

FORUM

A Scottish Assembly?

Renewed interest in the issue of a Scottish Assembly should be placed within the perspective of the desirability or otherwise of a federal framework for the UK.

Support for such a constitutional system has good antecedents. Writing in 1891, Engels, reflecting on federal structures in different countries, and their desirability or otherwise, opined that, "It would have been a great step forward in Britain where four nations inhabit the two islands and three legislative systems exist side by side despite the joint parliament".

Lenin in 'State and Revolution' spoke approvingly of Engels' view when he wrote, "Even in regard to Britain, where geographical conditions, a common language and the history of many centuries would seem to have 'put an end' to the national question in the various small divisions of that country — even in regard to that country, Engels reckoned with the plain fact that the national question was not just a thing of the past, and recognised in consequence that the establishment of a federal republic would be a 'step forward'".

Lenin went on, however, to note, "Of course, there is not the slightest hint here of Engels abandoning the criticisms of the shortcomings of a federal republic or announcing the most determined advocacy of, and struggle for, a unified and centralised democratic republic."

In counterbalancing the two propositions, Lenin was giving voice to the perennial concern of Marxists as to how to reconcile the defence of the interests of minorities, national or otherwise, with the desirability of ensuring the maximum unity of the working class and securing the conditions for working class seizure of state power and transformation of the economy in a socialist direction over the widest possible area.

He recognised, however, that a genuine integration of the interests of a minority with a majority people could only be on the basis of mutual trust and respect. Any forced or unwelcome assimilation, such as evinced by Russian chauvinism, could only foster future dissension and bitterness which would undermine progress in a socialist direction.

Accepting that the world has changed dramatically since the day of Engels and Lenin, their views on the feasibility of a federal solution to the UK constitutional

SCOTTISH ASSEMBLY NOW

Glasgow, September 1987. Photo: John Harris, IFL

framework requires serious consideration. Nor can Socialist Organiser and Workers Liberty feel ill-equipped to openly debate this issue as our tendency has a proud record in terms of discussing issues of state power and its distribution and the defence of the interests of minorities. Our advocacy of a federal solution for Ireland, our concern that the people of the Falkland Islands should not be the victim of the ambitions of the Argentinian junta and our discussions as to how best to secure the interests of both Palestinian and Jewish peoples in the Middle East, all testify to our serious engagement with these issues.

There are many socialists who, whilst not opposed to advocacy of a federal solution for the UK, regard the demand for a Scottish Assembly as diversionary in that, rather than beginning from the interests of all workers in the UK, it advances the interests of one particular section and is therefore potentially divisive.

Whilst these concerns are understandable, they tend to be rather abstract in that they do not take into account the reality that there is a deeply felt demand within one part of the UK, Scotland, for a greater degree of self-government. No one now disputes that that demand exists; the question is whether we advise Scottish workers to restrain their claims on that score until we have constructed a viable federal framework for the UK as a whole or whether we proceed from the actual unfolding of events rather than the imposition of cut and dried schema.

Our views on this question will be to some extent conditioned by the degree to which we accept that there is a genuine Scottish identity.

Note that we did not say a 'genuine Scottish nation'. That remains a larger issue which we can only touch upon here.

Certainly we do not feel as confident to adjudicate as those,

presumably more deeply read in the subject than the present author, who can confidently state that no such entity exists.

The subject is a complex one and readers who are interested and have not done so, may care to read some of the essays in Tom Nairn's 'The Break up of Britain'. Whatever the limitations of Nairn's politics, his analysis of Scotland as being one of Engels' 'stateless nations' is worthy of study.

Essentially, his proposition is that, following the Union of Parliaments in 1707, a Scottish identity, as articulated by a galaxy of intellectuals, such as Burns, Smith, Hume and Fergusson, flourished in the 18th century but was eclipsed in the following century as the Scottish bourgeoisie immersed itself in the scramble for material rewards that characterised the Industrial Revolution and its aftermath.

The benefits of a share in the British Empire and joint industrialisation were more substantial than the pursuit of a national cultural tradition and identity. Thus, in the 19th century, the age of efflorescence of nationalism throughout Europe, when countries as diverse as Greece and Belgium, in response to the uneven development of capitalism as a system, consciously created a national identity out of literature, historical and mythological sources, Scotland submerged its identity in the pursuit of a share in the proceeds of imperialism and industrialisation.

A Scottish identity only begins to revive in the 20th century, especially from the 1960s onwards. Previous efforts to recreate that national identity by writers such as McDiarmid were of limited success.

It required changes in material circumstances, the discovery of North Sea Oil and the reaction to increased centralisation of power and wealth in the South East of

England, to foster modern 'neo-nationalism', a phenomenon not peculiar to the UK.

At present that assertion of identity is bound up with a massive Scottish working class (and substantial middle class) rejection of Tory Government policies in terms of their decimation of social services and de-industrialisation. That finds expression in a reinforcement of loyalty to a form of Labourism which is essentially defensive.

Increasing evidence of a failure to be able to defend conditions, jobs and services, which seems likely, may well lead to a move towards support for the nationalists in the form of the SNP.

It could be argued that the ingredients of a distinct national identity exist — geographical demarcation, the continuance of separate legal, educational and local government systems, the existence of the STUC and a separate teachers' union in the EIS, are some of the elements. All of which are overlaid by a subculture of resistance to Anglicisation and the flourishing over recent decades of a school of creative writers who are distinctly Scottish — Jenkins, Gray, Mellvany et al.

Whether these elements fuse into a resurgent Scottish nationalism with an articulated ideology and a mass popular base depends upon the response of the labour movement to the present juncture.

Here we reach the second ground for regarding support for an Assembly as diversionary — the view, expressed by one of the precursors of the present *Workers' Liberty, Workers' Action*, that its effect would be "much more to put wind in the sails of the nationalists than to enhance a general democratic idea." It is a finely balanced point and I have no doubt that in coming to that decision there were prolonged discussions as to whether support for an Assembly could encourage or discourage the nationalists.



No one can be absolutely sure of the answer to that. The vagaries of SNP fortunes at the polls over the years can only give some indications. My own opinion is that the long-term effect of refusal to support the Assembly demand will be to encourage the growth of nationalism although I can understand the views of those who are inclined to the contrary opinion.

What we should all be agreed upon is the need to resist the growth of nationalism. On the theoretical aspect of this Lenin was clear: "It is the Marxist's duty to stand for the most resolute and consistent democratism on all aspects of the national question, but this is the limit the proletariat can go to in supporting nationalism, for beyond that begins the 'positive activity of the bourgeoisie to fortify nationalism'."

He added, "to go beyond these strictly limited and definite historical limits in helping bourgeois nationalism means betraying the proletariat and siding with the bourgeoisie".

No doubt Lenin's view on this issue would extend to the attitudes socialists should have to defending distinct communities who are not necessarily national minorities. In practice however, Lenin recognised that this was a delicate issue as when he wrote, "There is a border line here, which is often very slight".

The danger was then, and remains now, of slipping over into defence of one's own ruling class.

That is why there can be no question, in supporting the Assembly demand, of becoming identified with cross-party, cross-class alliances. That is the position of the STUC and of several major unions, partly due to the malignant influence of Stalinism, either of the *Morning Star* or Eurocommunist varieties.

Socialists who support the demand for an Assembly can only do so from a Labour-trade union basis, independently organised and campaigning for an Assembly on its own terms.

Does that guarantee that the outcome will be an Assembly with a Labour majority? Not necessarily so. If the Assembly demand is a valid democratic one then it should be supported on that basis.

Moreover, we should argue that it be elected on the basis of proportional representation which may well mean that it is even less likely to be Labour-controlled. What will determine the nature of the assembly in terms of its constitutional powers and political make-up will be how socialists fight for it. Those who oppose it on the ground that it will be an 'expensive talking shop', 'a replica of Strathclyde Regional Council' etc, may well be engaging in a self-fulfilling prophecy, a pastime at which British socialists are adept. By maintaining an abstentionist stance they may well help to ensure an unsatisfactory outcome.

In conclusion, we are aware of the limitations of this article. It

does not address itself to the possible powers of an assembly or to the tactical issues related to securing it. What we have tried to

do is to raise some general questions relating to federalism, nationalism and the interests of minorities which will perhaps en-

courage further debate on these matters in the context of the demand for a Scottish Assembly.
Ian McCalman

Ban the Orange Order?

Geoff Bell (WL7) makes two points about Socialist Organiser's contribution to the Labour Committee on Ireland AGM. One is either a misunderstanding or deliberately misleading, the other is a genuine and very deep difference of opinion.

SO supporters did *not* argue against a conference motion calling for the disbandment of the UDR. What we did do, Jim Denham and myself, was to point out that this demand would entail a massive increase in the British presence in Ireland in order to carry out the disbandment. It is in effect a demand on the British government to send troops in!

This, we went on, is a bit of a contradiction with our overall policy of Troops Out. We proposed that we should have a full discussion on that contradiction. We don't think that the argument for withdrawal can be won if the LCI does not move beyond the simplistic and lightminded approach to Troops Out which it currently has.

We disagree on banning the Orange Order. We think it is Geoff's position which is reactionary nonsense.

Even though Geoff makes no attempt to explain the reasons for banning the Orange Order, or to substantiate his criticism of us, I will say something about the issue. At the conference very few reasons were put forward for the ban. It was assumed that all right-thinking people would agree with it.

The underlying arguments, I think, are as follows: the Orange Order is sectarian and bigoted, Order members have physically attacked or threatened other Labour Party members, some Order members have links with fascists.

The most important point to be made is that we do not believe that the way to deal with our opponents in the labour movement is to ban them. The exception to this rule is fascists and organised racists. This approach to bans sets us apart from Geoff, not just on Ireland. And it means that our opposition to a ban is not a token of any kind of solidarity with or support for the Orange Order!

Yes, the Orange Order is sectarian. So is the Catholic Church. Geoff should read some of Connolly's comments on the sectarianism of the Ancient Order of Hibernians, the Catholic Orange Order.

But expulsion from the labour movement is prescribed as a penalty only for Orangeists.

If Orange Order members physically attack opponents in the

Labour Party, then they should be dealt with for that, just as anyone else should. We are against physical violence within the movement. If Orange Order members are fascists or have close links with fascists, they should be expelled for that.

All this is beside the point of the LCI's crazy decision that every member of the Orange Order should be expelled from the Labour Party.

One SO supporter said that for many workers brought up in the Protestant community in Scotland the Orange Order was just a social club. Geoff Bell deliberate-

ly takes this comment out of context to make it look as if that is the top and bottom of our analysis of the Orange Order.

The same speaker also made the point that a ban on Orange Order members would drive thousands of the best militants in the Scottish coalfields out of the Labour Party.

The LCI motion is not important to Orangeists because fortunately it has no chance of ever being adopted by the Labour Party. It is important to socialists, however, because it is yet another sign of the lapse into Catholic sectarianism on much of the left.

I don't expect Geoff to agree with any of this, but it would be harder for him to misrepresent it if he actually understood it.

Patrick Murphy

The 'Perdition' debate

I would be the last person to complain that the reply to my letter in *Workers' Liberty 7* was more than four times the length of the original.

However, it might have been helpful, to say nothing of honest, if John O'Mahony had explained that the chunks of *Perdition* quoted were early drafts that were, as with most plays, articles, etc, discarded, amended, deleted and added to.

For example, the phrase 'Zionist knife in the Nazi fist' does not appear in the play, having been deleted at an early stage. Whatever its dramatic effect, politically it would not have been justified and Allen accordingly cut it.

To quote something that is not in the play itself but in a draft, and this was a common feature of attacks on *Perdition*, suggests an inability to come to terms with the thesis of the play, still less to prove the horrendous charge of 'anti-semitism'.

It is for the above reasons that I will refrain from commenting point by point on O'Mahony's critique of the draft and will confine myself to one instance. For making a connection between the Jewish religion and Zionism, Allen is guilty of a "Stalinist-type amalgam between Zionism and religion. In fact most of the Zionists in that period were atheists or not especially religious".

The relevant quote in the play is as follows:

Scott: Would you agree that most of those early Zionists were atheists and non-believers?

Yaron: Yes.

Scott: They rejected all religious concepts?

Yaron: Yes.

Scott: Would you say that they were nationalists who directed all

their efforts to the settlement of Jews in Palestine?

Yaron: Yes.

Scott: Well, how did the rabbis take it? This sudden rupture with the Jewish religious tradition?

Yaron: There was conflict... but over the years agreement was reached.

Scott: A sort of pact?

Yaron: Their aims became complementary.

Scott: Was this because without the stamp of biblical approval, Zionism could never have legitimised its claims to Palestine?... Zionism annexed the Jewish religious tradition.

As this passage demonstrates, Allen's handling of the complex interrelationship between religion and Zionism is far more subtle than O'Mahony's caricature of it, viz. an attack on "Jews in general, or his idea of Jews".

It is even more interesting that the most persistent Zionist critic of the play, David Cesarani, in an article in the *Jewish Quarterly*, makes the exact opposite point.

"Zionism is perceived here as an entirely modern movement without roots in Jewish religion or culture... Such an analysis is simplistic and ignores the role of rabbinical figures like Mohilever and Kook who were ardent Zionists, not to mention the whole stream of Mizrachi, the religious Zionists".

Whilst arguing a diametrically opposite case from O'Mahony, Cesarani still draws the same conclusion, i.e. *Perdition* is anti-semitic! Whatever Allen says is anti-semitic. Why?

Because his play looks at the Holocaust from an explicitly anti-Zionist perspective. On this Cesarani and O'Mahony agree. The difference between Cesarani and O'Mahony is that the former at least has a basic understanding and knowledge of Zionism, albeit

FORUM

from a non-socialist perspective, whereas the latter operates through the filter of the left-Zionist Mapam.

There are however more general points that O'Mahony makes. The central one is the question, how did the massacre of Hungary's Jews serve Zionism?

Not surprisingly, it is the wrong question. Only a few Zionists were calculating enough to assert that without mass genocide there would be no state and therefore the Zionist movement should act accordingly. To assert that this was the defined policy, acted upon and agreed in tandem, would be to tread dangerously close to a conspiracy theory (albeit of the mechanical left, not the fascist right).

What actually happened was that Zionism, a movement founded on the belief that anti-semitism could not be fought, a movement that sought to influence the powerful and privileged in the time-honoured ways of Jewish leaders, by pleading and interceding, was incapable of doing other than writing off resistance.

Further, given the Zionist goal of statehood above everything else, rescue that wasn't seen to be of benefit to Jewish Palestine ('refugeism') was opposed because it would render Zionism irrelevant. It was this indifference to, if not outright hostility to, rescue from the outside, coupled with acquiescence and yes collaboration inside Europe, e.g. serving on the Nazi-appointed Judenrate and police, that provide the backcloth to *Perdition*.

One can find all sorts of justifications for collaboration, and of course it was not between equals, but collaboration is nonetheless a class question (and this perhaps is the weakness of *Perdition*).

O'Mahony may defend the Kastners, but the survivors of Hungarian Jewry whose families were deceived by his 'rescue committee' were not so easily persuaded when they testified in Jerusalem in 1954. Such was the attitude to collaboration throughout Nazi-occupied Europe. Nor was it merely Kastner as an individual, but his role as representative of the Jewish Agency.

Nor was resistance in Hungary merely a question of hindsight. Those without this gift, like the Swedish diplomat Wallenberg, rescued up to 100,000 Jews. Outside pressure from the United States saved the remaining 500,000 despite Zionist silence.

The saving of the 1,684 leaders was indeed an example of "the cruel criteria of Zionism". Or, as the Attorney General in the real Kastner trial noted, "It has always been our Zionist tradition to select the few out of many in arranging immigration to Palestine".

Maybe, though, O'Mahony can explain away the betrayal of the Haganah parachuters to the Gestapo by Kastner, whose en-

trance threatened to disrupt the agreement to pacify and deceive Hungary's Jews prior to deportation to Auschwitz? And what of Kastner's appearance after the war at Nuremberg in order to help free, on behalf of the Jewish Agency, Kurt Becher, Lieutenant-General in the Waffen-SS?

O'Mahony speaks of the "loathing and hatred" of Allen for not merely Zionists but Jews. *Perdition* is an anti-semitic play.

Those who, like Erich Fried, lost friends and relatives in the Holocaust and have fought anti-semitism before and since, can write of *Perdition*: "I am envious that I have not written it myself... (it) is not anti-semitic... but it correctly quotes and unmasks the terrible attitude of some leading Zionists... To accuse the play of faking history or of anti-Jewish bias is monstrous".

Maxime Rodinson writes: "I have not the least doubt that there is not the slightest sign of anti-semitism in the play. I do not know Jim Allen personally and I cannot say if he is an anti-semitic in his heart. But if so, he has, in a masterly way, hidden this trend in his writing".

A reply

As always, Tony Greenstein doesn't debate the issue in dispute. He worries around the edges of it, quibbling over secondary details and evading the questions he is supposed to be dealing with.

The chunks of *Perdition* I quoted were not from 'early drafts' (where would I have got them?) Apparently, the version just published in book form was the fourth. The one I quoted from was the second. This was the one scheduled for production at the Royal Court Theatre, and it got some circulation, initially when the Royal Court sent out copies to theatre critics.

The third draft was, I understand, a modified version of the second after Allen made cuts under pressure of his critics. In the fourth, printed, version there are massive changes. Most of what I quoted from the second, or Royal Court, version, has been cut.

Ah! says Greenstein. In the middle of a raging public controversy you quote the available text, the one due for production, but that is impermissible and scandalous because six months later the author will publish an expurgated edition.

Allen massively changes his arguments under pressure, in such a way that he concedes a great deal of the political and historical criticism of his opponents and all their moral case. Yet he maintains his thesis. I would say that that is a scandal.

Allen and Brenner both have a picture of Zionism as some out-

Even Dr Levenburg, veteran Zionist and author of the original Institute of Jewish Affairs Report on the same script that O'Mahony quotes from, states: "The author avoids using anti-semitic arguments but some viewers of the play will not be able to avoid forming a negative attitude about Jews".

How is it that O'Mahony is able, with such certainty, to brand *Perdition* as anti-semitic when Jews with a proven record of having fought anti-semitism and racism take the opposite viewpoint. Indeed, how is it that an avowed Trotskyist can become not merely an ardent apologist for Zionism today, but for its past too, even if it does mean lining up with the most reactionary sections of bourgeois opinion?

Finally, if going against a bourgeois tide of opinion places one in the 'two-camps left in world politics', so be it. Certainly it is preferable to providing a socialist coat, *Militant*-style, for imperialism. To O'Mahony it may appear as a third way, to revolutionaries it is merely the old reformist path.

Tony Greenstein

side force, allying with anti-semites and Nazis, hi-jacking the Jews. At the same time Allen sometimes conflates secular Zionism and the Jewish religious communities. I thought that was important because it leads Allen, whose explicit hatred is directed at the devil-ex-machina Zionists, to claw into his target range vast layers of the Jewish communities who were not Zionists.

Perdition does not "look at the Holocaust from an explicitly anti-Zionist perspective". It uses the Holocaust as raw material for a scapegoating historical forgery whose target is the existing state of Israel.

In the guise of an independent exposure of the alleged role of 'the Zionists' in helping the Nazis kill Jews, it presents a Zionophobic message whose current political implication is to provide justification for those — like Allen and Brenner — who would destroy the Jewish state. It is not history. It is not criticism and polemic of a political trend from the point of view of international socialism. It is part of an Arab-chauvinist propaganda drive to deny the rights of the Israeli Jews by branding the founders of Israel with some responsibility for the Holocaust.

Zionophobia on that level is comprehensively hostile to most Jews — whatever Allen's feelings about Jews. Initially I wrote that I had no doubt that Allen was not anti-semitic personally. Analysing the passages I quoted in *WL 7*, I no longer felt sure about that. If the passages I quoted and commented on don't explain why to the non-Greensteinian reader, then repeating them here will not help, and is anyway impossible.

In his own way Greenstein repeats all the nonsense. Only "a few" Zionists wanted genocide, he says, moderately. *Which Zionists, Greenstein?*

Zionists didn't resist the Nazis? One of the changes in Allen's fourth version is the admission that some Zionists did organise resistance and fight back.

The Zionist movement wasn't responsible for the Judenrate. But it is not a matter of 'defending' either Kastner or the Judenrate. Naturally socialists would be on the other side of the divide from these 'prominents' and bourgeois. The socialists in the ghettos, including socialist Zionists, were on the other side.

But we have a duty to understand, a responsibility to refrain from glib and facile denunciations of people living in conditions and within choices that we have to strain our imagination even to begin to comprehend.

You can't equate Israel with 'imperialism'. The existence of the Jewish nation is a fact separable from any links it has with US imperialism.

Finally, on the new version of *Perdition*. It is a much better play for the pruning and the additions. Its poisonous theme is the same, but now it is hidden.

The basic dramatic weakness — that the case against the author's 'anti-Zionist' thesis was not really put — has now been resolved by Allen abandoning even the pretence that he is mounting a serious debate on the issues. Now the trial is just a charade. The defendant and his accuser are in collusion. Old Yaron wants to confess and have himself judged and scourged in public. His accuser, Ruth, is being helpful.

Thus Allen turns the play into a silly melodrama. Worse than that, though. In the play Yaron is guilty, and he knows it, of helping kill hundreds of thousands of Hungarian Jews. Could someone admit that guilt and stay alive (helped by a little public scourging)? Could a play deal with such a subject and avoid all the dramatic demands for catharsis or expiation? Allen's does!

Even in melodramas the villain usually comes to a bad end. In *Perdition* mark 4 Yaron, the organiser of mass murder, and Ruth, his accuser, comfort each other. He forgives himself, she forgives him. The last cosy scene — after the issues raised in the play, and after Yaron has been branded a mass murderer — is schmaltzy enough to make you retch.

With the new ending Allen brands himself as not taking his own case seriously.

It is not just bad non-drama. It is also a give-away. For Yaron in the play is just a stalking horse for Zionism. The anger of the author is not really focused on historical figures like Kastner-Yaron but on Israel now. Otherwise the camp schmaltz-fest at the end would not be psychologically possible.

John O'Mahony