

## **REVIEW: ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IN SCOTLAND**

*Daniel Mittler*

Kevin Dunion, **Troublemakers: The Struggle for Environmental Justice in Scotland**, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003, 246 pp, pb, £15.99, ISBN 0748617817.

It is rare enough that non governmental organisations (NGOs) manage to insert a new word into the policy discourse. It is even rarer that they convince the powers that be to implement these novel ideas. And it is hardly heard of that both these things happen without the concepts in question being – like sustainable development - so exceedingly vague that they can be adopted as mere rhetoric. Friends of the Earth Scotland has achieved all these things – with the radical concept of 'environmental justice'. Kevin Dunion, as Chief Executive, played a crucial role in this campaigning success. He imported environmental justice from the United States. He adapted the concept to the Scottish context (focusing more on class divisions than the race divisions most prominent in the US debate). He convinced the First Minister, Jack McConnell, to adopt environmental justice as an official policy. He gained funding for a major project to train 'troublemakers' as agents for social change. Queen Margaret University College in Edinburgh is teaching the first ever university diploma course on environmental justice. There, community activists are, for example, trained to use the law to gain their rights in the planning process.

But, as if all of that was not enough, Dunion has now also written a most readable book on why this needed to be done – and on what remains to be done. **Troublemakers** is a number of things at the same time. It is a history

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of Scottish environmentalism and a history of ideas on sustainable development. It is a polemic which does not mince its words when it comes to taking sides between the haves and the have-nots. Even mainstream environmentalists are not safe from attack, as Dunion harshly criticises the policy of many mainstream NGOs, such as WWF International, of accepting money from perpetrators of ecological destruction such as the French multinational Lafarge, which was behind the plans for a Superquarry on the Isle of Harris<sup>1</sup>. **Troublemakers** gives an intelligent input into the policy debate around regulation. If you want an impassioned critique of voluntary agreements as the holy grail to making business more socially and environmentally responsible; if you want to be reminded of the importance of laws and regulations – even if they are currently dreadfully underenforced; indeed, if you want to learn about how law enforcement could be strengthened, especially through better access to information by a wider public – **Troublemakers** is not a bad place to start. The chapter on the Scottish Freedom of Information Act is especially interesting to read now, as Kevin Dunion – with much public controversy, as befits a life-long troublemaker – has left Friends of the Earth Scotland to become the Scottish Parliament's first Information Commissioner.

**Troublemakers** is also a contribution to the literature on globalisation, documenting effects on Scotland both empirically and in terms of the Scottish environmental debate. Dunion's classification of the environmental globalisation debate is a useful guide both for an interested general reader and for activists trying to find their own intellectual place in the global justice movement. Dunion writes from a distinctly Scottish perspective. And yet **Troublemakers**, like Dunion's previous writings (e.g. **Living in the Real World**, Edinburgh: SEAD, 1995) is decisively informed by his extensive international travels and experience as a global activist. Dunion, when telling Scottish stories, draws interesting parallels with many corners of the world. And he describes not just how he arranged the visit of leading black American environmental justice academic, Bob Bullard, to Scotland; but also how he arranged a visit by the First Minister to a community suffering environmental injustices just south of Johannesburg in South Africa.

Above all else, however, **Troublemakers** is a story of environmental injustices in Scotland and the struggles against them. **Troublemakers** takes

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<sup>1</sup> *Lafarge has since abandoned these plans.*

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us on 'the Dirty Scotland trail' (p.1). As such, the book should be required reading for any tourist – as well as for any middle class 'environmentalist' who still thinks that questions of poverty reduction and environmental welfare are not related. Dunion is at his best when he recounts the impressive struggles of local activists and their communities, many of whom he and Friends of the Earth Scotland have personally helped. Some of the stories told in this book are by now well known. Rosie Kane, for example, is here featured for her long-standing struggle against the M74 motorway extension threatening to destroy her Glaswegian community. Since May 2003, of course, she has been a Scottish Socialist Party list MSP for Glasgow. At Holyrood she has gained a prominent platform to continue her fight against the M74 – one of the clearest examples of environmental injustice in the current Scottish Executive's policy programme. The M74 extension exemplifies what environmental injustice means: it will benefit the few, but will impose noise and pollution on the poor. It will blight the life of poor people in Glasgow *and* contribute to global climate change, which in turn will undermine the livelihoods of poor communities in countries like Bangladesh.

Kevin Dunion tells of unsung heroes who have stopped illegal dumping of waste by Edinburgh City Council; who have exposed toxic neighbourhood pollution in Glasgow; who have stood up against toxic waste dumping in Greengairs; or who have stopped attempts to munch up the mountains of Harris to build more roads. To a long-term campaigner such as the author of this review, it is impressive how many of the campaigns described have been successful. But even if success has not yet been secured, the book illustrates marvellously that social change only ever happens when some people stand up to be counted. As the **Sunday Herald** commented in their review: 'Those who make trouble make progress'. That, in one sentence, is indeed the message of this book.

Kevin Dunion is aware of the dilemma of him speaking on behalf of communities that he is not a member of. But anyone who reads **Troublemakers** will, I believe, agree with me that Dunion tells these stories respectfully – and exceedingly well. Any criticisms? Well, yes. Sometimes the book overdoes the quotations from intelligent people who have influenced Dunion's own thinking. And, at times, the book does not entirely hold together as a book – precisely because of its ambition. **Troublemakers** is too many books at once: a history, a history of ideas, a polemic; a book on local histories *and* globalisation, a book on ethics, a book on planning and the

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policy process, a book on freedom of information, a book on law... But this overambitious diversity ensures that there will be something in this book for almost everyone – even those who violently disagree with Dunion. **Troublemakers** tells the story of how campaigning for environmental justice came to Scotland. It is an encouragement to those who still suffer environmental injustices. And it is a roadmap the Scottish Executive simply cannot ignore if it is serious about its verbal commitment to implementing environmental justice in Scotland.

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