

## **RC Politics Parliament in View**

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### **Adoption Bill Proceeding**

The Adoption Bill has completed its second stage in the Scottish Parliament. The final chance to make changes to the bill rests on a final debate which will be held in the Parliamentary Chamber. Despite containing many measures which have been welcomed as an improvement to the adoption system, the bill is fatally flawed due to the inclusion of provisions to allow homosexual and unmarried couples to adopt.

This change, say the Executive, is necessary to widen the pool of potential adopters and unfortunately this view is supported by the vast majority of MSPs. In reality only 0.15% of households are headed by a same-sex couple according to Census figures. This would mean that statistically the change would not even account for one extra adoption per year, bearing in mind that only around 400 adoptions per year take place at present. Of these approximately 20 adoptions are by single people.

The education committee which progressed the bill had two homosexual members and the committee members all endorsed the new measures. Amendments aimed at improving the bill were brought forward by two Labour MSPs, Michael McMahon and Paul Martin, (not members of the responsible committee) who felt they needed to intervene in the proceedings. Non-committee members are not allowed a vote at stage 2 and the amendments were not voted through, but they can be debated at stage 3.

Roseanna Cunningham of the SNP spoke powerfully against the proposal to allow homosexuals to adopt and she acknowledged the pressure she felt for being so out of step with the majority of other members who have now passed a long list of pro-homosexual measures. Cunningham is likely to attempt to have an amendment removing the provision to allow homosexual couples to adopt debated at stage 3. It will at least allow voters to see on record the views of their elected members should the amendment be permitted time during the debate.

As well as permitting homosexual couples to adopt, the bill could threaten the existence of Catholic adoption agencies. They could be challenged to place children with couples who are not married. The McMahon amendment aims to provide protection to such agencies but it is being argued that the parliament does not have the authority to legislate on this matter as it pertains to discrimination which is a reserved matter. Regulations going through Westminster, *see accompanying article on Religious Freedom*, will also have a bearing on the future of Catholic adoption services.

### **Prostitution Bill Struggles in Committee**

The Prostitution Bill aims to balance the punishment of men and women involved in prostitution by focusing on punishing kerb-crawling. It has been argued that the present law is tougher on women who can be prosecuted for soliciting whilst it does not forbid kerb-crawling.

The bill would make the seller and purchaser of sex both liable to prosecution under the circumstances described in the bill. These circumstances, however, are poorly defined in the bill, claim witnesses to the committee. The MSPs seem to share that view. The definition in fact would only cover cases where a man stops his car and engages a prostitute in conversation. The majority of kerb-crawling incidents, where men drive very slowly following women, would not be covered by the legislation as it is presently worded. Police giving evidence to the committee stated that they did not believe the bill would be enforceable as it stands. Nationalist MSP Fergus Ewing stated that it is the matter of purchasing sex which is wrong and that this needs to be made illegal.

### **It's Only Fair**

The campaign for Fair Trade has been growing in Scotland for some time. Recently it received further backing from the Scottish Executive when First Minister Jack McConnell announced criteria to enable Scotland to become a Fair Trade nation. In his speech, he recognised that "Fair Trade is not about charity – it is a way to ensure workers receive fair prices and decent working conditions". The statement which contains benchmarks for measuring future progress, includes action at national and local level. Expectations are, for example, that 100% of local authorities will have active Fair Trade groups working towards Fair Trade status, 75% of people will buy a Fair Trade product every year and 40% of people in Scotland will regularly buy Fair Trade products. There are also expectations of a greater role for education.

For more information see [www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2006/07/03112221](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2006/07/03112221)

### **Another Perspective on the Environment**

We are living in the fossil fuel age and it will come to an end just as the stone age came to an end, not from lack of resources but from better and cheaper alternatives.

This was a point made by Bjorn Lomborg in a presentation given in the Scottish Parliament. The energetic academic presented a fascinating account of the challenges of environmental change and placed these changes firmly in a context of how seriously it will affect life on earth.

His view is not popular with environmentalists who believe he is downplaying the need for action on the environment.

His facts and figures were however impressively delivered and he seemed to have all the evidence to back his views in the face of some hostile questioning.

Some facts he highlighted -

-The world is likely to warm by 2 to 3°C in the next century and the changes will affect developing countries most because they are poor and cannot meet the costs of adapting to change.

-The solution of implementing the famed Kyoto Protocol to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions will have a miniscule impact on global warming. Yet it will cost far more than it would to provide the whole world with clean drinking water and sanitation.

-Air and water purity have steadily improved and are cleaner than they were in the middle

ages.

-Development gives greater opportunity to tackle environmental degradation and lack of development kills vast numbers.

Death by inhaling particles produced by burning smoky fuels e.g. wood, is a major environmental hazard to human lives. The development of fossil fuel sources such as gas are cleaner and reduce such risk.

His presentation emphasised that we need to be level headed when addressing problems. We should be aware of the damage that reducing CO2 emissions will have .

He asked pointedly *“Do we want to help more well-off inhabitants in the Third World a hundred years from now a little or do we want to help poorer inhabitants in the present Third World much more?”*

He showed that the short-term impact on the environment needs to be assessed in this broader picture and in light of the inevitable move to solar and renewable energy.

### **Socialists Unite for Easier Abortion**

Marchers marked thirty-nine years since the passing of the Abortion Act with a torchlight procession in Glasgow in October. Despite the appalling slaughter of hundreds of thousands of unborn innocents during those years, it appears that pro-abortion advocates remain unrepentant. These advocates were supported by a handful of MSPs in holding a ‘pro-choice’ week of action and calling for still easier abortion. Socialist MSP Carolyn Leckie proposed a motion supported by several other Socialist MSPs including Tommy Sheridan and Green MSP Patrick Harvie, demanding that the “right to abortion” be “enshrined” in Scottish law. The killing of unborn babies has continued to rise in Scotland reaching a new high of more than 12,000 last year. This is despite the increased promotion of contraceptives and the growing use of the Morning After Pill which must account for many more lives lost. A more appropriate motion would be to seek that the “rights of the unborn” be “enshrined” in Scottish law.

Ironically the new socialist party created under the banner Solidarity contrasted its values with the catholic Solidarity of Poland which led to peaceful collapse of socialism. The Scottish MSPs of that party called for a “Polish Right to Free, Safe Abortion” in a parliamentary motion — the lengthily worded motion hit out at current proposals to change the Polish constitution to ban all abortions. This, argued the motion, would be “in violation of the rights of women to planned parenthood and is at variance with human rights and European standards” .

Perhaps the concern shown for all members of society in Poland may help change those European standards.

### **Knife Crime**

A roadshow was launched by Justice Minister Cathy Jamieson and head of the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU), Detective Chief Superintendent John Carnochan, aimed at tackling the problem of knife crime. It is set to visit areas hard hit by violent crime beginning with Govan and Greenock.

The eight week campaign is to be backed by initiative is backed by radio, newspaper and bus adverts, outdoor posters and marketing combining to cost £580,000.

The latest initiative follows on from a year of work which has included the introduction of

stiffer penalties for knife crime and a knife amnesty which collected 12,500 deadly weapons from the street. Further information will be produced in local media.

### **Legislation in Progress**

Adoption and Children (Scotland) Bill (Ex) (Education Committee), Stage 2 completed 8/11  
Adult Support and Protection (Scotland) Bill (Ex)(Health Committee), Stage 1 Report published 10/11

Airdrie-Bathgate Railway and Linked Improvements Bill (P) Preliminary Stage, 7/11

Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Bill (Ex) Stage 1, 22/11

Bankruptcy and Diligence etc. (Scotland) Bill (Ex) Stage 2 completed 7/11

Cairngorms National Park Boundary Bill (M) Introduced 21/09

Christmas Day and New Year's Day Trading (Scotland) Bill (M) Stage 1 Report (Justice 1 Committee) to be published 14/11

Civil Appeals (Scotland) Bill (M) Introduced 29/09

Commissioner for Older People (Scotland) Bill (M) Stage 1, 14/11

Criminal Proceedings etc. (Reform) (Scotland) Bill (Ex) Stage 2 (Day 3), 15/11

Crofting Reform etc. Bill (Ex) Stage 2 (Day 1), 15/11

Custodial Sentences and Weapons (Scotland) Bill (Ex) Stage 1, 21/11

Edinburgh Airport Rail Link Bill (P) Consideration Stage, 21/09

Education (School Meals etc.) (Scotland) Bill (M) Stage 1, 21/11

Glasgow Airport Rail Link Bill (P) Consideration Stage, 14/11

Health Board Elections (Scotland) Bill (M) Stage 1, 14/11

Home Energy Efficiency Targets (Scotland) Bill (M) Introduced 19/09

Legal Profession and Legal Aid (Scotland) Bill (Ex) Stage 2 completed 31/10

*Stage 3 amendments may now be lodged with the clerks to the Justice 2 Committee*

Planning etc. (Scotland) Bill (Ex) After Stage 2, 14/11, Stage 3, 15 & 16 November

Prostitution (Public Places) (Scotland) Bill (Ex) Stage 1, 7/11

Protection of Vulnerable Groups (Scotland) Bill (Ex) Stage 1, 15/11

Provision of Rail Passenger Services (Scotland) Bill (M) Stage 1, 9/11

Rights of Relatives to Damages (Mesothelioma) (Scotland) Bill (Ex) Stage 1, 29/11

Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Bill (Ex) Stage 1, 15/11

Scottish Commission for Human Rights Bill (Ex), Passed 2/11

Scottish Register of Tartans Bill (M), Introduced 27/09

St Andrew's Day Bank Holiday (Scotland) Bill (M), Stage 2 completed , 7/11

Tourist Boards (Scotland) Bill (Ex), Passed 25/10

Transport and Works (Scotland) Bill (Ex) Stage 1, 7/11

Treatment of Drug Users (Scotland) Bill (M), Introduced 29/09

### **In Brief**

#### **Sign of Cross**

The recent controversy arising from a complaint against the Celtic goalkeeper at an Old Firm match prompted a response from Elish Angiolini, the then Solicitor General. She stated, "making the sign of the cross does not constitute a criminal offence."

#### **What's a family?**

Two elderly English sisters have launched an attack on inheritance tax rules which require them to sell their family home to pay taxes if one of them dies. They are highlighting tax laws which now allow co-habitants to benefit from avoiding inheritance duties while discriminating against two unmarried sisters in their eighties, who have lived in their jointly-

owned Wiltshire home for their entire lives. They are taking their case to the European Court of Human Rights.

### **Quotas and Fines**

Home secretary John Reid has announced plans to allow a quota of about 1800 skilled and 20,000 unskilled workers to be given permits to work in the UK. This will be accompanied by £1,000 on-the-spot fines for those found working illegally. The plan is aimed at limiting the number of arrivals to the UK from Bulgaria and Romania when the two eastern European states join the EU in January.

### **Burden of Checks**

Wendy Alexander voiced concern that new laws aimed at protecting vulnerable groups could lead to a massive bureaucracy by requiring huge numbers of individuals to go through checks before being allowed to come in to contact with vulnerable people. The Protection of Vulnerable Groups (Scotland) Bill is still at Stage 1, it could require up to a million adults in Scotland to be checked.

### **Support for European Finances**

A house of Lords committee has backed the financial integrity of the European Union, which they say has been unfairly tainted with a reputation for fraud and corruption.

The refusal of the European Court of Auditors to give the accounts for the EU's £81bn annual budget a clean bill of health for the past 12 years was widely "misunderstood", and the committee called on the auditors to distinguish between losses due to fraud and "administrative mistakes" in future reports.

The committee, chaired by Labour peer Lord Radice, heard from the head of the UK's National Audit Office, Sir John Bourn, that he would not be able to give the British government the all-clear if required to give a single statement of assurance on all its accounts.

### **Regulations Clash with Religious Freedom**

The government is to introduce regulations aimed at eradicating discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation in the provision of goods and services but will not distinguish between homosexual orientation and homosexual behaviour.

Ministers are presently examining the exact wording of the new laws which will be passed in April of next year.

Members of Parliament at Westminster may be able to influence the decision as to how extensively these regulations will impact on everyday life. The proposals so far promise to pose severe problems for those who cannot in conscience support homosexual relationships. Organisations and individuals may find themselves forced to promote or condone homosexual behaviour or face prosecution. The tendency to raise the preferences of homosexual groups to the status of rights now brings these rights into conflict with long held rights held by every member of society. The concern is that the trend has been that the wishes of homosexual campaigners trump the rights of others.

The Bishops' Conference of Scotland has produced a paper responding to the initial proposals which can be found at <http://www.rcpolitics.org>

The Bishops' Conference notes in particular the threats to individual conscience, Church facilities, education and adoption services.

Write to your MP or the minister Ruth Kelly asking for support in recognising the right to freedom of conscience and religious belief which are now under threat due to these

regulations.

## **Consultations**

### **Selected Consultations** (with closing date)

Lifelong Learning Strategy Consultation (05/02/2007)

Education Appeal Committees (16/02/2007)

Making sure that crime doesn't pay (09/02/2007)

Refresh of Adult Literacy and Numeracy in Scotland (ALNIS) Report (09/02/2007)

Transport (Scotland) Act 2005 - Road Works Secondary Legislation (Pt 2: Penalties, Disputes & Training).(18/12/2006)

Review of Home Education Guidance (16/02/2007)

Consultation on technical aspects of snaring (30/01/2007)

Consultation on draft Gambling Act 2005 regulations dealing with premises licences in Scotland (22/12/2006)

Public Health Legislation in Scotland: A Consultation (12/01/2007)

Diffuse Water Pollution from Rural Land Use - Consultation on proposed Regulations relating to General Binding Rules (19/01/2007)

Future European Structural Funds Programmes in Lowlands & Uplands Scotland 2007-2013 (08/01/2007)

Future European Structural Funds Programmes in Highlands & Islands 2007-2013 (08/01/2007)

Reorganisation of Charities (12/01/2007)

Proposed Merger of Bell College of Technology and the University of Paisley (11/01/2007)

Implementing the Water Environment and Water Services (Scotland) Act 2003: Proposals for environmental standards and conditions - phase 1 (13/12/2006)

Consultation on Procedures to be Exempted Under Section 20(5) of the Animal Health and Welfare Scotland Act 2006: The Prohibited Procedures (Exemptions) (Scotland) Regulations 2007 (05/01/2007)

Proposals for a Coastal and Marine National Park (10/01/2007)

Rights of audience - guidance for applicant bodies (10/01/2007)

Licensing (Scotland) Act 2005 - Consultation on draft guidance for Licensing Boards and draft regulations (08/12/2006)

Extension of Criteria of Blue Badge Scheme (29/12/2006)

The Waste Management Plan for Scotland Regulations (29/12/2006)

Science and innovation strategy for Scotland (05/01/2007)

Consolidation and alignment of Student Support Regulations (22/12/2006)

Subordinate legislation to reduce the minimum frequency of inspection of certain care services by the Care Commission under the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001 (08/12/2006)

Direct Payments for self-directed care : Draft policy and practice guidance (21/12/2006)

Statutory Consultation on Review of ROS (Support for Wave and Tidal Power) 2006 (12/12/2006)

National Review of the Early Years and Childcare Workforce - Report and Consultation (22/12/2006)

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