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The Scottish Labour Party: History, Institutions and Ideas  
(review)

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McCormick compensate, using unit histories and contemporary documents to put these individuals' stories into a larger context.

One of the best-known incidents of this campaign came very early on in the hostilities. Japanese naval aviation units sank HMS Prince of Wales, a new battleship, and HMS Repulse, an old battlecruiser, which had arrived, along with four destroyers, to bolster the defence of Singapore. The Royal Marines that survived the sinking formed a naval battalion on shore. Many of these Marines were from Scotland and fought alongside the 2<sup>nd</sup> Argylls, which gives this book its odd sub-title and focus. After the defeat, the authors include chapters on the experiences the men faced as prisoners of war, and then what became of them after the conflict ended.

There are a number of shortcomings to this book. The first is the inherent weakness of a series of interviews done some fifty years after the fact. No matter how well-intentioned people are in answering questions, memories falter, details fade away, and personal accounts tend to glorify the past. These problems are obvious when dealing with oral histories, and a number of the selections the authors use have these flaws. The most blatant was when one of the interviewees fondly recalled getting into bar-room brawls, which probably is a pleasant memory to a man living life trapped in an old and enfeebled body. To their credit, Moffatt and Holmes McCormick are on many occasions reluctant to accept colourful stories without some form of qualification. On the other hand, though, it seems that the authors are determined to use every fact that they collected. How important is it that readers know what was on the menu at the first post-war reunion of the Argylls, the type of socks the men wore, or that the regiment dressed in kilts of loosely twisted wool threads instead of those that were hard twisted? There are also embarrassing glitches that better copy-editing might have caught. On page 351 the readers are about to learn what Field Marshal Sir Bernard Montgomery thought of Stewart only to turn the page and have a new paragraph start that has nothing to do with the Field Marshal or the Laird. Finally, if this unit was as good as the authors suggest—and they make a convincing case in this matter—then why were the Japanese victorious? The explanation for the outcome of the campaign is rather vague and disappointing.

In the end, this book is a worthwhile account. Members of the general public will find it engaging, and enjoy its easy flow. It can also be used in classrooms with profit, but only if the instructor is aware of its limitations.

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NICHOLAS EVANS SARANTAKES

*The Scottish Labour Party: History, Institutions and Ideas.*

Edited by Gerry Hassan. Pp.vii, 255.

ISBN 0 7486 1784 1.

Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 2004. £15.99.

Surveying the last 150 years or so of Scottish political history a number of significant changes are apparent: firstly, Liberalism was the hegemonic force in Scotland in the nineteenth century, but collapsed like a pack of cards after the First World War; secondly, there was a period of Tory dominance, but since 1955 the party has spiralled in an irresistible downward direction; thirdly, there is the mercurial rise of the SNP in the late 1960s and 1970s, which has threatened to win independence for Scotland, but has never quite delivered; and, finally, there is the Labour Party, as entrenched and as dominant as Liberalism was in its heyday. We seem to have experienced almost unconsciously a series of peaceful political revolutions, and yet, outside of a deluge of writing on the rise of the

nationalist vote in Scotland, we know very little about the nation's political development in the post-Second World War decades. That particularly applies to Labour. For all its hegemonic status north of the border the history of the Labour Party, particularly after 1945, remains uncharted and under-analysed. Thus, Gerry Hassan's edited collection of essays, which emphasises the party's growth and development since 1950, is very welcome, providing as it does a framework to begin the serious task of analysing the modern Labour Party in Scotland.

However, like any collection the quality of the chapters is uneven, although a number stand out in terms of the excellence of the writing and the level of analysis. Part of the problem lies in the diversity of the contributors, who range from historians to political scientists, to journalists to policy-makers. There is also a wide diversity in terms of approach, the broad brush style sitting rather uncomfortably with more narrowly-conceived pieces of work. Thus the collection is rather haphazardly put together and the reader would have been better served with a series of essays that had a consistency of purpose and methodology. One example of this might be taken from Section IV, which purports to deal with Scotland and the wider world but in fact contains an essay on trade unions and the Labour Party and something on Gordon Brown's philosophy.

The content is very good in places, but rather poor in others. Indeed, such is the level of tedium in some of the chapters that one comes to understand why there exists such a large democratic deficit in Scotland and the rest of the UK. These are writers obsessed with committees, institutions and personalities, and who have no understanding of forces that shape them or change them, far less any concern for their impact on the people of Scotland. The editor's overview of Labour Party history since 1950, however, is extremely useful and thought-provoking and contains a number of nuggets that could be the subject of more analysis and investigation. Apparently, the party north and south of the border share striking similarities in term of social profile. Membership is overwhelmingly white, male, middle-aged and middle class and generally is indifferent towards activity, with around 50 per cent never attending meetings in a year (pp. 6-7). Labour is also a party at a crossroads, facing a choice between jettisoning its past and accepting New Labour and the social market or clinging to Old Labour, class and state socialism. The former, obviously, is electorally attractive, while the latter is more principled and more in keeping with the party's ethos and traditions. It is therefore a party fighting for its very soul. But, while interesting and engaging, the other contributors do not build upon Hassan's analysis. The chapters on history are slight in terms of analysis, while the others are so varied in terms of the themes and issues they address that they leave the reader wondering what is the point of the book?

What stands out in the history of Labour in Scotland is that the party cannot be abstracted from the working-class culture within which it was established, but also how that culture has itself been fundamentally transformed in the course of the twentieth century. The party was formed as an alliance of the white, Protestant skilled workers and the petty bourgeoisie. In the course of this century that culture has been decimated by far-reaching economic restructuring, the historical impact of which is still unclear. This has produced a new type of party, as Hassan notes: one that is less misogynist and less sectarian, and these developments are to be welcomed; but that transformation has also been at the expense of other, more desirable features—notably a commitment to greater social and economic equality. For in spite of its weaknesses and flaws, the older workplace culture was capable of mobilising workers around commonly agreed interests and values. In its absence, and as a result of the changes mentioned, we are left with a de-skilled working class unable to challenge effectively the

appropriation by capital of its working space and time to anything like the extent of its industrial forbears. The results of this have been socially disastrous. Even the Tory historian, Ferdinand Mount, writing in *The Sunday Times* (5 September 2004), has argued that both Tory and Labour governments in recent years have created a class of what he misleadingly calls 'downers', who while suffering 'the daily practical misery of not making ends meet', also have to contend with 'seeing how little the society they live in values their efforts ... and entrenches [their] feelings of worthlessness and inferiority'.

We therefore need to worry less over Labour's relationship to the Scottish Parliament, or whether Brown will replace Blair, or whether the committee structure in Parliament is working effectively, or whether Labour is pro- or anti-Union, and more about these fundamental issues of providing decency and comfort as a right of citizenship. That would bring people and their aspirations and concerns into the debate, something that might prove uncomfortable for Hassan's contributors.

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WILLIAM KNOX

*She Was Aye Workin': Memories of Tenement Women in Edinburgh and Glasgow.*

By Helen Clark and Elizabeth Carnegie. Pp. 192.

ISBN 1 873487 05 3.

Oxford: White Cockade Publishing, in association with The People's Story, Edinburgh and the People's Palace, Glasgow. 2003. £8.99.

Personal space was non-existent in the tenement housing of Glasgow and Edinburgh; a tenement child's first place of rest was often in a chest of drawers, and similarly, the kitchen table provided the dead with a final resting place before burial. The majority of working-class families were crowded into one-room single-end and two-room room-and-kitchen tenement housing for most of the nineteenth century; as recent as 1951 half of all Glaswegians still lived in houses with only one or two rooms, and a shared toilet in the stair. The shortage of space dictated cleaning and cooking rotas, facilities for bathing, storage of personal belongings, and sleeping arrangements, all of which inevitably created a loss of privacy. Such close proximity to family members over the life course demanded much from the individual, in both logistical as well as psychological terms. An identity based on the role of the individual was less significant than that of collective familial roles. Furthermore, the organisation of family life was largely the culmination of a co-operative effort, arguably driven by the female members of the household. Indeed, for the entirety of her life, a tenement woman's sphere was almost entirely confined to the management of her family and home. Not surprisingly, reminiscences of tenement living resonate with a tremendous sense of claustrophobia.

A compilation of oral histories conducted for the People's Story in Edinburgh and the People's Palace in Glasgow, *She Was Aye Workin': Memories of Tenement Women in Edinburgh and Glasgow* is composed almost entirely of the reminiscences taken from over sixty contributors. Quite specific remembrances are articulated verbatim. These testimonies of life in tenement housing provide a gendered perspective, not unlike those found in other oral history projects conducted over the past twenty years, such as *Uncharted Lives: Extracts from Scottish Women's Experiences* by the Glasgow Women's Studies Group (1983), *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working-Class Women, 1890-1940* by Elizabeth Roberts (1984), and *Up Oor Close: Memories of Domestic Life in Glasgow Tenements 1910-1945* by Jean Faley (1990). Indeed, this text is best seen as a counterpart to