came out of, I can't disagree with Trump's recent statement that 'I want people to come into our country in the largest numbers ever, but they have to come in legally'.

Despite the current political dysfunction, now is the time to address the immigration issue because it's not going to get any easier in the future. The World Bank estimates that, by 2050, climate change will create hundreds of millions and possibly as high as a billion new migrants as swathes of the world disappear under the waves or become uninhabitable, creating both economic and moral reasons to rethink our approach and raise our absorption rate.

The to-do list is certainly daunting, but we can't let the extremists on both sides define the debate and weaponise the issue. Immigration reform demands moderation and bipartisanship, which are obviously in short supply on both sides of the Atlantic.

In the US, we need to fix legal immigration by ending visa lotteries and limiting the family chain migration that currently accounts for 70% of legal entrants. We also need to tackle Central American migration at the source by stabilising the countries they are fleeing from and recognising that rising immigration is just one more reason to tackle climate change. But we also need to simultaneously strengthen borders, improve workplace enforcement, invest in the infrastructure to clear the backlog of four million legal applicants, and make asylum a quick, rigorous and fair process. We also need to offer those who are already well integrated into US society a qualified right to remain.

Finally, it's critical that we celebrate diversity and neuter white nationalism by severing the last links between national identity and ethnicity. As a country built on ideas, America should be in an ideal position to make that transition. Rural white Midwesterners need help appreciating that it's a source of strength that the New York Borough of Queens is the most ethnically diverse place on the planet, with nearly 140 languages spoken in an area of just over 100 square miles.

Despite Trump's 'murderers and rapists' characterisation, the data is crystal clear that immigrants make excellent citizens. They commit less crime, are less likely to become addicted, are less likely to own guns, and are generally more likely to act like strivers who want to create a better life for themselves and their families. Celebrating the upside of diversity is how you raise the absorption rate and how Canada has managed to get to 22% foreign born without immigration becoming a hot button issue. Although to be fair, Canada doesn't have to deal with hundreds of thousands of Americans illegally jumping the fence from Minnesota into Manitoba – although that may change if Trump gets re-elected.

I'm an American by choice and I want to live in a country that lives up to the ideals of the Statue of Liberty. A country that is a compassionate haven for the truly persecuted but also a beacon for the aggressively entrepreneurial. Post-Brexit, the UK will also need to decide what sort of country it wants to be. Will it pull up the drawbridge and embrace

Japanese insularity and declare 'we're full', or can it pivot to Canadian openness by welcoming and integrating a new generation of economic and moral migrants?

It's depressingly clear which way the political wind is currently blowing. In the US, a recent Harris poll showed that over 80% of registered voters want to reduce immigration by at least a third. So, to return to David Frum, the gloomy 2020 reality for the US is that if the Democrats can't move to the centre and embrace both enforcement and reform, the electorate will once again vote for the candidate of enforcement.

Even the French have started talking about the weather

Keith Aitken

2019

August, France's designated month of national inertia, is not halfway through, yet already the supermarkets have had special *rentrée* aisles in place for well over a month, stacked with garish satchels and lunchboxes so that kids go back to school at the start of September fully equipped. You'd think French parents couldn't wait to ship the little bandits back into captivity.

I have no evidence that this is so, I should hasten to add. As a general proposition, French parents have an easier, or at least quieter, relationship with their children than their British counterparts. They are no more likely to exclude the kids from outings, even late into the evening, than they are to leave their neurotic little dogs at home. Sometimes, true, the measured politeness with which the Gallic generations address one another can strike the British onlooker as faintly chilling – until the next time you see a British child throwing a weapons-grade tantrum in a public place. But I digress.

No doubt, part of the reason for the supermarket pre-emption is changed consumer behaviour. French retailers are no more immune to the migration of their customers online than British. The same desperation that now makes UK stores begin their Easter promotions around lunchtime on Boxing Day is possibly inducing French supermarkets to try to exploit the return to work even before people have started their holidays.

La rentrée signifies much more than a new school term. It is a national catharsis, deeply embedded in the operating software of every French adult, and not just because of the tradition (latterly eroding) that everyone who can do so takes their main annual holiday in the same August weeks as everybody else. *La rentrée* is France knuckling back down to work, resuming normal service and restoring grown-up topics to the news schedules.

It is also a rite of the passing year, a gear change in life's rhythmic journey, rather than an official deadline. It is the designated moment when summer ends and autumn begins.

The French are obsessed with these seasonal markers, and the rituals that go with them. It can be hard to get a handle on. The ones the British fuss most about, Christmas, for example, the French celebrate calmly and privately. On the ones we scarcely notice – VE Day, Ascension Day, Assumption – everything here comes to a halt. No French household would be caught without a vase of mimosa to replace the festive crib, or lily-of-the-valley on Labour Day, or a ticket to the fireworks on Bastille Day (14 July) or a Galette des Rois on Epiphany.

Beyond that, each locality has its own calendar. In Montpellier, there is a seamless succession of civic-backed festivals from February to October, and plenty of regular diversions outside those months. In this city of 70,000 undergraduates, academia adds

another layer of ritual. You learn to monitor the fluctuating volumes of young, phone-fixated cerebellum on the trams, eager for pizza after a tough day on Wikipedia.

All nations have their flag days, of course, but the difference in France is that they are very much participatory. In Britain, most seasonal events are passively received from afar: the Boat Race, the Proms, the Grand National, Ascot, Budget Day. Attempts to instil communal enthusiasm for marking the calendar – such as my friend Dennis Canavan's cheerleading for St Andrew's Day – seem doomed to indifference. When I was a boy, the *Today* programme tried to involve us by playing the national anthem on royal birthdays. All it instilled in me was bafflement as to why the Queen needed two birthdays. I'm still baffled.

In France, by contrast, it needs only the flimsiest excuse to throw up the food stands and wine tents, and invite everyone along. Better still if the due day falls midweek and can be turned into un pont (bridge), a semi-official extension of one day off into four or five by stretching it to the weekend.

My own theory is that the instinct to ritualise seasonal change is an atavistic memory from the time, not long ago, when France was predominantly an agricultural society, with sufficiently versatile terroir and climate to be self-sufficient. Cusps in produce cycles, definitive then, are heeded yet. They're most visible in the markets, which people still like to visit daily to assess what's current and good, and to plan supper around it. The changes can be abrupt. One week, every other stall is piled high with sacks of walnuts. The next, there is not a nut in sight, but there are apricots by the hodful, or soft white onions, or grapefruit the size of basketballs. Fresh purple garlic? Ah, must be June.

It is a wonderful way to pace the passing year, and it has the added virtue of making the French consumer doggedly resistant to the globalised shopping list. French shoppers see no point in eating melon, say, year-round. The time to eat melon is July, when the striped charentais are fresh from the soil and pulsing with fleshy sweetness. Once that's passed, you eat something else.

This year, though, has brought some disruption to the orderly procession. Things have been turning up out of sync, or of dubious quality, or not at all. The radishes were superlative: plump, full of bite and endless. But the figs are late, expensive, and so far not very good. Our exquisite neighbours, the flamingos, have evacuated to the outermost Camargue as their coastal lagoons turn to baked mud. Plus, of course, there are fears for the grape harvest, though when are there not? Place your orders now, messieurs, the vintage may be scant!

The reason is plain. This summer already seems to have gone on forever. If that sounds to you like a pleasure rather than an ordeal, then you have not experienced la Canicule with its temperatures in the mid-40s Celsius (somewhere over 110 in old money). Canicule translates inadequately as heatwave. Think of it all written in capital letters.

At its height (like the day our car thermometer hit 46 in a beach car park, falling only to 44 once we hit the road), it was simply unbearable. To step outside stung the skin, like

standing too close to a fire. Though the heat made headlines only when it broke records, we have had week upon week of pitiless sun and no rain.

The furnace, still in the mid-30s (mid-90sF) as I write, is the talk of the steamie. As a rule, la météo is regarded as a dull topic of conversation, best left to the Brits, especially here in the south where the weather is rarely volatile. But this year, everyone is exhausted, tetchy and grouching about the heat. It also, incidentally, lends some credibility to President Macron's frequent climate change sermons.

So perhaps the supermarkets are not jumping the *rentrée* gun solely from commercial despair. Perhaps they see a positive opportunity. Perhaps they've calculated that people won't mind being told prematurely that this particular summer is coming to an end. 'Summer's lease hath all too short a date,' said Shakespeare. Maybe not this year.

Does the US need revolution or reform?

Alan McIntyre

2019

My wife and I argue far more about politics than we used to. Trump does that to you. We don't disagree on the need to remove his corrosive presence from the White House, and we're equally resigned that there aren't enough vertebrate Republicans to convict him in the Senate. So, our debates focus on the Democratic primary and the choice of who will challenge Trump next November.

The Iowa Caucuses are now only seven weeks away and Fox News' composite caricature of the Democratic field is old, gay, unlikeable, corrupt and irredeemably socialist. With no candidate polling much above 25% at the national level, the Democrats only have six months to coalesce around a nominee who can simultaneously turn out black women in the South, energise college students in the Mid-West, and reassure soccer moms in the Philadelphia suburbs. With Trump's approval ratings stuck in the low 40s, he should be eminently beatable, but in the rancorous hyper-polarised politics he's created, his opponent needs to be able to both tell a compelling story and take a punch.

The swim lanes of the primary are now clear. Joe Biden has a lane to himself. Like many of the pensioners you see in municipal pools, Biden is swimming so slowly that you're convinced he's going to sink. Yet his sustained electoral buoyancy is keeping him well ahead in almost every national poll. His pitch is simple; it takes a thin-skinned septuagenarian white guy to beat one and, with decades of public service, he won't get shrug-dissed by Princess Anne or laughed at by Justin Trudeau.

Off to the left of Biden is the 'socialist' lane occupied by Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders, whose combined polling numbers have consistently topped Biden's for the last few months. They've fired up the left-wing twitterati and energised small-dollar donors with a slew of big government ideas from free college to single-payer healthcare, and they've not been afraid to say that taxes will go up. Warren's 'I've got a plan for that' policy machine has helped define the agenda for the rest of the field, creating a wake that everyone else in the pool needs to swim through.

In the lane right beside Biden are the other centrists; Pete Buttigieg, Senators Klobuchar and Booker, Governor Deval Patrick and a few others. Apart from Buttigieg, who is making steady gains, most are just treading water waiting for Biden to have a senior moment so that they can emerge as the pragmatic non-socialist alternative. Some, like Senator Booker, are now in danger of drifting over into the next lane which is increasingly congested with dead political floaters. The most recent high-profile addition to that non-swim lane is Senator Kamala Harris, who found that attacking Biden for being a racist did nothing except puncture her own electoral water wings, sending her quickly to the bottom of the polls.

Finally, there are two candidates who can lounge on their mega yachts rather than swim. Billionaires Tom Steyer and Mike Bloomberg are attempting to show that you don't need to eat bad fried chicken in country diners to be viable, instead, you just need to be willing to write humungous personal cheques targeted at the huge swathe of voters going to the polls on 3 March's 'Super Tuesday'.

The continued diversity of this field highlights the main issue energising the McIntyre dinner table debates. My wife contends that the country is simply exhausted, and that Biden offers a low-risk return to some sense of normality. As a potential one-term President with a strong heir-apparent VP like Buttigieg, Biden can bring the pendulum back from populist crazy land and stop it somewhere in the political middle. Even with a grown up in the White House, we might simply return to Obama-era congressional gridlock, but at least the executive branch won't be a mafia crime family with autocrat envy.

My wife also sees it as a positive that left-wing firebrands accuse Biden of being a creature of Washington who has consistently worked across the aisle, because maybe that means he'll be able to help moderate Republicans convalesce from Trump-era PTSD and re-engage in normal politics. So, Biden's policies don't really matter if his electability means he can win the swing states and draw a line under the last four years. She could be right, but the flaw in that approach was highlighted by Biden's endorsement last week by John Kerry, the 2004 Democratic nominee whose prized electability evaporated under sustained Republican attacks and who singularly failed to energise the broader Democratic base.

The counter argument, represented by my side of the dinner table, is that Trump's election was a symptom, not the cause, of what ails America and that radical change is required. If we don't deal with issues like weaponised social media, vast pools of dark money in politics, rampant voter suppression, and double-digit increases in violent hate crimes, the system will keep spawning Trump clones who may be even more dangerous if they're disciplined and competent. Only by addressing what's broken with our politics will we be able to grapple with longer-term problems like income inequality, sky-high healthcare costs, climate change and gun violence.

The conventional wisdom used to be that capitalism and democracy had a strong linear correlation. Nearly 30 years ago, Francis Fukuyama famously predicted that the universal adoption of market economics would lead to the 'end of history' and universal liberal democracy. Yet from Singapore, to the Middle East to China, there are now countless examples of state capitalism delivering economic growth with little or no democracy involved.

Even in the West, instead of a linear relationship there's now plenty of evidence of a convex curve, where at some point unfettered capitalism starts to degrade democracy. When 68% of US political campaign donations come from 0.3% of the population, there's a price for everything, from elite college admissions to an ambassadorship to the EU, and when the economic elite are inseparable from the political elite, the endgame is a banana republic kleptocracy where pay-to-play is brazen and unconstrained.

To hijack a democracy for personal gain you need a demagogic smokescreen to hide behind and that's where Trump's focus on divisive issues like immigration plays a huge role. Like any abusive relationship, the political genius of the American right has been to convince those who would benefit from radical change that any change is dangerous and destabilising. Rather than debate the actual merits of say free college education, Sanders and Warren are painted as harbingers of collective farming in the Mid-West and Washington – bureaucrats telling Caterpillar how many tractors to build. This fear of change has permeated the Democratic Party itself as evidenced by a recent (and rejected) \$1m donation that came with the caveat that it would be refunded if Warren won the nomination.

The 'booming' US economy with record low unemployment is also an effective smokescreen that obscures the facts that US life expectancy has fallen for three straight years, suicides are up 30% over the last two decades, and we've got an increasingly shameless self-perpetuating plutocracy in which the richest 400 Americans have more wealth than the bottom 185 million combined. If the 99% don't start voting their self-interest, many of them could find themselves in perpetual neo-feudal gig economy servitude. If there's one statistic that should drive voting patterns, it's the Pew Charitable Trust's estimate that three-quarters of young American adults will now end up financially worse off than their parents.

America's been here before and climbed out of the hole. The Gilded Age in the late 19th century was a period of rapid economic growth but also a period of increasing economic inequality, political corruption and social tensions. Ultimately, the robber barons were brought to heel by the rise of labour unions, the trust busting of President Teddy Roosevelt, and a progressive movement that increased the role of government and buttressed democracy. And yes, those progressive-era radicals were labelled socialists by their opponents as well, at a time when that word connoted far more violent insurrection than it does now.

The 'return to normal service' argument is seductive. Don't take the risk of letting Trump get another four years. Be pragmatic and disciplined and seek reform over revolution, a view backed by President Obama who intervened in the primary with the observation that America is 'less revolutionary than it is interested in improvement'. But that 'small c' conservatism begs the question of how you know when big structural change is required.

At the end of the Gilded Age, the tipping points were hundreds of workers dying in factory fires because there were no health and safety regulations, monopolists like Andrew Carnegie violently crushing strikes, and the blatant corruption of electoral politics. As we look to 2020, can tackling climate change wait for American politics to settle down? When medical bills bankrupt half a million Americans a year, is tinkering with Obamacare enough? And, is the 2019 record of more than one mass shooting per day a number we can live with as we wait for politics to normalise?

Democrats need to make a better case that unemployment and GDP growth are not the

only metrics that matter for society and that there's a viable version of American capitalism that puts more emphasis on social mobility, income equality and aspirational quality of life measures. You can point at Scandinavia, but it's not an easy argument to make as Jeremy Corbyn is finding out. His spending plans would put the UK public sector in line with most of the rest of Europe, but those plans have been demonised by most of the UK press as radical and dangerous under the premise that this type of political realignment is simply not possible. As British historian R H Tawney observed, 'happy the nation whose people has not forgotten how to rebel,' which may explain why both the UK and America are currently so miserable.

My heart says the US does need radical change to stop us reaching an inflexion point where it may no longer be possible. That the cancer of Trump and the late-stage crony capitalism that he represents now justifies strong progressive chemotherapy. But I'm also swayed by my wife's argument that anything that increases the risk of another Trump term also risks irreversible damage to both the US and the broader world.

I hope at least one Democrat emerges from the primary who can both make the case for change and reassure voters stuck in their abusive relationship with Trump that there's no need to be afraid of that change. But if they can't, and Joe Biden emerges as the 'safe' Democratic nominee, he will still have my vote come next November, and I'll be eating some crow for dinner if he wins.

HEALTH

Two ways to go

Catherine Czerkawska

2010

SR conducted a long and ultimately successful campaign in support of St Margaret of Scotland Hospice in Clydebank, whose continuing care of people nearing the end of their lives was threatened by a decision of Greater Glasgow and Clyde Health Board to transfer the beds to a private-sector development nearby.

With regard to Greater Glasgow and Clyde Health Board's proposals, Kenneth Roy asks: 'Why, with scarce resources and the ability to make a rational choice, would any responsible public body commit to such a building project when the service is already being provided to the highest standards of clinical and nursing excellence by a top-rated hospice?'

Why, I might add, would they have the lunacy to suggest that this same hospice become a 'nursing home' while a private company is left to care for the 'frail elderly?' Do they not know the difference? And if not, can this health board be described as a responsible public body? I hope these same board members never have cause to find out the hard way, for themselves or close relatives, the difference between the proper palliative care provided by the hospice movement, and the way in which the frail elderly – and not-so-elderly – are all too often treated in our hospitals and nursing homes. Actually, I'm lying. Let's be honest about this. I hope they do.

Some years ago now, I lost both my parents to cancer within a three-year period. My father died first, of pancreatic cancer. This is a form of cancer which is difficult to diagnose but, all the same, he was treated with particular cruelty. For a year – and this was a previously fit, good humoured, intelligent and active man, in his late 60s – he grew more and more frail. He lost a vast amount of weight and was hardly able to eat. He was obviously jaundiced, skeletal and exhausted. Frankly, an idiot could have seen that he was a very sick man. Every so often, he would be trundled off to hospital for a series of yet more inconclusive tests. Late in the day, they gave him a full body scan, and I still remember sitting outside the clinic, listening to his cries of pain as they sent his poor, tormented body through the scanner. That too was inconclusive.

It is impossible to describe to anyone who has not experienced it, the full horror and helplessness of watching a loved one die slowly, with no diagnosis, no treatment and – worst of all – no proper palliative care. It is as if the NHS, with all its focus on getting patients better and moving them on, is embarrassed in the face of terminal illness. One Friday, in desperation, I went to see his GP who told me that my father was a 'very difficult patient to treat' and prescribed anti-depressants for his 'psychological condition'. By

Sunday, dad was so ill that we phoned Doctors on Call. The visiting doctor took one look at him, and admitted him to hospital.

On Monday morning, with dad in a busy medical ward, a nurse said: 'Don't be scared, but he's been prescribed morphine'. We sat with him for a bit. He seemed to be drifting into sleep. I remember that, as we left, at the end of visiting time, he squeezed my hand, one lovely, warm squeeze and closed his eyes. We hung about the corridor, not sure whether to go or stay. Nobody spoke to us. But as he seemed to be asleep, we eventually left, planning to come back in the evening. He died that afternoon. In fact, mercifully, I don't think he woke up again. I think the staff arrived – 10 minutes, half an hour, perhaps an hour later – to find him dead.

Some three years later, my mother went through a similar diagnostic hell. My advice to anyone would be, if you are going to get cancer, do make sure it is a commonplace or fashionable one. Otherwise God help you. She had cancer of the oesophagus, but was diagnosed much too late – and long after the tumour had metastasised – for the fine surgeon who eventually treated her at Hairmyres to do anything except operate on her to make her more comfortable. Our local hospital told us they were 'struggling to expedite her transfer' for months. Oddly enough, she was only moved, and diagnosed within a day, after I contacted the surgeon at Hairmyres myself, to find that he knew nothing about her.

Fortunately, when she became too ill and frail to remain at home, she was admitted to the Ayrshire Hospice. How can I illustrate the many ways in which the hospice ethos comforts, not just the patient, but their family and friends? My grown-up son had just started secondary school as his much loved nanna was dying but he still remembers the hospice as a place of sunshine, chocolate cake and a garden where he played crazy golf with his dad. The staff advised that he should see his nanna, briefly, even when she became very ill 'otherwise the imagining is much worse than the reality,' and that he have a few days off school, just to spend time with his dad, while I was occupied with mum. They were right on both counts.

When mum had to spend a few days in hospital, the hospice promised to keep her bed for her and her relief was palpable. She was a popular and uncomplaining patient. In fact – and I had heard this from others, but would not have believed it, if I had not witnessed it personally – the more fragile she became, the more loving she seemed, as though everything else were draining out of her, leaving some central core of light. However, I was alarmed to hear a nurse in the hospital tell her, with a certain vicious satisfaction, 'you won't get cosseted here like you do in that hospice!'

Back in 'that hospice', to our relief, my mother was treated with infinite kindness and patience, and always with dignity. This even involved colour co-ordinating her nightie with the crocheted bedspread on her bed. She had always loved her garden. Now she was too ill to go outside, but it was a warm August, the windows were opened and the scent of roses drifted in. Her pain was addressed, her fears were addressed and so, in ways too numerous to mention, were all our worries. Nothing was too much trouble.

If she couldn't manage to eat, they would ask her what she fancied, and bring it, beautifully presented. There was always somebody to talk to, whether it was nursing staff, doctors or volunteers. In the last week of her life, I stayed there with a folding bed and blankets beside her bed. They would bring me a sherry at night and cups of tea, bacon rolls, toast. As she slipped away, there were people to sympathise, people to hand a tissue when it was needed, even people to shed a tear with me. No matter how terrible the illness, my memories of the place are still tinged with sunlight.

After my father's death, we were raw with a poisonous combination of grief, anger, regret and guilt that we had not been able to help him. After my mother's death, we felt sad, for sure, but although the illness had been dreadful, it had been, in every other sense – for her and for those who loved her – a 'good' death. I only wish my dad had been accorded the same quality of care.

One more memory from the hospice. My mum had a strong religious faith. She knew, with absolute and unshakable certainty, that she was going to see my dad and that all manner of things would be well. It was, in a way, the removal of at least one more worry. But I remember sitting quietly, wrapped in my blanket, beside my mother's bed, hearing the low murmur of a conversation between the lady chaplain and an elderly patient in the same room, who had been worrying the nurses and doctors for days because of her stark terror in the face of death. Eventually, they had discovered the source of that awful panic. It wasn't pain. They had addressed that. It wasn't even dying. But, because of her own religious background, she was convinced that she was one of the damned, doomed to hell.

It took a monumental effort in the face of overwhelming odds, but the gentle chaplain finally managed to convince this poor little lady of the reality of what she herself had faith in: a profoundly loving God. I doubt if it could have been done anywhere but in a hospice where the evidence was there for her to see, on all sides. Which is not, of course, to say that the hospice movement forces any kind of religious belief on anyone. But care for the entire person is at the heart of their ethos and whether that means addressing hideous worries about the afterlife or providing chocolate cake and prawn sandwiches, then they will do the best they possibly can.

I know all too well the arguments on all sides, and accept that others may feel differently, but still, my experience of dedicated palliative care, and its opposite, has made me very wary indeed when politicians talk of assisted suicide. Before we can consider such legislation, we need more hospices, many more of them, not fewer. Nursing homes are no fit substitute.

Hospices need funding, but then they need to be left to get on with what they know best. Greater Glasgow and Clyde Health Board is proposing to hand over care to a private health company whose main function (according to its own website) seems to be to run nursing and care homes. This is an iniquity so great that we should all be lobbying our politicians about it now. If they get away with it in Glasgow, where next?

The hospital bed

Jill Stephenson

2011

The National Health Service as a concept and a method of delivery is popularly – and politically correctly – deemed to be above reproach. Yet aspects of its *modus operandi* come in for a battering in the press. The worst aspect appears to be the treatment – or neglect – of the very elderly, particularly those who cannot do basic things for themselves, such as feeding.

It may be that there are different standards of nursing, and nurses, in different areas of the health service. In the less acute areas, and particularly in a less than glamorous area such as care of the elderly, there may be cases of a lack of dedication and a shortage of that priceless commodity, patience. In the acute areas, nurses have often had specialist training and require special skills – how to insert a cannula, for example – that enhance their feeling of self-worth. But that does not necessarily mean that, because they are more skilled and *au fait* with modern technology, they lose the human touch.

My two recent stays in hospital, in clinical oncology, have suggested the reverse. The staff nurses have been brisk and efficient, but they have also been patient, concerned and positively friendly (I am trying to avoid using that awful word 'caring'). Nothing was too much trouble, day or night. I had the same feeling, some 15 years ago, in clinical neurosurgery – with the exception of one sister who talked at a high volume from start to finish of her shift, not something to endear her to a patient who had suffered a subarachnoid haemorrhage and the head pain accompanying it. The other nurses were calm, helpful and pleasant. One, called Pat, sat up with me through the night before my somewhat hazardous procedure and talked for hours in a reassuring and friendly manner that I shall never forget.

An enterprise of the size and significance of the NHS requires to be run according to a clear structure of rules and regulations. The problem is, who is it who ensures that all of these rules and regulations are mutually compatible and serve the best needs of patients? For example, it used to be customary (even in the 1990s) for a doctor, on his rounds, to sit on a patient's bed to have an intimate discussion of the patient's progress and response to his/her treatment. It is probably extremely sensible that someone, somewhere, has now ruled that medical staff should not sit on a patient's bed – to avoid cross-infection, it is said. We would all wish to avoid hospital-generated infections, and so this no doubt seems a reasonable precaution.

From another point of view – that of the patient – it is not reasonable. One day during my second recent stay in hospital, my restricted space was invaded by four medics – a consultant, a registrar and two juniors. I was sitting on the only chair, and, as they towered

over me, I said to the consultant: 'Of course, you're not allowed to sit on my bed?', to which he answered 'No'. I then told him that he would have to tell someone in charge of these regulations that having four tall people standing around one's seated self was not a patient-friendly way of proceeding, and that it was, frankly, intimidating. I don't expect him to do any such thing. But I could not see how I could have a useful discussion about my treatment and my response to it when I felt at such a disadvantage.

Thinking about this, I was reminded of two previous experiences. When my father, in his late 80s, was in hospital at a time when he had Parkinson's disease, he had difficulty in eating. With shaky and swollen hands, he could not manoeuvre food tidily into his mouth, and so, after every meal, the front of his pullover was encrusted with dried food. I suggested to a nurse – in all innocence – that he could perhaps be given a bib of some kind to wear, as he did at home. She was affronted. 'That would be so demeaning,' she exclaimed. And wearing a food-encrusted pullover wasn't demeaning? Someone well-meaning had made up a rule about this, without considering the actual human implications of it.

A similar, but even more demeaning, distressing and deeply humiliating fate befell my husband in the last days of his life in an Edinburgh hospital, where the nurses on the ward were seriously deficient in the human qualities that mean so much to a patient, and that I have recently experienced during my own sojourns in the same hospital. It may be untypical, but I found the male nurses, particularly, distinctly insensitive. It was not only that they were, shall we say, insouciant about having, as they freely admitted, given my husband an excessive dose of laxative. Their response to the consequences of this remains so distressing that I cannot bring myself to write about it. Once again, someone had decided, from a totally unempathetic point of view, what would be demeaning for a patient without following through the law of unintended consequences, one of which was a far deeper degree of humiliation.

I don't know who takes these decisions, but I am beginning to doubt that they are taken by real live human beings. Management automata with clip-boards see one side of a problem. We need individuals, or even groups of people, who can view a problem from all of its angles instead of simply trying to solve one problem without considering what additional problems such a decision might generate. Perhaps this is a case where some role-playing would not go amiss. In addition, I would wish for the impossible: that every doctor should witness – and learn from – the wonderful bedside manner of the delightful registrar who has recently been in charge of me. Her listening skills and her empathy, as well as her natural communication gifts, would provide a valuable and salutary example for anyone in medicine to learn from.

A diagnosis of Scotland's GP surgeries

Kenneth Roy

2013

1.

A staggering 1.3 million people in Scotland are registered with GP practices boasting patient lists of more than 10,000, a survey by the *Scottish Review* reveals. The growth of these supersize surgeries has deprived many patients of choice.

Our research shows that only a minority of Scotland's largest practices offer working people early morning consultations; that some close their surgeries at lunchtime; that fewer than half have introduced an online service for repeat prescriptions; and that prospective patients are ill-informed about catchment areas.

These findings, among others, fail to inspire confidence in the growth of industrial-scale GP practices, some with patient lists larger than the population of a medium-sized town. It is impossible for us to judge the quality of the medical care they provide. What we do feel able to judge, from information publicly available, is whether they are meeting the needs of their patients. The answers are patchy at best, shocking at worst.

2.

It is 10 years since a team from University College London undertook a major piece of research on the standards of general practice. Although their work was concentrated on England, their conclusions were regarded at the time as more broadly applicable. They found that the trend in the NHS towards larger practices had little impact on the quality of primary care. They examined in particular the care of patients with chronic heart disease and found that the results were similar across the board, irrespective of the size of the patient list.

They also found that patients seemed happier with smaller practices, which were seen as more accessible, building greater trust between patients and doctors, and achieving higher levels of patient satisfaction. The team concluded (in an article in the *British Medical Journal*): 'The NHS should reconsider how it can improve the quality of care provided by GPs, without relying on the presumed benefits of consolidating them into larger units'.

On both sides of the Border, this advice was comprehensively ignored. In 2003, the team from University College defined a small practice as one with 1,200 patients; that would now be regarded as tiny. The largest practice it visited had a list of 13,000. Ten years on, a list of that size in Scotland is large but by no means exceptional; there are many larger ones.

In 2004, the original NHS principle of personal doctoring, and of the patient's right to choose, was fatally undermined when patients were obliged to register with a practice as a whole rather than with a specific GP. According to the NHS in Scotland, 'the concept of

average numbers of patients per GP is now less meaningful' – which does not prevent unreliable attempts being made to calculate such averages.

What is not in dispute is that there are 1,002 GP practices in Scotland with an average list size of 5,518. This relatively human-shaped statistic has, however, concealed until now the gigantic scale of the top layer, which has been created largely by an unchecked process of amalgamation. The think tank Reform Scotland observed in a recent report that 'choosing your own doctor' – the proud claim of the NHS's founding fathers – has become impossible. Our research substantiates that view.

3.

We have worked out that there are 109 practices with a patient list exceeding 10,000. They account for a disproportionate number of patients – almost one in four of the population.

We were able to compile, from official records, a unique table of Scotland's 20 largest practices with their patient numbers:

1. The practice of Drs Byford, Spence, Haggerty and Meredith, Maryhill, Glasgow: 21,629
2. Inverurie Medical Group: 21,625
3. Peterhead Medical Centre: 20,995
4. Inverkeithing Medical Group: 18,636
5. Waverley Medical Practice, Coatbridge: 18,292
6. Old Machar Medical Practice, Aberdeen: 17,598
7. Wellwynd Practice, Airdrie: 17,421
8. Ellon Group Practice: 15,760
9. Maryhill Practice, Elgin: 15,195
10. Skene Medical Group, Aberdeen, 14,867
11. Nairn Healthcare Group: 14,481
12. Newbattle Medical Practice, near Edinburgh: 14,227
13. Townhead Surgery, Irvine: 14,183
14. Linlithgow Medical Group: 14,080
15. Kilsyth Medical Practice: 13,938
16. Portlethen Medical Centre: 13,865
17. Tranent Medical Practice: 13,808
18. Largs Medical Group: 13,559
19. Kenilworth Medical Centre, Cumbernauld: 13,301
20. Parade Group Practice, Glasgow: 13,221

We excluded the Edinburgh University practice because of its specialist nature.

Having compiled the table, we looked at the services each practice provides. We found that three of the top 20 have no website and that the website of a fourth – Townhead in Irvine –

is down because it is being 'reconstructed'. In its absence, NHS Ayrshire and Arran has put a basic page online with a phone number and email address for the practice, a list of 10 doctors, but no information about consulting hours.

When we searched for the website of the Kilsyth practice, we found only basic entries in business directories and a report in a local newspaper which claimed that people calling the surgery had been placed on hold for as long as an hour and that calls were not being returned. The partners had given an assurance to the local MSP that these issues would be addressed. Eighteen months later, it seems that the practice still has no website.

Reform Scotland maintained in its report that 'any organisation which is providing a service to the public and is in receipt of public money, such as GP practices, should have a website'. We agree. Our research shows, however, that a significant minority do not have websites. Among the 16 largest practices which do, three appear to be no more than web pages of their NHS board and are impersonal and institutional in character.

4.

We tested each of the 16 practices on three questions:

(1) Do they offer early morning appointments to workers?

Despite the size of the GP teams – as many as 18 full-time doctors plus a battery of nurses and back-up staff – only six practices do. The Linlithgow surgery is open some mornings from 7am; several others from 7.10am or 7.30am. We found only one practice – Old Machar – which has any Saturday opening (once a month). Most offer extended hours on selected evenings. Three say they have extended hours without specifying what they are. Another seems to have forgotten to include any of its surgery times.

Extraordinarily, given the number of available staff, two of the 16 take no appointments during the lunch hour. If this pattern is typical, at least 125 of Scotland's 1,000 practices continue to observe the hours of a small town solicitor in the 1950s. But the figure for lunchtime closing will almost certainly be higher, since smaller practices have less cover.

(2) Do they offer an online service for repeat prescriptions?

Only seven out of the 16.

(3) Are they specific about their catchment areas?

Only four practices publish a map on their website. Another assures prospective patients that 'if you live in the practice catchment area you are eligible to join the practice' without identifying the catchment area. Others advise patients to 'contact reception' for details. This lack of clarity is striking. It seems to put the onus on the patient. It could be mistaken for complacency – or the arrogance born of monopoly.

Although most practices make the business of registering sound as inviting as national service, a few (such as Maryhill in Elgin) strike a friendlier note. The Elgin website is,

indeed, exemplary in every respect. But what are new patients in Inverurie expected to make of a statement that requests for same day appointments 'will be triaged by the duty doctor?' Or those in Ellon of a list of 10 GPs, all of whose first names are expressed in initials, making it impossible to identify the gender of the doctors?

5.

We have specific recommendations for the Health Secretary, Alex Neil. Scotland's largest GP practices – the 109 with patient lists of more than 10,000 – should be obliged by the terms of their NHS contract to have a functioning website; to organise early morning surgeries for working patients; to offer repeat prescriptions online; and to publish online a list of the full names of their GPs and to identify whether each GP is male or female.

Unless these mega-partnerships up their game, the policy of forbidding private companies to establish rival GP practices in Scotland will inevitably begin to be challenged – and with some justification.

A man's last hours, and the shame of NHS 24

Kenneth Roy

2013

1.

On 28 January 2010, the board of NHS 24 – 'Scotland's provider of national telehealth and telecare services', as it describes itself – held its first meeting of the year in a mood of self-congratulation.

The chairman, Allan Watson, told his colleagues that the agency's performance over the 2009-10 'festive period' – a euphemism for the extended closedown of GP surgeries over Christmas and New Year – had been 'strong, with all key performance indicators achieved and call demand managed in a clinically safe and appropriate manner'. Mr Watson went on

to remark 'upon the very evident confidence with which the operational issues were handled, and the commitment and high morale of the staff'.

He said that, in early January, he and the chief executive had sent a round-robin email recording 'appreciation of the efforts of all staff'. The board for its part 'commended the performance of the service over the festive period'. In this bluest of blue-sky reports, there was no hint that anything had gone seriously wrong in a call centre at Cardonald, Glasgow.

But something had. The full story has only just emerged and is told here in depth for the first time.

2.

On Christmas Eve 2009, John Willock, aged 43, of Erskine, Renfrewshire, twisted his knee while he was walking down an icy, slippery path. He decided not to mention this apparently minor accident to his partner, Carolann Rogers, or the rest of his family. He had no wish to spoil Christmas for them.

Around 7pm on Boxing Day, while he and Carolann were socialising at the home of her parents in Erskine, John confided in his partner that he was unwell. He said he was feeling sick and shivery. At 9.30pm, he went back to his own house, leaving Carolann with her parents. By the time she returned around 1.00am, John had been sick several times. He was sick many more times that night.

The following sequence of events is not disputed by any of the parties involved:

27 December

8.14pm

Unable to keep any food or fluids down, feeling 'very clammy', John Willock calls NHS 24.

A call handler at Cardonald – call handler 1 – notes that he had been ill for four days. It had in fact been 24 hours. The call is referred on.

8.23pm

A doctor – GP 1 – phones John. He records 'general malaise for three days' – again inaccurate – and other symptoms. GP 1 notes that he 'offered to get him seen at PCEC [primary care emergency centre] but [John] declined, was looking for house visit, advised would not be appropriate as symptoms sound viral and self-limiting'. GP 1 agreed later that he 'did not pick up on the fact that John Willock was essentially housebound' and that 'he had not put himself in a sufficiently informed position to make a safe clinical decision'.

GP 1 gave two reasons for this lapse. First, he was not as thorough as he could have been. Second, NHS 24 allows doctors only six minutes to evaluate a patient – to open the call record, read it, dial the number, speak to the patient, make an entry in the clinical record, and close off the case on a computer screen. In John Willock's case, the entire process took five minutes, including a telephone consultation which lasted two minutes, 47 seconds.

During the night of 27-28 December, Carolann notices that John has started to become breathless.

28 December

8.48am

Monday, the fourth day of the holiday weekend, and still the GP surgeries are closed. John Willock makes a second call to NHS 24 and speaks to call handler 2. She fails to tell nurse adviser 1, to whom she refers the call, that he is a return caller.

During the verbal handover, call handler 2 advises nurse adviser 1 that 'the patient's got a burnin' sensation in his chest for about 10 hours an' a' the other symptoms ok?' Nurse adviser 1 assumes it is a fresh call. But even if she had been aware that it was a return call, she would have had no access to the record of the conversation with GP 1; it is not the practice of NHS 24 to make such records available to its staff.

In the clinical opinion of nurse adviser 1, John has indigestion. She recommends him to take cold milk and Gaviscon – a counter-productive remedy for any patient who is vomiting.

After this exchange, John becomes cold to the touch, yet his head is warm. His injured knee is now double the size of his other knee. He is constantly sick.

4.28pm

Carolann, extremely concerned, calls NHS 24. She tells call handler 3 that her partner has called twice before. Call handler 3 refuses to speak to her and insists on speaking to John himself. Later she acknowledges that she 'rushed the call and did not pay attention to what she was being told' and that she had been 'abrupt'. She gives as the reason for her behaviour

that she had been 'tired'. Although John sounds breathless, she omits to mention his breathlessness to nurse adviser 2 when she puts through the call. She says in the handover that he is a return caller, but that he is calling about a different complaint: an injury. Nurse adviser 2 treats it as a fresh call about a sore knee. She advises him to take Ibuprofen, one of the common side-effects of which is vomiting.

John's condition continues to deteriorate during the night of 28-29 December.

29 December

9.30am

The GP surgeries have finally reopened. Carolann phones her partner's practice and speaks to a nurse who passes a message to GP 2 that he is 'not absolutely convinced' of the necessity for a home visit.

11.08am

GP 2 speaks to John on the phone. GP 2 is not particularly concerned about his condition, but decides to visit him at home anyway.

12.00noon or 1.00pm (there is a disagreement about the time)

GP 2 calls at the house. Carolann insists that John 'looked clammy, as if he had a temperature, was very, very breathless, bothered by light, his speech laboured'. GP 2 observes no difficulty in his breathing, does not think his speech is laboured or that he is clammy or bothered by light. He concludes that John has gastro-enteritis and gives him an anti-sickness injection.

It is the fourth mistaken diagnosis in 40 hours: first, something viral; then indigestion; then a sore knee; and now gastro-enteritis. There has been a complete absence of any holistic approach to the patient's condition.

5.40pm

A desperate Carolann phones the GP practice and speaks to GP 3. She advises her to give John two cocodamol tablets.

6.05pm

Carolann dials 999 and requests an ambulance.

6.08pm

Paramedics arrive and find John to be 'unresponsive'. They conduct CPR to no avail.

6.20pm (40 minutes after the last GP consultation)

They tell Carolann that there is nothing more they can do for him.

9.25pm

John is pronounced dead by a police casualty surgeon.

11.00pm

His body is removed to the mortuary of the Royal Alexandra Hospital, Paisley.

3.

In the last 46 hours of his life – between 8.14pm on 27 December and 6.20pm on 29 December – John Willock spoke to one GP, three call handlers and two nurse advisers employed by NHS 24, as well as a GP and a nurse employed by his own practice – a total of eight health service professionals, none of whom correctly diagnosed his condition, two of whom gave him remedies that would have exacerbated his condition, two of whom failed to observe the correct procedures for the handling of calls, and one of whom acted abruptly towards him for no better reason than that she was 'tired'.

A post-mortem established that John Willock died of septicaemia. He was a good man; much-loved.

Thirty days later, the board of NHS 24 was told that calls over the Christmas and New Year holidays had been managed in 'a clinically safe and appropriate manner' and the chairman informed the meeting that the entire staff had shown 'commitment and high morale'. There was no mention of the death of John Willock at the board meeting. There was no mention of it in the subsequent annual report of NHS 24.

4.

NHS 24 is the agency on which the people of Scotland depend for after-hours medical care. What has it learned from its performance in the case of John Willock? Has it learned anything? At this point, the personal becomes political.

In December 2009, it was only 'good practice' for nurse advisers to check a patient's call history when taking a call from a return caller. It is now mandatory in some cases. But, after the death of John Willock, it took NHS 24 almost two years to introduce this change. It finally came into force in November 2011. Why the delay? NHS 24 has never offered an explanation.

Nor does this change dispose of the matter. It is still not mandatory for nurse advisers to check the call history of every caller. Patients who call back with a different complaint – as John Willock was mistakenly thought to have done – fall outside the requirement. Without a comprehensive check, without the assurance that nurse advisers will check the call history of every patient put through to them, there is no guarantee that the same situation will not recur. Why will NHS 24 not introduce such a check?

As we saw in the case of John Willock, nurse advisers are unable to access GP records of telephone calls. NHS 24 says it would be 'difficult' to put such a system in place. If it is possible, it should be done.

Six minutes to assess a patient's condition – from the opening of a file to the closing of it. What does NHS 24 have to say about that? So far – nothing. But in the call centre at Cardonald, where NHS 24 has its national headquarters, the sky remains blue and the boxes go on being ticked.

We'd rather die: our fear of doctors

Barbara Millar

2013

The case of John Willock, highlighted by Kenneth Roy in last week's *SR*, is an indictment of NHS 24 and its hopelessly inefficient and, ultimately fatal, patchwork response to a seriously ill man.

But, as I read that shocking story, one question kept returning – why didn't John and his partner phone for an ambulance and go to A&E? Why, in the face of an interminable GP surgery Christmas closedown and advice from NHS 24 'professionals' that was exacerbating, rather than relieving, his symptoms, didn't the couple seek face-to-face advice?

My conclusion – and not just in response to John's case – is that we are all, generally, far too passive in our relationships with medical professionals. Medics themselves may complain that the era of deference to the white coat is largely over, but I remain concerned that our mute acceptance of whatever the medical profession chooses to deliver – or not – permits a great deal of less-than-satisfactory care.

John's case made me think of my close friend N, who died earlier this year after living with bone cancer for seven years, a recurrence of the disease that had begun with breast cancer some years before. N knew her illness was terminal, but her abbreviated life was made infinitely less endurable by devastating symptoms – some related to the cancer, some not – which there seemed to be no will, no effort, to resolve.

During one stay in a Glasgow hospital, N acquired MRSA and, after discharge, she spent two years unable to walk more than a few steps because of the pain from the suppurating sores on her leg and foot. Two years is a long time in anyone's life; for someone who knew they were living on borrowed time, it is an eternity.

Oh, she wasn't ignored by the medical profession. She had visits almost on a daily basis at times, from a succession of nurses, with the occasional GP looking in. They would turn up with no dressings, or the wrong dressings, or with a treatment that they had already tried and that had failed, or they would put the dressings on the wrong way round. It all seemed so careless, and so callous.

And N sat there – almost a fixture on her living room sofa for two years, unable to walk – subjecting herself to their less-than-effective ministrations and excusing their catalogue of failures with: They're so busy. They're doing their best. They say they don't know what else to suggest.

I used to get incandescently angry on N's behalf, and I really wanted to be there when they called, to challenge their methods, to question their expertise, to beg them to find a solution, to relieve the *ongoing* torture my dying friend was experiencing. But N would

never permit that. She dealt with it in her own way – and I fear that her passivity took a heavy toll. But I

wonder whether I would have reacted any differently had I been the patient? Would not I, too, have accepted the verdict of the professionals without demur?

I saw it again with my neighbour. B was an active professional, still running his own business at the age of 73, a regular gym-goer, a keen gardener. He had a fall and, as was echoed so vividly in John's case, he didn't want to make a fuss. So he delayed going to the GP and finally, when in so much pain that he did go, he accepted the GP's verdict that this was another bout of shingles, despite the fact that his symptoms were not the same, despite the fact that he was hallucinating, could keep nothing down, and was in constant, searing pain. He eventually ended up in hospital with multiple organ failure and a death certificate which, like John's, said the cause of death was septicaemia.

His widow said, after his funeral, that if only he had known where this would end – in his premature demise – he would have been so angry with himself for not seeking medical attention earlier, and in not insisting in a more rigorous examination when he was told he had shingles, which he knew he did not have.

But we don't want to make a fuss. And we don't want to question the professionals. John didn't want to make a fuss, neither did N, nor B. They are all dead. John accepted what he was told by NHS 24, B accepted what he was advised by the GP. They are both dead. Why don't we challenge the medical profession more often? Why do we believe that being passive and accepting is our only option?

We are constantly exhorted not to visit A&E unless absolutely necessary and never to use its facilities instead of visiting our GP. But GP appointments are getting harder to make – you may have to wait many days or, in the case of the anonymous contributor to the *SR Cafe* last week, you may be fobbed off with a telephone consultation, rather than a face-to-face examination and discussion, or you may be ill at that most inconvenient time of the year – Christmas – when GP surgeries close for a ridiculous number of days. Personally, I would rather wait in a soul-numbing queue at A&E than risk a 'tired' nurse at NHS 24 giving me advice that could hasten my end, rather than prolong my life.

I don't think our passivity is anything to do with class or education. We are told that the articulate middle classes are better at arguing their case, and get better treatment as a result. B was an architect, a well-educated professional with a string of qualifications, who had no problems at all in having robust discussions with others in his field. Yet, when faced with a medical professional, he became a passive acceptor of their advice, their 'wisdom'. But passivity can kill. We need to challenge more, and often.

Life and death by computer

John Womersley

2013

Barbara Millar describes 'the hopelessly inefficient and patchwork response' of NHS 24 that led to the death of a seriously ill man. She asks why no-one had phoned for an ambulance – to get to A&E for face-to-face advice – and concludes that: 'We are all far too passive in our relationships with medical professionals, mutely accepting whatever medical profession chooses to deliver'.

Kenneth Roy asked what NHS 24, the agency on which the people of Scotland depend for after-hours medical care, learned from its performance in this case. A self-congratulatory report in January 2010 stated that all key performance indicators had been achieved and call demand managed in a clinically safe and appropriate manner. There was no mention of the death and 'no hint that anything had gone seriously wrong'. It took almost two years after this event for NHS 24 to make it mandatory for nurse advisers to check repeat calls made by a patient about the same problem.

These articles highlight two of the most distressing changes in the NHS over recent years. Donald Berwick, healthcare advisor to President Obama and asked by David Cameron to report on the state of the NHS in England, observed that responsibility in the NHS is too diffuse: 'when responsibility is not clearly owned, with too many in charge, no-one is'. This unhappy situation is the result of increasing specialisation (with poor communication between specialists), discontinuity of care (exacerbated by the European working time directive) and abandonment of the daily ward round in hospitals. The 'system' (or lack of it) is probably very much more to blame than any inadequacies in front-line professionals.

Where senior members of the medical profession are very much to blame is in allowing computer 'algorithms' developed by private companies to become a barrier to face-to-face contact between a patient (or relative/friend) and a health professional. When you telephone NHS 24, a call handler responds. This is not a health professional; it is someone with around 36 hours training in asking and responding to questions delivered by a computer.

On *World at One* (14 August) a harrowing recording was played of a woman speaking to an NHS 111 (the English equivalent of NHS 24) 'call handler' because her husband was in severe pain resulting from a ruptured aorta. Two minutes were spent obtaining personal details (including having to explain why she was calling on behalf of the patient) followed by over six minutes of questions such as 'can he touch his chest with his chin?' It took over nine minutes before an ambulance was called. Dr Peter Holden from the BMA remarked that it would have taken him or an experienced nurse about 30 seconds to appreciate the urgency of the situation and call an ambulance.

A caller well known to me perhaps rather foolishly telephoned NHS 24 because she was bleeding heavily after an operation at Glasgow Royal infirmary. The call handler told her that her case was not the most urgent (because, I learned later, she was still feeling well at the time of the call) and that a doctor would call back within 90 minutes. Fortunately, a doctor called back after 45 minutes and advised her to get to hospital immediately, where she collapsed in the car park and required four pints of blood.

The computer algorithm used by NHS 24 call handlers does not identify bleeding as life-threatening; but it cannot be modified because their copyright is owned by a private company (Capita Clinical Solutions). So much for learning from mistakes. Lengthy correspondence was required to extract this information – patient confidentiality continually being cited as a reason for preventing its disclosure.

What a distressed caller most needs is a response from someone in whom they have confidence, and many callers assume that they are speaking to a health professional. Their distress is greatly increased as they realise that they are in effect speaking to a machine. And at the end of the diatribe the decision, for example, to send to hospital or to wait 90 minutes for a doctor or to just 'wait and see' is very much more likely to be wrong than if made by a nurse or doctor.

In January, I wrote to NHS 24 to ask why serious bleeding was not considered an emergency, and was told that this was because the caller felt well at the time, and the 'outcomes of calls are dependant on the symptoms presented at the time of the call'. I also asked whether the protocol for haemorrhage could be examined to see whether any improvement was necessary. I learnt that 'the detail of the protocol is owned by its clinical content supplier' and could not be divulged. However, Professor George Crooks, medical director of NHS 24, subsequently promised (4 April) that his deputy would undertake a 'clinical review of the relevant algorithms' for haemorrhage. Despite several requests, I have been unable to find out whether this has taken place.

Glasgow GP Dr Des Spence wrote: 'Continuity in out of hours care was completely lost as general practitioners were replaced by a faceless and increasingly algorithmic, bureaucratic and risk averse NHS Direct and NHS 24. The only way to reduce hospital admissions is to re-establish local accountability in general practice. A simple first step would be for practices to return to telephone triaging of out of hours calls'.

Professor Crooks says: 'I am unaware of any desire (by doctors) for a return of out of hours services to local practices'. But *The Times* reported: 'Senior GPs in Scotland demand NHS 24 be scrapped and its £64million funding better spent elsewhere'. Glasgow GP Gary Hamilton remarked that NHS 24 is too risk-averse and too protocol-driven, and that if we went back to doctors being the first contact, it would be someone who is able to take responsibility.

I asked Professor Crooks why no local general practice cooperatives were invited to run the out of hours service. His reply was 'Clinical Solutions is a software provider of an accredited medical triage system. No GP cooperative produced clinical triage software'.

One might ask why on earth the use of computer software was made a prerequisite for the provision of out of hours services – thus putting local practices and cooperatives out of contention.

But to reassure me that all is well, Professor Crooks adds: 'NHS 24 has an extensive programme of public engagement, including involvement on our advisory groups, our governance committees and programme boards. NHS 24 also works with the Scottish Health Council who regularly review our public involvement activities. NHS 24 has been commended for this aspect of our work. We regularly conduct patient satisfaction surveys... and ratings are always in the high 90% bracket'.

Barbara Millar concludes: 'We need to challenge more, and more often'. There are few systems of greater need of challenge in Scotland than NHS 24. Our lives are now in the hands, not of doctors and nurses, but of call handlers and privately-owned computer algorithms.

Cheating the necropolis

Katie Grant

2014

It's a splendid Glasgow joke. The view from the Enhanced Recovery ward in the Glasgow Royal Infirmary (GRI) is of the city's grand necropolis, lumpenly spiked with ponderous memorial follies to people who will 'never be forgotten' but nobody now remembers.

In my morphine haze, I think how clever that it's but a short taxi ride from the old St Rollox chemical works into the GRI and thence to the grave, and if a taxi is too pricey, a healthy relative could push you in a wheelbarrow. At times during my fortnight of grave-watching, I would gladly have jumped out of the window and saved the bother of even a wheelbarrow. Death is infinitely preferable to this other realm of pain I seem to have entered. Unremitting, the intensity reduces me to scrabbling and plucking at my fingers, the sheets, the bed rail, my poor husband's sleeve. If I look demented, it's because I am.

A consultant walks briskly into the ward, a posse of junior doctors obsequious in his wake. They are inspecting the woman opposite and studiously avoid looking at me. The inspected patient is very concerned. 'Shouldn't you help that lady?' she asks. 'Look at the state of her.' The consultant and his sheep keep their faces blank. The ward is faintly shocked, apart from two girls glued to their mobile phones. That's on Tuesday. By Friday night, the consultants are looking at me all right.

A CT scan has shown something alarming. After four days of hell, I am catapulted into the operating theatre for emergency night-time surgery. Coming to in the High Dependency Unit, I am euphoric. The agony is over. There is plenty of other pain and tubes galore, but Christ! Easy! I'm like a runner relieved of a knapsack of lead. It may be unfair but I keep thinking that the NHS nearly kills you, then quite superbly saves your life.

How did I get here? Well, Monday 1 September was a perfectly ordinary day. At about 9pm I didn't feel well. Ten minutes later, my husband thought 'hospital'. Five minutes later, he dialled 999.

At the GRI A & E, somebody takes my blood, and the porter calls me by the wrong name. I try to correct. A doctor tells my husband that my bloods are normal and an X-ray has revealed (oh how humiliating) constipation. Discharge with paracetamol and a laxative. Given the state I'm in, my husband is astounded. But I think 'good, this is nothing, we'll be home in a minute'. The doctor rushes back. The lab has rung again. They've made a mistake. If your amylase (yes, no idea either) registers over 500, hospitalisation is needed. My count is 2,272. Turns out I have acute pancreatitis.

I slot into the only ward with a bed. It's not a ward for pancreatitis. A junior vulture comes to extract arterial blood from my wrist. The artery is deeply hidden. 'This will hurt,' the vulture says and takes his time to botch it on both arms. Irritated, he leaves. Almost

immediately, a lady vulture is determined to succeed where her colleague has failed. She barely looks at me as she botches it in her turn. My arms purple, as though I've tried to smash all the veins with a hammer.

A senior consultant arrives. He bites his lip at the mess his juniors have made and performs the task with instant and painless success. 'I'm moving you up to my ward,' he says. I'm very relieved, except this means that the ultrasound scan booked to investigate the ghastly pain low down in my abdomen as opposed to the pancreatitis pain higher up, never materialises. The porters go to my admission ward, discover I'm not there and make no attempt to find me.

The appropriate scan doesn't take place until Friday. I am wheeled down on a trolley in the general lift because you could die waiting for the lift designated for patients. The uselessness of the lifts drives the porters mad. Not me, though, because the pain is so monumental I'm swilling about in Hilary Mantel's *A Place of Greater Safety*, the gurney a tumbril transporting me to the place of execution with George-Jacques Danton and Camille Demoulins. I know there's no guillotine in the hospital but am hopeful of electrocution. Instead, I get the emergency operation. Danton and Demoulins weren't so lucky. Living flesh, dead meat. Living flesh, dead meat.

Post-op euphoria doesn't last. Although the crippling pain has gone, I begin to understand that I'm poleaxed by two medical conditions at once: the aftermath of major surgery with all associated weaknesses, susceptibility to infection and 20 staples; plus the damned pancreatitis.

To prevent organ failure, I'm attached to a fast-running drip which blows me up like a prize pig. My wrists and ankles vanish first, then my hands, then my arms and legs. Though I haven't eaten for a week, I am a huge boggy balloon, a thin person trapped in a water-filled fatsuit, the tap still full on. The weight of the fluid means I have to physically haul my limbs about, leaning heavily on a frame. My consultant is unimpressed by my horror. 'This is nothing. I've seen people's skin blister with fluid.' The nurses are more comforting. 'The swelling will vanish as soon as you're off the drip,' they say. 'Then you'll pee for Scotland.' Even so, I'm immensely distressed. How will I ever get out of this place if I can't get into my clothes?

The High Dependency Unit is mixed-sex. My opposite neighbour is an elderly man. His voicebox has been removed and is slotted in for visitors. When he's without it, he presses his 'nurse-alert' button all the time, even when a nurse is with him. I marvel at the nurses' patience as the buzzer bleeps endlessly day and night. The man can't say what he wants. I want to murder him. There's also a young man who is, I think, some kind of pop star. Since I'm a vomiting lump crumpled into a hospital goonie, I want to see him about as much as he wants to see me. The following day, thank God, both men are replaced by an elderly lady.

I'm moved to the Enhanced Recovery ward. Interminable nights, tubes dragging and tangling, sickness welling, general malaise, are followed by days of stalking the wards. The

consultants say moving is key to recovery so I'm Lady Macbeth on a zimmer. I want to exhaust myself because I feel I don't sleep although I must because my dreams are as violent as Peter Howson paintings: big men with fists, mayhem, bombing. My nasal-gastric tube is a snake. My bed is a suffocating assassin.

The day brings something more than Lady Macbeth stalking. It brings the cold-water moment when I have to turn down work. Suddenly, and with as little warning as a car crash, I'm a sick person, one of the dependent slumped, the criteria for success not public articulacy or insights over the impending referendum, but medical reports on the state of my innards. I'm alive but not living.

The physio girl, impossibly young and glowing, addresses me in that special voice reserved for the elderly decrepit. 'Are you relatively mobile at home?' 'This is not me,' I try and say. 'I'm a fit person. I walk for miles. This weight is fluid, not fat.' She gives me a pacifying smile. 'And how are you with stairs?'

Only two of us in Enhanced Recovery are likely to leave any time soon. One lady has been incarcerated for months, condition piling onto condition. She is drip-dependent and can't eat. Another lady has cancer. Her tubes are indescribable. She's endlessly hopeful of being allowed to drink hot chocolate. We are a band, partly because there's no privacy.

In the mornings, the dread is missing our consultants on their rounds because we're in the loo or it's finally our turn for a shower. If you miss the consultant, it's a hammer blow. Once that terror's over, we call the nurse for each other and the more mobile help the immobile. We're solicitous when courage falters, and congratulate when things look better. The cancer lady rings her parrot on her mobile phone. The parrot is sulky. We commiserate. Bloody birds!

The nursing in this ward is mainly first-class: unsentimental but not uncaring; professional but not cold. It's not their fault that the food, served on vomit-coloured plastic plates, is, in the main, revolting, and sometimes lunch must be attempted whilst the ward floor is being washed.

Worse than the food is the hospital estate. In my ward, the shower drain is blocked so the shower is unusable. This was reported but, three weeks on, nothing has been done. The general basin in the next ward is covered with a 'do not use' sign. Their shower is a swimming pool affair. To keep the water running, you must continually jab a button. There is no bar to hold onto, only a plastic chair to sit on, not a shower chair with a hole, but an ordinary kitchen chair. Everything gets soaked. There is no shelf at the basin, so your washing things end up on the floor. Nothing has been designed with any understanding of incapacity.

In our ward loo, there is one bar, but most of us need one on each side for safety. I can only think that this obstacle course is deliberate so that when you get home, life's a doddle. But it makes patients fearful – what if I fall? The cancer lady, just out of intensive care for pneumonia, had a cold shower the night she arrived. She's pretty forthright with the consultant on his rounds but I don't think he feels the showers are much to do with him.

When I'm feeling better, I ask my consultant whether he's ever been seriously ill. The question surprises him into humanity. 'No,' he says. 'Should be compulsory for a surgeon,' I say. 'You need to know what it feels like. When you're laid low, I'll visit you.' He leaves smartish.

Fourteen days after I was admitted, the ghouls over the road are still crooking come-hither fingers. I shake my head. I'm weak; I'm scarred; I'm bloodied and rather bowed. Nevertheless, I have beaten the necropolis. As my husband and a friend help me into a taxi, I hear an echo: 'we'll get you in the end'. They're right, of course. The dead always have the last word, the bastards.

A whistle-blower's story

Dr Jane Hamilton

2017

When a National Health Service consultant, Dr Jane Hamilton, raised concerns with her employer about the safety and quality of a new perinatal psychiatry service, she encountered an extraordinary hostility that forced her out of her job and destroyed her career. Exclusively in SR, Dr Hamilton now reveals the personal cost of whistle-blowing and casts doubt on the Scottish Government's assurances that people like her will be treated more sympathetically in future

Initiatives around whistle-blowing and governance in the NHS in Scotland have been in the news again over the past few months. Whether this will lead to any significant change seems to me very unlikely for a variety of reasons. Amongst other things, the Scottish Government has recently concluded another public 'consultation' exercise, the Public Petitions Committee at Holyrood has been taking contributions on the subject, and the Health and Sport Committee (chaired by Neil Findlay MSP) has announced an inquiry into governance and whistle-blowing in the NHS. A recent issue of BBC radio *File on Four* revisited the same issues across the UK featuring various whistle-blowers, including myself. The outcomes of these sagas, several years on from the scandal at Mid-Staffordshire and the Francis report, personally and for the NHS, was uniformly depressing.

The government has also mandated health boards to appoint whistle-blowing 'champions' although it turns out the health boards have, for the most part, appointed existing executive members, some of whom have been involved in alleged instances of victimisation of whistle-blowers or of covering up of wrong-doing and incompetence. The identity of some of these 'champions' has apparently not even been revealed to employees. Curiously, they have nowhere appointed 'experts by experience' although this strategy has been adopted in many parts of the world. It has also been proposed to appoint a (single) independent national (whistle-blowing) officer (INO). Curiously too, this appointment has still not yet been approved by the Scottish Government.

Paul Gray (CEO of NHS Scotland) has recently published a welcome acknowledgement – long overdue – that whistle-blowing may be a problem for staff in the NHS. He concluded his piece by urging those whose concerns are not being heard to come forward and 'tell him'. As one of the whistle-blowers mentioned, I had done just that and formally approached Mr Gray two years before having fruitlessly exhausted internal procedures, and been victimised for doing so, within NHS Lothian.

His response was to refer my concerns back to the very health board where I had raised serious concerns about the safety and quality of the new perinatal psychiatry service and its

management. This is akin to asking a local police force to investigate a complaint against itself. NHS Lothian then managed its own 'external' review of my saga and its outcomes.

The various concerns I raised were never properly investigated. They were deferred and then buried until I was forced out of my job. I was initially subject to a widely-publicised 'gagging clause' in a settlement agreement 'offered' to me. I was subject to a demonstrably false 'smear' campaign. I had my specialist career (and a large treatment trial for stressed and depressed pregnant women) destroyed. I have effectively been blacklisted in Scotland.

The concerns I raised have been vindicated piecemeal by the findings of a few limited inquiries, by a series of critical incidents including maternal deaths and, recently, by the damning verdict of the Mental Welfare Commission (MWC) on the treatment by NHS Lothian of a woman (Ms OP) with a post-natal psychosis who killed her baby. For the most part, the recommendations of such inquiries have not been implemented. The 'external' review commissioned by Lothian, at Mr Gray's instigation, was in fact critical of the setting-up and management of the perinatal service and of my treatment, but NHS Lothian refused to publish this, citing 'confidentiality'. I would be astonished if NHS Lothian furnished the MWC inquiry with any of these documents.

I met recently with Paul Gray following his public statement, although only at my insistence and following further media exposure, to present my ongoing concerns. He has since stated publicly on Radio 4 that he takes my concerns 'seriously' and wishes to obtain my 'assistance' in moving forward – although not, I suspect, in properly investigating my saga, nor wrong-doing and incompetence in NHS Lothian. To have an independent legal expert examine the formal responses of the health board to the concerns I submitted would be very simple and offer an opportunity to 'learn lessons'. I have no doubt, despite the rhetoric, that the underlying intention will be to draw me in somehow, 'seek my views', and close down this saga without further potentially embarrassing investigation or action.

But I have discovered that my tale is absolutely typical of whistle-blowers (see safety expert Margaret Heffernan, or whistle-blowing experts such as Dina Medland or Kim Holt), both generally but particularly within our current NHS.

What all frontline NHS staff, whether whistle-blowers or not, have learned through bitter experience is that, despite government or health board rhetoric, it continues to be unsafe for staff to raise serious concerns about anything that might reflect badly on or cause 'reputational' damage to management, health boards or those politically responsible for them. Any such whistle-blowing is certainly not going to be investigated seriously, and staff who attempt to do so are almost certainly going to be victimised for their efforts. Incidentally, these pressures also apply to management colleagues who risk raising their voice or stepping 'out of line'.

We have all seen inquiries around grievances and administrative problems done rigorously by health boards, but never when they threaten reputational damage. There is no genuinely independent body with investigatory or disciplinary powers to address such concerns or to protect those who raise them. The so-called 'helpline' is a joke (callers are

simply referred back to the very health boards they are concerned about), as are recently promoted anonymous 'chat sites'.

There is now a vast literature worldwide on the importance of whistle-blowing for safety and quality of services, and for their cost-effectiveness whether in the NHS or industry, but there is clearly still a breathtaking lack of understanding or appreciation ('wilful blindness'?) of the issues involved throughout the NHS and those responsible for it. These include its (often unconscious) systemic and group psychology, e.g. denial, projection, unconscious bias, scape-goating, cronyism, 'in' and 'out' groups, mobbing, smearing (whistle-blowers are 'difficult', 'disruptive' or 'vexatious'), vendettas, blacklisting, or the psychologically traumatic effects on those involved.

All of these issues were clearly described and summarised in the *Private Eye* supplement – 'Shoot the Messenger' – published several years ago and, over the years, various aspects of them by writers such as Margaret Heffernan, Kim Holt, Penelope Campling, Onora O'Neill or Robert Francis. The supplement also included a list of well-recognised 'dirty tricks' for dealing with and silencing whistle-blowers. These include trumped-up complaints about their competence, blaming them for the very problems they highlight, suspension due to their 'difficulty', referral to regulatory bodies such as the GMC or NMC, commissioning and managing 'reassuring' limited 'inquiries' internally, endless administrative 'delays', gagging 'agreements', or effective blacklisting.

The idea that any institution can be trusted to manage any investigation into its own possible shortcomings is, in the 21st century, dead in the water – or should be – following decades of scandals and experience in the UK and worldwide.

Effective 'whistle-blowing' is well-recognised to be of massive importance for the delivery of safe, high-quality and cost-effective services, for the well-being of patients and the morale of staff upon which good governance and care critically depends, and overall for proper accountability and transparency of a major public service.

Front-line staff are now additionally obliged by a 'duty of candour' to raise concerns where they become apparent, with legal consequences (such as being struck off or prosecuted) if they do not. Curiously and discrepantly, no such legal 'duty' applies to senior management nor are they ever held legally accountable for wrong-doing or incompetence, as would occur in the private sector for example. (Airline managers not being held accountable for plane crashes due to management incompetence?) Senior government advisers state this would be bad for their morale, but the same consideration does not seem to apply to frontline staff.

As NHS staff surveys consistently show, the majority of frontline colleagues no longer trust management, would not whistle-blow or recommend the NHS as a place of work, and something like an astonishing 15% of the workforce feel they are actively (as opposed to potentially) being bullied at work. The NHS also increasingly experiences major problems with recruitment, retention of staff and chronically high stress and sickness rates. All of this would be regarded as catastrophic and a major cause for concern in any independent sector organisation.

On top of this, in almost Orwellian fashion, successive governments, for their own obvious reasons, continually insist that 'less is more' and we have overall a happy, harmonious, progressive health service of world-class standard that is safe, person-centred and staff-friendly. I do not know of a single frontline colleague who would subscribe to such a view. It is also not the highly critical picture painted by reports from respected outside agencies such as the OECD, the Nuffield Trust, the Swedish 'Health Consumer Powerhouse' think tank, or indeed in Scotland by, for example, Audit Scotland'.

Meantime, NHS Lothian continues, to my ongoing amazement, to repeat its mission statement at the foot of all communications: 'Our Values Into Action – Quality | Dignity and Respect | Care and Compassion | Openness, Honesty and Responsibility | Teamwork'. As one colleague quipped, 'they're only kidding', or as another put it in a more sinister tone, 'forget it Jane – it's Chinatown'.

Some background considerations

I have also learned that whistle-blowing cannot be considered separately from the broader managerial and sociopolitical culture in which the NHS is embedded. The latter includes a culture that is apparently well-recognised historically to be highly authoritarian and whose public life is characterised, perhaps inevitably in a small country and not all for the worse, by an extensive 'interconnectedness' (or cronyism). This clearly extends through public services, civil service agencies, legal, political and even media circles. Frequently the same people rotate around important posts in these different spheres. Partly for these reasons, I remain pessimistic about any imminent serious change apart from more cosmetic-type initiatives, especially given the current political preoccupation with constitutional questions.

In England, an increasing commercialisation of the NHS has generated its own particular problems. But a Beveridge-style, publicly-funded and publicly-run NHS (i.e. a virtual state monopoly) is no guarantee against the Soviet-style authoritarian managerialism and cronyism noted by authorities such as Brian Jarman or John Lees in mental health. Both systems are characterised and seriously undermined by the so-called 'new public management' style of managerialism.

As has been noted in an extensive critical literature, this can lead to a damaging 'commodification' of healthcare and privileging of supposed 'cost effectiveness' (usually it is not) and meeting 'targets' above quality and safety of care. Treating staff as functional commodities to be handled with suspicion and 'big sticks' also fatally undermines any 'public service ethos' – i.e. a culture of compassion, care and staff willing to work over and above the call of duty or 'go the extra mile'. All of these are located at the core of safe and effective healthcare. Rather, as staff surveys and college and union reports show, colleagues are defensive, feel frequently bullied, become cynical, stressed out, and get out if they can.

Overall, there has been a massive swing of the pendulum from largely clinical leadership and management (which had its own historic problems) to one run by managers, often highly committed but under pressure themselves. These are often non-clinicians with little

or no experience or expertise in the areas they are responsible for, nor, importantly, do many have any apparent interest in or respect for those who do. Indeed, some managerial staff appear to have adopted an almost vindictive, persecutory and vendetta-like approach to managing frontline and clinical colleagues.

I have learned also that the judicial system in Scotland appears notably reluctant to pursue any such concerns even when formally reported to them, and certainly not, it seems, if reassuring 'inquiries' have been undertaken by health boards. This is in marked contrast, for instance, to the automatic inquiries held promptly by coroners' courts in England.

My initial experience of moving to lead a specialist perinatal psychiatry service in NHS Lothian

My own personal saga in NHS Scotland began almost a decade ago when I was recruited from a major centre in England as an established specialist in my field of perinatal (mother and baby) psychiatry to lead the newly-established NHS Lothian and East of Scotland regional perinatal service. This was located at St John's Hospital in Livingston although no specialist mental health services had ever been delivered there before.

I was a long-established consultant in London and Sheffield, with 25 years of clinical experience and an impeccable record. I had been awarded numerous clinical excellence points, had a PhD and written various papers in clinical research, and had co-authored the internationally-recognised 'NICE' guidelines in perinatal psychiatry. I had also brought an ongoing major clinical trial concerning psychological treatment for pregnant women with mental health problems which I was encouraged to do. This is currently and belatedly being recognised as an area of major need and concern by the Scottish Government. But this trial, along with my specialist career, was destroyed by subsequent events.

Prior to coming, I had in fact been warned about cronyism, authoritarianism and resistance to incomers by various colleagues back in England. However, I naïvely assumed that, as I was moving as an established specialist consultant to a new service, this move would surely be supported and welcomed managerially. Nothing could be further from the truth, and nothing prepared me for what I encountered.

Virtually from the beginning I was extremely concerned at the lack of specialist training and supervision for staff. I was told, 'we will do things our own way and learn from our own mistakes'. There was a lack of appreciation for the needs of a regional service in a high-risk specialty for safe and prompt communications, for clear referral criteria, and the need for in-depth and accurate assessment procedures and triaging, given that obviously not all women with less serious perinatal illness could be admitted (with babies) to a very small specialist regional service.

Importantly, I also discovered that managerial and clinical decisions were much more liable to be influenced by who knew whom locally, and how long people had been around, rather than on the basis of expertise or appropriate clinical need. I discovered clinical decisions I attempted to make were being routinely undermined or countermanded by

other colleagues or managers who knew the local clinical director from many years before. Furthermore, plans and decisions about the nature of services and how clinicians should operate were apparently also being mandated and dictated to by local management, some of whom had no clinical background whatsoever, and certainly none in such a demanding specialty, but who, as I discovered, one crossed at one's peril.

In short, I had never, over a period of 25 years in clinical practice in many settings, urban and rural, academic and community, in the UK and through acquaintanceship with various services overseas, come across what I considered such poor and unsafe practice, and had never come across such obstructiveness to reform or improvement from local managerial and clinical colleagues. This appeared to me without doubt, compounded by the fact that I had come in as an outsider, and as a woman, from England, and been appointed over the head of a local, but non-specialist, candidate.

Having said all this, I also came across a number of very committed, caring and morally decent colleagues, both frontline clinical and non-clinical staff, as well as managerial staff who were also frustrated in their attempts to improve things in the face of such a managerial culture, and who suffered personally and professionally because of it. Given this situation, I was faced early on with trying to make improvements or get out. I naïvely took the first course, partly as a result of having just uprooted my family and my spouse (from a top NHS post) from central England.

Attempts to enlist help and raise concerns (whistle-blow) and subsequent experience of senior management in NHS Lothian

But when I attempted to address these issues and get help from local management, I was either ignored or undermined, and very firmly told, despite my expertise and specialist experience, I should conform to what local and other colleagues ('old pals' of management) wanted. I was told by local management, with no negotiation and in no uncertain terms, to do what I was told – or 'there would be consequences'.

Despite being appointed on a part-time contract ('cost effectiveness') with no proper job plan, I was mandated to cover various clinics locally and in Edinburgh, to provide input to obstetric liaison services, to a community team and to an inpatient unit. My 'job plan' was wholly inadequate and was never clarified or ratified, which was in clear breach of statutory requirements to do so and despite my efforts to negotiate one. Unsurprisingly, many colleagues became frustrated at the lack of input available after early management promises of a new, comprehensive service.

I quickly discovered that management in NHS Lothian would repeatedly, and without any concern for accountability or transparency, break statutory and government – e.g. Partnership Information Network (PIN) – guidelines with regard to contracts, job plans, clinical inquiries, disciplinary procedures, terms and conditions of settlement 'agreements', return to work procedures, or salary scale placement.

Within a year of being appointed, a number of untoward and critical incidents had

begun to occur as I feared (one involving the poor care and follow-up of a mother and baby that almost led to the death of a baby that has, to this day, had no formal outcome or response within NHS Lothian). These incidents presaged several fatalities that subsequently occurred after I had left (including one criticised by the MWC recently). I then felt obliged to approach senior management (in writing), in despair and frustration, and in retrospect rather naïvely. But I considered this was my professional and moral 'duty of candour', and had consulted the BMA, my defence union, and GMC formally about the situation and its potential consequences for patient care.

I formally approached both the medical director at the time and CEO of NHS Lothian. To my astonishment, they simply referred matters back to local management, who obviously reassured them that things were fine, and that this was essentially an employment issue relating to my job plan, and that I was being 'difficult'.

Then began a Kafkaesque period extending over half a dozen years, during which I was subject to inquiries in relation to a series of false allegations about me, which were unsubstantiated and ultimately unproven. During the course of these, I was subjected to a nightmarish process, including being blocked from my post and forced to go through a humiliating assessed period of 'return to work' under inappropriate procedures for failing doctors (and using headings from the initial complaint despite this not having been upheld), and with threats of referral to the GMC if I did not comply.

These various false allegations, made mostly by management colleagues well known to the (internal) investigator, were initially taken as read, despite lack of evidence, and despite documentary counter-evidence supplied by me (including many testimonials from previous colleagues). This was simply ignored. Neither I nor my defence representatives (typical for these health board inquiries I have learned) were permitted to challenge or cross-examine 'evidence' against me.

Furthermore, government PIN guidelines regarding the conduct of such inquiries (such as the mandatory requirement for prompt, formal written feedback or the right of appeal) were repeatedly ignored and breached. Later, the completely inappropriate 'return to work' framework for dealing with failing doctors was imposed on me implying inaccurately, but conveniently, that I, rather than management, was problematic.

I was also subject to a doomed so-called 'mediation' process with local colleagues about many of whom I had implicitly raised concerns and some of whom had perpetrated false allegations and smears against me. Some staff involved with this I had never actually met before.

All of this inappropriately and incompetently drawn-out process occurred at the taxpayer's expense – more than one million pounds as was ascertained from a FOI request by the press – whilst services were covered by a series of locums. Money was then squandered on costly legal fees and ultimately a settlement 'agreement' pay off for myself. The details of this I have been happy to place in the public domain, although most went towards my own legal fees and tax.

I had in the meantime also submitted to NHS Lothian, in despair and frustration, detailed and lengthy complaints (with supporting evidence) about wrong-doing and incompetence around the service and its management as well as about false allegations that had been made about myself. Although an initial meeting was held, with a senior manager mandated to investigate these, I was astonished to find that they were subsequently simply placed 'on hold' for a year and a half while, as it turned out, the health board frantically worked on some way of 'dealing with me' and getting rid of me.

Ultimately, I was summoned to a meeting with board-level senior management and told that I could not return to my post, even though I acted properly and professionally at all times, and despite their lack of investigation ('wilful blindness') into the very serious concerns I had raised about safety and quality of services. In the meantime, as I had predicted, a series of further critical incidents occurred, many of them not investigated properly or at all. These ultimately included maternal deaths and more recently the death of a baby killed by her seriously mentally ill mother.

But the official 'public' position that the health board has, for obvious reasons, attempted to maintain, and despite considerable evidence to the contrary, most recently the MWC report, was that all of my concerns were addressed and investigated and that various inquiries have found that the service and its management were of good quality. They have repeated this 'boiler plate' so often that it actually seems that senior management collectively believe this. However, I know from internal sources and leaks that the handling of my case provoked much discomfort and disagreement within and throughout the health board, although ultimately a 'party whip' was obviously imposed and a predictable, defensive standard script issued.

The overall management culture of NHS Lothian I encountered, and documented by David Bowles a few years ago, was characterised by 'bullying, harassment and covering up'. Unfortunately, it has by all accounts become, if anything, apparently more toxic, dysfunctional and unaccountable. Staff morale is appalling despite (predictable but non-evidence-based) claims of positive change by the health board. These claims are certainly not supported by recent NHS staff surveys.

Experiences of trying to raise concerns beyond the health board

During this period I had also, in following due process, directly contacted successive Cabinet Secretaries for Health for help and to express my concern that these issues were not being properly investigated by NHS Lothian (on the contrary they were being covered up) and that I was also being victimised for whistle-blowing. However, despite reassuring rhetoric ('we take these matters very seriously indeed') the upshot was simply that, yet again, the whole saga was simply mandated back to the health board.

They, of course, 'reassured' them that all was being properly investigated and handled. Following media publicity, the matter was raised in parliament but the then First Minister, Alex Salmond, simply proffered in typical 'assertive' style the 'reassurances' he had received

from the health board about encouraging 'independent' inquiries, but without addressing the substantive issue of my complaints.

It was as though no major institutional scandal or victimisation of whistle-blowers had occurred anywhere in the world over the past generation. I know for a fact from several sources that the smear campaign against me from within NHS Lothian had been widely propagated. The former First Minister is fond of saying that, 'a lie can get halfway round the world before the truth can get its boots on', and is capable of demanding genuinely independent, in-depth inquiries when it suits, for example, into whistle-blowing by a Navy submariner, or about UK Treasury 'leaks' during a referendum.

It seems previous governments (including the previous Lab-Lib coalition) have also all maintained similar approaches, adopting a convenient 'wilful blindness' with regards to the importance of whistle-blowing in the governance of the NHS and public services in Scotland.

I also contacted the so-called whistle-blowing helpline run by Public Concern at Work (PCaW) which, as it routinely does, simply referred me back to undergo due process through the very health board I was trying to raise concerns about. They have no investigatory powers themselves. This was a totally demoralising experience and in terms of its effectiveness was completely risible and a sham.

It remains the case that my formal complaints have never been properly investigated and in several instances never investigated at all. The only inquiries that have been conducted have all been commissioned and managed by NHS Lothian itself and have been undertaken either internally or by colleagues previously involved in reports on the service and involved with its development.

Some final thoughts and conclusions

In many ways, I feel I was very lucky to escape from this situation with an early, although greatly-reduced, pension due to my seniority, and despite the fact that I (and my family) have been profoundly shaken and traumatised. Others, who may also have been gagged (or 'super-gagged') have not been so lucky.

But I do feel at least, in spite of the massive cost to my career, reputation and health, that I did the right thing and acted properly out of a 'professional conscience' and 'duty of candour'. (Amongst other things, I suffered years of poor sleep with recurrent bad dreams, teeth-grinding and broken teeth, and developed severe phobias about anything, e.g. mail, to do with NHS Lothian.) However, I had intended to work much longer and now two consultants are covering the part-time post I left. Given the worsening NHS recruitment crisis, this is clearly a serious waste of both manpower and money.

I am also still very upset to think that had my concerns been taken seriously, many patients would have received much better care and, possibly, some might still be alive who are not. In the wake of my own experiences, my advice at present to others thinking of whistle-blowing (whatever current government rhetoric) would be to keep your head down, and don't even think about it. Get out if you can. Or if you do, be prepared for

savage and damaging consequences for yourself and possibly others. As one colleague of mine put it at the time: 'who would dream of raising concerns when you see what happened to Dr Hamilton?'

With regards to broader questions for the future, I would simply repeat suggestions that I and other whistle-blowers in Scotland have previously made. These include the urgent undertaking of an in-depth, genuinely external 'root and branch' review (conducted by an expert group with several members from outside Scotland, and also 'experts by experience') of the overall structure and managerial culture of the NHS extending all the way into government.

Such a review should also include, as a matter of urgency, in-depth surveys and focus groups about the real-life experiences and views of all workers in the health service with regards to NHS managerial culture and governance. These should especially include those incomers or returnees who have worked in and have comparative experience in other countries and cultures. The various political parties in Scotland always seem very ready to undertake surveys and focus groups when an election is looming.

These suggestions would also include the setting up of a genuinely independent regulatory body with investigatory powers to whom whistle-blowers and others (e.g. patients or families with complaints) may turn. This body would need to promote a culture of transparency and accountability in the management of the NHS, extending right to the top and to its political stewards, and foster a broader 'establishment' culture where there is a prompt and impartial application and 'rule of law'. This would clearly require increasing awareness and training initiatives around the issues involved (notably systemic and psychological ones) in speaking out or whistle-blowing in a public service like the NHS, akin to those now routinely mandated for all staff in relation to 'equality and diversity'.

At present, essentially government-controlled 'internal' agencies such as Healthcare Improvement Scotland (HIS) or the MWC simply do not meet these criteria. Whistle-blowers cannot approach the Public Services Ombudsman, and current judicial processes such as Fatal Accident Inquiries (FAIs) are simply not fit for purpose in this context, certainly not when compared to coroner's court procedures in England.

It remains to be seen whether there really is any serious senior managerial or political will to undertake any of this. Without doubt, change will also need to come through public pressure and demand, and a refusal to put up with such a managerial and political culture for public service(s) in Scotland (health and social care are now merging) in an allegedly democratic, civilised country in the 21st century.

To address the problems of the NHS will require civic pressure and political will, but there does exist, it seems to me, a massive opportunity in doing so. The new NHS merging with social care urgently needs to develop a culture of transparency and accountability. Health boards can no longer be allowed to be judge, jury and jailer for any concern or complaint that is raised, nor should the shocking practice of protection and covering up for them by those in administrative or political power be accepted.

Despite the damage done to clinical effectiveness and staff morale in recent years by a culture of unaccountable 'managerialism', it is perhaps not too late to rescue and resuscitate some of the human commitment, care and compassion which motivated healthcare staff in the first place, but which has been increasingly squeezed out of them. This is the ethos that is critical to the delivery of high-quality, person-centred, compassionate care.

It is also recognised to be fundamental to and a *sine qua non* of safety. Arguably, the operation and character of this major public service should be seen as a barometer and indicator of the health and well-being of civic society in general in Scotland. Based on my traumatising personal experiences and the apparent direction of travel of NHS governance, I am not holding my breath.

Acknowledgement: I have been greatly assisted in preparing this article by my husband (Dr Ian B Kerr) who has been with me through every step of this long, nightmare experience.

69 nights

Bob Cant

2017

Last year, I spent 69 nights in NHS beds – 48 in hospital and 21 in a rehabilitation centre funded by the NHS. Plenty of time for reflection but, although I may well owe my life to the NHS, I did not give much thought to the structure or vision that I thought the organisation needed. Rather, I turned an ethnographic eye on what I was participating in.

It all happened very suddenly. One Sunday, last July, we went for a long walk by the sea before I purchased a print from a gallery with a tea room. Forty-eight hours later, I was writhing around with abdominal pains in the worst agony I have ever experienced. I called 111; they listened to what I had to say and within minutes two paramedics were pumping morphine into me. It didn't have the desired effect and they decided I needed to go to A&E urgently for an assessment.

This was the point when I knew that I wanted to nominate someone as my next of kin. I am a single man who lives a long way from my biological family. I didn't really want to hand over urgent major decisions to a group of strangers. I wanted to have an advocate who knew me. I have known DS for over 40 years; we live in the same block of flats and see each other every day. He is an experienced trade unionist and is not intimidated easily by people in authority. The role of next of kin is legally complicated and sometimes contested; in fact, there was no problem here and everyone treated him with respect. Someone who knew me well was rooting for me.

I was *compos mentis* enough to agree to an emergency operation for a strangulated hernia. Nobody mentioned that the risk of mortality is seven times greater when these operations are done on an emergency basis rather than electively. But what could I have done with the information if they had? For the next few days, I was in some kind of drug-induced parallel universe. I managed to lose 10 kilos of weight in less than a week. My grandmother's wedding ring which I have worn for 30 years kept falling off my little finger in a way that it never had done before.

I may well have become a difficult patient to manage; I was pulling cannulas out of my arm; at one point security was summoned to get me to go to bed. This is what I am told; I have no memory of this time. DS and another friend, SC, spent a lot of time by my bedside but my side of the conversation was limited to the occasional grunt. My eyes remained closed for much of the time. I could have died. I certainly felt very near it. Meanwhile DS was fretting and finding it difficult to get anyone to take seriously his insights into my condition or my life history.

DS finally made a connection with a senior nurse who paid attention to his fretting. Shortly afterwards, I was diagnosed with peritonitis. I am glad that no-one conveyed that

diagnosis to me because I had this notion that people normally died of peritonitis. That may once have been the case but in 2016 surgery was an option. The effects of the morphine changed and having been morose I allowed my imagination to go into overdrive. I was convinced I was flying to places like Iceland and nobody seemed interested that I had got the last flight out of Reykjavik. Because of my confused state, a special procedure for consent to further surgery was invoked that did not require my verbal agreement. A second general anaesthetic six days after the previous one really was a big deal.

My other closest friend, NS, came from Spain and read extracts from the short stories of Meagan Delahunt. The words made no sense but the sound took me to a place that felt comforting. NS also took it upon himself on his return to Spain to update people through Facebook about my condition and that proved a really useful way to communicate with people who did not live near me.

Seventeen days after the second operation, I was shipped off to a rehabilitation centre where I was almost the only male resident out of a total of 20. I spent a lot of time listening to Radio 4 on my transistor; nursing care was only available for 12 hours a day; during the night you could either dial 111 or make use of the services of the friendly night staff. Their commitment and imagination went well beyond the requirements that might have been expected of someone earning the minimum wage. Some of their dressings were positively Heath Robinson but they did enable me to get a good night's sleep.

The return home was not the happy ending I had been hoping for. I found that it was easy to become dehydrated; on occasions, I lost my balance and fell over. It was a time spent in the shadows. Part of me was preparing for the end; I was disposing of things in the way that I remember my mother doing shortly before she died. Seventy days after returning home, I was re-admitted to hospital.

Once in hospital, I seemed to be on a constant drip to restore my levels of salt and magnesium. I didn't know how the situation was going to resolve itself. Then I was offered the possibility of more surgery; initially I had a very negative response. After two forays with surgery already that summer, I was really averse to any more general anaesthetic. I was aware that I was not the only septuagenarian whose body was more of a covert masterpiece of medical engineering than anything that could be described as 'natural'. But I did have to think about it; and I talked about it with friends (particularly DS, NS, SC and LF) and a couple of friendly nurses. The prospects for my quality of life seemed miserable. What did I have to lose? Eventually, I agreed to let them make some more cuts to my intestine. Of course, it was a risk.

The surgery took place on 14 December. I had no memory of being in the recovery suite before and when I came round I asked the nurse who was taking care of me if I was in Dundee. She was a nice girl from Malaga and I am not sure that she really understood my question but she was able to assure me that I was in the same city as I had been before I went under the anaesthetic. I continued plaguing her with questions because it felt like there was a fog obscuring my vision. DS was in Derbyshire, visiting his elderly father, but I

wanted the reassurance of speaking to him. She rang his mobile and found him having a lunch break in Clay Cross churchyard; he was able to assure her that my querulous behaviour was fairly normal post-operatively and that set her mind at rest. He and I did not have much that was concrete to say to each other but the sound of his voice helped me to clear the fog and to bring me back into the real world.

This is not an article about the crisis in the NHS. I didn't even attempt a back of the envelope calculation of how much my 69-night stay on NHS premises might have cost me in a less egalitarian scheme. But I do have things to say about the staff who took care of me. They came from a variety of backgrounds – all over the EU and poorer parts of South Asia, as well as Sussex and other parts of the UK. They worked hard and during the night and they also had to engage with tangential mental health problems on the part of many of their patients. A couple of them told me that they were afraid that, as a result of Brexit, they would be shipped back to their countries of origin. I don't think they found my view that they will be allowed to stay, but with a second-class status, very helpful.

Certainly, this hospital without EU staff would be a forlorn place. I felt that communication between different groups of staff could be improved – or even valued. There were too many silos in the system and they all seemed to have their own internal hierarchies of deference. But the communication between me and individual members of staff was beyond criticism. Staff did want to do well. That was also true of the ancillary staff who served the tea or swept under the beds. On the day of my departure, two such staff came looking for me in the room where I was waiting for the wheelchair to take me to the room where I would wait for the ambulance. As the woman who served tea said to me: 'When people are ill, they need people to be friendly to them'. She was proud to be part of a service that cared.

Usually when patients are allowed to go home, it takes ages to organise the details. There is something approaching a ritual dimension to it. Wives or brothers have to be phoned to see if they remember promising to pick the patients up; then there are frequently bad tempered follow-up calls to explain the layout of the car park. The pharmacists have to bring medication and that has to be checked by two other members of staff; it can all take hours. So, I was rather surprised to be asked to vacate my bed in 10 minutes. It seems that there was a man who had been waiting in A&E for a long time and my bed was the only male bed left in the hospital. There was no slack at all; no time to disinfect the bed thoroughly. But someone's sense of guilt about the haste surrounding my departure ensured that my transport home was arranged quickly.

It's difficult to know how to finish this article. There's neither a happy ending nor a tragic finale. I am face to face with a different – but manageable – post-operative reality. I remembered how David Bowie had helped me to make sense of lots of the ch-ch-changes in my life in 1971 and so I turned to him again. In his 2015 video, *Where are we now?*, the questions he asked about how to make sense of his life struck a chord with me. 'Where are we now? The moment you know you know you know... Fingers are crossed just in case.'

It would be hard to explain just what it is that I do know, but I am aware that I am more curious about the spiritual dimensions of my knowledge levels than ever before. Perhaps because I have less faith in my body than I once had. I have no idea where any spiritual path might take me – or whether I even want to follow it – but I am clear that after four months of the darkest times, my knowledge of myself, my limitations and of the perils and the pleasures of the world around me, is much more sure and grounded than ever it was before. Knowledge alone is not enough but it is a starting point that enables me to try to live meaningfully. One day at a time – what else can you do?

The jab

Kenneth Roy

2018

Spring will be here in a few weeks, love is all around us (just listen to those birds), and soon it may be possible to see outside the dirty, steamed-up windows of one of Souther's buses. But before we proceed to the next season in the troubled history of the human race, there is an interlude in which to evaluate the full horror of the winter we have just endured: the winter of the great flu epidemic.

For this purpose, I must take you back into distant history – 9 January 2018. It was on that date that the *Daily Star* splattered across its front page, in melodramatic red type, news of the forthcoming apocalypse. It was expressed in a single figure:

750,000

Even I, an infrequent reader of the *Daily Star*, was impressed by the death toll. It was equivalent, after all, to every man, woman and child in the city of Leeds and exceeded the population of our own largest city. Imagine: Glesca wiped out before the final concert of Celtic Connections.

In my astonishment and dismay, I could scarcely bear to read on: 'A deadly flu epidemic raging out of control could kill up to 750,000 in Britain, the government's disaster planners have warned... About 155,000 could die in 21 days at the height of the outbreak, which includes the devastating Aussie virus'.

It didn't take long to translate this public health catastrophe into more comprehensible terms. One in every 80 people in Britain could be dead by the end of February. In my own village, and in the neighbouring small town, we were looking at 200 flu deaths well ahead of Ayr United's promotion to the Championship. It was inconceivable: and I'm not talking about Ayr United's promotion, which I tend to take for granted.

Two days later, the *Daily Mirror* reported grimly that 97 had died so far 'as deaths soar by 77% in a week while the country struggles against aggressive Aussie and Japanese strains'. Ninety-seven: another 749,903 and we'd be home and dead. Yet it was utterly pointless to remind the *Daily Mirror* that 77% up on almost nothing was not perhaps as staggering as it sounded.

By 25 January, even the sobersides *Guardian* was panicking. The number of deaths since October now stood at 155. Across the UK in the last seven days, 35 people had died of flu 'more than three times the 11 deaths recorded in the corresponding seven days of 2016'. It all added up. Exactly three times more would have been 33. Conveniently two more had succumbed: it was now a better story – one of those 'more than' stories.

What *The Guardian* didn't say was that, in the same seven-day period, 'more than' 3,000 had died of cardiovascular disease; that another 3,000 would die of the same cause the following week; and another 3,000 the week after that; and, if it came to that, which it usually did, every single week of every single year.

But we are concerned only with the great flu epidemic because, for some reason, flu is sexier than cardiovascular disease.

By the beginning of February, the *Daily Mail* was able to record that 'the killer epidemic' had claimed 193 lives in England, 26 in Scotland and 12 in Northern Ireland – a grand total of 231 in four months. Hard to say what was happening in Wales; they seemed to be having some counting difficulties in Cardiff.

We were now only 749,769 behind target with a whole month to go. A week later, however, a sense of anti-climax was detectable. The total had crawled up to 254, the outbreak was officially 'stabilising', and the NHS was instructing GPs to stop ordering fresh supplies of the vaccine. The uptake had been unexpectedly low anyway, especially when it became clear that the jab protected patients against three strains of the illness but failed to protect them against a fourth – the one that happened to be associated with the vast majority of cases reported by labs.

We have been here before. Nine years ago, the UK Government rushed to respond to a predicted swine flu pandemic by stockpiling, at a cost of around £400m, a drug called Tamiflu. At the start of the so-called pandemic (July 2009), the then Chief Medical Officer for England, Sir Liam Donaldson, predicted that 30% of the UK population would be infected and that up to 65,000 might die. Sir Liam's absolute 'best-case scenario' was 3,100 deaths by the time the outbreak had run its course.

By the time the outbreak had run its course, 457 had died and the Chief Medical Officer was forced to concede that the 'pandemic' had been 'considerably less lethal' than feared. It was not Sir Liam's finest moment, but he retired the following year and went on to greater glories. I see he is being described by the King's Fund as 'a global leader in public health' and by Chatham House as 'an international champion of healthcare'. He's just not very good with the crystal ball, our Liam.

It was years later that an independent group of eminent scientists (the Cochrane Collaboration) assessed the efficacy of Tamiflu as a protection against flu and concluded that it was no more effective than aspirin, that it offered only a small benefit to sufferers, and that there was no evidence that it reduced the risk of hospitalisation or death. By then, the World Health Organisation had recommended massive investment in Tamiflu, and governments around the world had duly obliged.

Of the 40 million units of the drug ordered by the UK Government, only 2.4 million were ever consumed and 10 million had to be written off because they had been poorly stored. Members of the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee took a dim view of these disclosures, and a prominent backbencher at the time, David Davis, called on the manufacturer, Roche, to refund UK taxpayers if the findings of the Cochrane Collaboration

were true. Roche replied that the scientific study had been 'seriously flawed' and that the researchers 'appeared not to have understood how Tamiflu works'. It certainly worked for Roche. In 2014, when the critical report was published, its sales of Tamiflu were worth \$713m a year.

Meanwhile, as we approach the end of this trying winter, and despite a jab that hasn't done much good, there are somehow 749,746 people alive in Britain who should have been dead by now.

Three refugee nurses

Steve Tilley

2018

For some time, my mind has been much on refugees. In images: the small boy washed ashore dead on a Turkish beach; the man who walked the Channel Tunnel from Calais nearly to Dover; Germany's welcome and later reaction.

And for a longer time, my mind has been much on refugees of a different generation, who came to Scotland, and who made substantial contributions to different spheres of nursing. Here I would like to share some thoughts on three of these refugees, and invite readers to reflect on what of value refugees might bring and contribute to Scotland now.

Annie Altschul (1919-2001) was one of these remarkable nurses. Annie was the most significant psychiatric nurse of her generation in Britain. Born in Vienna, and expelled (along with all Jewish students and staff) from the University of Vienna after the Anschluss, she was part of the Jewish exodus from Middle Europe in the 1930s. Arriving in England in 1938, a refugee from Nazi Austria, she worked initially as a domestic, before training as a registered mental nurse. At the age of 80, she expressed her core commitments: 'My passionate concern for those suffering from mental disorder, my affinity with them, and my quest for knowledge about mental illness have never flagged'.

Recognised during the Second World War for her role in therapeutic community and group therapy innovations in treatment, Annie was a major influence in the post-war development of UK mental health nursing education and practice. She became principal tutor at Bethlem and Maudsley Hospitals; and completed a psychology degree while working full-time. Her *Psychiatric Nursing* and *Psychology for Nurses* were the standard texts for many years. In 1960-61, Annie carried out a pioneering investigation and critical appraisal of education for nursing practice in American mental hospitals (*Re-reading Altschul: a Festschrift*). She returned having 'started on a train of thought' she 'pursued' in landmark research following her move to Edinburgh.

The Scottish phase of Annie's life began with her appointment in 1964 to a WHO-funded lectureship in nursing studies at the University of Edinburgh, where she was professor of nursing studies from 1976-83. Henry Walton acknowledged her bringing 'the concept of the autonomous, self-directed nurse' to her 'huge participation in the local renewal of psychiatry,' including teaching and research at the Royal Edinburgh Hospital and Dingleton Hospital.

Her MSc research (and book *Patient-Nurse Interaction*) seeded a distinctive body of UK psychiatric nursing research. Her wider contributions to public life included membership of the Mental Welfare Commission, and writing openly about her own experience of depression, in her chapter in the book *Wounded Healers*. Annie's achievements were

recognised in her appointment as one of the first cohort of fellows of the Royal College of Nursing, and investiture as a CBE.

She concluded the text she wrote in 1999 to accompany her 80th birthday portrait photograph:

Psychiatric nursing does not lend itself to pictorial representation and so I chose to have this picture taken in my own home where I am surrounded by music and books, and where visitors are always welcome. The painting behind me forms a link with my origins: an Austrian rural dwelling with lilac, horse chestnut and window boxes – a painting which was the sole possession my mother decided to bring with her when she joined me in exile, now over 60 years ago.

Annie is remembered, perhaps uniquely, in both the University of Vienna's *Memorial Book for the Victims of National Socialism at the University of Vienna*, and *The Biographical Dictionary of Scottish Women*.

Our next remarkable nurse, Dr Lisbeth Hockey (1918-2004) was born in Graz, Austria. Lisbeth studied medicine at the University of Graz for three years before the Nazi occupation in 1938, intending to become a general practitioner, as she thought that was the path to treating the 'whole person'. When the Nazis entered Austria, her father – a government architect and therefore at risk – sent Lisbeth to London. Later, the Nazis identified her parents as Jewish; both her mother and father died in a concentration camp.

In London, Lisbeth was helped by quakers, becoming a governess for children of members of the Wedgwood family. Advised there was no prospect of her continuing medical studies in the UK, she learned sufficient English to begin nurse training. Her training was interrupted: as a non-British subject she could not nurse prisoners of war; she was, however, allowed to train as a fever nurse, due to shortages of trainees in that dangerous field. Lisbeth went on to qualify as a general nurse, health visitor and midwife.

Interviewed later in her life, Lisbeth recalled that her mother had always encouraged her to ask questions. She recalled too her deep frustration, as a trainee nurse, at the resistance she encountered when she asked questions about nursing practice. On one occasion, she asked the ward sister whether something could be done to prevent the severe pressure sores many of the patients suffered. The sister replied: 'Go back to your work, if we knew the answer we wouldn't have any sores'.

Lisbeth questioned no further on that occasion. Instead, she began keeping a journal in which she noted the problems she thought needed to be addressed, and her questions about practice. This material later formed the basis for a superb, short book, *Nursing Research: Mistakes and Misconceptions*.

Chosen in 1962 to coordinate district nurse training in London, Lisbeth extended this questioning approach. Diagnosing a need to determine whether the then-current curriculum for training was still suitable, she proposed and carried out research to answer

that question. Recognising the limits of her knowledge of research methods, she did a course in statistics, and later a degree in economics as an evening student.

In questioning practice, and herself as practitioner, Lisbeth became a pioneer of nursing research, and of education to enable nurses to play roles in a research-informed workforce; and was a significant influence on nursing research development in Sweden and Germany. In 1971, she was appointed the first director of the nursing research unit at the University of Edinburgh (the first such unit in the UK and Europe). Thus two refugees from Nazi Austria became colleagues. For over a decade (till Lisbeth's retirement in 1983) they were key figures in the university's substantial influence on nursing, locally, nationally and internationally.

Lisbeth offered generous hospitality to guests and visitors, especially to students far from home and alone in Edinburgh during holidays. I think both she and Annie understood, from experience, the impact of being displaced, and of projects interrupted. Lisbeth had to forgo becoming a general practitioner, but was awarded honorary doctorates in law (University of Alberta) and in medicine (University of Uppsala). In 1982, she became the first (and for 20 years was the only) nurse to be made an honorary fellow of the Royal College of General Practitioners.

Our third remarkable nurse, Rosa Sacharin, was born in Berlin in 1925. She arrived in the UK in 1938 on the first Kindertransport train and boat. A 13-year-old refugee, she travelled to Edinburgh where she lived and worked as a domestic with two families. At 16, she moved to join her older sister in a hostel for Jewish refugees in Glasgow, the city where she still lives.

There, with assistance from a minister's wife, she learned sufficient English to progress through secondary school. Advised to train as a nurse, she found her vocation, training first as a sick children's nurse, and later a general nurse (adults) and midwife. Very focused, and making the most of opportunities available to her, Rosa became a senior nurse teacher and an examiner (nursing), and completed an Open University degree.

Like Annie and Lisbeth, Rosa questioned, challenged and changed then-current practice and authority. For example, instead of nursing child patients in their cots or beds, Rosa sometimes played with them on the ward floor; her example led to change in ward practice. Later in her career, perceiving a lack of suitable books on paediatric nursing, she co-wrote (with M H S Hunter) *Paediatric Nursing Procedures* and wrote *Principles of Paediatric Nursing*; the latter was translated into two languages.

In *The Unwanted Jew: The search for acceptance*, self-published in 2014, Rosa Sacharin tells the story of her life. She contextualises that story by first sketching the history of Berlin and of the Jews in Berlin, and her own family's history. The book has elements of both personal and historical narrative: the title conveys the relationship between those elements.

In the preface, she notes that she wrote the book especially for her two daughters and her grandson. The book conveys the impact of her childhood experiences of distress, separation, and loss on her later life. She was cared for in Jewish children's homes and a

Jewish orphanage from the age of three to 13, following her parents' separation. She recounts the rise of Nazi power and its impact on her family, and on those institutions. Her father was imprisoned on political grounds and later died in a concentration camp. Her brother also died in the Holocaust; Rosa spent years trying to establish where. Her mother survived the war in Berlin, joining Rosa and her sister in Glasgow in 1947. She lived near Rosa's family till near the end of her life, severely affected by the traumas she had endured.

Rosa has played important roles in Jewish refugee communities and societies in Glasgow, Scotland and the UK, and in the creation and maintenance of those Jewish communities' archives. She recounts one singularly significant act of memory. Rosa travelled to Germany in 1966 to see the Catholic woman who had been an important carer for her as a child in Jewish care homes in Berlin, who entrusted to Rosa photographs and memorabilia from those homes. In 2000, Rosa donated these artefacts to the then-new Jewish Museum Berlin, where they became part of the exhibits.

In one of her textbooks, Rosa invited readers to consider the experience of a child coming to hospital, and the experience of the paediatric nurse responsible for meeting the child's needs:

It is important to remember that the child has suddenly been uprooted and placed into an environment which is both strange and frightening to him... If the child shows obvious signs of illness, it is comparatively easy for the nurse to be compassionate... Greater difficulty is experienced with the child, coming to the hospital, who is active, resentful and frightened or timid and frightened.

At one stage in her work, Rosa experienced significant difficulties in understanding and responding to the mother-child dyad. She sought help with this from Dr Winifred Rushforth, pioneer of Edinburgh's family- and community-focused Davidson Clinic and Wellspring. The significance of that relationship was deepened when Rosa asked Rushforth to help her mother. Rushforth's intervention helped Rosa's mother find work in a Jewish restaurant and a valued connection with the Glasgow Jewish community.

Rosa brought much of value when she came to Scotland in 1938. She has given – and still gives – much through community, public and professional service. *The Unwanted Jew* is a unique document and resource for thinking and feeling more deeply about those seeking acceptance: what they may bring and what we may bring to them.

Rosa, Annie and Lisbeth let us see how much potential refugees have to contribute, but their stories also show some of the challenges they faced. They invite us to respond to refugees now in the light of what these women – their lives and work – have taught us, and can still teach us.

We must control vaping before it's too late

Anthony Seaton

2019

In 1970, the late Dr George Miller, a friend of mine working for the UK Medical Research Council in the West Indies, was asked to investigate an outbreak of a fatal lung disease in Guyana. He discovered that it was occurring in smokers who had been enhancing their experience by adding mineral oil to the tobacco leaf and wrote a famous paper on 'blackfat tobacco smokers' lung'. Inhalation of mineral oil was a rarely recognised cause of lung damage, often fatal.

In 1980, as a chest physician in Edinburgh, I was consulted by a young building labourer with a cough and an abnormal chest radiograph. Until a year previously he had been a full-time punk rock drummer and fire-breather, but had ended this career after incinerating his flat. He told me that before performances the band smoked whatever they had gathered by way of drugs in the previous week, these not being confined to tobacco and cannabis but included various pills that they had gathered, and ground into a powder. I took a sample of his lung and it was full of oil and mineral particles, leading to scarring. I recorded this case of 'punk rock drummer's lung' in the *British Medical Journal*.

The good readers of the *Scottish Review*, most having led a more sheltered existence than those of us at the frontline of medicine, would be surprised to know what tricks people get up to in order to enhance their experience of life, or at least to make it seem bearable. The most popular is burning vegetable matter containing nicotine and inhaling the mixture of poison gases, nanoparticles, carcinogens and radioactive substances known as cigarette smoke. This was once almost universal among men of my generation, as nicotine is one of the most addictive chemicals known.

Mass-addiction to tobacco proved extremely profitable to both manufacturers and suppliers, and brought considerable income to governments from taxation; there has been a long battle to counter this mass-intoxication of the public, and part of this has been to find ways of treating the addiction in its victims.

Public information on risks of heart attack and cancer, and exhortation by doctors initially had little effect on smoking rates in the population until governments were shamed into taking action through progressive taxation. The work of Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) was countered by the propaganda of the tobacco companies, who knew that addiction to nicotine acted to their financial advantage and they continued to entice youngsters into the habit.

A breakthrough in management of cigarette addiction came in the 1980s with the introduction of nicotine substitution, especially when combined with counselling. Patches, allowing nicotine to be absorbed in small doses through the skin, were proved to be an effective aid to stopping smoking in people who wished to do so. More recently, the

introduction of vaping has also proved effective in the hardcore of serious addicts wishing to give up, allowing them to get something of the oral pleasure of smoking as well as the satisfying neuro-psychological effects of nicotine.

Nicotine is well known to pharmacologists for its effects on nerve transmission, in the brain and in blood vessels, the bladder and the gut, but it does not increase risks of cancer. Like many chemicals, it may have apparently beneficial effects as well as harmful ones, the balance between these being dependent on the dose taken, a well-recognised effect of most of the medicines we may have to take. Nicotine causes release of substances in the brain that are responsible for the pleasurable sensation sought by addicts, but among other unpleasant effects it causes narrowing of arteries and rises in blood pressure; it is likely that it plays a part in the increased risk of heart disease and sudden death among smokers.

The advantage of nicotine substitution is that the individual no longer craves cigarettes and thus may stop inhaling the carcinogenic substances in tobacco smoke. However, the consequences of long-term nicotine use are as yet unknown and it is probable that heart attack and stroke will prove to be among them. Moreover, there are more immediate problems to consider.

In the United States and increasingly in the UK, vaping is being promoted to young never-smokers as well as to those who wish to quit. There is clearly a lucrative market for an apparently safe, legal means of producing the pleasant effect of intoxication especially, if as with nicotine, it guarantees that the new customer will become addicted.

In such circumstances, one would expect people to overdose and experience serious poisoning. It would be expected that those so inclined would seize the opportunity of adding other chemical substances to the fluid being vaporised. Over the last two years, several hundred young people have been hospitalised in the USA for serious lung problems associated with the use of vaporisers; several deaths have been reported and the evidence suggests that they have died of acute lung inflammation caused by inhaled oily cannabis-related substances added to the inhaled fluid, rather like the Guyanan blackfat smokers. It is to be expected that long-term crippling lung scarring, as in my punk rocker, may be a consequence in some survivors.

In the UK, we are used to our medicines and consumer products being certified safe and for our medicines to be tightly regulated. At present, we can purchase vaping equipment freely and manufacturers of the fluids are adding numerous chemicals to make them more attractive to potential users. It is possible to purchase any number of fluids on the web that have not been subjected to any toxicological testing.

Tobacco addiction ranks as the greatest man-made killer of people, even including warfare, and controlled use of nicotine as a medicine has been helpful in reducing this. As someone who spent part of my lifetime looking after the victims of smoke-related diseases and the other part researching the harm done by inhaled substances, I nevertheless foresee a looming problem from uncontrolled use of vaping. It is not yet too late to prevent this in Scotland; regulation of the sale and use of vaping apparatus and fluids as medicines is urgently needed.

FOOD AND FARMING

Angry about a sausage

Alex Bell

2014

I was going to write about Europe but was distracted by a square sausage. What a foul thing, a crime against food and possibly a crime against humanity. Who would stand in court and defend it against charges of making people suffer unduly? There are dog snacks I'd sooner eat than a slice of Lorne.

All food has peasant origins, with classic dishes improved over time – the square sausage can be the only staple that was born out of crap and will die there too. A dish of gristle, bone and gut fried that should have disappeared with paraffin lamps.

There is a point to this. Food is political. Like access to water and land, it sits at the very heart of what it means to be a citizen. To eat and drink is to live – in a civilised world, to eat and drink well is to be part of society. When such basic needs are met, the community is functioning properly.

To define civilisation is notoriously hard but surely the patisserie, charcuterie, cheeses and drinks of Europe are as important as the statues, museums, laws and habits of this continent? Good food, neither expensive nor fancy, is what makes life bearable. Yet we fail so profoundly on food.

Our butchers sell square sausage and 'king rib', and items which food retailer's call 'shit on a stick' owing to the origins from the abattoir floor. They sit beside grass-fed beef and lamb of the highest quality. Of course, price divides the two, but so do the politics.

Bizarrely we export much of our good food and import mechanically recovered mush for square sausage and grease van burgers. We are all fed, but on third-rate food. This bad food doesn't just sit on the breath or the bones, but on our health system. It makes us obese, brings with it cancer and heart disease, and renders good lives into fatty imprisonment. Cheap food costs the state a lot of money.

Rather than demanding better food – often grown in our fields – we celebrate the rubbish. In Scotland's perverse omni-ordinary culture, the square sausage, deep fried pizza and diet of ginger are credentials of normality. The tampon textured white slice is not seen as a cruel trick by rich food barons to fob us off, but rather a symbol of belonging. The hunk of Lorne isn't poor-man's pacifier, but proof of being Jock Tamson's bairn.

We worry that income for our 'luxury' foods is flattening as China loses its economic bounce. Better to worry about a food production model which assumes the bounty of the land is for others, not ourselves. The real issue is why we have allowed land barons to milk euro benefits while selling us the sweepings from the barn. In any other walk of life, such an operation would be seen as organised crime against the citizenry.

You may have had lamb over Easter. It is apparently traditional, but the lambs on the

hills are too small for eating, so in truth we eat year-old meat, on the cusp of lamb becoming hogget. Better to eat Scots lamb for Christmas if you want to be seasonal and are after something tender, grass-fed and delicious. Because we eat lamb a year old, it means the animals are taken off the hill for winter and given manufactured feed. This significantly pushes up the price and explains why New Zealand farmers can produce, butcher and ship lamb to us for less money than our own crop.

The puzzle over the price of lamb – marginal profits at market yet so dear on the butcher's slab and so easily beaten for price by imports – is one that should occupy every rural MSP, MP and MEP. We boast of great food but deny it to ourselves and bankrupt our farmers. It is an issue that needs to be solved.

Fortunately, we have an organisation that obsesses about food – it's called the EU. It is the world's largest food regulator, protector and farm subsidiser. The European Union had to become this because most of its member states recognise that food is at the heart of life. Quite rightly, they'd look upon the square sausage as an abomination.

Tomorrow, you and I get to vote on the latest set of MEPs. Surely these are the very people we need to address Scotland's ill-health from the bad food/failing agricultural sector dilemma. Have you had any information from them at all? I haven't. Not to worry, because they can do nothing. We will return six MEPs for Scotland and they will do virtually nothing of any note. It won't be their fault – the system doesn't allow the democratically-elected

member much influence.

The power over farm and food decisions comes between member state governments and the commission. In this relationship, the plight of Scotland's people and sheep are equally small. And so it should be until Scots are prepared to look at the square sausage on their plate and get angry – angry that they have so easily been taken for suckers, angry that they care so little for what goes in them, or the welfare of the farmers and producers.

This issue has added significance. Amid the lull in referendum excitement a real issue has arisen which should be a test for both sides. The tremors rocking the Co-op group could yet have huge consequences for Scotland. If the worm of financial incompetence should eat through the shops as well as the banking operation, then we have a crisis.

As any citizen outside the cities knows, the Co-op is the lifeblood of the country. While big supermarkets dominate the urban high street and shopping centre, it is often a lonely Co-op that provides the milk, meat, bread and booze of smaller communities. Nor is this just a pale shadow of the bigger chains. The Co-op sells happy chickens, fairtrade tea and coffee, and competitively priced essentials.

The Co-op also used to be the biggest farmer in the UK – despite neo-liberal nostrums about competition, it showed you could run an entire food operation, from farm to plate, while making a profit and protecting food producers. It was, still is, a functioning cooperative, that bedrock of food production on the continent. All this may be lost in the downfall from the banking disaster – a greed for financial obesity.

We shovel EU cash at big landowners while bankrupting farmers and destroy successful food cooperatives because of the incompetence of the very rich (who own the big land) – perhaps we deserve our slice of square. I shall vote tomorrow out of duty, not hope, and for so long as our food market is so patently unfair, I can't bring myself to respect the EU. Make MEPs eat Lorne and then things may change.

They are destroying our way of life

Helen Stewart

2018

On 7 July 1599, Shakespeare was still writing for the Globe, and that is when my family started farming outside Pitlochry – where I still live and work today. Growing up on the farm, my parents taught me 'farm first', meaning that the farm came before everything else. If this meant going without, if it meant no holidays, if it meant staying up late or getting up early, then that is what would be done. Not because we owned anything but because we belonged to it. It is our meaning in life to look after the farm.

When I reached high school, my head teacher even pulled me into her office concerned about our lifestyle. She asked: 'When last did you have family time?' I couldn't understand what she was getting at and replied: '... we were castrating lambs at the weekend'. But she said this didn't count. What she failed to understand was that it was a different culture entirely, a different way of living.

It was December 2014 when I realised things weren't that simple, that life on the farm was propped up by a complex grant system issued by the EU called the Common Agricultural Policy. It is a massive policy taking up 40% of the EU budget. I only really thought about it in 2014 because that is when it stopped working.

In 2014 the Scottish Government had introduced a new computer system to manage this grant. The computer system wasn't ready and wasn't working. We eventually received a decreased payment, and this was just the start. In 2015, there was a five-month late payment, again decreased – only 80%. In 2016, the payment was so late that the government issued a part payment loan to farmers. Overall, the subsidy was almost a year late – and this trend

is spiralling. Still the computer system is faulty beyond function.

This subsidy is now dangerously out of sync for Scottish farmers. But without it an estimated 90% of farmers would go out of business within a year as it makes up an average 55% of our income. The Scottish Government has driven farmers into the hands of the banks and the depths of debt.

Last January due to this disruption my dad had a heart problem and that's when I decided to finish my studies and go back home. I knew the stress was bad when I visited my parents from university and I would hear my dad getting up to redo his budgets at 1.30 every morning. There would be plan A, and plan B, and plan C, throughout the week. He said he couldn't look at the numbers by daylight. Yet, the sheep still have to be fed, vet bills still have to be paid, there is no telling the taxman that you're suddenly missing over half of your income. It hurt me to see my dad, after all of his hard work, being put in a position like this. We were constantly being told to get with the times and

run the farm like a business. Yet what business does not know when, or even if, money is coming in?

Following the financial disruption this year, the government launched a new suicide hotline in an attempt to stem the number of farmers taking their own lives. Farmers, who take identity from their livelihood, who are often isolated with traditional 'stiff upper lip' attitudes, are not fit socially to be bearing this level of uncertainty.

This isn't just a problem for now, a temporary 'glitch' as the government attempts to reassure us – it is putting down roots. Already I look around and the farms surrounding me have given up. They may not have walked off but they intend to retire and not pass the farm on to their family. There are no alternatives when we are not even told when the situation might be resolved. Every month is a lottery of checking the bank account and phoning around your neighbours as if you're going mad.

The financial disruption has shattered our 'farm first' image: farms are seen as a burden rather than a privilege – for who would want this for their children? When I complain, as I often do, about the dying farms, people say: but isn't this great for you?; you will have more land, more opportunities, more subsidy for you. And this is what upsets me most. There are so few farmers in Scotland and yet we are expected to turn on each other. It's almost cannibalistic – a starving body breaking down its muscle mass only to survive.

Yet, say you don't particularly care about Scottish farming. We could just import all our food and forfeit the food independence we have left. Does it not concern you that our own government mismanaged this so drastically and that we don't really hear about it? The Common Agricultural Policy equals around 40% of EU funds: that's €58 billion a year. To mismanage 40% of EU funds, surely that is gross incompetence? It certainly concerns me that our government can bring an industry to its knees through an organisational 'transitional' error. Yet there are no investigations; there is painfully little media coverage.

The loss of the stability of farming is a loss in culture, a loss in mental well-being, a long-term, long-reaching loss. It hurts all the more when we feel it is a loss we bear in silence.

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