

Editorial

The issue opens with a discussion between Douglas Alexander and Gerry Hassan, in which they tease out some of the more interesting questions that lie behind what Gerry calls the loud voices and self importance of each camp in the battle between unionism and independence in Scotland. Though they have very different positions on independence, underlying their exchange are concerns about how equality and identity can be connected in politics; an understanding that most people hold multiple identifications; a rejection of exclusivist identities; a sense of nation that is not absolute; a focus on issues of poverty and inequality and how these intersect with identity; and a recognition that changes in civil society are often as important as constitutional change - though the two are also intertwined. Their dialogue is thus one in which real dilemmas and issues are defined, rather than positions shouted. As such it is an important contribution to the wider debate about the future of the multi-national British state, and the ways in which national and other identities are played out within it.

A similarly complex understanding of the importance of place underpins Ruth Davis and Guy Shrubsole's articles on the future of green politics. Ruth argues that our sense of where we live is deeply embedded within the economy; the availability of decent local jobs and housing is at the heart of our relationship to our neighbourhood. And our sense of our own place and environment is for many of us the source of our concern for the wider planet. The environmental movement needs to shift away from a politics of exhortation - which relies on individuals changing their behaviour rather than corporations and governments - and reconnect to this sense of relationship with our material surroundings. She also argues that the environmental movement needs to end its entanglement with government-inspired managerialism and utilitarianism - as most recently evidenced in George Osborne's 'Natural Capital Committee'. Vested interests are the main obstacle to the creation of a greener world, and defeating such interests requires taking on the elite rather than submitting to its arcane and obfuscating world of committees and audits. Guy Shrubsole also argues the importance of a reconnection with nature and the land, a process in which he sees questions of ownership as central. This would include the encouragement of renewable energy co-operatives, energy bonds or even a renewable energy sovereign wealth fund; and the exploration of new forms of owner

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relationship to Britain's forests and commons, and even the reversal of previous enclosure acts.

If our sense of place and nature is embedded in our localities, the same cannot be said of global capital. Phillip Brown and Hugh Lauder argue that the global jobs market means that we are seeing the rise of a high-skilled but low-waged global economy, as low-wage economies shift from competing at the bottom end of the skills scale to competing right across the skills spectrum. Competition across the world market means that in the near future only a tiny corporate elite will be able to maintain what is currently regarded as a reasonable middle class standard of life. Continuing faith in supply-side measures such as training and education, and an enduring insistence against all the facts that the state has no role to play within the economy, mean that the current government has no chance of altering this trend - even if it wanted to. From the perspective of educationalists, Martin Allen and Patrick Ainley argue that the current generation of young people are the most highly educated ever seen in Britain, and yet they cannot find decent jobs. Clearly the problem lies with the structure of the economy rather than in any lack of training or skills. If the government does not adopt a proactive industrial and employment policy there is little prospect of improvement for this generation.

Cormac Hollingsworth and Gerry Holtham both make a strong case for state intervention in the economy, particularly in financial support for industry. They both argue in favour of a state investment bank, which is necessary since private finance is unwilling to invest in the parts of the economy that most need it. Cormac argues that one of the main problems is that, contrary to popular belief, the returns on private capital investment in equities are more often than not disappointing for investors, a fact that is usually disguised by the way that stock market indexes in general exclude failures from their figures. In the state investment sector on the other hand, failure is unremittingly highlighted because of its greater public accountability, and this contributes to the age-old rhetoric of state failure. In fact in Britain the state is in a better position to borrow to invest than private companies, as we have seen during the financial crisis, when it has only been the state's capacity for borrowing that has secured the survival of many banks, and as is evident in the continuing demand for state bonds. The government is able to borrow at a lower cost and to invest in the longer term. Gerry makes the important point that government borrowing for investment should not be thought of as contributing to

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a budget deficit, because investment in the future does not create any problems for future generations, since its costs are covered through the returns it brings. Both show that state involvement is crucial to the success of the economy.

Elsewhere in the issue Tim Bale shows how the Tories seek to maintain their support in spite of all their many failures on all the issues discussed here, and Francisco Dominguez documents the terrible consequences of neoliberalism for Latin America in the second half of the last century, as well as continuing efforts to undermine left politicians such as Hugo Chavez who are now overseeing a change of direction, involving a huge redistribution of wealth away from the elite. Barry Winter reviews Paul Salveson's book on the importance of regional identity and Ken Worpole remembers the work of Colin Ward, a man who believed in community co-operation and bottom-up social initiatives. Finally, our roundtable discussion on generational politics points to the ways in which the last three decades of market dominance have created a society which does not invest in the future of its young people. Once you abandon the idea of planning for the future or intervening to shape the world in the interests of the majority, you also abandon the hopes of those at the beginning of their lives.