

THE POLITICS OF ENVIRONMENT

A Guide to Scottish Thought and Action

Malcolm Slesser

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Including

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and Action

by Malcolm Slesser

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This book is dedicated to My Neighbour

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CONTENTS

Introduction	<i>page</i> 9
Part i Nations at the Crossroads	13
Part ii The Scotland of Tomorrow	25
Part iii 1. Scotland Today	49
2. Resist and Achieve	100
Part iv 1. Constraints on Expansion	119
2. The Balanced Communities	141
3. Resource Management	154
4. The New Politics	164
References	175



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INTRODUCTION

I, Malcolm Slessor, am really only the editor of this book, presenting here some of the ideas being worked over by a growing number of those responsible for advances in science, technology and commerce in Scotland and elsewhere. These people, themselves specialised products of modern society, are not only aware of the malaise now obviously affecting this society, but by the very nature of their work have been forced to recognise its cause. The rapid growth of technology, so beneficial to man, has precipitated a crisis in the evolution of his society and, as in previous evolutionary crises of other living beings, an initially useful feature has galloped away out of control; our crippling dinosaur armour, our self-destroying sabre-tooth, is industrialisation. This excellent servant is a deadly master. Encouraged by the more ambitious practitioners of the as-yet naive 'science' of economics, this expanding industrialisation is today destroying the land and its communities, and tomorrow there must be heavy retribution.

The protests of the conservationists, the apparent unreason of affluent strikers, the violence of students, the attempts to escape through drugs into fantasy, are all symptoms of our growing unease: for it is obviously a great strain to pretend that we can continue to cram an infinitely expanding economy into a finite land – something must burst, and the greater the pressure the bigger the bang. But how can we stop it? Should we ourselves even bother? The ever-stretching affluence might just last out our time – our children can inherit the ruins. . . .

For certainly our time is short. Affluence no longer decides our consumption, but is itself solely and precariously dependent on the accelerating increase of this consumption. Hence the desperate search for wider boundaries, like that belt without a buckle, the European Common Market. But these make-shifts are of little use, as is increasingly evident; based on the sickness they try to cure, they merely exacerbate the situation.

A return to a balanced economy, where technological pro-

gress plays its correct part subservient to the individual, is obviously necessary. But such a return is extremely difficult for communities already violently pledged to imbalance by over-industrialisation and sometimes by over-population as well. Such communities expand forcefully, with the most plausible excuses, into their more favourably situated neighbours – usually after weakening any economic or cultural resistance. The USA has Canada, Mexico and the rest. The USSR has its vast eastern territories and satellites. England, more constricted and more desperately committed, has now only Scotland and what charity Europe may allow her.

The less committed nations have a chance to readjust with less upheaval, provided they can ward off the surrounding pressures. This book examines particularly the position of Scotland. It offers merely an outline, but its deliberate simplicity should not be taken as the last word; more detailed treatment of the subjects has been under way for some time. We have here tried only to put across the message.

For a message is badly needed. The planned flooding of Scotland with English workers and industries cannot possibly cure England's imbalance; but, to gratify the temporary indulgence of her addicted neighbour, Scotland as a community will be destroyed permanently and the regeneration of England made more difficult – for there would not be available the example of a restored and progressive society over the Border.

This book is in four parts. Part I examines the predicament of today's advanced nations from first principles, treating a self-governing community in the only practical context possible – its territorial and marine resources, the number of its inhabitants, and the cultural cement that has held the structure together through the past and will strengthen it for the future. Part II, taking Scotland as one such community, sketches the programme of its repair to a balanced and progressive nation, able to develop its own pattern of democracy in a world certainly needing as many such examples as possible. Part III

illustrates how the land, the spirit and the future of the Scottish people are disappearing under sterile colonisation by an out-dated 'British' economy, and describes how each member of the Scottish community can play his or her part in defeating this planned eradication, and so save the promise of the future for our children.

These three parts are deliberately brief. They are to be read as a handbook to further thought and action, as a framework round which discussion groups can build a more comprehensive structure. The authors have met so many who hold these views and have so signally failed to find them printed anywhere in relation to Scotland, that they judge such an abbreviated treatment to be necessary at this time.

The fourth part gives a wider background to the first three. It illustrates how leading scientists and economists confirm the dangers of runaway expansion of industrial aggression in a world growing smaller and indicates the disasters which await continued biological imbalance in a world becoming more crowded; in this context, it examines further applications of technology for the more satisfying Scotland of the future. It may be read as complementary or supplementary to the first three parts, or simply as a beneficial and instructive irritant in its own right.

Finally, we believe there is a need in this world to explore new forms of politics and government, based on the future circumstance of Man. We believe this will result, not in ever larger economic groupings, but in an emphasis of the role of national communities. Present-day Scotland is an excellent model to work on. Each inhabitant of that or any similar community can play an active part in bringing about this most necessary change. The newness of this book lies in this dovetailing of new ideas with an old struggle, rational observation with political evolution, theory with simple practice.



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PART I

Nations at the Crossroads

Even as recently as 1967 it was possible for a major work to be written about the state of the world some thirty years hence, considering only economic factors. This book, *The Year 2000*, by Herman Kahn, prophesied dazzlingly high figures for the national wealth of many of today's industrialised countries. These figures took no account of the impact of unthinking industrialisation on Man and his environment – or that a reaction, often religious in its intensity, might interfere with the projected course of economic growth. This reaction is a natural one, being biologically necessary. Before it is too late for all of us, it is necessary to stop and consider the consequences of the obsessive industrialisation which exists today in many of the world's communities and which may well exist tomorrow everywhere.

As we do this we find ourselves inevitably asking for whose benefit a community is to be run. While obviously we must progress towards some form of world government, it is equally obvious that no centralised government could meet the wishes of the vastly differing communities which will continue to inhabit the earth, each of which has its own satisfying pattern of life. Within the world framework there must operate a number of reasonably self-governing units. We are at once led, therefore, into requiring a working definition of such a community – a nation. And it need only be a working definition – no absolute one is called for. As we consider the consequences of this thoughtless industrialisation, we will find ourselves arriving at such a working definition.

The main problems of the future therefore appear to be: firstly, the size of these self-governing units in a world state,

and secondly, the day-to-day running of these units so that each person in them enjoys the greatest choice of physical and mental activity permitted by the elected administrators of his unit community. These local governments must provide basic aid against a member's misfortunes, such as sickness and resultant poverty, and against the destruction of his physical and mental heritage – his satisfaction in his land and its culture – by acts of aggression. Such aggression – waged internally or without – formerly was military, but is now increasingly and more effectively, economic.

In the past the determinants of the unit communities of the world have been basically two :

- (i) the resources of the land occupied
- (ii) the number of people in that land.

But these are lifeless and statistical parameters; the stability of such communities, their inspiration to progress and the joy of living in them has been due to a third factor – the unique human awareness of time. By this great gift the past history of the community has been cherished, creating a common bond for the present; and this bond has been immeasurably strengthened by the promise of a future. In this way the community has identified itself and become aware of the possibilities of development; it has stabilised itself and thus been selected for successful evolution.

Communities have trodden along this path of time, yarning of scenes past, planning the ways ahead. Their cultures – their song and story, have blossomed along the route, with squabbling, theft and interchange. Many communities have fallen by the wayside, some victims of disease, flood or other unavoidable catastrophe, others overtaken by their more efficient neighbours.

Efficiency for these human communities, as for all living systems from single cells upwards, consisted in coming to terms with their environment, extracting from it their energy, their food and materials, mastering it sufficiently to serve their pro-

gress, yet not exploiting it so that it ran dry on them at their sudden hour of greatest need. History records the unsuccessful, the over-conservative stagnators who never tried and the brash adventurers who tried too hard, as fossils tell us of the earlier biological failures.

The most powerful material factor in the successful evolution of a community was the development of tools, fashioned with ever-increasing ingenuity to win more wealth from its own land or from the hoards of other communities; an industrial expansion by peace or by war.

Until a century or so ago this evolution of communities proceeded relatively slowly. The three determinants of land, people and culture interacted to preserve viability in the successful ones. Of course the stagnators were still being enslaved, the sated empires still toppled; but the world was very large and it had plenty of time. The mistakes of Egypt, Carthage or Rome affected only a small area.

But then the scene changed. Human social evolution began to accelerate rapidly. Such evolutionary spurts have happened to many species in the past, incurring often their salvation or their downfall. Science, with its accurate observation, opened up the secrets of the environment, technology spread this knowledge and, multiplying its acquisition at undreamt-of speed, used it to wrest further and further wealth from the land. The world became smaller and its dominant societies found one aspect of their culture, that of commercial industrialisation, growing to grotesque proportions, taking over as the sole determinant of a community. However beneficial any such aspect may be, its monstrous and unpremeditated growth at the expense of all others can only develop from the bizarre to the pathological; the pathological state is entered when the growth becomes malignant, a cancer which can no longer stop proliferating, which swells at the expense of all the other resources of a living community, and which will inevitably destroy that community.

Most of the large industrialised nations of the world are

entering this irreversible stage, and are no longer balanced evolving communities of the type we have described. We can recognise the fatal symptoms very easily. In face of such malignant industrialisation, the other determinants go down. The natural resources of a land are considered irrelevant, as are the number of people pushed into it. And, of course, the communal spirit of those inhabitants is necessarily eroded by this malignancy, and is actively attacked should they dare to oppose it. We are tragically familiar with the parrot cries of 'Bring in the jobs', 'Mobility of labour', the jeers at 'idealistic scientists' (who should stay at their benches), at 'romantic traditionalists', 'middle-class conservationists' and the like.

The tragedy, of course, lies in the naivety of those supporting the growth of imbalance. Some admittedly are merely cynical, content to be going back on human progress, to be replacing modern man by a collection of industrial helots, slaves once again, dependent on factory planners for their land, their culture, their free gift of 'instant community'. But most industrialists and their advisers are simply ignorant of the astonishing archaism of their approach. They cannot see that they break the elementary rules of the science they so frequently invoke, that they betray the technology they hire.

Science is largely accurate observation coupled with commonsense. The man in the street is, because of this, scientist enough to sense that something is going badly wrong. What is going wrong? What do we see around us?

We see a loss of communal spirit, of 'morals', of respect for any standard of ethics in the members of the present self-governing units.

We see, as well as the waste of these psychological resources, a waste of the material resources in the land occupied by those communities.

We see a growing backlash of resentment against such losses and ultimately against the whole politico-economic system encouraging them.

We see excuses offered, apologetically, that it is impossible

to halt – in these finite, limited areas – what has now to be considered infinite, unlimited industrial expansion.

We see successive governments attempting to stabilise society by using this runaway accessory of a balanced development – industrialisation – as a final determinant of the self-governing communities, one which dictates the resources of the land and the number of people in it. And which therefore dictates the boundaries of these communities and their day-to-day running, the work and leisure and education of their inhabitants, and which no longer nourishes an individual person on his community and land, or on its history and its future, nor on his own free ideas, but which subordinates him to a confessedly unpredictable and as yet incomprehensible process of economics – a ‘discipline’ whose development is still at the leech, purge and incantation stage of mediaeval medicine and as disarmingly arrogant. The wiser economists will freely admit this; they are among those most disturbed by an ‘expanding economy’, as will be plain from the extracts quoted in Part IV.

Until recently this unease, felt by both the man in the street and the economist, has been bribed away by the attractive flashing of cash, the carrot of rising wages dangled on the string of inflation.

The sorry comedy of this diversion is now realised by many people, and is guessed by most. Indeed, the results can no longer be hidden, even by the most careful erection of out-moded political screens – such as the old barriers of ‘class’, or the newer ones of ‘age’.

Those accustomed to enjoying their heritages of traditions and landscape, now burst out in demonstration against Concorde, Cublington, Hunterston, Teesdale and the London Box. Those brought up to regard skilled labour as no degrading thing and now, thanks to technology, enjoying at last comparative affluence, indulge in otherwise meaningless strikes in order to preserve at least the illusion that they still possess independence and self-respect. Those educated to the ideals of the old communities and finding no ideals left, nor any communi-