

# Comment

## The Progress of Creeping Fascism

Owen Logan

In the 1950 film *Sunset Boulevard* an ill-fated hack writer accidentally finds himself in a gothic Hollywood mansion. At first the mysterious and supercilious mistress of the house wants to throw him out but the writer pauses, "Wait a minute... I know your face ... you used to be in silent pictures. You used to be big!" The ageing star, played by Gloria Swanson, straightens her back and replies witheringly, "I *am* big. It's the pictures that got small." The same might be said of the relationship between Fascism and nations, without any sense of the deluded grandeur which marked the character played by Swanson. Nationalism did get smaller, to the point where the very concept of national sovereignty is now widely regarded in international relations as the relic of a bygone era. If anything, Fascism got larger by disposing of its early romantic stars, leaving many of their followers to go about peddling their somewhat revised ideas about human affairs. As the economist J.K. Galbraith implied when he lamented Albert Speer's undeserved reputation as an industrial "genius of production"<sup>1</sup>, the new men of power in various countries post-1945 were not disinterested.

Very little attention is given to the positive reputation enjoyed by men like Speer. In countries that were not ill-treated by dictatorships with their made-to-order folksy nationalism, anti-Fascists tend to be preoccupied by the overt manifestation of Fascist Parties and politics. The skinhead squad-member from a run-down estate who dwells spiritually in imperial nostalgia and trots out racist hate-slogans might be an enduring characterisation, but this ironic persona is a deceptive icon, as those who have lived through a Fascist State know; its brutish foot soldiers quickly and willingly become its cannon fodder. The disenfranchised and demoralised people who become Fascist supporters make inadequate targets for democrats because the visibility and aggressive popular style of Fascism conceals a far more subtle ethos at the heart of the ideology. It is the subtle aspects of Fascist ideology that remain standing and develop their forms and continue their onward march despite all the military defeats suffered by Fascism's historic regimes.

The corporate monopolisation of markets is the symptom and outcome of this onward march, but not the cause, which is the monopolisation of public reason. For Benito Mussolini this depended on stealthily "plucking the chicken one feather at a time."<sup>2</sup> His preferred name for the system was corporativism and a fuller understanding of this so-called 'friendly Fascism' and its pre-history provides a vital means to oppose the whole Fascist phenomenon.

Fascism ought to be understood as an ideologically sophisticated and creeping set of political relations that undermine free contest and the full expression of different material and class interests within society at large. From this perspective, the general geopolitical failure of Fascism only marks the end of various formally authoritarian States and certainly not the end

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of authoritarian State politics at a number of levels. Fascism's more subtle progress is the true 'clear and present danger' to the development of democratic society or to whatever integrity democracy might still possess. The danger arises partly because one of the historical preconditions of Fascism, as theorised by Mussolini, has now been achieved thanks to the adventurism of the U.S. empire. The war on terror has given us the state of permanent, unbounded war originally dreamt up by the Italian dictator to bring about a specific economic and ideological order at home and military expansionism abroad.

That the Italian Republic, supposedly founded on the defeat of Fascism, has re-embraced the ideology under the guise of "Post-Fascism" within a parliamentary democracy is alarming. But, perhaps more alarming is that elsewhere, with no mention of any sort of Fascism, we also see the triangulation of policy towards "single purpose government", as it is now called in Scotland. This widespread and neo-totalitarian sense of purpose favours corporations by gearing all policies towards existing markets or their creation where they do not already exist. In return, States are blessed with various stamps of approval from big business and the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. Despite their reputation for imposing deadly market orthodoxies across the world, the power of these controversial institutions appears to be unassailable.<sup>3</sup> These developments are connected to the progress of Fascist ideas and opposition to them is a matter of great urgency.

### A Living History

Mussolini envisioned the corporative nation in biological terms as a body of non-competing and co-operative functions. In 1934, Fascists from different European countries agreed that this was the defining element of their international movement. As Francis Mulhern notes in 'Culture/Metaculture', the functions of corporativism, or corporatism as it is now known, are all imagined to make "their necessary, mutually non-exchangeable contributions to the health of the whole. It is accordingly anti-individualist in temper (the notion of competition between parts of the body is absurd) and also anti-socialist (the notion of a struggle between the hands and the head is equally absurd – as are democracy and equality)."<sup>4</sup> While this mythic idea of the nation as the body coincided with the racial policies pursued by the Nazis, the bodily doctrine cannot be reduced to its most murderous convulsions. In Nazi Germany, *Gleichschaltung* also aimed for the co-ordination of the life of the nation and it is the deep-seated ideology of enforced co-operation and managed national solidarity which provided the underlying logic of Fascism.

Although independent trade unions were politically disabled and outlawed in Italy, top-down organised labour and welfare policies were reborn in the image of Fascist corporatism, which, if nothing else, adhered to the aristocratic ideal of *noblesse oblige*. According to Gaetano Salvemini, an exile from the Italian system and one of its most sensitive critics, the impact of this policy to disorganise and manipulate the autonomy of labour was to effectively nationalise it, making labour into the State's bargaining chip in its dealings with capitalists. Imagine being threatened by your boss for using the word "ballot" in communicating with fellow trade unionists because that word alone was

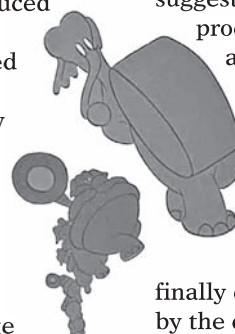
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an incitement to industrial action. Sadly this is not an example of legalised bullying under 1930s Fascism but the experience of a member of the Public and Commercial Services Union in Britain today. One only has to think for a few moments about nation-States with their normalised anti-labour laws and activities and see these policies in the context of international capitalism to begin to see the triangular outlines of the renewed repression.

In Fascist Italy of the 1930s, public institutions called corporations were to support co-operation and consultation between different interest groups, between labour and capital and between various economic sectors. In reality they were unrepresentative talking shops, the real function of which was to dignify a range of coercive policies. Followers of the Marxist, Antonio Gramsci would call this passive revolution, whereby "in lieu of attaining support for what it is doing, a government instead decides to act as if it alone were the origin of social change."<sup>5</sup> Yet the rhetorical element of co-operation and consultation remained central to Fascist practice. So attractive was the ideal of corporatist State to its proponents that they wrote admiringly of its company-like functions before the public corporations were even brought into dubious existence. Perhaps the reality is best summed up by Salvemini in his 1936 book 'Under the Axe of Fascism'. For Salvemini, to find real co-operation and genuine consultation taking place through corporatist institutions was like "looking in a dark room for a black cat which is not there."<sup>6</sup>

With this history in mind the obvious question for trades unions and other pressure groups in civil society today is how far has advanced capitalism adapted itself to the same logic of disempowered, disabled yet highly symbolic communication? There is a growing body of research on international development which suggests that the outcomes of participatory processes and public deliberation about policy are in fact preordained by the wisdom of the international financial institutions such as the World Bank.<sup>7</sup> It should be asked, therefore, how far do citizens become institutionally formed and incorporated by processes that allow us the pleasure of expressing our views, and sometimes taking action, but only in return for the finally demoralising experience of being overcome by the carefully structured imbalance of actual power?

But if such a bleak perspective is valid, it is too easy to lay the blame on big business or some overly abstract notion of "the system" when corporatism is a particular rot that can set in almost anywhere. It can be seen in the paternalistic ethos of politicians, and in the dealings of "sweetheart" trade unions that function more like an arm of management, or in any number of individuals and *ad hoc* groups that grasp opportunities to represent or to lead the



course of policy without examining the issue of meaningful democratic accountability.<sup>8</sup> However compelling one may find Naomi Klein's account of the 'Shock Doctrine',<sup>9</sup> shock tactics are not necessarily required to ignite the slow burning processes of corporatism. Trying to address these difficult issues here leads gradually towards a key distinction between freedoms of expression, on the one hand, and how the terms of communication may or may not be defined by the public interest, on the other. We live in an era that rather robotically celebrates individuals: individuals as spokespeople for the 'voiceless'; inspired, creative and visionary individuals; individuals as over-achievers, enlightened benefactors, and celebrity of all kinds. But has an actual individualism, of the kind that historians and sociologists have found at the heart of Bourgeois revolutions against feudalism, been subtly replaced by mere persona in consumerist society? Are the beneficiaries and descendants of social and political flux in the 1960s now at one with an entrepreneurial ideology which downplays the new 'feudalism' perpetrated by a remarkably like-minded corporate power elite?

### Technocorporatism

For anyone who has been subjected to mind-numbing processes of fake consultation – in the workplace or in civic deliberation on matters like housing, health, urban planning or culture – Salvemini's metaphor of the darkened empty room minus cat has a certain poetic resonance in relation to the way the appearance of consensus is constructed in a political and ideological vacuum. Often, this is done with the aid of key unelected personnel who, we are endlessly told, have expertise although they often appear to have descended upon us from another lifeworld where everyone gets along and power goes unquestioned. Nevertheless, it would be misleading to immediately draw a line from the original Fascist ideology of co-operation to the dispiriting operations of technocrats and today's neo-corporatism. Moreover, the Fascist-spawned British National Party knows only too well how to exploit the void opened up by the legitimate and widespread public contempt for what passes for democratic process in Britain. The response from mainstream parties has been to co-ordinate their campaigning to exclude the BNP. If taken in good faith, this response from mainstream politicians, would be more convincing if they were able to demonstrate a genuine commitment to unfettered public reasoning.

Undoubtedly, public discussion has been substantially dumbed down by the adherence to neoliberal ideology by all the main parties and their favourite 'opinion-formers'. The truth is that far-right populists have arguments that cannot be properly answered without raising the ghost of anti-capitalist counter arguments which, however unpopular they have become in consumer societies, remain extremely relevant. In the face of the ongoing financial crisis, witness the media silence about the continent-wide reforms to the financial system underway in Latin America.<sup>10</sup>

Part of the problem of restricting public discussion along narrow ideological lines is the way that primitive xenophobia gets branded as Fascist and racist, sometimes as if those were quite simply one and the same. We should remember that Italian Fascism *became* officially racist, it did not start out that way. Moreover, Fascist identity politics were not quite as exclusivist as often painted. In keeping with the history of liberal imperialism they were, and remain, all about reinforcing a variegated, and historically variable, racial pecking-order. More blindly xenophobic voices today are rather too hastily ostracised for their proto-Fascist tendencies when the crucial Fascist lineage is far more likely to be the ongoing development of coercive rationalism, certainly not confined to matters of 'race'. Paradoxically, when brought to public discourse it is this branch of rationalism that would coercively exclude the

BNP. And in doing so it implicitly reduces Fascism to its most primitive party-political manifestation and therefore misrepresents or ignores its true philosophical scope. It is also this branch of rationalism that can be seen adapting centrist politics to totalitarian-like policies such as torture, the derogation of key laws, support for undue or unaccountable police powers, and the attack on civil liberties in general. If all this is not enough to demand that we take the philosophical basis of coercive rationalism seriously, then polling evidence, suggesting that a majority of Britons agree with far-right policies when they are not known to be those of the BNP, should make us pause for thought.<sup>11</sup>

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### Philosophy and the Technocratic Turn

The coercive branch of rationalism celebrates the power of the mind and self-will. It neglects the social and historic complexity of the development of modern societies along with the most troubling aspects of everyday life in them. This ideological vanishing trick draws us back to the key philosophical split of the European Enlightenment: "on the one hand [there is] the Enlightenment's association of progress with autonomous and critical self-reflection within a society based on the principles of equality, liberty and the participation of independent and rational individuals, and on the other, the identification of progress with the development of scientific/technical reason and the subordination of society to the requirements of this process."<sup>12</sup> This is no abstract philosophical matter. As Val Plumwood argues in her book, *Environmental Culture*, "reason has been captured by power and made an instrument of oppression, it must be remade as a tool for liberation."

Both egalitarian and technocratic branches of rationalism have classical roots in Athenian democracy and various studies describe how the latter branch (rooted in anti-democratic Platonic philosophy) provides a "foolproof way to blame the losers – in terms of their alleged deficiency of reason, demonstrated by their being losers."<sup>13</sup> When it comes to capitalist industrialisation, the basic truth of capitalism, namely that the system generates and gives power to capitalists, must somehow be denied. Fascism's modern obfuscation of this absolutely essential truth was described by Salvemini as *Homo Corporativus*, or the self-conscious corporative individual. Yet, against his/her supposedly co-operative instincts *Homo Corporativus* merely substituted class struggle with a wholly bureaucratic struggle between the offices and the categories of his/her own authority. Nevertheless, the myth of corporativism gave a new, entirely self-contained plane of politics its very reason for being and, with it, a struggle over categories replaced struggles for democracy. For ordinary citizens to participate in technocratic politics at all, demands that, to some extent, they master technocratic rationalism and, therefore, place themselves on the ladders of its discursive

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power. In many instances, this may already be an act of submission. To summarise all this more bluntly, if the Fascist thugs are notorious for putting the boot in when you're down, this desk-bound rationalism is their philosophical sidekick.

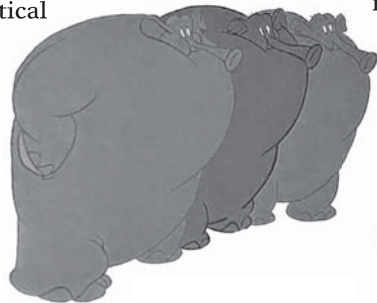
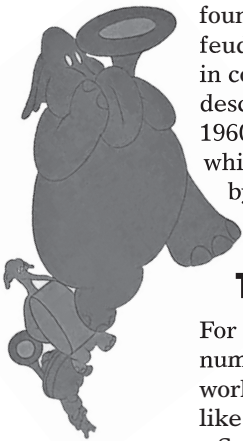
The heirs to the technically reductive version of the Enlightenment are legion! They provided the personnel required for the upward transfer of power during the Cold War. In many countries, widespread support for anti-imperialism, meaningful social democracy and socialist policies was immanent in 1945. Yet, if one looks into the working class movements internationally it is hard not to conclude that, while they were not exactly beaten to the ground, many were ideologically weakened and organisationally depleted by the combination of total war, the division and betrayals within Left politics, and what may well be seen as the technocratic turn in the Soviet Union – those repressive Russian influences still too casually ascribed to Stalinism alone.<sup>14</sup>

By the 1950s and '60s, U.S. sociologists C. Wright Mills and G. William Domhoff and the economist J.K. Galbraith were mapping the rise of a neo-corporatist system in which technocratic power and prestige was increasingly accumulated in Western democracies. In this neo-corporatist world, decision making shifted from the holders of political capital to a skilled technocratic class that mediated power and ultimately shielded elites from political pressure from below. In his study of "technocorporatism" today, Frank Fischer argues that the nexus of technocratic expertise and corporatist ideas continues to rest on a set of undemocratic "beliefs about how the world works, a conception of the way it should work, and a set of tactics for changing it. [...] Democracy is taken to be an inappropriate, inferior decision-making system for the emerging post-industrial society".<sup>15</sup> Indeed, in place of democratic public reasoning the so-called advanced democracies rely on technocrats and think-tanks for policy formation, heavily slanted consultation processes from which technocrats extract their monies, and a system of "revolving doors" through which formal State authority and informal political power is kept in the hands of the same people; and finally, unsurprisingly, massive democratic deficits with ordinary citizens playing walk-on parts in what many on the Left will regard as the greatest show on earth: the mass media's "manufacturing of consent".

Before his adaptation to the same habitat, the British sociologist, Anthony Giddens, well described the insidious qualities of technocracy. Giddens wrote: "it is not just the application of technical modes to the solution of defined problems, but a pervading ethos, a world view which subsumes aesthetics, religion and customary thought to the rationalistic mode."<sup>16</sup> The key question which thinkers like the now ennobled Baron Giddens and many other upwardly mobile well-wishers have failed to answer is how can superficial democracy be democratised without any serious commitment to democratic radicalism; how can the egalitarian values of democracy be realised with little or no cost to the ruling elites and their order of things? For the cultural engineers who have made careers out of technocorporatism, radical politics appears as an obstacle to "partnership".<sup>17</sup> Only deliberately naive intellectuals can be blind to the way this order is worsening and becoming more disreputable by the day. As it was under classical Fascism, Socialism has been turned into the plaything of the rich.

### The Knowledge Economy

One of the key universal justifications defined by UNESCO for the State support of higher education is that universities are, or should be, intellectually autonomous. To understand why, one needs to be able to appreciate knowledge as a process of production rather than one of consumption or a mere delivery mechanism. The ancient Greeks did this by differentiating the *techne* and *episteme*, effectively drawing a line between instrumental or practical knowledge on one hand, and the larger epistemological task of making sense of reality on the other. However idealistically reasoned,

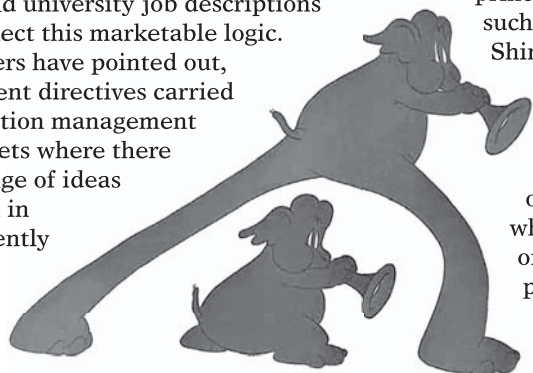


the autonomy and epistemological scope of universities is supposed to ensure that the public gets value for its money and that these institutions serve the broad public interest. If the common good is to be served this would of course include a holistic understanding of labour interests. There have certainly been technocratic plots against any such universal regulation. In a 1983 confidential report a Department of Education official wrote: "We are in a period of considerable social change. There will be unrest, but we can cope with the Toxteths... but if we have a highly educated and idle population we may possibly anticipate more serious conflict. People must be educated once more to know their place."<sup>18</sup>

Given the extent of deindustrialisation under Conservative governments and the conversion of Britain into a retail society with finance capital and defence as its last great industries, New Labour's original mantra 'Education, Education, Education' might be more honestly described as 'Training, Training, Training' for an extraordinarily technocratic Knowledge Economy. Symptomatic of this are disputes over academic freedom in higher education where the entrepreneurial mindset has become managerially enshrined. Not enough that this skews the culture of institutions towards research and teaching in favour of the business ethos as if that were synonymous with the public interest (an idea which Adam Smith would have objected to) but it has even been demanded, in at least one university, that academics demonstrate their commitment to the new philosophy in their bodily comportment too. Less explicitly elsewhere, individualism is increasingly measured against the development of amenable corporate personae. In the face of mounting university bureaucracy, totally unrealistic workloads and job insecurity, these compliant characters are expected to exude casual efficiency and pragmatism with just the right dash of creative individualism – an entrepreneurial balancing act no doubt reflected in the appalling reports of mental health among academics.<sup>19</sup>

There is, however, a more eerie reminder of Fascism to be gleaned from a spasmodic crisis of consciousness in higher education. The pervasive campaign for an entrepreneurial economy centred on knowledge and cultural products in support of urban renewal provides a mirror image of Mussolini's campaign to regenerate Italy's rural economy and resurrect traditional peasant life. In both cases, the first victim has been the critical autonomy required to create a balanced economy based on social co-determination rather than fictional co-operation and technocratic zeal. In Britain now, as in Italy of the 1930s, the actual impact of technocratic policy creates increased dependency on corporations and big business. Italy's countryside became less typically "rural" and more monopoly bound under Fascism, just as Britain's cities have become far more economically homogenous and indistinguishable than might have been envisaged by New Labour's technocrats. Like the Fascists, who believed that Italy's problems would be solved by regenerating a peasant lifeworld, New Labour's semi-independent technocracy of think-tanks and consultants have behaved as if the regeneration of Britain's cities along the lines of their Yuppified dreams was a policy that would solve an amazing range of socio-economic and political ills caused by neoliberal globalisation.

Of course, bolstering consumerism and a feel-good factor based on fictive capital has been the key aspect underlying these now threadbare technocratic fantasies. Yet in perfect synergy with Fascist philosophy, the mindset of neoliberal expertise sees the mass spirit and self-belief as everything. Mission statements in higher education and university job descriptions overwhelmingly reflect this marketable logic. As many other writers have pointed out, neoliberal government directives carried out by higher education management seek to create markets where there is still a free exchange of ideas and knowledge, and in doing so they frequently appear to have utterly abandoned universal standards.



Rather than supporting the broad public interest by defending criticality and free thought, their promotional mode of address reflects the unrelenting ideology that markets and business values are best: "Our vision is for a more dynamic, entrepreneurial and internationally competitive Scotland", reads the Scottish Funding Council's mission statement.<sup>20</sup>

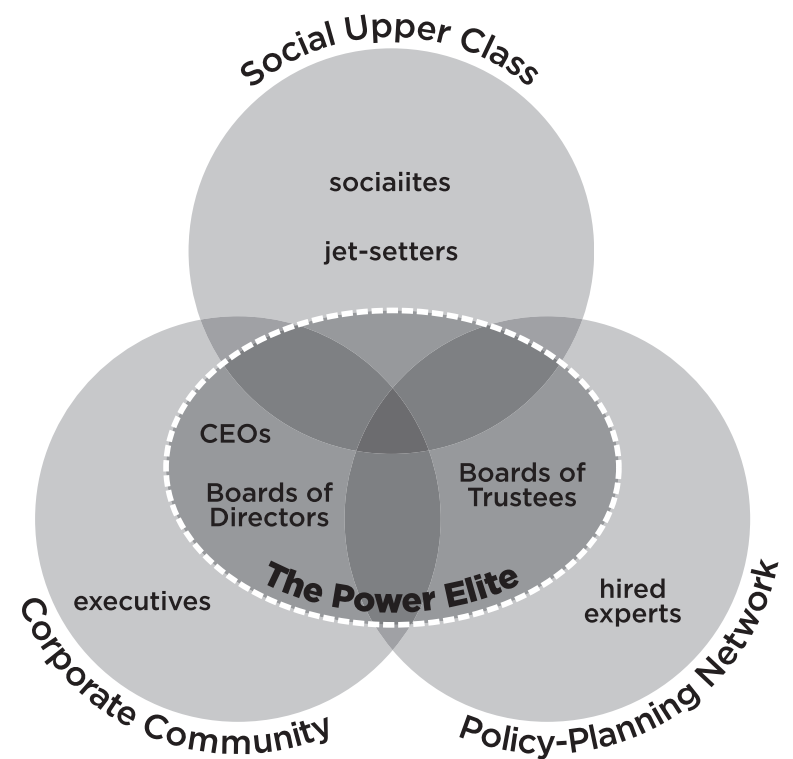
Yet most people are not employers or self-employed in their possession of an enterprise, they are instead employees and/or dependents. In a Danish international survey in 2000, Brazil came out on top with a rate of under 17% of the population involved in entrepreneurial activity. The UK registered around 6% of the population gaining from any sort of entrepreneurial livelihood.<sup>21</sup> Even if such figures were quadrupled one would still expect higher education to be geared far more positively towards an even-handed analysis of the interdependent relationship between public and private interests, accountability in public services, contemporary labour and social studies, and so on. After all, the common experience is not entrepreneurial but membership of an increasingly flexible and casualised labour force. Given this demographic reality, the technocratic commitment to envisaging the public interest in quite the opposite terms is an extraordinary ideological achievement of which any Fascist myth-maker could be proud. Nonetheless, it should be a matter of shame in primary schools where nine year olds are softened-up in classes that make the likes of Richard Branson into a hero comparable to Martin Luther King, and in secondary schools where Business Studies creeps in to replace economics classes. The response from any democrat should simply be where's the equilibrium? Where, for example, is that new secondary school course on trade unions and social movements? Clearly the widespread abandonment of social truth and a consequential unpreparedness for 'your place' appears to be what 'knowing it' is all about.

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### Reining in Culture

Culture, that vague and fought over term, might be the most slippery issue to rescue from creeping Fascism. Freedom of expression, with its interwoven rights and responsibilities, appears to lie at the ideological centre of contemporary cultural policy as a key human right and "pillar of democracy". Yet freedom of expression is *contingent* on freedom and equality in communication, or what was called *Isegoria* under Athenian direct democracy. Although modern representative democracies have not ignored this principle, different studies by academics such as Clive Barnett and Roger A.

Shiner show how freedom of expression under neoliberalism has been increasingly commercialised and steadily trivialised.<sup>22</sup> This degradation came at the expense of piecemeal but hard-won legislation which, in keeping with the principle of *Isegoria*, promoted equalities in public discourse. Although this most democratic principle helped to deepen public reasoning in



modern democracies, that is not what politicians seem to now want as they put their efforts into the construction of a rather unreasonable, ill-educated and corporate friendly culture.

The difficulty of giving democratic weight to freedom of expression is only too apparent in Scotland. In a number of announcements, politicians and cultural technocrats have pinpointed artists as the flag-bearers of cultural freedom. But this individualistic emphasis looks like a rhetorical sleight-of-hand trick when compared to their insistence on a business-led approach to cultural matters which will reduce the autonomy of the already fragile infrastructure on which many artists and cultural workers depend. The thin end of the notorious financialisation wedge is the imposition of loans with grants becoming only one part of a "light touch [...] funding system."<sup>23</sup> The policy of structural adjustment here is being implemented by the Scottish Government's own Frankenstein's monster, Creative Scotland 2009 Ltd., with a board made up mainly of ex-bankers and businessmen.

With the typically corporatist metaphor of "Team Scotland" appearing as their guiding ethos (the bodily metaphor wishfully reborn with a sporting twist), Creative Scotland seems set to narrow the scope of free expression by forming an "entrepreneurial organisation". One doesn't have to take an overly pessimistic view of the future to predict the consequences of this move as it is already apparent how little time Scotland's new promotional culture has for anyone who is not a card-carrying supporter of this entrepreneurial mindset. An example very close to home was the interference with the distribution of *Variant* by Culture and Sport Glasgow, in part, for showing the city, and thereby the brand, in a bad light.<sup>24</sup> As with the adaptation of Higher Education to the Knowledge Economy, the project of single purpose government seeks to blend arts and culture within an entrepreneurial "spectrum", to use the specific term deployed by Mike Russell MSP, the minister currently overseeing culture and constitutional change. It would be naïve to think that what doesn't fit comfortably into this single purpose spectrum won't be squeezed out, as we have already witnessed with CSG. Essentially, the function of entrepreneurial ideology today appears to be all about dispersing risk away from corporate concentrations of capital – "investing in people", as one slogan goes. In this instance, making individuals and organisations more fearful of the political risks that go with exercising freedoms of expression.

Perhaps it is no surprise that, in a country which pillaged much of the world, many people still adhere to a highly objectified sense of culture. The imperially influenced reification of culture might be detected in the often repeated words of the Victorian, Mathew Arnold, for whom culture was "the best that has been thought and said in the world." Commercially revamped, it is just a short step for politicians to begin thinking about culture not as communication and process but something more like the best that has been done and sold, or

Diagram of composition of the power elite, *Power in America: Power at the National Level*, G. William Domhoff, April 2005.

in the language of Creative Scotland, its “economic contribution fully captured.” Again, this purposeful drive, under the banner of the creative industries, brings governments to the limits of 20th century universal rights and standards, which state that “cultural goods and services [...] cannot be considered as mere commodities or consumer goods like others...”<sup>25</sup> It is worth recalling the circumstances in which universal rights and standards came into being under the auspices

of the United Nations after World War II.

Undoubtedly, Fascism forced Liberal capitalism to face up to its weaknesses and the dictatorial outcomes of its own oligarchic and imperial tendencies. Confronted also with the threat of geo-politically backed Communist insurrection, Liberalism appeared to require ethical reinforcement from a more genuinely democratic script if it was to survive at all. In today's circumstances of capitalism's monopolistic ascendancy, it would be foolish to imbibe the mood of parochialism projected by so many politicians and neglect those international legal instruments intended to provide democratic leverage for both ordinary citizens and States. Moreover, rulings against countries such as the UK and Austria in the European Court of Human Rights show that citizens can sometimes make rights to Freedom of Expression work in their favour and, in the process, reveal corruption of the public interest on the part of governments.<sup>26</sup>

This is especially important because in the absence of any serious historic threat to capitalist oligarchy, Universal Declarations and their subsequent conventions are being casually suborned by the political class. In the domineering managerial spirit of Scotland's cultural policy formation, the key distinction between culture and commerce at the heart of the ‘UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions’ is being obscured by Orwellian doublespeak. On the part of a nationalist Scottish government, this is a supreme case of cherry-picking. It is the same convention that lends support to policies to promote Gaelic across Scotland, yet in its nationalistic drive the government has suborned the anti-commercial reasoning of the convention that lends support to such a policy. In the context of globalisation, what UNESCO recognised, against U.S. wishes, was that language is one aspect of culture which is broadly threatened by the reification and commercialisation of life. The formation of Creative Scotland and its business-minded pronouncements seem to be an expression of this very problem.

### Walled Gardens

Perhaps the most significant argument that nationalists may pose against their various ideological critics is that the sovereignty of the people requires a socially meaningful geographical/legal space for democracy to be realised.

However, this implies critical issues about how a trans-national economic system might be made accountable to the citizens of supposedly sovereign spaces. One would expect any sincere and nationally-minded democrats to focus, first and foremost, on these questions of democratic process and open-ended public reasoning. It is far too easy for opportunists to replace the complex politics of space with the technocratic management of *cultural nationalism*. Indeed, it is the manipulation of cultural identity and a commanding

form of nostalgia that characterises the vociferous neo-Fascist tendencies apparent in regional autonomy movements in countries as different as Italy and Bolivia.<sup>27</sup> For its part, the Scottish Government's tourist campaign *Homecoming Scotland 2009* was an embarrassingly chauvinistic exercise in cultural assimilation and historical amnesia that shows many of the same traits. *Homecoming* was managerially constrained and commercially orientated. As such, it was an

## There is little value opposing Fascist Parties unless the essential core of coercive rationalism is exposed wherever it creeps in to monopolise public reasoning.

entirely predictable expression of myopic cultural nationalism. More problematically, for an avowedly outward-looking campaign that set its sights on people overseas who could claim Scottish ancestry, it demonstrably blocked out the history of Scottish participation in transatlantic slavery.

Robert Burns is said to provide the inspiration for *Homecoming*, yet any full appraisal of Burns' life shows the bard in a less romantic light than do his words. In fact Burns took up the position of an overseer on a slave plantation in Jamaica but was persuaded to abandon going. However, his decision to seek such a job recalls Scotland's development on the back of transatlantic slavery. But *Homecoming* brushed over much more than Burns' morally ambiguous pragmatism. The campaign appears to take after James Wedderburn who shut the door in the face of his *mulatto* son who had travelled from the Caribbean in 1779 to announce himself on these shores – likewise the promotion of *Homecoming* treated Scotland's African-Caribbean relatives as nothing more than the nation's bastard offspring. In a highly advertised racial pecking order they were made all but invisible. This may have something to do with the fact that Scotland officially takes its lead from Ireland in defining “who belongs” to its diaspora.<sup>28</sup> So why the mismatch with Scotland's history? The answer seems to lie in a long running desire of Scotland's political class to replicate the business networking of Ireland's now defunct boom time. In the words of a Scottish Government summary which deals with this policy development, “Scotland has already made significant progress in connecting with its diaspora and has been cited by the World Bank as an exemplar of best practice in the area of business networks”.<sup>29</sup> From this angle, the true inspiration for *Homecoming* looks more like the World Bank than Robert Burns.

As Stephen Mullen reveals in this issue of *Variant*, the Scottish Government's promotion of *Homecoming*, in its neglect of duties under the Race Relations Act, would, no doubt, give succour to BNP supporters. *Homecoming*'s narrow historical construction also suggests a thinly veiled contempt on the part of the political class for broad-based knowledge. Evidently, this is what happens when commerce and culture are merged.

## *Homo Corporativus* is the ideological outcome of the absurd metaphor of the nation as body that the original Fascists projected onto the public. It is high time it was buried once & for all.

### Disposing of the Body

Scotland's *ad hoc* cultural agenda has developed from a long and typically costly technocratic process which easily started as early as 2000 and took in the year-long Cultural Commission in 2004-5. Why is it that, after years of consultation, debate, deliberation and report writing, a government is cynically suborning UNESCO

conventions and is very likely breaking the law?

Overall, the answer to this question is creeping Fascism and, specifically, the Scottish Government's denial of well-founded differences over key matters of the public interest. Instead of acknowledging complexity and the negative influences of commerce (as is still possible in Scandinavian cultural policy), governments which have completely given way to creeping Fascism gush out vacuous promotional pronouncements that overwhelmingly favour big business. We live in the era of a hyper-mobile global money-making machine and, on the balance of probability, this machine will devour us and our planet if left to its own devices. Of course, old-fashioned Socialists and radicals would argue that this is precisely the nature of capitalism, and those politicians who, in a spirit of moderation, allude to “an arc of prosperity” and “sustainability” are indulging in hubris and selling their fatal fantasies to the public.<sup>30</sup> But, in place of ideological diversity in debating and co-determining how the broad public interest is served, we are ruled by the directives of a new *Homo Corporativus*. He or she comes in all shades, from all classes, speaks in many languages and accents, and has any number of high-sounding liberal beliefs. But just like the original

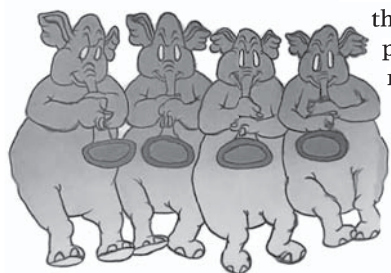
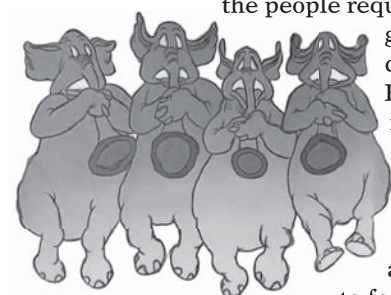
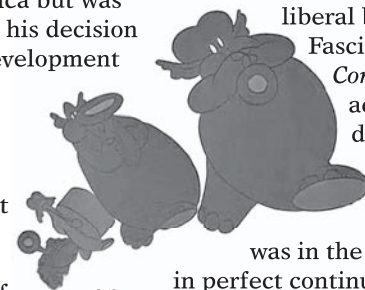
Fascist prototype, the new *Homo Corporativus* cares nothing for real accountability and bottom-up democratic organisation although, of course, the masquerade of public engagement is absolutely crucial just as it was in the classic Fascist State. Indeed, in perfect continuity with classical Fascism, our *Homo Corporativus* bestows upon the public the wholly bureaucratic “struggle of the categories” as a substitute for more rigorous and meaningful debates about how the common good can be pursued.

Our new *Homo Corporativus* is the present-day ideological outcome of the absurd metaphor of the nation as body that the original Fascists projected onto the public. The body metaphor, so essential to Fascism's coercive rationalism, is today based on an even bigger lie about the relationship between nations and capitalism. It is high time *Homo Corporativus* was buried once and for all. There is little value in opposing Fascist Parties unless the essential core of coercive rationalism is exposed wherever it creeps in to monopolise public reasoning.

An example of this trend was the 2008 Lothian Lecture given in Edinburgh by Professor Tom Nairn, one of the original members of Britain's New Left intellectual elite, introduced by Scotland's First Minister Alex Salmond, a former Royal Bank of Scotland economist. Nairn, sporting a tartan tie, and Salmond in his more soberly managerial attire, envisioned Scotland as a “nimble nation light on its feet” and “possibly out-smarting heavyweights” like the U.S. or China. A critical question that finally came from the audience about how such an idea has any bearing on a world dominated by global corporations was sidelined by Salmond and ignored by Nairn. Nevertheless, it's worth setting the record straight here. It should be immediately obvious to all that nation states are not mobile bodies within the international juridical system of sovereignty and, unlike corporations, banks and other businesses, which *are* mobile, nations do not enjoy the option of bankruptcy. But, as outlined here, the subtler aspects of Fascist ideology have moved centre stage. Scotland's cultural nationalism appears absolutely at one with the stream of neo-corporatist myths like “UK PLC”. As in the past, the progress of Fascism is being helped along by the opportunism of those who would like to call themselves democrats, and the insincerity of nationalists who have no commitment to realising the sovereignty of the people.

### Notes

1. Albert Speer was Hitler's Minister of Armaments and War Production. Friedrich von Hayek's explanation for Speer's rather glamorous reputation for technical expertise (despite the Nazi reliance on slave labour) was that unlike his counterparts in wartime Britain and the U.S., “Speer was a brilliant self-taught amateur...” See Gitta Sereny's, *Albert Speer: His Battle with Truth*, (1995) Picador, p551.
2. See Philip Morgan's, *Italian Fascism 1915-1945*, (2004)





- Palgrave / Macmillan, Basingstoke, p80.
3. The whistle-blower Davison Budhoo, an IMF economist, wrote in his 1988 resignation letter that, "I may hope to wash my hands of what in my mind's eye is the blood of millions of poor and starving peoples." Two independent studies commissioned by the government of Trinidad lent support to Budhoo's accusations that the IMF fabricated statistics to enforce economic liberalisation against the interests of developing nations. Despite many campaigns and calls for the abolition of the World Bank and IMF, Budhoo felt these would not succeed. See Naomi's Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, (2007) Penguin, p260.
  4. See Francis Mulhern's, *Culture / Metaculture*, (2000) Routledge, London, (glossary).
  5. See Andrew Robinson and Simon Tormey's 'New Labour's neoliberal Gleichschaltung the case of higher education' <http://sys.glotta.ntua.gr/Dialogos/Politics/New%20Labour%20HE%20White%20Paper.pdf> (Accessed May 2009.)
  6. Gaetano Salvemini, *Under the Axe of Fascism*, (1936) Victor Gollancz Ltd, London, p114.
  7. See, 'Stones on the Road: The politics of Participation and the Generation of Crisis in Bolivia', by John-Andrew McNeish, (2006), *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, Vol.25, No.2, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, p230.
  8. The problem of incorporation is hardly new in representative democracy although its contours have changed with the development of universal suffrage and the accompanying legal twists and turns that limit the political power of the workforce. *The History of Trade Unionism*, (1912) by Sidney and Beatrice Webb, recalls the activities of the Trade Union Congress Parliamentary Committee from 1875-1885 which lobbied the House of Commons. To the Webb's, the erosion of the labour movement's original demands for full democracy through this well established lobbying group showed the "extent the thoughtful and superior workmen had, at this time, [instead] imbibed the characteristic ideas of middle class reformers." p352
  9. <http://www.naomiklein.org/shock-doctrine>
  10. An exception to this silence came when the former World Bank economist and Nobel laureate, Joseph Stiglitz, lent support to the foundation of *Banco de Sur*, the Latin American bank which has set out to reform the fractional reserve banking system and create a new regional development bank. Stiglitz said this was "a welcome shake-up to the Western lending institutions" and thought it will "reflect the perspectives of those in the South" and help counter "the American strategy of divide and conquer, a strategy trying to get as much of the benefits for American companies," and "little for developing countries..." reported by Associated Press 11/10/2007.
  11. A YouGov survey in 2006 suggested that although many British people would lend support to policies associated with the BNP once the policies were known to be those of the far-right party support fell.
  12. See, 'Theories of industrial society', by Richard J. Badham (1986), *International Series in Social and Political Thought*, published by Croom Helm, p19.
  13. Val Plumwood, *Environmental Culture, The Ecological Crisis of Reason*, (2002) Routledge, London, p20.
  14. As early as 1920, the poet Aleksei Gastev, director of the Central Institute of Labour in Moscow, was implementing Taylorist methods with a mass utopian zeal that paid scant regard to the incompatibility of "scientific industrialisation" with the independence of the Soviet Union or its workforce. Gastev's ideas about fusing society into a bodily machine were typically corporatist. In trivialising any questions of working class autonomy and democracy, Gastev's vision was in fact proto-Fascist in character. He acknowledged that the Taylorist transformation of the Soviet Union would depend upon foreign capital investment and would enslave Soviet industry to capitalists – a necessary evil which appeared not to obstruct his more poetic vision of a single-minded mass society. Gastev was proud that Lenin had one of his Taylorist charts hung in his office. See Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe, The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*, (2002) MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, p107. For a recent study of the breakdown of workers democracy see, *The Russian Revolution in Retreat, 1920-24, Soviet Workers and the New Communist Elite*, Simon Pirani, (2009) Routledge, London.
  15. See, Frank Fischer, *Technocracy and the politics of expertise*, (1990) Sage, London.
  16. Anthony Giddens, *The Class Structure of Advanced Societies*, (1973) Harper and Row, New York, p258.
  17. Charles Landry, author of *The Creative City*, (2000) was one of the key proponents of the insidious idea that politics is a failure of true partnership, which has been Landry's great goal. In this Landry has been among those who dangerously trivialise the deeply unequal politics of participation. See, *Beyond Social Inclusion Towards Cultural Democracy, Cultural Policy Collective*, p38. <http://www.variant.org.uk/20texts/CultDemo.txt>
  18. See, Andrew Robinson and Simon Tormey, op. cit.
  19. In April 2000 the BBC reported that "more than half of academics [in the UK ] believe themselves to have 'poor psychological health'. And over a quarter reported that they had suffered from a 'stress-related' illness in the past year." See, 'Academics' poor mental health', <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/712391.stm> (Accessed May 2009.)
  20. Scotland's Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, Fiona Hyslop MSP, wrote to the Scottish Funding Council on 18th of November 2008 underlining the SNP's government's 'single purpose.' Hyslop wrote that "the Council occupies a unique position and I believe has a vital role to play, as an agent of change, in realising our vision. There is no other organisation, which can so significantly drive the contribution of our colleges and universities to the delivery of economic, social and cultural change." For their part, the corporate friendly mission statement of the Council says "Our vision is for a more dynamic, entrepreneurial and internationally competitive Scotland, whose people are amongst the most skilled and educated of any of our competitors, and whose colleges and universities are world-class contributors to economic, social and cultural development." <http://www.sfc.ac.uk/index.htm> (Accessed May 2009.)
  21. Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, 'Danish National Executive Report – 2000' <http://www.ebst.dk/publikationer/rapporter/gem/kap5.html> (Accessed May 2009.)
  22. See Clive Barnett's, *Culture and Democracy, Media Space and Representation*, (2003) Edinburgh University Press, and Roger A. Shiner's, *Freedom of Commercial Expression*, (2003) Oxford University Press. Perhaps the most infamous example of the subversion of freedom of expression is the US Supreme Court judgement on campaign finance in 1976 the Buckley v. Valeo case which found that "money is speech." This judgement effectively renounced the classic principle of *Isegoria* which was implicitly expressed by the findings of earlier cases and acts.
  23. See 'Culture Minister speaks about Creative Scotland, April 28, 2009', <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l7dM7ykSUMg>
  24. Following a complaint from Culture & Sport Glasgow (CSG), Variant were informed that the magazine had been removed from Glasgow venues managed by CSG following the publication of 'The New Bohemia', an article by Rebecca Gordon Nesbitt that critically mapped the political network of CSG. The interference with the distribution of *Variant* would appear to contravene the author's rights to free political expression as determined by the European Court of Human Rights in cases such as *Lingens v. Austria* (1986), *Oberschlick v. Austria* (1991). See, 'Freedom of Expression on Trial: Caselaw under European Convention on Human Rights', by Sally Burnheim, <http://www.derechos.org/koaga/i/burnheim.html> (Accessed May 2009.) See also, 'Comment' in *Variant*, issue 33. An extract from CSG's complaint to *Variant*, 23/7/08, states: "The images you chose to illustrate the piece are in no way representative of Culture and Sport Glasgow and the work that it does. They would appear to have been chosen to illustrate the city of Glasgow in a negative way and thus associate Culture and Sport Glasgow with negative imagery."
  25. From the Ten Keys to the 'UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions', UNESCO 2007.
  26. See, 'Freedom of Expression on Trial: Caselaw under European Convention on human rights', by Sally Burnheim, <http://www.derechos.org/koaga/i/burnheim.html> (Accessed May 2009.)
  27. For an example of the local or regional "democracy" that now expresses profoundly anti-democratic and authoritarian instincts through the manipulation of cultural identity, see 'Spectacles of Autonomy and Crisis: Or, What Bulls and Beauty Queens have to do with Regionalism in Eastern Bolivia,' (2006) by Bret Gustafson, *Journal of Latin American Anthropology*, Vol 11, No.2, University of California Press.
  28. <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/05/28141101/0>
  29. See, 'The Scottish Diaspora and Diaspora Strategy: Insights and Lessons from Ireland' <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/05/28141101/1> (Accessed June 2009.)
  30. In his classic study, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy – Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World*, the historian Barrington Moore Jr came to consider the outcomes of Anglo Saxon moderation as "totally inadequate ... to make democracy work". Based in a strong sense of practicality, the moderate position "tries to solve issues by patently ignoring them" (p139). Taking the long view that hindsight permits, Moore writes: "As I have reluctantly come to read this evidence the costs of moderation have been at least as atrocious as those of revolution, perhaps a great deal more." Penguin Books (1974), p 505.