

STRANGE CURRENCIES: MARGARET THATCHER AND JAMES KELMAN AS TWO FACES OF THE GLOBALISATION COIN

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INTRODUCTION: AN UNLIKELY PAIRING

In stating that ‘there is no separation between culture and politics’ James Kelman (2008) is notable, yet hardly exceptional, among Scottish writers in drawing together artistic and political concerns. Yet the manner in which he pursues these is distinctive. Hugh MacDiarmid blended poetry with a wider project of Scottish cultural and civic re-awakening, while Kelman’s colleague and collaborator Alasdair Gray has not only written two books (1997, 2005) advocating self-government for Scotland, but provided (through his own prior borrowing) the epithet ‘work as if you live in the early days of a better nation’ for the walls of Enric Miralles’ Scottish Parliament Building. The pay-in of Scottish writers to Scottish ‘cultural nationalism’ and its role in reaffirming the autonomy of Scottish civic institutions and identities has been acknowledged by a number of commentators such as McCrone (1996), Gardiner (2004), Bell (2004), and Miller et al., (2010). Indeed, it was common to see pre-devolutionary Scottish literature as the result of political impulses driven into the interior lives of individual artists, and its apparent recession from the post-devolutionary public sphere as born of disillusionment:

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Critics used to argue that the renaissance of Scottish literature in the 1980s and 1990s was the product of a sublimation of the political energies frustrated in 1979. If there had been any truth to this, one might have expected national cultural production to disappear in a puff of smoke with the establishment of a Parliament (perhaps leaving Alan Massie ploughing a lonely furrow). The quite proper cynicism with which most writers have greeted the Scottish Executive's cultural policies reflects the fact that literature's integration into political process will never be possible on the terms it might imagine for itself, but only as the source of national political kitsch (cities of literature, notwithstanding).
(Thomson, 2006 :133-134).

Yet Kelman, arguably the most significant and internationally well known of these, seems not so much disengaged from the post-devolutionary political atmosphere, as never engaged in the first place - despite the pre-devolutionary 1980s and early 1990s being a period of intense and sustained political activity on his part. Nor did he join with Gray in lending his support to new political formations such as the Scottish Socialist Party that followed the creation of the parliament in 1999¹.

To begin to answer why this is so, we must look at Kelman's disengagement and mistrust of civic structures and hierarchies as they existed in Scotland during the 1980s and 1990s. Structures such as the Scottish Labour party, Education System, major churches and trade unions were at this same period in time forming allegiances to resist the reforms instigated by the government of Margaret Thatcher (May 1979-November 1990) and, more gradually, being co-opted into the pro-devolution movement as recorded in Edwards (1989). Indeed, writers such as Lindsay Paterson (1994) identify Scotland's civic institutions as the quiet, even clandestine, pursuers and guarantors of Scotland's autonomy. While hardly opposing the aims and achievements of these political movements, Kelman frequently critiqued these civic institutions as implicit partners in the oppression of working class communities and

¹ *It is worth noting however, that Gray never himself joined the party. His biographer Rodge Glass does tell us that Gray was in communication with Tommy Sheridan over the wording of a proposed Scottish declaration of independence (Glass, 2004: 83) and had some interaction with party activists, often through his former poetry student, the actor and SSP activist Peter Mullen*

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continuing social injustice². In many respects, he swam outside, if not against, the political tide. In an essay entitled ‘Let the Wind Blow High, Let the Wind Blow Low’ published in **Some Recent Attacks**, a collection of essays published in 1992 at the culmination of many of his own political involvements, he delivered a blistering attack on the electoral system and the functioning of party politics, which implies (if not states) scepticism over the value of the type of parliamentary institutions and representative systems pro-devolutionary campaigns wished to bring to Edinburgh:

A vote for any party or individual is always a vote for the political system ... If there was any possibility that the apparatus could effect a change in the system then they would dismantle it immediately. (1992:87)

Willy Maley (1995:47) has characterised Kelman’s take here as ‘don’t vote, you’ll just encourage them’, with ‘them’ being defined as the political and economic elites who define and protect the establishment. If electoral politics intimated the possibility of real change in the relationship between people and these elites, they would be abolished. The task of understanding the relationship between Kelman’s political beliefs and his development and practice as a writer led to our recent publication **The Red Cockatoo James Kelman and the Art of Commitment** (Sandstone Press 2011). However, the process of uncovering Kelman’s singular political operation – often far outside the established ‘mainstream’ of politics – led to much wider-ranging insights into how politics in Scotland, and abroad, has changed in the face of globalisation and subsequent liberalisation of the economy. Kelman’s trajectory through various political campaigns offers, through the lens of the theorist Castells, a valuable case study of how Scottish political activists from outside a perceived or actual establishment, have responded to the challenge of globalisation.

Kelman is typically characterised in terms of being an ‘old lefty’ – as writing and campaigning solely on behalf of those victims of an era of heavy industry, and standing up for the rights of the proletariat in defiance of the ‘captains of

² Kelman writes, for example, ‘Activists on the left have always had to fight against the leadership of the Labour Party’, (Kelman 1992: 4)

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industry³ and other greedy robber baron types from the class of ‘those in control’ (Kelman 1992: 28; 1988: 4). Writings and articles from Kelman’s oeuvre can easily be found and invoked to back up this characterisation, including for example, one article where he lauds the shop steward management and shop floor solidarity of the Transport and General Workers Union on the Barbican building site where he once worked, detailed in Harris & John, (1991: 89-91); another article which he wrote for **The Herald** newspaper in support of the striking steelworkers at the (then) threatened Ravenscraig plant (2008: 120-135); and various pieces of writing in which he has admired the founding fathers – amongst them John McLean, Harry McShane and others – of Scottish mass movement socialism and communism as shown in Kelman (1992: 46-52; and Savage (2006: 9-65).

It is our contention in this article however, that the reality of Kelman’s politics is that, notwithstanding the claims he makes in several places for his belonging to a ‘left’ tradition, he can be seen as, and indeed is conscious of his work as⁴, a reformist of that tradition, both in his understanding the need for, and in his great part in the ushering in of, new forms of social movement to defend citizens, their jobs, houses, culture and cities in an age of globalised capital. This line of inquiry has led us to draw an unexpected parallel between Kelman and his cohorts, and Margaret Thatcher, who, as the obverse to Kelman, is herself a political operator who reformed her own political tradition in response to the challenges of globalisation, albeit to very different effect.

³See O’Hagan *London Review of Books* 26 May 1994, pp.8-9, ‘Kelman-man is a working man from the days when the working class could find work ... Kelman brings to his writing priorities from another time, a time when working class people worried about trade unions and over time ... Kelman’s workerist lament’ and, Christopher Taylor, *The Guardian*, (*Guardian Review* p.10) 17th April 2010: ‘his workerist politics’.

⁴Kelman writes ironically of others viewing his work in the ‘workerist’ tradition, ‘So the Workers City group was presented as an unpatriotic bunch of philistines, the ghost of Stalinist past and workerist future.’ (Kelman 1992: 1)

THE NEO-LIBERALIST SIDE OF THE COIN

Neo-Liberalism has been characterised as one reaction to the economic problems of that age⁵: a major strategical rethink of how and on behalf of whom the state should manage and control its territory. If the 1950s and 60s were a period of government intervention in Western industrial economies and a 'never had it so good' golden age of economic prosperity, then neo-liberalism was claimed as the response to problems suffered in those economies from the 70s onward by certain political interest groups on the right. The oil crisis caused a sudden slump in economic performance (particularly with the problem of stagflation) when cheap fuel was no longer available, and it also became evident that in a new age of globalisation Western governments could no longer keep such a tight control of production in their own economies. Harvey makes the case, however, that in terms of 'stimulating' economies in slump, and as a 'potential cure all for political economic ills', neo-liberalism doesn't even do what it says on the boosterist packet:

Its actual record turns out to be nothing short of dismal. Aggregate global growth rates stood at 3.5% or so in the 1960s and even during the troubled 70s fell only to 2.4%. But the subsequent growth rates of 1.4% and 1.1% for the 1980s and 1990s (and a rate that barely touches 1% since 2000) indicate that neo-liberalisation has broadly failed to stimulate worldwide growth. In some cases, such as the territories of the ex-Soviet Union and those countries in Central Europe that submitted to neo-liberal 'shock therapy', there have been catastrophic losses. During the 1990s Russian per capita income declined at the rate of 3.5% annually. A large proportion of the population fell into poverty, and male life expectancy declined by five years as a result.

Harvey (2005: 154)

Harvey maintains that these difficulties in the world economies from the 1970s onwards only provided one of many particular opportunities which a ready neo-liberal lobby seized upon, not as a calculated reaction to these particular crises, but in order to progress their true aim of 'restoring class power' (or in the case of Less Developed and former socialist countries, 'forming class

⁵ *Harvey, for example, writes of neo-liberalism and its advocates' 'rhetoric about curing sick economies'. (Harvey 2005: 88)*

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power') (2005: passim). In Scotland, resistance to this radical restructuring of class power was aided by broad-based popular and institutional support, so much so that a powerful mythology that neo-liberalism largely passed Scotland by persists to this day, as argued in Davidson et al. (2010).

The government of Margaret Thatcher played a particularly significant role in re-forming this class power. Rendered both by class and gender as a relative 'outsider' to the various networks and tribalisms within the British Conservative Party of the late sixties and early seventies, her gradual penetration into the higher echelons of the party was aided by a crucial alliance with the Scottish peer George Younger and the economist Keith Joseph, with Britain's grave economic crises creating frequent political vacuums that provided Thatcher's group with its opportunity (1975). Thatcher and her cohorts were thus able to build improbable alliances within the Conservative movement largely through their willingness to break with consensus politics and their radical assertions of the rights of capital above the rules and rituals that had governed British public life since the Second World War. Of particular importance was the project of dismantling Keynesian economics (while insisting, in the case of Joseph, that they were the true Keynesians) and introducing a monetarist model of managing the economy, as was argued in Joseph's short but influential tract, **Monetarism is Not Enough** (1976).

This is not the place to argue for or against the strict orthodoxy of Margaret Thatcher's Conservative Government policies (1979-1991) in terms of neo-liberal thinking. But in a general way we could say that in her governments' attempts to shrink the state and squeeze the public sector (resulting in mass unemployment as industries formerly in receipt of subsidies gradually collapsed) and their emphasising of the efficiency of the private sector and free market to provide services, they claimed adherence to neo-liberal doctrine, and in particular to the economics of Milton Friedman and Friedrich von Hayek, identified early on by Frazer (1982). Their response to the problem of the state's involvement in production of goods and services was in general to turn away from the attempt to manage the production side of the economy⁶ and concentrate on consumers and demand. Thus in the case of Housing Policy for

⁶*This governmental promotion and involvement in demand side as opposed supply of goods and services, is in contrast to the financial markets where neo-liberalism required the government to keep a tight control on the money supply.*

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example, where at the beginning of Tory rule (in 1980) there were 41,521 annual starts to building public sector housing, by 1990 there were only 8,590⁷, and at the same time Housing Benefit was introduced in 1982: a means-tested allowance ultimately paid out to more than 4 million people to help themselves find and pay for housing⁸. In other words, central government subsidies on housing were not stopped but switched from the mass producers to the individual consumers. Thatcher's government also ended the principle of basing economic management on achieving full employment, a change which opened up a number of political options previously regarded as unthinkable (MacInnes, 1995). In Scotland heavy industries such as steel and coal mining were decommissioned, resulting in a major restructuring of the Scottish workforce, with massive long term socio-economic implications, among them a rise in unemployment that profoundly changed the balance of many Scottish working class communities. Here we see a first, if very indirect link from Thatcher to Kelman. As John MacInnes notes, the effects of deindustrialization on Glasgow were severe:

Data assembled by the GRA identified 8 'Priority Regeneration Areas' with a population of just under 300,000: over two-fifths of those living in the city. All these areas have male unemployment rates in 1994 above 25%; some approach 40%. All had long-term unemployment rates (proportion of unemployed who are long-term unemployed) over 38% in 1989. (1995: 93)

The resultant crisis in deeply seated collective values and certainties held by the working class communities affected provided an important backdrop to Kelman's short story collections such as **Not Not While the Giro** (1983) and novels such as **A Chancer** (1985), and, through the creation of an endemic, persistent urban underclass, to **How Late it Was, How Late** (1994). Even in **The Busconductor Hines** we see hints of changing work relations affecting the aspirations of the titular character's life. Although it is hardly likely she

⁷Steve Wilcox (ed.), *UK Housing Review 2007/2008*, see Table 19g 'Housing Starts in Great Britain', www.ukhousingreview.org.uk, last viewed 20/12/2011

⁸Steve Wilcox (ed.), *UK Housing Review 2006/2007*, see Table 115a 'Numbers of recipients and average Housing Benefit in Great Britain: all cases', www.ukhousingreview.org.uk, last viewed 20/12/2011

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would ever acknowledge it, Thatcher creatively, as well as politically, set Kelman's stage.

Clearly these changes in the ecology – that is, in the interdependence and relative positions and interactions, of production and consumption brought about by both global factors and state manoeuvres – had consequences for the left and 'those in protest' just as much as for 'those in control'. The fact is that there was already a long history of dissent and division – going back to the 1920s, and arguably even further – of the mass organised Marxist (Leninist and ultimately Stalinist) left. Both the national communist parties, and Comintern itself, had long dictated that only the party's unified, top-down policy was representative of the true class struggle, and that spontaneous and local protest and local differences were either misinformed (and should be taken over by the party), or bourgeois, or even organised by agents provocateurs. It may have been inevitable given this authoritarian approach that fragmentation and splits would soon occur in the left, but, at any rate, the institutionalised forms of mass mobilisation of the workers around issues of production and supply – mass trade union disputes etc – were, just as much as governments, unable to persist in the face of the effects of globalisation on production, which meant separation of productive work and management, and remoteness from the site of production of control, ownership, power and systems of information.

It was in this new arena of power relations that what have been called 'new urban social movements' by such writers as Harvey (2005: 198-206), Castells (1983: *passim*) and Tonkiss (2005: 59-66) started to operate in the 1970s and 80s. These new groups, operating independently of trade unions or political parties, were typically involved in struggles to do with distributive justice, social equality and community issues. Just as with governments, they turned away from production issues (as had concerned the mass membership trade unions) and concentrated on consumption, and their share and use of the city was a principal concern. As Henri Lefebvre has it, the urban realm was both the 'setting' and the 'stakes' in their struggle. (1991: 386)

In his book **The City and The Grassroots** Castells traces the formation and effective operation of these groups back to American inner city revolts in the 1960s, to pre-World-War-II strikes in Latin America, to the Glasgow Rent Strike of 1915 and even further back in history. Harvey points out however, that with the advent of neo-liberalism, these grassroots organisations operating in civil society 'proliferated remarkably' because

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The Gramscian idea of the state as a unity of political and civil society gives way to the idea of civil society as a centre of opposition, if not an alternative to the state. (2005: 78)

And this in turn, writes Harvey, is because with neo-liberalism:

There has been a radical reconfiguration of state institutions and practices (particularly with respect to the balance between coercion and consent, between the powers of capital and popular movements, and between executive and judicial power, on the one hand, and powers of representative democracy on the other). (2005: 78)

Castells goes on to define the three basic characteristics of these new movements as being that they regarded themselves as principally 'urban' movements, that they were locally based and territorially defined (in contrast to the universalism of organised Marxism), and that they tended to mobilise around three major goals: collective consumption, cultural identity, and political self-management (1983, 328). Castells considers that all three of those goals are necessary in combination to bring about social change, since otherwise the movement remains simply at the level of an 'interest group'. The typical movements which Castells cites as representative here, are, amongst others, the gay liberation movement in 70s San Francisco (1983: 138-172), and the various worldwide squatters' rights movements. (1983: 176-212)

THE LEFT-LIBERTARIAN FLIPSIDE: JAMES KELMAN AND OTHER NEW URBAN MOVERS

In many ways James Kelman's activism and his writing in support or in description of it can be seen not only as conforming to, but as driving, the agenda of these 'new urban social movements' in Scotland and beyond. While it is true, as mentioned above, that he has written admiringly of the founding fathers of mass movement Scottish socialism and communism, the most comprehensive and detailed piece of writing he has published on that topic treats at length figures like Harry McShane and Hugh Savage, who were ultimately forced to resign from the official Communist party – but carried on their activism and campaigning from the 50s onwards; and John McLean, who died young, and despite being declared Soviet Consul for Britain was never in

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the Communist Party of Great Britain at any time. Kelman makes his feelings about that story clear:

The Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) was quickly corrupted intellectually, but not from beginning to end. There were thousands of individuals who acted in good faith and struggled on. Activists could and did involve themselves completely in the issues of the day, strikes, demonstrations, parades and commemorials such as May Day. There was much being done but it took place in a sort of intellectual vacuum. For any 'freethinker' the closer one got to power, the more demoralising it must have become. Without access to their own history and traditions how can people breathe? (Savage 2006: 19)

A lengthy discussion of Kelman's participation in various campaigns, groups and movements is given in our **The Red Cockatoo: James Kelman and the Art of Commitment** but restriction of space here will allow us to look very briefly at three examples of the sort of urban social movement Kelman was involved in throughout the 80s and 90s and beyond, before we examine the significance of each engagement in the critical context we have described above.

In 1987-88 Kelman began to play an important role in two groups: the Free University Network and Workers City. From 1991 for 2 years or so he worked full time for the charity Clydeside Action on Asbestosis.

With respect to his involvement with the latter charity, Kelman had previous personal history of working with asbestos, but his time there was spent researching cases and giving advice. Details to do with the problem that workers suffering from the fatal disease of asbestosis faced, and of their struggle to gain acknowledgement of the disease, its cause, and compensation for their suffering, from both government in the form of the Department of Health and Social Security, and their former employers who had the vicarious responsibility for introducing them to the deathly environment in the first place, can be found in various essays in Kelman's oeuvre. Some important Trade Union officials were involved in setting up this group, but it was independent and self managed. As regards Castells' definition of a new urban social movement as one that can bring 'social change', self management is an important constituent of that tripartite phenomenon. But inasmuch as the group campaigns on one issue only – albeit a vitally humane issue – and one which,

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although it demands to a certain extent recognition for the cultural condition and rights of workers, demands universal legal recognition which can clearly be seen as a form of collective consumption, there is a case for seeing this one-issue campaigning body as what Castells calls an 'interest group' (1983: 328).

Kelman was one of the founder members of the Free University Network along with his publisher Peter Kravitz, various ex students, artists and writers in the West End of Glasgow in January 1987. It was based loosely on previous Free University experiments in Berlin, Paris, etc, and was a decentralised network of people who wished not only to organise resistance to the central government policies of the Thatcher era, but also to organise their creativity and civil and political engagement in a different way from mainstream politics. As various participants put it, in their own words:

Not about reformism of existing institutions but something else, where you could be exposed and share ideas with other people. It was about learning other things and how they all go together and that goes to the roots of Common Sense philosophy where everybody can potentially know and learn.

(Dickson et al., 2008).

a decentralised and loose network to bring together people of different ages and different classes who are completely outside orthodox educational establishments, but who still want to debate and discuss issues outwith a small-minded Labour or SNP party caucus.

(Peter Kravitz, cited in **Glasgow Herald**, 6/1/1990)

One of the things that defines it is it's difficult to define. It drew from a network of 200 people but realistically only about 30 or 40 people ever came along more than once. But a lot of people liked to know it was there. It was a fairly homogenous set of people, young-ish, disaffected, half-unemployed, half ex-students. One thing that they probably all had in common was that they were not involved with orthodox political parties, not involved with relevant specialist political activism per se.

(Peter Kravitz at the 'Self Determination and Power Conference, Govan, 10/11th January 1990)

The FUN organised meetings, get-togethers, picnics, days out etc on which discussion and debate took place and the wide ranging list of the concerns was

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made explicit when again one member recalled their programme of talks arranged in 1987:

Law Centres, Pulp Fiction, Simon Frith, John Leytham, Computers and People, Lettrism and the Situationists, Resistance to WWII, Chinese Enterprise, The Future Scope of the Free University, Post-Feminism, Aids Culture, 40s Anarchism, Women in Scotland (by Elspeth King), Radical Bookshops, Alienation, Poll Tax, Garden Festivals, Joseph Beuys, Paolo Freire, Autonomous Politics, The Pleasure Tendency.

(Dickson et al., 2008)

Clearly, in terms of Castells' three necessary goals, the group were self managed, and they were mobilised strongly around the notion of exploring and defining cultural identity (or identities). On the question of collective consumption however the lie of the land is less settled. It seems as though their attitude to all sorts of material, intellectual and educational, was one of consumption, the right to experience and to know and to put it to your own use, but it's not clear what is the relationship of this peculiar gathering of people and their activities to wider collective consumption, to public goods and public rights.

The exploring and expression of cultural identity was not seen, however, as a by-product of intellectual and educational concerns, but was a conscious and explicit endeavour for the Free University Network, one that was seen as being a part, not just of a tradition, but of a local tradition and a continuing one. As Kelman said himself at the Free University Reunion:

In the Free University we wanted to unite the generations, that was crucial. We wanted to get people in their 20s, in their 40s, in their 60s and upwards, so that all the sophisticated politicisation of these earlier generations would not be lost.

(Dickson et al., 2008)

and

Picking up our own radical tradition ... even to see what was the struggle that went on with, for example, John McLean, or for example , the Workers' Educational Association from the 20s, to try and come to terms with the fact that these things were important within Glasgow, and for that

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older generation ... there was access to this kind of thing within our culture. The Free University were transmitters of that sort of knowledge. (Dickson et al., 2008)

This idea of a 'local' tradition, albeit one which seeks to enrich itself from outside, also conforms to Castells' description of these social movements as being urban, locally based and territorially defined. In fact the issue of having a place of their own was one which to a certain extent dominated their agenda for a while. As we outline in **The Red Cockatoo: James Kelman and the Art of Commitment**, community spaces and facilities had also been squeezed tightly by Local Authorities since the imposition of financial cuts in the mid 70s. This meant it was difficult to find spaces where, as Kelman said in the Free University Reunion, 'different groups and different formations could have got together.' Kelman and fellow participant Euan Sutherland stress that it was important for the Free University to find a space where you didn't have to pay for the privilege of having a meeting, discussion, a workshop, a presentation or a gig. This would be a space where, unlike a café or a pub, you did not have to enter into a commercial transaction in order to guarantee your right to stay on. Kelman describes how he, Carol Rhodes, Jim Ferguson and others spent time on this search for a home for the Free University and 'gave a lot of energy to it'. Ultimately however the search proved unfruitful, and Peter Kravitz, at least, states how he felt relieved for that, saying it was 'brilliant to realise you didn't have to worry about a permanent building – just create it wherever – that was really positive.'

The Workers City group had a very different membership and set of aims and operations from the Free University. It was set up by a largely middle aged, male, working class set of individuals with left wing and anarchist backgrounds in activism⁹. James Kelman did not join the group and begin to take part in their operations until some time after they had set up, but soon became a prominent member, and often acted as spokesman to the media about their activities. Where Free University was a forum for ideas and discussion – although its members did also take part in some political campaigning and

⁹*William Clark, in his twenties at the time, was a member of Free University and the Workers City group, he wrote later, 'An aspect of Workers City I would find hard to talk about would be the difficulty (my difficulty) with some of the attitudes of the other members of the group. They showed no sense of treating the sexes with equality and respect' (Savage 2006 : 259.)*

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demonstrations – the Workers City Group, while also holding debates and discussions, sought to raise political consciousness in the city, by two specific methods, publications such as those edited by McLay (1987, 1991) and public demonstration.

The two parts to the name of the group are of immediate interest in our context here¹⁰. The use of the word ‘Workers’ could be seen as misleading, or even as wishful thinking, as this type of small (if influential) self-managed and organised group could not call on a mass worker support, and was not part of the traditional ‘workerist’ institutional organisation of Trades Unions. As regards the word ‘City’ it is clear that a major part of their allegiance and outlook was concerned with urban issues, and the right to the city, and in fact the boosterist manoeuvres of the Glasgow Labour Council in the late 80s and early 90s were a principal target of their operations – although they did also support a number of workers disputes and other campaigns too.

Two of their highest profile campaigns (from among many in the late 80s and early 90s) can serve as examples of their typical methods of work: namely the campaign to prevent Glasgow City Council privatising, or in any way ‘selling off’, Glasgow Green, and the support given to Museum curator Elspeth King in her efforts to save her job with the Council.

The first named campaign concerned the oldest green space in the heart of the city by the River Clyde, Glasgow Green, currently a park, but since the 12th century a space where the citizens were free to foregather, to take leisure, to organise political protest, and to carry out domestic tasks like washing laundry in the river and hanging it out to dry. The Council had announced plans to privatise parts of this public space and Workers City organised various forms of demonstration to raise awareness of this issue and mobilise mass protest against it. In the first place they published histories of the space illustrating its central importance as both a cultural and physical amenity throughout the civic story of the city (McLay 1987). They also gave notice of the councillors’

¹⁰*Kelman provides a straightforwardly political inspiration for the name, writing, ‘The name Workers City was chosen directly to challenge “Merchant City” and the grossness of the fallacy that Glasgow somehow exists because of the tireless efforts of a tiny patriotic coalition of fearless 18th century entrepreneurs and farsighted politicians. The same merchants made the bulk of their personal fortunes by the simple expedient of not paying for the price of labour.’ (Kelman 1992: 1-2)*

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intentions in their free newssheet. Kelman wrote of the newssheet in his Introduction to *Savage* (2006)

The Keelie became its heart. The appearance of this free newspaper coincided with particular campaigns and demonstrations. Its primary targets were Labour politicians and where possible it named names and used photographs. **The Keelie** featured snippets of local history and occasional lampoons in the form of poetry and cartoon. Everybody associated with Workers City was encouraged to contribute. (2006: 13-14)

John Taylor Caldwell's history (1987) published in **Workers City** described the struggle against the city Authorities' attempt to restrict by byelaw the right of assembly on Glasgow Green and highlighted the fact not only that 'those in control' of the city have a long history of attempts to censor and silence public expression, but also that there exist tools with which to fight this oppression and they have been used by specific people in specific ways. With the resource of Caldwell's essay to hand, the citizens were thus furnished with a historical context for such authoritarian actions, and need not therefore be surprised by such political manoeuvres, but could be ready for them and understand how to organize, and what effective recourse and direct actions are available to them. This empowerment by establishing a continuity of traditions and canons of action is, furthermore, carried through in (the book) **Workers City** into the depiction of individuals who have been engaged in the struggle against authoritarianism and political corruption. Besides publication *Workers City* also organised various demonstrations against the council plans on Glasgow Green itself (a Mayday celebration for example) and elsewhere. Their efforts culminated in a (semi) organised piece of direct action whereby a *Workers City* demonstration of around 200 people at the City Chambers insisted on gaining entrance to the Committee Rooms where a decision was being made by the sitting council committee on development proposals for Glasgow Green. Under such pressure the Council buckled and announced in the press on the following days that they were dropping their plans, and thus the campaign can largely be considered a successful one for the movement, as was detailed in McLay (1991)

The other campaign concerns the fight for Elspeth King to retain her council job as curator of the People's Place Museum. The People's Palace Museum is an award-winning museum of Glasgow working class history. King had built up, through years of service, an enormous range of artefacts and expositions of

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Glasgow life, and she was described along with her partner and deputy at the Museum by novelist Alasdair Gray in the Workers City publication as ‘the only keepers of Glasgow’s local culture’. Unfortunately both she and her partner Michael Donnelly had also been dismissive in public of the Council’s boosterist exertions and their move to a more profit-related and entrepreneurial role for the arts and culture in the city with the planning and advent of Glasgow’s year as ‘European City of Culture’ celebrations in 1990. Donnelly was dismissed from his post, and King was, in effect, constructively dismissed when the Council changed her job description and role, and made her reapply for it. The Council was changing the way it housed and exhibited its archive in line with its push to rebrand the city as a post-industrial centre of culture, and this meant for example that some exhibits that had been free for the public to view at the People’s Palace were moved to temporary museums for the ‘city of culture’ exhibitions, where the public had to pay. It was clear that King’s dissenting voice on that and other matters made the Council uncomfortable¹¹.

Again Workers City published extensively on this issue, with essays in their book **The Reckoning** by such prominent authors as Kelman and Alasdair Gray. They also organised demonstrations, letters to the newspapers and so on. For members of Workers City this was not only a humane demonstration against an oppressive employer, but also a symbolic struggle over who owns history, and how the story of the working class in Glasgow should be told. On one level it might seem simply that this campaign ultimately failed, as King lost her job, and had to move away from the city to find employment, and the Council carried on with their planned changes in their museum strategy.

CONCLUSION: THE OTHER SCOTTISH POLITICS

There is no doubt that, in terms of the characteristics Castells sets out as the basic form of the new urban social movement, Workers City, of all the groups Kelman worked with, is most easily co-opted into that category. It is self consciously urban, it operates at a local level, and is politically self-managed. It is involved not only in the promotion of the politics of identity and culture, but also in the archaeology of that cultural identity in the very urban and civic

¹¹When King was forced to apply for the new curator’s post which was *de facto* her own job, Julian Spalding, Director of Glasgow’s Museums and Art Galleries, commented that ‘there are no jobs for the girls’ **Glasgow Herald** 9th June 1990.

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fabric of society. But once again the question of the name as misleading, or even as a complete misnomer, arises here. For despite the adoption of the title 'Workers', the movement was not involved in producing, nor in campaigning for the production of, anything. Instead they thought through and carried out a series of tactical mobilisations – as seen here in their high-profile campaigns at Glasgow Green and the People's Palace Museum – which sought the right to *consume* the city in their own way and to construct collective representations and images of the city as they saw fit. Just like Thatcher, in other words, they abandoned attempts at supporting production-side economics for a cultivation of demand. The Thatcher government deregulated the financial services sector in 1986, releasing flows of capital from their anchorage in specific sites of production, and throughout the 1980s public spending was cut, and state run industries closed down or sold off. Meanwhile Workers City, a voluntary group operating in civil society and notably not a political party nor a Trades Union (TU membership also fell throughout the 1980s), campaigned for their own stake in urban space where, as per Harvey, the state gradually abandoned its productive interest in these sites.

The question of the overall success of Workers City is a moot one. Ultimately Castells believes that these groups have a defensive role addressing issues (1983: 331) but not on a scale nor on terms 'adequate to the task', and that in this globalised world they cannot be 'agents of structural change' (1983: 329) although they can still have 'major effects'. Kelman himself raises a similar point in his own ruminations on his political activities, asking in **And The Judges Said**

Most campaigns fail. But what does it mean to win? All campaigns concern miscarriage of justice in one form or another. They can involve the worst cases of brutality. In many instances 'to win' a campaign is simply to have acknowledged by those in authority that a miscarriage of justice has occurred. (2008: 11)

Kelman's aims have never been to 'win' a campaign as such, and then to replace, as Kafka puts it, the authority figures of one power regime with his own 'secretaries, officials, professional politicians ...'.¹² What concerns him then is the engagement with arbitrary and oppressive structures and hierarchies;

¹² Cited in Deleuze, G., Guattari, P.F., (1986), *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, University of Minnesota Press, pp57-8.

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bringing the relationships and workings of power to light, and exposing them in public space.

When Castells says these groups cannot bring structural change, his evident meaning is that the capitalist system is neither overturned nor fundamentally altered. But one of Castells' case study movements was the organisation Glasgow Rent Strike of 1915 (1983: 27-37), and it does seem undeniable that the 60 years of rent control as British Housing Policy which followed that particular mobilisation can be considered a 'major effect', albeit one which never smashed the capitalist economy. But what of Kelman and the Workers City – was stopping the privatisation of the free public space of Glasgow Green not also a 'major effect'? How long the effects of that 'victory' will last remains to be seen.

What is possibly more important than these questions of victory and duration is the model which Kelman and his cohorts represent – namely a 'native' tradition of non-aligned, self-organised political movements which, in its semi-formalised, horizontal structures, non-violent stance and focus on opposing structures and hierarchies, seems to anticipate broad-based movements such as 'Occupy', while belonging to an era that had none of the advantages of the latter movement in terms of the accessibility of mass communication devices. If, as Thomson argues, the imagination of Scottish writers created terms for political involvement that meant they could not be integrated into the architecture of the devolved state, then it is important to recognise that this same imagination can actually create political structures that sit far outside of Parliaments themselves. Indeed, the case of Kelman's involvements seem to demonstrate that Scotland has been the site of not one, but at least two parallel processes of political re-orientation. It is mere poetry that both these processes acknowledged here were energised by and mirrored the phenomenon most commonly known as 'Thatcherism'

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