

# Editorial

## Nothing ever happened

"... Political language, as used by politicians, does not venture into any of this territory [the exploration of reality] since the majority of politicians, on the evidence available to us, are interested not in truth but in power and in the maintenance of that power. To maintain that power it is essential that people remain in ignorance, that they live in ignorance of the truth, even the truth of their own lives. What surrounds us therefore is a vast tapestry of lies, upon which we feed.

As every single person here knows, the justification for the invasion of Iraq was that Saddam Hussein possessed a highly dangerous body of weapons of mass destruction, some of which could be fired in 45 minutes, bringing about appalling devastation. We were assured that was true. It was not true. We were told that Iraq had a relationship with Al Qaeda and shared responsibility for the atrocity in New York of September 11th 2001. We were assured that this was true. It was not true. We were told that Iraq threatened the security of the world. We were assured it was true. It was not true.

The truth is something entirely different. The truth is to do with how the United States understands its role in the world and how it chooses to embody it.

But before I come back to the present I would like to look at the recent past, by which I mean United States foreign policy since the end of the Second World War. I believe it is obligatory upon us to subject this period to at least some kind of even limited scrutiny, which is all that time will allow here.

Everyone knows what happened in the Soviet Union and throughout Eastern Europe during the post-war period: the systematic brutality, the widespread atrocities, the ruthless suppression of independent thought. All this has been fully documented and verified.

But my contention here is that the US crimes in the same period have only been superficially recorded, let alone documented, let alone acknowledged, let alone recognised as crimes at all. I believe this must be addressed and that the truth has considerable bearing on where the world stands now. Although constrained, to a certain extent, by the existence of the Soviet Union, the United States' actions throughout the world made it clear that it had concluded it had carte blanche to do what it liked.

Direct invasion of a sovereign state has never in fact been America's favoured method. In the main, it has preferred what it has described as 'low intensity conflict'. Low intensity conflict means that thousands of people die but slower than if you dropped a bomb on them in one fell swoop. It means that you infect the heart of the country, that you establish a malignant growth and watch the gangrene bloom. When the populace has been subdued – or beaten to death – the same thing – and your own friends, the military and the great corporations, sit comfortably in power, you go before the camera and say that democracy has prevailed. ..."

**Extract from Harold Pinter's Nobel Lecture, 'Art, Truth & Politics'**

<http://nobelprize.org/literature/laureates/2005/pinter-lecture-e.html>

## The winter's passed, The summer's here. For this we thank Our party dear!

On January 19th the Scottish Parliament's Culture Minister Patricia Ferguson delivered their response to the Executive's £500,000 Culture Commission's 131 recommendations. [See Variant, issue 24 editorial for an appraisal.] The statement that the Executive aims to "support plans to nurture the best creative and cultural talent while cutting back on unnecessary bureaucracy" has been treated as a dismissal of the Commission's seemingly overly-complex proposals, but will instigate some of its lesser recommendations.

Spelled out by the Minister in a procedural



and distancing vernacular, they will legislate for "a legal framework for delivering rights and entitlements", while "local authorities will develop plans to ensure every person in Scotland is entitled to access cultural activity, reflecting the needs and wishes of local people and communities" within Community Planning—following Best Value, Community Planning is another oxymoron for extending the involvement of private sectors in public services.

As expected, the Scottish Arts Council (SAC) and Scottish Screen are to be merged creating "a new cultural development agency called Creative Scotland [...] with the key task of developing talent and excellence in all branches of the arts, and the creative and screen industries." However, it will not oversee the National performing companies as the Executive is to now do so directly, with former Scottish Arts Council staff transferred to an Executive unit responsible. There is also to be another review, this time of the National Institutions' collections. The SAC in response have stated: "The impact on staffing and other resources following their transfer is expected to be minimal." While the Centre for Cultural Policy Research at Glasgow University believe, the "proposed changes are more about tinkering with structures than making a radical shift."

Predictably, there is to be a Scotland-the-Brand "recognition scheme for Scotland's creative sector".

Blanket 'Cultural spend' by 2007-08 is said by the Minister to "rise to £234 million per annum", but only once "contribution to local authority cultural expenditure is included". Such heightened emphasis on Local Authority involvement is what many suspected and raises the spectre of increased tiered political bossing—that such a plan to rationalise "unnecessary bureaucracy" will in fact increase the bureaucratisation of culture.

The widely reported "plans to invest an extra £20 million per year from April 2007" relate to the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport's entire brief: from National Companies (and their deficits) to fitting out libraries, Sports Scotland, Cultural Portal, Scotland's Cultural Resources Access Network, Scottish Schools Digital Network, and all the Schools' curriculum pursuits including reading and music programmes... Not to forget the reshuffle to be Creative Scotland with the likely redundancy-fixes to ensue, office relocations, redesign and rebranding sinks, and the marketing of a needless celebrity award.

"Proposals for a National Box Office"—"a 'one-stop-shop' for culture and sport ticketing"—"will be scoped by the Executive and its national cultural and tourism agencies". Given their history of waste in this area with fiascos like VisitScotland (an internet gateway set up to promote tourism), we wait to see if this will be another over-priced PPP IT contract, preceded by publicly paid for private consultation out of the Edinburgh finance district.

With the Executive, and McConnell in particular, having recently been embarrassingly chastised by Westminster for posturing on immigration issues [see: 'They All Belong to Glasgow' in this issue], is unnecessary legislation on the vagaries of 'cultural entitlement' the kind of distraction from hard politics that the people of Scotland intended for a Scottish Parliament? Is this not really a means of unburdening responsibilities for delivery onto local government with Parliament being seen to be doing something akin to a legislative programme? Regardless, the reported financial increase is deemed not to start

before 2007/8, and the third general election to the Scottish Parliament will be held on May 3, 2007, so no one should feel obliged to keep any vague promises made now with all the competing pressures in an election year.

With the media diversion on how 'the Arts' as a category-of-their-concern will supposedly benefit, we also have to know how the reported increase relates to Glasgow's 2014 Commonwealth Games

bid, if successful—the winning city is announced in 2007, though its bid will have to be shored up now [see: 'Constructing Neoliberal Glasgow: The Privatisation Of Space' in this issue]. To say nothing of Scotland's spend on the 2012 London Olympics.

So how has the alleged £20m increase been calculated? For example: The Executive "will make available £400k per annum over the next two years to enable a new match-funding sponsorship initiative proposed by Arts and Business. Arts and Business will use our support to incentivise private sector sponsorship. That way, we aim to deliver over £700k in additional support for the arts each year, through a mix of public and private sector finance." Has £400k been sexed-up as a possible future £700k, as it looks that way.

Really there needs to be an accurate assessment of the current deficit in funding across the board for any sum to have any meaning in the overall context of what it's being applied to. Then, once we know what it's to cover exactly, a statement of how these time-limited increases (if they are) have been calculated and what they are going to have to cover in terms of stand-still funding now and thereafter given inflation (an announced £20m today is not going to be of that value if it kicks-in in a couple of years time and then eight years down the line). And, importantly, any expansion of the Minister's brief or usage in support of other policy areas, as expressed in McConnell's St. Andrew's Day 2003 Speech—it's no secret that the Executive needs the excuse of Culture to redirect funding into major taxation areas together with using it as a tool to extend the involvement of private sectors into public services. Is this really what we want?

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2006/01/19093710>

## The Comedian's Comedian

François Matarasso of new Labour think-tank Comedia is the new Chair of the Arts Council England, East Midlands and therefore a member of the national Arts Council England governing body. Described on their web site as "a freelance writer and arts researcher, specialising in community-based cultural activity and its role in people's lives", worryingly there is no mention of his more prominent position as a private consultant going up and down the country promoting a very polite description of government control of the arts—Matarasso's "research was designed to add a dimension to existing economic and aesthetic rationales for the arts by looking at their role in social development and cohesion." His influential 1997 justification for social inclusion programmes, 'Use or Ornament', has been damningly critiqued in *Variant* by Paola Merli for its shoddy methodology and for the role of private sector consultancies and freelancers in promoting the social inclusion agenda.

For further reading, see:

**'Evaluating the social impact of participation in arts activities: A critical review of François Matarasso's Use or Ornament?'**, Paola Merli, *Variant* issue 19

<http://www.variant.org.uk/19texts/socinc19.html>

**'When the going gets weird, the weird turn pro'**, William Clark, *Variant* issue 11

<http://www.variant.org.uk/11texts/Clark.html>

**Beyond Social Inclusion: Towards Cultural Democracy**

<http://www.culturaldemocracy.net/>