COMMON SENSE, SCOTTISH THOUGHT AND CURRENT POLITICS

Richard Gunn

In an interview held in 2010, Bella Calledonia reminds John Holloway of his earlier involvement with the Edinburgh-based journal *Common Sense* (published between 1987 and 1999).[1] Bella Caledonia observes that there 'seems to be a continuity' between *Common Sense* and Holloway's later *Crack Capitalism*, and goes on to wonder whether this connection is real. Holloway's response is unequivocal: 'For me, the continuity is very real and very important'. Especially important was the link between the 'common-sense aspect of Scottish eighteenth-century philosophy' – the view of common sense which *Common Sense* favoured – and the conviction that 'being an anti-capitalist revolutionary is the most ordinary thing in the world, simply part of everyday life'. Reading these words on the Bella Caledonia website recently, I felt that I was transported through time.

The time was the late 1980s, when the early issues of *Common Sense* appeared. Together with Werner Bonefeld and John Holloway and some others, I was a member of the *Common Sense* collective; words quoted in the Bella Caledonia interview reminded me how vital and self-transformative – personally and politically and conceptually – the *Common Sense* project was. The atmosphere which surrounded the journal was electric. Distinctive perspectives fused and fertilized one another and developed in different but related directions. Distinctive vocabularies – those of critical theory, of autonomist Marxism and of Scottish philosophy – presented themselves in lights that could be surprising. Underlying *Common Sense* was a conviction that could be implicit or explicit: political and philosophical ideas exist in and through, and as part of, what Holloway terms 'everyday life'. A radical political idea or movement must have a first-person, grassroots existence. A truthful philosophy must address an audience amongst whom mutual recognition prevails. Whether theoretical or practical, ideas subsist in and through interaction. They subsist, that is, through shared or common sense. And they must understand themselves as subsisting in this fashion.

The just-summarised points give a reader an idea of what *Common Sense* stood for. But an all-important step remains to be made. Mention must be made of the journal's most striking conceptual reversal: in its pages, the term 'common sense' ceases to mean, merely, current prejudices and assumptions. It points out ahead towards free

1 'Crack Capitalism' (interview with John Holloway) in *Bella Caledonia* 22 July 2010.

interaction in an unreified world. Everyday life becomes shot through with not-yet-existence. Understood in terms of common sense, nothing counts as stable. Cracks – to employ Holloway's later term – open within it, and points forward to what may become. Such is the argument, I note in passing, of Holloway's *Crack Capitalism*. As the Bella Caledonia interview indicates, *Crack Capitalism* (published in 2010) connects directly with debates of the *Common Sense* period.

The first issue of *Common Sense* appeared in May 1987. Since then, a period of almost thirty years has elapsed. Do the ideas that were associated with the journal still have meaning? I propose that they do. In what follows, I suggest that *Common Sense* was right to link grassroots revolution with the 'common-sense aspect of Scottish eighteenth-century philosophy' (in Holloway's formulation). And I sketch issues which, from a *Common Sense*-inspired viewpoint, arise concerning the independence debate.

I

The title of *Common Sense* and articles in its pages relate Scottish thought to a radical, first-person viewpoint on political issues. Was *Common Sense* justified in so doing? I suggest that it was. The history of Scottish social and political thinking between 1560 and the 1770s – or between the Scottish Reformation and the high point of the Scottish Enlightenment – is complex and many-sided. But it bears out the proposal that face-to-face interaction is a theme to which Scottish thinking recurred.

It is true that, from a *Common Sense*-inspired viewpoint, much in Scottish thought is a disappointment. The Scottish Reformation was a revolt of the 'nobility and estates' of Scotland as much as the 'commonality' – I borrow John Knox's terminology. When the National Covenant of 1638 spoke in favour of 'Noblemen, Barons, Gentlemen, Burgesses, Ministers & Commons', it underscored existing social orders rather than conjuring a comminity that was interactive and free. When the line of Stuart monarchs was ended, in 1688-89, an upsurge of clerical authority and witchcraft persecution were amongst the results. In the eighteenth century, piety based on Natural Theology became hegemonic: Francis Hutcheson spoke for many when he referred to the 'benevolence' of the 'ORIGINAL MIND'. In the same fashion, Colin McLaurin rounded off his exposition of Newton by admiring 'an All-Governing Deity' and Thomas Reid grounded common sense in humanity's God-given 'constitution'. An easy-going belief that all was for the best in a divinely ordered nature underlay some (but not all) of the Scottish Enlightenment's positions. Worse still from a *Common Sense*-inspired view, there seemed to be no equivalent in Scotland of a Rousseau who pointed accusingly to Natural Law's and the Enlightenment's property-based social assumptions. When Adam Ferguson came to draw up a list of kinds of people who might serve in a civic militia, he ended on a telling note: the list 'excludes all Cottagers, Day-Labourers and Servants'. Thereby, he

draws a line around the social élite who might, in his view, be socially active. The Scottish Enlightenment, which has been celebrated as a hotbed of genius, can no less accurately be described as a hotbed of philosophical and political complacency.

This said, Scottish thought of the period between 1560 and the 1770s contains fissures and insights and patterns of thought which support *Common Sense's* claims. I sketch three such patterns.

(i) The first is the pattern of ideas linked to philosophical scepticism. This pattern is, at first, difficult to see – for two reasons: it is conceptual (or "philosophical") and, further, it enters Scottish thought in an indirect way. Let me explain.

By *scepticism* I mean the view that truth claims and value claims lack a conceptual basis. In the sixteenth century, a characteristic move made by scepticism-influenced thinkers was to despair of human reason and turn, instead, to faith. One such thinker was Jean Calvin – and the Scottish Reformation was Calvinist in character. When, in 1560, Scotland imported Calvinism it took on board more than faith and dogma and assurance. It committed itself to a sometimes-agonizing process of questioning and self-doubt. When, in the eighteenth century, David Hume renewed sceptical perspectives he gave deeply ingrained anxiety a voice. For this reason, he was both admired and denounced by his contemporaries. Hume was familiar with the 'despair' (his word) which a consistently applied scepticism might bring, and sought to avoid it. Not all of his attempts were successful, however. A notably weak attempt was his invocation, in his *Essays*, of market mechanisms: just as a Calvinist placed his/her trust in God, so Hume trusted the market to arrange human affairs aright. This was not, it is true, Hume's only solution to problems of scepticism. And at no point did Hume consider that a realm of pre-sceptical innocence might be restored. A philosopher must live in a demystified and disenchanted world. How was this possible? In the event, it was Adam Smith (Hume's close personal friend) who took up scepticism's challenge. For Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, human interaction was deep enough and resourceful enough to address foundational issues. At this point, a proviso implicit in Smith's argument must be noted: interaction may address foundational issues *as long as the to-and-fro dynamic of conversation is unimpeded*. Smith's *Wealth of Nations* – a work frequently, and wrongly, read as a hymn of praise to market relations – depicts a society where conversation is corrupt.

How does all this relate to *Common Sense's* project? The image of interaction presented in Smith has a lengthy future. It is echoed in G.W.F. Hegel's notion of mutual recognition and, from there, in Marx. When *Common Sense* looks towards a realm of free, first-person interaction, it carries forward an idea which the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* launched. And there is more. If sceptical challenge may be met through unconstrained interaction, scepticism itself may be rehabilitated as a step towards emancipation. In the pages of *Common Sense*, seemingly unrelated subject-matters are juxtaposed – in the expectation that they illumine (rather than undermine) one another. Juxtaposition is seen as a step in rewarding conversation. More than this:

it is a step towards free interaction in which emancipation consists.

(ii) The second pattern has, initially, a discouraging appearance. At the time of the Reformation and during the seventeenth century, Scottish Calvinists expressed political points in terms of social contract theory (according to which *promising* is the basis of social existence). At the time of the Scottish Enlightenment, political theory based on promising was widely (although not universally) rejected. Social contract theory came to seem a thing of the past.

My suggestion is that Scottish social contract theory has, nonetheless, points of interest. This is so because social contract theory has taken various forms. The core idea of social contract is that of a contract concluded in a presocial or asocial state of nature: from this contract, social and political relations arise. But this idea may be nuanced in a number of fashions. The contract may be pictured as a horizontal *pact of association*, where individuals contract with one another; alternatively, it may be pictured as a vertical *contract of government* between a prospective ruler and a people who is to be ruled. In addition, the contract may be pictured as actually taking place or as merely "hypothetical". A final difference is one of conceptual focus: a social contract theory may emphasise the the idea of a state of nature (understood as a realm where Natural Law prevails). Or the theorist may emphasise the act of promising or covenanting or contracting. When these differences are considered, intriguing features of Scottish contactarianism are revealed. First, a shift occurs during the period which concerns us: whereas writers of the Reformation crisis – I am thinking of Knox and Buchanan – refer to vertical contracts, the 1638 National Covenant gives horizontal promising a central place. All citizens of Scotland are seen as promising together (although, as I have commented, distinctions between them remain). Second, Scottish social contract theory of the sixteenth and seventeeth centuries thinks of contracting in actual (rather than "hypothetical") terms. Thirdly and finally, the emphasis of Scottish social contract theory falls on the act of promising. Throughout sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Scottish theory, there is scarcely a mention of a supposed state of nature. In the case of, say, Hobbes and Locke the emphasis is very different. The reason for this difference is, I suggest, the difference between English and Scottish estimations of natural law: whereas Hobbes and Locke belong in the Natural Law tradition, the Scots (influenced by a Calvinist scepticism) regard nature and human reason as saturated by sin. Be this as it may, the three features of Scottish contractualism that I have highlighted fuse in unforgettable image.

The image is of individuals who, together, make a mutual promise. The promising is not merely "hypothetical" or theoretical; it is an actual speech act. The promise is not merely an application of pre-existing Natural Law; it is constitutive and (to use a term from speech act theory) *performative* in the full meaning of the term. At the centre of Scottish contractarianism there lies an image of practical action. Insofar as promise-makers assemble together, and promise together, the action concerned is interaction. Because the promise is constitutive, rather than an application of existing law, the

white heat of the the interaction forges a political beginning. My claim is that, despite its dusty and dated reputation, Scottish social contract theory points towards interaction and freedom. As such, it points towards *Common Sense's* project.

(iii) The third pattern is that of the common sense tradition. Above, I have referred to Thomas Reid (Scotland's chief common sense philosopher). Reid grounded common sense in humanity's 'constitution' – a 'constitution' which was, in his view, God-given. Reid appears to have endorsed the following position: because God created humanity, and because God was benificent, common sense might be trusted. My suggestion is that common sense has no need of this theological underpinning. Reid himself does not always employ it, and the term 'common sense' has more than one meaning. In what follows, I indicate what some of these meanings may be.

In philosophy, the term 'common sense' (or *sensus communis*) has a lengthy history. In the light of this history, common sense may be pictured as an area – an area across which lines of division may be drawn. The lines sometimes reinforce and sometimes intersect with one another. I note three lines of division here:

- First, 'common sense' may refer to a sense or meaning shared by a number of individuals: it may, in other words, mean 'Publick Sense' (in Francis Hutcheson's translation of the term). Or 'common sense' may refer to a specific human capacity: our capacity to synthesise data which the five more familiar senses (sight and touch and so forth) supply. Might these two senses be related? I suggest that they can. It is through interaction with others that self-coherent individuality emerges; conversely, totalised or coherent individuals interact in a mutually recognitive way. Writers influence by Scottish thought – I have mentioned G.W.F. Hegel – draw the meanings of common sense together in this fashion. The journal *Common Sense*, which sought to prefigure mutual recognition, shared such an aim.

- Second, 'common sense' may be pictured *either* as something – a sense, a capacity, a set principles or judgements – that is present in every numerically separate individual *or* as something that is actively shared. The twentieth - century philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer draws this distinction when he contrasts common sense as 'a feature given to all men' with common sense as 'a social virtue'. In the eighteenth century, Reid frequently understands common sense in the first of these meanings. With its emphasis on interaction, the journal *Common Sense* favours the second.

- Third, common sense may be understood as an assumed context in which interaction takes place. Or it may be understood as something which interaction brings into being. It can be understood as a *background* or as a *project*. The distinction is important: if common sense is understood as a background, sceptical and relativistic objections go unanswered. Moreover, the notion of common sense remains politically conservative. If common sense is

> understood as a project, then everything changes – as can be seen, if we turn to Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. For Smith, conversational interaction does not merely presume this or that set of criteria. On the contrary, it is through such interaction that foundational questions may be addressed. The to-and-fro play of sympathetic imagination is, for Smith, the basis on which a set of publicly shared meanings may be erected. Unlike Reid, Smith does not present himself as a common sense philosopher. But the notion of common sense as a project is central to his concerns.[2] How does the background/project distinction, as just sketched, relate to *Common Sense* as a journal? I suggest that it underlines a double meaning contained in thejournal's title. *Common Sense* criticised common sense as a background, the better to highlight common sense as a project to light.

The above remarks do not exhaust the meaning of the term 'common sense'. Nor do they exhaust the common sense tradition. One important issue not discussed is common sense's relation to generalist education (see George Davie *The Democratic Intellect* especially chapters 1 and 11). My earlier remarks about *Common Sense's* juxtaposition of seemingly-unrelated subject matters refer, indirectly at least, to the notion of generalism. But I do not discuss the notion here.

Standing back, I conclude that *Common Sense's* claim to grow out of Scottish thought is well-founded. Of course, *Common Sense* did not *only* grow out of Scottish thought. *Common Sense* was *much more than* an outgrowth of Scottish ideas. Within *Common Sense*, a wide range of national and international themes were addressed. My concern here is the limited one of relating *Common Sense* to Scottish theory. Do the claims about Scottish thought, which gave *Common Sense* its title, stand up as well in 2014 as they did in 1987? My claim is that they do. There are features of Scottish thought – major features, conceptually important features – which are carried forward in *Common Sense's* programme. Viewed in retrospect, the features proliferate and grow in significance: my comments indicate how much, in a history of Scottish ideas, there is to explore. Above all, my comments link Scottish thought to the notion of free, first-person interaction. I have suggested that, in Scottish social contract of the seventeenth century, such a notion is fundamental. And I have indicated aspects of common sense – aspects associated with Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* – which highlight this idea. It is, I propose, the idea to which *Common Sense* was committed.

In section 1, I have commented on interaction in a history-of-ideas context. I have proposed that, in 2014, *Common Sense's* perspective on Scottish thought may be defended. What about its political perspective? In 2014, in a Scotland galvanised by the independence issue, does a politics grounded in free, first-person interaction have a place? In the section which follows, I raise some questions and offer some thoughts.

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2 A reader of my text, or of *Common Sense*, may be surprised to encounter favourable remarks on Adam Smith. Was Smith not a champion of a free market? Of unrestrained capitalism? Although widespread, such views of Smith strike me as absurd. For a reading closer to my own, see Neil Davidson, Patricia McCafferty and David Miller, ed., *Neoliberal Scotland* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing 2010) pp. 3-6.

II

What were *Common Sense's* politics? The journal was politically committed: for example, issue 8 (published in September 1989) carried a cut-out-and-display anti-Poll Tax poster. A horizontally related anti-Poll Tax conference was organised. (Someone attending the conference raised an objection: should there not be a crèche? We proudly replied that a crèche existed.) This said, individuals wrote and published as individuals; in the pages of *Common Sense*, a party-political voice would have been out of place. *Common Sense's* commitment to free interaction and a politics of 'everyday life' (Holloway) meant that principles resembling those of the later Occupy movement prevailed.

In one sense, the editorial attitudes of *Common Sense* were uncompromising: free interaction meant free interaction. That is to say, the interaction which the journal sought to bring into existence, and which its in-house style prefigured, was one of a grassroots (rather than institutional) kind. Just as the editorial practices of *Common Sense* made the institutional status of a contributor irrelevant, so the politics of *Common Sense* drew on autonomist traditions. Social change had to mean more than a change in institutions. If change were merely a matter of replacing one set of institutions with another, deep-level continuity would result.

Are the political perspectives of *Common Sense* relevant in a 2014 context? I suggest that they are. In order to argue this, I set out what (I believe) would be a commonsensical response to the independence issue. In Scotland today, political debate focuses on the September 18th referendum and large parts of the left see returning a “Yes” vote essential. How, from a *Common Sense*-guided viewpoint, should this focus be regarded? Does national independence offer an 'opening' – I employ James Foley's and Pete Ramand's term[3] – to radical ideas? If the discussion which follows raises troubling questions, *Common Sense* has continuing significance.

Viewed in what I have termed a commonsensical perspective, a worthwhile political campaign promotes free interaction. If this is so, the origins of current debate on independence give grounds for disquiet. At the start of the campaign lies an agreement between two political leaders, both of whom form part of the neoliberal establishment. It is, of course, possible for such an agreement to trigger a radical movement. An agreement between established leaders is, however, likely to have pro-establishment results. Viewed from the grassroots, the institutional and “top-down” beginning of the debate is inauspicious. A first instinct is not to endorse either a “Yes” or “No” position wholeheartedly – but to question, and stand back from, a state-inspired alternative.

3 J. Foley and P. Ramand *Yes: The Radical Case for Scottish Independence* (Pluto Press 2014) p. 122.

A second instinct is to be suspicious about *nationhood*. The supicions that I have in mind do not concern (or do not *merely* concern) nationalism's blood-and-soil manifestations. They concern the circumstance that nation states are institutions. As institutions, nation states belong – and are *required* to belong – in an international world order. This order is neoliberalism. If this is so, September 18th offers a choice between two forms of nationalism – "Scottish" on the one hand and "British" on the other[4] – and, thus, a choice between two pro-neoliberal positions. Despite these remarks, can a nation state (for example, an independent Scotland) set itself against neoliberal norms? Are my remarks too pessimistic? Perhaps. But the notion of *nationhood* is scarcely encouraging.

From instincts I turn to issues. In an interview earlier this year, Tariq Ali stated: 'If Scotland gains independence, and if its leadership has the guts, it could break with neoliberalism'.[5] I comment on 'guts' later. Here, I focus on 'neoliberalism' and on what a 'break' with neoliberalism entails. Sometimes, 'neoliberalism' is understood as free-market capitalism – so that a change from free market solutions to a form of Keynesianism would bring neoliberalism to its knees. At other times, 'neoliberalism' is seen as taking free market and Keynesian (or semi-Keynesian) forms. My inclination is to take the second position. I understand neoliberalism as, so to say, capitalism distilled to its essence: neoliberalism turns on market principles, but such principles may be (and usually are) enforced by states. If 'neoliberalism' is understood in this fashion, a 'break' with liberalism breaks with capitalist principles. In the current debate on Scottish independence – in, for example, the invocation of the 'Nordic' model in the Jimmy Reid Foundation's 'Common Weal' document – the notion of what may be termed left-Keynesianism is widely invoked. I shall take it that, although Tariq Ali refers warmly to 'Scandinavian' countries, his remark about a 'break' has more than a left-Keynesian meaning. In the quoted interview, Scottish independence is described as an 'opportunity' to 'break out of the prison that is the United Kingdom': in the last instance, the 'prison' is the capitalist world.

Does Scottish independence provide an 'opportunity' to move (or to start moving) beyond capitalism? It is difficult to reply that, yes, an opportunity presents itself. This is partly because *any* state moving in an anti-neoliberal direction faces all-too-familiar opposition. What happens if an independent Scotland takes its oil industry into public ownership? What happens if an independent Scotland takes a principled stance against the politics of austerity – and refuses to shoulder what Yes Scotland terms 'a fair share of the UK national debt'? What happens if an independent Scotland decides to leave an alliance armed by nuclear weapons? In such situations, a state learns what membership in a neoliberal word order entails. A foretaste – the *merest* foretaste – of the pressure to be expected was the Ineos lockout at Grangemouth in

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4 I agree with Foley and Ramand that a choice between "Yes" and "No" is not a choice between nationalism and its opposite. Both "Yes" and "No" positions are nationalistic. My worry is that nationalism in 2014 has neoliberal connotations.

5 'Dismantling the British State' (interview with Tariq Ali) *Bella Caledonia* 10 March 2014.

2013.

Besides difficulties faced by *any* state which moves against neoliberalism, diffulties specific to Scotland arise. Present-day Scotland is heavily dependent on foreign investment: 'almost none of the the North Sea oil from Scottish waters is owned by Scottish companies, while more than 80% of whisky and salmon production is foreign-owned, and only a third of the Scottish-based finance sector is Scottish-owned'.[6] According to the official Yes campaign, 'Scotland is an extremely attractive place to do business' – and Swinney's determination is that nothing will change.[7] Suppose that the government of an independent Scotland decided that, *pace* Swinney, change was desirable. Suppose it discovered 'guts' to take a step out of the neoliberal 'prison'. How much room for maneouvre would it have?

Standing back from my comments, I add a note of explanation. What I have said about 'opportunity' is not to be taken as a declaration against anti-neoliberal struggle. It is to be taken as an indication of difficulties to which *institutional* struggle is exposed. An anti-neoliberal struggle which focuses on national independence is struggle which focuses on a specific institution. In 2014, a nation state belongs in a world order that is increasingly well policed. This being so, a struggle *for* national independence and *against* neoliberalism is a struggle against itself. In a sense, this contradiction has been present in all forms of social democracy. In a neoliberal world, however, the contradiction is acute.

Are there forms of anti-neoliberal struggle which do not pursue an institutional path? Are there ways of changing the world without taking institutional or state power (to paraphrase the title of an earlier John Holloway book)?[8] In Latin America, Raul Zibechi has discussed the idea of power's 'dispersal';[9] in the UK, writers associated with the Heathwood Institute and Press (www.heathwoodpress.com) explore the Occupy movement's notion of of horizontal organisation. Can such lines of thought be developed further? I suggest they can. Here, however, I confine myself to a general comment: discussion of emancipation cannot be left to institutionalist ideas.

My discussion of the independence campaign has, so far, focused on institutional pressure. I turn now to interaction. Tariq Ali has claimed that, if Scotland's leadership had guts, it could break with neoliberalism. Does the question turn on the 'guts' which a 'leadership' may or may not have? I doubt that this is the case.

Viewed from a *Common Sense* angle, social movements begin in interaction and, if they are emancipatory, have free interaction as their goal. How, in this light, is the independence movement to be seen? Above, I have suggested that the top-down

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6 I quote from S. Carrell 'Scotland independence case “strenthened by foreign wealth”' *The Guardian* 30 May 2014. For more detail, see S. Carrell, I. Griffiths and T. Macallister 'New doubt cast over Alex Salmond's claims of Scottish wealth' *The Guardian* 29 May 2014.

7 Thus Swinney: 'We will have the economic levers to make Scotland an even more attractive place to invest in' *BBC News: Scottish business* (5 June 2013).

8 J. Holloway *Change the World without Taking Power* (Pluto Press 2002).

9 R. Zibechi *Dispersing Power: Social Movements as Anti-State Forces* (AK Press 2010).

beginnings of the current debate give grounds for disquiet: what about the debate itself? Can a social movement begin with an institutionalist perspective and put down interactionalist roots? For Robert McAlpine, the radical independence campaign (unlike the “No” campaign) has 'given birth to a spontaneous grassroots movement': it taps into a sense that we no longer 'accept being told what is good for us by “important people”'.[10] If McAlipne is right, 'leadership' is not the most important political issue – and I agree. But is the notion of a 'spontaneous grassroots movement' for national independence coherent? Such a movement may, to be sure, be widespread and popular. If it is to remain a *national independence movement*, however, must it not fix its eyes on the institution of the nation state? I have suggested that such a focus is not without its problems. Here, my concern is with a movement which makes national independence a key theme.

A danger with national independence as an issue is that it threatens to engulf all else. All *other* issues which have emancipatory meaning – peace, equality, social justice, participatory democracy – tend to be seen through the independence issue as a lens. If national independence is viewed as an 'opportunity' (Tariq Ali) which makes other goals achievable, the élan and excitement and moral seriousness of issues such as peace and justice come to be transferred to the independence issue. If national independence is viewed as a straight gate through which radical struggle must pass, as it is when the costs of non-independence are stressed, the same shift of focus takes place. So to say, the issue around which single-issue campaigns make common cause becomes an end in itself. Is such a shift inevitable? It seems likely, to say the least. A campaign for national independence may see itself as a political catalyst. That is, it may see itself as breathing life into quiescent or inadequately-supported issues. If it does, the meaning of the hitherto “quiescent” issue is altered: the issue becomes a *national* issue, rather than one to be pursued in its own terms. Perhaps a campaign for independence may avoid seeing itself in this quasi-magical fashion. If such temptations are avoided, however, the danger remains.

Does it greatly matter if the left succumbs to this danger? My response is that it matters profoundly. To the extent that campaigns come to focus on national independence, they allow themselves to become incorprated in an institutionalist world. Earlier, I suggested that a choice between “Yes” and “No” on September 18th is a choice between two neoliberal positions. To make the choice between “Yes” and “No” *the* pivotal issue in present-day Scottish politics is to step away from interaction and on to territory where neoliberal criteria apply. If such a step were merely a *loss* on the left's part, it would already be disasterous. It is more: it is to invite every single-issue campaign, however everyday, to see itself in relation to institutions and to adopt a state-centred gaze. If this is so, the independence referendum has already performed chilling and debilitating work. It has domesticated a left that dreamt of less institutional and more interactive things.[11]

10 R. MacAlpine 'Taking politicians out of politics' *The Scotsman* 26 April 2014.

11 The tension between autonomy and domestication is not, of course, unique to Scotland: see B. Dangl *Dancing with Dynamite: Social Movements and States in Latin America* (AK Press 2010).

Where next? The logic of the position that I have described as commonsensical may seem to dictate abstention on September 18th. If “Yes” and “No” are both pro-neoliberal options, why vote? The position is not so easily met, however: an abstention, like a “No” vote, supports UK nationalism and thereby neoliberalism. On September 18th, there is in fact *no* way of keeping ones hands clean. My response – which I offer *as* a response, rather than a recommendation – is to avoid supporting the most objectionable side. Given the depth of my antipathy towards the Cameron government, this means voting “Yes”. A further part of my response (which I regard as the most important) is to argue for social movements' autonomy in post-referendum days and years.

My paper has asked whether the ideas underlying *Common Sense* carry conviction today. My answer to this question is that they do. In both of the areas that have considered – those of Scottish thought and present-day politics – commonsensical ideas strike me as fresh and telling. Scottish thought really does contain lines of thought which, in the 1980s, *Common Sense* could develop. More, a *Common Sense* perspective invigorates the study of Scottish thought. Regarding politics: an emphasis on common sense helps counter a drift into institutional thinking.

In what I have said about Scottish thought and Scottish politics, the notion of interaction – first-person or, in Holloway's term, 'everyday' interaction – is my most controversial theme. Controversial or not, it is the theme on which my discussion turns. In Scottish thought, interaction is not merely one theme amongst others: the versions of social contract and common sense philosophy that I have highlighted picture interaction as having a constitutive – so to say, a socially formative – role. In political debate, similarly, interactive life and institutional life do not merely affect one another: institutions are interaction which has frozen into fixed and “reified” existence. The notion of what may be referred to as *living* common sense underlies *Common Sense's* blend of radical politics and earlier theory.

In his interview of 2010, John Holloway describes the continuity between the ideas of *Common Sense* and the ideas of *Crack Capitalism* as 'very real and very important'. My suggestion is (echoing Holloway) that *Common Sense* opened still-vital paths.

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Note: All twenty four issues of *Common Sense* (1987-1999) are available online at http://commonsensejournal.org.uk/.