The Story of THE RIGHT TO EXIST

THE CLYDEBANK INDEPENDENT RESOURCE CENTRE

Chik Collins
School of Social Sciences
University of the West of Scotland

Oxfam
Supported and funded by Oxfam

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Contents

List of Abbreviations

AGM	Annual General Meeting
BBF	Building Brighter Futures/Building Better Futures
BMP	Benefits Maximisation Project
CAB	Citizens Advice Bureau
CDC	Clydebank District Council
CFB	Clydebank Fights Back
CHA	Clydebank Housing Association
CIRC	Clydebank Independent Resource Centre
CLWD	Community Links West Dunbartonshire
CPP	Community Planning Partnership
CRF	Community Regeneration Fund
CUCRC	Clydebank Unemployed Community Resource Centre
CUUP	Clydebank Unemployed and Unwaged Group
DHSS	Department of Health and Social Security
DWP	Department of Work and Pensions
FLAG	Ferguslie League of Action Groups
GEAR	Glasgow Eastern Area Renewal Project
JSA	Job Seekers' Allowance
NUWM	National Unemployed Workers' Movement
PPA	Priority Partnership Area
ROA	Regeneration Outcome Agreement
RP	Regeneration Programme
SCVO	Scottish Council of Voluntary Organisations
SDA	Scottish Development Agency
SIP	Social Inclusion Partnership
SLA	Service Level Agreement
SOFFA	Scottish One Fund For All
SRC	Strathclyde Regional Council
STUC	Scottish Trades Union Congress
SURF	Scottish Urban Regeneration Forum
TGWU	Transport and General Workers' Union
UAG	Unemployed Action Group
UCS	Upper Clyde Shipbuilders
UP	Urban Programme
URC	Urban Regeneration Company
UWC	Unemployed Workers' Centre
WDC	West Dunbartonshire Council
WDP	West Dunbartonshire Partnership

The Right to Exist: The Story of the Clydebank Independent Resource Centre

Book launch in Clydebank Town Hall, 22nd May 2008

A launch for this book was arranged, to coincide with the Annual General Meeting of the Clydebank Independent Resource Centre, ahead of the book's anticipated publication in May 2008. Events, including the progress of a certain Scottish football club in European competition, conspired to ensure that the book was not back from the (Airdrie based) printers in time for the launch. Nonetheless, the launch went ahead with some improvised copies – and was a great success.

The delay in publication affords an opportunity to report a little of what happened on the day. Firstly, here are some views on the book from people who kindly agreed to speak at the launch, and who were able to read the book in advance.

John McAllion (former MP and MSP)

"Usually when a pile of paper produced by an academic or a consultant lands on my desk my heart sinks. But this book is very different. Chik Collins writes in his introduction that he is trying to tell the story of a fascinating organisation, and to make it readable and engaging for as many people as possible. He has succeeded very well in that. At times the book reads like a political thriller. As I read the Centre's story I continually found myself remembering the same kinds of things happening at the same points in time in my own city of Dundee. And this is because in bringing the story of the Centre to life Collins crystallizes a whole range of issues and problems which are of vital relevance, not just to Clydebank, but to towns and cities across the whole of Scotland, and in fact much of the UK. It is a story which not only pays fitting tribute to what has been achieved by the local community in Clydebank, but which skilfully exposes the manipulation, misrepresentation, half truths and at times downright lies which have far too often been perpetrated in the name of 'regeneration' in Scotland."

Stephen Boyd (Assistant Secretary, Scottish Trades Union Congress)

"For some time we at the Scottish Trades Union Congress have been concerned about the quality of the research and evidence on which debate about social and economic questions in Scotland is based. This is very much the kind of work which can help us to improve the quality of the debate. In particular it can help us to do better in addressing the problems of local communities in the future. It reveals not just how poorly the so-called regeneration and anti-poverty initiatives have performed over the past 30 years, but also the apparent reluctance on the part of so many to confront that reality and to draw the relevant conclusions. Most importantly, for us at the STUC, it highlights the importance of the Clydebank and District Trades Council to the success of the Centre over almost four decades. In doing so it reminds us of the kinds of positive links between trade unions and local communities which were so important in the creation of the STUC in the first place. We need now to return to and nurture these links more in other towns and cities, because increasingly it is not only local communities which are challenged by poverty and regeneration; our own members are facing those challenges too. The STUC will be helping to disseminate this research, and seeking to act on its recommendations."

Danny McCafferty (Former leader of West Dunbartonshire Council and long-standing supporter of the Centre)

"The Right to Exist *is a serious academic work written by someone who has many years' experience in his field. But it is written in a way which is very unlike most academic research, as a story in which there are real people who come to life off the pages. Chik Collins tells their story with a warmth and feeling which shows that he has understood who they are and what they have stood for over the years. That is so important to the local community in Clydebank. But it will also be important in ensuring that this is a book which other local communities will be able to read and learn from. Too much research is written for government and agencies. It might as well have 'communities keep out' printed on the title page. Not this one.*"

Louise Carlin (Country Programme Manager, Oxfam)

"At Oxfam we do not share the view that poverty is the unavoidable consequence of economic forces working at the global level. We take the view that it is the entirely avoidable consequence of decisions and omissions which favour the richer nations of the world, and certain groups within those nations. In particular, women and girls remain consistently at most risk of poverty throughout the world because of both poverty and discrimination. We also take the view that if poverty is to be tackled, then the frequently heard rhetoric about empowering local communities has to translate into a real shift in power towards women and men experiencing poverty and communities finding solutions for themselves. Chik Collins's telling of the story of the Clydebank Independent Resource Centre is not only unusually readable as social and economic research goes, it also provides striking confirmation for the views that Oxfam holds and the way it works. For here is the story of a community having doggedly to defend its right to identify and respond to local needs over many, many years, to great effect in the face of political decisions and policies which have at times made matters worse . The story of the Centre provides a clear example for other communities to learn from. It also poses very stark questions for those in power in Scotland to ensure that policies actually create real changes for the many thousands of women, men and children who still live in poverty in what is an affluent, developed country."

At the end of the proceedings, a special presentation was made to two 'Bankies – George Cairney and Patricia Rice – to acknowledge the special contributions each has made to the Clydebank Independent Resource Centre over many years. In recognition, the Centre's new premises now bear a special plaque:

The Right to Exist
Clydebank
Independent Resource Centre
Book Launch
Thursday 22nd May 2008

In recognition of George Cairney, Patricia Rice and many others who have supported us in our struggle to survive and who have always believed in our right to exist.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all of the staff, volunteers and users of the Clydebank Independent Resource Centre, who made me feel very welcome, made themselves available for discussions, and answered my many queries and requests for information and clarification with courtesy and patience. Thanks also to Oxfam Scotland for providing funding to help to cover the costs of the research. Further thanks to both the people at the Centre and to the people at Oxfam Scotland – in particular Jim Boyle – for the patience which allowed me the time to write the story of the Centre in the way I felt was needed.

Anyone who has read anything based on research in Clydebank in recent years will probably have seen other authors write that the staff in the Local Collection at Clydebank Library – in particular Pat Malcolm and Mary Frances McGlynn – could not be more courteous or helpful. I can confirm that is indeed the case, and I add my sincere thanks to them both.

Thanks also to Louise McGrath in the Innovation and Research Office at the University of the West of Scotland for her great help with administrative matters. Finally, thanks to John Foster and Mae Shaw for comments and suggestions on a draft of the work, and also to Darryl Gunson – who spent a good few of his lunch breaks listening patiently and advising accordingly.

1. Introduction: Why write the 'story' of the Clydebank Independent Resource Centre?

This book tells 'the story' of what is today called the Clydebank Independent Resource Centre (CIRC). It has been written because people working on Oxfam's UK Poverty Programme in Scotland came to the view that a work telling the Centre's story could make an important contribution to the development of genuinely community-based responses to the experience of poverty in contemporary Scotland.

The Centre's story is that of an organisation which has remained solidly rooted in its local community for well over three decades. During that time it has worked consistently, and with success beyond all reasonable expectation, to express and address the needs of that community. It has been able to continue to do that in circumstances where other organisations might well have lost their independence, been co-opted to the agendas of others, and quite possibly been killed off – all occurrences which have been rather too common in the stories of other community organisations.

Across its life-span the Centre has also witnessed the coming and going of a bewildering range of so-called 'regeneration' projects, which have been initiated by different governments and have involved a wide range of organisations and agencies. Its own record of enduring achievement stands in stark contrast to the records of these projects, and of many of the organisations and agencies associated with them. Indeed the story of the Centre provides a very productive perspective from which to view and critically assess the nature and role of 'regeneration' over three decades.

All of this means that the Centre's story does indeed seem to have some rather special significance. If policy makers at national level really want to begin to understand how to develop 'community based initiatives' and how to 'combat poverty', then they would do well to begin by learning about what the Centre has achieved and how it has achieved it. It has actually delivered results where official – and often very expensive – regeneration programmes have conspicuously failed, and it has done so on the basis of at best very modest support from government.

At the same time, and rather more importantly, the story of the Centre also offers something of great importance for local communities. For it can help community organisations, and those sympathetic to them, to begin to think beyond the largely defensive lines along which they have tended to respond to the experience of poverty and 'regeneration' in recent decades. It seems to help, that is, in beginning to think more positively and expansively about possibilities for the future.

A Story with Special Significance

The main lines of the existing defensive responses are familiar. Over the years community organisations have understood that there is much that is wrong with the operation of 'regeneration' projects. They have understood that too often external agendas have been imposed, and that these have borne little relation to the priorities local communities would have chosen. They have understood that despite the many years of talk about 'community participation' and more recently 'community engagement', typically it has been far too difficult – and generally not possible – for communities to exercise meaningful power in deciding how initiatives have been framed and progressed. They have seen that activists and organisations who have challenged this have too often been put under very real pressure for trying to stand up for their communities. They have understood that far too often the reality behind the

public relations exercises and the high-sounding jargon of the 'regenerators' has been a rather unpleasant – and at times deplorable – attempt to manipulate and control local communities to secure the implementation of external agendas. And they have understood that typically such 'regeneration' projects have failed to make things significantly better for their communities – that too often such limited 'regeneration' as has taken place has been outweighed by ongoing 'degeneration', and by problems getting worse.

These responses are well-founded. They express the 'hard' experience of many organisations and activists over many years, and they remain an important part of the learning that still needs to take place. But they *do* remain largely defensive. What has been more difficult for community organisations, and for others who really do wish to see genuinely community based responses to the experience of poverty, has been to offer a more positive and expansive view of possibilities for the future. It is here that we find the real significance of the story of the Centre in Clydebank.

Firstly, the Centre's capacity to maintain its independence over such a protracted period demonstrates very clearly the counterpoint between, on the one hand, a genuinely community based organisation, and its role in and relation to wider organisations, initiatives and developments, and, on the other hand, the kinds of manipulation, co-option and control which many other communities have complained about consistently over many years. It demonstrates positively what has in fact been possible for an organisation which has known what it has been about, which has known how to look after itself when the going has been very tough, and has then also actually been able to *do* that. Without all of that the Centre, as we shall see, would have ceased to exist long ago.

Secondly, the fact that we are able to chart the broader history of 'regeneration' policies against the history of the Centre gives us the kind of sustained, grounded perspective that allows us to go beyond a largely defensive critique of those policies. It allows us, that is, not only to say *that* policy has repeatedly failed, but to begin to say *how* and *why* it has failed. In doing that we are able to understand rather better just *why* the experience of community organisations has been along the lines described above, for we are able to begin rather more effectively to reveal the true character of what has been called 'regeneration' policy.

The crucial contribution that the story of the Centre can make in the current context would seem, then, to be in helping to facilitate this step from a largely defensive response to the experience of recent decades, towards a rather more positive view of the possibility for the re-emergence of genuinely independent, community based organisations, linked to a wider critical analysis of the forces and policies that have worked in recent decades to contain and suppress them.

A key part of the argument which is ultimately put is that the Centre's capacity to sustain its independence is strongly linked to its roots in, and continuing relationship to, the trade union movement – both locally (through the local Trades Council), and nationally (with the Scottish Trades Union Congress). These roots and relations have shaped the identity and purpose of the organisation, and have helped to give it a clarity of aim and consistency of purpose which have allowed it to chart a path through the minefield of shifting agendas and institutional landscapes over the years. It has also meant that the organisation has been able, in charting that path, to draw on the vital knowledge and understanding which key individuals have acquired through their previous roles as active trade unionists and as shop stewards.

It seems to be this trade union link, above all else, which has meant that the Centre has had the capacity for flexibility and adaptability through changing

circumstances, but at the same time the understanding to know when important lines needed to be drawn, and the conviction and support required not to cross them – so resisting co-option and maintaining that all-important independence. And this, it will be argued, is a very important pointer, both for community organisations as they seek to meet the intensifying challenges of the currently developing 'regeneration' agenda, and for the trade unions who are themselves showing increasing concern about the implications of ongoing developments in the field.

Before proceeding to tell the story a few preliminaries are in order. Firstly it is necessary to say a little more about how it came to be written. Secondly, it will be necessary to do a little to introduce the reader to the Centre, and to draw out from the first impressions some of the key underlying issues which led people to believe that its story would be worth telling. And thirdly it will be necessary to say a little about how the story is written, where it begins, and how it develops. These preliminaries are dealt with in the remainder of this introduction.

Local Communities, 'Regeneration', the Centre and Oxfam

The proposal to write the Centre's story arose out of its participation in a series of community conferences on Clydeside in recent years. The Centre hosted the fourth in the series in November of 2006. The previous three conferences had been hosted by communities which, like Clydebank, are witnessing the very large-scale work of 'regeneration' ongoing along the banks of the river. The first was in Govan in 2004, the second in Partick in 2005 and the third was in Port Glasgow in early 2006. The conferences were attended by individuals and organisations from a range of other communities on the wider map of 'regeneration' in Scotland – for example from Greenock, Paisley, Barrhead, Alexandria and the Renton, North Ayrshire, Edinburgh (notably Craigmillar), several other parts of Glasgow and Dundee.

The attitude towards 'regeneration' at these conferences has been consistently critical and questioning. Communities have been asking: 'Regeneration' of what, and for whom? To what extent will the poor communities, in whose name 'regeneration' is typically justified, actually be its beneficiaries? Or will others be the main beneficiaries – perhaps developers, and those able to afford those 'luxury' properties?

This critical and questioning attitude has not reflected some deep desire on the part of the communities to be 'negative' or 'pessimistic'. It has reflected instead a decades-long experience during which promises of 'regeneration' have been made, and hopes and expectations raised, but in which the actual outcomes have, at best, fallen far short. To many it has seemed that through the various 'generations' of 'regeneration' initiatives, not only has the situation of the poorest communities not improved very much, but that too often things have seemed to become rather worse.

At the first three conferences local community organisations had been seeking to share their experiences of these processes, to build a picture of how things had developed in recent decades, how they found themselves facing a new 'regeneration' agenda, and how it was that so many were seeing major new property developments in their areas. They had been trying to figure out the ways in which the new situation challenged their communities, and the ways in which it might be turned to their advantage. Crucially, they had been trying to begin to build upon, and move beyond the limits of, their existing kinds of defensive responses to the experience of poverty and 'regeneration' in recent decades.

By the time of the Clydebank event there were signs that this was beginning to happen. Those participating in the conferences felt that they were 'getting a handle' on their situation. A more coherent 'voice' was emerging – more confidently

expressing the needs and concerns of local communities. The input from Clydebank on that day in November 2006 was important in further progressing and projecting this emerging 'community voice', which, thanks in part to the efforts of a press officer working for Oxfam Scotland, was covered widely in the Scottish media.

The capacity of the Centre to play this role reflects both the experience of the town in recent decades and also the way in which the local community has responded to it. Across this time processes of political and economic change have delivered great benefits to some sections of the UK population – particularly to better off groups, and even more so to the very richest. But they have also generated great poverty, have intensified the way in which it is experienced, and have often concentrated it in particular localities. Clydebank's experience, like that of too many other communities in Scotland, reflects the latter processes very much more than the former.

But the local community in Clydebank has also, to a much greater extent than many others, proved able to sustain its own organised and independent effort to ameliorate its problems. The Centre has been a very big part of that. In its current form it has some 15 years of experience in expressing and addressing the needs and concerns of the local community. But the current organisation emerged out of a predecessor, the Clydebank Unemployed Workers' Centre, which played a similar role through the 1980s – in the wake of the industrial closures and 'downsizings' which decimated the town's economic base. That organisation in turn emerged out of an Unemployed Action Group dating back to the early 1970s – when the first wave of *mass* unemployment in the post-war period really began to impact on the west of Scotland, and on Clydebank in particular.

While the current Centre is in ways quite different from these predecessors, in other ways the organisation seems to have absorbed and preserved, in the transition from one form to the next, much of the learning and experience that each form embodied. And included in that is a lot of learning and experience in relation to 'regeneration'. This began with the construction of new industrial estates in the early 1970s – in the hope of generating new employment in the area. Then came the Scottish Development Agency's "Task Force" and the high profile "Enterprise Zone" which operated throughout the 1980s. That was followed by a Smaller Urban Regeneration Initiative in 1993, and then the Priority Partnership Area (PPA) of the mid-1990s. In the later 1990s that PPA became a Social Inclusion Partnership (SIP). And a few years later 'regeneration' took another new turn with the creation of an Urban Regeneration Company (Clydebank Re-Built), and then a new Community Planning Partnership (CPP) to take over the 'regeneration' brief of the SIP. Then, in 2006, Clydebank was designated as part of the larger Clyde Corridor – the number one national regeneration priority for the Labour-Liberal coalition at that time.

The community in Clydebank has seen all of these phases of 'regeneration' come, and it has seen all but the most recent of them go – though one has a fair sense this will also happen in due course. Unfortunately, far too few of the aims of each phase of policy have ever been met before things have moved on to a new phase. This leaves the observer with a distinct impression of the transience of national policy and particular initiatives, set against the dogged, long-term commitment of a local organisation to the needs and interests of the community it serves.

It was this impression which so interested the people at Oxfam, and which led them to believe that the story of the Centre could make an important contribution to the development of genuinely community-based responses to the experience of poverty in contemporary Scotland. In the spring of 2007 Oxfam approached the author, who had been an invited speaker at the community conference in Clydebank,

with a view to obtaining a 'report' which would document something of the history and contribution of the Centre, set against the background of the coming and going of the various phases of 'regeneration' through the years. This book is the result. It has been produced in the belief that the experience embodied in the CIRC, and often meticulously detailed in its records, constitutes a rich resource which can contribute quite significantly to our understanding of the problems and challenges that face local communities, and to our perspective on how communities themselves, and indeed others, might usefully respond. Telling the story of the Centre is the necessary first stage in tapping into that resource.

Meet the Centre: First Impressions and Underlying Issues

Before setting out to tell the story of the Centre, let us first try to do a little to acquaint the reader with both the place, and its people, and to further draw out some of the underlying issues which seemed to make its story worth telling.

The Clydebank Independent Resource Centre was, as the research for this work was beginning, located in a former 'gate house' belonging to a local firm called RHI Refractories (formerly Thor Ceramics). The Centre moved into these premises, in Stanford Street in the town's Whitecrook area, in July 1992 – at that time under the name of the Clydebank Unemployed Community Resource Centre. It initially occupied part of the building, but later gained the use of the whole, and subsequently the use of further space around the building to develop a crèche and other facilities in portacabins. It has since moved from Stanford Street to new premises on the Dumbarton Road in the Dalmuir area of the town. But here let me try to introduce you to the Centre as and where I found it when beginning to research its story - in the summer of 2007. What follows is from my notes on an early visit.

> The Centre is staffed by a Co-ordinator, Mary Collins, who has been in post since February 1992, together with 3 full time workers. A General/Information Worker, Julia Doulati, organizes, amongst other things, a range of education and training activities. Janice Dickson is a Welfare Rights Worker, and Kirsty Cullen is the Centre's Debt/Money Advice Worker. There is also a part-time Financial Administrator, Vicki Cullen, and a part time Cleaner, Brenda King .
>
> The Centre takes pride in the extent and quality of input from volunteers, who deal with tasks in reception, administration, welfare rights and money advice, data recording and statistics, counselling, and various other aspects of the work and upkeep of the Centre. Current volunteers include Catherine Gray, Ellen Hamilton, Isabella Traynor, John McDermott, Sandra Doig, Pam Smith, Patti Riach, Jacqueline Murray and George Cairney. Over the years there have been many, many more.
>
> The appearance and initial impact of the Centre belies its location in a less than scenic industrial district of the town. For a visitor, the immediate impression is one of care – an impression that this is a centre which people care about very much, and which itself obviously cares very much about the people who come to make use of its services. Obvious efforts have been made to make the place bright and welcoming – from the investment in the garden and the extensive external art work, to the internal displays which tell of the history and activities of the Centre and its users over the years. These bright and welcoming physical aspects of the Centre are an extension of the character of the staff and volunteers who have made it that way, and who receive visitors and users in that way. They are made to feel welcome and worthwhile, they are listened to, and offered help and support by people who share an *ethic* of care.
>
> Beginning to explore a little further, the visitor will be struck by the 'depth' of the Centre. What seems like a fairly small building as one approaches turns out to be deceptively large internally, and to have a wide range of activities going on at any one time. As I visited, I found the Co-ordinator at work in her office, a group receiving tuition in the adjacent computer suite with the Information Worker, various staff and volunteers receiving and dealing with clients on welfare rights and money advice matters, and a group just about to start a Spanish class with a tutor from a local further education college. This was just in the main building, and it was by no means a particularly busy day. In the portacabins there would usually have been other activities going on,

but volunteers were now working in preparation for the Centre's rapidly approaching move to new premises.

My first impression was that a visitor would quickly come to feel that the Centre was a very important part of, and contributor to, the life of its local community: working to maintain and repair the fabric of community life, and helping to develop the knowledge, skills and potentials of people who are out of work (and of some who are in work too). And the visitor would be right in that, for, as I was soon to find out, the Centre's role in, and contribution to, the local community has been the subject of a raft of monitoring reports and evaluations over the past 15 years. These have been consistently positive, have demonstrated some striking achievements, and not a few have been effusive in their praise. In recognition of these achievements the Centre was presented with a plaque by the local council in 1999: "In recognition of their commitment to the people of Clydebank". It also received an award in 2003 from the Scottish Urban Regeneration Forum, and shortly afterwards its co-ordinator, Mary Collins, was awarded an MBE for her contribution to the community over the years. It is only on the basis of the achievements that these awards recognize that the Centre has been able to obtain the funding necessary to its continued existence.

From this, however, the visitor might also make the assumption that the story of the Centre has been one of steady progress – a story in which its evident contribution to the life and development of its community establishes the need for its continued existence, allowing it to build steadily, and with a degree of confidence and certainty for the future. But that would *not* be right, in fact it would be very misleading, for in this regard there have always been 'issues'. Maintaining the Centre in existence has been *anything* but straightforward.

Of course, the same thing could be said about many voluntary organisations over the past 30 years. Not a few of these years have been years of crisis and change for local government, for the voluntary sector, and for the framework of 'urban regeneration'. But what is perhaps most intriguing about the Centre is that it has managed to continue to exist, to function, and indeed to enhance and progress its contribution to the life and development of its community, through all of that. It seems in some ways, curiously, to have thrived amidst the adversity that has 'buried' many other community organisations in other 'regeneration' areas. What makes that 'feat' of survival and development all the more intriguing is that the Centre has maintained an ethos which reflects its trade union roots and relations, and which, while it is undoubtedly crucial to the contribution it makes to the community, might seem to many observers to be likely to place it 'at risk' from the 'partnership' agenda which has developed in 'regeneration' during its lifetime. For, as we shall see, despite demonstrating significant flexibility and adaptability through changing circumstances, in other ways the Centre seems not always to have fitted very well with the 'required profile' of a 'community organisation' in the 'partnership' framework. And in the field of 'regeneration', survival has very often depended on fitting in with the latest agenda – other merits notwithstanding.

For the Reader

So how is it that all of this has happened? The book seeks to begin to address that question. It is not an 'evaluation' or a 'value for money' report, though some of the findings of the reports on the Centre which have dealt with those subjects will be reported along the way. Rather it is told as a 'story' that seeks to account for how and why *this* Centre has been able to survive, develop and contribute as it has over so

many years, where other organisations have struggled and died. And it seeks to begin to extract from the 'story' of the Centre what we might find to have broader relevance to community organisations – like those participating in the community conferences around Clydeside – and to all who wish to contribute to the struggle against poverty, and for the *meaningful* regeneration, not just of land and buildings (important though that undoubtedly is), but of our poorest *communities*, and the lives of the individuals and families who make them up.

Before beginning the story it is also necessary to say something about how it is written. It is a detailed and at times complex story. It attempts to chart the experience of the Centre against the development of 'regeneration' policy in recent decades, which means also linking it to developments in politics and economics. In some ways it is as much a story about the policy and politics of 'regeneration' seen from the perspective of the Centre as it is a story of the Centre in and of itself. But that is necessary, because the Centre does not exist 'in and of itself', and its story wouldn't actually *be* 'its story', and would tell us much less of value, if it were approached too narrowly. Moreover, as we have seen, the fact that the long history of the Centre makes possible a *broader* perspective on the development of politics and policy over such a sustained period is a big part of what makes its story so significant – and which helps to facilitate the progression towards a more expansive response to the experience of poverty and 'regeneration' than we have hitherto typically seen.

Given the necessary detail, and at times the complexity, the story could be 'hard going' for the reader. I have tried to avoid that, and to make it readable and engaging – to hew from the mass of Centre records, reports, minutes, correspondence, and other documents a *story* which does justice to the genuinely fascinating organisation that we are here dealing with. The reader will judge whether and how far I have managed to do that – but I *have* tried. In so trying I have sought to avoid cluttering the story with the footnotes and references which one might expect to see in standard academic work. I have limited myself to footnotes where I quote from academic texts. Where I am making use of other documents, reports, newspapers and so on, it should be clear what they are. If there are occasions where that is not the case, the reader can feel free to ask me. Equally, if the reader has anything to add to the story, or any suggestions to make, then I would be more than pleased to know.

Unfortunately, the field of 'regeneration' is awash with abbreviations and acronyms. I've tried to keep these under control, and have provided a list of those which are used at the beginning of the book.

Finally, it is probably also helpful to acknowledge that the reader might at first be surprised by where the story begins, for it begins not just before the Centre was formed, but before the town of Clydebank itself was in existence. As the author I am also a bit surprised by this. I originally agreed to spend about 12 working days pulling together some materials from the Centre's archive, and had imagined that I would be writing a short 'report' about the past decade and a half. But as what I regarded as the salient questions formed in my mind, I was led to reflect on the significance of the Centre's roots in organisations and 'traditions' which long predate 1992. So, I ended up digging rather deeper, and longer, than I had imagined. And ultimately I was led to realise the way in which those previous organisations and longer-standing traditions reflected the particular way that the town of Clydebank itself came into being. I was led to realise that one significant key to understanding the Clydebank Independent Resource Centre lies in its *being in Clydebank*. When it's put like that it hardly sounds surprising, so let's start there.

Part 1
From the ‘Risingest Burgh’ to the ‘Enterprise Zone’

Clydebank’s ‘breakneck’ industrial development in the late 19th and early 20th century fosters a tradition of independent community organization in responding to local problems, with key roles played by trade union and socialist activists. This long-standing tradition is reflected in the activity of the Unemployed Action Group in the early 1970s. This group, initiated by the Clydebank and District Trades Council, responds to the growing crisis of unemployment as the town’s economic base is steadily eroded by lay-offs and closures. In the early 1980s this organization develops into the Clydebank Unemployed Workers’ Centre, which takes up residence in the newly-created Clydebank Business Park – part of the Conservative Government’s ‘Enterprise Zone’ which is supposed to ‘regenerate’ the town.

2. Something about Clydebank: From the 'risingest burgh' to the 'right to work'

Clydebank did not exist as a town until 1886. It emerged in the 15 years prior to that as a kind of late 19th Century 'new town' – and a booming one at that. The town developed rapidly around two principal industrial concerns, both of which were to remain almost synonymous with the town for the greatest part of the next 100 years. The first was the Clyde Bank shipyard, which was relocated down river from Govan in 1871 to land formerly known as the Barns o' Clyde. The yard, from which the town was duly to take its name, was subsequently acquired – in 1899 – by a Sheffield steelmaker and armaments producer, John Brown & Co. It was soon to be one of the best equipped in Britain, responsible for building some of the most prestigious vessels of the age for the likes of Cunard and the British Navy. The second concern was the Singer sewing machine factory. Relocated from Bridgeton, Glasgow, in the mid-1880s, within a few years it was employing 5,000 workers and manufacturing 10,000 machines weekly in what was reputed to be the largest and most modern factory in Europe. By 1911 it had over 12,000 employees turning out over a million sewing machines a year. By the start of the century a further shipyard was being established by William Beardmore at Dalmuir, just to the west of John Brown's yard. During WWI, as Beardmore diversified production, his workforce grew to some 13,000.

The 1911 Census shows the massive dominance of local employment by these concerns. It also shows that Clydebank not only provided employment for its own residents, but for large numbers residing outwith the town (perhaps as much as 60% of the Singer workforce – which would do much to explain why it needed its own railway station). With transport links improving, and an expanding pool of skilled labour, other industries were attracted. These included D. & J. Tullis, manufacturers of laundry equipment, and the United Co-operative Baking Society. In 1906 the Clyde Navigation Trust established its Rothesay Dock, to the East of the John Brown yard.

The "risingest burgh'

This industrial boom saw Clydebank mushroom. In 1873 the population was 2,700. By 1886 this had more than doubled and Clydebank was a burgh in its own right. By 1913 the population had risen to 43,000, and the town was being referred to as "the risingest burgh". Local librarian and writer Pat Malcolm sums all this up rather well:

> The period 1870-1914 saw Clydebank's transformation from a rural community to the fastest growing town in Britain. During this period, it became world-famous as a centre of shipbuilding and as the home of the world's largest sewing machine factory. This was, indeed, boom time for "The Risingest Burgh".[1]

The point here is not to try to give an extended account of the town's early years. That has been done by others, and the above outline draws liberally on their work.[2] The point, rather, is to make clear that the town, and of course its community, were created in a 'breakneck' industrial surge on a 'green field site'. Clydebank mushroomed in the industrial boom, and, perhaps unsurprisingly, it was subsequently to prove particularly vulnerable to the fortunes of industry – particularly its ill fortunes.

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[1] See *The Clydebank Story* at www.theclydebankstory.com

[2] See esp. *The History of Clydebank*, compiled by John Hood, Parthenon Publishing Ltd, Cornforth, Lancs, 1988.

> "Granny Kate was regarded as a Communist, because in those days anyone with strength of character and a mind of their own was regarded as a Communist, indeed all the people of Clydebank had the reputation of being Communists." (Meg Henderson, *The Holy City*)

The economic slump of the early 1920s and the depression of the 1930s brought very great hardship to Clydebank. In 1919 there were some 500 people unemployed in the town. By 1921 this had increased ten-fold. In the same year local people formed the Clydebank Unemployed Workers' Committee. This local organisation became part of the National Unemployed Workers Movement (NUWM) in 1925. In the later 1920s, as unemployment fell, the local organisation rather tailed off, but it was to return to prominence as unemployment rocketed in the early years of the decade that followed. In 1932 Clydebank was one of the worst hit towns in Britain – with a colossal 50.4% of the insured population unemployed.

This organisation of the unemployed is indicative of a more general disposition on the part of local people towards finding collective solutions to their problems. This seems to have emerged out of the peculiarly 'breakneck' pattern of the town's development, which, even in the 'boom times', made life difficult.

Housing was a particular difficulty. Here the problem was generally less to do with quality than in nearby Glasgow – because most of the building was relatively recent. Rather the strain on supply caused by the town's rapid growth led, in the predominantly privately rented housing market, to increasing rents. At the same time, due to the hostility of employers like Singer to trade unions, wages locally remained low. The result was problems of what we might now call 'affordability' in housing. If this was an issue in 'boom' times, it was all the more so in times of recession.

The local community organised. Throughout the 1920s in particular there was sustained and highly successful resistance, organised through the Clydebank Housing Association (CHA), against rent increases by private landlords. These increases came with the easing of wartime rent restrictions which had been imposed by government in response to rent strikes in various parts of Britain – but particularly in Glasgow – in 1915. The CHA response combined a rent strike with an "extraordinarily successful legal campaign … at Dumbarton Sheriff Court", which involved intelligent exploitation of legal loopholes to justify the withholding of increases.[3] The legal campaign was backed up by extensive grass roots organisation to obstruct evictions, with local women and members of the NUWM playing a key role.

Tom McKendrick's summary of the rent strike stresses its "huge impact on life in the Burgh" and its importance in "fostering a strong community spirit and identity".[4] In order to grasp *how* important we should remind ourselves that the ordinary people of Clydebank were still at this stage in the process of *constituting* themselves as a community – as what we now call 'Bankies'. And this meant that, not just some other aspect, but a *central* aspect of the "spirit and identity" of that community was linked to the idea of *sustained, independent organisation and action from within the local community itself* to address the problems which emerged as the town grew, and as it was affected by wider developments in economics and politics.

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[3] Iain Russell, "The Clydebank Rent Strike", in J. Hood (ed), *The History of Clydebank*, Parthenon Publishing Ltd, Cornforth, Lancs, 1988, p.83.
[4] See *The Clydebank Story* at www.theclydebankstory.com

Of course, Clydebank was by no means unique in this respect; working class communities in other towns and cities demonstrated similar tendencies. But there is little doubt that these tendencies were rather more pronounced in Clydebank than in most other places, and that this was related to the 'breakneck' nature of the town's development highlighted above.

It was also related to the presence in the town of numerically small, but nonetheless very influential, groups of socialist and trade union activists. There were, of course, always also people who were not members of any other organisations, and who contributed to, and at times led, local community organisations. But a good number of activists over the early decades of the 20th Century were associated with organisations like the Socialist Labour Party and the Industrial Workers of the World ('the wobblies'), the Independent Labour Party, and later the Labour Party and the Communist Party of Great Britain. The latter, in particular, played a key role in the local branch of the NUWM, and from the later 1930s had a presence on the local council – in Finlay Hart. This is not to suggest that the wider community as a whole shared the beliefs of these political organisations. But 'ordinary people' generally did tend to respect and admire the commitment and effort which many of those organisations and activists showed in working for their local communities, and it is important not to underestimate their contribution in shaping, not an overt political ideology, but that "strong community spirit and identity" identified by McKendrick – and the beliefs and values that went with them.

The experience of these inter-war years left a deep impression on the people of Clydebank, as it did on the people of many towns across Britain. What is often referred to as the 'post-war consensus' in British politics, with its commitment to full employment and collective social welfare provision, reflected the popular sentiment that the hardships of the inter-war years were not to be *allowed* to recur. Those who had endured the hardships of war were not to be forced to endure unnecessary hardship in the time of peace. This sentiment was undoubtedly popular in Clydebank.

A Community at Risk: From 'the Clydebank Blitz' to 'the Right to Work'

One of the reasons for the popularity of that sentiment in Clydebank was that here the hardships of war had been particularly severe. This was due in particular to the onslaught by German bombers on the nights of 13th and 14th March 1941, in what became known as the Clydebank Blitz. The *official* statistics record that 528 people were killed during those nights, that 617 were seriously wounded and that many hundreds more were injured. A lot of people felt the *actual* numbers were considerably higher. Three quarters of the town's housing was destroyed or rendered unfit for habitation. Only seven houses out of some 12,000 were left undamaged. The town's population fell to 2,000 as the remainder – around 48,000 – were evacuated.

So the people of Clydebank emerged from the World War II literally rebuilding their town – and with perhaps an even more acute sense than most that those who had endured the hardships of war should not in peacetime be forced to endure unnecessary hardship of the kind experienced in the 1920s and 1930s. And there is little doubt that the response of local people to increasing unemployment some 20-25 years later drew on that past experience and that sentiment, and how they had been conveyed, by those who lived through them, to the next generation.

This increase in unemployment in fact began in the late 1950s. The "inexorable and steepening rate of increase" is evident in the table below.[5] What is initially most striking is the relative severity of the problem as early as 1971. Thinking back, there is perhaps some tendency to date the problems of deindustrialisation and unemployment to the later 1970s and early 1980s. But these problems, while they were to be brought into even sharper focus in the years ahead, were already very significant a decade prior to that. The problems were more acute in Scotland than in England, and in the west of Scotland more significant still. And, in a society which had become accustomed to the idea of 'full employment', there was a real awareness and a growing concern about this. Clydebank was seen, and indeed saw itself, as a town in crisis, and on the verge of a much bigger crisis.

Unemployment in Clydebank, 1951-1971			
Year	Male Unemployment	Female Unemployment	Total Unemployment
1951	2.2%	2.0%	2.1%
1961	3.4%	2.6%	3.2%
1971	9.5%	4.4%	8.6%

It was in this context that Clydebank came to feature prominently in the event which probably did more than anything to shape the attitudes of people in Scotland to the re-emergence of mass unemployment in the 1970s – the UCS Work-In of 1971-1972.

The John Brown yard was by that time part of a consortium of four shipyards created in the late 1960s under Harold Wilson's Labour Government – called the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders (UCS). The other yards were upriver at Govan and Linthouse, on the south side, and at nearby Scotstoun on the north side. When Edward Heath's Conservative Party came to power in 1970 the Clydebank yard had a workforce of 4,011. However, under a 'restructuring' plan previously drawn up by the Conservatives in liaison with shipbuilders on the lower Clyde – as yet unknown to the public – John Brown's was to be closed. In the precise language of that plan, forever associated with the name of the Conservative strategist Nicholas Ridley, the yard was to be a victim of the 'butchering' of the UCS.

This reflected a broader policy change in the Conservative Party. It was actively seeking to break with the 'post-war consensus' and the commitment to full employment and social welfare. The 'butchering' of the UCS was a part of that. In the summer of 1971 Heath's government forced the consortium into liquidation. The proposal was to create a much smaller company at just two of the yards – Govan and Linthouse. It was to employ just 2,500 out of the total workforce of 8,500. Clydebank and nearby Scotstoun were to close altogether. On the day of the closure announcement a journalist working on the *Glasgow Herald* described Clydebank as "like a town in mourning": "groups discussed the decision in hushed tones, creating the atmosphere normally found at the scene of a disaster".

The workers of the UCS did not accept the government's proposals, and responded by taking over the yards and continuing to work – in a 'work-in'. They received overwhelming support from across Scottish society, and from the people of Clydebank in particular, who feared that their *survival as a community* was again in jeapordy. The Provost, Bob Fleming, declared that "the government were trying to do to Clydebank what the Germans had failed to do during the Second World War".

[5] See Professor William Lever, "Shipbuilding in Decline", in J. Hood (ed), *The History of Clydebank*, Parthenon Publishing Ltd, Cornforth, Lancs, 1988, pp137-138.

It is against this background that one of the key leaders of the work-in, a local man called Jimmy Reid, is still vividly remembered for the remarkable way in which he expressed the case for saving the UCS – with all four yards operating and without redundancies. Himself a Communist and local councillor, as well as a UCS shop steward, Reid drew upon the memory, still very much alive, of the unemployment and hardships of the inter-war years, and he connected that to the challenges the community now faced. He was able, it seemed, to speak on behalf, not just of the UCS workers and their communities, but of workers and communities under threat more generally from the government's new policies on industry, employment and welfare. He spoke on behalf of workers and communities who would not accept "that faceless men, or any group of men in Whitehall or anywhere else, can take decisions that devastate our lives with impunity". He spoke in plain, understandable terms about the importance of work to the most basic human dignity, and about how enforced redundancy and unemployment threatened and undermined that dignity. The 'work-in' itself was to act as a living demonstration of all of this. It was not 'a strike', but a reasonable response on the part of responsible people, acting with dignity and discipline on behalf of workers and communities across Britain, to try to preserve their "right to work".

In presenting the case in such terms, Reid did much to build the broad base of public support which helped to sustain the work-in through to its largely successful conclusion more than a year later. But in doing so, he and his fellow shop stewards also did much to shape the attitudes of people in Scotland to unemployment, and to help to define a broader political culture, which was to persist for many years, based on the defence of 'social democratic' ideas of full employment and social welfare, and opposed to the 'neo-liberal' policies which had such grave implications for Clydebank, and for Scotland more generally. In the years ahead the Scottish Trades Union Congress was to become the key institutional expression of this culture.

In the meantime this culture manifested itself in Clydebank in opposition to the Conservatives' 1972 Housing (Financial Provisions Scotland) Act. This was designed to increase rents for council housing, and to make the better off tenants, rather than the Exchequer, pay for the rent rebates of the poor. The Clydebank Council, led by Labour but with three Communists councillors, one of whom was Jimmy Reid, was one of a number of authorities that refused to implement the Act into 1973. A year later it refused to implement a second phase of increases and was fined £20,000. The Act was repealed when Labour returned to power in 1974.

The Deluge Delayed

One consequence of the success of the work-in, linked to the broader opposition to the Conservative's new agenda, was that the Heath government made its infamous 'U-turn' – a turn away from neo-liberal policies, and back towards something rather more in line with the social democratic consensus of previous decades. And so it is no exaggeration to say that in 1971-72 the ordinary communities of Clydebank were very much at the heart of events which were vitally important in shaping government policies on industry and employment, and how unemployment was to be seen and understood by the public more generally for years to come. This did much to build the confidence of these communities – for they had shown great resilience and not a little talent in their endeavours.

It is also no exaggeration to say that significant elements in the Conservative Party strenuously disapproved of this turn of events – and no doubt of the self-confident communities of ordinary people who had brought it about. And these

elements were duly to ‘turn’ the Conservative Party back towards its neo-liberal policy agenda when they found themselves in opposition in 1974 – electing a certain Margaret Thatcher to lead the Party in 1975. It was a sign that in the years ahead the local community in Clydebank was going, more than ever, to need to draw on the memory and traditions of the 1920s and 1930s.

3. What's Bred in the Bone: The Unemployed Action Group

Heath's U-turn did not mark the end of the challenge posed by industrial closure and unemployment to the people of Clydebank – quite the reverse. The campaign for 'the right to work' achieved a very significant, but ultimately partial and temporary success. There was no 'inevitably' about this; things could have turned out differently. But from today's perspective it is clear that the campaign warded off the worst effects of neo-liberal economic policies for the best part of a decade. In the meantime, unemployment in the town, while undoubtedly much lower than it would have been without the campaign for the 'right to work', remained at historically high levels.

Report from 1973

A useful snapshot of the continuing problems of the early 1970s came to light recently in the form of a video of a Scottish Television programme, called *Report*, made in mid-1973. Written and presented by an Alex Dickson, and directed with some skill by a Charles Wallace, it reports on unemployment in Clydebank, by then at 11% – almost double the Scottish average, and more than triple the average for the UK.

The 'report' features, amongst others, a father and son, both then unemployed. The father, Jim McGahey, then aged 43, is shown doing domestic work in the family kitchen, trying to 'make himself useful'. Like the other unemployed people featured, he expresses a sense of bewilderment at what is happening in his town. He was one of the last people to be made redundant from Babcock and Wilcox in Clydebank, after thirteen and a half years of service. Fourteen months later, and after forty job applications, he had not even had an interview. With unemployed applicants massively outnumbering vacancies, bewilderment was giving way to despair: "The way things are at the moment, things are getting worse in this area instead of better. My chances are getting slimmer as the days go on". His 17 year old son, Paul, was still looking for his first job, and was also beginning to despair: "It's as if nobody cares. I wish someone would care and give me a job". [6]

Bill Curtis, a young welder with a new wife he had met in England and brought back to Clydebank, found himself having to live with his parents and brother because he – like his father and brother – could not find work: "three tradesmen in one house and nobody wants us". Newly built "advanced factories" on the former Babcock and Wilcox site were lying empty, and promises by government and others to find work were coming to nothing. Bill had concluded that with "no job, no house and no prospects" he would need to go to either England or Germany to find work.

If the campaign for 'the right to work' had done something to build the confidence of ordinary communities in Clydebank, this programme gives a very good insight into the corrosive effect of the ongoing deterioration of the employment situation in the town in the following years. But it also clearly indicates that the recourse to collective organisation in the face of unemployment was very much alive. For the programme also features an unemployed man by the name of John Nicholson. Married with three children under 10 – John, Margaret and Janette – he was the chair of the Clydebank and Drumchapel Unemployed Action Group. This group maintained a daily presence at the Clydebank office of the Department of Health and Social Security (DHSS) – known in the west of Scotland as 'the buroo' (deriving from the

[6] Another of Jim McGahey's family, Peter, handed a copy of the video into the Centre in June 2007, and later kindly came to the Centre to talk about it with the author and some of the Centre's Management Committee. Thanks Peter.

word ‘bureau’, as in ‘unemployment bureau’). There it sold its newspaper, *The Voice of the Unemployed*, for two new pence. The group took up the cases of local people to try, as we might say now, to maximise their benefits: “Most cases we lose”, comments Nicholson standing outside the local DHSS, “but in the meantime we’re trying to do the best we can, defending people”. This group was, as we shall see, the direct ancestor of the Clydebank Independent Resource Centre.

The Unemployed Action Group

Nicholson and his group had already, a year earlier, gained prominence in the national press. In June 1972 a feature appeared in *The Daily Record*, with a photograph of Nicholson and other group members, and the appropriate headline: “For The Benefit of All: Out-of work John fights red tape on the dole”. It is worth reproducing the bulk of that feature here, for it contains much that is of relevance to our story.

For the Benefit of all

OUT-OF-WORK JOHN FIGHTS RED TAPE ON THE DOLE

Six months ago John Nicholson was an unemployed labourer, just one of Scotland’s total of thousands. He still hasn’t got a job. But he hasn’t wasted his half-year on the dole.

For 31-year-old John is now an expert at deciphering the mass of rules and regulations governing the Labour Exchange and the Social Security Office.

It started when he heard of a group of men – all on the dole – who had banded together to fight for the rights of the jobless.

Maze

He joined, and now John is chairman of the Clydebank and Drumchapel Unemployed Action Group.

“When I went on the dole,” he says, “I realised there was more to collecting buroo money and social security benefits than simple queuing at the counter.

“There is a maze of rules covering the various benefits available and most working people can’t understand them.”

He spent weeks poring over dozens of Government regulations. “I found that the rules often said one thing, while the clerks at the Social Security Office said another,” he explained.

Now another 150 jobless have joined the group and they hold meetings every Monday to hear the problems of others.

Appeal

Mr Nicholson … said “The Transport and General Workers Union is the only union to give us concrete help – they lend us their Clydebank office for the meetings.

“We are now building up the skill needed to fight the cases we get – as far as the Appeals Tribunal if necessary.”

Already Mr Nicholson and his committee have taken 40 cases to the tribunal in Glasgow, and have provided help for many more jobless in filling in forms.

“We have won six of our cases, which is six more than the individuals concerned could have done. Many of them don’t even realise that if they are refused help they can appeal,” he added.

The rest of the four-man committee are as fervent as the Chairman. And all of them have become heavily involved in trying to unravel red tape.

Former machine operator, 38-year-old Joe McGraw … was involved in fighting his own case.

Right

He explained: “There’s a rule called the wage stop which says that someone unemployed should be no better or worse off than when he was working. Before I lost my job a year ago I was earning an average of £29 a week, although my basic wage was £17 a week. We took the case to the tribunal as the social security only pay me £17. But we lost.

Mr Nicholson added, “We still think we are right. Joe is £12 worse off than when he was working.”

Harry Darby, 56 … is on the disabled register and has been out of work for 18 months.

“Two weeks ago,” he said. “I got a gas bill for £19, which I obviously can’t pay off my £9 a week social security. We tried to get an exceptional needs payment but were refused. We have the appeal coming up at the tribunal.

“There was another case,” Mr Nicholson went on, “where an unemployed lorry driver needed a medical for his Heavy Goods Vehicle licence. Getting the licence meant getting a job. But the social

security wouldn't advance him the £4.50 for the exam. They were refusing him the right to work. The tribunal agreed to pay the money straight to the doctor after we took it up with them."

Branch

He added: "We are trying to become a branch of the trade union movement, since most workers do not know their rights. We are here to explain them, and if need be, fight for them.

As the article indicates, the group was not initiated by Nicholson, but by others. Who were they? Here we are able to draw on the recollection of someone who was there. Danny McCafferty was an early member of the group and has been involved in, and associated with, the organisations which have 'descended' from it in subsequent decades. Despite his then tender years, he wrote for *The Voice of the Unemployed* in the seventies, and participated in the activities of the group. Its key early figures, he recalls, included Eddie Kelly, who will figure prominently in our story as it proceeds, together with Chick Kilpatrick. Both were well-known trade union and community activists in Clydebank, and were involved in particular with the Clydebank Trades Council. It is from within this organisation that the original impetus for the creation of the group came. Kelly and Kilpatrick seem to have seen Nicholson's talent and encouraged him to play a leading role.

The limited success rate with tribunals in the early years did not discourage the group, and its capacities and achievements developed and improved. Danny McCafferty recalls that over time a rather positive relationship developed between the group and the management and workers in the local DHSS. Group members, and Nicholson in particular, really *did* become "experts", and worked in conjunction with the 'buroo' to *avoid* the cost and hassle of tribunals – by laying out their case to make it clear that the claimant would be likely to win. In McCafferty's words: "There was a respect there. The manager of the local office trusted John Nicholson, and acknowledged that he knew the system better than many of his own staff. Members of the group became something like advisors to him".

Prior to this, however, McCafferty recalls an overnight occupation of the 'buroo' – entirely peaceful of course. It was called at short notice by the group in response to fears that claimants would lose benefits due to the difficulties which the local office was having in keeping up with the volume of new claims. This meant group members having to stay in the building from the late afternoon without having been able to bring any provisions. Nothing was organised. The response of local people was entirely spontaneous, and indicative of the survival of that "strong community spirit and identity" forged in the 1920s and 1930s. In McCafferty's words, "Local people brought in dinners. Nobody asked them to, it was an absolutely spontaneous response to a situation which they understood."

What's Bred in the Bone …

More research on this group would be both interesting and useful, and the author hopes to be able in due course to undertake some of that. But on the basis of the material and testimony we have here it is already possible to identify a range of features of the group which, as we shall see, seem significant in understanding the organisations which were to follow it – up to and including the current Centre. These are its political independence; its trade union origins, links and aspirations; its emphasis on learning and development; its 'ordinary' language and its emphasis on rights; and its dogged and persistent commitment to its aims and to its community. Let us take these aspects in turn.

Firstly, the group was politically *independent*. Nicholson himself was not even a member of a political party. Interviewed for the Report programme, he was at pains

to stress the political independence of the group as a whole: "Basically we're a non-political group; we've no political ties to any *party*, any*where*". Secondly, while *politically* independent, the group was created by local trade unionists, and was given "concrete help" in the form of the use of the local offices of the Transport and General Workers' Union. The aspiration was for groups like the one in Clydebank to become as Nicholson put it, a "branch of the trade union movement".

Initially this second feature of the group may seem to qualify the first – making it seem less independent. But of course then, as now, people who were members of different political organisations, and a much greater number of people who were members of none at all, were members of trade unions. Moreover, the group's origins in the Trades Council, and its view of itself as part of the trade union movement, were to prove important in *preserving* the independence of the group – and of its descendants.

We can see this if we set the group in the context of the broader proliferation of community groups in the early 1970s. These were the years of the "community action movement", in which local tenants' and residents' associations, and action groups and community newspapers burgeoned. Often combative and assertive, these groups challenged the bureaucratic and paternalist nature of the welfare state. They aimed to transfer meaningful power away from politicians and bureaucrats, and towards local communities themselves – in the name of democracy. Democracy here, though, was not some abstract ideal; it meant ensuring that the bureaucracies responded to the needs of the local communities they were meant to serve.

Through the course of the 1970s the broad legitimacy of the community action movement was, in varying degrees, accepted by local authorities. And at the time of local government reorganisation in the mid-1970s, when the large regional councils were being formed, the movement was seen to be potentially very useful. It could be used not only to help to bring about a more just, and efficient, allocation of resources amongst different communities – by ensuring that the most disadvantaged communities exercised some effective voice in decisions about spending (as better off communities were typically able to do). It could also be useful in helping to improve the 'democratic' credentials of what were large and potentially rather remote new authorities, by securing 'citizen' or 'community participation'. And, of course, it had a use in helping to sustain the fabric of community life in what were increasingly difficult times for a good number of communities.

This kind of thinking led to local authorities, and in particular Strathclyde Regional Council, embracing the idea of 'community development' and employing professional community workers to promote and support community organisation in the poorest communities – which were soon to be identified as Areas for Priority Treatment. In this way, many of the "community action" groups ended up with local authority community workers attached to them and 'developing' them.[7]

The Unemployed Action Group, however, does not seem to have progressed along these lines. This no doubt partly reflects the fact that its concerns were generally less to do with the functions of the local authority than those of tenants' and residents' groups. But it would also seem to be because the organisation looked to the trade union movement for its support and its identity, more than to the local authorities.

[7] The thinking around this in Strathclyde Regional Council was laid out in policy documents like *The Worthington Report: Policy Review Group on Community Development Services* (1978); *Helping the Community to Organise* (1984) and *Social Strategy for the Eighties* (1983).

This seems to have had important implications for the *independence* of the organisation as it developed. For while many local authority community workers were to make significant contributions in the areas they served in the years to come, and were to seek to ensure that local organisations remained independent of the local authorities, in practice, the greater their role and contribution, the greater loomed the possibility of a developing *dependence* on the local authorities. In practice many organisations did become overly dependent on community workers, and many more were to be largely created and led by them. As the political context changed, this was to prove problematic for many groups – but perhaps less so for the descendants of Clydebank's Unemployed Action Group. Local authority community workers would in the coming years contribute to the development of the group, but never to the extent that the group became dependent on, or led by, them.

A third feature of the group is closely related to this. The group did not look to development workers, but looked to *develop its own workers* – by building the knowledge, capacities and confidence of its own members. This is very clear in the *Daily Record* report from 1972. Nicholson had by then already become something of an expert, and the group was "building up the skill needed" to represent the needs of the local community. The rest of the committee were "heavily involved" in this, and claimants were encouraged to get "involved in fighting their own case".

This emphasis on learning and development, entirely self-motivated, and the apparent degree of success it achieved, is striking. Today we might refer to it as 'capacity building', or as 'promoting social capital'. But Nicholson and his colleagues had no need, nor one would imagine any *desire*, for these kinds of terms – which are, after all, terms developed by political and professional groups to talk about 'the needs' of poor communities. They are also the kinds of terms, and indicative of a wider and at times bewildering *array* of terms, which those communities often find rather alien. This is the fourth characteristic of the Unemployed Action Group which we might do well to register at this stage. *Its language was rooted in and reflective of the needs and self-understanding of its own community.* Cue Nicholson:

> We demand the right to work, we're just bein' refused it. We've got six or seven factories in Clydebank daein *nuthin*, we've got Scotland West Promotions promisin' to find work, the council, the government are all promisin' us work, and the fact of the matter is there's naebudy daein *anyhing* fur us.

So, in the meantime, the people were doing something for themselves:

> In the meantime we're tryin to do the best we can, defendin' people … We're just trying to get a decent standard of living for the people on the buroo.

If we want to understand the resonance which the group clearly found with its local community, then we should not underestimate the significance of how its representatives spoke about the group and its activities. The key word was simple, popular and widely understood – *rights*. Denied 'the right to work', in the meantime the emphasis shifted to what we would now call 'welfare rights': "Join your local unemployed action group", its members declared as they stood outside the local DHSS, "get your rights off the social security". In a sense, and a very unfortunate sense at that, the campaign for "the right to work" was giving way to a more basic struggle for *the right to exist*.

A final striking characteristic of the group is its rather single-minded persistence. Again this seems to be somewhat characteristic of Clydebank. Organisation on the rents issue in the 1920s spanned the greater part of the decade.

And in the Unemployed Action Group we see something of the *doggedness* which must have sustained that. Cue Nicholson again, being interviewed outside the local DHSS in 1973:

> There's always one of us here every day, continually, day in day out, there's somebody comes out of these exchanges wi a problem.

Every day, continually, day in, day out! And the response to the potentially discouraging acknowledgement that in 1972 only six of 40 tribunal cases had been won? It was "six more than the individuals themselves could have done". What was needed was not self pity, but "building up the skill" to win more cases, and to work to "become a branch of the trade union movement".

…Will out in the flesh

These, then, are five key features of the Unemployed Action Group which emerged in Clydebank in response to the developing crisis of unemployment in the town in the early 1970s: its political independence; its trade union movement origins, links and aspirations; its emphasis on learning and development; its 'ordinary' language and emphasis on rights; and its dogged and persistent commitment to its aims and to its community.

"What's bred in the bone", it is said, "will out in the flesh". And here this saying seems rather appropriate. For, as we shall see, all of the features of the UAG identified above have an enduring relevance to the story of its 'descendants'. The first of these was the Clydebank Unemployed Workers' Centre.

4. Talkin' 'bout Regeneration: The SDA, The Enterprise Zone, and the Clydebank Unemployed and Unwaged Group

Unemployment and its consequences had been very bad in Clydebank in the early 1970s. Within a few years they were to be very, very much worse. Kennedy puts it succinctly: by the end of 1979 developments "threatened to wipe out the town's economic base".[8] The John Brown yard had been taken over by Marathon at the end of 1972 as part of the settlement of the UCS work-in. Marathon was in turn later bought out by Union Industriel d'Enterprise of Cherbourg. Having employed over 4,000 in 1970, by 1981 the numbers would be down to less than 900. At Singer's things were worse still. As recently as 1976 the factory had employed 5,600 people. By the autumn of 1979 the numbers were down to 3,000, and it was being announced that the plant would close permanently in June of the following year.

From Bad to Worse

The combined effects of these, and other, closures and 'downsizings', was that by 1981 unemployment had more than doubled from its 1971 level.

Unemployment in Clydebank, 1971 & 1981			
Year	Male Unemployment	Female Unemployment	Total Unemployment
1971	9.5% (= 1600)	4.4% (= 360)	8.6% (= 1960)
1981	20.8% (= 3023)	9.7% (= 930)	18.2% (=3953)

Professer William Lever sums up the longer term changes as follows:

> In the period from the end of the Second World War to 1980 the industrial structure of Clydebank changed dramatically. It is no exaggeration to say that in 35 years a heavy industrial town, dominated by shipbuilding and engineering, shrank to a service centre with a few local-servicing manufacturing industries and one vulnerable shipyard.

He indicates that the total number of jobs in the town declined from 35,000 in 1950, to some 15,000 in 1981. The balance of the remaining jobs shifted decisively to the service sector – which accounted for less than a quarter of all jobs in 1950, but over two thirds in 1981. At the same time the proportion of jobs held by women increased from a quarter to a half – even though the absolute numbers of female workers fell from the mid-1970s.[9] This would also have meant, unfortunately, and given what we know about segregation and discrimination in the labour market in that period (and still today), an increasing proportion of the workforce on relatively lower wages. Unsuprisingly, in this context the town was to suffer a substantial decline in population, from almost 59,000 in 1971 to just over 51,000 in 1981, and under 50,000 in 1985 – a decline of one sixth.[10]

The impending closure of Singer's in particular focused minds and energies in the town. The response reflected the kind of broad-based campaign which had been seen in the defence of the UCS, and which was to characterise the STUC-led campaigns to defend jobs and communities in the next two decades. The Clydebank

[8] Gordon Kennedy, "The New Clydebank", in J. Hood (ed), *The History of Clydebank*, Parthenon Publishing Ltd, Cornforth, Lancs, 1988, p.205.
[9] See Professor William Lever, "Shipbuilding in Decline", in J. Hood (ed), *The History of Clydebank*, Parthenon Publishing Ltd, Cornforth, Lancs, 1988, pp137-138.
[10] See Andrew A. McArthur, "Jobs and Incomes", in David Donnison and Alan Middleton (eds), *Regenerating the Inner City: Glasgow's Experience*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987.

Campaign on Employment embraced the local churches, the trades council and trade unions, the town's traders, the local authorities and the local MP. From the summer of 1979 it worked energetically to bring investment and employment to the town. What it was offered by government was the opportunity to become the subject of an 'experiment' in urban policy, or, as it is now often called, 'urban regeneration'.

The 'Regeneration' Game

The term 'urban policy' is generally used to refer to measures developed from the later 1960s onwards for intervention in areas of what we might call urban 'degeneration'. The *stated* aim of such interventions has been to improve economic, physical and social conditions in the interests of the existing communities. But the actual experience of 'regeneration' over the past 40 years, and especially post-1979, has led some to argue that there have been other aims, sometimes in addition to the stated ones, and sometimes *in place* of them. We shall, in due course, see the kind of developments that have led some to suggest that.

Clydebank had at this stage not as yet been the subject of a specific 'urban policy' intervention – though it has been subject to them almost continuously ever since. Briefly, this is how such interventions had developed until that stage.

The first broad urban policy agenda, dating from the late 1960s, was called the Community Development Project. It targeted specific neighbourhoods, with the government's stated aim being to find "new ways of meeting the needs of people living in areas of high social deprivation". It was funded through the newly created Urban Programme. There were twelve such Community Development Projects across the UK, but only one in Scotland – in the Ferguslie Park housing estate in Paisley, then with a population of around 12,000 (1972-1977).

By the mid-late 1970s, under the Labour Government of James Callaghan, there was a recognition that the developing problems of unemployment and poverty in urban areas were much broader and more serious than the CDP policy had assumed, and that they were rooted in the serious erosion of the economic base of many towns and cities. The response was to seek more comprehensive redevelopment of areas of greatest need. This was, however, to be funded by the retargeting of *existing* budgets ('bending the spend' is the term used more recently for this), together with an increase in Urban Programme funding earmarked specifically for those areas.

The Glasgow Eastern Area Renewal (GEAR) project exemplified this thinking. It sought to address the deteriorating situation in Glasgow's east end. It started in 1976, and involved a new agency created by the Callaghan government. The Scottish Development Agency (SDA) had powers to promote industrial development and 'urban renewal', and was tasked with leading the broader GEAR project – involving the newly restructured local authorities (Strathclyde Regional Council and Glasgow District Council), and the central government housing agencies (the Scottish Special Housing Association, and the recently created Housing Corporation in Scotland, which were the predecessors of what was later Scottish Homes, and later still Communities Scotland).

In the early years of GEAR these organisations, particularly the local authorities, did not work well together, and the new SDA was itself busy trying to learn how "to undertake political and technical tasks for which neither they nor anyone else in the United Kingdom had much experience".[11] It was still doing that

[11] Urlan Wannop and Roger Leclerc, "Urban Renewal and the Origins of GEAR", in David Donnison and Alan Middleton (eds), *Regenerating the Inner City: Glasgow's Experience*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987, p.69.

when, in 1980, it was given the additional responsibility of leading a "Task Force" to respond to the deepening crisis in Clydebank.

The Herald of Free Enterprise I

By then the SDA was also coming to terms with a new government – the government of Margaret Thatcher – which had a different kind of agenda for 'urban regeneration'. This agenda was to emphasize the role of private enterprise over that of the public sector. The belief was that a thrusting and dynamic private sector was straining against 'the dead hand of the state', and that if 'liberated' it could bring a new wave of prosperity to 'areas of decay'. The idea was that urban policy could be used to demonstrate this as 'the way forward' for the country as a whole.

These were to be the days of 'private good, public bad', of 'personal responsibility', and 'the lady' who, unlike her predecessor Heath, "was not for turning". They were also the days in which men and women who had worked, and shown "personal responsibility" all of their lives, and who found themselves the victims of a brutal process of deflation and deindustrialization, which was not their responsibility and entirely outwith their control, would be told: "get on your bike".

The SDA Task Force arrived in Clydebank in July 1980 – in the form of a team of six people based in an office opposite the Singer factory. Its role, as in the GEAR Project, was to lead the various bodies who had a contribution to make. At the same time it was announced that the town would be given "Enterprise Zone" status – it would, that is, become a testing ground for the Conservatives' new 'free market' orientated 'regeneration' policies. The idea was for the various public agencies to work to create the conditions in which private enterprise would be able to generate wealth and create employment. This was to mean improving the industrial environment, in particular through the provision of attractive premises for smaller firms. Such firms were also to be provided with significant financial incentives to set up in the Zone, where there would also be a reduction in planning controls. As things developed, the idea was that business confidence would grow, public agencies could play a lesser role, and economic development would become self-sustaining.

This thinking was widely criticised at the time. It was at best highly improbable that such measures could lead to anything like the required impact in terms of job creation. But the designation was, in the circumstances, welcomed by the local authorities responsible for Clydebank. The zone, covering some 570 acres overall, was officially designated in August 1981. By March 1982 the SDA had already spent £10.5 million, as, amongst other developments, the 86 acre Singer site was redeveloped as the Clydebank Business Park.

The Clydebank Unemployed and Unwaged Group and the UB40 Centre

Under the Conservative's new agenda, Urban Programme funding was to be cut in real terms, and preference for funding given to schemes involving the private sector, as against 'social' and community projects. Thankfully, this reorientation did not go so far as to eliminate funding for the latter. In fact, the early 1980s in Clydebank saw what had been the Unemployed Action Group of the 1970s develop into a new organisation which was to be the recipient of 'Urban Aid' – as it was generally called. This was the Clydebank Unemployed and Unwaged Group (CUUG), which was duly to create the Clydebank Unemployed Worker's Centre, or, as it was to be commonly known the "UB40 Centre" (the UB40 being the card which unemployed people took with them to "sign on" when claiming benefit at their local DHSS office).

Eddie Kelly was the key figure in this development. Having been involved in the creation of the UAG in the early 1970s, he was, from within the Clydebank and District Trades Council, to be the driving force behind the new Centre. Previously a trade union convener in the nearby Yarrow's shipyard (which was originally part of the UCS, but had been hived off a few months prior to the work-in), Kelly was also a longstanding member of the Communist Party. However, like other members of the Party, he was less interested in 'preaching' politics in his community than in working as a member of the community, and on the community's terms, to help to organise and act on those problems and issues which were of concern. He was clearly a man of great energy, and had a very deep commitment to the community of Clydebank, and to the situation of the unemployed in particular. He was, by all accounts, a redoubtable character, but was open and inclusive in his dealings, and was widely admired and respected in the town for his contribution and commitment over many years. He was to remain active in the Trades Council and involved with the subsequent development of the Centre until his death in 2006. His funeral was a significant event in the town, and a tribute appeared in the local press to a "much loved Bankie" who had been the "champion of the unemployed".

Not all of the papers which would allow us to document the history of the UB40 fully seem to have survived. However there is enough material in the current Centre's records, and in the archives of Clydebank District Library, to allow us to build a good picture. The Constitution of the Clydebank Unemployed and Unwaged Group (CUUG) stated its objects as follows:

> a. To promote any charitable purpose for the benefit of the inhabitants of Clydebank and its environs and in particular the advancement of education, the furtherance of health and the relief of poverty, distress and sickness particularly for those who are unemployed or unwaged.
>
> b. To promote and organise co-operation in the achievement of the above purposes and to that end bring together in association representatives of statutory authorities and voluntary organisations engaged in the furtherance of the above purposes within Clydebank and its environs.

Membership was open to the unemployed and unwaged, and to anyone else who supported the objects of the Group. The Group had a management committee composed of 8 voting members, elected at an Annual General Meeting.

To meet its objects the Group required a base – or 'a centre'. Initially Clydebank District Council provided premises in a building known as the "old bank" at number one Dumbarton Road. The Centre at this stage was staffed by unemployed volunteers. Its operation was overseen by a distinct Management Committee, which consisted of two representatives from Clydebank Trades Council, two representatives of Clydebank District Council and four members of the Management Committee of the CUUG – which was often referred to as the Users' Group. The Users' Group was also allowed a further two representatives without voting rights.

Into the Zone

There are different accounts as to why the Centre had to move from its Dumbarton Road premises – one being that its location was less than ideal and the building more generally not that suitable; and the other the Council wanted to 'redevelop' the area. What is clear is that an approach was made to the SDA, and that premises were secured in the Clydebank Business Park, in two of the newly created "Enterprise Workshops" in North Street.

Now hold that image. Somehow, a Trades Council inspired unemployed workers' centre, which was trenchantly opposed to the kind of neo-liberal thinking

which had inspired the Enterprise Zone, had found its way into that Zone's flagship development. One imagines that those who were busily trying to remake the image of the town might have found that a bit problematic – 'old Clydebank' right at the heart of 'new Clydebank'. In that image we find reflected the deep contradictions of the early 1980s – not just in Clydebank, but across the UK more generally. We also see reflected the deep inadequacy of the thinking and of the 'solutions' in the face of the reality of the problems. It was the kind of image which was perhaps a bit *too articulate*, and it was, as we shall see, duly to prove a bit *too* problematic for the SDA.

Part 2
The Clydebank Unemployed Workers' Centre and the Campaign for its 'Regeneration'

The Centre is considered to be "not compatible with the image of a business park", and is asked to leave its North Street premises. But it defends itself and in the coming years develops into a vibrant organisation, expressing and addressing the needs of its community. As it does so it 'outperforms' the Government's Enterprise Zone, but increasingly finds itself threatened by the developing 'doomsday scenario' in Scottish Politics in the later 1980s.

5. Kelly's Heroes: The Clydebank Unemployed Workers' Centre

The Clydebank Unemployed Workers' Centre was officially opened in 1982 by the Provost of Clydebank – who unveiled a plaque with the following inscription:

CLYDEBANK UNEMPLOYED WORKERS CENTRE

OPENED ON

TUESDAY 31ST AUGUST 1982
BY
PROVOST JAMES MCKENDRICK

DEDICATED TO

ARNOLD HENDERSON

WHO DEVOTED HIS LIFE TO

THE TRADE UNION AND LABOUR MOVEMENT

ESTABLISHED BY

THE CLYDEBANK & DISTRICT TRADES COUNCIL

The continuity with the previous Unemployed Action Group is readily apparent, not just in the person of Eddie Kelly, but in the Centre's relationship with the Clydebank and District Trades Council and in the dedication of the Centre to Arnold Henderson – who had himself been a Trades Council activist, and a prominent local councillor.

Securing Funding

The move to the new premises more or less coincided with an application to secure Urban Aid funding for the full-time staffing the Centre really needed. There was an initial application for a year's funding, which, on the advice of the Scottish Office, was followed up with additional information to justify a further year. This "Supplementary Information" was contained in a "Strategy Paper" prepared by the group, with support from a Regional Council community worker – Charlie Baird.

The paper, amongst other things, reported on a survey carried out by a group of unemployed from across the town. This group had interviewed 363 people outside the local DHSS. The results were very clear: "It was immediately apparent that there is a demand for an unemployed workers centre in Clydebank". 360 of the respondents wanted to see such a Centre, and some two thirds of those expressed an interest in "helping to get the Centre going".

The Strategy Paper is an interesting one (certainly as funding applications go) and it speaks eloquently of the damage being done to individuals, families and communities, and the hurt felt, in Clydebank – and other places like it – through mass unemployment.

> Experience in most industrialized countries … has shown that in general the longer a person is unemployed the less they feel like joining in community life. Confidence goes, energy follows, isolation creeps in and the will is weakened. The consequences affect relationships, health and longevity and it seems as though societies conspire to generate these negative effects for individuals. Such feelings are reinforced when it appears that nothing is being done to reverse the effects and to salvage human potential for better times. …The unemployed should seek each other out, for like bereavement, reactions to losing a job can come out as deep bitterness and anger, and it does no-one good to internalize the feeling and blame oneself.

Being told to "get on your bike" probably didn't help much either.

But a centre for unemployed workers would work to address all of this. It would counter the "forces driving them into hurt isolation", and allow them to develop as a collective element, in which form "they are extremely valuable, for they represent many skills, such experience and powerful potential." Above all, a centre would allow unemployed workers to identify their own needs and to develop their own strategies to fulfil them. To begin with, the survey findings identified needs for: leisure and recreation facilities; information, advice and counselling; skills training; education for social and political awareness; a skills exchange; a welfare rights course, and a claimants' self-help group. The theme of education is particularly stressed – as essential to the "philosophy of the project":

> The Centre should not be viewed as a 'PLACE FOR THE UNEMPLOYED TO GO', it is not an old man's hut! The real potential of the project is … as a creative and innovative programme of self-help. … The unemployed are a potential asset to our society and the unemployed individual must be given the potential to develop his and her full potential and ability.

A Centre doing all of the above would, of course, require full-time staff. The Urban Aid application sought funding for three – a Development and Information Worker who would also manage the Centre, an Adult Education and Outreach Worker, and a secretarial/administrative worker.

The application was successful. A minute of a Centre Management Committee meeting in January 1983, written in Kelly's hand, reports on a second meeting with an "Edinburgh official" at which the grading for the first two workers was established.

From Philosophy to Practice

In October of that year, shortly after the first re-election of Margaret Thatcher as prime minister, the first edition of the Centre's "Newspaper by and for the Unemployed" was distributed in the town – under the title *Work-Out*. It featured an analysis of the ongoing manipulation of unemployment figures. It challenged the government's statistics, but concluded with a more basic appeal to the reality of local experience:

> On an individual level statistics are meaningless. Poverty and a feeling of hopelessness are the realities of unemployment. No government statistical manoeuvres can change that.

It also featured an article by a young person on unemployment in the family – the experience of "the realities of life on the buroo without even having reached school leaving age". Other articles dealt with welfare rights and the controversial Youth Training Scheme.

A subsequent issue from March 1984, the month in which the 1984-85 Miners' Strike began, led on "Women and Unemployment". It gives some more general perspective on the developing activity within the Centre. William Rose had been appointed as Centre Manager, and, more recently Therese Orr had arrived in the role of Education Outreach Worker. The Centre was open from 9.30am-5.00pm each weekday. Games – snooker, board games, table tennis etc – were available in the mornings, but not after 1pm. There was also a Centre football team, outdoor recreation group, and a good-going craft workshop. Welfare rights advice was available each day, with external assistance for more complex cases on a Thursday afternoon from Ben Kelly of Strathclyde Regional Council. An eight week training course on Welfare Rights for Centre users, running on Thursday afternoons, had just got under way. One of the tutors was a Hugh Henry, later a leader of Renfrewshire

Council, Paisley MSP and Scottish Executive Minister. Advice and guidance was being provided in relation to job interviews, and an informal afternoon workshop was scheduled on letter writing, form filling and interviews. The 'informal' was stressed heavily. Continuing education – either in the FE or school sector – was being promoted and encouraged, as was the idea of "community business" as a "fairly recent form of community action".

The balance of activity is interesting here. In reality meaningful employment opportunities were very limited at this time. The Community Programme – a low-paying government job creation scheme – was in the 1980s one of the town's major employers. So it must have at times been difficult to sustain the interest of at least some of the Centre's users in education and development. Surely some would have asked: "Education and development for what?" But clearly a balance was being maintained.

Notice to Quit

After a year at North Street the Centre was advised by its landlord that its ongoing use of Clydebank Business Park premises "was not compatible with the image of a business park". Clearly the SDA could not tolerate any tangible evidence within the Business Park of the underlying problem for which the Enterprise Zone was supposed to be the solution. It was a fact which was perhaps even more revealing about the contradictions of the period than had been the presence of the Centre in the Enterprise Zone in the first place. At one level the blunt statement of that fact was bound to seem as offensive as it did absurd. But in another way, and from today's perspective, at least there was a certain honesty about it. Unwelcome as it was, at least the message was not wrapped up in some flowery language to conceal the unpleasant reality. The Centre was expected to get out promptly.

As we have seen, the local community in Clydebank has a history of opposition to 'evictions', and it was to oppose this one too. Later reports on the Centre record that the SDA was duly "taken to task" by the District Council and the Trades Council for its action. The Centre was then allowed to stay until "mutually suitable alternative premises" were found. Soon premises in the town's Miller Street were identified, but it was take some time before the move there could be organised.

Nonetheless, the premises issue and the publicity surrounding it dented the Centre at an important time – for it had to establish and develop itself sufficiently to be able to justify Urban Aid funding beyond its initial two years. In the summer of 1984 that is what it set about doing.

By August 1984 welfare rights activity had "started to build up again following the publicity that the Centre was remaining for the meantime in the Business Park". The Centre was also developing its participation in a "bulk buy union" and food co-operative. And as part of the education and outreach work, seven users had attended, together with users of other unemployed workers' centres (UWCs) in Scotland, a one day course on the use of video equipment run by the Scottish Council for Educational Technology. They had since been developing their skills. William Rose reported that:

> The group is very enthusiastic and full of ideas, one of them being making a video of the premises at Miller St. going through the various stages until the work is completed.

A further outcome of the one day video course was a discussion about the identity and future of the UWCs across Scotland. A discussion document was then drawn up by four representatives from different regions of Scotland. The UWCs were seen to be

vulnerable to removal of funding by central government in particular. It concluded that "the best protection against this possibility was the involvement and development of the Centres into the mainstream of the trade union movement". This was to prove particularly prescient. Again the themes of user involvement in defining the policies of the centres, together with the importance of education, were heavily stressed.

By May 1985 the Centre's newspaper – now called *Centre Spread* – shows that the UB40 had recovered its earlier momentum. All of this seems to have made an impression on Centre users – according to Danny McCafferty. He suggests that many people involved in the voluntary sector in Clydebank and beyond in later years "learned their trade, their skills, and acquired confidence and self-respect, through the Centre" in the 1980s. The Centre as a whole, in McCafferty's view, had an educational and developmental dynamic about it. Those associated with the Trades Council in particular, he indicates, were the kind of self-educated individuals who valued learning and self-development, and who gave people confidence in their ability and potential. He attributes his own return to education in the 1970s to his participation in the Unemployed Action Group. He himself went on to become a district councillor, leader of the unitary West Dunbartonshire Council, and the education spokesman for the Confederation of Scottish Local Authorities.

If all of this made an impression on the users, it seems also to have made an impression on the Scottish Office official who in 1985 visited the Centre in connection with the application for Urban Aid funding which would secure the Centre for a further five years – until 1990. The funding was awarded. In the meantime with the support "financial and otherwise", of the District Council, the Miller Street premises were readied by December 1985, and occupied by January 1986. It would be interesting to know just *how much* the image of the Business Park improved upon its departure.

A Vibrant Community

The new premises were "adequate but not ideal", yet the Centre flourished in them. By 1987 the new, and very high standard, newspaper had the title *The UB40 News*. Five thousand copies were being distributed throughout the town. That newspaper, and other surviving documents from the period, reveal a vibrant organisation. The Outreach Worker's Staff Report for 1987-1988 begins as follows:

> The last 12 months have arguably been the most successful since the Centre's inception. The Centre has never before offered such a comprehensive range of services and facilities to the unemployed and unwaged in the Clydebank area and this has been reflected in the dramatic increase in the Centre's usage. … It would be fair to say that our profile in the community has radically changed. There should not be one person in Clydebank who has been unemployed for any length of time who does not know what the Centre has to offer. Also our contact with the trade union movement has radically improved and this too has paid dividends for the Centre.

But, reassuringly, there was no complacency:

> It is quite clear that the Centre's strategy of development has been successful. However, we must not be complacent, there have been some projects which have been less successful than others. The weaknesses of these projects should be analysed and appropriate lessons must be learned for the future.

It is helpful to dwell on this report, and a few of the other documents from around that time – for they will help to provide some answers later on.

The report records the existing group activities with the Centre as follows. A large, well-run and successful angling group was bringing large numbers into the

Centre – and no doubt providing some healthy sustenance to local families, "all at nominal cost". An art group was attracting others – every Tuesday from 1pm. The drama group was working on its third production of the year, which it would duly take to Glasgow's Mayfest and to other UWCs, as well as around Clydebank itself. "Those participating", it was reported, "have got a lot out of the group in terms of personal development and the acquisition of new skills … [and] we have the added bonus of the fact that the group has entertained the community as well". The outdoor group was just as active, with some 40 members going through formal training, as well as participating in a wider range of both summer and winter activities. The Centre's administrative assistant – Graham Miller – was training as an instructor for outdoor activities. There was also a video group, and a woodwork group – well equipped with tools, but always on the lookout for wood – which ran all day on Tuesdays and Fridays. Outreach work was also underway with a group of unemployed in the town's Faifley housing estate, and the Centre was allocating £200 to help with the costs of its development.

New groups were starting on local history, and on the issue of unemployment and health, each supported by nine weeks of classes with tutors from Clydebank College. A new welfare rights class to get abreast of recent developments was being pencilled in for June 1988, together with a current affairs class. And a writers group was in the offing, supported by 4 weeks of classes with the writer Carl McDougall.

The 1987-88 report also suggested that the time was right for the Centre to broaden its activities to include more campaigning – "especially in view of the most recent attacks on the unemployed … [which] have left five of the ten million people who live in poverty worse off". It proposed a meeting to try to "work out the best strategy to develop a non-party political voice for the unemployed and unwaged in Clydebank".

Of course there were still games – snooker, board games, etc. – for those who wanted them, and help with welfare rights and employment law: "All queries are dealt with in confidence and no problem is too large or too small". There were around 60 benefits enquiries weekly at the end of 1988 – a dozen a day. On "job seeking advice" there was "a comprehensive service including free access to telephones and typewriters, help with application forms, and we will also help produce CVs". The Centre also had a non-profit making Café, providing "a wide range of wholesome food at very competitive prices" – five days a week.

And there are further indications of a vibrant organisation. One is the level of voluntary input. The annual reports from 1987 and 1989 each mention 13 or 14 regular volunteers – and the latter names them. At the well-attended Users' Group AGM in April 1988 the position of Secretary was contested – with Ruth Cooper winning the vote. Also contested at the 1988 AGM were the Group's positions on the Centre's Management Committee. Seven users contested the four available voting positions, and five contested the two non-voting positions. And at a Users' Group meeting that September, an attendance of 14 was considered a cause for concern. Many a voluntary organisation – then and now – would be delighted with attendances like that. But Ross Rintoul, who had replaced Therese Orr as Outreach Officer, undertook to ensure that more be done to publicise meetings.

That same meeting agreed, with only one dissension, to affiliate to the newly emerging Anti-Poll Tax Federation. It also received thanks from various quarters for the Centre's support in raising community concerns about the development of a new private hospital in Clydebank. Clearly campaigning really had been placed on the agenda.

By the end of 1988 providing space for everything was becoming a real problem – requiring careful programming of activities. The Drama group had raised £2,000, written their own play – "Where the Green Grass Grows" – and performed in Edinburgh and Stirling as well as Glasgow. A Woman's group was in the offing, and the Centre was thinking about the crèche it would need to encourage greater female participation. A subsequent report, which seems to date from 1989, reports both on the consolidation of that group, and also on increased female participation in the life of the Centre: "At the last users' group meeting, out of an attendance of 52, 28 of these were women".

When you go, will you send back a letter …

Let's leave the last word on the UB40, for now at any rate, to one of its users – David McPhail. In later years he was to emigrate to Australia, but not before he had made a vital contribution to the survival of the Centre. In the 1980s he arrived in Clydebank as a newly appointed fire-fighter. He was not unemployed, but in a time of personal need he found his way to the UB40, and he saw in its unemployed users "new hope". When he heard about the research being done for this report he wrote the following recollection:

> I entered the Centre and met a young woman by the name of Ruth [Cooper]. She was very polite and made me feel more than welcome to stay. She invited me to join in the activities the Centre had to offer, going through the different courses with her I actually felt as though she was interested in what I wanted to do.
>
> After filling out a few forms I was shown around. There were some people I remember gathered round an old computer being tutored on how to use it. They were talking about the different commands … there was no windows installed on those machines.
>
> I was shortly introduced to the writers and actors group. Most of the writers doubled up as actors. Kenny [Turlewiscz] and Frank [McNulty] were the two main players and writers of the group, and I was introduced to them straight away. From the moment I joined the group I felt part of something and they treated me just like all the other users.
>
> As time progressed I found other activities to be involved with within the Centre. There was a fishing club which I joined and we used to go on outings to Loch Awe and Loch Tay on occasion, even running our own competitions.
>
> I saw in these unemployed people new hope. They may have been unemployed but they were still active within a community of their own peers and still enjoying life. I never saw drugs or alcohol abuse within the groups and every group seemed to support the other. If there was play the fishermen would go and if there was a trip the actors would reciprocate.

The *unemployed* in 1980s Clydebank giving new hope to the *employed*. That was Eddie Kelly's UB40 Centre. Hang on to that thought as our story proceeds.

6. Caught up in 'The Doomsday Scenario': Remembering the later 1980s

David McPhail clearly has little problem remembering the UB40 Centre in the later 1980s. From afar, he recalls the time fondly and well. But in terms of the wider context, people who remain closer do not always remember that time so fondly, and sometimes not so well either. Memory can be complex that way, and intricately linked with feeling and emotion. Indeed there is evidence from around the world that people, both individually and collectively, sometimes manage not to remember – and at times actively to forget – moments and contexts which pose difficulties for them as their lives develop. Sometimes this is because remembering can be too painful, and perhaps 'inconvenient' in relation to where people later find themselves. In part, this can be linked to the process of a person or group remembering, not simply a context, but *who and what they were*, individually and collectively, in that context – particularly if connecting that to who and what they are in the present is problematic.

Time to Remember?

There is very probably a good case for seeing the 1980s as a whole, and how it is, or is not, remembered in the present in Scotland, in this light. Generally speaking, stories of hope and community resilience like that of the Centre notwithstanding, it's not that nice to remember what happened to individuals, families and communities in that decade – especially when it all touched the lives of so many people personally. Perhaps it would be better just to 'move on'.

But perhaps not. One good reason would be the duty we owe to the people who were the victims. Many of those who were hardest hit in the early stages of the process have since died, and many others are now elderly. Among them were many who gave their young years in the war against fascism. Perhaps we really should recall that they *were victims*, and often badly treated on top of that. Maybe someone could even apologise?

But for those who are not persuaded by such moral consideration for a passing generation, there is a more pressing and pragmatic consideration. It is that the damage done in that decade, in the words of *The Herald* journalist Ian Bell, "leeches through the generations" and continues, not just to affect, but *to define*, the problems which communities face, and which a whole plethora of organisations and agencies are supposed to be addressing. In September of 2007 Bell reported a salient question posed by some Labour MSPs:

> "How do we parent Thatcher's grandchildren: not just the sons and daughters of people whose life chances were stunted in the early 1980s, but the lasting legacy that scars our communities?"

Speaking of the policies of that decade, Bell added: "The young cannot properly explain the baleful effects on their lives, because they have no useful basis for comparison". Perhaps in our schools we could teach them something more about the lives of their parents and grandparents – as a kind of positive alternative to ASBOs? That would be another good reason – and there are more than enough of them – for those who are concerned with the problems of our poorest communities, and indeed the problems of our communities more generally, to try to remember the 1980s.

This applies in particular to the *later* 1980s, because it was in that context that government thinking about 'community regeneration' in Scotland was to mutate along the lines of 'regeneration partnerships'. This thinking has remained more or less intact

ever since – despite its demonstrable lack of efficacy, not just in promoting meaningful 'regeneration', but often even in halting continuing *degeneration*. It has been applied over many years in Clydebank itself.

This raises the question of how the first 'regeneration partnerships' emerged in the later 1980s, how the thinking behind them came to dominance, and continued to dominate even when it was obvious that it wasn't working. And to begin to address those questions, we need to see that thinking as a product of the wider dynamic of society and politics in Scotland in the later 1980s. So let's try to remember that context.

The 'Doomsday Scenario' and the 'dependency culture'

It's spring 1987. A young comedian called Harry Enfield is on the box in the persona of "loadsamoney", "shaking his wad" at the "sad gits" – the poor people in the towns and cities of the north in particular. Then it's the news. Some more of those "uneconomic pits" that the miners tried to defend are being wound down for closure. The Caterpillar plant is to close in Uddingston, despite the 103 day occupation by the workforce. And there's a general election on the way. A Scottish MP is being interviewed, talking about what he calls "the doomsday scenario". It's some bloke called Dennis Canavan. What happens, he asks, if the Conservatives under Margaret Thatcher are returned to power for a third term with a big majority, but at the same time lose heavily in Scotland? What will be the implications for the democratic legitimacy of government in Scotland, particularly given a government so unlikely to compromise with the social democratic preferences of the Scottish people?

In due course the "doomsday scenario" becomes a reality. In June 1987 the Conservatives are returned with a majority of over 100 in Westminster, but are reduced from 21 Scottish MPs to a mere 10. Even in the recent past such a low number had been unimaginable (though within 10 years it was to fall to zero).

Margaret Thatcher can't understand it – she *genuinely* doesn't get why the Scots won't vote for her. After all, she is thinking, the Scots, most notably in the person of Adam Smith, invented the theory of free market economics which her Party has been espousing. That may have been in the late 18th Century, but nonetheless: Surely today's Scots could be expected to be rather better disposed to her free market beliefs? Maybe it was the faint hearts of the Conservative leadership in Scotland that were letting her down? Mrs Thatcher didn't like faint hearts.

Malcolm Rifkind, newly in post as Secretary of State for Scotland, was anxious to refute such a suggestion. His explanation was that the sons and daughters of Adam Smith had themselves become seriously disconnected from the good news that he had brought to the world. They had been allowed to become too dependent on the state in too many aspects of their lives – and now exhibited a "culture of dependency". Rehabilitating the fortunes of the Conservatives in Scotland would require breaking this culture, and cultivating in its place a new "enterprise culture". This would not be a painless process, for the whole point was to deliver to the Scots precisely what they had made clear they did *not* want. But Rifkind assured his mistress that he and his Party north of the border were up to the challenge.

Some of the plans were already fairly well developed and over the next year or two they were to take their final shape. They covered in particular the areas of housing tenure, economic development, training and education, together with the reform of local taxation – in the form of the punitively unjust poll tax – which was later to feed through into the wholesale restructuring of local government. New organisations were created to carry these plans forward – Scottish Homes and Scottish

Enterprise. Crucially for us, urban policy was given a key role in bringing the plans together, beginning their implementation on the ground starting with some of the poorest areas, and establishing the momentum for their broader implementation across the nation as a whole.

New Life for Urban Scotland?

The idea was to attack the 'dependency culture' where it was at its worst. This was no longer in the inner cities which had been the focus of previous urban policy, but in the publicly owned peripheral estates on the outskirts of the major towns and cities. In 1988 a so-called "blue paper" for urban policy, *New Life for Urban Scotland*, designated four such estates as "partnership areas". These were to be the subject of 10 year 'regeneration' projects in which the Conservatives' philosophy of enterprise would be set loose, would gain the upper hand over the 'culture of dependency' spawned by previous governments and Labour local authorities, and would transform the fortunes of the areas and of their people for the better. The belief was that within ten years each of these estates, with their serious social, economic and environmental problems, would be transformed into "well functioning suburbs" of their respective conurbations.

"Regeneration" in this thinking, was a kind of strategic 'cutting edge' in a battle to change the Scottish political culture. But of course it could not be presented that way to the public. Quite the reverse was needed. This is where the language of 'partnership', which remains with us today, came from – with its themes of harmonious and consensual working across the public, private and voluntary sectors, and between central government, local authorities and local communities. It was developed, not in spite of the conflict and disharmony of the time, but *because of it*. It was a way of trying, at least partially, to mask the underlying problem of democratic legitimacy posed by "the doomsday scenario".

The areas designated under *New Life* were Ferguslie Park in Paisley, Castlemilk in Glasgow, Wester Hailes in Edinburgh and Whitfield in Dundee. Each was in close proximity to substantial ongoing property developments – in the cases of Wester Hailes and Ferguslie Park, adjacent to the two largest in Scotland. This was where the private sector involvement for the 'partnerships' was intended to come from. The government itself was to undertake the leadership role in each of the "partnership areas" – seconding senior staff to the areas in question to lead the multi-agency implementation teams. The local authorities were expected to follow their lead, and to play a junior, "enabling role" in relation to the contributions of the other 'partners' – especially the private sector.

This demotion of the (Labour) local authorities was, however, potentially problematic. They clearly had a democratic mandate which the government itself lacked, and so their demotion might tend to compound the problems of legitimacy which the government was already struggling to deal with. The government's clever solution was to play up the merits of *direct* democracy as against *representative* democracy. The local communities themselves would participate *directly* in the initiatives, rather than having the same old councillors, who would be liable to prove a bit 'negative', *representing* them. The local communities were also, it was claimed, to be 'partners' in their own 'regeneration'.

Thus was born in Scotland the agenda for 'urban regeneration' through 'partnerships' involving the private sector, the public sector, the voluntary sector and with the direct participation of the local communities themselves. It is an agenda which has been with us ever since. But it is firmly rooted in and reflects the deeply

conflictual and unpleasant context in which it emerged. It was the context of "There is no such thing as society", and of "The sermon on the mound" – when Mrs Thatcher helpfully explained to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland that 'the good Samaritan' was only able to be good because he went out and made some money first. It was the context in which the poll tax was 'fair and reasonable', and about to improve the quality of local democracy – a context in which the Scots were privileged to have the opportunity to try it out a year ahead of their southern neighbours.

And it was the context in which Rifkind's Scottish Office issued the four new 'partnership' implementation teams with a very clear instruction: "The partners should act in harmony and be seen to be doing so". One can almost hear the "*or else*" hanging menacingly in the air.

The Herald of Free Enterprise II

We left the Centre just as it was joining the Anti-Poll Tax Federation. We have seen that it was in its own way a thriving and vibrant unit. Of course no-one associated with it had any illusion that it could in and of itself transform the fortunes of the people in Clydebank. Its contribution could only ever be a more limited one – helping to make things rather better than they would otherwise be; helping its people, both individually and collectively, materially and mentally, to keep themselves together, and to defend and develop their self-respect and confidence; maintaining and repairing the fabric of community life; raising people's aspirations for themselves, their families, their community and their society. But we have seen that in these respects it was, by the later 1980s, a striking success.

The larger task of seriously improving the fortunes of the town was the responsibility of the SDA and the Enterprise Zone – of the people who hadn't wanted any unemployed centre tarnishing the image of their Business Park. So, if the UB40 Centre was, from its new location, delivering on its undertakings, what was the SDA delivering in Clydebank?

The answer is not nearly as much as had been intended, and not nearly enough to make a significant impact on the employment situation in the town. Certainly a lot of money was being spent. Already by March 1985 the SDA alone had spent some £22 million, mostly on factory construction. Substantial sums were also entailed in rates and tax relief. So there was a lot of *public* investment in this 'free enterprise' zone. That kind of expenditure was likely to have a *physical* impact on the landscape, and it did. But did that translate into a burgeoning free enterprise economy able to impact significantly on the economic and social life of the town?

In reality it had very little impact in this respect. In EZs as a whole – there were 11 in the UK at the outset – most of the jobs that were 'created' would have existed locally anyway. They were in firms which moved short distances to enjoy the advantages of the zone, or in firms which would have started up anyway – regardless of the existence of the zone. A young academic was to conclude in 1987 that:

> All the evidence suggests that Enterprise Zones may help to bring about some physical redevelopment of derelict industrial neighbourhoods …, but they are unlikely to contribute much to the more important job of economic regeneration.[12]

[12] Ivan Turok, "Continuity, Change and Contradiction in Urban Policy", in David Donnison and Alan Middleton (eds), *Regenerating the Inner City: Glasgow's Experience*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987, p. 43

One of his colleagues was to demonstrate that this was very much the case in the Clydebank Zone.[13] But, interestingly, that colleague was also to indicate that while this was widely understood in the academic community, information from public agencies often created a quite different picture. Such agencies made "impressive claims" about their achievements, though often not particularly well founded ones. And this, of course, was the information that tended to be reported to the public – including the public of Clydebank.

This left the public of Clydebank somewhat confused. They were told of such "impressive achievements" and of how things were getting better. But, at the same time, their own experience suggested something different. So did some of the other statistics. The unemployment count in Clydebank in 1987 was in fact almost 400 higher than in 1981 – 4,311 is the figure given by Kennedy (3,193 men and 1,118 women).[14] That is without adjusting for the kinds of ongoing 'changes' to the method for calculating unemployment which the first edition of the Centre's newsletter had been so concerned about. There had been 17 since 1979 – none of which had adjusted the count upwards.

Kennedy's concluding chapter to the centenary *History of Clydebank*, compiled by John Hood from the Clydebank Library in 1988, reflected this confusion. It was Kennedy's task to write about "The New Clydebank", and of course it was necessary to be as positive and as optimistic as possible. He reported both some of those "impressive achievements" claimed by the SDA, but also that paradoxical deterioration in the employment situation. He concluded that: "Despite the improvements made there is still a considerable problem to deal with in Clydebank". It was a considerable problem indeed.

A Pearl in Peril

The experience of the GEAR Project and of the Clydebank Enterprise Zone contributed to growing government disenchantment with the SDA itself. There was no leading role for the organisation in the new "regeneration partnerships" designated under *New Life*, and soon it was to be apparent that the organisation itself was to give way, through a merger process with the Training Agency, to a new agency more in keeping with the new agenda for Scotland – Scottish Enterprise.

This was indicative of the broader response to the failure of the 'enterprise' agenda of the earlier 1980s in places like Clydebank. The government concluded that what was needed was *a more forceful imposition of a more developed enterprise agenda on a much more ambitious scale*. And that was also to involve some further changes to the Urban Programme budget which funded social and community projects in areas of deprivation. There was to be an increase in the level of the overall budget, but after the cuts of the mid-1980s a substantial increase still meant that the total for Scotland in 1990 – with all of its poverty – would be just £69 million. There was, more crucially, to be a skewing of resources towards the areas targeted under the New Life programme, and a further attempt to shift the character of the projects funded towards something more business orientated and 'entrepreneurial'. This was to mean the elimination of a good number of projects across urban Scotland, and changes in the character of others.

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[13] Andrew A. McArthur, "Jobs and Incomes" , in in David Donnison and Alan Middleton (eds), *Regenerating the Inner City: Glasgow's Experience*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987, esp. p.77.

[14] Gordon Kennedy, "The New Clydebank", in J. Hood (ed), *The History of Clydebank*, Parthenon Publishing Ltd, Cornforth, Lancs, 1988, p.216.

In some places the consequences were nothing short of calamitous. In Paisley's Ferguslie Park, for instance, then (and still now – despite 35 years of almost continual 'regeneration') one of the very poorest areas in Scotland, projects which had helped offset poverty were eliminated at a stroke. At the same time the local community business, at one time a model of community business in Strathclyde, was 'restructured', made 'leaner and fitter' so that it might 'stand on its own two feet', look like a 'proper business' and so fit the new agenda. It was then awarded hundreds of thousands of pounds in capital grants and contracts by its local 'partners'. Within a few years it was at the heart of the most appalling scandal – deeply implicated in a drug selling and money lending turf war which was leaving bodies on the streets of Renfrewshire. The local MP was under police protection and councillors were in fear of their lives. The Scottish Office had succeeded in promoting an "enterprise culture" alright, but perhaps not quite the one intended.

More generally, for groups whose 'Urban Aid' funding was coming to an end, and which didn't fit the profile required under the latest 'regeneration' agenda, it was a perilous time. And one of those was the UB40 Centre in Clydebank. What to some people might look like a pearl, a vibrant organisation making a vital contribution to its community in hard times, might look different to other people. To some it might look like a manifestation of a "culture of dependency" – in need of elimination.

At the same time, the introduction of the poll tax was working to undermine the relationship between local government and community organisations. Would authorities implementing the tax want to continue to fund assertive local organisations who were opposed to its implementation? Such organisations might see themselves as defending their communities from a punitively unjust tax. But to the local authorities they might also look like a worrying threat to local government finances in terribly difficult times. The UB40 Centre was caught up in the dynamic of what Dennis Canavan had called the "doomsday scenario".

Part 3
The Clydebank Unemployed Community Resource Centre

The Centre's existence is put in very serious jeopardy by the politics of the poll tax. For a period it closes, but its users and volunteers lead a successful campaign to get it re-established. This process results, amidst the failures of 'partnership' in 'regeneration' across urban Scotland, in the creation of a *meaningful* partnership – in the form of the Clydebank Unemployed Community Resource Centre. It develops both as an important service provider, and also as a key contributor to campaigns on issues of importance to its community. It becomes a well-known and widely respected organisation, capable of looking after itself in the difficult period of local government reorganisation in the mid-1990s. As it does so, the Conservatives' official 'partnership' agenda for 'regeneration' is, despite its dubious record, being disseminated across urban Scotland. It is also heading for Clydebank – in the form of a Priority Partnership Area. The Centre survives its arrival because it breaks the rules of the 'partnership' game.

7. Paying for the Poll Tax? Closure and the campaign for the"regeneration of the UB40"

In the previous chapter we looked at the later 1980s. This was the high point of Mrs Thatcher's years in Downing Street – what has been called her "triumphalist period". It was the era of 'the yuppie' and the 'filofax', and of soaring property prices in the south east of England as the economy overheated in the midst of the 'Lawson boom'.[15] Some of the great hopes for 'regeneration' in Scotland through the New Life programme were linked to this boom. Malcolm Rifkind went so far as to talk of a coming "renaissance", not simply for the targeted areas, but for the nation as a whole. Scotland was to be reborn as "a country in which the future is even more important than the past". This was another one of those uses of language with which few could have argued in principle, but which in practice meant more than met the eye. It meant trying to kill off a whole social and political culture inherited from the past, and replacing it with something more sympathetic to the yuppie, the filofax, and Nigel Lawson.

Within a couple of years, however, the Lawson boom was to give way to the bust of the early 1990s, and Mrs Thatcher was to be unceremoniously removed from No. 10 by her own party. The term 'negative equity' was to enter common use – particularly in the south east of England. And in this context the local community in Clydebank were to remain of the view, contrary to Rifkind, that they would need to continue to look to the past to find the means with which to address the problems of both the present and the future.

Paying for the Poll Tax?

As the new regeneration agenda was winding up at the end of the 1980s, the Clydebank Enterprise Zone was winding down. The focus was moving elsewhere – to places where the potential to demonstrate the merits of the new agenda was thought to be rather better. Resources were being skewed towards these latter areas – leaving less for other areas of need. And there was no shortage of areas of need, not just in Clydebank, but across Strathclyde Region.

This was the context in which, in 1990, the Urban Aid funding which had sustained the UB40 Centre was coming to an end. Would the local authorities be able, or willing, to take over the funding of the Centre? Clydebank District Council felt both able and willing to do so, if Strathclyde Regional Council, in what was normally the arrangement for project funding, would match their commitment. But a paper to the Policy and Resources Committee of the District Council in 1990 indicates that, despite the latter's clear support, the Region took no decision on the matter at all.

The Region would certainly have been in a position to make some case along the lines that it was unable to find the money given the range of demands it had to meet – hard times, tough decisions and all that. But it did not make any case at all. Inevitably, people were to speculate about how far this indicated an underlying *reluctance* to fund the Centre for some other reason.

There are certainly grounds for speculation – if we reflect upon the politics of the poll tax. By 1989-90 Strathclyde was implementing it. In doing so it was following Labour Party policy. But it did so in the face of a campaign of mass civil disobedience organised by the Anti-Poll Tax Federation, and supported by some elements in the Labour Party itself. This was a campaign for non-payment, backed up

[15] Nigel Lawson being Margaret Thatcher's Chancellor of the Exchequer in those years.

by pickets to defend those whom the Council pursued through the courts – preventing poindings and warrant sales. It was all rather reminiscent of the Clydebank housing campaigns of the 1920s. But it was something much larger – civil disobedience on an unprecedented scale.

This posed some problems for the Regional Council. In the past it had actively promoted the development of organisations to campaign on issues which were vital to local communities. Such an issue was the poll tax, for sure. But the Council certainly didn't want to encourage local community action on *that* issue.

In this context, the Council's ideas on community development began, perhaps understandably, to shift quite significantly. This reflected not just the politics of the poll tax, but the increasingly embattled position of local government more generally – which was consequently feeling less and less well-disposed to critical campaigning being directed at it.[16] Henceforth, there was to be much less of an emphasis on the merits of campaigning and conflict as ways of pursuing the interests of local communities, and more of an emphasis on working in 'partnership' with local authorities and other 'partners'. Indeed it began to be argued by some that community organisations which maintained an active, campaigning agenda could not really *be* 'partners' in the newly emerging framework of policy and practice. For 'partners', it was said, talk nicely to each other, and they certainly don't shout at, or about, each other in public. There were new rules for 'community development' – at least for those who wanted to play to the rules of the 'regeneration game'.

In this context the word went out to Strathclyde's community development workers not to work with local groups on the issue of the poll tax. And in this light it seems not unreasonable to speculate about the willingness of the Regional Council to continue with the funding of the UB40 Centre. As we saw in Chapter 5, the Centre had in 1988 decided that it was time to make campaigning a more prominent part of its activities, and it had affiliated to the Anti-Poll Tax Federation. The Centre was an organisation serving a community which, if history was anything to go by, would be likely to respond to the campaigning call. From the perspective of the Regional Council, which was by this stage very sensitive indeed about the developing response of local communities to the poll tax, continuing to fund the UB40 Centre might have seemed tantamount to pressing the thorn into its own flesh.

Whatever the combination of 'willing and or able' may have been, funding for the continued running of the Centre was not forthcoming from Strathclyde. Subsequent newspaper reports speak of "bitter rows between the regional and district councils who couldn't agree who was to stump up the cash to cover the running costs". The District Council in the event did provide what would have been its share of joint-funding for the Centre, and this kept it open from April until September 1990. Towards the end of that period the last remaining staff member – Ruth Cooper, a volunteer who had replaced Ross Rintoul as Outreach Worker – was leaving for something more secure (curiously enough with the Regional Council). The paper to the Policy and Resources Committee of the District Council reported that:

> This will leave the Centre without any members of staff and without any funds with which to recruit new employees. In these circumstances, the Management Committee has written to the District Council indicating that it would be impossible to provide normal services … [and] that it

[16] Probably the best indication of this is Alan Barr's book *Practising Community Development: Experience in Strathclyde*, London, Community Development Foundation Publications, 1991. See also Chik Collins and Jim Lister, "Hands Up or Heads Up? Community Work, Democracy and the Language of 'Partnership'", in Ian Cooke and Mae Shaw (eds) *Radical Community Work: Perspectives from Practice in Scotland*, Edinburgh, Moray House Publications, 1996.

> will require to temporarily suspend its operations until a reply is forthcoming from the Regional Council as to the security of future financial support.

There is no doubt that the poll tax posed profound difficulties for the Regional Council, but its handling of the UB40 at this time, like the handling of the poll tax more generally, was perhaps not its finest moment.

Down, But Not Out …

At this point not a few community organisations would have given up the ghost – indeed not a few in the Region around this time actually did. But with the Centre things were different. The key to this difference seems to be that dogged commitment we have seen in the history of Clydebank to the task of developing and maintaining independent organisations able to address the needs and interests of the local community. The UB40 Centre had maintained that commitment through the traumas of the 1980s. It had done so by contributing very significantly to the lives of a lot of people. And these people – or enough of them at any rate – were not going to give up on it that easily. The paper reporting the closure to the District Council gives a clear indication of this:

> The Centre has asked the District Council to take care of the premises, equipment and resources until such time as they are in a position to relaunch activities. The Management Committee has also requested that the District Council provide active support via its officers to assist the Management Committee to liaise with the Regional Council and agencies interested in the issue of unemployment to ensure that a service continues and is re-established as soon as possible.

The work began immediately. A Users' Group meeting was called "by word of mouth" for the 1st of October. Twenty people attended. Eddie Kelly was not among them – so clearly the group was more than capable of acting without his presence. David McPhail undertook to write a reply on behalf of the Group to an article that had appeared in the *Clydebank Post*, and it was decided thereafter to maintain a weekly flow of correspondence from different individuals. The support of the local MP, former Regional Councillor Tony Worthington, was also being sought. And it was agreed formally to seek support from the Region's community development staff to help the Group to develop its case for the "regeneration of the UB40". Charlie Baird, the Regional Council community worker who had been involved in the early stages of the UB40, was already in attendance, and was duly allocated the role. Crucially, in light of our earlier discussion, his role was not now with a Centre that was campaigning against the poll tax. It was now with *what was left* of the Centre campaigning for its *right to exist*.

The meetings continued on a weekly basis and steadily developed the campaign. On the 8th October, with 25 in attendance, a steering committee of six was elected, with David McPhail as chair, and Alison Ferguson as secretary. On the 15th the steering group sought broader input from the various activity and interest groups associated with the UB40, and from the unions in local workplaces. On the 22nd reports on attempted liaisons with the local regional councillors gave an indication of the ongoing political sensitivity of the issue. Symptomatically, Worthington was treading carefully. Other matters, however, were not entirely neglected. There were 13 volunteers to help organize a christmas party for the children.

But amongst the Users' Group itself things were not all 'sweetness and light'. There were rumours of a planned meeting between the Region and the District about the future of the Centre, and apparent disagreements about how to respond. Some were calling for greater "militancy". Others clearly feared that this might prove

counter-productive. On the 29th October this led to "heated debate", the resignation of an office bearer in the steering group, and later to a vote of no confidence in the secretary – which resulted in a vote of 11-7 against.

Duly it emerged that the rumours of the planned meeting were well-founded. A visit to the District's Community Development Liaison Officer, Ronnie Nicol, brought confirmation that a meeting between the two authorities was scheduled for the 7th of November. He undertook to report to the Management Committee of the Centre, which the steering group had already been trying to reconvene, from which the Users' Group could in turn receive a report.

In the meantime a petition had been drawn up for signing outside the local DHSS and in the shopping Centre: "We the undersigned wish to see the re-opening of the UB40 Centre that is a vital facility for all the unemployed and unwaged in Clydebank and should be funded without delay." People of all social backgrounds appeared to be signing it – more than 1200 of them, based on the sheets that remain in the Centre's archives.

The day after the meeting between the local authorities Nicol duly reported back to the Centre's Management Committee. Nicol seems to have been trying to mediate an outcome which would allow the Centre to get re-established. That meant somehow saving the Region's 'face'. It was now suggested (rather dubiously in light of what we have seen) that the old UB40 Centre had lacked the kind of educational theme which would have allowed the Region to fund it. However, the Region did fund other unemployed workers' centres (UWCs) in other areas to do educational work, and the Clydebank group could liaise closely with their Glasgow Federation "to seek advice on the structuring of a new plan for the UB40 which would be acceptable to the Region". Crucially, however, funding would have to be seen, not as 'reopening' of an existing Centre, but as the creation of a new one. The Region, as the report of the meeting with Nicol records, "would not put money into a *closed* centre, as to do so would suggest that they were responsible for the closure in the first place".

Interestingly, Worthington was to receive a report on both of these meetings from the Chief Executive of the District Council almost immediately. Clearly the campaign was having an impact – without undue recourse to "militancy". But Users' Group meetings continued to be fractious as some advocated that recourse. At a meeting on 12th November little else was discussed and the meeting abandoned. The following week it was agreed that "it would be necessary to adopt a less liberal attitude with people who persistently disrupted the meeting". Those repeatedly disregarding the chair would henceforth be asked to leave.

Turning a Corner

McPhail and Ferguson show up as the key figures in this period. Kelly was not entirely absent, but he seems to have attended only a few meetings. Had things been otherwise, then things may not have become quite so fractious.

In this context it seems that Charlie Baird, the community worker, began to exert a greater influence. He proposed that the UB40 relocate for the time being to another Centre in another part of town with which he was involved – the Drumry Centre. McPhail and some others saw this as a way of keeping the organisation functioning, but others disagreed. In McPhail's words:

> We set up in the [Drumry] Centre, but lost some of our support soon afterwards. Some of the Group complained that Drumry was too far away for them and others, disillusioned with what was happening, just failed ever to show up again, accepting that the UB40 had gone forever.

Unfortunately, the move coincided with the resignation of the apparently able Ferguson from her role as secretary. She now had college commitments. Joan Halpin reluctantly took over the role. But there was a clear sense of drift developing, and the now diminishing group sought the advice of Kelly at a meeting at the end of February.

At that meeting Kelly expressed his disappointment about the ongoing decline of the Centre, which he said was no longer able to serve the purpose for which the Trades Council had established it. But he agreed to assist in the attempt to get it re-established. Crucially, the meeting resolved that the Centre must return to the town centre – if not to Miller Street, then to "something as good as". On that basis, Kelly suggested, the Trades Council itself could re-engage.

This meeting seems to have galvanised the group, and there was a renewed push to secure a meeting with the local authorities. Worthington was prevailed upon to write them a letter of encouragement. The result was a meeting at the beginning of May, involving, amongst others, Kelly, McPhail, Nicol, the local District Councillor, Frances Heaney, and both of the Regional Councillors for the town – Malcolm Turner and Des McNulty.

Kelly and McPhail duly reported to the Users' Group that they had "tried to get as much information from the councillors as possible by asking questions rather than getting involved in deep, meaningless conversation". They established that in principle each authority would be willing to commit around £17,000 if there were a suitable proposal, along the lines previously outlined, to which the Region in particular felt able to commit. If this sum were insufficient to run the Miller Street premises, then the District Council would consider proposals for sharing the premises with other groups.

At this stage the Users' Group began to grapple constructively with the challenge. In this regard the temporary move to Drumry had at least some benefit, for the advocates of "militancy" seem to have taken their leave at that point, allowing the others to get on with things. The group drew on past experience and agreed to develop a questionnaire which would be put to the unemployed of the town in order to establish demand. At the same time meetings would be arranged with the Glasgow Federation of UWCs to establish links and to get advice regarding a suitable proposal.

Mary Collins Arrives

But perhaps more important was the news delivered at this point regarding a certain Mary Collins. An activist in the Transport and General Workers' Union who, the Management Committee were advised, was "well used to negotiating with and on behalf of the unions", Collins had recently joined the ranks of the unemployed. Baird had introduced her to McPhail who recalls that:

> Mary was seated in the back garden of her friend's house, puffing on a cigarette. She looked up at me and asked if I wanted some help with the fight to reopen the Centre in Clydebank. She seemed genuinely interested in the fight and looked neither tired nor afraid of the Council. In fact she looked like she wanted to roll her sleeves up and get into the ring with the rest of us.

McPhail was asked to bring her along to the next meeting. He did, and she was elected to the Chair. McPhail took up the position of Secretary. So far, the Group had managed to establish the basis on which the Centre *could* be revived. What was now required was a person who could lead the Group in order to translate that possibility into actuality. Collins' trade union background and experience, together with her many other skills and personal attributes, were to prove vital to that.

Mary Collins had arrived. The Centre was now on its way back.

8. The Making of a *Meaningful* Partnership: The Clydebank Unemployed Community Resource Centre

In the previous chapter we followed the experience of the UB40 Users' Group through the closure of their centre, and the development of the campaign to get it re-established. Across the same period the government's wider 'regeneration' agenda – the *New Life for Urban Scotland* programme – was getting going.

In particular, the four "Partnership Area" initiatives had been established, led by secondees from the Scottish Office in each case. Every effort was being made to establish momentum in the application of their neo-liberal agenda, especially in relation to housing stock transfer, private housing development, and 'flexible' labour market initiatives. The idea was for these initiatives to set the agenda for urban Scotland more generally, and to be the source of a new 'best practice' for the organisations and professions involved across the public, private and voluntary sectors. A lot of money and a lot of effort was being expended – and a lot of work on public relations and image management.

However, notwithstanding all the work that was being done to present these initiatives as 'partnerships' based on harmonious and consensual working relations, there was an unavoidable whiff – and at times a definite reek – of power and domination in the air. This was the 'doomsday scenario' after all.

The Principle and Practice of 'Partnership'

The *idea* of partnership is one thing. Who could argue – at least *in principle* – with the idea that all relevant agencies and organisations should try to put aside their differences and work as harmoniously and consensually as possible to try to make things better for our most disadvantaged communities? But principle and *practice* are often quite different, and this was undoubtedly true of the practice of 'partnership' in 'regeneration' in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The practice didn't just challenge the principle, it *contradicted it*. The reality was of a Scottish Office which used its power and resources to secure the coercive imposition of a disliked neo-liberal policy agenda which, on a broader canvas, tended to do more to foster *degeneration* than to bring about 'regeneration'. Poll tax and partnership were bedfellows in that respect.

It was also one thing for the Scottish Office to get its own quangos (which it controlled) and the local authorities (who were desperate for the money) to live within the rules of the 'partnership' game – albeit in the case of the local authorities rather grudgingly – and so to maintain for the public the pretence of 'partnership'. But the local community groups in the 'partnership areas' were a different kind of a problem altogether. As we have seen, the Scottish Office rested the legitimacy of the 'partnership areas' on the assertion that the local communities were being 'empowered' as 'participants' in the process which was determining the future of their estates. But in practice they *could not* actually be so empowered, for the shape of their future had *already been determined*, and it was seldom the kind of future which they would themselves have chosen. So, from the earliest stages, there were very significant problems in managing "community participation". Extensive research was commissioned to try to find some kind of solution. But there could be no quick fix to this problem, because it was a product of tensions and conflicts that were deeply rooted in the real politics of the time.

The result was that it became apparent quite quickly that these 'partnerships' could hardly be characterised as partnerships at all. Community groups flagged up

their problems from the earliest stages – they were simply not being *allowed* to be 'partners'. Other public organisations did their own thing in their own way, rather than working in 'partnership'. Indeed, later research was to report that across the New Life programme there was often an absence of 'partnership working' between different parts of *the same* organisation, never mind between different organisations across sectors. And the same research concluded that generally it was not realistic to talk about the private sector as 'partners' – even where they were in some way present, and often they weren't even present.

We saw at the end of chapter six just how bad some of the unintended consequences of this scenario were across the river from Clydebank – in Paisley's Ferguslie Park. There, in addition to the problems with the 'community business' already highlighted, there were problems in managing 'community participation'. Ultimately, in 1991 the local community organisation, the Ferguslie League of Action Groups (FLAG), was crudely 'liquidated' when it threatened to go public with its critical views of its own 'partnership' – as the local community in Castlemilk had already done. FLAG was, almost overnight, replaced with a much less problematic, because much less rooted and much less effective, "Community Forum" – which could be wheeled out as and when required to maintain the illusion of 'community participation'. Established activists were carved out of the scene altogether. The result, unsurprisingly, was that the 'partnership' did more to *unpick* the fabric of community life than it did to strengthen it. And there were many other less than positive unintended consequences of 'community participation'in other places in the same period.

But in Clydebank there was actually a rather *positive* unintended consequence of ongoing developments. In a very curious way, the dynamic of the "doomsday scenario" actually led to the creation of a small-scale partnership which fitted very closely with the principle which the Scottish Office had been espousing.

There is a parallel here with the Ferguslie experience. There, as we saw at the end of chapter six, a certain kind of 'enterprise culture' had been created, but not the kind that was intended. In Clydebank a 'real partnership' was created, but again it was very different from what the policy makers had in mind. It was a real partnership not in spite of that, but *because of that.* It was the Clydebank Unemployed Community Resource Centre

Battening the Hatches and Setting Sail

As we saw in the previous chapter, this was entirely dependent on that dogged commitment we have seen in Clydebank to the task of maintaining independent organisations able to address the needs and interests of the local community. Without that the group would probably have withered and died. In the early stages McPhail and Ferguson in particular managed to hold the group together sufficiently well to avoid that. Now, with the arrival of Collins, it began to re-emerge.

Collins and McPhail developed a close and effective working relationship, and Kelly, seeing the progress and the potential, began to take a more active role again. The nature of the relationship with the Region's community development team was also clarified. Nicol had begun to treat Baird as the Group's "representative" rather than as a support worker. This misunderstanding was promptly corrected – both in writing and face-to-face.

The group then began to sort out its other relationships – both internally and externally. A meeting was organised with Rab Amos of the Glasgow Federation of UWCs. Kelly attended, representing the Trades Council. It was established that the

proposed Clydebank centre could join the Federation if it had Trades Council support and its own premises. It would then be able to adopt a model for educational provision developed by other centres affiliated to the Federation, and so access Regional funding (the Local Collaborative Programme). This typically involved buying in tutor time from local education colleges for courses for which there was known demand.

At the same time the group, in McPhail's words, set to "battening down the hatches" internally. Groups which had been part of the UB40 in Miller Street, but which had drifted since its closure, were called in and asked to clarify where they stood, and reminded of their responsibilities – and also of their duties in terms of accountability. Care was taken not to cause offence, though some was taken anyway. But the Centre needed its people with it at this crucial time, and this meant re-establishing appropriate activities within the Centre in its existing location.

These activities, and the progress with the Glasgow Federation, were then reported at a meeting with the local authorities at the end of July. Here one sees clearly the outline of the 'partnership' that was emerging. District Councillor John Gilleece attended together with his colleague France Heaney. The two Regional Councillors – McNulty and Turner – were there. McPhail and Collins attended for the Users' Group. Kelly represented the Trades Council, and Amos the Federation. There were also representatives from the Region's Community Development team and Education Department. Nicol convened the meeting.

The results of the survey questionnaire were presented at this meeting. 187 unemployed people had been surveyed, and their responses demonstrated both a desire for a centre, and a widespread lack of awareness regarding provision and services for the unemployed. In particular, there was a demand for additional help for people seeking work, for education and training provision, and for mutual support from others in similar circumstances. Long lists of names and addresses could be produced as evidence of specific people seeking education and training, and other lists of people interested in assisting with the running of a centre. Generalised to the unemployed population as a whole, the survey results made a very strong case for establishing a Centre.

It was agreed that Collins and Nicol should begin work on a projected budget for £33,000 and a job description for a Centre Co-ordinator. But premises remained a problem. The rental on Miller Street would now be far too expensive – likely to consume a third of the limited budget. As yet there was no obvious solution. Sharing seemed like the only viable option, but that would make space very tight. On this basis a specific "Relaunch Proposal" for "Clydebank Unemployed Resource Centre" was discussed at a further meeting of the various parties convened by Nicol at the beginning of September. It proposed a management committee that would "integrate funders and users", and staffing by a co-ordinator and a part-time clerical assistant. The District Council's Finance Department would provide accounting and payroll services, as it already did for other voluntary projects – saving an administrative burden, "while maintaining the autonomy and independence of the Centre".

Duly it was agreed that this proposal be put to the authorities. By October the District Council had agreed to commit £16,000 for 1991/92, and by November the Region had agreed (not quite) to match that – committing £14,750. Preparations were being made for a bid for 1992/93 – due in December – under the name of the Clydebank Unemployed Community Resource Centre. Its Management Committee would consist of six people elected from the ranks of the Centre's users, together with two representatives from each of the local authorities (councillors) and two from the

Trades Council. In addition there would be non-voting positions for officials of each of the local authorities – including Ronnie Nicol – and the centre's staff members.

The Making of a Meaningful Partnership

Early in the new year the posts were advertised, and an appointment committee established. On the 13th of February Mary Collins was appointed to the post of Co-ordinator, and took up the post shortly afterwards. Eddie Kelly, seldom it seems one given to undue praise, confided in Danny McCafferty that the group had been fortunate to find a "good yin". Soon Martin McNaughton was to join the centre as the part-time clerical worker.

Things were taking shape, but premises remained a problem. Volunteers had, as the local press reported, "gutted, cleaned and polished" the Miller Street premises – filling several skips in the process. But it had since become clear that the costs of adapting the building for shared use would be massively prohibitive – perhaps as much as £50,000. This really was a *problem*. Ongoing searches turned up vacant "gate house" premises belonging to the local firm Thor Ceramics in Stanford Street (later taken over by RHI Refractories). Enquiries were made, followed by a visit by committee members, followed by the offer of a lease for the bulk of the premises on "generous terms" – indeed on very generous terms. The lease was swiftly accepted and on the 13th of July the Clydebank Unemployed Community Resource Centre took up residence in what would be its home for the next 15 years and more. It was also agreed that in the future, when the Centre had improved resourcing, it might lease the whole of the building at an appropriately adjusted rent.

This solution to the premises problem saw the completion of the CUCRC 'partnership' – the contribution from that elusive private sector partner. It meant that the CUCRC now bore an uncanny resemblance to what the Scottish Office seemed to be describing when it talked the language of 'partnership', but which it seemed to have great difficulty in actually creating in its own massively funded and high profile "partnership areas". For here was a partnership which genuinely brought together the different sectors, all of which were prepared to co-operate and work constructively to make a vital contribution to the pressing needs of the local community. It was itself located in the voluntary sector. It had very significant private sector input – in fact it could not have functioned without it. The local authorities were involved in both the funding and management of the partnership. It encompassed also the local Trades Council, and through that was linked also to the Scottish Trades Union Congress. And here the local community really *was a partner*, in fact the *leading* partner.

This 'partnership' might not have been created in a process that was entirely harmonious and consensual – but then the 'real world' is seldom like that, and the reality of urban Scotland in the later 1980s and early 1990s was *really* not like that. In fact the Scottish Office's myth of harmony and consensus had been invented largely to try to obscure the fact that the reality was *really* not like that.

What the process did show was that reasonable people, left to their own devices, could, even in very difficult circumstances, work through their disagreements and try to do something constructive in responding as best they could to local needs. Indeed, one crucial factor which perhaps allowed them to do this was the *absence* of central government and their agents from the process – the fact that the Scottish Office's own efforts to create 'partnerships' were focused elsewhere. Had their efforts been focused on Clydebank, then perhaps the 'real partnership' that was the CUCRC would not have been *allowed* to re-emerge from what was left of the UB40.

If the story of that re-emergence has here seemed a little tortuous, then the author has succeeded in what he set out to do across the previous and current chapters. If it has seemed like a protracted and painful process to read about, then the reader can be assured that it was a protracted and painful process – and at times more painful than I have felt it appropriate to convey – for those who worked their way through all that was required. This would have been especially true for those who were unpaid volunteers, and who could quite easily have chosen, as some did, to go off and do something else with their time. Some of them – ultimately enough of them – didn't do that, and the local community in Clydebank, and not a few people beyond, owe them thanks for that. For they won a significant victory in the town in the campaign for the right – both that of the Centre and of those whose needs it served – to exist.

9. Getting Back to Basics: Gearing up for the dog days of conservatism

As the local authorities were agreeing to fund the re-launch of the Centre in the autumn of 1991 there was a feeling of optimism in Labour circles, and a sense of anticipation in Scotland more generally. If the polls were right, the next general election – which could be no later than June 1992 – would see a change of government. Out would go John Major, who had replaced Margaret Thatcher at the end of 1990, and Labour would be returned to power under Neil Kinnock. Scotland would have an end to the ongoing crisis of legitimacy which it had endured for a decade – and a government which would actually reflect its voting preferences.

1992 and all that …

That was still how it looked as the campaign developed ahead of Major's chosen date – early in April. Major was playing on his own humble origins. He took to the streets with a soapbox to proclaim the virtues of 'meritocracy' – a Britain in which an ordinary person with ability could rise to become Prime Minister. Kinnock, as in 1987, went for a rather slicker campaign managed by Peter Mandelson. On the eve of poll Labour were still ahead, and their victory was confidently predicted.

Major kept plugging on the street. But Kinnock decided to celebrate victory at a mass rally in Sheffield. At least that was how it looked to the country. "Do ya feel alright?" he roared repeatedly – like an ageing rock star whose back catalogue had been dusted down for re-release. Twenty four hours later, after the votes had actually been cast, the Conservatives replied that they did indeed, with another 5 years of power ahead of them, "feel alright". Their situation in Scotland had in fact slightly improved, and here there was a degree of disbelief. That was soon to be followed by protests against the continuing "democratic deficit". Kinnock had spent almost a decade doing what he argued was necessary to make the Labour Party "electable". It had become apparent that as leader he himself was one of the key problems. John Smith took the reins.

Had Labour been returned to power in 1992 then there would have been some significant changes from the policies inherited from the Thatcher and Major years. But now these policies were to be continued – most fundamentally, in Scotland, the policy of generating an "enterprise culture" to supplant the inherited "dependency culture". With Ian Lang now Secretary of State, the Scottish Office pushed forward with its plans for the wider dissemination of its 'partnership' agenda.

A key part of that was to be a major restructuring of local government. New single-tier authorities were to replace the two-tier structure which in the 1970s had created the large and relatively powerful regional councils in particular. Local government was to be made smaller, weaker, poorer, and it was to be forced increasingly to be the agent of the centre. This was the culmination of the attack on local government in which the poll tax had figured so prominently, and was itself a key part of the ongoing attempt to undermine the social and political culture which had opposed neo-liberalism in Scotland over many years – by destroying established institutions and networks within which quite a bit of that opposition was located. The restructuring process was of course bound to create insecurity and demoralisation as people were redeployed, or required to re-apply for their jobs. But that too could be seen to be a 'positive' from the point of view of bringing about attitudinal change – or at least a reduction in positive opposition to the government's agenda.

Thus, while many railed against the "democratic deficit", it is no surprise that amongst all the demoralisation there seemed to be a perceptible drift – a sense of some people letting some previously held ideas and beliefs slide, and of their beginning to accept that perhaps at least some of that new "best practice" which the Scottish Office had been working so hard to demonstrate in their new 'partnerships' really *did* represent the only realistic way forward. People who had previously seemed to speak the language of 'partnership' with their fingers crossed behind their backs now seemed less ill at ease with its terms, and at times seemed increasingly to speak that language as if it had always been their own. Not everywhere, and not very much in Clydebank as yet, but it was noticeable nonetheless. It reflected the beginnings of the kind of culture change which the Conservatives had been pursuing, and on which basis Labour itself, as "New Labour", would later seek to build.

Getting back to basics in Clydebank

We saw at the end of the last chapter that the relaunch of the Clydebank Unemployed Community Resource Centre was possible in part due to the relative neglect of the town in the early stages of the *New Life* programme. But it became clear that with the return of the Conservatives in 1992, 'regeneration partnerships' would soon be brought to bear more widely. Clydebank's continuing plight was such that it could hardly be ignored when that happened – now that the Enterprise Zone was no more.

The key figures in the Centre may not have been fully been aware of this, or of its implications. But it meant that they had only 2-3 years before they would be involved in a larger 'partnership' designated from Edinburgh, and substantially accountable to Edinburgh, under a new single-tier local authority – covering something called West Dunbartonshire. These were to be the 'dog days' of Conservatism in Scotland, and the Centre would have to become established – and robust – if it was going to be ready for them. It was time, to borrow a phrase invoked elsewhere in the same period, for the Centre to "get back to basics".

In the period since February the Co-ordinator's time had largely been consumed in trying to sort out the most basic problem of premises. Now, thanks to Thor's generosity, attention could be devoted to other basics – the basics of a functioning unit, serving the needs of its community, and able to demonstrate the requirement for its own continued existence.

The official unemployment figures were certainly contributing in the latter regard. The figures had declined in the later 1980s – during the "Lawson boom". But now that boom had begotten its bust, and unemployment was up significantly. In June of 1990 the official number of unemployed in Clydebank was less than 2,500. Eighteen months later there were 750 more – nearly all of them male. And of course there were all the others who were no longer counted. A year later the situation was unchanged. So there was certainly a continuing need for a centre.

Creating a *functioning* centre, actually working to meet those needs, was now the challenge. Ongoing finance was a concern. The 1992/93 application to the local authorities had been for a total of £37, 000 – £18,500 from each of the councils. But Strathclyde came up with just £15,500. This was less than it had initially promised for 1991/92 – when the initial £16,500 had become £16,000 and ultimately just £14,750. The District was clear that it could only match what the Region would commit, so there was already a substantial hole – some £6,000 – in the already limited finances. This kind of situation was to become a continuing problem in the years ahead. The award was appealed, but to no avail.

The Centre opened its doors to the public in September 1992. The formal opening was delayed while some initial headway was made. Courses in hair care and in basic computing – using three computers purchased earlier that year – were up and running quickly, as was a Women's Forum. Steps were being taken to bring welfare rights and money advice provision to the Centre, and to train up the Centre's own volunteers in these areas. Volunteers were also assuming reception duties. A local Jobs Access Initiative was making use of the Centre's premises twice weekly – with the involvement of Ruth Cooper, a previously mentioned Centre user and employee. She was now a Community Economic Development Officer with the Region. A newsletter was distributed in the town in November – called, appropriately, *Square One*. And soon it was time to work on the funding application for 1993/94, and to hope that there would be no repetition of the problems which had been encountered the previous year. £18,650 was sought from each of the authorities.

By early January a ten week Scotvec course in word processing was running, and two separate groups were following a basic computing course. An application, ultimately successful, had been made for a small grant for computer graphics software to allow courses dealing with that. A range of other courses for which there was an established demand was being planned. Assistance was available for those seeking work – with CVs, application forms, letter writing and so on. In February the Centre held its first AGM – chaired by McPhail, who was now one of the Trades Council representatives on the Management Committee. That month two users attended a Jobs Action Day in Westminster organised by the STUC – lobbying MPs and being photographed for *The Guardian*. Also in February volunteers – Margaret Sim and Lockhart Cameron – undertook two days of welfare rights training. By March they were involved in basic advice provision. The Women's Group was gearing up for a fundraising fashion show in the Town Hall.

The main concern was a repetition of the previous year's financial problem – the Region was again only able to commit £15,500, leaving a shortfall of £6,300 on a budget which already, as Mary Collins was to protest, "barely covered the running costs of the project". Nonetheless, some significant headway had been made, and it was time to think about a formal opening event.

The Formal Opening

It was agreed that the opening should coincide with the arrival in Clydebank of the STUC's Scottish People's March for Jobs and Democracy on the 7th of May 1993. This was one of the events in which Scottish 'civil society' responded to the continuing 'democratic deficit'. No less a figure than Donald Dewar was there in Clydebank to greet the marchers on their arrival.

The opening itself was attended by the Provost of Clydebank, Tony Worthington MP, local church leaders and other dignitaries, and representatives of other unemployed centres. Jayne McKay, the Secretary of Glasgow Trades Council, unveiled a plaque with the following inscription:

CLYDEBANK U.C.R.C
OFFICIAL OPENING
7TH MAY 1993
BY JAYNE MCKAY
GLASGOW TRADES COUNCIL
DEDICATED TO Mr E. KELLY
FOR HIS COMMITMENT
TO THE UNEMPLOYED

Kelly was by this time 62 years of age, and had been working for the unemployed through the Trades Council and the Centre for over 20 years. He was due his tribute, and looked quietly touched in the photographs which appeared in the local press. But activists like Kelly seldom retire. He was to continue his commitment for a further decade and more.

The formal opening speaks more generally of the continuity of the basic identity of the organisation over the 20 years of Kelly's work. This was an organisation which self consciously retained its roots in the trade union movement, and which saw itself as having a campaigning, as well as an educational, purpose. As Kelly would no doubt have explained, there are few things more educational – more productive of learning and development – than a good campaign. So, with the opening over, everyone moved on to the Town Hall to hear speeches from the marchers. In due course the Centre received the personal thanks of Campbell Christie, General Secretary of the STUC, for their contribution to the campaign.

In the wake of the opening, and the publicity that went with it, the usage of the Centre increased. Courses were over-subscribed and welfare rights enquiries were increasing every week. Advisors were dealing with appeals and reviews, and would soon be attending tribunals. Policies were being put in place in relation to handling of case files, and recording of outcomes – good practice which was to prove particularly prescient in due course.

Further staffing was becoming a priority. Advice from the Glasgow Trades Council and the Federation led to a funding application to the Scottish One Fund For All (SOFFA). SOFFA, part of the national OFFA, was an STUC initiative to raise money for unemployed centres through subscriptions from trade unionists in work. The application led to funding for six months for a Resource and Development Officer. Margaret Sim was appointed to the post in December and promptly began to organise more educational courses, and committee skills courses for users. By this stage those attending such courses, and other group activities, were able to access free crèche services, courtesy of the Clydebank East Mobile Crèche.

Gearing up for the Dog Days of Conservatism

As the development of the Centre progressed, the Government's 'regeneration' agenda was working its way back towards Clydebank. The *New Life* programme was from the early stages the subject of extensive research commissioned by the Scottish Office and its quangos, and conducted by various academics and consultants. From the various reports it was deduced, though quite *how* is not always readily understandable, that the pilots were working well, achieving very good outcomes, and that the 'partnership' approach represented the way forward, not just for 'regeneration areas', but for the nation as a whole.

In 1993 a Smaller Urban Regeneration Initiative (SURI) was designated in Clydebank, covering the Faifley housing scheme, together with an area known as The Terraces and Trafalgar Street. But more significantly the Scottish Office also issued a consultation paper, called *Progress in Partnership*, on the intention to disseminate its model of 'regeneration partnership' rather more extensively. More significant still was the introduction to the Westminster Parliament of the bill dealing with local government reorganisation in Scotland. There were now clearer indications that the landscape in which the Centre was operating was about to change significantly, and that it would need to sustain its development if it was going to be 'fit' for what was to come.

The key figures in the Centre may not have been aware of that in the summer of 1992, but by the end of 1993 and early 1994 they clearly were. Regional Councillor Des McNulty raised the issue of local government reorganisation with the Management Committee, saying that:

> Because of the uncertainty in the transitional period and the difference in the tax base, this organisation may be under threat since mainline funding like education would be protected. He suggested that the Centre should make people aware of the problems and difficulties that would be caused by reorganisation, and … should contact people and organisations which might be able to exert influence.

Soon afterwards an open meeting was arranged with the local MP, Tony Worthington. Fifteen users attended, and in particular aired their concerns about the increasingly coercive and punitive drift in the government's treatment of the unemployed. The contrast with the Centre's own approach was no doubt stressed. Collins duly laid this approach out in the Centre's Annual Report (1993/94).

> At a time when [official] unemployment is again reaching the three million mark, it goes without saying that unemployed people need to come together in order to overcome obstacles such as access to education and training, welfare advice, etc. The UCRC over the past two years … has been a lifeline for many individuals. … Locally, nationally and internationally we continue in recession and the problems which beset so many in our community grow seemingly ever more entrenched. It is against this background that the Clydebank UCRC strives to provide some hope and practical help for the unemployed of Clydebank District. *It is a demanding task which calls above all else for a proper sense of the individuality of those we serve*, and for an understanding of their various needs ranging from the most basic assistance towards self confidence and self-esteem, to the most complex of vocational advice. It is fair to say that a centre such as ours, with local community volunteers and groups operating on a sympathetic scale, and perceived rightly as non-threatening has many advantages when it comes to this [work] … There are many [in Clydebank] who think so! (emphasis added)

Here are contained some of the most basic insights about engaging with unemployed and 'workless' individuals which local and national programmes have struggled to learn and adapt to in the intervening years.

This encounter with the Centre seems to have made an impression on Worthington, who in that period was – rightly – acutely concerned about the provision of training to the unemployed through Scottish Enterprise and its Local Enterprise Companies. Thereafter he maintained fairly regular correspondence with the Centre, seeking information and advice on local developments.

An Assertive Centre

However in this period the Centre began to demonstrate more than just a capacity to explain its 'philosophy' to a sympathetic audience. It also began to demonstrate a capacity to assert itself as an organisation concerned about new developments in the locality which it feared might lead to rather less sympathetic treatment of the unemployed – and perhaps also jeopardize its own position. Indeed the Centre became involved in something of a 'showdown' in the locality.

Firstly, in the later part of September 1993 the Centre received District Council support for an Urban Aid application. It sought funding for a resource worker and a part-time administrative worker to help to implement the Centre's 'philosophy' over a four year period – with younger adults, adult returners and the long-term unemployed. There was to be a particular focus on the needs of women in the outlying estates. The feeling of the Management Committee was that the application was a

strong one, and there were high hopes. But in June 1994 the news was received that the application had failed.

Within a few months, however, it became apparent that two other bodies, apparently linked, were being developed for the locality, without any consultation with the local community or its organisations. One of these alone had a projected budget of £400,000 – combining resources from the Region, Dunbartonshire Enterprise, Urban Aid and European funds. A substantial part of the projected funding was to be used to renovate local church premises as a base for the projects. Given the lack of consultation, it was feared that the projects might not share the Centre's philosophy regarding the treatment of the unemployed. And it would have been reasonable to anticipate that their combined scale would be a threat to the very existence of the Centre.

The Centre went into action. As part of that, those developing the projects were invited to come along and explain themselves at meetings that autumn. One of them was Ruth Cooper – the former user and employee of the Centre. They were met there with representatives of a wide range of bodies from Clydebank and beyond who politely, but nonetheless persistently, enquired as to who had been planning what, with whom, and why so much of it seemed to have been done without any consultation with the local community, or with the local organisations who had been working with the unemployed for many years in the town. While funding for further provision in the town was, all accepted, a good thing, it was necessary to ensure that those resources were deployed appropriately. The slogan "jobs *and democracy*" had been embraced in Clydebank on the day that the Centre was formally opened – and it was important not to forget the latter part.

Ultimately neither project went ahead. This was not a direct result of the intervention by the Centre, but the episode demonstrates that the Centre had, in a short period of time, developed the kind of self-confidence, and also the kind of authority in speaking for the local community, that meant that it could assert itself in its local arena. At a time when many other local organisations in Scotland were losing their independence, and the capacity to assert themselves, this was a significant achievement. It showed that the Centre was developing the kind of attributes that it would need to deal with the real challenges that would be coming their way soon.

10. When Things Could Only Get Better, Clydebank Fought Back

The mid-1990s was not the finest period for the reputation of politics and government in Britain. John Major's parliamentary majority had been slashed in 1992, empowering a right wing minority to expose his party's deep divisions over Europe. Now even the leader of the Conservative Party thought the Thatcherites were "bastards"! At the same time a long series of scandals exposed the gap between the morality the Conservative Party preached to the nation ("back to basics"), and that which many of its members practiced themselves. There was a tangible sense of decay, both of 'loyalty' and of morality, at the heart of government. There was also a collapse in confidence as to its competence. Black Wednesday saw to that. In September 1992 Britain was forced to withdraw at massive cost from the European Exchange Rate Mechanism after an attack on the pound by speculators. George Soros was reputed to have made $1 billion in the process. Interest rates were raised by 5% in one day, and the polls show that confidence in the Conservatives was severely damaged for years to come. Within a couple of years the 'New' Labour Party would be campaigning under the slogan "things can only get better".

In Scotland an arch-Thatcherite was soon to be Secretary of State – the controversial Michael Forsyth. Under his tutelage Scotland was to be carved up in a range of ways, all of which seemed to have the intention of saving at least some of his Party from the electoral wipeout which had been threatened in 1992 – but which now looked highly likely in the near future. The boundaries for Parliamentary constituencies were to be redrawn, as well as the boundaries for local government. The latter process, in the words of *The Herald* journalist Douglas Fraser, was to leave a council map which to this day remains "a glaring indictment of naked political gerrymandering". And the allocation of resources to the newly emerging phase of the government's 'regeneration' agenda would seem to many to emit rather more than a whiff of the political manipulation which was more generally in the air.

You don't ask, you don't get

In Clydebank, the Centre continued to consolidate and progress. Crucial headway was made in dealing with the repeated shortfall in the funding allocations from Strathclyde. The shortfall for 1994/95 was of an order which threatened the basic viability of the Centre. The District Council approved funding of £19,050. But the Region, facing its own crisis, was offering only £13,950 – and the District would ultimately only match their contribution. The matter was pursued with some zeal, and ultimately the relevant councillors secured an increase to £16,785. This was to be complemented with a further sum which could be applied for, and was duly awarded, under another grant heading. It may sound easy when it's laid out in a couple of sentences, but it took some doing to get there in practice.

The Centre's 1993/94 Report was now able to list users who were proceeding into employment and further education, and to report on the increasing range of courses, particularly IT courses, provided on the premises. The welfare rights work, both training and delivery, was building up, and the figures for monies attained were hitting impressive levels. Between April and November 1993 the awards of Disability Living Allowance secured amounted to almost £31,000 per annum. Over the projected lifetimes of the recipients these awards would be worth well over three quarters of a million pounds. Awards for invalidity and industrial disease took that

figure over the million pound mark. All of this was money to which local people had a clear right, and which they otherwise would not have received.

The woman's group was "growing steadily in strength and numbers", was networking beyond Clydebank, and was attending the STUC Women's Conference. There were also now arts and creative writing groups. A group of Centre users and children attended a residential weekend of outdoor activities in the summer of 1994, funded through the Regional Council, and would go again in 1995. Funding had also been secured in 1994 for a drama group, run in collaboration with a local youth café, which was soon working on a play called "Close Living". It was performed, to popular acclaim, in December of that year.

The 1994/95 Annual Report calculated that the Centre's welfare rights work in the year from November 1993 had helped to secure almost £120,000 in annual payments for claimants – which represented over £1.5m over the projected lifetimes of the recipients. Significant experience, and success, had been gained in social fund reviews and tribunals – on claims related to asbestos, industrial injury, disability, attendance allowance, invalidity, unfair dismissal and war pensions. The cumulative sum secured since April 1993 was now almost £2.6m – all achieved by *volunteers*. By 1995 the cumulative total was to exceed of £5m, at which point the Co-ordinator was reporting to the AGM that:

> Statistics are recorded in all areas of work and group participation by staff and volunteers. We take great pride in the various monitoring systems that have been created since the onset of the project.

Events seven years later were to confirm that they were right to have pride in those systems.

In January of 1995 the Management Committee bade farewell to Ronnie Nicol, who was moving to another job. He had been very important to the relaunch of the Centre and its subsequent progress. He rightly left with the thanks and best wishes of its staff, volunteers and users. In the same month, Collins, with characteristic charm, wrote to Alan Thornton, Managing Director of Thor Ceramics. With the increase in activity at the Centre space was getting tight. The remaining part of the building would now, Collins explained, be very useful – particularly for a computer suite. She wrote that while the Centre had always hoped to be able to secure the funding which would allow for the rental of the rest of the premises, the funding scenario over the coming years was going to preclude that. So, Collins asked if the Centre could have the use of the space *without* any additional rental charge. You don't ask, you don't get; the request was approved.

'Evaluating' New Life

Also in January 1995, the outcomes of the Scottish Office's *Progress in Partnership* consultation were made known – in the form of its *Programme for Partnership*. This outlined the framework for the dissemination of the 'partnership' model for urban regeneration which had been developed in the New Life 'partnership areas'. The new Programme drew on the mid-way evaluations of the initiatives in each of those areas, which had been contracted to research teams at Glasgow and Bristol universities. Their reports were made available to the public later that summer.[17]

[17] Lucy Gaster (et al), *Interim Evaluation of the Ferguslie Park Partnership*; Keith Kintrea (et al), *Interim Evaluation of the Whitfield Partnership*; Alan McGregor (et al), *Interim Evaluation of the Wester Hailes Partnership*; Mo O'Toole (et al), *Interim Evaluation of the Castlemilk Partnership*. All of these published by the Scottish Office Central Research Unit, Edinburgh, 1995.

Despite the Scottish Office's attempts to put a positive 'spin' on the reports, it became clear that they showed significant problems across the areas – despite the very large amounts of money that were being spent by the various 'partners'. Ferguslie Park was already national news in light of the previously mentioned scandal surrounding its community business – which had been set up via the local 'partnership'. Now it became apparent that in Castlemilk and Wester Hailes benefit dependency had *gone up* since 1988. In a meeting with the local community in Wester Hailes a prominent Glasgow University researcher, Alan McGregor, suggested that the best way to deal with this problem would be to ensure that the new social housing in such areas be let only to incoming households who were *not on benefits*. His advice was, in the words of one Wester Hailes resident, "rejected as being absolutely outrageous by the local community". Morever, his statement, reported in the national press, shone a light on the reported improvements in claimant rates in the other two areas – they in fact reflected the *export* of those on benefits to other areas. *The Herald* offered a fairly sobering assessment of the substance of the matter:

> The researchers who compiled the interim reports are surely right when they say that getting so many organisations to work together was an achievement in itself … Nevertheless it would be wrong to ignore the fact that evidence on the intractable problem of unemployment in the four areas does not give … much reason for hope. Overall employment did not improve, and in Whifield in Dundee the improvement could be ascribed to new owner-occupiers.

It was becoming clear that the results of the *New Life* programme were going to be very like those of earlier attempts at 'regeneration' – a lot of expenditure producing new buildings and changes to the environment, but with insufficient social and economic impact. Indeed, in key respects such impact would actually be *outweighed by ongoing processes of degeneration* as the effects of Thatcherism, to use Bell's words again, "leeched through the generations".

Perhaps better to say, however, that all of this was becoming clear to those who were prepared to look at the evidence, draw the conclusion and say it out loud so that the public and local communities might hear. Unfortunately, beyond the local communities themselves, there were too few of those who were involved in – and earning a living out of – the process of 'regeneration' (including prominent researchers) who were actually willing to do that. This was terribly unfortunate, because it allowed the Scottish Office ministers involved, as *The Herald* and *Scotsman* reported, to "put a positive gloss on the research" and to proclaim that the "major and comprehensive impact" of the New Life Programme showed the path for the future. Unfortunately this was very far from the truth, and the failure to assert that fact would mean that a further raft of areas would be the subject of a new phase of 'regeneration' initiatives which would, like their predecessors, achieve far too little. Clydebank would be one of them.

The Programme for Partnership

Programme for Partnership outlined the first major overhaul of the Urban Programme (UP) in Scotland since its inception. Until this time the most deprived 10% of enumeration districts across Scotland were eligible for UP funds. Henceforth, however, two-thirds of all UP funding was to be awarded to a maximum of just 15 areas. These areas were to be known as Priority Partnership Areas (PPAs). The areas were to be designated on the basis of a competitive bidding process. The new local authorities for such areas were now expected to be rather more compliant than their predecessors had been in the 1980s, so they were now to be trusted to act as lead

agents – co-ordinating the various bodies who would be expected to collaborate, and leading the bidding process. Bids were to be submitted to the Scottish Office, and would be judged not just on the basis of the level of need demonstrated, but also on the basis of bid 'quality' – which in practice left a lot of scope for other considerations. The remaining third of the UP funds was to be granted to areas bidding for a lesser designation as Regeneration Programmes (RPs).

All of this was, of course, taking shape during the process of local government re-organisation. At the same time it was being made clear that the total level of resources allocated to the UP was to be cut by some 20% over a three year period. So, the emerging scenario was one in which the new, smaller, less powerful and often somewhat demoralised local authorities would have to compete in a scramble for a diminishing pot of UP resources, and would be obliged to demonstrate an embrace of the government's 'partnership' model of 'regeneration' if they hoped to be successful.

The announcement of the winners and losers in this scramble was much delayed – for reasons that will become apparent. They were eventually made known in December 1996. Bids were made from within 16 local authority areas for a total of 29 PPAs and 21 RPs. In the event, 12 PPAs were established in 9 local authority areas. West Dunbartonshire was one of them. It had an 'archipelago' PPA – one composed of various 'islands' circled on a map which gave the appearance of an archipelago of poverty. Eleven RPs were also designated.

Academics later provided a most interesting analysis of the bidding process. They concluded that while "social need and bid quality were supposed to be the principal determinants of area selection", in practice "other factors seem to have intervened"[18]. Some areas of clearly demonstrated need lost out in the process. The city of Glasgow was the worst hit – ending up with less UP resources than it had received previously (despite its colossal level of need).

On the other hand, straightforward electoral considerations seem to have been important in the designation of PPAs in Ayr and Aberdeen, and in the awarding of a generous RP to the town of Stirling. Both Ayr and Stirling were then marginal constituencies held by Tory incumbents – the latter by Michael Forsyth. Aberdeen was the location for a new constituency in which the Conservatives hoped to do well.

To put things in perspective, the PPAs in Aberdeen and Ayr, the biggest winners, were funded to the tune of £110 and £98 per person per annum respectively. In West Dunbartonshire, where the drawing of the local government boundaries had left an authority in which the very serious social need was in stark contrast to a badly diminished local tax base, the figure was £40. Some of that moral decay which seemed to be in evidence around Westminster seems also to have been in evidence in Edinburgh.

Clydebank Fights Back

Not for the first time in the recent history of Clydebank, an externally imposed agenda was creating a rather unwelcome scenario. As *Programme for Partnership* was being published, the Centre was being invited to a meeting of voluntary organisations, churches and cultural bodies called by Strathclyde Region's Finance Committee chair. Moving towards a reorganisation of local government which no-one had asked for or wanted, he explained, reductions in central government funding were likely to mean wholesale cuts for the voluntary sector across the Region. At the same time, local

[18] Ivan Turok and Nick Hopkins, "Competition and Area Selection in Scotland's New Urban Policy", *Urban Studies*, 35, 11, 1998, p.2049

authorities, including those responsible for Clydebank, were having to undertake extensive work to create local 'partnerships' *just to have the chance to bid* for a share of that diminishing pot of UP resources – and there was no guarantee that they would get any in the event.

This was despite the fact that the situation in Clydebank, as in many other places, was very bad indeed. There were still close to 3,000 people 'officially' unemployed in the town, and many more struggling in poverty and hardship – with all the consequences of that in terms of family and community breakdown. The town was second worst in the Strathclyde Region for dependence on income support and housing benefit, children on free school meals and clothing grants. Thanks in part to the appalling legacy of asbestosis in town – which has the highest death rate from that disease in the UK – it was worse than even Glasgow for mortality rates.

This was the kind of scenario that could make reasonable people want to protest and fight back – and that's what the reasonable people of Clydebank decided to do. George Kirkpatrick seems to have been a particularly important instigator. A local man and previously an engineer, Kirkpatrick had experience both as a shop steward and as a community activist. Having been made redundant from industry, he went on to become the co-ordinator of the Drumchapel Unemployed Workers' Centre. But around 1993 he became unemployed again and arrived back in Clydebank. A long-time friend of Kelly, he was voted onto the Management Committee of the Centre in early 1994. A year later he was pushing for a local campaign in response to the emerging scenario.

Things moved swiftly. On the 21st March a "Public Awareness Campaign Against Government Cuts" was launched at Clydebank Town Hall – organised jointly by the Centre and the Trades Council. There were speakers from the STUC and from the Scottish Voluntary Organisations Alliance. Kelly spoke for the Trades Council and the Centre and explained that the latter would be willing to provide facilities for an alliance to progress the campaign.

That alliance emerged in June 1995 under the title Clydebank Fights Back. Over the next couple of years it was to be tremendously active across a number of fronts. It embraced the Trades Council, the Centre, the Clydebank Justice and Peace Group, and members of local churches. Kirkpatrick played a prominent role, together with George Kas, Eddie Kelly and Janice Dickson. A local minister, the Reverend Robert Haslam, also made a striking contribution.

In September the group convened a meeting on unemployment in Clydebank addressed by the Chief Economic Advisor to the Fraser of Allander Institute at Strathclyde University – Jim Stevens. He helped the local community to resolve that confusion which had troubled them for several years, and which was mentioned in Chapter 6. It arose from the contradiction between, on the one hand, the "impressive achievements" claimed by the SDA during the 1980s, and, on the other, the community's own experience of continuing, and indeed often intensifying, problems. Stevens used census data from 1981 and 1991 to clarify the situation. The "achievements" were actually not remarkable in the way that had been claimed, and the local community had been misled. Clydebank was remarkable primarily in having seen an increase in jobs in the locality at the same time as a decrease in population. This was because the jobs had not so much been 'created' as *moved*, at great expense, from nearby locations by existing firms which wanted to benefit from the EZ financial incentives. They were jobs which largely already belonged to other people. At the same time, the slight improvement in the overall unemployment figures between 1981

and 1991 was due to a much more significant decline in the proportion of the population counted as economically active in the first place.

As was mentioned earlier, there are few things more educational than a good campaign, and the group drew the appropriate lesson: In future 'regeneration' initiatives local people must have a proper voice: "to make sure that … jobs created in Clydebank will be suitable for and available to the people of Clydebank". This meant that the group would have something to say in relation to the 'partnership' now evolving in Clydebank in preparation for the PPA bidding process.

The Clydebank Partnership

The Clydebank Partnership, as it was at this stage, prepared the "Consultative Draft" of its Strategy Document in the summer of 1995. A "consultation/awareness seminar" for the local community was organised for the 7th of October. Bids to the Scottish Office were to be submitted by November, so the time scales, like the Strategy Document itself, did not promise much in terms of what the organisers thought of as constituting 'consultation'. But in order to look democratically legitimate, and to fit with the 'partnership model' established under *New Life*, the PPA bid had to demonstrate 'community participation' – and that was an opportunity for Clydebank Fights Back.

The group got news that the organizers of the seminar intended a slick presentation to be followed by the appointment of three hand-picked "community representatives" for the 'partnership'. Haslam, wearing his collar, was chosen as the ideal person to intervene early in the proceedings and to set the tone – outlining what had happened in the 1980s and how the group had concluded that in future proper community representation was vital to try to avoid the same thing happening again. The result was that the organisers were obliged to think again. In the wake of the meeting CFB wrote a short, but very pertinent and incisive analysis of what had been wrong with the 'consultation'. It could have been written in relation to many similar 'consultation' events which were happening around the country at the same time. Clydebank was different from many of those places in that it still had local community organisations capable of responding in a manner that could not easily be ignored or marginalised.

A further meeting followed, and ultimately a deal was hammered out whereby there would be 12 community representatives, three of whom would come from the ranks of Clydebank Fights Back. These representatives secured resources for training and education, and for visits to other parts of the UK to share experiences of related initiatives. It was a notable achievement.

It was not enough to render the broader West Dunbartonshire PPA which eventually emerged from the bidding process a success – because as we will see it never had the potential to bring about meaningful 'regeneration'. However the intervention did ensure that in Clydebank what was called "community participation" amounted, at least in the early stages, to rather more than the tokenism and manipulation which was to be seen in too many other localities. That was because in the years when it seemed that things could only get better, the local community in Clydebank didn't wait for them to get better, but instead took active steps to make sense of their own experience, and to fight back.

11. Breaking the Rules of the 'Partnership' Game: Thriving in adversity

If the Centre was fighting in 1995 then we could also say that it started the year scraping – scraping for funding. Sorting out the 1994/95 funding had been a challenge, but in 1995/96 the challenge escalated. Firstly, as the workload of the Centre increased there was a pressing need for greater staffing. Comparable organisations functioned with three full-time staff – as had the UB40 in the 1980s. So a further half post in administration was sought. Secondly, as it was realised that staff had no pension provision, costs for staff superannuation were sought. A total of £45,500 was required.

Fighting, scraping, progressing

Again the Region was unable to meet its 50% share – and offered only £15,000. A further £4,330 was again secured under another grant heading, but this still left a shortfall of almost £3,500. Collins summed up the situation at the AGM in May 1995:

> As the Co-ordinator … I feel duty bound to bring to the attention of this AGM the fact that the core funding from CDC and SRC barely covers employment costs, rent and rates, insurance and telephones. … [It makes] no provision for forward planning or innovative developments and will not cover the continuation of services and activities that have been on offer to date. The real dilemma the Centre finds itself in arises from competing with other local community groups through the local grant system *to ensure its very existence*, as opposed to applying for these grants in order to enhance existing facilities and services (emphasis added).

Tony Worthington recognised the situation in sending his apologies for the meeting:

> I do recognise the need to help the Centre in *order to ensure its continued existence*. Please let me know if you can think of any other way in which this could be done and I shall do all I can (emphasis added).

The remarkable thing was that in this context the Centre seemed, as we have seen, not just to be holding its own, but progressing. More progress was soon to be in evidence.

In March 1995 £3,000 was secured from SOFFA to upgrade the computer equipment. In May a meeting was held with a representative of Dunbartonshire Enterprise – who seem to have been keen to consult with the local community in order to avoid the kinds of problems encountered over the initiation of employment projects in 1994 (discussed at the end of Chapter 9). This was soon to lead to an award of £4,000 towards a "General/Information Worker" for the Centre. Julia Reid, a Centre volunteer, was appointed to the post when the money eventually came through in the summer of 1996. CDC were then asked if they would be willing to make up the shortfall on the SRC allocation. You don't ask, you don't get. The outcome was that the authorities agreed to offer £1,800 each. In this way the Centre emerged from what was a real funding crisis slightly ahead of the game – and able, duly, to employ an Information Worker. Later that year things were to improve again, with the award of a Lottery Grant of £118,000 to develop the Centre's own crèche facilities, and to provide a mini-bus. At the same time a draft proposal was being developed for a collaboration with the new local authority and others on the welfare rights front.

But still fighting

As we saw in Chapter 7, one of the conventional wisdoms of 'community development' in these years was that organisations had to choose between

Clydebank & Drumchapel Unemployed Action Group
The photograph shows a group meeting in 1972.
Left to Right: Joe McGraw, Harry Darby, Chairman John Nicholson, Robert McGuire and Mrs Jean Murray.

Clydebank Fights Back
Members of Clydebank Fights Back pictured in Clydebank Business Park in November 1996.
Left to Right: Reverend Robert Haslam, Episcopalian Church, Clydebank
George Kirkpatrick, Clydebank Trades Council
Janice Dickson, Centre Volunteer Welfare Rights Advisor
Eddie Kelly, Clydebank Trades Council

David McPhail's Leaving Do - 1998

Left to Right - Bernadette Traynor (Centre User/Member), David McPhail, Clydebank Trades Council, Gina Traynor (Centre User/Member), Janice Dickson (Welfare Rights Admin)
Foreground - Scott Ward (Centre User/Member)

David leaving Clydebank to live in Australia.

Plaque Unveiled

Plaque Unveiled by Jane McKay STUC
1. Mary Collins, Centre Co-ordinator
2. Jane McKay, STUC
3. Kathleen McKenna, Centre User/Member
4. Eddie Kelly, Clydebank Trades Council
5. Lockhart Cameron, Chairperson Management Committee
6. Frances McMillan, Centre User/Member

Crèche cashes in on Lottery

From left to right - Lorraine from West Dunbartonshire Mobile Crèche with a couple of User/Member's children, Tony Worthington MP, Provost O'Neill, Mary Collins, Centre Co-ordinator and Tom McKendrick, artist.

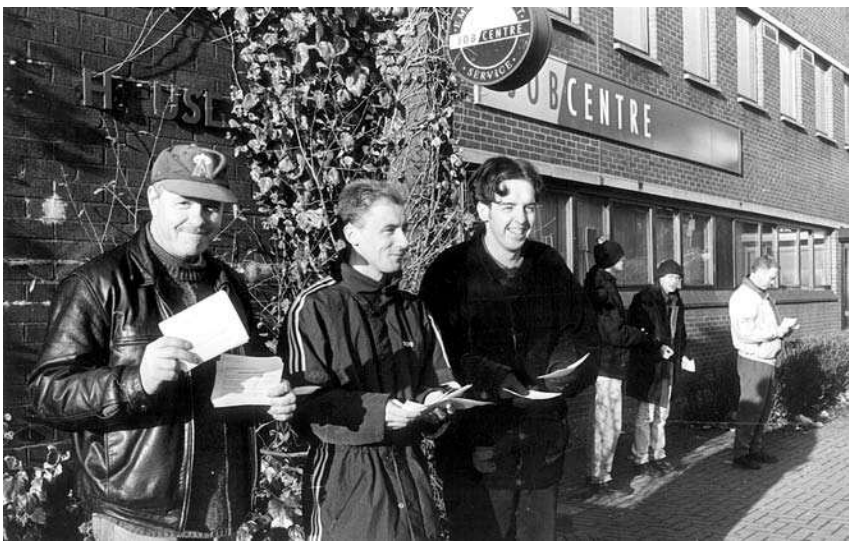
Ten of the best!

CLYDEBANK Unemployed Community Resource Centre recently celebrated its tenth anniversary . . . and to mark the event members and users were awarded certificates.

The celebration was attended by MP Tony Worthington, Des McNulty MSP, Councillor Andrew White, leader of West Dunbartonshire Council, and Jackie Baillie MSP, Minister for Social Justice.

Mary Collins, centre co-ordinator, said: "We have come a long way in those ten years. I hope we can continue to make such a positive impact in assisting the community of Clydebank."

The photograph is taken in a marquee erected in the Centre's yard (Thor Ceramics) to accommodate the many people who attended the event. The User/Members and volunteers are seen receiving certificates for the courses they participated in throughout the year.



Jobseekers Campaign Group

Centre Campaigners protest outside the local Job Centre against the introduction of the Job Seeker's Allowance.

Shipyard Gifts Lamposts to People of Clydebank

Centre staff and User/Members pictured with Kvaerner workers and Cllr Mary Campbell (seated second left)

Campaigning against the closure of Kvaerner in Clydebank shopping centre.

Taking petitions (behind the tables, left to right)
Bridget Oliver, Mary Collins-Centre Co-ordinator and Robert Robertson-Kvaerner Convener

1993 - Clydebank united against un-employment

When marchers from the Scottish Peoples' March for jobs arrived for the official opening of the town's unemployed resource centre in Stanford Street. There to greet the weary foot soldiers from Stranrear was Provost Patrick O'Neill, and Jane Mackay, Secretary of the Glasgow Trades Council.

Surf Award, taken outside Crèche at Stanford Street in 2003.

1. Bill Davidson, Centre User/Member
2. Alison Doig, Computer Tutor
3. Hugh McNeil, User/Member
4. Charlie Marshall, User/Member
5. Carol Shirkie, Centre User/Member
6. Janice Dickson, Welfare Rights Admin
7. Thomas Beattie, User/Member (Deceased)
8. Hugh O'Neill, Former Welfare Rights Officer
9. Vernon Martin, Current Management Committee member
10. Julia Doulati, General/Information Worker
11. Elspeth Kerr, Centre User/Member
12. Mary Collins, Centre Co-ordinator
13. Elsbeth Wyper, User/Member
14. Joan Martin, User/Member
15. User/Member
16. Lesley Connolly, former Financial Admin Worker
17. Janice Paterson, Welfare Rights Volunteer
18. Jean Hay, User/Member
19. Isabella Traynor, Volunteer Welfare Rights Advisor
20. Brian McNeil, User/Member
21. Michael McGarry, User/Member (Deceased)
22. Scott Ward, User/Member

Art tutor Susan White (left) on her 40th birthday with Kathleen Sweeney, Financial Admin.

Pam Smith
Disability Behaviour Advisor

Isa McAfferty Presentation - 1995

Isa McAfferty was given a gold pen by the STUC Chairman, Campbell Christie, for exceptional services rendered to the Trades Council over 30 years.

Eddie Kelly 50 years UCCATT member

Eddie Kelly celebrating 50 years as a member of UCATT at a 'do' organised by the Centre in the Stanford Street premises. Harry Frew of UCATT presents Eddie with a UCATT Tie.

Reverend Robert Haslam's Leaving Do

Robert receiving a gift from Provost Cairney as a memento of his time as a minister in Clydebank. Robert was going into semi-retirement and going to live in Spain.

Danny McCafferty

Visiting the centre in his capacity as leader of West Dunbartonshire Council

Visiting Ruchill UWC
Clydebank staff and User/Members visiting Ruchill Unemployed Workers Centre during a meeting of the Women's group as part of the Glasgow Federation of Unemployed Worker's Centres.

Pictured smiling - Patricia McLaren, Co-ordinator of Ruchill Unemployed Workers Centre, and to her left with white mug in hand is Ann Cooper, Co-ordinator of Milton Unemployed Worker's Centre. The rest of the group is made up of User/Members from different centres.

The Centre's Users are pictured here assisting members of Clydebank Disability Forum, who took part in the 13 mile run to raise funds for their group. The Users took turns pushing the wheelchairs and collecting money in buckets from the spectators lining the route.

Dalkeith Unemployed Workers Centre (1994)
Centre User/Members and staff visit Dalkeith Unemployed Workers Centre and are treated to a slap up lunch and some great chat.

Plaque Presentation April 1999

Bernadette and Thomas Traynor are pictured with Provost Cairney
who is presenting a West Dunbartonshire Council plaque.

Welfare Rights Advice Certificates

Bill Speirs, General Secretary STUC, presenting Volunteer Welfare Rights Advisors
John McDermott and Isabella Traynor with their certificates.

campaigning 'from the outside', and participating with 'partners' and securing funding 'from the inside'. This 'wisdom' was created by the dynamic of 'the doomsday scenario' and the development of the 'partnership' agenda in 'regeneration'. In other nearby places – Glasgow and Paisley for instance – it was being asserted with some vigour.

If one examines this 'wisdom' then one finds little merit in it – at least in terms of reasoned argument. Why should such a choice have to be made? It was not seen as a necessary choice in the previous decade. In fact then *the opposite* was true. The great irony was that as the choice was being asserted as necessary, people were also talking about the need to 'empower' communities and to promote the development of a 'community voice'. Yet what this 'conventional wisdom' was saying was that community organisations could have *either* resources *or* a tongue in their heads.

In Clydebank the Centre decided that it should have both. Had it been located in Glasgow then it might not have been allowed to do that. But in its own arena it was able to assert that right, and while its local 'partners' were not always overjoyed, it is to their credit that they by and large accepted that it was the Centre's right – at least in this period. So, as the resources were starting to come in, Clydebank continued to fight back.

At the end of 1995 there was serious flooding in the Faifley area of the town. Early in the new year the group organised assistance for the families affected – collecting and delivering furniture and raising cash for those with no household insurance. Also, in the later part of 1996 CFB organised a Poverty Hearing in liaison with Church Action on Poverty. Benefits claimants had been widely demonised by the government in the early-mid 1990s – Peter Lilley's attacks on young single parents comes to mind, but that is just one example – and the purpose of such a hearing was to allow those worst affected to tell the grim realities to local decision makers, and for the latter to *listen*.

Against the Job Seekers' Allowance

In the summer of 1995 campaigning was opened on another front – on the government's plans to introduce the Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA). The latter translated the increasingly punitive and stigmatising drift of government rhetoric in relation to benefits claimants into the actual operation of the benefits system. Clydebank District Council was asked to consider the following resolution:

> That this Council condemns the introduction of the Jobseeker's Allowance in the new Social Security Bill, intended to take effect on 1st April 1996, as Government estimates show that 90,000 people will lose all entitlement to benefit and 150,000 will have their benefit entitlement reduced. In particular, it condemns the reduction in Unemployment Benefit from 12 months to 6 months, and the use of Income Support rates for all those aged 18-24 regardless of National Insurance contributions.
>
> That this Council calls on the Government to re-think this proposal to avoid plunging many more people into the poverty trap.

The resolution was passed. Duly the Centre and the Trades Council were instrumental in creating the Clydebank Campaign against JSA, which remained active for at least two and a half years. Activity was particularly intense towards the end of 1996, when, following a six month delay, the JSA was being implemented. As in previous episodes of the Centre's history, a local man, Joe Henry, came to the fore – leading protests outside the local Job Centre (where the staff themselves went on strike in

protest over the JSA), monitoring the implementation of the new system, and reporting to the local press.

A meeting held in the Centre on the 8th October was particularly successful, and led to an excellent report in the *Clydebank Post*. Kirkpatrick, Kelly and Haslam summed up the experience and learning which the recent campaigning had produced – the claims and promises made in relation to 'regeneration' in the past, set against the reality of the actual outcomes. Kirkpatrick, now chairing the Centre's Management Committee, was quoted:

> This Centre is in total opposition to schemes which drain the energy of the unemployed. Most training offered to the unemployed goes through private agencies with very little accountability. Clydebank needs jobs, not a half-empty business park. If you look behind closed doors there are folk in Clydebank leading terrible lives.

The Poverty Hearing had demonstrated that he wasn't exaggerating. Henry added:

> I'm on the dole and the terrifying thing is there is no safety net. If you argue about what is reasonable work your benefit gets chopped. … It's blaming the unemployed for the lack of jobs.

Also quoted was a Gail Birnie, Assistant Producer of "the top-rated" BBC Scotland programme *Words with Wark*:

> I was very impressed with the eloquence of the people at the meeting. There was a great deal of passion and very important points were put across clearly. We are looking seriously into doing a programme on this subject.

The campaign had the wholehearted support of Worthington. Indeed the legislation was, as Donald Dewar reported in a letter to the Centre, opposed at every stage by the Labour Party – because it would "hit some very vulnerable people" and be likely to be "operated in way which will be widely seen as punitive". Labour, he promised, would conduct "a very thorough review … if, as I hope, we are in office after the next election".

The media latched on. On the 31st October Eddie Kelly participated in the Radio Scotland discussion show *Speaking Out*. And in November Wark Clements and Co. Ltd, the makers of *Words with Wark*, duly went ahead with their programme. However that week a certain Paul Gascoigne was in the news – regarding domestic abuse. In the event the latter item was given rather more air time than the issue of the JSA, and the feeling at the Centre was that this was less to do with the important issue of domestic abuse, and rather more to do with the issue of celebrity. There was both disappointment and anger in Clydebank. Haslam and then Kirkpatrick pursued the issue with a rather defensive Alan Clements over the next month.

Into West Dunbartonshire

The old local authorities ceased to exist on the 31st March 1996. The boundaries of the new local authority – West Dunbartonshire – very much reflected that "naked political gerrymandering" that Douglas Fraser was later to write about in *The Herald*. The most prosperous parts of Clydebank District Council and Dumbarton District Council (Milngavie and Helensburgh respectively) were incorporated into neighbouring authorities where the Conservatives hoped to be able to compete rather better than they could expect to in either of the two main towns. The remainder – which was to become West Dunbartonshire – was seen by the Conservatives as an electoral basket case. The result was an authority with a very serious concentration of need, together with a heavily diminished local tax base – to the extent that its basic viability was

seriously in question from the outset. The danger was clear enough, and was pointed out by at least one of the MPs in the locality (John McFall) in personal conversations with Alan Stewart – who was then Minister for Local Government at the Scottish Office. But in the dog days of Conservatism in Scotland such appeals were to no avail. In the fullness of time the decision was to contribute to some very bad outcomes indeed in the locality.

The Centre's Constitution was duly changed to reflect the new local government arrangements – allowing for four representatives from the new Council to replace the two and two from its predecessors. Daniel McCafferty, by now a Councillor, was one of those chosen, together with Patricia Rice – who would go on to become an important part of the Centre. One of the other two was a young man called Andrew White, who was soon to be the leader of the new authority.

West Dunbartonshire Council was met by an immediate funding crisis, which led to large Council Tax hikes in its first two years. In this context the now too familiar work of securing the resources to continue to exist got underway again. £59,575 was the requested sum for 1996/97 – including a sum of £6,000 to replace the contribution which had previously been available through the Regional Council's funding of education courses via the Glasgow Federation of UWCs (the Local Collaborative Programme). An additional application was made for £19,000 to develop the welfare rights service in collaboration with the Council's Social Work Department.

The funding problem seems to have been compounded by confusion resulting from the transition to the new local authority structure. By May, following extensive clarification and appeals, only £40,100 had been secured. Further work managed to secure a total of £53,000 by October. It was, of course, less than had been asked for. But it was also only a little short of what had been achieved in total the previous year – including the contribution from Dunbartonshire Enterprise. Clearly, the Centre was learning how to play the funding game quite well – even in times of austerity.

Later in the year CFB was also campaigning on further cuts to the funding of voluntary organisations which loomed in light of the following year's settlement for local government. On Friday 13th September they, together with a couple of thousand others, took to the streets of Edinburgh to express their anger to Michael Forsyth and his Scottish ministers. It also lobbied the new West Dunbartonshire Council to demand that it should show a bit more of the fight being shown by the local community. A couple of months later the Council took the hint and began to campaign itself – pointing out that the cuts they were being obliged to make would necessarily fall on the most vulnerable groups in the community. Indeed it emerged that West Dunbartonshire was amongst the councils worst affected by the funding which had been announced – one of the appropriately named "doomsday group" of authorities which would have to massively increase Council Tax levels simply to maintain their past spending commitments. Better late than never, the Council called on members of the public to support *their* (i.e. the Council's) campaign!

As the award of PPA status for West Dunbartonshire was finally being announced at the end of 1996 there was at the most six months to go before the next general election. There was a sense of anticipation. But there remained the danger that the projected local government settlement would do serious damage ahead of the election. So the campaigning continued with an all-night vigil at the Centre in February of 1997 – to coincide with what had been declared Unemployment Sunday across the UK by Justice and Peace. The need for the Centre "to continue to exist"

was heightened by almost 450 redundancies at John Brown Engineering in 1995, and more at the nearby Yarrow's shipyard.

In the meantime the Centre continued to raise funding from other sources. Dunbartonshire Enterprise had already agreed to provide the funding for the General/Information Worker post for a further year. In February, Urban Programme funding of £15,000 was obtained to equip the computer suite in the newly expanded premises. At the same time, following a delay caused by uncertainty due to the transfer of ownership of Thor to Austrian owners (RHI Refractories), it was now possible to use the £118,000 provided by the Lottery to develop the crèche facilities. This particular 'private landlord' had again proved remarkably helpful – granting use of the required space at minimal cost.

The Centre's impressive track record on welfare rights also meant that it could offer its services to the developing West Dunbartonshire PPA – if suitable resourcing could be provided. Later that year, as we shall see, it would be forthcoming. In this way the Centre was developing the kind of profile that would make it quite difficult for the Council *not to* provide the core funding that made all the rest of these 'add-ons' possible. £57,000 was requested, and eventually £53,000 was obtained – a very good outcome given the ongoing funding crisis.

Breaking the rules of the game

The progress of the Centre in Clydebank was in stark contrast to what was happening with the UWCs in Glasgow at the same time. There the local authority embrace of the logic of the 'official' version of 'partnership' had been much stronger, and this posed political problems for organisations rooted in the trade union movement and with a commitment primarily to progressing and developing individuals, rather than remoulding them to fit with the demands of a 'flexible labour market'. This, together with problems with particular personalities, led to some rather ugly conflict and to protracted strike action by UWC staff. By April of 1997 a review had been carried out of the seven centres, led by a young councillor called Paul Martin, which concluded that they "did not provide overall value for money". Implosion ensued. Operating outwith Glasgow, the Clydebank Centre was mercifully clear of all of this. More generally, given the Clydebank Centre's now established track record, it would have been very difficult – at best – to make the case that it "did not provide overall value for money".

In the circumstances, which as we have seen were less than propitious, the development of the Centre in this period seems quite remarkable. How was it able, not just to survive, but to progress and develop along the lines that we have seen? In particular, how was it able to do this when, as we have seen in this chapter, it seemed to break the rules of the 'partnership' game by continuing to campaign and to voice critical views of its own in public?

Part of the explanation lies in the previous chapters. In the period since 1992 the Centre had steadily been developing the capacities it would require to look after itself in any circumstances. By early 1994 they were quite consciously preparing for the difficulties that local government reorganisation in particular was going to create. The structure of their own Management Committee, with representation from each of the local authorities, helped in this regard – both in ensuring knowledge and awareness of developing scenarios, and in ensuring that the key funders were fully appraised of the contribution the organisation was making to its local community.

But another part of the explanation lies in this chapter. It is that the Centre's willingness to break with the 'conventional wisdom' about how a voluntary

organisation seeking funding should operate – by campaigning on issues of vital interest to its local community – raised the profile and esteem of the Centre, both in, and well beyond, Clydebank. It was clear that that the Centre and the Trades Council was at the heart of so much that was positive in this troubled town. Here were principled and dignified people working very hard, most of them entirely unpaid, to be able to say and do what was right on behalf of their community – and for no other reason than that it *was* right. This seems to have raised the Centre's esteem not just in the eyes of the local community, who would then *expect* that it should be funded, but also, at times albeit a little grudgingly, in the eyes of the funders themselves. In a sense they felt they 'had to hand it to them' – and they did.

The Centre, that is, seems to have progressed and developed in these very difficult years, not in spite of its willingness to break the rules of the 'partnership' game, but *because* of that. And that meant that, unlike many other organisations which had then been around for some time, the Centre would be around to serve the needs of its community for some time to come still.

Part 4
New Labour, Local Politics and National Policy

New Labour come to government, but continue with many aspects of Conservative policy – including its 'regeneration' policy. The Clydebank Priority Partnership Area becomes a Social Inclusion Partnership. Paradoxically, the Centre thrives under the SIP, but this is linked to the fact that the latter was *not* achieving regeneration. Thereafter developments in both local politics and national policy begin to emerge and converge in a manner which poses a serious challenge to the Centre's continuing existence. The Scottish Trades Union Congress uses its influence to defend the Centre against that challenge.

12. From *New Life* to New Labour: Old wine in new bottles

In May 1997 it actually happened; the Labour Party won a General Election. To put that into perspective: Children who were just being born the last time that had happened were by now approaching their 23rd birthdays. The Conservatives were electorally devastated south of the border. Nor had their plan to re-engineer the culture and character of the Scottish nation brought the electoral dividend hoped for north of the border. They were humiliatingly wiped out – even in those constituencies they had carved out most carefully, and resourced most intensively.

There was a degree of euphoria – and *schadenfreude* – about that; but it was euphoria tinged with a degree of trepidation, for many people were no longer very sure about what the Labour Party had become. Under the leadership of Tony Blair, who had succeeded John Smith after his untimely death in 1994, the Party had been 'reinvented' as 'New Labour'. It looked 'new' alright, but was it actually Labour? Increasingly the noises suggested otherwise; they seemed to indicate that what had been the Labour Party had been converted to key aspects of Thatcherism. After the election it wasn't just the noises that suggested this, but also many of the actions.

For instance, prior to the election it was made clear that New Labour would not be repealing any of the legislation which had so weakened the trade unions in the Conservative years. This had seriously undermined the bargaining power of working people, and had contributed significantly to the growing problem of poverty among households whose members were actually in employment. It was also made clear that the incoming Chancellor would not be indulging in 'tax and spend', and indeed would stick to the "eye-wateringly tight" spending limits specified by the outgoing Conservative Chancellor for the next two years. The 'five pledges' which the Party were trumpeting in their election campaign were, by Blair's own recent account, minimalistic slogans which seemed to be designed mainly to sound good, cost little, and fit onto something the size of a credit card. Some stalwarts suggested that it was all just an electoral ruse, and that the real social democratic Labour Party would come to the fore after the election. But that was explicitly rebuffed by Blair on election night: elected as 'New Labour' the party would govern as 'New Labour' – and he meant it.

It wasn't exactly what the Centre, or so many others in Clydebank, had been waiting for. Some bright spark somewhere pointed out that Tony Blair MP was in fact an anagram of I'm Tory plan B. They laughed about that in the Centre, but one imagines they did that with a bit of a grimace.

Joined-Up Government?

At the same time some very good things were happening at the Centre. Thor's generosity, thankfully continued by its new owners, allowed for the lottery funds to be deployed. The long-desired crèche facilities were established in portacabins in what became an extension of the Centre's back yard. They were eventually opened by Worthington in August 1997, and provided spaces for 22 children. Combined with the mini-bus, they would enable many more people to access and use the Centre.

At around the same time, given the very serious level of need in West Dunbartonshire, the Council's mind was on the problem of low up-take of benefits. It was estimated that in the region of £5 million pounds a year was going unclaimed. This had direct implications for the Council itself, in the form of large sums in relation to Housing Benefit and Council Tax. A proposal ultimately emerged for an authority-wide Benefits Maximisation Project to be funded through Urban Aid. It was

to involve extensive outreach work in the areas designated as part of the PPA archipelago. In the town of Dumbarton the local Citizen's Advice Bureau was seen to be best placed to deliver the project. In Clydebank, however, the Centre was the obvious choice. Shortly the shape of the project was hammered out. "Each end of the authority" would get a rights worker and administrative support – to be recruited by the host organisations. The Council itself would secure and maintain a vehicle, and fund the driver's post. By spring of 1998 the "Benefits Bus" was on the road.

Thus, across the Council area there was a campaign underway via the PPA to try to ameliorate some of the damage done to local communities – and to local government coffers – by government rhetoric and policy on benefits in the Conservative years. This campaign involved reaching out to people, telling them that they should not feel ashamed to claim their entitlements, and that indeed there was no need to feel grateful for receiving them.

Now, these were the days in which the New Labour mantras of "joined-up thinking" and "joined-up government" were on ministers' lips. So one might have imagined that what was being done on benefits in the locality would have been reflected also in what ministers were saying and doing at national level. But it wasn't quite like that.

Old Labour, New Labour and the JSA

Some of the Centre's correspondence between 1996 and 1998 gives a clear indication of the developing drift of New Labour's own rhetoric and policy. In November 1996 letters regarding the JSA had brought prompt, personal responses from senior Labour figures like Donald Dewar. By mid 1997 he was Secretary of State for Scotland, working towards the referendum on devolution. Soon he would be First Minister in the duly devolved Scottish Parliament. Previously he, like his Party, had been trenchantly opposed to the JSA. Indicatively, Tony Worthington had sent the Centre a speech by Labour's Ian McCartney in which he had thundered against its "callousness":

> The JSA is one of the most draconian and anti-libertarian measures ever introduced in the United Kingdom. It is based on the belief of the Tory right wing that unemployment only exists because people are workshy or lazy

Seven months later, however, a letter regarding the future of the JSA from Joe Henry to Brian Wilson at the Scottish Office merited only a curt reply from a junior civil servant saying the letter had been forwarded to the Benefits Agency. *Three months later* the Agency replied:

> Modernising the Social Security system is a key priority of the Government. The Government's objectives are to reduce poverty and welfare dependency and to promote work incentives. The Government will develop a system that supports work, savings and honesty. One of the Government's first steps is to focus on helping people off welfare and into work. As the main benefit for the unemployed, the JSA will have a major role to play in the transition from benefit to work, and an extensive programme of work is under way to enable the government to ensure that it is achieving these objectives. … I hope this reply has helped to explain the position.

It did that alright! An attempt to reach Henry McLeish met with the same fate. Those so-accessible politicians of the previous year were now rather less accessible, and for some reason they were now letting others do the talking for them.

Mama mía: a letter to Harriet

If there were any doubt about whether this kind of thing indicated a more basic continuity with the previous government's attitude towards claimants, it was dispelled by the early summer of 1998. At that point the Centre wrote to Harriet Harman regarding the cuts that she had recently announced to Lone Parent Benefit – cuts which led to the resignation of Malcolm Chisholm from his junior ministerial post. The letter conveys a combined sense of disbelief and rage – and concludes with an appeal to Harman's better moral judgement, which, very cleverly, invokes some of New Labour's own moral rhetoric:

> We feel that it would be criminal, and we are sure that you will fully understand as a mother, that the children are made to suffer from these punishing cuts. You have to be in the position of being an unemployed lone parent to fully appreciate the hardship that we face without the added burden of being expected to survive on less. After 20 years of Tory rule and severe cuts in the Welfare State, we expected better from New Labour, to go forward, not back and we hoped for a brighter, safer, more prosperous future for our children. We ask you to reconsider your planned attack on some of the most deprived individuals in our communities, to show compassion and understanding … The children must not be made to suffer.

The pattern was becoming clear. Soon some of the most reputable academics writing on social policy would be commenting on the new government's open sympathy with its predecessor's views on welfare – as "wasteful" and "inappropriately addictive" – and on the ongoing emphasis on "personal responsibility" which had "if anything, been strengthened" under New Labour. Those interested in the development of public attitudes to welfare suggested that the government had been actively seeking to play up long-standing public prejudices about "undeserving" groups. And they specifically warned that a government which declared very ambitious aims in terms of "tackling poverty" could only undermine those aims if it continued to do that. It was suggested that perhaps the government could do something as simple as publicising just how miserably low many benefits were, because the public at large showed little awareness of that reality. Failing that, it would be very difficult to improve the lot of some of the most vulnerable groups, which was precisely what those ambitious aims required.[19]

From Poverty to Social Exclusion

In 1998 Harman's announcement was a bridge too far for Chisholm and many others in the Labour Party – and for everyone at the Centre. For others, though, it was to be justified in terms of the recasting of policy in terms of the idea of social exclusion/inclusion, rather than in the more familiar terms of poverty and inequality. And these ideas were to be the basis not just for what looked like the continuation of the Conservatives' attitudes to benefit claimants, but also for what looked very like the continuation of their policies on 'regeneration'.

The idea of social exclusion came to prominence in the European Union in the later 1980s and early 1990s. It was used to try to think about how to avoid the worrying social fragmentation and loss of cohesion seen in US society as the neo-liberal agenda of Reagan and Bush (Snr) took hold of the country. As European societies increasingly embraced a neo-liberal market agenda, it was being suggested, they must seek to avoid such outcomes.

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[19] See the annual *British Social Attitudes* Reports in the years after 1997 – esp. the 16th Report (1999/2000), the 18th Report (2001/2002) and the 19th Report (2002/2003). The quotations above come from the introduction and chapter one of the first of these.

The rationale for this was that the kind of 'social exclusion' seen in the USA (and brought vividly to life in New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina) would limit the pool of available labour in Europe, and so undermine the labour 'flexibility' which employers increasingly were seeking – leading to rising wages. In this light social exclusion could be seen to be economically inefficient. It would require states to maintain large dependent populations – not infrequently in prisons (which are expensive) – at the same time as leading to increased labour costs for employers.

New Labour went big on the idea. Social *inclusion* was going to be seen as crucial to the competitiveness and efficiency of the UK labour market. On this basis, the ethic of *work* became central to the language of social exclusion. A clear emphasis was now placed on the responsibilities of individuals, families and communities to fall into line with the new agenda – and of the role of government in 'encouraging' them to do that.

In principle, of course, getting people into employment is a very good thing. But, as we have seen before, practice is often another thing. Because for people to get into employment there needed to be jobs, and they needed to be suitable jobs. That was a problem. Moreover, the basic aim of 'social inclusion' was to maintain a labour market based on 'flexibility', which means significant job insecurity and, particularly at the bottom end of the market, part time hours and low wages. With trade unions still hamstrung by Conservative legislation, it would be difficult to try to improve those things. A minimum wage would help, but it would need to be set at a sufficient level – the kind of level which New Labour's new best friends in the private sector would not be willing to tolerate. This is perhaps the key reason why in the social exclusion/inclusion mindset *poverty* was given a much lower level of priority than previously. It was to be seen as just as one aspect of the problem of social exclusion. Other things were to be seen to have as much, and at times perhaps even greater, overall importance. Not surprisingly, a growing problem of 'in-work poverty' was to ensue.

From New Life to New Labour

Thus, social exclusion/inclusion became the basis of New Labour's urban policy in Scotland at the end of the nineties. As may already be apparent, this did *not* mean any significant departure from the previous government's 'partnership' agenda for 'regeneration'. For there was a very significant overlap between the concerns that had motivated policy in the Conservative years and New Labour's own thinking. Fundamentally, both governments were committed to neo-liberalism.

In December 1997, Donald Dewar established a group of senior civil servants to develop "a corporate approach to promoting social inclusion within government" in Scotland. This was called the Social Exclusion Network. In February 1998 it published a consultation paper called *Social Exclusion in Scotland*, out of which emerged a Scottish Social *Inclusion* Network. In turn this Network produced, in the spring of 1999, a strategy document entitled *Social Inclusion: Opening the Door to a Better Scotland*.

These documents gave a clear indication that the transition from New Life to New Labour was not going to involve fundamental changes in urban policy. The consultation paper set the tone with its declaration that the *New Life* partnerships had "effectively tackled many of the problems of social exclusion". Similarly, the strategy document argued that:

> The four pilot partnerships set up under New Life for Urban Scotland in the late 1980s have achieved substantial improvements in many of the common measures of deprivation, including

> significant reductions in unemployment, crime and low educational attainment as well as improvements to the physical environment through investment in housing and local amenities.
>
> The key planks of the New Life approach have … been widely recognised as the necessary ingredients of effective regeneration.

It then proposed that the Conservatives' subsequent Programme for Partnership had successfully taken the "key planks of the New Life approach" forward, and announced that the new Government would be designating its own Social Inclusion Partnerships (SIPs) , which would be "like PPAs". The existing PPAs and RPs would then "be expected" to evolve, quite unproblematically, into SIPs.

What was happening was that the new government was continuing and developing its predecessors' programme – 'rebadged', as they say, as a 'social inclusion' programme. The West Dunbartonshire PPA was going to become a SIP.

Evidence based policy or vice versa?

In heralding the "substantial" achievements of the *New Life* programme, *Social Inclusion: Opening the Door to a Better Scotland* offered a very significant qualification to the claim it was making.

> That is not to say that the [New Life] partnerships have been uniformly successful, and it is important that lessons are learned from the final evaluation that is currently taking place.

It was one of those pregnant little paragraphs which would probably barely have registered with many readers. But it was saying that the New Life programme had been declared to be a significant success before the consultants commissioned to evaluate it had actually done their evaluation.

So on what basis was the programme being declared a success? It could hardly have been on the basis of the mid-way evaluations published in 1995. We saw in Chapter 10 that while the Scottish Office had heralded the programme's "major and comprehensive impact" on the basis of these evaluations, the actual content of the research suggested something quite different. Labour MP John McFall, at that time Deputy Shadow Scottish Secretary, had himself pointed this out. The programme, he stated, had *not* been effective "in reducing unemployment, poverty and alienation". Had something radically changed in the interim? That was unlikely, as the Conservatives had concluded that in the intervening years they would largely continue to do what they had already been doing. Even if it was *suspected* that there had been some new departure since 1995, then surely it would have been be necessary to wait for the research to be completed before concluding that there had been? After all, the government was talking already about the importance of policy being informed by research – of having 'evidence based policy'.

What transpired in due course looked worryingly like the precise opposite of that. In 1999 the Scottish Office published the evaluation of New Life it had commissioned from Cambridge Policy Consultants.[20] McFall had been right. The substantive findings were in line with what one would have expected on the basis of the mid-way evaluations of the programme. However, with ministers having already committed to the continuation of the 'partnership' agenda for 'regeneration', the substantive findings had to be – and were – 'spun' in a manner which was remarkably

[20] Cambridge Policy Consultants, *An Evaluation of the New Life for Urban Scotland Initiative*, Edinburgh: Scottish Executive Central Research Unit, 1999.

reminiscent of what had happened in 1995. However, now the intervention of the 'spin' machine seemed to be even more clearly perceptible in the body of the consultants' report itself – for instance in the following statement about New Life:

> As an experiment it has been largely successful, as a programme of public expenditure, it has been value for money. There is a good chance that many of its achievements will be durable. New Life has created a platform which, with good continuation partnerships and fair economic weather, gives residents the chance of a sustainable improvement in their quality of life.

At first glance this may seem highly positive, but on closer reading it looks very different. It's the kind of thing a researcher would be highly unlikely to write by way of an "executive summary" of findings without the intervention of some consideration other than clarity of communication with the intended reader. For it in fact said that there was only a "chance" that residents of the areas would experience "a sustainable improvement in their quality of life"; and this chance, in turn, rested on continuing urban policy interventions and on "fair economic weather". This was not at all what the promoters of the New Life programme had claimed would happen. This, moreover, was the most optimistic scenario. The actual detail of the consultants' evidence suggested that it was rather *too* optimistic.

The fact was that ten years of sustained attention by a whole range of organisations, led by central government itself, and spending a grand total of £485m on just four housing estates, had come nowhere near to creating the "well-functioning suburbs" which New Life had set out to create – never mind the "renaissance" that Malcolm Rifkind had promised. And given that, what chance could there be for meaningful regeneration through the much smaller scale, and much less generously resourced 'partnerships' that had been created under the *Programme for Partnership*, and which were at that very moment evolving into New Labour's Social Inclusion Partnerships? They were bound to fail to achieve that, and they did. A few years later they would be criticised very heavily by Scottish Executive research for that outcome. But what was really surprising was that anyone who had followed the developing situation over the years of 'regeneration' was remotely surprised by their failure.

13. The SIP/Centre Paradox

As the SIPs were being announced the Scottish Parliament was coming into being. The 1999 elections delivered, on the basis of the 'additional member system' of proportional representation, no overall majority for any of the parties. A Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition ensued, with Donald Dewar as the first First Minister of the new Scottish Executive. What was called 'urban regeneration' now fell under its jurisdiction. Within three years it would be declaring that its initial foray in the field – in the form of the Social Inclusion Partnerships – had fared very poorly indeed.

We saw in the previous chapter that this could have been predicted. Indeed not only *could* it have been predicted, it *was* predicted. Perhaps significantly, though, it was predicted most clearly by academics who were not amongst those continually pursuing research funding from the government and its agencies. One of these was Professor John Foster, then Head of the School of Social Sciences at the University of Paisley (now part of the University of the West of Scotland). In the early summer of 1999, Foster, himself a long time member of Govan Community Council with direct experience of 'regeneration' over many years, was asked to contribute his observations on the problem of 'social exclusion' to the Lord Provost's Commission on Overcoming Social Exclusion in Edinburgh. Over a period of a few days, while also doing other things, and at no additional cost to the taxpayer, he drafted an eight page document which laid out all the essentials.

Fostering Understanding on the SIPs

Foster identified four main reasons for the failure of the *New Life* programme. Firstly, the partnerships had operated in a broader context where income was being redistributed *away* from the poorest sections of society. Taxation became more regressive; the relative value of most benefits and pensions fell; more work was part-time and insecure, and wage levels for many unskilled workers were also depressed. The poor continued to become poorer.

Secondly, Conservative housing policy operated to concentrate the poorest people in particular areas – generally of council housing. Switches of subsidy from buildings to benefits forced up rents, so that those who could afford to get into owner occupation would do so. This was often through the 'right to buy', which also removed the best stock. The poorest were left behind in the diminishing stock – which was also the least desirable. Problems became concentrated and intensified.

Thirdly, the *New Life* programme was much too optimistic about the role which would be played by the private sector. This was clearly demonstrated by the government's own final evaluation. In practice the private sector did not play a leading role. The expectations which had been expressed at the height of Thatcherism seem barely to have outlived the Lawson boom. In the context of the recession of the early 1990s they were found to have been very unrealistic.

A fourth reason was the problem of community participation. In practice community participation became a mechanism for managing and restructuring communities which tended to compound, rather than offset, their fragmentation and loss of cohesion. Across the 'partnership' areas what was called 'participation' had led to the *disempowerment* of local communities, and to an actual *fall* in the overall level of community organisation and activity in the estates – a decreasing proportion of residents who ever participated in *any* kind of local groups or meetings.

Foster then explained that the emerging SIPs would be very unlikely to succeed where *New Life* had failed. The adverse trend in income distribution was not

being reversed. The minimum wage had been set too low, and changes to taxes and benefits would not be sufficient for a significant impact. Indeed it was soon to transpire that income inequality was *worsening* during the first Blair government. Moreover, New Labour housing policy was heading towards the *intensification* of the Conservatives' neo-liberal agenda of stock transfer and privatisation. By that time it was already clear that this would also be the policy of the coalition in Edinburgh. Large scale transfers of local authority housing – the kind of thing which the Thatcherite 'bogey men' of recent decades (the Ridleys, the Josephs, and Forsyths) had only been able to dream – were to be the order of the day. In addition, the SIPs retained, and in relation to housing intensified, the kind of unrealistic expectations about markets and the private sector which had been in evidence in *New Life*. Finally, the perspective on community participation which was then emerging in the SIPs was likely to make existing problems worse rather than better. For it was being suggested that community leaders should be rendered more accountable to their SIP 'partners' and less accountable to their communities – which, in the circumstances, could only lead to further damage to, and demoralisation of, what was left of community organisations in areas of poverty.

Foster was clear that this virtually dictated failure. He also indicated who would get *the blame* when that failure became apparent. It would, he indicated, be blamed on the *local implementers*, rather than on the government's own policies – on the failure of local 'partners' to work together properly, in a 'joined-up' way, to 'deliver' on central government's priorities. In due course, as we shall see, this is *precisely* what was to happen.

Something of a Paradox?

We left the Centre coming to terms with the drift of welfare and regeneration policy in 1997 and 1998. Astute readers may have noted something of an apparent paradox emerging in that period. On the one hand the drift of policy was revealing the basic continuity between the policies of the New Labour government and those of its Conservative predecessors. And we saw there, and even more clearly in this Chapter, that this meant the prospects for meaningful 'regeneration' through the emerging SIP in West Dunbartonshire were, at best, not very good at all.

Yet at the same time we have seen that the Centre continued to progress and develop. We saw some of the reasons for such progress and development in the years immediately prior to this in Chapter 11. But in the years of the PPA/SIP there is another significant aspect to consider – which we shall come to in due course.

It's not like relations were harmonious with the *local* 'Partnership'. Indeed the evidence across these years is that the relationship between the Partnership and the Centre, indeed between the Partnership and the local community more generally, was very strained. Eddie Kelly gave regular reports to the Centre on just how frustrating it was to try to represent the community. He wanted the councillors on the Centre's Management Committee to be aware that community representatives were not given the information they required to make decisions, and that they were not even involved in the exchanges where decisions were actually being made. He wanted them to know that community representatives had been bluntly told that time often did not *allow* the Partnership to defer decisions to allow time for community participation. People were getting worn down and demoralised, and it was becoming increasingly difficult to sustain the broader community input to the process. On one occasion a meeting on the issues of poverty and health, on which one would imagine community input would

have been vital, was called with *three days' notice*. By the middle of 1998 even someone as dogged and able as Kelly was considering giving up.

These were precisely the kinds of complaints about 'participation' which local communities in the New Life partnership areas had been making a decade earlier. Little wonder that there the experience of 'community participation' had proved so counter-productive. In light of that experience it would have been incredibly difficult for the Centre to sustain on an ongoing basis the kind of campaign that would have been necessary to achieve meaningful participation in their own area – it might have entailed doing nothing else at all, and still failing to make the required impression. In that light, Kelly's instincts were, not surprisingly, rather good.

So, this rather compounds the apparent paradox – the centre continuing to progress and develop, not just in a context where national policies were so unconducive to meaningful regeneration, but where 'participatory' relations with the *local* Partnership itself were so poor too.

Nonetheless, the Centre *did* continue to progress and develop. In this period it was able successfully, if not always straightforwardly, to secure resources for its work through its key partners – from the Council for its 'core funding'; from the Partnership's Urban Aid allocation for its continuing role in the Benefits Maximisation Project, and also from Dunbartonshire Enterprise. And on this basis it was able in the coming years to access other resources – including another substantial Lottery Grant to fund its educational provision.

The Centre in Bloom

In a way the Centre bloomed – both literally and metaphorically. Collins has always been insistent that the Centre should never appear dilapidated, but must always be bright, warm and welcoming. Crucially, users must not be given an implicit message that they only *deserve* something less than that. But at the same time the Centre was located in what the 1998/99 Annual Report called a "hard industrialised area", and looking onto a less than scenic industrial facility. So, funding was secured from SOFFA and BAA Scottish Airports Charity Group for a Garden and Art Project which would radically improve the yard space through which users entered, and which linked the main building with the crèche facilities. A large mural was created to change the vista, a garden created, and also a 'picnic area' for staff and users to eat lunch when weather permitted. And of course the users could be involved in the design, creation and maintenance of the area – with Thomas Beattie in particular making a great contribution in this respect over the coming years. The results were very impressive, and created a real feeling of security and warmth – a sense of a little island in that "hard industrialised area".

It wouldn't be going too far to say that this literal blooming was reflected, metaphorically, in the broader development of the Centre and its activities. Dunbartonshire Enterprise funding for the post of "General/Information" worker, filled by Julia Reid, was confirmed for 1998/99 early in 1998. The Benefits Bus was on the road in April, and after some initial staffing difficulties Benny Lynch took up the Welfare Rights post. He was later replaced by Hugh O'Neil. By October 1999, initial difficulties notwithstanding, the CUCRC end of the authority-wide project had helped claimants to secure entitlements to almost £1.3 million.

So, by 1998 the Centre had 3 more full-time staff in addition to the Co-ordinator and part-time administrative worker paid for through core funding. In March the latest application for core funding was sent off – seeking £62,000, including funding for a part-time cleaner. Only £53,400 was forthcoming. This resulted in a

projected overspend of some £9,000 as the year progressed, which the Council was then able to alleviate with a further award. Then in the autumn of 1999 a further Lottery award of £72,000 was secured to fund the Centre's educational provision. This award allowed for that provision to be planned and developed over three years, which had never been possible in the past. It also helped to address a 'funding gap' which had been left after the demise of the Regional Council, and with it the funding to the Glasgow Federation of UWCs – the Local Collaborative Programme – on which the Clydebank Centre had been able to draw. This period also brought affiliation to the Scottish Council of Voluntary Organisations (SCVO), which was in due course to help to bring in more funding. Around the turn of the millennium there was a degree of uncertainty caused by the transition of the PPA into a SIP, but before too long 'normal service' was more or less resumed.

At the AGM in February of 2000 Des McNulty, now a Member of the Scottish Parliament, told those attending that the Centre had now established itself as "a model for unemployed workers' centres and … a leading centre of its type in Scotland". And with references like that the Council was willing to confirm, later that same month, an award of £68,200 for the forthcoming financial year. In the later part of the year Scottish Enterprise Dunbartonshire were in touch again to extend the funding of the Information Worker post for the 2001/2 financial year.

In the spring of 2000 a formal evaluation of the BMP got underway. The outcome, in July, was a glowing report. The Centre's contribution showed "an impressive throughput of enquiries", a particularly active engagement in tribunals, and now over £1.5m in awards since the start of the project in 1998. Moreover, the wider remit and activity of the Centre had been "particularly valuable to the individuals using the service" – because it linked them into education and training, and a range of other services and opportunities. Vital to these outcomes had been "the high degree of commitment of the staff and volunteers from the CUCRC", who had delivered "a valuable contribution to WDC's anti-poverty strategy and a significant impact on the lives of many individuals and families living within the SIP areas". Soon this success was being used as the basis for an application via SCVO for European funding to help further to train the Centre's welfare rights volunteers, not just to improve the operation of the BMP, but also so that the volunteers might be able to progress to paid employment of their own in the welfare rights field. This training duly got under way in 2001.

Campaigning and Controversy

There were also some unwelcome reminders, if any were needed, as to the reasons for the Centre's existence, principally in the form of the threat of several hundred redundancies in the town. What had been the UIE yard had in recent years been taken over by the Norwegian firm Kvaerner. Despite attempts by the Scottish Executive Minister, Henry McLeish, to persuade them otherwise, the owners were now leaving the yard – and no suitable buyer could be found. In February of 2000 the yard's union convener spoke at the Centre's AGM. Mindful of the need for such Centre, his members donated £500.

That summer the Centre participated in a campaign in support of the workforce. Pictures from the campaign speak a thousand words – people queuing to sign petitions outside "Poundstretcher" and similar outlets; little Alexis Kerr, daughter of Centre user Neil Kerr, holding a candle at the start of an all-night vigil at the yard. But by December the Centre was delivering advice on welfare and training and education for the workforce. It was clearly appreciated. The Centre's staff and users

were invited to a social evening in January, and a further donation of £2000 was made on behalf of the workforce early in March. The yard closed later that month.

More positively, the Centre was also contributing, as it already had been over the years, to the campaign of the Clydebank Asbestos Group. New urgency was given to this campaign by the 'strategic' liquidation of the liable insurance firm – Chester Street Holdings. The Centre participated in the ensuing campaign, mobilising people to ensure that the Government would, to quote Helen Liddel – then Scottish Secretary of State – "make it clear to the insurance industry that they cannot just walk away from their responsibilities". Subsequently it was indeed made clear by the government that this would not be allowed. In 2002 the Centre also campaigned in support of the workers at the Faslane naval base, who were opposing privatisation plans.

Equally positive was the Centre's response during this period to the Council's identification of the immediate locality – Whitecrook – as a possible destination for asylum seekers. There was an immediate welcome for the proposal, and it was made clear that in the event "support and practical assistance" would be offered by the Centre. In due course preparatory meetings were held with the Council and the local police. Ultimately, due to problems in liaison between the local authority and the Home Office, the plans did not go ahead, but we should note the very positive response of the Centre to the plans, and the willingness to anticipate, prepare for, and take the lead on, issues that might have arisen. Later that year the Centre ran its mini-bus to the St Andrew's Day March and Rally in Glasgow – under the banner of 'Challenge Racism'.

By 2002/03 WDC's core funding for the Centre was over £71,000. A further £14,000 was being secured from the local SIP to upgrade the computer suite. Scottish Enterprise was continuing its funding of the Information Worker. The BMP was going strong, and there was a very good indication that it would be funded in the following two years as well. The Skypoint Centre in nearby Faifley was seeking an advice surgery to be delivered on its premises by Centre staff beginning in June of 2002. At around the same time the Scottish Executive, seeking to respond to the growing problem of indebtedness, was making funding available via local authorities for provision of debt and money advice services. The Centre was an obvious candidate to receive some of this in West Dunbartonshire. Funding was duly awarded towards a post for a debt/money advice worker – £11,500 a year, over three years.

This gave rise to a little controversy. By March 2001 the Centre's participation in the BMP had generated almost £2.5 million in awards to local people. Over half a million of this was in relation to Housing Benefit and the Council Tax – and so had a direct impact on the finances of the local authority itself. However, in discussions about the allocation of the new Scottish Executive resources at the Council in May 2002 these figures were publicly disputed by a Labour councillor. The Centre's response was to ask the London-based Federation of Information and Advice Centres, to which it had been affiliated for some years, to review and comment on its data recording and reporting practices. Nick Pearson, the Federation's National Money Advice Co-ordinator, replied in due course that he and another senior colleague were: "most impressed by the exceptionally high quality of the statistical material recorded each month and the very comprehensive nature of the client data recorded". He then continued:

> We were pleased to note that the statistics recorded relate to the actual clients advised and assisted as well as the number of enquiries dealt with by the Centre. In addition we were most impressed by the clarity of the information provided in the Centre's annual report for 2001/2002 in relation to both awards of benefits and appeals for the period 1st January 1998 to 31st March 2001. Having

> examined the client statistics for the period in question we can confirm that these statistics are fully and accurately recorded and a most reliable record of the work of the Centre. We would like to congratulate you and your staff on the very high quality of the statistical information recorded by the Centre. *We would go as far as to state that the data recording procedures used are a model of good practice for the advice sector.* (emphasis added)

Controversy over: The letter was circulated widely. By March 2002 the BMP awards stood at £3.15 million – almost £700,000 of which was going to the Council in Housing Benefit and Council Tax awards.

The SIP/Centre Paradox Explained

Earlier in this chapter it was suggested that across these years there was an apparent paradox in the situation of the Centre – in its continuing progress and development, not just in a context where national policies were so unconducive to meaningful regeneration, but where 'participatory' relations with the local Partnership itself were also very poor. If things were really like that, some might ask, then how come the Centre seemed to bloom and grow in the midsts of it all – and substantially on the basis of resources provided through organisations which were in fact 'partners' in the SIP? It is a good question, and a productive one in helping us to understand something quite significant in the situation. It leads us to reflect on the relationship between amelioration of problems which reflect processes of *degeneration*, and the attempt to address those problems by tackling the underlying causes – so bringing about *regeneration*.

One would imagine that the ideal relationship between these processes would be one of productive tension – of amelioration co-existing with regeneration, until such time that the latter reduced or eliminated the need for the former. At that stage organisations which dealt with the former could either pack up, or perhaps more usefully, evolve towards doing things other than relatively straightforward amelioration.

What was happening in Clydebank was, unfortunately, not like that. It would seem that one of the reasons why the Centre fared so well in the years of the PPA and SIP was that it was in a relationship, not of productive tension with an ongoing process of regeneration, but of straightforward compatibility with broader projects which themselves could only be vehicles for partially ameliorating problems which reflected deep and long-standing processes of *degeneration*. The Centre, in effect, 'fitted' very well with what the SIP could in fact do in Clydebank – because neither the Centre nor the SIP had the capacity or resources to bring about *regeneration*.

The difference between the two, however, is that the Centre has never seen itself in any other light. From the outset it recognised, to quote the 1993/94 Annual Report, that it could not "solve the economic ills of Clydebank or create jobs on any scale", and that, to quote a young Julia Reid writing as a volunteer in the same Report, "ideally unemployed centres would not exist". The Centre has always understood itself as an agency of amelioration waiting, hopefully, for regeneration to be delivered. The SIP on the other hand, like the broader and ongoing 'partnership' agenda of which it was part, was presented to the world as a vehicle of regeneration. It was inevitable that a time would arrive when it would be recognised that it, and indeed the other SIPs around the country, had been nothing of the kind. The question was what would happen when that day arrived, and what would be the implications – both for what had been called 'regeneration' policy, and also for the Centre.

14. Trouble Ahead: Local Politics and National Policy 1999-2002

The writer John Steinbeck has a wonderful way of intimating the beginnings of change to his readers. In books like *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Of Mice and Men* – works which relate, as does this one, tales of communities dispossessed and impoverished by economic and political processes beyond their control – he invokes the subtle, but inexorable, changes of the seasons and movements of the creatures to convey a parallel sense of shift and change in human affairs.

Studying the development of the Centre in the early years of the new millennium, someone who had read Steinbeck might sense a wee change in the breeze in Clydebank; not *that* much really, but somehow unfamiliar, and enough to make that urban vixen which had been around Stanford Street at the time gather her cubs to her, and scurry away. And as Steinbeck would probably have told it, that wee change was first felt when everything had seemed calm and predictable, when the garden and the mural were at their prettiest, and a squirrel, finches and butterflies were drawn to a little island of bloom in a "hard industrialised area" of Clydebank.

Local Politics 1999-2002

Changes were unfolding at two levels – the local and the national. Their interaction would ultimately pose a deep challenge to the Centre. As had been the case in the past, it would have to fight for the right to exist.

Let us begin with developments in the locality itself. On the same day in 1999 that the first elections for the Scottish Parliament sent Des McNulty off to Edinburgh as an MSP, Labour were returned to power in West Dunbartonshire under the leadership of Andrew White – still at that time a Council representative on the Centre's Management Committee. Labour took 14 of the 22 seats to the Scottish National Party's seven. The remaining seat was taken by an independent socialist candidate – Jim Bollan, representing the outlying ward of Renton/Alexandria South.

Retiring from the ruling Labour Group on the Council was Patricia Rice, who now became a Trades Council delegate to the Centre. But joining the Group was Mary Collins – representing the Faifley ward. Collins had stood for the Council in 1995 in the Whitecrook ward, but had lost to the Scottish National Party candidate. Thereafter she had been involved with the Council as Liaison Officer for its ruling Labour Group. Now she was a member of the Group herself. Also a member of that Group was Danny McCafferty. In July it was confirmed that White would continue to represent the Council on the Centre's Management Committee.

So, in terms of relations with the Council, it might have appeared that the Centre was rather well placed to continue its progress and development. However it is clear from the Centre's archives that during the next 18 months something quite significant happened to change the relationship between White and the Centre. Firstly, at the beginning of 2001 White resigned from the Centre's Management Committee. The correspondence on the matter seems a little terse. Ultimately he was replaced by Councillor Mary Campbell. Secondly, in March and April the preparations for the Centre's AGM in May suggest a degree of concern about the relationship with White, who was to attend as a guest speaker. There was also concern, it would seem, about the possibility of other 'uninvited guests'. The archive then contains a detailed report on an unpleasant incident at the AGM with just such an uninvited guest – who had arrived with Andrew White. Working through the archive, a researcher is bound to

wonder about what was going on in West Dunbartonshire Council. Within a few years a lot more people would be wondering about that.

In outline, the background to these events was as follows. Relationships within the Labour Group had become problematic very soon after the 1999 elections. Collins and McCafferty were among a number of Councillors who had serious concerns about the direction of the Group, and ultimately about its stewardship of the authority. They raised these concerns within the Party, both locally and nationally, but were unable to get them acted upon. They themselves came to be seen as 'the problem'. Ultimately, during 2001 Collins, McCafferty and two others – Mary Campbell and John Syme – left both the Labour Group and the Labour Party and became independent councillors. Together with the SNP councillors and Jim Bollan they were able to take political control of the Council away from the Labour Group. So it was that while White had attended the 2001 Centre AGM as the Leader of WDC, in 2002 it was Danny McCafferty who attended in that capacity.

Those who know about local politics in the west of Scotland, and local Labour Party politics in particular, will know that people do not generally abandon their party loyalties lightly. Those who do will seldom anticipate that their erstwhile 'comrades' will forgive and forget when it comes to future dealings. The accusations made by a *Labour* Councillor about the Centre's BMP statistics in May of 2002, which were discussed at the end of the previous chapter, were perhaps already some indication of that. So, we should deduce that "the gang of four" as they were sometimes called (misleadingly it has to be said, as they do not seem to have operated as a group between 1999 and 2001), took the course of action that they did in light of very serious concerns that they were unable to get addressed in other ways. Later developments, after the 2003 elections had seen Labour returned to power in the locality anew, were to give a very good insight into the nature of those concerns, and just how serious they were.

Getting on with things in Stanford Street

Meanwhile the Centre got on with its business. In the early part of 2002 a further grant was secured from SOFFA to run non-vocational art course under the direction of Susan White – who herself had been a Centre user. Later that year SOFFA made a monitoring visit in relation to the award, together with an HM Inspector – who was suitably impressed both with the art class and with the ongoing activity of the Centre as a whole. In December an exhibition and sale of work by the class was held in Stanford Street, featuring the work of 13 Centre users. It was opened by Des McNulty, together with Bill Speirs, General Secretary of the STUC. There are photographs of the class at work in the Centre's archives, and they clearly convey the joy of people, of all ages, who have been given an opportunity to express and develop their creative talent – not primarily to meet some 'employability' target (although progress towards that very probably also resulted), but because they have been recognised as worthwhile human beings who deserve and value that opportunity.

During the same year the Centre also worked towards the preparation of a strategic plan with the aim of getting beyond the perpetual insecurity resulting from having to compete on an annual basis for its ongoing funding – particularly as the Lottery funding for education courses would be running out over the next year. There was encouragement in the fact that the BMP funding from the SIP was, as we have seen, being allocated at least provisionally on a three year basis. But, more importantly, in May 2002 the Council established a pilot 3 year "Service Level Agreement" with the other participant in the BMP in West Dunbartonshire – the

Dumbarton Citizens Advice Bureau. The aim was provide the kind of longer-term plan which could justify a similar arrangement for the Centre. Scottish Enterprise Dunbartonshire provided funding for the planning process, together with a recommendation of a consultant to assist with it. By June a series of six meetings to inform the plan had been devised, and the consultant was advising on the preparation of a proposal to the local authority.

At the AGM that September there were five councillors in attendance. None were members of the Labour Party. This was an indication of just how radically the local situation of the Centre had changed. In addition to Collins (present in her capacity as Centre Co-ordinator), there was McCafferty, now the independent leader of WDC who had been invited to speak to the meeting, together with fellow (former Labour) independents Mary Campbell and John Syme, and SNP Councillor Ronnie McColl.

Addressing the meeting McCafferty paid tribute to the spirit of the Centre, and of the people involved in it, and to its great practical impact in addressing the needs of its community. He also stressed the need for longer-term funding and "urged other partners to actively support the Centre in pursuing a mainline funding agreement with WDC for the core funding for the Centre". This would also, he emphasized, be important in accessing other sources of funding for the local community – such as Lottery funding – which increasingly required assurances of longer-term viability of organisations before committing additional resources. He stressed that with the Scottish Executive itself now committing funding to local authorities on a three year basis – through its Comprehensive Spending Review – it should be possible for the local authority to plan its own commitments to the voluntary sector along the same lines. A request to WDC was duly submitted.

National Policy

While these developments were unfolding at local level, there were also indications of significant changes in the national policy agenda. Just before the 2002 AGM a letter arrived from Mike O'Donnell, the manager of the West Dunbartonshire SIP. It drew attention to "national developments which are currently underway and which will have an impact on your project". It particularly highlighted the Scottish Executive's latest "strategic document which outlines how it sees regeneration activities in the years ahead". O'Donnell wanted to make a visit to discuss these developments – which he duly did in October.

At that meeting O'Donnell spoke about the Scottish Executive's latest "regeneration statement" – *Better Communities in Scotland: Closing the Gap* – which had been published in June. This document gave an indication of an ongoing re-evaluation of regeneration policy at national level. This process of re-evaluation was to continue, and show significant new departures, over the next few years.

Symptomatically, *Better Communities* was a rather incongruous document – one which was not going to be the end of the policy re-evaluation. It was informed by an extensive review of literature and evidence provided by an academic at Heriot Watt University.[21] That review indicated, albeit at times via euphemisms which seem rather out of place in academic research, that three decades of 'community regeneration' had generally not managed to make things better in the poorest communities, and had at times contributed to making things rather worse –

[21] Michael Carley, *Community Regeneration and Neighbourhood Renewal: A Review of the Evidence*, Edinburgh, Communities Scotland, 2002.

particularly in its interaction with wider government policies. Nonetheless the Ministerial Foreword to *Better Communities* declared that future regeneration activity would "build on the firm foundations that are already in place". As we have seen previously, this curious kind of relationship between research and policy development is not at all unprecedented in urban policy. However, on this occasion, the policy agenda was to develop quite rapidly over the next year – by which time the idea of the New Life programme and the SIPs providing "firm foundations" for community regeneration would be explicitly renounced.

In the meantime, *Better Communities* announced that future regeneration activity would be pursued through new Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) – into which the existing Social Inclusion Partnerships were to be integrated. Community planning, however, was not just a new framework for 'regeneration'. It was an agenda for implementing 'partnership' as the basis for 'local governance' more generally, and for the so-called 'modernisation' of public service provision.

The idea of 'community planning' had in fact been developed since 1997. Soon it was to be given statutory underpinning. The *Local Government in Scotland Act* (2003) would place a duty on local authorities to "initiate, facilitate and maintain" CPPs in their areas. These 'partnerships' would bring the local authorities together with other public agencies, who would also have a legal duty to participate, and the private and voluntary sectors, as well as 'representatives' of local communities. Together they would have to form a 'partnership' to develop and implement a jointly agreed strategy to promote 'well-being' in their areas – in the form of a "community plan". Significantly for what will come later, that same legislation also placed a duty on local government to secure "best value" in service provision, through the pursuit of "continuous improvement" in all aspects of their function.

What is perhaps most striking about this new agenda for *local* governance was just how far it entailed creating a framework for *central* government to determine and monitor activity in local areas. The aim, as the Executive's guidance on Community Planning explained, was to "improve the connection between national priorities and those at regional, local and neighbourhood levels". Local 'partnerships', that is, were to be expected to 'deliver' on policy objectives determined in Edinburgh (and beyond that often by New Labour in Westminster), and they were to be monitored, and if necessary held accountable, for their performance in doing that.

'Regeneration' was to be an important part of the remit of the CPPs. They were to have a specific focus on the needs of the poorest communities. These were to be defined as the poorest 15% of areas identified by a new Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (to be ready in 2004). CPPs were to work to 'close the gap' – the widening chasm of inequality – between these areas and the broader community. This was supposed to be achieved by encouraging economic activity, especially through smaller business start-ups, while also ensuring that partners would 'bend' their other spending priorities accordingly (an idea which we saw already in the 1970s projects).

At the same time the Urban Programme would be replaced by a new Community Regeneration Fund from which CPPs could secure additional resources. Allocation of these funds would be based on bids linked to Regeneration Outcome Agreements (ROAs) – which CPPs would have to agree, and then submit to a recently created Executive Agency for approval. This was Communities Scotland, formed as the Executive's housing and regeneration agency in 2001, through the merger of the housing quango Scottish Homes, and the Area Regeneration Division of the Scottish Executive (which had previously been responsible for the SIPs).

That would have been a heck of a lot for anyone to get their head around at that meeting in October 2002. What was clear was that in due course West Dunbartonshire Council would have to have a Community Planning Partnership, would have to demonstrate 'best value', and that it would be monitored and held accountable for all of that. The local SIP would in due course be integrated in the new CPP, which would, in turn, be expected to deliver on nationally set regeneration priorities in West Dunbartonshire. People at the Centre weren't sure what to make of that, but at the next Management Committee they were clearly concerned about what it might mean. They were right to be concerned.

Trouble Ahead: Local Politics and National Policy

At the beginning of 2003 the Centre's computer suite got its upgrade, and both students and tutors were reporting their delight with the new resources. Councillor Mary Campbell was able to give an indication that the Centre's application for core funding for 2003-2004 – for almost £76, 000 – had been approved in full. Support was also accumulating for the Centre's request to WDC for longer-term funding. Des McNulty, local political issues notwithstanding, wrote a letter of support in February. The Centre's Strategic Plan was completed and submitted ahead of the Council meeting due on the 26th – where a decision would be made. On the 25th Bill Speirs, General Secretary of the STUC, intervened with an important letter of support.

> On behalf of the Scottish Trades Union Congress and its affiliated members, I m delighted to write in support of Clydebank Unemployed and Community Resource Centre. … We know the Centre offers an extremely valuable service for unemployed people in Clydebank and for the community in general. We have seen this service develop and increase over the years and the number of people who directly benefit from the service continues to grow. In particular the STUC fully supports the case which the Centre is putting forward to secure long term funding, to enable further expansion of the services it can offer and attract additional funding partners. Now that the Scottish Executive is awarding funding to local authorities on a three year basis, this seems a perfect time for voluntary bodies, such as Clydebank UCRC, to be similarly funded. The Centre would then be able to benefit from continuity of service, as well as giving an opportunity for better long-term planning. The STUC believes that secure long-term funding for this vital service to the Clydebank community is essential. I am more than happy for these comments to be used in the context of an application to the West Dunbartonshire Council.

On the 26th the Council approved funding for the coming three years – 2003/4 to 2005/6. This was not as yet a Service Level Agreement, but the hope was that in due course, after evaluation of the pilot agreement with Dumbarton CAB, the Centre would also secure such an agreement.

The next Management Committee was informed that the users who had attended the Council meeting were "happy with the outcome". But it was also made known that the outcome was achieved "after much debate", and that there was "disappointment" at the treatment of the Centre's application by some, and also at "the conduct of some of the elected members". With elections little more than a month away, and with every likelihood of the return of the Labour Group to power in WDC, that did not bode particularly well.

Also in March there was evidence that the process of re-evaluating regeneration in Edinburgh was still ongoing. Just nine months previously, *Better Communities* had avoided facing up to the reality of failure in past 'regeneration' initiatives – as had so often been the case in the past. Now that reality was being depicted very starkly, at least in relation to the SIPs. Communities Scotland published a consultants' report which had been commissioned to inform the integration of the SIPs into the CPPs. It delivered a withering critique of the SIPs. Taken as a whole, the

report argued, the SIPs had too often not known what they were about, and even when they had, they had tended not to have a very clear idea of how to be about it. Beyond the public sector – and not infrequently within it – partnership working had still been very limited. Community participation was very far from what had been envisaged, and the private sector was still not really present as a 'partner' in any meaningful sense. The spend of SIP 'partners' had not been bent, and often the SIPs had failed seriously to attempt to ensure that it was. Monitoring and evaluation had been seriously deficient. Ultimately, even adjusting expectations significantly downwards from those originally set for the SIPs, the results, were still – as the authors diplomatically put it – 'disappointing'.

Significantly, though, there was no suggestion that there may have been something wrong with the basic conception of the SIPs – not least that they had been conceived on the basis of a serious mis-evaluation of the New Life programme. It was still not thinkable, it was apparent, that the Conservative governments that had given us the poll tax, and shamelessly gerrymandered the council map of Scotland with so little consideration for the needs of the poorest communities, might not have come up with a 'regeneration' agenda that was appropriate to the needs of those communities. Instead the suggestion was that the failure of the SIPs was caused by problems with the *local implementation* of national policies. As Foster had predicted in 1999 (see Chapter 13), the blame was placed on local 'partners' for failing to work together properly. This made the emphasis in the new community planning framework on ensuring the effective delivery of national priorities at the local level all the more urgent. On this the consultants' message was unusually blunt. It was time, they said, to confront those "matters which, if they are not dealt with in an appropriate manner, will strike at the heart of the regeneration process and the associated quest for social justice for deprived communities". Future monitoring and evaluation of regeneration would have to be prepared for "ruthless recognition of the weaknesses which have obstructed previous initiatives in achieving their full aims and potentials".[22]

This sharpening of the tone of the evaluation of the SIPs was evidence that the process of reassessing regeneration policy in the Scottish Executive was still ongoing. Indeed subsequent comments by key civil servants indicate that in 2003 the Executive had already decided, notwithstanding the recency of *Better Communities*, that a new regeneration statement was going to be required. Talk was turning to the 'dynamism' of regeneration policy in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when Scotland was, suypposedly, at 'the cutting edge' of things – and of the need to try to regain that dynamism anew. The years of 'the doomsday scenario' and of *New Life for Urban Scotland* were somehow being re-remembered – as a 'golden age' of regeneration.

In retrospect, March 2003 appears as a rather dramatic moment in the history of the Centre. On the one hand it seemed finally to have overcome the perennial dilemma identified by Collins in 1995:

> The real dilemma the Centre finds itself in arises from competing with other local community groups through the local grant system to ensure its very existence, as opposed to applying for these grants in order to enhance existing facilities and services.

But on the other hand, at that same moment there was, in terms of both local politics and national policy, a lot of uncertainty in the air – and not a little foreboding.

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[22] Cambridge Economic Associates, *Developing a Transition Framework for Social Inclusion Partnerships*, Research from Communities Scotland, Report 19, 2003, p. 27

15. Gathering Clouds: Local Politics and National Policy 2003-2004

In the spring of 2003, as we saw in the previous chapter, the Centre seemed to have achieved the relative security in its funding which it had long sought. Shortly afterwards, on the first of May, the voters returned the Labour-Liberal coalition to power in the Scottish Parliament. They also returned the Labour Party to power in West Dunbartonshire – with a clear majority.

However, the next four years would see all of this change. The Centre would very soon find itself struggling again for 'the right to exist'. It would be caught between a hostile local authority administration, on the one hand, and, on the other, a developing national regeneration policy agenda which would lend itself to local interpretation offering a cloak for the expression of that hostility.

At the same time, the Labour-Liberal coalition's own monitoring systems for "best value" and "community planning" would deliver a hugely damning public indictment of Labour's stewardship of WDC. Several of the leading members of the Labour Group would find themselves, like Mary Collins and Danny McCafferty, outside of the Party. These latest departures would, however, not be entirely voluntary – several would entail expulsions. Serious questions would be raised in the national press as to why the Labour Party, including senior members of both the Westminster and Scottish parliaments, had not responded to a very bad situation in West Dunbartonshire of which it must have been aware rather earlier than it did. And in turn the voters would return verdicts which would see the Scottish National Party in power in Holyrood and leading West Dunbartonshire Council.

Who said politics is boring? People at the Centre, and many others in West Dunbartonshire, and beyond, might have preferred it to be less 'interesting' than it turned out to be.

Gathering Clouds

Having secured approval for the three year core funding package in March, things at the Centre seemed, on the surface at least, to be progressing well over the next couple of months. At the end of March, Scottish Enterprise Dunbartonshire once again confirmed its funding for the Information Worker post for 2003-2004 – albeit with a new stipulation as to the need to 'track' its use in terms of employment 'outcomes'. Shortly afterwards approval was obtained for the use of the additional funding for debt/money advice to employ a trainee who would work towards qualification in the field. By mid-April an existing volunteer had secured the post. The welfare rights outreach service at the Skypoint Centre in Faifley was going well, and surgeries had been added in Mountblow and Carleith.

By June confirmation of the BMP funding for the year had been received, and it was more or less sure to be forthcoming for 2004-2005 as well. That funding continued to deliver remarkable results. Between April 2002 and March 2003 staff and volunteers dealt with 1,867 enquiries and helped clients to secure almost £1.5 million in benefits. Backdated payments alone amounted to over a quarter of a million pounds, and awards relating to Council Tax and Housing Benefit were greater still.

Things were good in other ways too. That summer, thanks to the efforts of volunteers, the garden was in full bloom. In particular Thomas Beattie, as was noted in the Annual Report (2003/2004), "worked industriously" nurturing the plants and painting the garden furniture and fencing. An afternoon Garden Party was organised

to allow users to make the most of it. There was also, in September, a surprise party for the golden wedding anniversary of Eddie Kelly and his wife Lily – with a visit by the Provost of Clydebank who made a speech and presented "some very nice gifts". The Annual Report tabled at the AGM that same month makes more than impressive reading. Bill Speirs as a guest speaker summed up the contribution to the local community as "beyond any expectations". But then, for some reason, he stressed that the Centre would be able to count on the STUC's backing "when they need it".

Speirs said "when", rather than if, and this is a pretty clear indication that at a deeper level signs were less promising, and things not quite so nice. Ahead of the elections there had been some suggestions made to the local press that the Centre's application to the Council in March had not been backed up by sufficient information to justify the award. And in June the Labour Group in the new Council, against the recommendation of officers, suspended all payments from the Council's Local Grants Budget pending a report at its August meeting. That later meeting agreed that a "stocktake and review" of information and advice centres in the locality would be undertaken to inform future funding decisions. It was to report on "whether the services should be provided directly by the Council or indirectly by another organisation in conjunction with a service level agreement".

In August there was concern at the Centre regarding a "socio economic study" of the Whitecrook area, the Centre's own immediate vicinity. It was being undertaken by a body called Community Links West Dunbartonshire (CLWD) – which had fairly recently been created by Communities Scotland, West Dunbartonshire SIP, Scottish Enterprise Dunbartonshire and eight local housing associations. It had been created as part of a Communities Scotland initiative to develop the broader role of local housing associations in helping local people "to create and access local services". CLWD, through its Development Officer, Callum Smith, wrote to the Centre to explain that the study was being "conducted on behalf of the Whitecrook Area Regeneration Strategy Group, who are considering various issues in relation to the regeneration of the Whitecrook area".

The Whitecrook Area Regeneration Strategy Group was one of two such groups recently formed in the town. The other was in the Dalmuir area. They had been formed in order to access European Community Urban Initiative funding under the URBAN II Programme. This had become available, in significant quantities, in certain parts of the town (referred to as "Clydebank South") in order to "build the capacity of local communities in supporting local regeneration". Another new organisation accessing that money was one with a rather taking name – Building Brighter Futures (BBF). It had been established in January 2003 by WDC and the SIP. Its funding, close to half a million pounds over three years, split equally between the local SIP and Europe, provided for two "capacity building officers", one youth involvement officer, and an information/administration officer.

Here, then, were emerging and developing organisations which were much less independent than the Centre – and certainly much less community-led – and also very much more likely to remain 'on message' as the still developing agenda for community regeneration at national level took shape.

WDC, the STUC and the SURF

The Council's changing representation on the Management Committee was also significant. Mary Campbell and John Syme were no longer serving on the Council, and the initial notification from the latter as to its representation gave only one name – Councillor Margaret Bootland. Bootland, though she does not seem to have been part

of the ruling clique that was to be so heavily criticized in 2006/2007, in fact took very little to do with the Centre over the coming four years. By September Jim Bollan – the previously independent councillor who had tipped the balance of power away from Labour in WDC between 2001 and 2003 – was added to the Committee as a Council representative. He was by this time a Scottish Socialist Party councillor, and he was to play a much more active and constructive role.

At the same time as the "stocktake and review" was in progress, the integration of the SIP into the emerging CPP was also under way. This process was to be guided by six priorities set nationally by the Scottish Executive: building strong, safe and attractive communities; getting people back into work; improving health; raising educational attainment; engaging young people, and the effective engagement of communities in establishing and addressing priorities at the local level. The Centre was asked by the SIP to complete a proforma detailing its role and contribution in addressing these priorities ahead of a Partnership Board meeting in December – which it duly did.

The Centre was certainly in a position to justify its existence against these priorities, but nonetheless the gathering clouds seemed obvious enough. It was facing a hostile political leadership in WDC which had initiated a review of its core funding. It was also facing a local SIP/CPP, which was also a key funder, but which was led by that same local authority, and which was both evaluating its own commitments in light of newly emerging priorities, and also involved in the initiation of new organisations and initiatives – some of which were already backed by very substantial resources – which it was hard to imagine *not* being competitors for future funding.

At this stage the STUC showed up as promised. Bill Speirs raised the Centre's profile by nominating it for one of the annual awards of the Scottish Urban Regeneration Forum (SURF) for 'best practice in urban regeneration'. In mid-November SURF wrote to say that their panel of independent judges had reviewed the wide range of nominations for awards in three categories – People, Place and Partnership. The Centre, very appropriately, had been chosen for the award in the People category, and representatives were invited to attend the annual awards ceremony early in December. The award was to be presented by the Scottish Executive's Communities Minister – the Labour MSP Margaret Curran.

This was very significant. The STUC would not have involved itself in the situation in West Dunbartonshire unless it had been very clear about that situation's rights and wrongs. And any *immediate* attempt to close or run down a Centre publicly feted by the STUC and a Labour minister in the Scottish Executive would now look rather questionable. There was some comfort at least in that.

Over the coming months the Centre was to receive warm congratulations on its award from a number of sources – but WDC, the Centre's 'core' funder, was not one of them. One can only imagine that the leading figures of the Council were not 'over the moon' when Mary Collins herself was named MBE in the New Year Honours List that followed.

Stocktake and Review

The developments over the next period have a very unpleasantly ironic – if not bizarre – aspect to them. On the one hand the Centre was asked to share, through SURF and Communities Scotland, the basis of its 'best practice' – so that other organisations might aspire to emulate its achievements in serving their own local communities. On the other hand, in its own locality it would have to devote an increasing proportion of its time and energy to warding off what looked like gathering clouds.

The continuing challenge that the Centre was facing is made clear by the reception which was given by WDC to the "Stocktake and Review of Community Information and Advice Centres" when it was discussed in January 2004. The rationale for this review was that four such centres – the Centre, Clydebank CAB, Dumbarton CAB and West Dunbartonshire Community Law Service – consumed 70% of the WDC Local Grants Budget. However, as the 20 page report produced by the Chief Executive's Policy Unit duly advised, this budget was one amongst a total of six through which the authority funded community and voluntary groups. The four Centres accounted for only 25% of the larger total. It also indicated that the expenditure allocated to them could only be seen as money well spent.

The summary provided to the Council for its meeting on 28th January concluded that the four centres "provide an important resource which complements the Council's anti-poverty and social justice policies and services". It then continued:

> In general, these services have been developed in discussion with Council staff. There is clear evidence that these services are needed by local people, and cannot be replicated by the Council or other statutory services. They deal with a volume of enquiries (around 20,000 per year) which the Council could not undertake – even if it was appropriate to do so.There is no evidence that community information and advice centres duplicate the work of council services, but they do offer local people a choice of provider. The Scottish Executive has stressed the importance of choice in money advice services, and the officers who are operational in this field believe that this is an important principle to maintain. This is particularly relevant in cases where there is the potential for the council to become involved in a conflict of interest. There are also many cases where the person would not approach an 'official' body such as the Council – and would run the risk of not receiving necessary advice or information [if they did].
>
> The officers' working group was particularly encouraged by the number of volunteers involved in the provision of services. [This] is a clear demonstration of local community activity and capacity building. These people provide a valuable addition to services. This could not be covered by paid staff, either in the Council or voluntary sector.

The report also indicated that the annual local grants expenditure on the four Centres of some £285,000 underpinned a further £330,000 in additional funding from non-Council sources, and an overall injection of almost £3 million to the local community in additional income. The Centre was particularly highlighted for its training and development of both staff and volunteers, and for its development of particular expertise in the area of Disability Living Allowance. And if one were to construct from the report a ratio of Council funding to additional funding (including additional income for service users), then the Centre would emerge as the best performing of the four Centres – by a margin.

The key recommendation was to maintain the funding of the organisations for 2004/2005, and, moving forward, to develop three-year Service Level Agreements with each of them along the lines of the pilot with Dumbarton CAB. This would "ensure both continuity of service and the opportunity to attract further external funding by demonstrating the longer-term viability of the organisations".

The "Stocktake and Review", then, produced a clear endorsement of the Centre, together with the other three organisations on which it reported, and an equally clear recommendation. But when it was presented to the Council on 28th January no decision was taken, other than "to continue consideration of the report to the next full meeting of Council" – in late February. At the latter meeting there was a proposal along the lines that one might have expected on the basis of the Chief Executive's report: "That Council agree the recommendations contained in the report and that the four community information and advice organisations be provided with mainline funding". But that was put by the SNP opposition, and defeated – with the

Labour Group itself voting for the motion: "That Council notes the contents of the report and that each grant application would be considered by the relevant Committee and dealt with on its own merits". More than a week later, Council staff were still trying to establish what this actually meant for the forthcoming financial year.

Over the next two months there was, understandably, great uncertainty at the Centre. But in the event, it seems that its track record, and its now further heightened public profile, meant that its funding could not simply be removed, or even substantially cut, at this stage. At a Corporate Services Committee meeting at the end of April an allocation was granted for 2004/2005 – at the same level as the 2003/2004 award. This was some £3000 less than had been recommended by officers, who indicated that index linking had been agreed by the Council in March 2003, but in the circumstances it was a victory for the Centre. Still, there would have been little doubt that the hostility from the Labour Group would continue.

Meanwhile, with confirmation that funding for the BMP of £47,500 had been secured, together with the funding from Scottish Enterprise for the Information Worker, and the continuing allocation of Scottish Executive money for the Debt/Money Advice trainee, at least things were reasonably secure for the year ahead.

National Policy

Meanwhile, the policy agenda for 'regeneration' was continuing to develop in significant ways at national level. This was linked to the findings of the *Cities Review* which was carried out in Scotland in 2001-2002 – in response to a somewhat earlier exercise by government south of the border.[23] The thinking that emerged from this was that cities had for too long been seen as places of decline and sources of problems. In the changing circumstances of the early 21st Century they were now increasingly to be seen as places of growth and development, and sources of potential. Moreover, cities were seen to be hugely important for the wider nations and societies of which they were part – for cities were seen as 'engines' or 'drivers' of growth for wider national economies. The challenge, then, was for cities self-consciously to grasp the new potential, so as to deliver more and better opportunities, both for those who lived in the cities, but also for the wider nations and societies to which they were so important. And above all, this was seen to require that cities should aspire to improve their connections to global markets, and make themselves competitive as places where private enterprise would want to be located and do business, and where the bright and aspiring younger people, who were seen to be so important to the modern 'knowledge economy', would want to live.

The implications that were to follow for 'regeneration' policy were very significant – and not just for the cities. In due course it would be deduced that the solution to the most intractable problems of urban policy lay in making urban environments significantly more flexible and friendly for business, while trying to ensure that barriers to the inclusion of the poorest communities in the benefits of growth were removed. In some ways this thinking was not new at all. As we saw in previous chapters, the New Life 'partnership areas' had been selected on the basis of their proximity to substantial private sector activity in adjacent areas, and the thinking then also was to try to ensure that their 'regeneration' was linked to the economic processes in those areas – particularly through participation in the labour market. But now it was being suggested that the poor results from that programme had been partly

[23] Scottish Executive, *Review of Scotland's Cities: The Analysis*, 2002, and *Building Better Cities: Delivering Growth and Opportunities*, 2003

due to the unwillingness of the private sector to play the leading role that had been envisaged, and that this in turn was due to the fact that the initiatives themselves were neither sufficiently 'business friendly', nor focused on the kinds of areas which were sufficiently 'attractive' to business in terms of making money. Future action would, in this light, need to work much harder to convince private business to 'buy in' to 'regeneration', and this would entail both persuading it that participation would bring real benefits, and being rather more discriminating about the areas on which action would be focused. In the latter regard, there was thought to be significant potential in the emerging redevelopment along the banks of the River Clyde – around which much of the new policy agenda was, in due course, to be focused.

In terms of linking the poorest communities to the ensuing 'regeneration', the emphasis was increasingly to be placed, not simply on tackling unemployment, but on tackling "worklessness". This new emphasis reflected the growing awareness of the discrepancy between the official rate of unemployment, the level of which had fallen significantly in the years after the recession of the early 1990s, and the level of economic inactivity – particularly in those areas worst affected by deindustrialisation in previous decades (some of which were located close to potential development sites along the River Clyde). In effect, a large part of the reduction of the former had been based on people of working age being reclassified as economically inactive, due to long term sickness or disability, and being moved onto welfare benefits where they were no longer required to be "actively seeking work". Academics at Sheffield Hallam University estimated that the 'real' level of unemployment in Glasgow in 2002 was 22.7%, and in West Dunbartonshire – second in Scotland only to Glasgow – as high as 19.2%.[24] Increasingly this was to be seen as the source of problematic 'inflexibility' in the local labour market – something which was a very significant barrier to the competitiveness required of any modern urban environment. It was also seen to be an integral component of the problems of the poorest communities – strongly linked to the other characteristic problems such as family breakdown, ill health, low educational attainment, and crime and anti-social behaviour. In this light it was increasingly to be seen as the single biggest barrier to social inclusion in Scotland's towns and cities. Both economic competitiveness and 'closing the opportunity gap' would require that more be done to get people off of welfare benefits and back into the labour market.

A "New Conventional Wisdom"

It would take another 18 months or so for all of this thinking more or less to solidify into what one academic has called a "new conventional wisdom" for urban policy in Scotland.[25] But in the meantime the Scottish Executive was working to lead the thinking in that direction. In August of 2003, in the wake of the *Cities Review*, a consultation paper on *Urban Regeneration Companies* was circulated. Such companies, which are formal partnerships of the public and private sectors operating "at arms length" to bring about 'regeneration', had been in operation south of the border since 1999. They were marked by a strong private sector ethos, and, in keeping with that, were intended to by-pass many of the standard conventions for

[24] Christina Beatty (et al), *The Real Level of Unemployment*, Sheffield Hallam University, Centre for Regional Social and Economic Research, 2002.

[25] Ivan Turok, "Urban Policy in Scotland: New Conventional Wisdom: Old Problems", in Michael Keating (ed), *Scottish Social Democracy: Progressive Ideas for Public Policy*, PIE Peter Lang: Oxford, 2007.

accountability which would routinely apply to public bodies – so as to be able to 'drive forward' development where it might otherwise be difficult to achieve. Early evaluations were suggesting, perhaps predictably, that these companies were making significant progress in delivering on their objectives south of the border. The suggestion now was that similar vehicles could perhaps do the same in Scotland. Bids for the URC 'brand' were invited.

To coincide with the consultation, the Scottish Urban Regeneration Forum held, on the 30th October 2003, a one day seminar on "New Delivery Vehicles in Regeneration". One of the speakers was Professor Greg Lloyd of the University of Dundee. He offered a rather more realistic appraisal of the attainments of the URCs south of the border, and of what they might be expected to deliver in the Scottish context. If the suggestion was that there might be some pay-off between local accountability on the one hand, and freeing up private enterprise to deliver economic regeneration which would deliver real social benefits to the poorest communities, then Lloyd's suggestion was that people in Scotland should think again. In practice URCs were largely focused on *meeting the needs of private developers* in terms of the land-assembly and up-front investment required to make investment 'attractive' to them – as well as on re-branding areas to promote confidence amongst potential buyers. There was little evidence to suggest that this development would be likely to bring significant benefits to the poorest communities, and it was at best highly doubtful that things would be any different if URCs were created in Scotland. The benefits were much more likely to accrue to developers and to better-off groups.

There was an obvious precedent for just such an outcome in the Thatcherite Urban Development Corporations (like the London Docklands Development Corporation) which had proved so controversial south of the border in the 1980s. And in this light one would have imagined that an Executive that really *did* want to learn from past experience, and whose primary concern actually was 'regeneration' in the sense of addressing the problems of the poorest communities in Scotland, would have thought again before going down the URC road. Lloyd himself suggested that 'regeneration' in the latter sense would not flow from the promotion of competition between Scotland's poorest communities; for that could only possibly lead to some areas of need losing out. Instead, it would require that a rather more consistent, egalitarian approach be taken across areas.

Part 5
The "New Conventional Wisdom", 'Worklessness', and another Near-Death Experience

A "new conventional wisdom" emerges in 'regeneration', reflecting the neo-liberal agenda of the Labour-Liberal coalition in the Scottish Parliament, and the influence of business organisations upon it. Clydebank itself becomes an important focus for the implementation of that 'regeneration' agenda, with additional funding directed towards it to reflect that. But the Centre eschews funding which has 'strings' that would divert it from its key purpose. Steadily, the developing 'regeneration' agenda offers scope for hostile forces in the local authority to undermine the Centre, but it manages to survive until those forces are themselves exposed by an audit of the local authority in 2006. A newly elected local authority in 2007 proves rather more sympathetic. The Centre survives and continues to serve its community.

16. The Challenge of the "New Conventional Wisdom": Clydebank Re-Built and the URBAN II Programme

It is unlikely that Greg Lloyd would have imagined, even as he made his case at the seminar organised by the Scottish Urban Regeneration Forum in August 2003, that the Scottish Executive would be swayed from its chosen path by something as elementary as a coherent and persuasive argument. This would be particularly unlikely when, as we shall see, rather more powerful voices were lobbying hard in favour of the 'competitiveness' agenda – people and institutions who have the influence to turn their own thinking into a "new conventional wisdom" with hardly any need for evidence or consideration of alternative arguments at all.

Behind the Changing Wisdom

Recent commentary from Glasgow University's Ivan Turok offers some interesting observations related to this.[26] The "new conventional wisdom" which was emerging in 2003 and 2004 virtually reversed what had been the *prevailing* wisdom about urban policy in Scotland. It did that, however, with "surprisingly little public debate" to scrutinise its *wisdom* (rather than to establish its conventionality). The claim that cities are the drivers of economic growth, Turok shows, remained just that – a claim. Evidence from the 2004 National Planning Framework suggested that it was, at best, "too simple" a claim. We might add that the further claim that cities fare best when they are fully opened up to global markets is also, at best, highly contentious. And even if such claims were accepted, then there would remain even greater doubts about whether the strategy which was being developed around them would "deliver opportunities of sufficient scale and relevance" to meet the challenge of 'regeneration' for the poorest communities. As Turok puts it:

> The focus on high-value jobs and top-quality living environments for highly skilled and resourceful people is a narrow basis for urban revitalisation and growth. It will do little directly to improve the life chances of people outside the creative class, that is, poor, low skilled and workless groups, and it may even cause harm through gentrification of inner urban areas and displacement of low-income households.

The emphasis on competitiveness between areas, moreover, would be likely to "increase social and spatial inequalities" between areas and communities, rather than to 'close the gap' between them.

One strong indication that the new 'wisdom' was becoming 'conventional' was the publication in November of 2004 of a revised (or as it was spun, a "refreshed") economic strategy by the Scottish Executive. The original strategy, *A Smart, Successful Scotland*, had been published in 2001, and was seen as the cornerstone of the broader policy framework for the Executive as a whole. It made hardly any reference to cities or their importance. In 2004 a second, "refreshed", edition was released which now declared that "Scotland's cities are vital to driving the overall economic health of Scotland".

And there was another change that seemed very significant in the new edition. The original publication had emphasized the importance of entrepreneurship and business start-ups to Scotland's future economic prosperity. But the "refreshed"

[26] See Ivan Turok, "Urban Policy in Scotland: New Conventional Wisdom: Old Problems", in Michael Keating (ed), *Scottish Social Democracy: Progressive Ideas for Public Policy*, PIE Peter Lang: Oxford, 2007.

edition placed a new, and more primary, emphasis on growing *large-scale companies* which would be able to compete successfully in global markets.

It seems clear that this reorientation of the basis of the entire policy framework of the Scottish Executive did not come about simply through quiet contemplation on the part of ministers and senior civil servants. There was plenty of evidence of lobbying and pressure being brought to bear in favour of the 'competitiveness' agenda – perhaps most publicly in the wide press coverage given to the (clearly ludicrous) claims from business organisations that parts of Scotland were comparable to the former Soviet bloc in the extent to which local employment was dominated by the public sector, and in their hostility to the ethos of private business.

But perhaps the clearest indication of the substantive influence of business in realigning the 'wisdom' underpinning policy was the publication by the Royal Bank of Scotland in May 2004 of a report called *Wealth Creation in Scotland*. This was in effect a critical rejection of the emphasis that the Executive had placed on business start-ups and entrepreneurialism in 2001. Now it was argued that if Scotland was to be able to compete with other small European nations it would be necessary to 'grow' more companies with the scale required to project internationally and compete in global markets. The Royal Bank's key proposal was that Scotland needed to embark anew on the kind of economic liberalisation and privatisation which had in the past spawned the likes of Stagecoach and the First Group – each of which had then been able to grow and to extend their operations internationally. The areas for future developments were identified as health and education, as well as Scottish Water.

The emphasis on growing companies of scale in the Royal Bank's report was remarkably similar to the change in emphasis that was to be seen, just six months later, in the "refreshed" version of *A Smart, Successful Scotland*. The latter would not be quite so bold as to specify privatisation in health and education – but it would have a ministerial foreword highlighting the key shift in emphasis for which the RBS had lobbied. What had at that time become the fifth biggest bank in the world was exerting its influence in favour of the 'competitiveness agenda' in the corridors of devolved power in Edinburgh – and was, pretty clearly, doing so to some effect.

Against this kind of thing, the voices of Greg Lloyd and other sceptics who were challenging aspects of the 'competitiveness agenda', particularly in its connection to 'regeneration' that might work for the poorest communities, stood – as people in Clydebank might say – 'two chances'. At the end of June 2004 three "pathfinder" URCs were announced with Executive funding of almost £50 million over four years. There was one for Craigmillar in Edinburgh, and one for the Raploch area of Stirling. And there was also one for Clydebank. Here, a regeneration company had been formed in November 2002 by West Dunbartonshire Council and Scottish Enterprise Dunbartonshire – under the name of Clydebank Re-Built Ltd. It was formed, in the wake of the closure of the Kvaerner yard, to participate in the development of the strategy for the 'regeneration' of the larger "Clyde Corridor", which was then taking shape across a number of local authority areas along the banks of the river. That company was now to be given URC status, and its first strategic priority would be "to increase Clydebank's competitiveness".

Implications for the Centre

By this point, then, it was increasingly clear that the urban policy agenda was being, and would continue to be, very significantly reshaped by the emerging 'competitiveness' agenda. It was also clear that Clydebank itself figured quite prominently in the developments that were taking place. What might the implications

be for the Centre? They need not *necessarily* have been too bad, but it is also clear that, for those who might wish to do so, it would be quite easy to argue that the Centre was rather 'out of step' with the new agenda. How so?

As we saw in previous chapters, the Centre in a curious way fitted rather well with the social inclusion agenda in the early years of devolution. The substantive focus of the SIPs was on ameliorating some of the worst manifestations of degeneration, and the idea of social justice was invoked in identifying targets towards achieving that. Indeed, between 2000 and 2003 the Executive reported its progress towards these targets and milestones (or lack thereof) in its *Social Justice Annual Report*. Therafter, however, this "social justice strategy" was "refocused" in terms which were rather more in line with the new 'competitiveness' agenda. In effect, the idea of achieving socially just *outcomes* across Scotland's poorest communities was displaced by the idea of reducing *inequalities of opportunity* between them. "Closing the gap" became "Closing the *opportunity* gap". Six new "Closing the Opportunity Gap" objectives replaced the previous social justice milestones. These six objectives were in turn expressed in 10 specific targets, the first of which was to: "Reduce the number of workless people dependent on Department of Work and Pensions benefits in Glasgow, North & South Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire & Inverclyde, Dundee *and West Dunbartonshire* by 2007 and 2010".

In this light there was the potential that the very success of the Centre in the previous period could be used against it. For it would be possible to argue that the Centre had, under the SIP, played a key role in securing for many in Clydebank the entitlements to benefits which had *removed* them from "actively seeking work" – so, in the new mind-set, *reducing* their "opportunity" in life. In the context of a new agenda which was being portrayed as 'a step change' from amelioration to serious regeneration, the Centre might be depicted as part of the old problem, rather than a vital part of the new solution. What was really needed, it was being claimed, was for the public sector to enable the private sector to create a dynamic new economy and a vibrant local labour market, together with concerted action to get people *off of benefits* and into the labour market so as to have the opportunity to share in the proceeds of that dynamic new economy. How, it might be asked, would the Clydebank Unemployed Community Resource Centre, with its proud record of securing *enhanced benefit entitlements* for its local community, fit in relation to all of that?

Language and Reality

It's the kind of question that might not have been asked out loud in public, but that one might reasonably expect to have been discussed discretely amongst those 'in the loop'. On the surface it has a certain resonance, but only on the surface. *As a genuine question*, it would only emerge from a deeply *unreflective* kind of thinking – one where it is imagined that talking about problems differently in and of itself changes, not simply the terms of the discussion, but the actual substance of those problems in the real world. For the designation of a URC for Clydebank did *not* represent any step change from amelioration to meaningful regeneration for Clydebank's poorest households and communities. It entailed substantial *public* investment in facilitating large scale *private* property development along the northern bank of the River Clyde, which would be likely to lead to substantial physical change, and quite possibly to significant numbers of better off households living in the town. But the benefits for the poorest households and communities themselves would largely be limited to a small, perhaps 'tokenistic', proportion of the overall development being set aside for 'affordable' and social rented housing. And the scope for the local community even to

scrutinise the company's activity, never mind hold it accountable, would be severely limited by its 'arm's length' from the local authority, and by the limitations placed on its board members – including its "community representatives" – by its status as a private company.

The prospects, at least on this basis, for a wider economic regeneration which would create a vibrant local labour market which 'the workless' of Clydebank could then be connected to and significantly benefit from were, as in the days of the Enterprise Zone (and it seemed almost to have been forgotten that there had ever been such a thing), likely to be very limited. Poor quality, low-paid, insecure, 'dead-end' jobs, often as damaging to local people as 'exclusion' from the labour market, would be more likely. And even if one were more optimistic about the likelihood of creating significant numbers of 'good' jobs which local people might be able to access, realistically contemplating the possibility of a return to the labour market for very many of them would entail an almost wilful forgetting of how it was that so many had ended up as economically inactive in the first place. With the best will in the world, and even with extensive help and support in place, it would be hard to imagine many of them ever being able to return to work, and for a good proportion even an attempt to do so could prove very harmful.

And the real danger in seeming to suggest otherwise, which was almost inevitable as the 'worklessness' agenda was pursued, was that a door would be opened for the expression of views which were *not* motivated by the best will in the world – views which would portray the 'workless' as feckless and idle cheats who 'neither work nor want'. If it really were possible for them to work, it would be asked, why would they be receiving sickness and disability benefits in the first place? It is a danger which, unfortunately, has proved far from theoretical. 2008 was to begin with a very nasty attack by the Conservative Party, led by public school educated millionaires, along just these lines – with communities in places like Glasgow and Clydebank very much in the firing line.

In this light the surface resonance of the question posed above can be seen to be just that – a surface resonance, which diminishes sharply after just a modicum of reflection on the kinds of claims in which it was rooted, and of their likely implications. But that would not necessarily prevent it from being used against the Centre as events unfolded in West Dunbartonshire.

The Clyde Waterfront URBAN II Programme

Given all that was unfolding, the funding which had been secured for the Centre for 2004-2005 would not have offered much reassurance for the longer-term. By that time the Whitecrook Area Regeneration Strategy Group, which had in August 2003 been "considering various issues in relation to the regeneration of the Whitecrook area", had spawned a Whitecrook Initiative. It was going, in due course, to have a new, purpose-built 'regeneration centre' – costing some £2 million. As indicated in the previous chapter, a large chunk of the funding for this project was coming from the EU's URBAN II programme, which was then matched by other partners.

The availability of this money in Clydebank was linked specifically to the participation of the town in the larger Clyde Corridor regeneration. Indeed, the entire URBAN II allocation for Scotland was targeted on just two areas, Clydebank South and Port Glasgow (which in 2006 would also be awarded URC status) – through the Clyde Waterfront URBAN II Programme. Between 2000 and 2006 it was to spend over £8m "to encourage community, voluntary and public sector organisations to devise and implement projects that would further the regeneration process in local

communities". Other recipients included Clydebank Re-Built, in connection with its "community consultation programme" and its marketing and communications strategy, and the previously mentioned (see Chapter 15) Building Brighter Futures.

During 2002, when the Centre had been developing its strategic plan with a view to securing longer-term funding, there had been plans for the Centre itself to seek funding through the Urban II allocation. But they were not followed through. One main reason seems to have been that at the time the Centre's efforts were very much focused on securing longer-term 'core funding' from the local authority, on which basis it would then be possible to pursue funding from other sources – including further Lottery funding. A further reason was that the URBAN II funding was available for just part of the town – referred to in the funding documents as Clydebank South (i.e. close to the river). In terms of specific residential communities, Whitecrook and Dalmuir were the principal focus. However, the Centre had in the past been determined to maintain its identity as an organisation which served the *whole town* of Clydebank, regardless of where specific individuals might be housed. This was based on a recognition that across Scotland – and the UK more generally – the majority of poor households *do not* live in areas officially identified as poor communities. It was long the view of the Centre that such people should not be disadvantaged by their postcode, or by other arbitrary lines on a map – or at least not disadvantaged in their access to the Centre.

And this insistence on dealing with people *as individuals*, and in light only of their needs, was reflected in what was perhaps the key underlying consideration. It was spelled out by Mary Collins early in 2004 in dialogue with a consultant who was preparing a project profile of the Centre. This was in the wake of the SURF award, and the profile was to be used by the Scottish Centre for Regeneration – part of Communities Scotland – in promoting 'best practice' in the field. On the question of funding, Collins offered the following view:

> It can be difficult to obtain funding for the work that your community wants and needs. Other funding packages are available, but these may lead you to compromise the work you want to do and create a tension between the needs of funders and the needs of service users. It is better to refuse potential lucrative funding that does not serve your objectives and do what you can with the funding which does.

Clearly people at the Centre were aware that participation in the URBAN II Programme entailed signing up to an agenda about which they had very significant reservations. In particular they had reservations about the agenda on 'worklessness'.

A Question of Ethics

This was not because the Centre lacked a commitment to encouraging and supporting people in returning to work – including people classified as 'economically inactive'. Over the years the Centre had made, as we have seen, a very significant contribution towards that end in Clydebank. Indeed, the letter the Centre had received from Community Links West Dunbartonshire in August 2003, regarding its socio-economic study for the Whitecrook Strategy Group, gave a clear acknowledgement of that fact.

> As part of the … study we have conducted numerous listening surveys with local people and CUCRC was highlighted on several occasions as being responsible for helping them into employment. Given your obvious success in moving Whitecrook residents into employment … I would be keen to have an informal discussion with any of your staff.

Rather, the Centre's reservations about the new agenda reflected an understandable fear that the specific way in which 'worklessness' was being discussed and approached, and the increasing prescription of targets for its reduction, could not but undermine the 'philosophy' which the Centre had developed and adhered to over many years in relating to its users. That 'philosophy', as Mary Collins had pointed out in the Centre's 1993/94 Annual Report (see Chapter 9), called "above all else for a proper sense of the individuality of those we serve". Seeing people increasingly as, or in relation to, targets (and postcodes) just seemed too much at odds with that.

This was not rooted in philosophical 'fundamentalism'. Over the years the Centre has been flexible and adaptable to changing circumstances, and it has applied its 'philosophy' pragmatically. But the judgement was that signing up for the emerging 'worklessness' agenda risked going too far in compromising the basic *ethic* which had guided its work through those changing circumstances. The emphasis on targets was, it was felt, likely to lead to some very vulnerable individuals being seen primarily, not as ends in themselves, but as means to the ends of organisations in the regeneration field – whose income (and in some cases we are talking about limited companies) would depend on achieving those targets. The vulnerability of the service user at that stage seemed to entail too much of a 'moral hazard'.

There are some in the field of 'regeneration' who get a little queasy when confronted by such moral language. This is curious, for the whole language of regeneration is, and has always been, deeply moralistic. In practice what seems to happen is that people get 'uncomfortable' when confronted with the kind of moral arguments which somehow *challenge their own practices*. And that is understandable, for 'regeneration' really does, unavoidably, pose serious moral questions for those who earn their (sometimes rather good) livings in the field. Unfortunately, there is little encouragement to reflect upon those questions – even in the basic ways that might be true of other 'professions'. Indeed the main pressure on workers in the field seems to be the other way – to accept uncritically the prevailing wisdom and the latest agenda, and to adopt for themselves the language (always moral) in which those are framed, or to be seen themselves as 'a problem'. This is not always enough to eliminate critical comment, but it generally does serve to minimize and contain it.

The Centre is, and, because of its roots and history, always has been, different in this respect. Mary Collins and others understood that if it ceased to be different in that respect it would, in a very real sense, no longer *be* the Centre that they had done so much to create and defend. Patricia Rice was one of those others. In discussion with the author she summed it all up rather well.

> Here the *ethic* is to bring local people on, and the Centre *does* that, not for the sake of meeting 'employability' targets, but for the sake of the folk themselves.

Here we see the case laid out, concise and precise, and with a simplicity of language characteristic of the Centre and its predecessors (going as far back as the Unemployed Action Group of the 1970s). It clearly reflects the discussion and reflection which had taken place in the Centre, and the deeply-rooted understanding of identity and purpose which it instils in its people. The Centre, it was ultimately resolved, would continue to "bring local people on", in terms of education and development, and in terms of labour market participation. But it would not be signing up to a 'worklessness' agenda which would be likely to go too far in making those people a means towards someone else's ends, and be likely to increase their exposure to the kind of prejudiced and

damaging attacks from the political right which people at the Centre, and in Clydebank more generally, remembered all too well from the 1980s and 1990s.

17. The Growing Challenge of 'Worklessness'

The Centre's decision not to bid for URBAN II funding was understandable. In light of concerns about the nature and prospects of the 'worklessness' agenda, and its implications for the Centre's relationship to its users, there is a very strong case for saying that it was the correct decision. Subsequent developments tend to reinforce this assessment. Research has since highlighted many of the flawed assumptions of the 'worklessness' agenda which people at the Centre were concerned about – for instance a review conducted by academics at the University of York for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, and a report by a group of community activists in Edinburgh (the North Edinburgh Social Action Research Project on Employment).[27] Moreover, as time has progressed the fundamentally coercive nature of the 'worklessness' agenda, particularly as driven from Westminster by the Department for Work and Pensions, has become increasingly clear. Then there is the emerging recession which began to unfold in the wake of the 'credit crunch' in the second half of 2007, and which will almost certainly (and probably has already begun to) undermine the extensive plans for property development to which the (already optimistic) hopes for the 'worklessness' agenda have been tightly linked. More generally, that recession will be likely to increase 'worklessness' in Clydebank and other places – with the question at this stage being one of how bad things will get. And in this light, the unfortunate, though entirely predictable, legitimacy which the 'worklessness' agenda has provided for attacks on claimants looks even more regrettable.

Shifting Contours

Yet, at the same time, the decision not to bid for URBAN II funding was one that would have significant implications for the Centre. For around 'Clydebank South' other organisations would emerge and develop on the basis of that money, and would be priorities for the 'match funding' from other local partners which it required. These organisations would be much less independent than the Centre – because lacking in the kind of basis in the community which the latter has always possessed. Unlike the Centre, these new organisations would be creations of the local SIP and its partners – which were at that point in the process of coming together under the larger umbrella of the Community Planning Partnership. They would also tend to be much less critical, if not plainly uncritical, of the 'competitiveness'/'worklessness' agenda – to which their funding was tightly linked. In this light, there would be a distinct danger that the Centre could begin to look like, or be painted as, 'outsiders' in the changing network of policy and practice – the 'awkward squad', the 'purists' taking the moral high ground while others were getting on with 'the real work'.

The People at the Centre had very probably been seen by others as being *a bit* like that quite often in the past. But at the same time they had been seen, more importantly, as a vital contributor to the local community, and a necessary service delivery vehicle for other agencies. Now, however, the balance could tip the other way – particularly as what was being seen as 'a contribution to the local community' was being redefined, and as other service delivery vehicles were emerging. Moving

[27] Peter Kemp (et al), *Routes out of poverty: A research review*, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation , 2004; *A Report on the North Edinburgh Social Action Research Project on Employment*, Edinburgh, The Pilton Partnership, 2007

forward, moreover, these organisations would, when URBAN II funding expired in 2006, become, even more, competitors for the available funding in the locality.

As is typically the case, the emerging contours of this scenario are rather clearer now than they would probably have been to the people involved at the time. But people at the Centre were fully aware as things were developing, and particularly with the continuing hostility of the ruling labour Group in WDC, that the situation was far from good. As we shall see in due course, West Dunbartonshire was by this stage getting something of a reputation as a council where 'unsavoury' things could happen to individuals and organisations who were, like the Centre, 'on the wrong side' of prevailing power.

Still Getting on With Things in Stanford Street

This was the kind of context in which it would have been easy for people to get distracted from the routine work of the Centre. But the evidence suggests that was not happening. In January 2004 Hugh O'Neill attended no less than 80 appeal hearings through the Benefit Maximisation Project. And in the year to April 2004 the Project's staff and volunteers secured a further million pounds and more for its clients – including a quarter of a million pounds in backdated payments alone, and a further quarter of a million that would go to the Council in relation to Housing Benefit and Council Tax.

O'Neill was later that year to secure a managerial post with Drumchapel Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB). This was itself some indication of what individuals who came through the volunteer system at the Centre were able to achieve (in O'Neill's case in a period of 5 years). Janice Dickson, herself a past volunteer and activist in Clydebank Fights Back, moved into O'Neill's post, while Janice Paterson, another volunteer, moved into the post of Welfare Rights Administrator.

This progression from user to volunteer to staff is a well trodden path in the Centre. It is one that has had real benefits for the Centre, as well as for the volunteers themselves – from as far back as the 1980s. The consultant who wrote the profile of the Centre for Communities Scotland, mentioned in the previous chapter, drew this out as a "key learning point" for other organisations.

> Employing local people with experience of and empathy for the situations of the people they work with will result in greater commitment and understanding of the ethos of the project. Progression routes from centre user to volunteer to staff are useful in maintaining the ethos and user led focus of the project.

More generally, the documentation from this period is indicative of a high level of activity and networking across a range of issues and areas of work. On education, there were new departures in light of the ending of the Lottery funding. Important classes on the most basic learning skills were being delivered in conjunction with a local organisation called Community Literacy and Numeracy. And additional classes were being provided in, but at no direct cost to, the Centre, by Anniesland College – including a very useful Introduction to the Internet, and Conversational Spanish. In March the Information Worker (Julia Reid, who was by now Julia Doulati) hosted a visit by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education in relation to the Centre's work with WDC Community Education. The Management Committee "were unanimous in their enthusiasm at having the opportunity to demonstrate the services and facilities available".

In June the Management Committee discussed the offer of grant which WDC had agreed in April, and which was now with the Centre. It required acceptance of a

Service Level Agreement (SLA) with the Council, and while in the past the Centre had actively sought this, by now there was some uncertainty about its precise terms. Mary Collins was nominated to liaise with the Council regarding these terms, and on that basis the offer of funding was accepted. The issue of the SLA dragged on for some time – due to a lack of response on the agreed draft submitted to the Council. By December there had still been no word.

However matters concerning other organisations seemed to be moving along more quickly. The Whitecrook Area Strategy Group was in touch with the Centre, amongst a range of organisations in the town, to publicise the plans for its "new, custom-built and fully functional community regeneration facility for Whitecrook", and to invite attendance at a presentation in the offices of the Clydebank Housing Association in December.

Feeling the Strain

There was a balancing act going on here. A high level of commitment and activity was being maintained. But at the same time the local political context was very difficult. This was bound to take its toll on people. This can be seen in the Annual Report that was presented to the AGM in December 2004. On the one hand it reports in the usual way on the main areas of activity in the previous period – the awards secured through the BMP, the 172 appeals tribunals (70% successful), the work of the Debt/Money Advice Service, the contribution and training of volunteers, the broader educational provision, the practical assistance towards employment, the operation of the crèche, the watercolour art and sewing groups, the SURF Award, Collins' trip to Holyrood to receive her MBE, a visit by Abdullah Musin of the Iraqi Federation of Trade Unions arranged through SOFFA, and the various social activities.

But on the other hand the Report reveals the extent to which the local political context was draining people. Collins herself had begun to think that perhaps the Centre might be better off without her. Feeling that she herself might have become a kind of a liability, she had resolved to retire. Her introductory remarks to the Report speak of her "final annual report", and go on to convey what can perhaps best be described as a kind of semi-censored rage. She first sets out to tell the Centre's story "as it actually is", and the "grim reality" of the problems which had threatened its existence over the years, and in spite of which the Centre had grown and developed. But she then draws back, apparently reluctant to burden her colleagues – who would have to go forward in the wake of her departure. She thanks the colleagues, volunteers and users who had "accomplished a great deal" over the years, "often in the face of adversity", by "committing to the belief that the community are unquestionably the foundation of the Centre's existence". Importantly, she also thanks RHI Refactories for the "support that has always been a fundamental element of the Centre's success and longevity". Ultimately she expresses her wish "that the Centre will flourish and eventually gain the recognition it deserves", and that it will "continue its links with the trade union movement – in particular with the STUC". But not before she has thanked "the few elected members of West Dunbartonshire Council who have been supportive of the Centre".

It's the kind of statement that Collins would not previously have made, and perhaps might have refrained from making even when she did. The fact that it was made at all says something about the strain that was being felt. And it is indicative also of the very real danger of the Centre becoming demoralised and disorientated as that strain took its toll.

Crucially, however, Collins was dissuaded from retiring. Others – including Kelly and McCafferty - counselled that the hostility directed towards the Centre would not go away even if Collins did, but that the Centre would be deprived of a vital asset in orientating itself were she to do so

The AGM and the Annual report also paid tribute to two of the Centre's Management Committee members who had died in the preceding months – Thomas Beattie, who had done so much in the garden, and Michael McGarry who had been a contributor to a whole range of groups in the town, and had been involved in the Centre since the 1980s. Their loss was felt deeply. 2004 had been a tough year.

The Growing Threat of "Worklessness"

The new year began with a press release to flag up to the people of Clydebank just how vulnerable the Centre was becoming: "Funding Fears For Centre Which Raised £1m For Bankies". It highlighted the uncertainty, not now just in relation to the core funding from WDC, but also in relation to West Dunbartonshire Partnership funding for the BMP. In the coming April this funding would come under the control of the new Community Planning Partnership. Regional list MSP Frances Curran, of the Scottish Socialist Party, who had spoken at the AGM, was quoted:

> This is an excellent project because it is run from the grassroots and that is what we need across Scotland. People who are working within the voluntary sector to create better communities should not have to be worrying every year about where their funding is coming from.

Nonetheless, come the end of February there was still nothing from WDC about that Service Level Agreement, and the Management Committee was being informed that the meeting to decide the allocation of funding for 2005/2006 would take place on the 30th March – the day before the existing funding would expire. £81,000 had been requested.

The Committee was also informed that in the first instance the new CPP would continue the funding of the existing SIP projects – including the BMP – through the new Community Regeneration Fund (which now replaced the Urban Programme), *but only for 6 months*. During that time consultants would be conducting evaluations to inform decisions about future commitments. The CPP Board's agreed preference for the future was "a smaller set of projects which would underpin the Regeneration Outcome Agreement, our agreed Regeneration Strategy".

Scottish Enterprise funding for the Information Worker post was in place. However, the monetary level of that award had not increased in nine years – although the criteria and targets to be met had.

It is interesting in this context to see that the Centre, when things were getting precarious, and it might have tended to withdraw into itself, chose instead to reach out and to develop in new ways. An approach was received from a group called Harlequin, which worked with children with autism, ADHD and other conditions. Within weeks the group was using the Centre's facilities to help to address local needs. Outreach work on benefits and debt money advice was also extended to more of the local housing associations.

At the end of March WDC's Corporate Services Committee met to consider the allocation of local grants. The recommendation from officers was that the Centre be awarded £77,674. Jim Bollan proposed payment of the full amount requested to "help fund the running and staffing costs of an organisation which helps tackle poverty in a very direct way". But this was defeated in favour of the Labour proposal: "That the Committee approve payment of half of the recommended grant for a period

of 6 months (i.e. a payment of £38,837), and request that a report be brought to a future Committee on the interaction between groups providing advice and guidance to communities." The "stocktake and review" in other words, which had begun in the summer of 2003, was, almost two years later, and in spite of the clear recommendations which the officers implementing it had offered in December 2003 (see Chapter 15), still ongoing. It was now also made clear that, as the review progressed, there would be a greater emphasis placed on "getting people back to work". Mary Collins was quick to explain to WDC officers that "this is, and always has been, an intrinsic aspect of the services delivered by the Centre". This was undoubtedly true – though one gets a sense that this was not necessarily how others were choosing to see it. Things were looking more and more precarious.

When is a glowing report not a glowing report?

By June the consultants' report on the Centre's role in the wider BMP had been received. It was able to report a further one and three quarters of a million pounds in monetary awards to Centre clients in the year to April 2005 – bringing the total over three years to some £4.5 million (against funding of around £134,000).

Beyond that the consultants were able to report what was already widely known about the Project and about the Centre. The Project had been "effective since its inception and offers good value for money". Being part of the Centre it was "trusted for its impartiality and independence" and was seen as "approachable and friendly". Local people felt that in using the service they were "being treated with dignity". Demand for its services continued to be high, particularly from the most vulnerable in the community – and the extensive outreach work was making an important contribution in connecting with many of those. The extensive input from well-trained volunteers was, as usual, highlighted in the most positive terms. There were no concerns about the management arrangements for the project, which was also "very efficient at providing monitoring information as required". It was "well thought of" by the staff of other organisations in the locality, and seen by them to be "providing a good service". The Project benefited from its integration as part of the broader activity of the Centre, and vice versa. So, for instance, someone seeking assistance on benefits might well proceed to access training and education, or other support.

This seems very much like the kind of 'glowing report' that we have already seen in relation to the Centre. But the consultant had clearly also been briefed about a perceived problem – the Centre's "actual or potential fit" with the new Community Planning Partnership's Regeneration Outcome Agreement objectives, and in particular its "actual or potential fit" on the theme of "worklessness".

> It is clear that there is pressure to realign the work of the BM Projects to fit the increasing push towards reducing worklessness. We feel that it is important that strategic discussions occur as soon as possible about the future direction of the project and its fit with the new priority.

Ultimately the consultants concluded that:

> The major challenge for the Project comes in developing the balance of work it does to take account of the increasing focus on moving people back into work (and therefore promoting the uptake of in work benefits to aid the transition period) with the need to provide support for the most disadvantaged clients living on basic benefits for whom a small increase in income, through accessing previously unclaimed benefits can make a difference, and of which there remain a significant number in the area served by the project.

Increasingly, the Centre, which as Collins had stressed "is now, and always has been" focused on "moving people back into work", was, as was anticipated in previous chapters, being 'constructed' as an organisation which was "challenged" by the "worklessness" agenda.

The Consultants as the above quotation shows, at least sought to balance the overall perspective by acknowledging that a large proportion of those on benefits would *not* be re-entering the labour market. They might also have mentioned the significant numbers who, due to deteriorating health (and there is plenty of that in Clydebank) or some other reason, would in the future be becoming eligible for the kind of enhanced benefits which the Centre had proven so accomplished in helping to secure. In other words the consultants seemed to be reminding those who might otherwise tend to get carried away with the latest 'regeneration' agenda that there was, and would continue to be, much more to addressing local needs than 'tackling worklessness'. But, again, one gets a fairly clear sense that in the clamour to fit with the latest agenda and "the new priority" this was not necessarily how those leading the ongoing reviews were approaching things.

Converging Reviews

Later in June 2005 the WDP Community Planning Board held a special meeting to discuss its recommendations for future funding. Even now it was acknowledged that the Centre's BMP work had "potential to make a significant contribution to reducing worklessness". However it also became apparent that the perspectives of WDC and WDP on the future of information and advice service delivery in the area were converging. The specific recommendation in relation to the BMP was to:

> Continue to fund until March 06 whilst conducting a review of similar projects with a view to clustering a cohesive set of financial inclusion and advice projects, and consider future funding based on outcome of review.

Indeed, soon this review was being spoken of in official correspondence as one that was being "jointly conducted by the CPP and West Dunbartonshire Council".

What was driving this convergence was the prominence now being given by the CPP to the Executive's "Closing the Opportunity Gap Objective" of "reducing the vulnerability of low income families to financial exclusion and multiple debts". This emphasis emerged quite quickly during 2005, as it became clear that it would be possible to secure resources from the Scottish Executive linked to it. The CPP duly integrated the emphasis into the Regeneration Outcome Agreement, which they were now required to produce and submit to the Scottish Executive to secure CRF funding. It did so by linking 'financial inclusion' closely to action on 'worklessness'. In this way the CPP was able to secure £1.2m from the Executive over the next two years specifically for work on 'financial inclusion'. The result was that the main threats to the Centre's funding – the 'worklessness' agenda and the review of information and advice centres – began to coalesce as part of the now "jointly conducted" review.

This review very quickly took shape. At the beginning of July WDC were in touch again to say how much all the work that had already been done in previous years to help with the review of information and advice provision in the area was appreciated. "Notwithstanding this previous work", however, more would be required within two weeks – as decisions were looming.

18. Another Near-Death Experience

A substantial amount of the Centre's time now seemed to be devoted to providing information for ongoing review and evaluation via both WDC and the CPP. The documentation from the period shows the Centre working energetically to demonstrate its 'fit' with various themes and criteria emanating from the new 'regeneration' agenda – nationally and locally. At one level this seems fine, and as it should be. But that would be at a fairly abstract level. Looking at the documentation in more concrete terms it all looks rather less becoming – perhaps even "grim". For one is seeing a truly community based organisation, which in so many ways should have had nothing to prove to anyone, laid out on the dissecting table for various local power-brokers to, well, dissect really. Too many of the indications are of a process that is working against the Centre. It has the feeling of a process that is *not* primarily about *weighing actual local needs* and how best to allocate local funds to meet them, but which is driven by 'themes', 'criteria' and 'principles' which bear at best an unclear or partial relationship to those actual needs, and which are being applied in a less than sympathetic manner in relation to the Centre in particular.

At least one can't help but draw such a conclusion upon finding Mary Collins writing to the CPP Manager, Mike O'Donnell, in mid-July to enquire as to the veracity of the rumours that the Centre's BMP funding for the remaining 6 months of 2005/2006 was in fact to be cut. In due course this was confirmed. Where the funding for the first 6 months of the year had been £23,750, for the second six months the figure was to be £14,250 (i.e. enough for three and a half months). This could hardly have been seen as an indication that the ongoing review "jointly conducted by the CPP and West Dunbartonshire Council", for which the Centre was still providing information, was being conducted with an entirely open mind. No doubt this reflected something of the "grim reality" that Collins had previously written about.

Grim and Grimmer

By October things were looking grimmer still. Remember that by this stage the Centre's confirmed WDC 'core' funding for the period March-September had already expired. Mary Collins was now writing to the Director of Corporate Services in relation to recommendations emerging from the ongoing review of information and advice centres. These recommendations had been put to the Corporate Services Committee on the 26th of that month. They included a £10,000 cut to the Centre's funding for the following year. Collins was writing to explain the implications in the context of the broader cuts. The not-very-encouraging response was that the Committee had decided to continue its discussion until the 14th of December, and that funding would be continued in the meantime *only until that date*.

In due course the meeting on the 14th of December agreed to terminate the funding of one of the other three Centres under review – West Dunbartonshire Community Law Service – as of March 2006. The other three, including the Centre, were to receive funding *until that point*. In the meantime "discussions on the future provision of this service should continue with officers with a report being submitted to a future meeting of the Committee".

Most readers will have grasped already how all of this must have been experienced by people at the Centre – not least by those whose jobs were on the line, and who now found themselves not just 'challenged' by the 'worklessness' agenda, but directly threatened themselves with 'worklessness'. It is regrettable to see anyone's future employment being the subject of such a protracted and unseemly

decision making process. When one thinks of the well-documented commitment that these people had shown over many years, both as unpaid volunteers and as paid members of staff, then it looks more regrettable still.

Mary Collins wrote at the end of December to Mike O'Donnell at the CPP explaining that the developments on funding "would effectively render Clydebank Unemployed Community Resource Centre inoperable". His reply neither challenged that possibility, nor expressed the slightest hint of regret that it might soon come to pass. It outlined the shape of a new future for 'regeneration' in West Dunbartonshire – one in which new organisations would be coming to the fore to deal both with 'worklessness' and 'financial inclusion', and in which there seemed to be no place for the Centre. Needless to say, despite being dated 5th of January, O'Donnell's letter did not offer any good wishes to the Centre for 2006.

Later that month the application to WDC for 'core funding' for 2006/2007 was submitted. £87,000 was requested. The Corporate Services Committee met towards the end of February to discuss, *once again*, the review of information and advice centres. The recommendations were now radically different from those that had been discussed two years earlier. It was now proposed that Clydebank Citizens Advice Bureau should close from March 2006, in addition to the previously decided closure of West Dunbartonshire Community Law Service. Indeed the Clydebank CAB had already begun to refer clients elsewhere on the basis that they *already knew closure was inevitable*. The existing Dumbarton CAB was then to become the basis for a new *West Dunbartonshire CAB*, which would receive the funding previously given to the Clydebank service. Part of the saving accruing from the closure of the Community Law Service – £20,000 – was also to be provided to the new authority-wide CAB for the provision of legal advice. In relation to the Centre, the proposal was for a straightforward cut on the previous year's funding of £10,000. No rationale was given for this, though it was noted that it would "stretch" the Centre's "ability to deliver."

These proposals were agreed by the Committee. The upshot of the review, then, was that what had been the Dumbarton CAB emerged a very clear winner. Two other organisations were eliminated, and the Centre itself was left 'stretched' – or perhaps, less euphemistically, 'hamstrung'.

Grimmer Still

Even at this stage the requests for information for ongoing reviews kept coming – now in the form of a detailed questionnaire from the CPP in relation to the review of 'worklessness' projects (as opposed to information and advice services). In its response the Centre, under 'any other comments' detailed its developing financial crisis. In 2004/2005 it had operated on the basis of total funding of £152,500. So far, the projections for 2006/2007 amounted to less than £80,000 – made up of the reduced 'core' funding, together with £11,500 for the debt/money advice work (which was still in place). BMP funding was in serious doubt, and there was no information as to funding for the Information Worker from Scottish Enterprise Dunbartonshire.

At this stage the developments in relation to the funding through the CPP/CRF become somewhat murky. The CPP's Regeneration Outcome Agreement, dated September 2005, shows planned CRF expenditure to 2008. It shows an allocation to the BMP across West Dunbartonshire as a whole of £30,000 in both 2006/07 and 2007/08 – £15,000 each for Dumbarton CAB and the Centre. However e-mail exchanges between the Centre and Mike O'Donnell six months later – in March 2006 – mention this only as an "indicative" offer, due to an ongoing "major review situation".

Mary Collins' account is that in the Spring of 2006 she attended a meeting involving WDC, Mike O'Donnell for the CPP and a representative of Dumbarton CAB. Here she was advised that in fact the Centre was to receive *nothing* in CRF funding linked to the BMP. All of the £30,000 was to go to the Dumbarton CAB. Collins had, according to Julia Doulati who also attended the meeting, recently been in hospital and was still recuperating (indeed Collins had endured several periods of serious ill health and personal loss though her years at the Centre). She had come in from her sick leave to attend the meeting.

As the meeting progressed, and as the intentions became clear, Collins was looking simultaneously more ill and more angry, and she eventually let loose her anger – reminding those attending about their moral and other obligations to the Centre's users, and also to its staff who had been their colleagues and partners in a joint project over a good number of years, and who were now themselves faced with 'worklessness'. It may be that those present were 'pricked' by what Collins said. It may even be that they feared that her health could 'take a bad turn' there and then – with all of the potential fall out that might have precipitated. But, whatever the reason might have been, Dumbarton CAB agreed to revert to the previously established arrangement of splitting the BMP money on a 50/50 basis with the Centre. Shortly, O'Donnell wrote to remind the Centre that:

> The £15,000 is the grant to cover Benefits Maximisation for the current year. As we discussed when we met, we are keen to channel funds via the CAB in future years and as such this should be regarded as transitional funds.

At the time this would hardly have been seen as a positive outcome for the Centre – which had two years previously secured close to £50,000 for its role in the BMP. But in the circumstances that funding would ultimately prove vital in helping to keep it in business.

When I'm Dead and Gone

Shortly after this there were developments also in relation to Scottish Enterprise funding. The Centre had been led to believe that this funding would continue into 2007 – though perhaps with some alterations to the criteria and outcomes applied to it. However in early-mid April other parties began, very untypically, to enquire as to what was happening with this funding. Then, on the 18th of April, a letter was hand-delivered by a Scottish Enterprise Dunbartonshire employee intimating that the funding for the Centre was ending – with immediate effect (indeed it had ended 18 days previously). Curiously, the letter was dated 4th April. The result was that the Centre had lost more in funding for the information service than it had just managed to 'save' in "transitional funds" linked to the BMP.

Collins and her colleagues now feared that the Centre was "dead and gone". And for all the world it was looking very much like that was how the various 'partners' would have liked things to be. If nothing else it certainly had the appearance of 'joined-up working' amongst agencies. The estimation seems to have been that the 'core' funding cut, together with loss of other funding, would not simply 'stretch' the Centre's ability to deliver, but radically undermine it – at least it is very difficult to imagine how anyone taking any kind of perspective on the situation could have seen things any other way. Collins, that is, would not have been the only one who would have been thinking that the Centre would soon be "dead and gone".

One gets a rather clear sense of this in reading a letter which was sent to Collins from WDC in the coming period. Collins had written to the Council asking if,

in light of loss of other funding, it would be possible to have the £10,000 cut to its 'core' funding reconsidered. In reply, the Council asked "two fundamental questions", the first of which was:

> If funding is not forthcoming from either the Community Planning Partnership or from reinstatement of the £10,000 given by the Council [or *not* given by the Council – CC], will your organisation be able to utilise the present funding to carry out the grant requirements.

This looks like the kind of invitation to self harm which someone less astute than Mary Collins might have accepted. Had she replied that the Centre would be unable to fulfil the grant requirements with the current funding, then the Council could simply have taken the money back – very easily, as the Council, as had been the case for many years, administered the Centre's budget. Had Collins replied that fulfilling the grant requirements was possible with the existing funding, then she could be told to get on with doing that. The temptation would be to fall into the first 'trap'. But Collins did neither of the above, replying only that:

> Our organisation will utilise present funding to provide services to those who need it for as long as funding exists.

Rumours of Our Death …

And that is what the Centre did. It gathered its people, and it worked through what it had to do to keep going, identifying resources which had to be committed, and things which could be left to one side for the time being. One member of staff – Janice Paterson – indicated that she would be leaving to take up a new job. This meant that one less salary needed to be found. On this basis it was calculated that the Centre could function until September. Thereafter, there were contingency plans to prioritise the payment of rent and utilities, and to continue to work on a voluntary basis if need be. In the meantime, 'emergency' funding would be sought from other sources.

On reflection, it looks very much like the lack of an integrated CAB service across West Dunbartonshire in the previous years is what gave the Centre at least some hope of survival. Had that service already been integrated, or had it been possible to integrate it reasonably straightforwardly, then the available funding might have been focused even more on the CAB – leaving the Centre unable to access even the reduced level of WDC funding that it did. But the creation of an integrated CAB service was seen to require the closure of the Clydebank CAB, entailing some very real acrimony, and then the creation of an authority-wide CAB based on the Dumbarton operation. And the movement of the latter into the Clydebank area would inevitably take time. In the meantime, given the lack of an alternative independent service provider, it was necessary to continue to fund the Centre in Clydebank.

That gave the Centre some breathing space. It was breathing space which some other organisations might not have had the awareness to grasp, or the courage or tenacity to seize. But then this was not the Centre's first 'near-death experience'.

Certainly there was a good case to be made to other sources for 'emergency funding'. Here was an award winning Centre, with a well documented track record over many years, which could show that its funding was being undermined in a way that threatened its ongoing role in the community. The problem was to find a suitable source for a decent amount quickly.

Here the outreach work which the Centre had developed in conjunction with the local housing associations proved to be vital. This work was now in jeapordy. Callum Smith at Community Links West Dumbartonshire, who had previously liaised with the Centre in relation to the work of the Whitecrook Area Strategy Group, played

a key role. CLWD had itself been formed, and part-funded, under Communities Scotland's initiative to develop the broader role of local housing associations in helping local people "to create and access local services". Smith suggested that it might be possible to access that same funding source in order to maintain the outreach work in Faifley in particular. In order to secure that it would first be necessary to access other resources against which it could be matched. By June, Smith's colleague at CLWD, Stephen Horsburgh, had helped the Centre to secure £13,340 from the Scottish Power Energy People Trust. The Centre faced some criticism in certain quarters for accepting it – given, for instance, the criticisms which that company has faced for its pricing of power for poorer households. But in the circumstances it was felt necessary to accept it. On that basis it was then ultimately possible to secure twice that sum from Communities Scotland itself – who, as we saw earlier, were by now well aware of the role and contribution of the Centre, which, after all, featured on its website as an example of good practice in community regeneration.

Sold Doon the Watter? Or a People's Clydebank?

On this basis the Centre was still operating, with its staff being paid, in the second half of 2006/2007. And it was in this context that it was able to host a Community Conference in November of 2006 – with the participation of community organisations from other areas along the Clyde (including Govan, Partick and Inverclyde), and from other parts of Scotland, who were facing a similar agenda and similar problems, and expressing similar concerns. The Centre gathered its people and put on quite an event under the title: "For a People's Clydebank or Sold Doon the Watter? What does the 'regeneration' of our town mean for ordinary working class people?"

George Kirkpatrick took the chair, and Danny McCafferty spoke of the local experience. Other speakers, the present author included, contributed on the national policy developments over the years, what had driven them, and what the outcomes had been. And others shared the experiences of their own localities, where previous conferences had taken place, and gave updates on issues discussed at those events. The welcome and hospitality shown to participants was, of course, second to none.

Alas one of the Centre's people was not there to witness it all. Eddie Kelly had died that May – when the Centre's existence was probably the least secure that it had been for 15 years. But six months later the Centre was 'off of the back foot' – now not so much being challenged *by* the new 'regeneration' agenda, as publicly challenging the claims which were being made by those promoting that agenda regarding the benefits which were likely to flow to the ordinary people of the town. This challenge was, thanks in part to the efforts of a press officer working for Oxfam, Aideen McLaughlin, projected far beyond Clydebank – in both regional and national newspapers, radio and television news.

And with this event the Centre let it be known to the world that it was still there – still fighting, independently and on its own terms, for the ordinary people of Clydebank. It was still, 35 years after people like Eddie Kelly and John Nicholson had built that Unemployed Action Group – which had also made an impression on the national media – fighting for 'the right to exist'.

19. A River Runs Through It: Clydebank, *People and Place*, the 'casualties' of local politics, and its survivors

The way things closed in on the Centre in 2005/2006 is very striking. The key impetus behind that was the hostility of the ruling elite in WDC. However, prior to 2005/2006 the Centre had largely been managing to fend that off. It was the emerging 'regeneration agenda' which seemed to change that. Indeed, as we have seen, it was substantially through the CPP that much of the damage was done. What seems to have been happening was that the new 'regeneration agenda' lent itself to a local interpretation which provided a cover for the hostility towards the Centre. But also, in integrating the work of 'regeneration' into the larger process of community planning, the new framework brought that work much closer to the broader activity – and oversight – of the local authority. The SIP's 'regeneration' activity seemed to be conducted with a certain degree of autonomy from the local authority. But with the CPP that changed. The overall result was that the Centre was now much more exposed.

True Believers and Critical Thinkers

Now the undermining of the Centre could be justified in terms of 'reassessing commitments' in light of 'newly emerging priorities', and charting a 'truly integrated strategy' – and all, it was being claimed, in a context which offered the potential to deliver the kind of 'regeneration' which the people of Clydebank had been promised for decades. Local 'partners' in Clydebank were, it was claimed, truly 'building a brighter and better future' for those in the poorest communities.

Indeed readers will remember (see chapters 15 & 16) that there had even been an organisation called Building Brighter Futures established by WDC and the SIP in 2003. It had funding over three years of close to half a million pounds – half of which came from URBAN II – to provide a range of services which eventually proved to be remarkably similar to those provided by the Centre. A description of the project provided as part of "a celebration of 20 years of European funds in western Scotland" reports, not very encouragingly, that the project "started slightly behind schedule due to difficulties in recruiting staff and difficulties in finding suitable premises". That sounds like a lot of difficulties in the life of a short-term project. Nonetheless, by 2006, with the URBAN II programme terminated, the project was being taken over as "an innovative new Community Planning initiative … to remove barriers to employment and support people … back into education, training, employment or other forms of meaningful activity". Under the slightly modified title of Building *Better* Futures it was being expanded and given hefty funding for another two years – until March 2008 – for, amongst other things, a "financial fitness team". Posts advertised in the early summer of 2006 alone had annual salaries approaching a quarter of a million pounds.

With developments like this under way, it would be possible to suggest that the future that was being built for the poorest communities in Clydebank really *would* be 'brighter' and 'better'. And if that meant a lesser role for one local community organisation, albeit an award winning one, and perhaps even its eventual disappearance, surely, it could be argued, that would be a small price to pay in light of the bigger picture.

It is quite probable that some of those involved in the decision making processes, at least in part, believed much of this. But perhaps better to say that they

might have *chosen* to believe it, as a way of doing what they felt they had to do. For it is hard to imagine that they could have been unaware that there were *other reasons* for what was being done to the Centre. Equally, it is hard to believe that they could have failed to realise, even when feeling at their most optimistic for the future of the town, that the actual needs of the local community were not going to change dramatically overnight, and that the understanding and expertise that the Centre had developed over decades could not simply be supplanted by a new organisation. This would be particularly the case for an organisation with at best very limited roots in and connection to the community it served, and even more so, perhaps, for an organisation which had only two years of funding and something of a track record of "difficulties" in establishing momentum.

Yet, what might have helped those involved in the process to neglect their awareness of such considerations, in order to be able to believe in the talk of "better futures", was the hype which surrounded the final coming together of the new 'regeneration' agenda in late 2005 and early 2006. The culmination of that process came at the end of February 2006 with the high profile launch by the Scottish Executive of a new 'regeneration statement' – *People and Place*. The civil servant who headed up that process – Neil McIntosh – came along to Glasgow University at the time of its launch to speak to a hastily assembled audience of academics and practitioners about how it had come together and what it was going to mean. Suitably enough, the venue was the University's Adam Smith Building.

McIntosh explained that the statement was in fact the culmination of a process of rethinking which had begun very shortly after *Better Communities* had been launched (in June 2002). In that period, as we have seen, there had been, as well as growing disappointment about the activity of the SIPs, a growing belief in the potential for a radically new departure for 'regeneration' in Scotland – a way at last to gear some of the poorest communities into processes of economic growth which would 'lift them out' of poverty . Once again there was talk in the room of Scotland regaining its place at the cutting edge of regeneration policy and practice in the UK – a place which, it was asserted, it had occupied in the later 1980s and early 1990s, but which it had since lost.

There was a fair degree of excitement around the launch of the statement. Indicatively, the hastily assembled audience that heard McIntosh speaking at Glasgow University late on a Friday afternoon was a large one – and not just because they all wanted to go out in the West End afterwards. There was a tangible sense of many in the room *wanting to believe* that after years of failure, they might be involved in the delivery of a more successful programme to the communities they served. No doubt, of course, there would also have been some awareness that, at least in the short term, 'buying in' to the new agenda would be important to people's personal ambitions and prospects.

"The Scottish Executive is Open for Business"

Notwithstanding the inevitable awareness of the latter, what might have encouraged a little more in the way of critical reflection regarding the likely beneficiaries of the new 'regeneration agenda' was the slogan with which *People and Place* was being trailed. McIntosh explained that the statement had been produced because ministers had "felt the need to say something" about 'regeneration'. And what they had ultimately felt the need to say was: "The Scottish Executive is open for business". Annette Hastings, one of the Glasgow University academics who spoke at the event, at least tried to encourage that critical reflection. For Hastings the thinking behind

People and Place looked too much like "trickle down economics" – the theory, associated with Thatcherism over twenty years previously, that if the 'wealth creators' are set free then the poor will benefit from their activity. It hadn't worked then or since, Hastings indicated, and she asked why anyone might imagine that it would now.

Hastings' point was a good one, well made. But there was rather more behind *People and Place* than just that. It showed that the agenda for 'competitiveness', linked to the revised edition of *A Smart, Successful, Scotland*, had become the key basis for regeneration policy. Indeed, it seemed to betoken more than even that. For, as the "open for business" slogan suggested, the primary focus of *People and Place* seemed to be much *less* on the welfare of Scotland's poorest communities, and rather *more* on the 'welfare' of private companies. It looked very much like an attempt was being made to use 'regeneration', and the moral legitimacy that goes with it, as a way of beginning to get the Royal Bank's 'firm growing' agenda, which was now central to the Executive's revised economic policy, moving on the ground.

"The Scottish Executive is open for business" was, in that light, a more general statement of economic intent. But *People and Place* was indicating – at times with exceptional clarity – the key role of 'regeneration' in beginning to translate that intention into reality. Henceforth, 'regeneration' was to be "a crucial part of growing the economy". It was to be about "creating value" and "providing private sector partners with clarity and certainty about the sustained commitment of the public sector". Henceforth the latter would, above all else, need to be "alive" to "the needs of the private sector". 'Regeneration' was to be about ensuring Scotland's *communities* – with their many 'development opportunities', but also with their health and social services and their education services – would be "open for business", and that their potential to fuel the growth of "service provider" companies might be 'opened up' too.

The stark statement of this perspective was concerning enough. There simply isn't the evidence to suggest that such a policy would bring about the kind of 'regeneration' which might benefit the poorest communities, and plenty of evidence to suggest that it would primarily benefit rather better off groups. What was even more concerning was that *People and Place* revealed a reasonably coherent framework to try to ensure its implementation "at regional, local and neighbourhood level where regeneration initiatives actually happen". Broadly, the approach was to use the implementation apparatus already set out around *Better Communities* – in the form of the CPPs. While the substantive thrust of policy had changed since then, the CPPs were thought still to be useful. This was in part because the CPP framework was designed to ensure a much firmer central grip over local implementation, and much clearer 'accountability' for those failing to 'deliver'. This meant that CPPs could play a role, as *People and Place* put it, in "bringing together key participants to act as a bridge to link national and local priorities better".

The URCs and the Clyde Corridor

However, the broader role of the CPPs was to be more about *disseminating* the new agenda than in actually *driving* it. A smaller number of areas identified as having particular potential were to be used to generate that impetus. And here, in particular, it was recognised that centrally driven priorities would not be sufficient. Action in these areas would need "clear political commitment from key players". Without this, *People and Place* feared, "the technical, financial, economic and legal complexities" posed by the new agenda might "prove insurmountable". The aim was to draw upon,

and extend, existing experience in dealing with such "complexities" – the experience of Public Private Partnerships, of the so-called "Community Ownership Programme" in housing, of public-private Joint Venture Companies, and of "bond issues, land trusts, and Property Investment Limited Liability Partnerships". There would need to be further movement towards a "mixed economy of investment" and more "dialogue with the private sector on new forms of financial instrument".

People and Place identified the particular "geographic priorities" in which all of this paraphernalia of privatisation was to be drawn together and further developed. URCs were to be crucial to these priority areas. To add to the three already established, a further two URCs were now announced - in Inverclyde (the Riverside Inverclyde URC) and on the Ayrshire coast (the Irvine Bay URC). But more significant still was to be the Clyde Corridor. At the heart of this was the highly significant Clyde Waterfront Strategic Partnership (CWSP) in west Glasgow. To the east was the "Clyde Gateway" project – along the route of the M74 extension. Here the "scale and complexity" of the project required a URC to "provide the long-term certainty needed by investors". And to the west was Clydebank with its existing URC – Clydebank Rebuilt. These three areas, as part of the larger Clyde Corridor project, were to be the key "national regeneration priority". But the broader intention was to disseminate the results from here, as well as the other URC areas, across the rest of the country – via the CPPs.

Moreover, the activity in these priority areas was to extend beyond the obvious property development to the broader agenda of "public sector reform" – generally a euphemism for further privatisation of public services. One significant passage in *People and Place* commented: "The relationship between regeneration, renewal and public sector reform is a complex but critical one: we will bear it firmly in mind in the context of the forthcoming debate on the future of public services in Scotland".

In this light the 'fit' between *People and Place* and the economic perspective laid out by the Royal Bank two years earlier seemed quite apparent. 'Regeneration' in the late 1980s and early 1990s had been at "the cutting edge", not so much in addressing the needs of the poorest communities in Scotland (where continued *de*generation was generally in evidence), but in developing a centrally driven neo-liberal agenda in relation to property development and the reform of public services (particularly housing provision). This, sadly, seemed to be the kind of thing that *People and Place* was aiming to recreate almost two decades on. It might be called 'regeneration', but behind that cloak there was rather more to it than is generally understood by that term. As we have seen in earlier chapters, *People and Place* was not new in that respect.

Controversy in West Dunbartonshire

Notwithstanding the clear indications given by *People and Place* as to the priority that was to be given to "the needs of the private sector" in 'regeneration', other than Annette Hastings, not many of the people who attended McIntosh's talk at Glasgow University on that Friday afternoon seemed to be thinking along such critical lines. But they were the lines along which the community organisations gathered in Clydebank nine months later were thinking. And the broadcasting of such critical views in the national media created some controversy in West Dunbartonshire and beyond. Yet that controversy was very soon to be overtaken by an even larger controversy which was to engulf WDC.

As was explained in Chapter 14, the 2003 *Local Government in Scotland Act* placed a duty on councils to lead CPPs and to secure "best value" in their localities. Henceforth all 32 councils in Scotland were to be audited on a rolling basis to assess the extent to which they were meeting these duties, and to identify and agree suitable improvements. By October 2005 it was WDC's turn to be audited. Audit Scotland came along to begin its work on behalf of the Accounts Commission for Scotland. By early October the following year the findings were ready. They were, according to *The Scotsman*, leaked to the local MP, now John McFall, and to one of the local MSPs, Jackie Baillie – who released them to the press. At that stage the Political Editor of *The Scotsman*, Peter McMahon, described the report as "one of the most damning ever produced by the public spending watchdog". When the Accounts Commission met to consider the report, one of the options open to it was to hold a hearing – though this had never actually been done before. WDC itself now specifically requested such a hearing, and the Accounts Commission agreed to their request.

The result was a two day hearing in Clydebank on the 29th and 30th of November. The complete proceedings – which run to 252 pages – are available on the Audit Scotland website, as is the final report which was duly published in February 2007. Together these documents make for a thorough indictment of the political leadership of WDC in the preceding years, and raise searching questions, and profound issues, beyond that.

Writing about the hearing in *The Herald*, Douglas Fraser ably summarised and analysed two days in which "the dry-as-dust substance of best value audit came fascinatingly to life". He is worth quoting at some length:

> The commission is likely to report next week, and while it would be wrong to pre-judge its findings, some free advice to the council's political and official leadership is to take a good look at the recruitment section in *The Herald*. … You could tell at the hearing something was amiss when the local Labour MP, a local Labour MSP and members of the Labour Group tore into their own Labour comrades on the council. They were confirming reports of bullying, harassment, skewing council finances to benefit favoured wards and punish enemies, unminuted decisions involving tens of millions of pounds, council officials too close to councillors; and they were followed by trade union representatives saying the bullying culture is widespread, with daily complaints and no confidence in the grievance procedure.

That was, pretty much, the indictment. But beyond that there were also some searching questions "about the way Scotland is governed":

> Locally they are asking why John McFall MP and Jackie Baillie MSP have taken so long to discuss publicly the problems afflicting their comrades. … If they were silent, knowing there to be serious problems with the Party's administration, can the same be said in other parts of Scotland?

And there was also the profound issue regarding the Conservatives' reorganisation of local government which created West Dunbartonshire Council in the first place. For, notwithstanding all that was clearly wrong in West Dunbartonshire Council, it was an authority which was confronted with very serious poverty and associated problems, and which had, at the time of its formation, been deprived of the kind of local tax base which was needed even to begin to address those problems. It was a very bad position from which to start, and in a number of ways unlikely to be conducive to good local government. This, Fraser pointed out, "is where the Tories come in":

> However they try to reinvent themselves, and to argue that Thatcherism's harsh economic medicine was necessary, the council map of Scotland is a glaring indictment of naked political

gerrymandering. West Dunbartonshire lost the tax base of prosperous Milngavie to its east, and Helensburgh to its west. It was one of those Tory-free zones that the Scottish Office thought would ensure safe Conservative enclaves nearby. How wrong they were, both in their political calculations and in their opportunism.

Down by the Riverside

One of the many issues on which the Accounts Commission heard evidence was the review of information and advice services that had been conducted initially by the Council, and more latterly in conjunction with the CPP. The evidence of Dennis Brogan, Independent Councillor for the Whitecrook ward, was that the process had been seriously manipulated so as to arrive at recommendations which could not have been justified by a transparent and appropriate review in line with 'best value' considerations. It had involved both "intimidation" and "disparagement of community members involved in the provision of services".

Another of those who gave evidence was Mike O'Donnell, the manager of the CPP. He had at the time recently started a secondment to the Scottish Executive to head up its Workforce Plus initiative – focused on 'worklessness' in the areas identified under the "Closing the Oportunity Gap" targets. That initiative had been launched by Scottish Executive Ministers on a visit to West Dunbartonshire in June of 2006. Clearly O'Donnell had put the area on the map as concerned the "worklessness" agenda. But what concerned Audit Scotland, and the commissioners at the hearing, was the apparent lack of progress of the CPP in term of its broader community planning remit. During the hearing O'Donnell was pushed quite hard on that. The ultimate conclusion that was reached in the published audit was that:

> West Dunbartonshire is the only area in Scotland not to have agreed and adopted a community plan. The partnership is still using the consultative draft which was issued in 2000. More generally, community planning in West Dunbartonshire has lacked impetus and its activity has had a narrow focus on establishing the structure and developing the ROA. A significant challenge remains for the partnership in ensuring its community planning arrangements can deliver improved outcomes and services for local people.

That challenge now fell to the new "temporary replacement" CPP manager.

Shortly after the hearing White resigned as Council leader. Soon he had been suspended by his party and was facing expulsion – which duly followed. Further suspensions, expulsions, and 'pre-emptive resignations' followed – as the Labour Group disintegrated amidst great acrimony.

The Town Hall is down by the river in Clydebank. Douglas Fraser reported that on leaving the hearing there, one "quietly satisfied woman" said to him: "It's true what they say, you know. Wait by the river long enough, and eventually all the bodies of your enemies will float by".

The Survivors' Tale

I can confirm for the reader that the woman in question was *not* Mary Collins – nor any of the other women at the Centre. They were by that time working towards something rather more important – securing the funding that would keep the Centre in operation for the remainder of 2006/2007 and into 2007/2008, and developing the planning of their ongoing contribution to their local community in the years beyond that.

As in the past, that has not proved to be straightforward. But, in speaking to the staff and the volunteers it has been clear that throughout the difficulties in recent years, notwithstanding the occasional and inevitable 'blow out', the mood and the

morale has remained surprisingly good. People seem to have been sustained by their shared belief in who they collectively *are*, and what they know they have achieved and contributed to Clydebank over many years. They also seem to have been sustained by a sense of obligation to the people who in previous decades had built and defended the organisation, and by the knowledge that those people had succeeded in getting it going and keeping it alive in very difficult circumstances. They didn't want to be the ones who 'let it die' – or be killed off – on their watch. What also became clear is that throughout the difficulties the Centre continued to function and serve the needs of its community in such a way that clients and users might hardly have been aware that the Centre was struggling for its existence.

However, following the public hearing there were soon some significant signs of change. By November the CPP Board was concerned about the prospect of *an underspend* in its CRF allocation for 2006/2007 – which would be retained by Communities Scotland, and so be lost to the locality. According to a report made to the Council on the matter in December 2006, the CPP Board "noted the need for urgent action to ensure the minimum required spend", and recommended that this would need to be "focused on either existing projects which were able to deliver additional services, or on capital expenditure". There was also an emerging underspend in relation to the Financial Inclusion Fund (that £1.2m which had been allocated by the Scottish Executive over two years), and the Executive was being asked to increase "the year end flexibility in 2006/2007 to approximately 30%".

Duly the Centre was advised to apply for more CRF funds. Now, hold that thought reader. After all that the Centre had been put through in relation to its funding by the CPP, and after all that it had been told about the development of carefully constructed and integrated plans for a 'better future' which meant that its own funding could not continue and that sadly jobs would have to go, that same CPP was seeking out the Centre to *ask it* to apply for money which the CPP otherwise would be unable to spend – and which would then be lost to the local community. In the changed context in which the CPP was now functioning, the Centre was able to secure a further £16,000 – which helped it to get through to the end of the financial year.

Come the end of the financial year there was no decision from the local authority as to funding for 2007/2008. And none would be forthcoming until after the elections on 3rd May. On that day, and the next, amidst the debacle of spoiled ballots in the polling process for both local government and the Scottish Parliament, the political landscape of Scotland changed rather significantly. The SNP became the largest party in the Scottish Parliament and formed a minority Scottish Government (the name Scottish Executive went out with the Labour-Liberal coalition). And in West Dunbartonshire the new Single Transferable Vote system of proportional representation saw two independent councillors – one of whom had recently 'resigned' from the Labour Party – together with Jim Bollan of the SSP, holding the balance between Labour (10 councillors) and the SNP (9 councillors). The former Labour Councillor got to be Provost, and the SNP got to lead the authority with the support of Bollan and the other independent.

Between the changes to the control of the Council, and the clearing out of the cabal which had previously controlled the Labour group, the Centre found itself for the first time in several years with a full complement of political representatives – and supportive representatives – on its management committee. Jim Bollan continued as a WDC representative, and was joined by two SNP Councillors and one from the Labour Party. Soon the Council approved funding for 2007/2008 – with a 10% increase on the previous year.

The new SNP Convener of Finance at the Council, Craig McLaughlin, who had under the previous regime challenged the review of information and advice centres and the recommendations emerging from it, promptly visited to reassure that in his eyes the Centre was an essential service provider, and could expect to be treated as such. And in spite of the earlier suggestion from Mike O'Donnell that the BMP funding for the 2006/2007 should be seen as "transitional funding" only, the CPP was now willing to honour the commitment laid out in its 2005 ROA to provide £15,000 in 2007/2008 as well. Together with the continuing Scottish Executive provision for debt/money advice provision, and a further grant from Communities Scotland, the Centre was able to continue, albeit still one member of staff down, through 2007/2008.

That year would see another major event in the life of the Centre. Early in 2007 RHI Refactories made it known that it now required the site of the Centre's premises for other purposes. After 15 years the Centre would have to find a new home. Following searches and investigations new premises were identified on Dumbarton Road – in the Dalmuir Area of the town. Initially £35,000 was secured through the Community Regeneration Fund to make the premises fit for occupation. George Cairney, a retired former provost of Clydebank, spent untold hours on the project on a voluntary basis – determined to do what he could to keep a vital community service in operation. The Centre opened to the public in its new location on 7th January 2008. More recently a further £17,000 has been secured from the CRF for additional work that is required in the premises. They are not quite as spacious as those in Stanford Street, but there is no doubt that the people at the Centre will make the most of them. There are already plans for the garden.

Oh, and by the way, the Centre is no longer called the Clydebank Unemployed Community Resource Centre. Recently it has changed its name. Partly this is because of the proliferation of organisations in Clydebank in recent times – one of which has a name which was so similar to the Centre's own that it was causing confusion. Partly it is in recognition of the changing nature of the Centre's activity over the years. And partly it is linked to the Centre's decision to become a registered charity. But most importantly it is to emphasize something that all those reviews in recent years indicated the users of the Centre valued most highly. The Clydebank *Independent* Resource Centre now awaits the new Scottish government's 'regeneration' strategy. And it lives in hope ……

20. Conclusion: Learning from experience and building for the future

This book has told 'the story' of what is today called the Clydebank Independent Resource Centre. As was explained at the outset, it has been written because people working on Oxfam's UK Poverty Programme in Scotland came to the view that a work telling the Centre's story could make an important contribution to the development of genuinely community-based responses to the experience of poverty in contemporary Scotland.

Beginning in the late spring of 2007, the initial aim was to write a 'report' documenting something of the organisation's history and contribution, set against the coming and going of the various phases of 'regeneration' since the 1970s. This turned out to be a larger and more time-consuming project than had initially been imagined, but as the research progressed it was felt that it was not only worthwhile, but *necessary*, to devote the time that was required to tell 'the story'. And that was because of the growing awareness that the Centre's experience, over three decades and more, of responding to unemployment and poverty amounts to a rich resource which can contribute significantly to our understanding of how local communities, and others, might usefully respond to the problems they continue to face.

In particular, it became apparent that the story of the Centre could play an important role in helping communities to move beyond the often defensive reactions to the experience of poverty and 'regeneration' that have become familiar in recent decades, and to develop a more positive and expansive view of the possibilities for the future.

Learning from Experience?

This is now, early in 2008, even more important than it was when the work was begun. For now there is a new Scottish Government developing its own agenda for 'regeneration'. Will that agenda be one which repeats the failures of the past? Certainly, as we have seen, in recent years there has at least been a growing willingness to acknowledge that the failures of the past have indeed *been* failures. And the policy documents that emerged in this period have certainly spoken boldly and confidently about 'learning', 'raising our game', and creating a 'step change' in 'regeneration'. But have we *really* learned from the failures of the past?

Even some of those who in certain contexts speak boldly and confidently along these lines are, in other contexts, rather less confident about what the most recent policies will deliver. And what they are most sceptical about is the extent to which such policies will deliver benefits to the poorest groups and communities in our towns and cities. In other words, they are most sceptical with regard to what 'regeneration' is *supposed*, most fundamentally, *to be about* – and certainly the thing that is most commonly invoked to *justify* 'regeneration' policy and expenditure.

This is no great surprise. Indeed it would be a source of both surprise and concern if significant figures in the field did *not* have such reservations, because that would indicate a worrying detachment from reality on their part. In reality there is very little evidence to suggest that the kinds of policies that have been developed in recent years will deliver sufficient benefits to the poorest groups and communities, and 'close the gap' – and rather more to suggest the opposite. What is perhaps regrettable is that such concerns are not shared sufficiently with the public, or with the

poor communities who are supposed to benefit from 'regeneration'. Rather such concerns tend to be denied or managed out of public discussion.

Some of this can be seen even in the academic community. Take for instance one academic whose work has been quoted approvingly in previous chapters. Ivan Turok is Professor of Urban Economic Development at the University of Glasgow. As we saw in Chapter 16, in his recent academic writings Turok expresses significant reservations about the 'competitiveness' agenda that emerged in the wake of the *Cities Review*. He is at best unconvinced by the basic notion that cities are key 'economic drivers' for the national economy. But, more importantly for our current discussion, he is straightforwardly sceptical about the extent to which the poorest groups and communities will benefit from policies based on 'competitiveness'. Indeed he fears that in key respects such policies could *exacerbate* their problems and make existing inequalities between areas and communities *even worse*. Policies based on 'competitiveness', that is, might 'widen the gap' rather than 'close the gap'.

Yet, in his contributions to broader public discussion – for instance appearances on BBC's *Newsnight Scotland*, or writing in *The Herald* (14th September 2007) – such reservations and scepticism are much less conspicuous. On the basis of the latter contributions Turok appears virtually as a public advocate for the 'competitiveness' agenda. This, on the one hand, is what one might expect given that Turok was a member of the Strategy Steering Group for the Glasgow Economic Forum which produced the latter's economic development strategy for Glasgow in 2006 – a strategy which is very strongly based on the 'competitiveness agenda.[28] But, on the other hand, it is not what one would expect on the basis of the very serious reservations that he expresses when writing for his academic peers.

This is not intended, and nor should it be interpreted, as a personal attack on Ivan Turok. That could serve no constructive purpose whatsoever. Over the years Turok has made a valuable contribution to our knowledge and understanding of urban 'regeneration' – which is why his work has been cited in the previous chapters. Rather, Turok's 'ambivalence' seems to reflect something significant about the current context in which policies and strategies are developed and promulgated. It is a context in which there are certain 'expectations' of those who are 'insiders' – in terms of what they say to the world. Other 'insiders' are often similarly ambivalent, and have similar reservations. In Turok's case we are able to see this, because as an academic he also inhabits another world where he is able to – and to some extent *must* – show the 'other side' of that ambivalence.

The point is that in the 'policy community' such ambivalence is very real. There is a clear enough sense that the bold and confident talk of learning from past failures might amount to very little in practice. In terms of 'closing the gap' and really benefiting the poorest communities who are supposed to be the beneficiaries of 'regeneration', it is understood that we might very well be working our way towards yet *another* policy failure. And when key figures do not feel at liberty to discuss such concerns in public, then we can be very sure that we do not as yet have the kind of learning environment that allows us confidently to assert that we really are likely to have learned the important lessons.

But if it is at times difficult *really* to learn with and from the 'great and the good' in 'regeneration', then perhaps we can learn more easily with and from our rather less ambivalent friends in Clydebank and in other places like it. So let's turn

[28] *A Step Change for Glasgow: Glasgow's Ten-Year Economic Development Strategy*, Glasgow Economic Forum, 2006.

now to drawing out some answers to the questions we posed in our introduction to the Centre's story.

The Trades Union Connection and Independence

The key initial aim of the research was to account for how the Centre has been able to survive, develop and contribute as it has over so many years, through circumstances in which many other organisations have struggled and died. By now much of this will already be clear to the reader – indeed some of the key aspects of the account were outlined in the discussion of the Unemployed Action Group of the 1970s in Chapter 3.

Going even further back, one key element of the explanation is that the Centre reflects and continues a long-standing tradition in Clydebank of sustained, independent activity from within the local community itself to address the problems which have been generated for it by the town's pattern of development. Being in Clydebank, then, is part of the explanation. And as we saw in Chapter 10, had the Centre been in Glasgow (or had the town previously been incorporated into the city), then it might not have been able to hold out against the stronger embrace of the 'official' version of 'partnership' in the city – which was more strongly intolerant of genuinely independent community organisations – during the 1990s.

Trade union and socialist activists have played a key role in the organisations that have sustained and developed independent community activity in Clydebank over the years, and this has certainly been true of the Centre and its predecessors. In particular, the Centre's origins in the Clydebank and District Trades Council seem to have been very important in its ability to maintain its *independence* – despite its close ties to the local authorities and other funders over the years. The Centre's response to the 'competitiveness' and 'worklessness' agenda in recent years is a striking indication of its capacity to defend that independence in exceptionally difficult circumstances.

The achievement which is entailed in this is all the more apparent when it is contrasted with what is happening with other organisations in the voluntary sector who now find themselves working to implement that same 'worklessness' agenda – despite very serious misgivings. Almost by the week, it seems, the fundamentally coercive nature of that agenda become more apparent. At UK level the latest development (5th February 2008) is the proposal from Minister for Housing, Caroline Flint, to make tenants of social housing actively seek work as a condition of their tenancy, and to open up privately run 'job centres' on housing estates to drive them into work. That is not, at least as yet, being proposed for Scotland, but it is an indication of the drift of policy at UK level – which is the level at which the Department for Work and Pensions operates. And how long until it *is* proposed for Scotland? Perhaps even by people *in* Scotland?

The unavoidable fact is that the income stream of significant voluntary sector organisations is now to a very worrying degree bound up with the implementation of this agenda. And this means that organisations which were founded on an ethic of care for vulnerable people increasingly find themselves in a position where such people's vulnerability has an economic value which they seem to be required to realise for their own continued existence. The voluntary sector was strongly opposed to Norman Tebbit's "get on your bike" attitude in the 1980s. What will be the response of voluntary organisations in the housing and employment fields to Caroline Flint's "get out of your house" attitude in the period ahead? Thankfully we know the answer to that question in relation to the Centre. And the suggestion here is that this pleasing lack of ambivalence is linked to its roots in the trade union movement.

Over the years there has been a degree of material support offered to the Centre by the wider trade union movement – for example the UAG's use of the TGWU premises in the 1970s; the contributions from SOFFA in the 1990s and into the 2000s, and the donations from trade unionists like those at Kvaerner around the time of its closure. But the symbolic link to, and support of, the STUC has also been very important – and was particularly important to the defence of the Centre in 2003 and 2004, helping to raise its profile at national and UK level. The Centre would probably not have survived without that.

But most vital of all, on a more enduring basis, has been *the sense of identity and purpose* which the Centre's roots in, and connection to, the wider trade union movement has given it. This seems to be at the root of what sets it apart from a lot of other voluntary organisations. This in turn is a key part of the explanation as to how it has been able to survive, develop and contribute as it has over so many years – when many other organisations have lost their way, struggled and died.

The Role of 'Special' Individuals

Of course it will be apparent that the Centre has also been fortunate to have had a lot of input from some rather special and talented individuals. But it would be wrong to think that this was *simply* good fortune. A substantial part of that has also been down to the organisation's links to the trade union movement, to the way in which the Centre also *produces* its own people, and to the nature of the collective which then supports them.

Firstly, because of its continuing connections to the trade union movement, the Centre has always been able to draw on people who have previously been trade union activists and shop stewards. The experience – the *nous* – they have brought with them has been of fundamental importance. People like Eddie Kelly, Mary Collins, George Kirkpatrick and others brought with them an understanding of the ways of the world, the workings of power, and what is involved in organising and leading ordinary people seeking to defend and promote their own interests. Elsewhere the relative inexperience of those involved in community organisations has rendered them vulnerable to manipulation and to co-option to the agendas of others. Not a few have found themselves misled, exploited and then discarded – often with their credibility in their own community seriously affected – when they were no longer required.

Secondly, the Centre has worked to share and transmit the kind of understanding and experience which these people have brought to the organisation amongst its other workers, volunteers and users. Where many other community organisations, as we saw in Chapter 3, looked to local authority development workers, the UAG, and later the Centre, looked – and still does look – to *develop its own workers*. This has been important, not just in preserving the independence of the organisation, but in *producing* some of those special individuals we have encountered in the Centre's story – individuals who internalise through their training and development the *identity and purpose* of the organisation so that it can continue to progress and develop with its independence intact.

This rings out in the testimony of David McPhail (which was used in Chapters 5, 6 and 7). And it is very evident indeed in the resolve of the people at the Centre in the most recent period not to let it 'die on their watch', so to speak. Had they not internalised that identity and purpose, then they might just have gone off and found employment – and no doubt a quieter life – elsewhere. But having travelled the path from user to volunteer to staff, as that Consultant writing for Communities Scotland observed, they possessed "greater commitment to and understanding of the ethos of

the project" than might have been seen elsewhere – and an evident resolve to maintain its "ethos and user-led focus" (i.e. its *independence*).

Moreover, the contributions of individuals at the Centre have always been heavily dependent on the broader collective. For instance, when the Centre was struggling back to life in 1990 and 1991 Eddie Kelly was not to the forefront, and Mary Collins was yet to arrive. It was a broader collective that played the key role in those stages – including McPhail and Alison Ferguson. Had they not done so, then Eddie Kelly's legacy might not have been carried forward after 1990, and there might not have been a role for Mary Collins in the years ahead. Similarly, when Mary Collins was having to respond to WDC's manoeuvres in the summer of 2006, her carefully calculated responses reflected the input and advice from the Centre's broader collective – including Danny McCafferty.

The point in highlighting the way in which the Centre's 'special and talented' have been trained in the trade unions, and then the way in which it has worked to *produce* its own people, and also the dependence of each of these people on the broader collective, is in no way to diminish the unique contributions of any of them (though they themselves would be the first to efface that). Rather the point is that it shows how other organisations might work to emulate its achievements – by creating the kind of links, context and processes that are conducive to recruiting, producing and supporting the workers they need. Clydebank does not have a monopoly on special and talented people.

hoodaeyehinkyirtawkintae?

Another important characteristic of the UAG of the 1970s was, as we observed in Chapter 3, that its language was rooted in and reflective of the needs and self-understanding of its own community. This continued to be the case in the 1980s, and it has probably been strengthened since the early 1990s. This has also been vital to the way in which the Centre has developed.

In recent decades there has been almost continual lip service to the idea that local communities should be 'at the heart of the regeneration process'. But at the same time the language of 'regeneration' too often seems to suggest an *Alice in Wonderland* world where unfamiliar terms emerge which seem to have little discernible meaning at all (what on earth is a 'vibrant community'?), and where familiar words seem to lose their connection with what they ordinarily mean ('partnership'? 'participation'? 'voice'? 'empowerment'?) and seem to end up meaning whatever the people with power *declare* that they will mean. And if that sounds terribly confusing, disorientating and not entirely to be trusted – *that's the point*. Communities have long protested, but it hasn't changed that much, and often things have seemed to get worse. And this is as sure an indication as anyone could need of the fact that communities *are not now and never have been 'at the heart of the regeneration process'*. Community organisations which have begun to talk in the language which registers this fact have themselves been in the process of losing their roots in and connection with the communities they serve. And the more they talk in that language, one imagines, the more they hasten that process.

But there has been no indication of that with the Centre. The language there just isn't like the typical 'urban regeneration' talk. That is because an organization which is rooted in the needs and interests of its community doesn't easily get drawn in to the latest agendas and their alienating rhetoric. Instead it gets on with doing what it's there to do, while other initiatives and agendas come and go. And in turn an organization like that, as we have seen, can draw on deep-rooted resources which

allow it to survive and endure where others might find themselves just too vulnerable to the agendas of others.

Aims and Purpose, People and Premises

So far we have highlighted the Centre's capacity to maintain its independence, and the way in which it has been able to recruit, and then to produce for itself, workers with the sense of collective identity and purpose necessary for it to play its role in its community. We have also highlighted the way in which its 'ordinary' language has both reflected and sustained its roots in its community.

Taken together these attributes have all been important in allowing the organisation to maintain an absolutely crucial *clarity of aim and consistency of purpose* over many years. Over those years it has encountered many difficulties, not a few crises, and at least two 'near death experiences'. But it has negotiated them precisely because it did not wander confusedly from crisis to crisis. Evident in the minutes of the Management Committee over the years, and in the other documents the Centre has generated, is a continually evolving analysis of the changing circumstances of the organisation, and an attempt to grapple *intellectually* with emerging threats, challenges and opportunities, before confronting them practically. So, to take just a few examples, we saw in Chapter 4 how in the mid-1980s the Centre participated in broader discussion amongst UWCs across Scotland about their future orientation, and concluded that it was crucial to maintain and develop links with the broader trade union movement. How prescient was that? We saw in Chapter 8 how in 1991 the Centre, when it was coming back from its first 'near death experience', carefully assessed its situation, "battened down the hatches", planned its route 'back to life' and then implemented it. We saw in Chapter 9 how it was anticipating and preparing for the implications of local government reorganisation as early as late 1993 and early 1994. We saw also in later chapters the sustained collective thought and planning that went into surviving the period from 2003-2007.

And the ability to do all of this and more has substantially been based, not simply on the collective sense of identity and purpose at the Centre, but on the clarity and consistency about aims and purpose to which that is connected. The aims are not earth-shattering or overtly about changing the world. They are about maintaining and developing a viable user-led Centre which can express and, as far as is possible, work to address the needs and interests of the local community, and in particular those in poverty – whether unemployed or (as seems increasingly to be the case) in employment. How those aims are fulfilled has varied through the years – with information and advice, welfare rights, training and education, campaigning, childcare, and creative and social activities consistently being emphasized, though with changing emphases and approaches at different times. At times, as we have seen, it has been necessary to defend the aims and purpose of the Centre from some who have advocated greater 'militancy'. And at other times it has been necessary to defend them from attempts to co-opt the Centre to other agendas, or to put it out of business altogether. But largely speaking they have *been* successfully defended, and given the extent of the threats and challenges encountered along the way, that is a notable achievement.

One aspect of the developments in the locality in recent years serves to highlight something else that is very important. We saw in Chapters 15 and 17 how URBAN II funding, matched by other local partners, was directed into Area Regeneration Strategy Groups in Whitecrook – then the Centre's own locality – and Dalmuir from 2003. The Whitecrook Group was in the later part of that year

undertaking a socio-economic study of the area, and by the end of 2004 it was publicising plans for a new £2m "custom-built and fully functional community regeneration facility for Whitecrook". By December 2006 a "newsletter" produced by Strathclyde European Partnership to "demonstrate how European Structural Funds have made a difference in your community" was explaining how work had begun. The new building was heralded as evidence of "Partnership in Action". Work was due to finish in June 2007.

> Local residents can soon start learning and training, increasing their levels of participation in the local community, improving their own lifestyle and exploring opportunities to move into employment.

But unfortunately this is not what has transpired. As I write (February 2008) the building is *not* operational. There seem to have been some 'difficulties' in linking it appropriately to local community organisation in the Whitecrook area, and as a result it is Clydebank Housing Association which is in control of the building. It remains unclear how the building will function and who will occupy it. It looks very much like a building in search of an appropriate social organisation which might give it a spark of life. The fear is that this might not actually happen, and that, in an area which has its problems, a building (even a very expensive one) which somehow seems not quite to 'belong' might be in physical jeopardy.

This is a striking demonstration of the fact that the first priority in developing local provision in areas of need is for viable and functioning social groups which have been generated from within the local community. The next priority is for premises from which they can operate. Reversing these priorities can be very risky.

For the people at the Centre premises are important. They were very attached to their premises in Stanford Street, and it was hard for them to uproot the organisation recently and move to Dalmuir. But as they searched for those premises they were an established and viable group of people looking for a building – not the other way round. As a result, service provision to the local community was only very briefly interrupted.

These difficulties with the Whitecrook Centre, moreover, seem to echo the difficulties (see Chapter 19) that attended the creation of Building Brighter Futures – which also received very substantial funding through URBAN II, matched by other local partners. They seem to have been echoed again with the new organisation, Building Better Futures, which evolved out of it in 2006 – on the basis of very substantial funding from the CPP. Funded only to March 2008, Building Better Futures did not have its official launch until March 2007. Unfortunately its own future is currently very much in doubt.

One can't help but wonder what the Centre itself, as an already established organisation with a clear track record and with a solid basis in the local community, might have been able to achieve with just a fraction of the funding that was allocated to ventures like the Whitecrook Centre and Building Brighter/Better Futures.

Pulling it Together

At this stage it is possible to pull together the various aspects which have been highlighted so far, to summarize what they indicate overall, and to begin to make practical suggestions which might be of benefit to local communities, and of interest to those who want to work with them, in the years that lie ahead.

The basic lesson of the story of the Centre's campaign for the 'right to exist' in Clydebank seems very clear. It highlights the need for communities to develop

viable, *independent* local organisations – understood not a premises or buildings, but as functioning collectives of people – which are rooted in and belong to the best elements and traditions of the communities they serve. Such organisations need to be able on an ongoing basis to recruit and to produce for themselves *the people* who can carry forward the commitment and ethos which is required *genuinely* to serve a community. This means also that these people need to be able to defend the organisation's independence from others who would co-opt and divert it to other ends, and perhaps emasculate it altogether.

This does not mean defending independence in some absolute sense, it means, rather, having the awareness to know when a line is being crossed, and the courage and conviction not to cross it. In fact independence, as we have seen in the story of the Centre, does not, and can not, mean standing alone. Community organisations need to be connected, both to each other and to broader social institutions. The question is about the kinds of connections which actually facilitate and encourage meaningful independence. To whom should community organisations see themselves as connected if this is to be the case?

There are, as we have seen, different models. Some have looked to local government and to their community development workers. As was argued earlier, over time this model proved problematic. More recently, as part of the broader implementation strategy for *People and Place*, central government itself sought to present itself as 'the friend' of local communities – often in opposition to local authorities. It sought to develop its own 'network' of community organisations as part of a 'community engagement strategy' – under the name of the "Community Voices Network". A private company – Paul Zealy Associates – was even commissioned by Communities Scotland to support and develop it. As is often the case, there was rather more than met the eye to this initiative. Almost inevitably, it was rather less to do with maintaining the independence of local communities, and rather more to do with trying to have them on the side of central government in implementing the agenda laid out by *People and Place* – which was, as we have seen, not likely to have poor communities as its primary beneficiaries. In practice, however, despite some significant expenditure, the efforts to develop the CVN have come to very little in practice (of which something more shall be said below). Of course there is also the broader voluntary sector, and it will generally be important to maintain links there. But the problem here, again as we have seen, is that the broader voluntary sector has itself proven rather too vulnerable in terms of its independence.

With the Centre, as we have seen, the key institutional link – to some extent materially, but also symbolically, and perhaps above all *culturally* – in terms of maintaining the organisation's independence has been with the trade union movement. And the suggestion here is that community organisations more generally might usefully start to develop that kind of link, and start to see and think of themselves in that connection. This would by no means be a new departure in Scotland. Active trades councils concerning themselves, in the interests of ordinary people, with the broader social, economic and political life of their towns and cities, have been an important part of the history of the STUC. Indeed, over a hundred years ago it was the need to defend the role of the Trades Councils that was the initial reason for the disagreement with the TUC in London that led to the formation of a *Scottish* Trade Union Congress in the first place.[29] Clydebank is one of the places in

[29] See Keith Aitken,. *The Bairns O' Adam: The Story of the STUC*, Edinburgh, Polygon, 1997.

Scotland where that tradition has been kept alive, and used to some positive effect. But there is no reason why this cannot be rekindled in other places too.

There is some significant encouragement here in the interest which the STUC has been showing in the series of Clydeside community conferences in recent years. As we saw in the introduction to this book, the telling of the story of the CIRC is in a very real sense an outcome of this conference series. The fifth in the series of conferences took place in Renton in November 2007, and was addressed by Stephen Boyd of the STUC – the Assistant Secretary in its Policy and Campaigns Department. In his presentation he explained that the 2007 STUC Congress had passed a resolution on 'regeneration' and 'community planning' – raising concerns about local democracy, cut-backs in service provision, and large subsidies for property development "that have nothing to do with the needs of local people". It drew attention to the work of trades councils in places like Dundee and Clydebank in highlighting these issues, and called for a campaigning agenda in responding to them. Boyd suggested that going forward the STUC might do rather more to link to the activity of local community organisations, and vice versa.

In discussion around his presentation it was made clear that this was not some attempt by the STUC to 'muscle in on', or 'take the credit for', the activities or achievements of community organisations. Rather it needed to be recognised that community organisations have often had to struggle in very difficult circumstances in recent decades. In some places there have been achievements in spite of all of that. But the achievements remain limited. Things have not improved sufficiently for Scotland's poorest communities, and in many places they have not, on balance, improved at all. In significant part this is because communities have too often lacked the kind of broader network and support that might have helped them to sustain their own voice and achieve their aims. It was also a recognition that it is entirely in keeping with the role of the STUC to try to make some more significant contribution in this respect.

The evidence from Clydebank is that this contribution need not be a hugely onerous one for the STUC. The evidence also indicates that it would be unlikely to amount to the STUC trying to 'take over the show' or take the credit for the achievements of local communities. And what certainly seems to be clear is that if 'regeneration' is going to continue to be a way of trying to implement and progress a neo-liberal agenda based on property development, privatisation of public services, and the coercive pursuit of a yet-more 'flexible' labour market, then the STUC and local community organisations have a clear mutual interest in working together to challenge that, and to develop alternatives which are more likely actually to benefit poor communities. Had this been done previously, say in the later 1980s or early 1990s, then perhaps local communities might have been able to benefit from 'regeneration' rather more than has, unfortunately, been the case.

Further community conferences will take place in the next few months. There is one planned for Sighthill in Glasgow in March 2008, and another for Paisley in May 2008. In relation to the latter, it is encouraging to see that the Paisley and District Trades Council is playing a role in organising the event. It is to be hoped that these events might continue to bring the STUC, trades councils, and local community organisations closer together

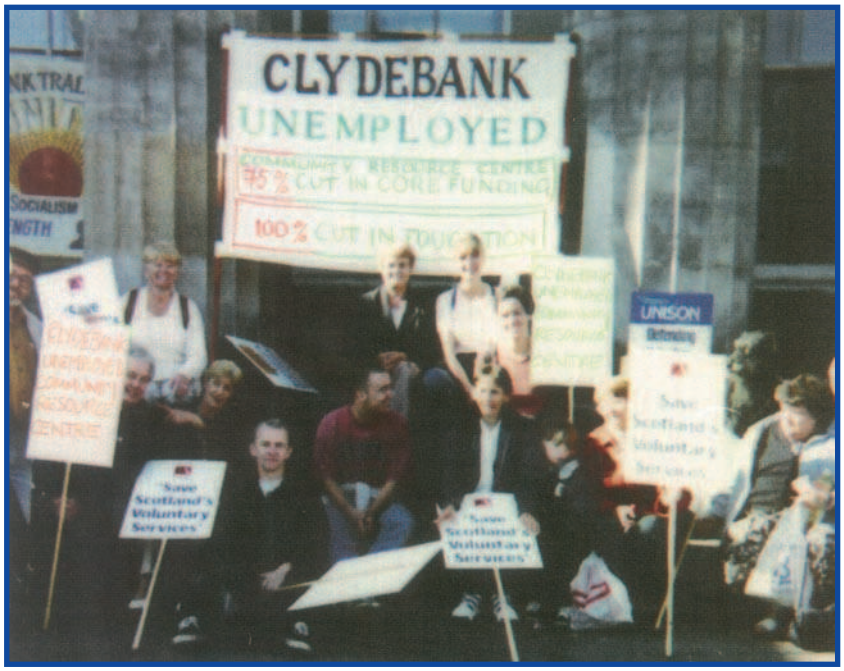
This kind of reorientation of community activity would also seem to make sense in light of recent developments at national level. Perhaps most significant has been the new Scottish Government's review of agencies – such as Scottish Enterprise and Communities Scotland – and the increasing devolution of responsibilities and

discretion to local authorities. This is quite a significant reorientation, and it would seem to call for a parallel reorientation of community activity – a reorientation which takes it back into local politics, and to active campaigning (at national level too) to try to ensure that the need and interests of the poorest communities are adequately represented.

Over the past 20 years the 'partnership' agenda has, quite explicitly, depoliticised community activity – and very much to its detriment. In doing so, it has often built on ground that was prepared by local authority community development strategies. 'Partnerships' have diverted organisations and activists into 'interfacing' with 'regeneration' agencies, too often leading to their co-option and emasculation. Indeed, one of the reasons the Community Voices Network had so little success since its official launch in March 2006 is because 'partnership' working, together with the intensifying problems of local communities, has done so much to *undermine* local organisations. In too many places there hasn't been much left for Paul Zealy Associates Ltd to work with! A turn away from 'partnership' has been badly needed for a long time, and one of the useful aspects of the current context is that the kind of changes which are underway in the institutional landscape themselves highlight this as something which is needed.

This should not be seen as a call for local community activity to be *party* political. Again the evidence from Clydebank – from the UAG of the 1970s, to the campaigns of the 1980s, to Clydebank Fights Back in the 1990s, and to the work of the Centre in more recent years – highlights this fact. Its activity has always been political, but without being *party* political. The need is to engage with politics and political processes, at both local and national levels, in order to give *meaningful* voice to the needs and interests of those poor communities who have too often been very poorly served by 'regeneration' and its 'partnerships'. And campaigns need to be open to all who are willing to work under that umbrella – people of all parties and of none.

What emerge from our consideration of the Centre's story are some basic, but also, one hopes, useful suggestions for community organisations, and those who want to work with and support them in thinking about the challenges that lie ahead. No great originality is claimed for them. Indeed it might well be argued that they embody some rather old 'wisdoms'. If so, then so much the better for that – it would have been very naïve to try to concoct some pristine 'blueprint' for overnight success. Developing and maintaining effective, independent community organisations which can serve communities over the long haul is not going to become that much easier very soon. But if we can learn from the experience of the Centre in Clydebank the success rate is likely to go up. What has been achieved there can be done in other places. It can also, very probably – albeit with suitable care – be scaled up.



A candle of hope for Kvaerner.
Kvaerner closed on 22nd March 2001.