FURTHER DISCUSSION ON THE
SCOTTISH ASSEMBLY

McVicar's Ahistoric Compromise .......... Casey
On a Scottish Assembly ................. McVicar, Macman, Benjamin
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A letter and a reply from Workers' Action, December 8 1976

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McVicar's An Historic Compromise

(This does not deal with the contents of McVicar's piece in the last 12 because this has been written prior to the appearance of that 12. Where part of any quote given below is emphasised, the emphasis has been added in all cases.)

In a recent letter to SS, McVicar warns of the post-election danger of many of the socialist intelligentsia running round like headless chickens, joining the SNP, retreating into Leninist sects, returning to their doctoral theses, or retreating to their herb gardens. Unfortunately, though hardly surprisingly, he omits to mention one other pastime to which Cambridge graduates can turn in their hours of distress: the advertainment which he himself now pursues—campaigning for a Scottish Assembly.

Although something of an over-simplification, there seem to be basically four driving forces pursuing this diversionary and reactionary goal:

a) Scottish 'nationalism'. (Since Scotland is not a nation, oppressed or otherwise, there cannot be any such thing as a genuine Scottish nationalism.) Disregarding the various fringe groups campaigning round the slogan of 'Kick the English out of Scotland!', Scottish 'nationalism' finds its principal organised expression in the SNP, for whom, its govt without saying, 'Scotland's problems' flow from 'Westminster rule', not the capitalist mode of production. It was virtually annihilated in the General Election, with its residue of support now predominantly in rural areas. For the SNP, or at least sections of it, an so is a step towards the final goal of Scottish independence.

b) Communist Party/fellow travellers in the Labour Party. For Stalinists of all varieties, the notion of an so is like a dream come true. It provides a very concrete focus for their favourite shibboleth of the 'breath of democratic alliance' (i.e. cross-class collaboration). At a recent meeting of the Scottish Socialist Society (SSS), itself little more than a catalogue for Stalinism, CP speakers openly dismissed setbacks as 'a narrow economic focus' and 'traditional methods of trade union work' (i.e. strikes, occupations etc.) as 'disastrous failures and a thing of the past'. What was needed was a 're-definition of socialism': the Stalinists can provide that all right and the construction of a movement of national, not labour movement, resistance to Thatcherism; on the grounds that 'the differences between us (CP/SNP/Labour/Liberals/SDP, and presumably progressive Tories as well) are subordinate to the dangers from Thatcherism.'

c) Union bureaucrats/labour MPs and councillors. These are the kind of people who shoot their mouths off about how they're all in favour of an so as to be better able to fight the Tories. One would have to be criminally naive (or an accommodationist) not to see through such dishonesty. These are the same union bureaucrats who sabotage the ENS disputes and send striking miners back to work, the same MPs who have done nothing in the way of parliamentary obstruction or anything else to fight the Tories during their first term of office, and the same councillors who have not even put up token resistance to the Tory-demanded cuts. But now, as 'proof' of their determination to fight the Tories, they're suddenly all in favour of an so. Their deviation to the cause of an so flows out of a desire to avoid any confrontation with the Tories. Maxton, MP for Cathcart, did at least have the decency to spell this out at the recent SSS meeting: 'We must make it clear to the Tories: grant us an so, then there will be less pressure on you in the United Kingdom. Extra-parliamentary activity (in pursuit of an so) cannot replace and overthrow Parliament. We cannot have such activity bringing down a democratically elected government.'

d) Middle-headed petty-bourgeois intellectuals devoid of even a minimal acquaintance with working-class struggle and who equate socialism with import controls and the sale of council houses. These are the people who have got it all muddled out a scenario of mounting class struggle culminating in Scottish labour MPs (Hugh Brown? Bruce Millan? James White?) withdrawing from Parliament to set up a Scottish Constituent Assembly, harbingers of a Socialist Scotland. It is true that such people can't even run a Polish Solidarity Committee, or even use a stapler, but, meditating in their Habitat armchairs, they've already mapped out the road to socialism in Scotland.

Now McVicar, no doubt choking on his breakfast kippers, will vehemently deny that any of the above has anything to do with HIS reasons for campaigning for an so. He's got SOCIALIST reasons for campaigning for an so. Sad to say, this is not the case. This can be easily proven on two levels: that of McVicar's general arguments, and
The General Arguments: The gist of these has been dealt with in the article in the call for an "as". Instead of moving a battery of amendments to motions calling for a straight vote against, some points need to be added/expanded upon:

a) By calling specifically for a Scottish Assembly, credence is automatically given Britain (the demand being raised is for a Scottish Assembly only, not devolved government territorially different from England/Wales). As soon as that is conceded then one is on the different and how different should the form of government for Scotland be (devolution? Federalism? Full independence? an "as" with tax-raising powers?)

b) The call for an "as" also automatically endorses the Stalinists' argument that "what divides us is subordinate to the danger from Thatcherism." By an apolitical lumping together of all the votes cast against the Tories in Scotland, McVicar is able to conjure up that mythical beast, the overwhelming anti-Thatcher majority in Scotland. Thus the differences between a nominally left-wing Labourism, Scottish nationalism, bourgeois liberalism, classical social democracy, not to mention a few hundred votes for the fascists, are subordinated to the abstract notion of "anti-Thatcherism". Moreover, depending on whatever starting point you choose to take (to ensure you come up with the result you want), vastly different results can be achieved: a decisive rejection of Labourism (34% of the votes only for Labour); a decisive rejection of Scottish 'nationalism' (11% of the votes), or a decisive rejection of the Alliance (26%)...

c) Fundamentally, McVicar's call for an "as" is a response to the result of the General Election. Prior to June 5th of this year there was no suggestion that we should campaign for an "as". But by McVicar's "logic" there was a greater need for one than then now: in 1979 Labour picked up more votes than it did this year, and there was a bigger 'anti-Thatcher majority' in Scotland than not. To respond to the return of a Tory government by calling for another tier of local government is no response at all. It also automatically lets Labour councillors/MPs and union bureaucrats off the hook: if an "as" is needed to fight the Tories, then, given that none exists at present, councillors, MP, union bureaucrats can't really be blamed for failing to put any effective resistance to the Tories.

d) McVicar has no basis upon which to refuse to go along with the Stalinists' call for a popular front for an "as". Supposing that the Young Liberals, the SNP and SDP decided to affiliate to the Glasgow Polish Solidarity Committee (assuming that they actually managed to find the thing!), would McVicar accept their applications? We know that he would. So why not also have a joint campaign with them for an "as"? They support an "as". McVicar supports an "as". Isn't that basic agreement good enough for a united (popular) front with them? True, the SNP and the CP place their call for an "as" from a different motive than McVicar. For them it's a way of breaking up not just support for the Labour Party but also the Labour Party itself. (And it would be a break-up on the worst possible lines as far as socialists are concerned) But in any united front the motives of the various bodies participating are always different anyway.

e) McVicar, I believe, endorses the general contents of an article by Phil O'Brien in the July edition of Strathclyde Labour Briefing. Given that the article sums up just about everything wrong with any attempt to make a 'left-wing' case for an "as", a few comments on it:

1) "John Maxton's stirring call for socialism and a Scottish Assembly ...". It must be a matter of debate as to whether Maxton can even spell the word 'socialism'. His movement to the right continues unabated: his support for Kinmonth for leader, his current whipping up of a witch-hunt against Militant in his CLP, his support for the sale of council houses, his fear of any decisive confrontation with the Tories (see above) etc. Yet, solely because of his call for an "as" (every Labour MP is verbally for socialism), the article portrays his as a left-winger!

2) "The Scottish teachers' union called for an "as" ... as one way to defend and maintain public education in Scotland... The Scottish miners at their annual conference called for an "as" as an essential step in the Labour Party's fightback against Tory policies." But the teachers' conference voted against specific motions (e.g. on Hunn and Dunning) which would have defended education in Scotland. And the miners' leaders calling for an "as" as an essential step in the fight against the Tories are so genuine in their calls to fight the Tories that in the last four weeks alone they
have ordered back to work striking miners at three Scottish pits in order to fight against the Tories. That such conferences passed motions for an all-party assembly, actually prove the diversionary nature of the call for an all-party assembly, least certainly suggest it though. But all this is ignored by Phil O'Brien's article, which simply presents the passing of motions for an assembly in these conferences as what is to be welcomed by the Left.

3) "An assembly have figured prominently in the election. It was the symbol of an issue. This was no doubt an honest assessment by O'Brien on the basis of his own experiences in the election campaign. But other activists did not gain the impression. And even if the assembly was to use O'Brien's expression, "Scotland's Secret Manifesto" (not even, note, the Scottish working class's secret manifesto, but Scotland's) - so what? Would that make it politically correct? Is Britain's Secret Manifesto of import controls also something for which socialists should campaign? In the case of Phil O'Brien the answer is unfortunately 'yes'. And the author of the article goes on to contradict himself completely when he goes on to admit: "The truth is that the majority of the working class, particularly workers, the assembly is a yawn."

4) "The assembly is ... a democratic demand because the majority want it ... and it could help defend and extend democracy itself. So hanging, too, given that the majority want it, in a democratic demand? What next - socialists for hanging? And, other things remaining equal, as an assembly would not defend and extend democratic rights in Scotland, but on issues such as gay rights and women's rights, create a second Northern Ireland.

5) "The assembly is ... a socialist demand because the only group that can carry through a campaign and sustain an assembly in the labour movement, and the labour movement will only do so if the Assembly is seen to have a socialist role. The first argument is simply factually wrong. The second argument in political nonsense: it would be true only if the working class had already been liberated from bourgeois ideology and were full-blooded socialists. However, himself is amongst those who have constantly poured scorn on such an idea.

6) "Scottish Labour MPs are right at this stage (my emphasis) not to support an all-party alliance ... tactical alliances may be feasible later."

8) "If we are serious, then we must face the prospect of withdrawing MPs from Westminster to establish a Constituent Assembly. In fact, once we have to be in a particularly jovial mood to envisage such a prospect. Unless the sentence is sloppily written, it actually prove the Assembly is a yawn."

9) O'Brien's article, like the position of Lochaber, fails to explain just how an assembly would be elected, what powers it will have, what it will do, and why Labour MPs sitting in Westminster (the 'tactical alliance' referred to above), Scottish Labour MPs, never mind the rest, certainly aren't going to be dragged away from the Commons Bar and the Mother of Parliaments to set up a Constituent Assembly. And how would it benefit Scottish workers anyway to have Hugh Brown, Donald Dewar, James White, John Barlow and Aitken sitting around in Edinburgh instead of in London?

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The need only look at West Germany and the United States to see that federalism is not in the least incompatible with the capitalist state.

As Practice: The Birth of Tartan Federalism
An attempt to put forward a 'socialist' case for an as leads, of necessity, to a review of the logic of the class struggle. One finds this in McVicar's own, written and verbal, arguments.

Maxton's support for an as (to try to defuse class antagonisms) is, in the footsteps of Phil O'Brien, served up by McVicar as evidence of Labour's socialist credentials: in his article in the latest issue of 'Strathclyde Labour Briefing' McVicar's approach to Maxton is indistinguishable from that of O'Brien, with support for an as being regarded as interchangeable and synonymous with support for socialists.

The original text of McVicar's 'social resolution' for an as 'underlines the extent to which reality plays second fiddle to any arguments' that can be dug up for an as. The original text of the motion referred to the overwhelming support for Labour in Scotland reflected in the results of the General Election. No-one even glancing at the General Election results with an open mind could have made such a claim, given that Labour's share of the votes fell by 7% to 34%. Moreover, McVicar, who writes letters to SC becoming the lack of analysis and substitution of scenarios instead of front page articles on the General Election in SC, does exactly the same thing himself; he makes no attempt to explain why Labour lost ONE IN SIX of its voters in Scotland at the last General Election, compared with 1979; instead, Scotland is portrayed as a Labour stronghold, supposedly justifying a campaign for a Scottish Assembly. Nor has McVicar ever made any reference to the fact that where Labour's vote in Scotland did hold up or increased, it did so in traditionally Labour areas in the country.

The massive vote chalked up by Martin, Millan, or White were not votes for a fighting, campaigning Labour Party; they were traditional Labour-loyalty votes at their worst, especially in the case of Hugh Brown. But all this is glossed over by McVicar in his search for a 'socialist' campaign for an as.

It is also worth noting McVicar's sudden decision to drop his idea of campaigning for proportional representation (PR). In the aftermath of Bermondsey, McVicar wrote a document suggesting that socialists should campaign for PR. Yet now, when PR really is an issue because of the imbalance between the socialist vote in Scotland and the number of seats they have in Parliament, McVicar has dropped his earlier position in favour of the call for an as. For the left-reformists, an as elected on the basis of PR would not be of any use since Labour MPs would not be in a majority. So anyone calling for an as elected on the basis of PR would certainly be out of line with that section of the mainstream left which supports an as. (By no means all of the mainstream left supports an as: the ILP and sections of the LCC, for example, don't. McVicar's ditching of his earlier position can be easily demonstrated. As the League's Scottish aggregate on June 12th 1975 all present agreed that where a motion was moved for an as, we should move a series of amendments including the proposal that an Assembly should be elected on the basis of PR. (On reflection, this was wrong: we should simply oppose and vote against such diversionary motions). Yet when McVicar presented his model resolution to a Strathclyde Labour Briefing meeting the following evening and put the same motion to his Labour Party branch meeting the evening after that, not a single one of the amendments agreed to at the Scottish aggregate were included; on the ground that, as McVicar later explained, the motion would not have got through if it included the clauses agreed to at the aggregate. McVicar's enthusiastic support for PR thus disappeared in order to get through a motion for an as.

In passing, it should also be mentioned that both the pre-fusion organisations had anti-as positions. McVicar is therefore acting out with the constitution in moving such a motion, and engaging in external factionalisation in his attempts to set up his 'Socialists for a Scottish Assembly' campaign.

In spite of the watering down of the motion, McVicar still encountered problems at his Labour Party branch when moving it, due to a clause to the effect that if the Labour Party branch had not granted an as by the end of the first full session of Parliament, then the Scottish Labour movement should hold elections for an as. (All the scenarios for an as are based on the months of the calendar and the Parliamentary timetable, not on the rhythm and logic of the class struggle.)

Now such a clause is clearly nonsense. The only situation in which the labour movement could hold society-wide elections (even just on a Scottish level) is if it were already the
the holder of power in society, which in turn could only come about as a result of a working-class revolution. In any other situation any call by the labour movement to participate in an election which it organises would simply be ignored. For the labour movement to seize power in order to hold an election for its own is obviously a nonsensical position to put forward, even implicitly.

At McVicar's branch meeting the objections to the clause came from the same basic direction, though from a different perspective: that the labour movement could not hold an election because it did not have the right to do so. Fortunately for his motion, and the cause of Scotland, however, McVicar was able to find a formula to put these troubled minds at rest: that the labour movement, in conjunction with other forces, should hold an election. These other forces being of course the SWP, CP and Alliance - and maybe a few progressive Tories as well, just for good measure.

McVicar calls for a 'socialist' campaign for an SA because he is opposed to the class collaboration of the Stalinists' one. Yet the highpoint of McVicar's own campaign turns out to be collaboration with the very forces which he condemns the Stalinists for wanting to campaign with. At least the Stalinists are consistent.

Those with an interest in esoteric irrelevancies and mysticism may well be able to spend many a happy hour musing upon 'socialist' campaigns for an SA. Serious socialists however can find somewhat more fruitful activities, and politically principled ones, in which to engage their energies. Certainly, in this particular case, the SWPer who rushes off to the nearest picket line with nothing in his/her head but a pile of 'Socialist Workers' in their arms is an infinitely better socialist than those who want to conjure up 'socialist' campaigns for the irrelevant diversion of an SA - with class collaboration as the highpoint of their 'socialist' campaign.
On a Scottish Assembly

1. "Formal Position?"

In a letter dated 5 July to the comrades in the Glasgow branch, Annual, WSL is "the previous position of the two pre-fusion organizations, ie to regard the Assembly as a diversion."

This is not strictly an accurate explanation of the situation. It would be more accurate to say that, whereas the pre-fusion WSL regarded the Assembly as a diversion, to be opposed whatever the state of popular sentiment on the matter, the ICL was of the opinion that the demand should be supported if the majority of people in Scotland demonstrated their support for an Assembly. There are two distinct positions, the confutation of which is insupportable. The grounds then for claiming that the WSL has even a "formal position" of opposition to an Assembly are extremely weak.

Secondly, these grounds are even further undermined when we consider how little evidence exists that anything like a thorough analysis of the issue took place in either organization. The only documentary evidence of a "debate" in the ICL we have witnessed is a brief piece in a back issue of "International Communist" by a comrade who ceased to be a member of the organization a number of years ago. As for the pre-fusion WSL, we are unaware of any theoretical analysis of the issue. We would surmise that the only article analysing the issue in any depth from which that organization drew its conclusions was written by one of the signatories of this document, in an issue of the "Fourth International" published by the Socialist Labour League. The anti-Assembly sentiments expressed in that article are no longer espoused by its author.

Taken together, the two contributions constitute a very slender foundation for establishing an anti-Assembly position. As well as being inadequately researched, they are also now very dated. To claim that the WSL has even a "formal position" of opposition to an Assembly on the basis of these documents is an untenable posture to strike.

Hence we would contend that, as the Assembly in its present issue in the Scottish context and as the organization has no fixed position on the question, the decision allowed to proceed publicly as well as internally and that there be no attempt made to restrict comrades from publicly participating in the campaign for an Assembly.

A Mandate for an Assembly

Although there are some, as far as we are aware, no public opinion polls conducted on the issue in Scotland since the General Election, we are in no doubt that a majority of people in Scotland now favour the establishment of an Assembly. At the election, 73% of the Scottish electorate voted for parties other than the Tories and all of these anti-Tory parties contained an Assembly pledge in their manifestos. Since the election, the largest teachers' union in Scotland, the EIS, and the Scottish Area of the NUM have both declared for an Assembly. No one doubts that a very large body of opinion within the Scottish Labour movement and within the populace generally now supports the establishment of an Assembly.

In parenthesis, it is worth noting that the reason for the failure of pro-Assembly opinion to prevail in the 1979 Referendum was because of an amendment to the Referendum Bill secured by George Cunningham who later defected to the SNP. This amendment stipulated that 40% of the Scottish electorate had to vote for an Assembly before that demand was acceded to. In the event, 35% did so, and thus the pro-Assembly campaign lost. It is noteworthy that if British general elections were decided on the same criterion, then almost every government since 1945, whether Labour or Conservative, would have failed to be elected.

We would therefore contend that those socialists who said that they would support the pro-Assembly campaign if the majority of Scottish people so decided, are now morally obliged to do just that.

Scotland - a Nation?

The second group of socialists we referred to earlier are those who are adamantly opposed to an Assembly on principle. We believe that it is essential to try to convince those comrades of the democratic, and potentially socialist,
nature of the Assembly demand.

It is hardly surprising that the issue remains a source of debate within the British Labour movement. There is a long history of contention over this issue, with the ILP being passionate advocates of Scottish self-government. With the rise of a bourgeoisie nationalist movement in the late 19th century, however, John Carstairs Matheson and the predominantly Scottish Socialist Labour Party came out against Home Rule. As a result, John Maclean was to become increasingly passionately devoted to self-government, ending his days campaigning for a Scottish Workers Republic.

With the death of Maclean and the defeat of the post-war upsurge, the increasingly Stalinised Communist Party vigorously opposed any moves towards Scottish self-government, describing Maclean as a "racialist" and expelling Graham Gibbon, the finest modern Scottish national, for alleged "Trotskyism". As James Young has pointed out, it was only in 1940, when the Scottish Committee of the CP was looking for a popular front with the Nationalists, that an about-turn was made on the question of Scottish self-government.

In the meantime, the small group of Trotskyists in Inter-War Scotland was unable to make any insightful contribution on the question. Influenced by Trotsky's one-line dismissal of a Scottish parliament in "Where is Britain Going?", they clung to an abstract internationalism within which they were unable to posit their indigenous experiences.

In more recent times, it has been the right wing who have strenuously resisted any form of Scottish self-government within the Scottish Council of the Labour Party. Willie Ross, the honer of the Tartan Tories, exemplified the right-wing establishment which dominated Labour politics in Scotland in the period since 1945 until very recently. It has been amongst the left wing, whatever its limitations in other respects, that the sentiment for an assembly has been strongest.

Whilst many English socialists say that they are not insidious to a federal framework for the UK; they can see no valid reason why such priority should be given to the establishment of a Scottish Assembly. That view can only meaningfully be countered by a sustained exposition of the concept that there is an exceptional character to the Scottish dimension. What are the salient characteristics that give Scotland a national identity?

The turning point in Scottish history was undeniably the Act of Union of 1707. Prior to that, despite the Union of the Crowns in 1603, no one denied that Scotland was a nation state. The removal of the seat of government, parliament, from Edinburgh to Westminster produced a crisis of national identity. Henceforth, as Tom Mairn has argued so cogently, a gulf opened up between the political and the civil life of Scotland.

Throughout the 18th century, Scotland retained its separate legal and educational systems, as it still does to the present day. Those distinctive elements were supplemented by an efflorescence of Scottish culture which made the country the intellectual envy of all Europe. With talents such as Hume, Burns, Scott and Black, in the words of T.C.S. Smout, "the cultural performance of Scotland between 1740 and 1850 was of dazzling virtuosity".

Yet that rich cultural heritage was to wither and virtually perish in the course of the 19th century. The onset and acceleration of the Industrial Revolution opened hitherto unknown opportunities for the Scottish bourgeoisie. This, combined with unrestricted access to the markets of the Empire of the English, became the focus for the energies of the burgeoning industrialists and middle classes. Enthralled by the possibilities of self-enrichment, they abandoned governance to the English aristocracy and culture to the Lulliard. Thus, in the great age of European bourgeois nationalism, which culminated in the attempted revolutions of 1848, Scotland remained on the sidelines, engrossed in the pursuit of material wealth.

What then accounted for the neo-nationalist upsurge of the late 1960s and the 1970s? The material basis for that must be sought in the malaise of British capitalism, unable now to fall back upon the spoils of empire so readily as in the past. From being a powerhouse of the Industrial Revolution, Scotland, saddled with a preponderance of heavy industry, became crippled by massive unemployment and social deprivation. Multinationals, at first attracted by the generous disburse-
3.

off their subsidiary branches. The uneven development of capitalism in the material awareness was to be made even more intense by the agonizing spectacle of successive
sustaining ever-lengthening dole queues and hideous food surpluses in the EEC.

In the few sketchy paragraphs above we have tried to outline, however schemati-
cally, some of the elements which Scottish socialists have wrestled with through-
identity beneath the Tartan kilt and grasping self-interest of the bourgeois
expression is manifested at this juncture in the demand for an Assembly.

The Break-up of the British State

The results of the recent general election will achieve nothing in terms of
alleviating the moribund state of British capitalism. Thatcherite right wing
radicalism will be no more successful than the welfare capitalist measures of
successive post war governments, Labour or Conservative. The reasons for that
failure are as much governmental as economic. The inability of government in
Britain to achieve limited growth and efficiency even in capitalist terms is
irrevocably bound up with the strangulating impact of the British state.

That state, a symbiotic formation of patrician dilletantism and rapacious
finance capital, the historical development of which has been so well described by
Perry Anderson and Tom Nairn, defies all attempts at reform, whether Wilsonite
"white heat technological revolution" or Thatcherite laissez faire plus Hayek
style pruning exercises. The centralised, bureaucratic British state defies all
reform, stultifies all efforts to change, absorbs all Labourite challenges.

The process of socialist change in Britain must encompass the destruction of
that state. From the arsenal of Marxism we must draw upon the tradition expressed
by Marx concerning the Paris Commune in 1871 and as developed by Lenin in "State
and Revolution". It is that tradition which must be the inspiration of socialists
rather than the conception of the seizure of the existing state machine and its
utilisation in the interests of the working masses, a view which Marx abandoned
in 1871 and to which Lenin was forced by circumstances to reluctantly return in
1918.

A key factor in the disintegration of the state in Britain is the struggle to
establish a Scottish Assembly. The break-up of the unitary state, we are convinced,
would be a significant contribution towards rupturing the stasis which dominates
in British politics.

Why a Labour Campaign for an Assembly?

Although the project for an Assembly has been a long time in gestation, the
Labour movement in Scotland remains bereft of a feasible strategy. This has been
exemplified by the divisions apparent since the general election.

On Friday 8 July it was intended that a meeting should take place involving
representatives of the executive of the Scottish Council of the Labour Party and
members of the executive of the STUC to discuss the launching of a Labour Campaign
for an Assembly. That meeting never took place. The reason? Leading figures in the
Scottish trade union movement found themselves unable to attend for a variety of
reasons. In other words, the STUC opted out. But why? Surely a clue must be found
in the contents of a paper prepared for that meeting by George Poulkes, the
Ayrshire MP. In this Poulkes proposed a number of practical options, involving
degrees of parliamentary disruption and non-cooperation with the Tory government
at national and local governmental levels.

How could the leadership of the STUC even contemplate being involved in such
radical courses of action when they, like their counterparts at Congress House,
have set their faces firmly against any moves to stop talking to the Tories? Even
the mildest forms of non-cooperation are off the agenda as far as Milne and Co.
are concerned.

Their incapacity to attend the Friday evening meeting was overcome by the
following day when they appeared at the meeting organised by the Campaign for a
Scottish Assembly, held in Edinburgh. There the leadership of the STUC found no
difficulty in getting down to talk with the SNP, SDP, Ecology Party, Communist Party and sundry others. There the STUC knew they would be calling up to do no more than pass the usual pious resolutions. They would not face up to the danger of being outflanked on the Left which possibility would be strengthened if the campaign were to be a Labour movement affair.

The inadequacies and manoeuvres of the STUC cannot however be the pivot upon which socialists should determine their orientation on this issue. The question remains - why a Labour Campaign for the Assembly? Why not an all-party, cross class alliance united to achieve this single objective?

Our primary concern as socialists must be the mobilisation of the working class in action to achieve the democratic aim of an Assembly. The key to that development lies in the Labour movement, whatever its inadequacies. One of those shortcomings is the prevalence on the Left in Britain of a primitive, economistic conception of class struggle which, although willing to accommodate various kinds of double oppression, is unable to form the conception of the break-up of the unitary, centralised, British state. Re-educating the Labour movement throughout Britain on that question will be one of the prime aims of the Labour Campaign. In fulfilling this educational role, and in many other respects, it will be not unlike a number of other Labour movement based campaigns (eg Labour Committee on Ireland, Labour Committee on Palestine, Labour Campaign for Gay Rights).

Does that exclude alliances with other political formations in Scottish society to achieve our objectives? Certainly not. Any "Labour Party sectarianism" in this campaign would be counterproductive. It will be necessary to make tactical alliances to achieve our objectives. We would contend that the Labour Party should have been present at the conference on 9 July in order to state the case for a socialist perspective in the Assembly campaign and the necessity for an independent form of organisation to project that trajectory to and mobilise opinion around it. Given the back tracking by some sections of the Labour and trade union leadership and deliberation sabotage by others, how should we now proceed? Any initiative must come from the base as well as the leadership for it to be capable of creating a viable campaign. We would therefore advocate that activists in Scotland get themselves organised in forming local branches of the Labour Campaign for an Assembly, even if that is in embryo form in the period immediately ahead.

That orientation should be pursued irrespective of ditherings and posturings by Labour MPs. John Maxton said from his call for an Assembly as a springboard for Socialism to his sectarian, bureaucratic speech at the Scottish Socialist Society Conference a few weeks later; Hatterley calls for an Assembly whereas Kinnoch and Heffer remain silent on that issue; Robin Cook becomes an overnight convert to federalism; George Poulkes, hardly the fulcrum around which we build our campaign. They have to be studied and related to but they do not determine our trajectory.

The Outcome

Only the most wilful perverseness could blind anyone to the reality that, under the most sustained campaign for an Assembly, involving rallies, demonstrations, parliamentary disruption etc, Thatcher will refuse to implement such a measure. An Assembly with meaningful powers will have to be torn by forceful action from the British state. That will assuredly involve the establishment of a constituent Assembly which will be the ultimate arbiter of its rights and powers and its relationship with Westminster. Again, the initiative for that must be taken by the Labour movement in tactical alliance with other pre-Assembly political forces. Comrades who deride the Assembly campaign on the grounds that the mechanics of such a Constituent Assembly have not been determined at this stage reveal themselves to be the most timid constitutionalists.
Another objection that has been raised is that such an Assembly will be no more than another tier of government, unable or unwilling to resist the dictates of Westminster or Whitehall, as impotent as Strathclyde or Lothian Regional Councils. We are not in the business of offering guarantees but what we can say is that the political composition of an Assembly will be determined by the nature of the campaign that is waged to secure it.

If the concept of an Assembly is counterposed to the struggles of the working class as favoured by the Stalinists and Nationalists, if it is posed as a retreat to the laager behind which we will vainly try to hide from the Tory storm, as favoured by not a few Labour Mps, then all that will ensue will be frustration, demoralisation and a debacle. On the other hand, if the campaign for an Assembly is fought for throughout the length and breadth of the British trade union and labour movement as a democratic demand, if it is emmeshed with the struggles of Scottish workers in every form, if it is projected as a springboard for the implementation of socialists, then it may both fulfil the interests of the Scottish working class and, through undermining the viability and credibility of the British state, thereby create possibilities for the working class throughout Britain to get to grips with the dismantling of the centralised capitalist state.

Macvicar
Noohan
Benjamin

July 1983

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Some Introductory Reading

James Young, The Scottish National Question and Labour History (1982)
The ICL Position on Scottish Nationalism

The position taken by the old ICL on Scottish nationalism is summarised in the
excerpt below from the ICL Manifesto.

On the issue of the Scottish Assembly, we called for a 'no' vote in the referen-
dum. Although formally and generally there is a democratic case for 'devolution',
we argued that in this particular case to vote 'yes' would be much more to put wind in
the sails of the nationalists than to endorse a general democratic idea.

While arguing among the Scottish people that they should not demand an Assembly,
we also argued among the English people for Scotland's right to such an Assembly if
a majority wanted it. Thus, when a majority did vote for an Assembly in the referendum,
we called for the Westminster government to respect that vote. We
condemned the undemocratic 40% rule under which the Assembly was denied.

We did not change our view on the diversionary nature of the call for an As-
sembly. We simply maintained our stand in favour of the democratic rights of the Scottish
people.

Kinnell

Nationalism in Britain

The weakening of British capitalism and the failures of the official labour move-
ment have generated a number of nationalists within Britain: Scottish, Welsh. These differ
fundamentally from the nationalism of the Catholic population of North-East Ireland,
because throughout much of its history those sectors, unlike Ireland, have been more or less
equal partners in British capitalist state, in its colonial and imperial phases. The
new sub-nationalisms are reactionary, like British nationalism as a whole.

Scottish nationalism is not in any serious way a response to the needs of oppressed people, as a general frustration with which they respond with a petty bourgeois spirit of particularism, parochialism, and
the narrow and narrow search for sectional advantage (South Sea Bill! - such views have
nothing in common with a working class outlook.

They have nothing to contribute to drawing together the workers of England, Scotland
and Wales in real fraternal unity.

They are a distraction of the labour movement, a device to divide and fragment the
real unity, necessary to Scottish, Welsh and English workers, which now exists. Their
logic is regional fragmentation of the organised labour movement from the trade unions
to the Labour Party.

These sub-nationalisms are pernicious, not only in their openly right-wing expres-
sions, but also where they find influence in the left, for example, in the Scottish
Labour Party and the SDP's adaptation to Scottish nationalism. 'Left' Scottish nationalism looks to John Maclean. Maclean was a great martyr
and fighter against capitalism, the British Karl Liebknecht. But his lapse into the
cynicism that a fusion of a Scottish independence movement with communism could be a lever
for disrupting the British Empire was a tragic and entirely negative experience of
early British communism.

We endorse the general democratic right of self-determination and oppose the
Tories and Unionists who would deny that right to Scotland, for example, by rigged
referendums. A referendum on the future of Scotland (or Wales) should be conducted in
Scotland (or Wales) and also include English voters. That denial, rooted in conservative
Great British nationalism, will help, not hinder, the spreading of the nationalist
poison.

Put within Britain the ICL puts all its emphasis on opposition to nationalism
and particularism. At present we oppose and will come to separate and if there
is an expressed majority in Scotland (or Wales) for separation, we support their right
to separate.
From W.A. 18/12/76 - a letter from a reader and the reply by Workers' Action

Face the Fact about Scottish Nationalism

I hope you will let me take up some of the points raised in your reply to my letter on Scottish nationalism. As you no doubt realise, the issues involved are not only of a serious political nature (what side do we take in current arguments) but also a profound scientific nature, referring to the history of Scotland and the nature of imperialism and nationalism. Unfortunately your reply makes far too little of such issues, sliding as it does round many of the theoretical questions I raised.

Let me give you a couple of examples. You say that the Jacobite rebellions can scarcely be presented as a national-democratic movement, and that such a movement was thoroughly reactionary. My original letter did not refer to the Jacobites as such a movement - I only implied that they were mainly a nationalist movement. Of course the Jacobite movement was feudal in character and based on one of the most backward sections of the Scottish people, the Highlanders, as well.

If you remember, Trotsky was prepared to support the Ethiopians fight for national independence from their Italian conquerors, even though the movement was led by a reactionary feudal king. Similarly in the case of the Ukraine he was prepared to support bourgeois nationalists against representatives of a degenerated workers' state. In writings on the national question did Lenin and Trotsky use the backward nature of the social group which was pressing for national independence to deny that group the right of self-determination.

Nationalism is precisely the expression of such a group's desire to improve its conditions. It may not be the highest necessary expression - but it is an advance.

Lest on you appear to deny the identity of Scotland as a nation. This is asserted rather than proved - indeed, I would like to see you try to prove it.

Scotland has a distinct history, culture, religion, and form of government up to the Act of Union in 1707. It was separated and developed independently of Britain for longer and in a more advanced fashion than Ireland and today that national legacy is still there.

A Scottish nationalist movement has existed in one form or another ever since the 16th century. Contrary to your belief, the majority of the Scottish people did oppose the Act of Union. The Scottish parliament itself was heavily bribed to make it do the wishes of the English government. Even so, one of its members claimed that there weren't a man in Scotland who wished to see the Union.

It was short after this that the Jacobites rose up against the English oppression. What could be clearer than that that was a nationalist revolt?

Comrades, face the facts. The SNP according to the /electoral projections will sweep Labour out of power in Scotland. I agree that that will be so because of the failings of the Labour government, but that is still no argument against moves for Scottish independence.

In a sense, you recognise this by meandering willy-nilly moves for Scottish independence. In so far, you recognise this by meandering willy-nilly moves for Scottish independence. In so far, you recognise this by meandering willy-nilly moves for Scottish independence.

I find it ironic that the same issue of Workers' Action which contains your reply also contains an article supporting independence for Quebec. For the life of me, I cannot see any fundamental differences between the Scottish and Quebecois nationalist movements...and I suspect most of your readers can't either.

Surely, comrades, this shows the pedantic nature of your arguments against Scottish nationalism. Wake up, comrades. Nationalism is sweeping Scotland. Revolutionaries should be linked to that movement by offering it critical support. If you don't change your line, Scottish readers of Workers' Action will not be swimming against the stream - they'll be swept away by the flood that is moving in the right direction.

Richard Hargreaves
Reply: Acting as the catena of reaction

Let us first recapitulate the elements of the Marxist theory of the national question.

As trade comes to play an increasing role, and (over a long period) the unit for economic life from the household, the village, the tribe, or the lord's estate, it grows larger, setting the boundaries of these units are called determined by - and determine - geography and communications, including the most important means of communication, language, and the forms of culture built up around it.

The decisive stage in the development of nations is the emergence of capitalism and the associated massive increase in trade, mobility of population, and communications generally. As the Communist Manifesto puts it: "Independent, or but loosely connected provinces with separate interests, laws, governments and systems of creation income lumped together into one nation, with one government, one code of law, one national class interests, one frontier and one customs union." National political institutions - political parties, trade unions - also arise.

Last Refuge

This development of nation states is progressive as against semi-feudal particularism, pulling the way to the advance of the forces of production and the more extensive organization of the working class. Thus Marx and Engels considered the struggle for the unification of Germany and Italy and (in retrospect) the creation of a uniform national market and state system by the French Revolution, while C. H. Prout declared that "whether is the last refuge of the second-class nation, the understanding of the nation, the last refuge of the second-class nation, the understanding of the nation.

Interests and trade develop even before the flowering of capitalism, and capitalism itself creates a world market and the close economic interconnection of every area of the world. If capitalism developed in an even, straightforward fashion, it would long ago have progressed from the nation-state to continental or world-wide state forms.

However, capitalism develops unevenly. Even before the consolidation of the classic nation-states of Europe was complete, these states were plundering and oppressing large areas of Asia, Africa, and America. Certain small nations in these areas - particularly in Eastern Europe - also suffered the fate of becoming economic and political vessels of the major states, rather than being integrated into or developing an autonomous state.

Spanish In Spain there has been a peculiar development where the mass incompleteness of the bourgeois revolution left the state as nothing more than a collection of provinces held together by bureaucratic imposition of the authority of Madrid. The national question has remained alive, especially in Catalonia and Basque (though revolutionaries in these regions do not fight for separatism).

With the more or less complete division of the world by the major capitalist states, by 1900 - that is, the epoch of imperialism - the national question took a different aspect. The nation-state has become obsolete in comparison with the tremendous development of the forces of production, but the rival bourgeoisie have been unable to transcend it. The best they have managed is the feeble federalism of the RCC. Thus the tension between the needs of economic development and the of the RCC. Thus the tension between the needs of economic development and the national-state framework has been expressed in the creation of colonial or neo-colonial empires and continual disputes between rival imperialist bourgeoisie trying to expand their empires at each other's expense. The two World Wars were the most bloody of these disputes.

National self-determination and 'national defence' have thus become obsolete and reactionary slogans for the major imperialist nation-states of Western Europe and America. However, they mean the 'determination' and the 'defence' of colonial or neo-colonial empires. (A limited and partial exception to this generalisation can be made for the national question in certain countries while they were overrun by Germany during the second World War - but that is a side issue for the present discussion).
Meanwhile, however, since World War I, especially, the national question has become a burning issue in the oppressed nations. Marxists believe the nation-state is obsolete; yet we have supported dozens of national liberation struggles. In these struggles we fight for the working classes to take the lead, and thus to take the struggle forward to socialist conclusions. Yet we support the national liberation struggles against oppressor powers even if they remain under the leadership of petty bourgeois or bourgeoisie forces.

**Nation-State**

Why? The nation-state is obsolete from the standpoint of world history. But from the standpoint of nations, or nascent nations, whose development has been arrested by imperialism, it is far from obsolete. They have no prospect of emulating the classic West European nation-state, that is, of their statehood being the basis for massive and organic bourgeois development (though some real development certainly is possible). However, the demand for these oppressed nations or semi-nations to have their own government is an elementary bourgeois-democratic demand.

Bourgeois democracy, too, is decaying and obsolete. Yet Marxists continue to fight for basic bourgeois-democratic rights, because the more such rights are achieved, the more widely can the working class organize and the more clearly can it see the fundamental classes in society. We are ultimately fighting a world-wide federation of nations - a voluntary federation on the basis of equality. Modern imperialist nations are - as a matter of economic law - incapable of establishing democratic and equal links with 'third-world' nations. Marxists therefore support the struggles for national liberation of oppressed nations.

We do not cease to fight politically against the nationalism of oppressed nations, any more than we cease to combat the ideology of bourgeois democracy. Indeed, our support for national liberation struggles derives not from any sympathy for nationalism, but from our bitter opposition to the (anti-democratic) nationalism of the oppressor nation. To deny the right of one nation to separate from another is to endorse the 'right' of the dominant nation to control the dominated nation - it is thus to endorse the nationalism of the dominant nation.

What, asks comrade Hargreaves, is the difference between Scotland on the one hand, and Quebec or Ireland on the other?

Scotland was certainly not a fully-developed nation prior to the Union of 1707, still less so prior to the 'Royal Union' (the merging of the monarchies of England and Scotland into one person) of 1603. There was no national economic integration, no common language, and not even (as comrade Hargreaves suggests) a common religion.

The development since Union has not been a colonial development, but one of integration into the British national economy. Even the Scots-nationalist writer Tom MacIntyre concludes that 'Scotland had in Scott's own time left the category of 'subject nations' for good and joined the ranks of the 'important nations' ', and notes Scottish participation in two centuries of Great-British exploits, in the subjugation of many genuine 'subject nations'. As regards the distinctive economic character of imperialism, export of capital, John Porter records that 'it seems clear that Scotland contributed far more than its share of the British total' before 1914. Today, one third of British finance capital is in Scotland.

Some autonomous development of social institutions - law, education, - does persist in Scotland. But this is to be attributed to the notorious un-radical nature of the British bourgeoise revolution, which leaves us also with no such medieval remnants as the monarchy and the House of Lords. There is no serious history of national struggle in Scotland (the Parliamentary efforts of the Scottish Home Rule Association in the 1880s and Hugh MacDiarmid's crusade of the Scottish Home Rule Association in the 1930s were insignificant). The public oppositional struggles were just about the high points prior to today's oil-fired SNP exploits, and political institutions - especially those of the working class - have developed on an all-British, not Scottish, basis. Indeed, Scottish
militants have often played a major role in the British Labour movement.
On the other hand, the formation of a nation - bringing into some vague concept of distinctive culture - Scotland might be characterized as a nation. With a Marxist method, treating economic development and class struggle as basic, etc., and if it is a nation, it is without doubt an oppressed nation.

Comrade Hargreaves' comparison of the Jacobite rebellions of 1715 and 1745 with the Ethiopian war against Italian imperialism in the 1930s is to use the kindest word possible - acridic. (So also in his comparison with the Ukraine, but one thing at a time.) John Foster writes of the union showing "the need of English capitalism at this difficult stage in its development to gain the admission of culturally similar forces elsewhere or at least to prevent the inevitable alternative: the precipititation of feudal, highland-based counter-revolution. The Jacobites represented just that feudal revolution. To the extent that the rebellions were "nationalist" (which was not much: the Pretenders aspired to the common throne of Scotland and England; the 1745 rebellion penetrated deep into, and raised forces in, England; and there were more Scots involved in defeating the 1745 than supporting it) they represented the revolt of particularism against bourgeois economy. It was not one of the national-democratic movements characteristic of European politics in that epoch, but just the opposite.

The case of Ethiopia, expelled into revolt against modern imperialism long before bourgeois-democratic movements would organically have developed there, is something quite different. Certainly, for example, Haile Selassie laid no claim to be King of Italy.

If comrade Hargreaves wants to make comparisons with Italy, it would be nearer the mark to compare the war of 1860 in which Garibaldi defeated Francis II and made possible the integration of the kingdom of the Two Sicilies into a united Italy. Francis II, it is quite likely had plans towards the North; after the unification there were substantial revolts, led by priests and agents of Francis II, in the South; and even today the South is a deprived area of Italy. Would comrade Hargreaves consider King Francis II to be the leader of a nationalist movement to be supported against Garibaldi? Or would he define Southern Italy as a nation?

Mildly inaccurate.

One statement, and a mildly inaccurate one at that, from a member of the Scottish Parliament, amply stands as evidence of massive popular opposition to union - certainly not if put against the lack of genuine popular anti-imperialist agitation. Also, most importantly, there is no evidence of an imperial/colonial relationship between England and Scotland at all comparable to Italy's to Ethiopia. John Foster firmly declares that it was a non-colonial relationship, "a position of near partnership; the result of a careful grafting of one capitalist economy and culture onto another. "Tom Nairn challenges "the rapid progress of Scotland's new bourgeois civil society" in the extremely unfavourable conditions of the Union. "Yes, even among the experts, nationalists, would regret that the country escaped so sharply from its age of witch-burning and feudal futility."

What of Quebec and Ireland? They were subjugated by colonial conquest. They have a distinct economic and geographical identity - not of a fully-developed nation-state, obviously. They have a distinct language (in the case of Quebec), distinct religion and culture (for the majority, at least), distinct political institutions, and a militant history of national struggle.

National independence (and national unity in the case of Ireland) is an essential democratic demand on the road to clearly uniting the proletariat of those nations against their 'own' bourgeoisies.

In the Scottish case, separation would hinder the unity of the working class. In this consideration, and on no predication, that our policy is based.
Right direction?

If comrade Hargreaves wants an example from Canada, he would find a better analogy in Canadian nationalism (which is a strong feeling, directed against the USA), or in the separatist sentiments emerging in some Canadian provinces like British Columbia. Would he consider those to be "in the right direction" too?

Revolutionaries who argue against Scottish particularism, while conceding the general right to self-determination, are no more condemned to "complete impotence" than revolutionaries who likewise uphold an internationalist policy against strong popular feeling by saying that workers should not vote in the EEC referendum. (Though, if comrade Hargreaves is logical, he will conclude that the "no" vote, being nationalist, was also "in the right direction"). On the contrary, those would-be revolutionaries who argue (albeit with inexcusable "'nationalism'") for Scottish separatism are condemning themselves to be the outpass of reaction.