

## ***Critical Social Policy***

### **Special Themed Issue**

## ***Devolution and Social Policy***

### ***‘We’ve Never Had It So Good’:***

### ***The Problem of the Working Class in the Devolved Scotland***

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#### **Abstract**

Class has become the social condition that dare not it speak its name in the devolved Scotland. This is despite the persistence of marked class divisions and structured inequalities within contemporary Scottish society. We critically examine the most empirically sophisticated and coherent analysis of social class in Scotland, that provided by ‘the Edinburgh school’ of social scientists, particularly their claim that Scotland is now a prosperous, ‘professional society’ where only a small but significant minority are trapped in poverty. This paper further considers the extent to which ‘devolution’, and the dominant

representations to which it has given rise, serve to generate a series of other myths in which class is both devalued but simultaneously mobilised in the negative portrayal of some of the most disadvantaged sections of the working class. Against an emerging, home-grown view of 'New Scotland' as a prosperous 'Smart, Successful Scotland', poverty and wealth inequalities continue to be a necessary feature of the division of labour. In Scotland, as elsewhere, class remains the pivot-point around which much of social policy is encoded and enacted.

### **Keywords**

Class; Scotland; 'professional society'; poverty; inequality.

### ***Ignoring and Insisting on Class***

In Scotland, as elsewhere, class remains the primary determinant of social life. Historically, politics and culture in Scotland have been formed by a sharpened class consciousness and class-based organisations. Intellectually and ideologically, class represented the Archimedean point of reference that helped to explain everything from voting patterns and attitudinal differences, political mobilisation, social conflict, to lifestyle and consumption patterns, and even personality traits. Yet, the concept of class no longer occupies centre stage in devolutionary Scotland. Academic, policy and journalistic discourses about Scottish society have been largely de-classed. To draw attention to this eradication of class from the policy lexicon is hardly to make a controversial claim. Class, as Andrew Sayer (2005: 1) put it, has become 'an embarrassing and unsettling subject'. As such, class has been excised from much of the

analysis of UK policy-making as a whole. There is something approaching a consensus that class has declined as a significant factor in the routine structuring of social and economic relations in contemporary society. While such claims have been criticised from widely different perspectives (see for example Savage, 2000; Skeggs, 2004; Sayer, 2005), they take on a particular resonance and meaning in the context of devolved welfare governance in the UK.

Class has become the social condition that dare not it speak its name in the New Scotland. This is despite the persistence of marked class divisions and structured inequalities within contemporary Scottish society. In particular it is claimed here that in the New Scotland there is a recurring identification of that part of the working class suffering most from the effects of the restructured division of labour as 'a problem'. Such 'problem' groups occupy a highly precarious relationship to the means of social reproduction through the labour market. In neglecting the structural barriers to adequate social reproduction this vulnerable fraction of the working class becomes the object of overlapping pathologisation processes – in relation to social inclusion policies, in debates around educational attainment, in relation to patterns of ill-health and morbidity, and, most publicly, in the mass media, in relation to questions of criminal justice, especially around urban youth crime, and sensationalised news reporting. For instance, during 2003 and 2004 something approaching a moral panic appeared in the Scottish press over urban youth, or what is referred to as 'ned culture', and anti-social cultures of violence, drugs and

alcohol, fuelled in no small part by the Scottish Executive's determination to publicise its commitment to 'law and order' (Law, 2006).

Class therefore continues to be a rarely spoken but pivotal element of contemporary Scottish governance. Under the terms of neo-liberal governance class has been devalued and usurped by the self-improvement of the individual personality as an entrepreneurial self. When the persistence of class as a social relationship cannot be wholly avoided a range of coy euphemisms are deployed that further obscure the character of class divisions in modern Scotland. Against an emerging, home-grown view of 'New Scotland', a singular, prosperous 'Smart, Successful Scotland', poverty and wealth inequalities continue to be a necessary feature of the division of labour in Scotland.

Even where the extent of poverty and deepening inequality is registered class may be reduced to a descriptive variable, as only one among other equally significant variables in complex systems of stratification, and thereby, in our view, minimised as an explanatory concept. We therefore turn our attention to the most empirically sophisticated and coherent analysis of social class in Scotland, that provided by the group of social scientists at Edinburgh University (whom we term 'the Edinburgh school' for convenience). Through a series of empirical studies and their house journal, *Scottish Affairs*, they have had a significant impact on public and policy discourses in Scotland than perhaps is the case elsewhere in the UK. In so doing, the Edinburgh school have transformed the study of Scotland, helping shed the charge of

parochialism in the study of class and nation in a small country like Scotland (McCrone, 2005). Indeed, they have consistently addressed the wider issue of what constitutes national 'society'. In contrast, for too many social scientists in the devolved UK, England and Britain are still treated as unproblematically coterminous and simply assumed as a universal frame of reference. Hence, even where class is made the subject of sustained analysis, as in a recent themed issue of the scholarly journal *Sociology* (2005) on 'Class, Culture and Identity', most contributors took for granted England as their societal frame of reference and made only passing mention, if any, to the national specificity of their studies. So while there is a well developed sociology of Scotland no comparable 'sociology of England' has yet emerged. Such remains the unacknowledged reifying power of England-Britain, what Michael Billig (1995) termed 'banal nationalism', that nation and class become universal abstractions. While the Edinburgh school have played a key role in ensuring that 'nation' is at the forefront of sociological concerns in Scotland their approach to class shares some of the same conceptual assumptions as elsewhere. We therefore go on to critique the self-imposed limitations of the Edinburgh school's analysis of class in Scotland, couched as it is in terms of market power rather than the social relations of production.

This paper further considers the extent to which 'devolution', and the dominant representations to which it has given rise, serve to generate a series of other myths in which class is both devalued but simultaneously mobilised in the negative portrayal of some of the most disadvantaged sections of the working class. While we wish to emphasise the mediation of neo-liberal

priorities for social policy through the concrete particularities of Scotland, the issues explored and arguments we advance here have a resonance well beyond any single national example. Under various *noms de guerre* it occupies a central place in the analysis of New Labour's social and economic project and remains the pivot-point around which much of social policy is encoded and enacted.

### ***The Absent Presence of Class in Scotland***

While class has largely disappeared from view following devolution in 1999, save to recognise its role 'merely', and often at best, as only one of a series of dimensions or aspects of inequality and identity, class continues to assert itself as an *absent presence* throughout contemporary Scotland. By this we mean that class remains an unruly signifier of collective antagonistic social relationships, reproduced through conflictual social processes underlying the grossly unequal acquisition of material necessities (Bourdieu, 1984). This is a contradictory process. In conditions of generalised scarcity individuals without capital are compelled to enter the market as competitive monads to sell their labour power but are thereafter subject to collective exploitation in the production process itself. Classes are therefore formed by the intersection of two sides of a single process: on the one hand, the *social* division of labour itself (or the division of labour in exchange) and, on the other, the *technical* division of labour in the labour process (or the division of labour in production). Clearly the interaction of the division of labour in exchange and the division of labour in production internally stratifies the working class. This

conception of class gives lie to the idea that those with a precarious relationship to relatively well-paid, secure employment somehow form a separate class cut adrift from the rest of the working class (see Mészáros, 1995).

As formed and reproduced by the division of labour, class continues to be the primary factor in accounting for inequalities in health and morbidity, education, income, housing, diet, consumption, and so on. As such it also pervades - albeit largely unseen - huge swathes of policy-making discourses and academic discourses. Where it does surface, as we will argue below, it appears either as a passive description of an empirically-given reality, as in the Weberian classification schemas of academic social science, or, more commonly in public policy discourses, as a ghostly apparition, a metaphysical *absent presence* of being always materially there but simultaneously rendered almost opaque through the deployment of a range of class euphemisms and elisions. In other words class fails to be openly named. Instead, its feint outline is cast semantically in terms other than 'class'. Notable here, and not only in the context of contemporary Scotland, are routinely repeated references to 'the excluded', to the 'disadvantaged', 'the marginalised', the 'deprived'. Such abject euphemisms are typically deployed to describe categories of people thought to be lying outside the conventional arrangements of social stratification and transform the impoverished working class into illegible ciphers for amoral cultures of despondency. In reality, these euphemisms refer, indirectly and curtly, to the existence of the patterning of inequality by the social and technical division of labour. Hence the trick is

accomplished of dispensing with the troublesome business of class as a social relationship by isolating a discrete social group from wider class relationships in order to return them for inspection and diagnosis by the ambiguous discourses of moral self-governance, above all in the valorisation of paid employment. Notable here is the collapse of class inequalities into the nebulous arena of 'social exclusion'.

In Scotland two other inter-related factors have worked to further dilute the salience of class. First, class has long been subordinated to and over-laid by the notion of a 'Scottish national interest' (see Bond et al, 2003). While this idea was especially evident through out the post-1945 period, it has been re-invigorated following devolution where the construction, understanding and articulation of national social and economic 'problems' are framed less in terms of class than in relation to an apparently self-evident idea of 'the Scottish nation'. Here the corporate domination of class interests by the 'national interest' has been defined traditionally by the national institutions of middle class 'civil society' such as education, religion and law, and, latterly, the 'welfare nationalism' of the post-war period (Paterson, 1994; Law, 2005).

Second, it is a short step from the determination of a national interest by the small middle class elite who occupy the institutions of 'civil society' to the idea that society as whole is somehow forged together into a higher national unity. The institutions of 'civil society' mysteriously displace the vulgar material division of society into classes and provide 'society' with a wholesomeness it would not otherwise possess. Even where social differences are registered,

the overwhelming picture remains of 'Scotland' as a singular, homogenous nation. Hence the distended nation, the 'One Scotland', is imagined as a horizontal, multicultural (though rarely vertical, multi-class) community of interests. Such thinking permeates policy-making rhetoric:

One Scotland – a better Scotland – where all Scots can be proud to live in the best small country in the world.

(Jack McConnell, First Minister, Speech to Labour Party Conference, Brighton, September 27, 2004)

Strident efforts have been made by New Labour politicians, the Scottish Executive, policy-making and academic networks, and new and traditional elites to sell the idea of the 'New' Scotland as 'One Nation'. This vision of 'One, New Scotland' owes much to an uneven mix of diverse perspectives and ideas including: residual elements of an Old Labour-style social democracy, though the term social democracy has largely been replaced by the more ambiguous 'social justice' (see Scott and Mooney, 2005); more conservative notions of social order and community; and neo-liberal ideas of enterprise, the market and individual responsibility (Law, 2005).

In the devolved Scotland significant sections of the working class are increasingly viewed as a hindrance to the Scottish 'national interest' by failing to develop an entrepreneurial spirit. In particular, some of the most precarious groups in Scottish society, made vulnerable by their unfettered exposure to the social division of labour, are increasingly seen as being 'out of step' with

what is now considered by New Labour and policy elites as 'normal' or 'mainstream' Scottish society. Yet even those fractions of the working class with a relatively secure place in the division of labour find only a weak resonance with the political and institutional structures of New Scotland. No longer do Scotland's middle classes view the established institutions of the working classes, such as trade unions and the Scottish Trade Union Congress (STUC), as a central part of the institutional culture of Scottish society. For the new elites in Scotland, the working class tend to feature only as an ever-present source of disappointment. On the one hand, the most dominated and impoverished groups constitute the source of respectable fears of social disintegration and criminality. On the other hand, where the employed working class are organised in trades unions, especially in the public sector, they are seen as refractory material to the necessity for managerial efficiencies and economies such that they constitute a hindrance to the competitive performance of neo-liberal Scotland. Here, the pre-dominant discourse is that of fragmented, alienated, atomised, demoralised social groups as a problem to be targeted and overcome. As Chris Haylett (2003: 57) has succinctly argued, such 'positioning has a cultural history through which working-class cultures and identities are cast as causal to problems of economic inequality and disorder'. This has taken on a particular resonance with the claim that 'the Scots' suffer from 'a collective crisis of confidence'. Such a diagnosis helps explain Scotland's under-performance in both the UK and global economies (Craig, 2003, 2005). Craig argues that deep-seated change in the Scottish national 'psyche' is necessary if Scotland is to be renewed. Craig (2005: 49) identifies:

...a proclivity in Scotland to emphasise the collective rather than the individual and this too has made it all too easy for us to assume that transformational change would be brought about from changes in the national structures, rather than from changes in our personal lives.

Instead the structures of collectivity need to be disaggregated down to the level of the individual personality for Scotland to flourish:

...if we want Scotland to become a society which is able come up with constructive solutions to the many problems which blight our society, feeling better about ourselves and feeling more positive would help us find these solutions. (Craig, 2005: 52)

This kind of neo-liberal populist psychology finds a ready home among Scotland's governing class. In addressing such a 'problem' the Scottish Executive and other 'leaders' of Scottish society work tirelessly to fashion the working classes in their own image: as entrepreneurs, as responsible citizens, as consumers exercising good taste, judgment and self interest, as orderly, restrained and law-abiding citizens, fully engaged in well managed communities. This represents an ideological mobilisation to re-assemble working class lives, particularly among the poorest and more disadvantaged, according to the gratifying self-images held by middle class elites in Scotland.

### ***The Strange After-Life of Class in the New Scotland***

Amidst the post-devolution clamour to construct and project an image of 'the New Scotland' it is perhaps not surprising that 'older' concerns with class tend to be marginalised – or indeed forgotten. The new Scotland is as yet an uneven, at times partial and underdeveloped ideological construct, but already the key elements in this discourse can be identified. Scotland is perceived as a land that has undergone dramatic and fundamental change in the last few decades of the twentieth century. This discourse of 'the New' both underpins and permeates how journalists, academics, policy-makers and think tanks construct social, economic and political change. That there have been far-reaching changes in Scotland in recent decades has widespread assent, though all too often the uneven, partial and contradictory nature of such shifts has yet to be acknowledged let alone explained. In 2001 a team of leading social scientists from Edinburgh University could breathlessly claim that:

There is currently a real sense in Scotland that everything is changing; that nothing can be taken for granted..... The country is going through the closest to a social revolution that can be found in a developed western democracy. (Paterson et al, 2001: 167).

More recently members of the same 'Edinburgh school' have marshalled considerable quantitative data to further their argument that Scottish society has undergone far-reaching change. Sociologists Frank Bechhofer (one of the

original researchers on the famed *Affluent Worker* study of the 1960s) and David McCrone (author of path-breaking study, *Understanding Scotland* (2001)), under a newspaper headline, 'Scotland 2004: Why we've never had it so good', refer to 'a truly astonishing picture of a Scotland which has transformed dramatically even since adults in their mid-twenties were born' (Johnston et al, 2004). In claiming that the Scotland of the early 2000s is 'barely recognisable as the same place of the early 1980s', Paterson, Bechhofer and McCrone (2004: 149) focus on demographic, household, and employment shifts. However, what tends to be obscured is the profound *continuities* with the past, notably with regard to the highly unequal social relations of exchange and production that characterise Scottish society. In claiming that 'for eight out of ten people, Scotland is a better place to live than 25 years ago' (Johnston et al, 2004), the Edinburgh school misdiagnose and underestimate the nature, extent and endurance of inequality, social antagonism and polarisation in Scottish society. There is some recognition that Scotland remains an unequal society:

Nevertheless, one would require truly rosy spectacles not to see a much darker side. Amidst this *largely benevolent change*, Scottish society is seriously divided and stratified. The basis of stratification has changed somewhat, and the size of the disadvantaged segments of society has shrunk, but the nature and experience of the resulting exclusion may, if anything, have worsened. (Paterson et al, 2004: 151; our emphasis)

What is being implied here is that poverty and related forms of disadvantage are almost marginal or residual features of contemporary Scottish society. And in deploying the troubling language of a 'darker side', there is a neglect of the processes that lead to polarisation and inequality, that between the accumulation of wealth and the accumulation of poverty there is unbreakable umbilical connection. Moreover, the conception of class, or rather 'stratification', that is called upon differs in significant ways from our own.

In such analyses, the working class, *qua* the working class, is deemed to be something that belongs largely to a bygone era of Scottish society. And yet we do not have to look far to see that ideas of class remain central to some of the long established and enduring myths that have tended to feature most prominently in representations of Scottish society. Such myths tend to cohere around claims that in some ways 'the Scots' are more inclined to be collective, social democratic, egalitarian (Gall, 2005) and that these inherent values, that insulate 'the Scots' against Thatcherism, now work to inoculate them from some of the more extravagant neo-liberal zeal of New Labour's Blairite policies in the rest for the rest of Britain (Mooney and Poole, 2004).

Indeed, for those like the Edinburgh school who recognise the extent of, and object to, the gnawing social deprivation in Scotland, at least the growing poverty of the 1980s and 1990s may have been halted, though not reversed. Here New Labour's taxation policies and the minimum wage may have had a mildly redistributive effect, which in itself is insufficient to tackle endemic social polarisation. As the Edinburgh school put it:

What can be said is that policy since the change of UK government in 1997 has at best brought to an end the widening of inequality that has been taking place since 1979. To go further and actually reduce inequality would require that governments, both at Westminster and in Edinburgh, embark on a more redistributive regime than at present seems likely. (Paterson, et al, 2004: 78).

**<insert Table 1>**

As Table 1 shows the number of people living in low income households after housing costs have been taken into account has remained stubbornly constant at around the million mark, out of a total population of just over five million. This impoverished twenty per cent consists of the working poor, the unemployed, children, the elderly and the sick. Neither has the pattern of wealth distribution altered course. If anything it has become more entrenched, with high levels of landownership and personal wealth held by very small groups of people. While real incomes may have risen on average for most categories of workers inequalities have also increased: 'the wealth of the individuals and households at the upper end of the distribution is dramatically greater than that of those at the bottom end or indeed the vast majority of the population' (Paterson, et al., 2004: 78).

Such research suggests that the mythology of a 'proletarian Scotland' flies in the face of the new empirical reality that Scotland has become a more

affluent, middle class and 'professional society' in the past decade or so (Paterson, et al, 2004; McCrone, 2001). Thus the Edinburgh school point to evidence that the largest rise in occupational structure over recent decades has been in 'lower managerial and professional' jobs (see Table 2). Such shifts have led the Edinburgh group to the following insight: 'If there is one dominant conclusion it is that Scotland is becoming a professional society in a much thorough way that it was even in the 30 years after the Second World War, when the professions came to dominate social policy and public life but still from their inherited position as a relatively small elite' (Paterson, et al, 2004: 101). This is compounded by a narrow identification of the 'working class' with the contracting manual workforce in the manufacturing sector.

**<Insert Table 2>**

Yet, working class identity and collectivist ideology in Scotland remains widespread, with more than half of 'professionals' identify themselves as 'working class' (see Table 3). For Paterson, et al (2004: 99-101) the self-misidentification and misattribution of the class position by those in 'professional' occupations who see themselves as working class is a peculiarly Scottish phenomena that can be explained sociologically as a function of the recent experience of upward social mobility: 'It seems that the continuing working class consciousness of the increasingly middle class society is probably because of upward social mobility'. To be seen as 'working class' is therefore culturally and politically important in Scotland even if it fails to correspond to socio-economic reality. On the other hand, it could be that

the category of 'professional middle class' covers a multitude of sins and that fewer occupations carry the traditional professional characteristics of task autonomy, independent decision-making and self-regulation. Here, the Edinburgh school prefer to emphasise the growth of industry-specific 're-skilling' of the Scottish workforce (Chapter 4), which somewhat belies the increase in generic credentials for most types of work. On the other hand, and in inversion of the 'spiritually homeless' salaried masses found in earlier studies of white collar workers that imagined themselves as 'middle class', the strength of working class identity in Scotland might correspond more closely to the proletarianisation of white collar occupations, including those depending on relatively high levels of credentialism, through work intensification and rationalisation, technological substitution, micro-managerialism and bureaucratic regulation.

**<insert Table 3>**

Advocates of the 'Scotland as professional society' thesis are echoing earlier discourses about the declining salience of class, especially the working class, in terms of 'the affluent society' or 'post-industrial society' theses. Such approaches adopt the broadly Weberian notion of class as a contractual indicator of the market power of individuals. As the Edinburgh school argue: 'Simply put, social class refers the structuring of power, mainly but not exclusively economic power, power in the marketplace, which differentiates people according to the skills and resources they are able to bring to the market, and the rewards they derive from it' (Paterson, et al, 2004: 81). Here

the focus is one-sidedly on the possessive individualism of market conditions rather than in the 'hidden abode' of production where exploitation occurs. Insofar as production is discussed it is in general terms of occupational standing. Alternatively, class is secured by the prior structural relationship to effective ownership of the means of production. Class relations are given their specific colouration by the inequality between the value contributed by labour power in the production process (including the production of 'services') and the lower value represented by wages. In contrast, market power merely appears to equalise labour of different kinds and reward competing stock of individual power resources in terms of income. Individual exchange in the marketplace between equal individuals thus *appears* disconnected from class relations, above all the structural domination of labour by capital. Those unable to secure the sale of their individual labour power in the market, the unemployed, and hence stand outside of the immediate process of class exploitation in production, are saddled with an unsaleable commodity, their labour power, because it is not projected to add surplus value to a given composition of total social capital. Despite their own, admittedly surreptitious, commitment to redistributive social democratic values, the Edinburgh school eschews making their value judgements explicit:

Some areas of Scotland are multiply deprived and a considerable proportion of Scotland's people, probably around one in seven, are severely disadvantaged and unlikely to escape from this situation into better circumstances. It is not our task in this book to comment on the moral and political implications of the picture presented in this chapter or

indeed elsewhere, it is for the reader to draw her or his own conclusions.

(Paterson, et al, 2004: 78)

Such value-free neutrality attempts to let the empirical facts speak for themselves - even while imposing the 'professional society' thesis on them. Value-restraint severs the link between partisan politics and objective scholarship and places rationalist empirical methodology beyond critique. In refusing to 'comment on the moral and political implications' of their own evidence of substantial social suffering in Scotland the Edinburgh school pragmatically avoid public dissent with the Scottish state and maintain the stance of academic impartiality. Yet the Edinburgh school are not consistently value-neutral. Thus McCrone (2005, no page number) in an address to the British Sociological Association in Scotland claimed the legacy of critical sociology from, C. Wright Mills and Alvin Gouldner, but especially from Tom Burns, who McCrone cites positively, arguing that sociology must question assumptions made 'by people in authority in education, law, politics and so forth, about the behaviour of people'. Burns went on to elaborate:

The practice of sociology is criticism. It exists to criticise claims about the value of achievement and to question assumptions about the meaning of conduct. It is the business of sociologists to conduct a critical debate with the public about its equipment of social institutions. (cited by McCrone, 2005, no page number).

It is in this critical spirit, we would contend, that the study of class, state and nation in Scotland needs to be conducted. It can do so by locating class not simply as one stratification variable among many but as a necessarily exploitative social relationship that reduces moral worth to exchange value. Given that neo-liberal governance in Scotland and beyond is intent on establishing this as the essential disciplining power of 'accumulation by dispossession' it becomes necessary to return to the critical injunctions of the an earlier brand of Edinburgh sociology.

### ***Governing without class***

Besides the impartial academic slicing-up of class as various market positions, the idea of a 'new' Scotland is also being constructed in less value neutral ways. Here the Scottish Executive plays the major role in framing the new de-classed discourse. Scottish politicians, especially from the Labour Party, are not averse to drawing upon perceived ideologies and myths about Scottish civil society, particularly concerning its egalitarian and collectivist tendencies. However, such myths are also often constructed as nostalgically 'old-fashioned', particularly when they are viewed as a hindrance to the Scottish Executive's key goal of imagining the new Scotland as a vibrant' and 'dynamic' economy in which enterprise can flourish (see Bond et al, 2003, Law, 2005; Raco, 2002). Here we have a sharp juxtaposition of two Scotlands. On one hand, the 'old' proletarianised Scotland of largely male-dominated industrial and manufacturing employment, urban squalor and welfare dependency (including 'dependencies' on council housing and 'old style' public services). On the other hand, the 'new' information/knowledge

society-based of today is typified by 'de-classed' private service sector work in call centres, retail, leisure, and tourism related-employment. A new Scotland is thereby posited in which the ongoing reform of public services – variously including housing stock transfer, PPP/PFI in education and in the health service, 'new' flexible working practices and managerialism – promotes personal 'choice' for consumers who stand outside of class categories. Here we have an archetypal case of what David Harvey (2005) calls 'accumulation by dispossession', where the shelter provided for social need by the public sector is broken into and its value confiscated by private capital to effect the renewed self-expansion of private accumulation at the expense of public services like pensions, health, education or housing. Accumulation by dispossession is a class-based project – class struggle from above – of which there are many exemplary cases in Scotland, just as there is of class-based resistance – class struggle from below – including the Scottish nursery workers strike in 2004 (Mooney and McCafferty, 2005).

Neo-liberal thinking has become the new common sense among the political and policy-making intermediaries in Scotland. It is central, for example, to the 2003 Partnership Agreement between the Scottish Labour Party and the Scottish Liberal Democrats, the governing coalition in the Scottish Executive where the pursuit of social justice and social inclusion is unambiguously founded on a strategy of 'growing the Scottish economy' (Scottish Executive, 2003):

The balance in Scotland's economy now needs to make a shift.

Improving public sector efficiency has had a significant part to play in the overall improvement in Scotland's relative productivity.

(Jack McConnell Legislative Programme, September 6, 2005, [www.scotland.gov.uk](http://www.scotland.gov.uk))

Here, as elsewhere, the new Scotland is constructed first and foremost in the language of the Scottish Executive as a 'smart, successful Scotland'.

All of this has significant consequences for welfare and social policy.

Investment in social policy objectives and public services and, crucially, the routine practices of social policy, only make sense if they are economically framed, in the context here that they help 'Scotland' compete 'in' 'globalisation'. Neo-liberal capitalism is thus naturalised by New Labour as the limit point of all human activity and potentiality. Crucially, and to return to our argument above, there are a series of classifying practices at work in Scotland that seek to identify, construct and portray certain disadvantaged groups as beyond the 'New Scotland' mainstream, a brake on the drive to modernisation and competitiveness. Here the assumed value characteristics of Scottish working class-ness, reflected in cultures of poverty, moral decay and community disorder, are features of a wider welfare dependency that only undermines the efficiency of capital in Scotland. Much of this thinking, and the practices to which it gives rise, is driven by UK-wide New Labour policies especially, but not only, in relation to welfare to work, work activation strategies and criminal justice measures. Across the UK programme of

welfare restructuring there is a forging of a new national order of work, welfare and community, premised around the efficient functioning of the individual in the new division of labour. For this, new malleable subjectivities are necessary, always and everywhere premised around work and enterprise. Such subjectivities disavow class as a meaningful form of identity even while they re-impose class subordination to the divisions of labour in exchange and production.

In Scotland, therefore, a conjuncture of UK-wide welfare reforms, constitutional devolution and neo-liberal capitalism propels the new de-classed value structure. While the construction of a 'modern', 'competitive', 'future', 'forward-looking', and 'new' Scotland is presented matter of factly as a technical or administrative issue, this is essentially a vision of a country in which all aspects of daily life are collapsed into work-centred activities and modes of understanding. With the Scottish Executive, social inclusion, anti-social behaviour, community, social capital and the pursuit of social justice are understood as principally economic issues, encapsulated in policy discourses of 'competition and cohesion'. Here the diagnosis and prognosis of the permanent condition of class reproduction in Scotland is erased from view at a discursive level only to be constantly reproduced in practice through the new division of labour as an unforgiving social reality.

We would further argue that the discursive de-classing of Scotland coupled with the ascendancy of professional and managerial intermediaries corresponds to closely what Bourdieu (1984) called the 'new petit

bourgeoisie'. Such class intermediaries create new 'needs' rather than imposing moral norms among the dominated classes:

The new petty bourgeoisies of course sees class, classifications as irrelevant, they are free to make their own taste in the precious but bloodless struggle against all taboos – yet they are fixed to a definite social space (Bourdieu,1984: 370).

In Scotland, the new petit bourgeois includes the apparatchiks that mediate the new structures of devolved governance, preoccupied with the presentational issues of neo-liberal governance (Schlesinger, et al, 2002).

Among the new petit bourgeoisie there is widespread unanimity that class is already extinct in Scotland, except for a supporting role in cultural edification or heritage nostalgia. Scotland is to be re-fashioned in their own self-image as entrepreneurial, dynamic and innovative. All this takes the primacy of market of the market as a given fact, with Scotland seeking to emulate Ireland as a 'celtic tiger' economy. However, this vision of what MacAskill (2005) terms the new 'Caledonian consensus' simply wishes away the actuality of class relations.

Clearly, we are much less sanguine about the discourse of a de-classed 'new Scotland', by which the Caledonian consensus promises to eliminate at a stroke all the troublesome business of unequal material reality and antagonistic socio-economic relations. Nor do we share the more

sophisticated 'professional society' thesis that is imposed on broad shifts in the occupational structure of Scotland. Class reproduction is always an open-ended and unfinished process but it is one that necessarily re-composes relations of wage labour and capital accumulation on a renewed basis. Class denial or class minimisation strategies not only obscure and marginalise the continuing legacies of the past, not least in relation to the continuing salience and potency of class divisions in contemporary Scotland. They also construct opposition to what David Harvey (2005) calls 'accumulation by dispossession' as a relic of another (soon to be forgotten) time. De-classing reality is, we have argued, itself a class-based project that while denying or minimising class seeks to undermine recalcitrant working class cultures of solidarity. In the New Scotland, as elsewhere in the UK today, class-based forms of inequality continue to be reproduced, while simultaneously attempts to understand these through class analysis face patronising dismissal for refusing to face up to the new complexities of a transformed, looser, more socially mobile society. While this has distinctively Scottish dimensions to it in terms of constitutional change, sectoral restructuring and collective identity, this is not simply or solely a Scottish question but one that asserts the profound significance of class relations in the changing political and social conditions wrought by neo-liberalism.

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**Table 1 - Proportion and Number of Individuals in Relative Low Income Households, below 60% of GB Median Income, Scotland, 1994/5 to 2003/4 <sup>1</sup>**

	All individuals				Children				Working Age Adults				Pensioners			
	Before housing costs		After housing costs		Before housing costs		After housing costs		Before housing costs		After housing costs		Before housing costs		After housing costs	
	%	No. (00 0s)	%	No. (00 0s)	%	No. (00 0s)	%	No. (00 0s)	%	No. (00 0s)	%	No. (00 0s)	%	No. (00 0s)	%	No. (00 0s)
1994/95	19	960	22	1,080	26	280	28	300	16	490	18	540	22	190	27	240
1995/96	18	920	22	1,120	26	290	32	350	14	430	17	530	24	210	27	230
1996/97 <sub>2</sub>	20	1,010	25	1,230	29	320	33	370	16	470	20	600	26	220	30	260
1997/98	19	940	22	1,090	29	310	30	330	15	460	18	530	19	170	25	220
1998/99	19	930	22	1,110	27	290	30	320	15	460	19	560	21	180	25	220
1999/00	19	960	23	1,150	26	280	30	330	16	480	20	590	23	200	26	230
2000/01	19	940	23	1,140	24	250	29	310	17	510	21	630	20	180	23	210
2001/02	18	880	21	1,060	25	260	30	320	15	460	19	560	18	160	20	180
2002/03	19	940	22	1,070	23	240	26	280	17	520	20	610	21	180	21	190
2003/04	17	860	19	960	22	220	25	260	15	470	18	540	19	170	18	160

1. Due to rounding, the estimates for children, working age adults and pensioners may not sum to the total for all individuals.

2. 1996/97 is the baseline year

Source: Scottish Executive, 2005.

**Table 2**  
**Socio-economic classification of economically active population aged 16-74, 1991 and 2001**

% in columns Socio-economic classification	Year	
	1991	2001
Large employers and higher managerial	2	4
Higher professional	5	7
Lower managerial and professional	20	25
Intermediate	17	13
Small employers and self employed	8	8
Lower supervisory and technical	10	10
Semi-routine	17	16
Routine	19	12
Full-time student	1	4

*source: Census 2001 (Table 16); the balance of the percentages is people who could not be classified. (In Paterson, et al, 2004: 179)*

**Table 3**  
**Self-perceived class<sup>1</sup>, by broad socio-economic group, 1979 and 1999**

% in rows within year	Year			
	1979		1999	
Self-perceived class	working class	middle class	working class	middle class
Broad socio-economic group <sup>2</sup>				
Professional and managerial	42.2	50.0	51.8	43.5
Intermediate non-manual	52.8	30.3	56.1	38.8
Junior non-manual	71.6	19.3	72.6	26.1
Skilled manual	78.4	10.8	82.8	14.6
Semi-skilled manual	84.2	10.5	79.1	15.7
Unskilled manual	81.3	6.3	79.6	15.3
All	62.8	20.9	69.2	26.9

*source: Scottish Election Survey 1979 and Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 1999, in Paterson, et al (2004: 99)*

<sup>1</sup> Balance in each year is percentage not acknowledging a class identity.