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reason in revolt

The 1707 Act of Union and the rise of the Scottish working class

"In the question of the self-determination of nations, as in every other question, we are interested, first and foremost, in the self-determination of the proletariat within a given nation...." VI Lenin

THE London establishment and the government and the British Labour Party are agitated by the fear that the Scottish Nationalist Party and others who want an independent Scotland will in the 2007 elections win a majority in the Scottish Parliament.

A sense of distinct Scottish identity has survived 300 years of union with England and the long Scottish equal partnership with England at the centre of the British empire. The setting up of a Scottish Parliament did not satisfy, placate or politically disarm Scottish nationalism. It has encouraged and stimulated it.

Whatever happens in 2007 the movement towards Scottish independence increasingly looks like it is becoming an irresistible force. The "Scottish breakaway" from England, Wales and Northern Ireland is now, it seems, a probability.

For international socialists the rise of Scottish nationalism raises important questions. Not new questions but old ones in a new form. Virtually all those in Scotland who consider themselves socialists are now for Scottish independence. Some are enthusiastically for it, while others go passively with the flow of a strong current. Others have convinced themselves that the attainment of "an independent Scottish Republic" is indistinguishable from a Scottish Workers' Republic, or at least the close prelude to it.

For international socialists the issues are on one level simple and straightforward: if a majority of the Scottish people want independence, then we will defend their right to have it, and if necessary their right to act to get it. Our first and central concern is that the unity forged over centuries of the Scottish and English, Welsh and Northern Irish labour movements should survive any secession of the Scottish state.

The great precedent is the attitude of the Swedish and Norwegian socialists to Norway's separation from Sweden in 1905. Lenin summed up the experience:

"The geographic, economic and language ties between Norway and Sweden are as intimate as those between the Great Russians and many other Slav nations. But the union between Norway and Sweden was not a voluntary one, ... Despite the very extensive autonomy which Norway enjoyed (she had her own parliament, etc.), there was constant friction between Norway and Sweden... [In 1905] the overwhelming majority... voted for complete separation from Sweden. After a short period of indecision, the Swedes resigned themselves to the fact of secession.

"This example shows us... the *form* secession sometimes assumes under conditions of political freedom and democracy.

"No [socialist] will deny — unless he would profess indifference to questions of political freedom and democracy (in which case he is naturally no longer a [socialist]) — that this example virtually proves that it is the *bounden duty* of class-conscious workers to conduct systematic propaganda and prepare the ground for the settlement of conflicts that may arise over the secession of nations, not in the [autocratic] "Russian way", but *only in the way* they were settled in 1905 between Norway and Sweden....

"What position did the Norwegian and Swedish proletariat take, and indeed had to take, in the conflict over secession? *After* [emphasis Lenin's] Norway seceded, the class-conscious workers of Norway would naturally have voted for a republic... The Norwegian proletariat had to oppose this aristocracy and support Norwegian peasant democracy.

Signing the Act of Union

And the Swedish proletariat?... "The Swedish Socialists would have betrayed the cause of socialism and democracy if... they had failed to demand, *not only* equality of nations in general... but also... Norway's freedom to secede.

"The close alliance between the Norwegian and Swedish workers, their complete fraternal class solidarity, *gained* from the Swedish workers' recognition of the right of the Norwegians to secede."

(V I Lenin: *The Right of Nations to Self-Determination*, early 1914)

Scotland was not an involuntary partner in making the union. Nor was it an oppressed nation in the 300 years union with England and Wales. It was a major partner and beneficiary in England's colonial and imperial enterprises.

As Stan Crooke demonstrates in this *Workers' Liberty*, it is myth rather than history that, in Robert Burns's song the Scottish people were "bought and sold for English gold" in making the union.

But if Scots now want independence then Scotland should have it and is entitled to the support of democrats throughout the rest of the present United Kingdom. What is not clear cut or straightforward and simple is what attitudes Scottish international socialists should take to the agitation for Scottish independence now, before there is a secure and stable majority for it.

A Scottish Republic would by definition for socialists and consistent democrats be a democratic step beyond the UK's constitutional monarchy. A small step that would simultaneously weaken the forces of republicanism in the present UK. In any case, this question of replacing Britain's constitutional monarchy with a plutocratic republic is for all practical considerations too small to be a decisive consideration with socialists.

The idea that an independent Scotland would be on the high road to a socialist Scotland is sheer delusion generated by those woolly-minded socialists who need pseudo-socialist mystification in order to justify their advocacy of Scottish independence.

The idea that the Scots are or were an oppressed people, tricked if not coerced into the union, is more ideologising fantasy, than "historical" fact — the fantasy of historical oppression that complements the fantasy that an independent Scotland will necessarily be socialist. International socialists have no tolerance for either of these fantasies. We believe it is our duty to hold to a true picture of UK-Scottish history and to a true picture of the road to socialism in Scotland — the education and organisation of the working class to fight for it.

Socialists must resist both narrow-minded petty-bourgeois and fantasy-addled "socialist" nationalism.

Scottish separatism has been stimulated by the end of the British Empire and by the immersion of the old UK in the EU. Paradoxically, the creation of a broader European federation of peoples has led, and not only in the UK, to the prising apart of the component parts of some old nation states — Italy for example — in which once divergent peoples had been bolted together and bound in a common state by the development of the capitalist national economy (and in Britain's case in the 300 years since 1707 also by the advantages for the UK including Scotland that came from the British Empire).

If there is to be a separation, then it is the duty of socialists to ensure that it is as radical and Republican a break as possible — that is takes the Scottish working class forward. We must insist against all the nationalists that the Scottish working class has no common interest with the Scottish bourgeoisie, be they for or against an independent Scotland. That it has more in the common with the English, Welsh and Northern Irish working class than with any Scots of other classes.

We publish this article by Stan Crooke as a contribution towards the work of demystifying Scottish and Scottish-English history.

Sean Matgamna

The Act of Union

Three hundred years ago, on 16 January 1707, the Scottish Parliament voted in favour of ratification of the Treaty of Union with England. On 28 April the Scottish Parliament was dissolved by proclamation. Three days later, with the opening of the first session of the new British Parliament, the state of Great Britain formally came into existence. Stan Crooke examines the background and the immediate results of the Act of Union.

"The most radical elements in the modern British labour movement are most often natives of Ireland or Scotland... Scotland entered on the capitalist path later than England: a sharper turn in the life of the masses of the people gave rise to a sharper political reaction." Trotsky 1925.

THE English and Scottish Crowns were united in 1603 with the death of England's Queen Elizabeth I and the accession of Scottish King James VI, to the English Crown as James I. Proposals then for some form of closer union between England and Scotland had come to nothing.

A major obstacle to union of the two kingdoms had been the unwillingness of the English bourgeoisie to allow Scottish merchants access to England's colonies in America.

Hostility towards Scottish Presbyterianism by English Anglican Tories had been another. English politicians also saw Scotland as a poor country with little or nothing to contribute in the event of union.

Yet by 1707 there were good reasons for the English ruling classes to go for union.

Since 1701 England had been fighting France in the War of the Spanish Succession, a conflict over which dynasty would inherit the territorial possessions the last Spanish Hapsburg king. A victory for France threatened England with the loss of its American colonies, the main source of the English bourgeoisie's mercantile wealth.

In 1688 the Catholic King James II of England (and James VII of Scotland) had been chased out in the "Glorious Revolution" which established Parliament's primacy in governing England and Scotland. he was succeeded by his Protestant daughter mary and her husband William of Orange (William II). They were succeeded by James Stuart's other daughter Anne, who had no living children. Who would be monarch after Anne?

The English government wanted to ensure that Queen Anne was succeeded by a member of the House of Hanover. This would prevent, or at least minimise, the danger of a Stuart restoration.

In 1701 France recognised the Catholic son of James II/VII as the rightful monarch of England, Scotland and Ireland. The English government feared a Jacobite (pro-James Stuart) uprising in Scotland, backed by French forces.

What was at stake, therefore, was the political and economic power of the English bourgeoisie. A Stuart restoration in conjunction with defeat by France could undo the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688 as well as depriving England of her colonies.

Since the Union of the Crowns a century earlier England had undergone a bourgeois revolution. Scotland's history over the same period, however, had been a very different one.

Early eighteenth-century Scotland was still essentially a feudal society. Whereas in England the attempts of James II/VII to establish a form of absolutist rule had been opposed — and, in the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688, defeated — because they threatened the interests of a post-feudal bourgeoisie, in Scotland they had met the same fate because they threatened the rights and privileges of a feudal nobility.

The Scottish nobles exercised their own jurisdictions: "regalities" in the case of the most important nobles, and baronies in the case of the lesser nobles. These courts were empowered to try most criminal offenses.

As Daniel Defoe, the English writer and government spy, wrote of such feudal powers, "they bound down Scotland to the private tyranny and oppression of the heritors and lairds."

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Another contemporary observer commented: "The barons have power not only in life and limb but in an absolute sense too... In fact, these lords of regality are sovereigns, not subjects."

The vassals of the feudal lords were required to carry out military service for their masters. Vassals were also obliged to carry out non-military services. Even craftsmen, such as weavers, shoemakers and millers, were subject to the feudal privileges of the nobles on whose estates they laboured.

By the early eighteenth century many nobles had fallen into economic difficulties. The estates of these nobles were the main source of the major Scottish exports: textiles, cattle, and, to a lesser extent, coal.

Linen was woven by tenants and paid to their feudal lords as a form of rent in kind. Black cattle were exported to England from estates in the Highlands and, much more so, from estates in the Lowlands. (In 1703 black cattle exports from the estates of just one Lowlands lord accounted for 40% of the value of all Scottish exports to England.) In Fife and the Lothians the estates of lesser nobles were the main sources of Scotland's exports of coal.

The contents of the proposed treaty triggered popular unrest. Demonstrations were staged outside Parliament House.

The feudal nature of Scottish society was reflected in the composition of the Scottish Parliament.

One hundred and fifty members of the Parliament were feudal nobles, members by birthright. Ninety members represented the counties. They, and their "electorate", consisted in the main of lesser nobles who also exercised feudal rights. The other 67 members represented the royal burghs: their "electorates" varied from 33 (in Edinburgh) to nine (in the smaller burghs).

There were "parties" in the Scottish Parliament. But they bore no resemblance to parties today, or even to the Tory and Whig parties which had emerged in the English Parliament by this time.

The main parties — the Court party and the Country party — were unstable alliances between different nobles. Their members regularly switched their allegiances in pursuit of personal gain and advancement — "disobliged courtiers and self-conceited men who could relish nothing but what was of their own contrivance", as one contemporary writer described them.

In the latter part of the seventeenth century the Scottish Parliament had taken steps designed to promote Scottish trade, banking, manufacturing, and imperial expansion. A small minority of nobles had begun to promote mining and industrial production on their estates. There had also been some improvements in Scottish agriculture, and market relations had begun to penetrate agriculture, in the south east in particular.

BUT despite such — modest — developments, late-feudal Scotland remained a poor country. Scotland consisted of a series of small local economies, rather than anything even beginning to approach an integrated national economy.

For every ton of Scottish shipping, England had a hundred tons.

Most money in circulation in Scotland was foreign.

Agriculture in Scotland was largely subsistence-based. Harvest failures could, and did, result in mass starvation. In the last decade of the seventeenth century between 5% and 15% of the Scottish population perished after a succession of harvest failures.

"Everyone may see death in the face of the poor that abound everywhere. Some die in the wayside, some drop down in the street, the poor sucking babs are starving from want of milk," wrote one contemporary.

At the close of the seventeenth century something over 5% of the Scottish population lived in towns, compared with over 18% in England. Only two towns in Scotland had populations exceeding 10,000.

Scotland's economic weaknesses were mirrored in — and reinforced by — its failures to emulate England in the sphere of imperial enterprise.

Settlers who claimed Cape Breton Island for Scotland in 1629 quickly surrendered to the French. An attempt to create a "new Scotland" in Nova Scotia collapsed in 1632, when the territory was ceded to the French.

But the weakness of manufacturing in Scotland meant that the would-be colonists had nothing to trade.

When a new session of the Scottish Parliament assembled in May of 1703, it did so at a time of a virtual crisis in Anglo-Scottish relations: policies pursued by the English Parliament and successive monarchs were condemned for having benefited the English ruling classes at the expense of their Scottish counterparts.

England imposed high customs duties on its principal imports from Scotland. The English Navigation Laws, which denied Scottish merchants access to England's American colonies, were being enforced with increasing vigour. England's wars with the Netherlands and France had damaged Scottish trade with continental Europe.

The response of the Scottish Parliament was to pass the Act of Security. Under the terms of the Act the Parliament would meet within twenty days of the death of Queen Anne and, in the absence of an heir apparent, choose a successor — who would not necessarily be the successor to Queen Anne chosen by England for England.

The Act of Security declared that the Union of the Crowns would be maintained only if "the freedom, frequency, and the power of parliament, and the religion, liberty and trade of the nation (free) from English or any foreign influence" were guaranteed in the course of the current monarch's rule.

A second Act gave the Scottish Parliament the right to declare war and make peace even if Scotland and England continued to have a single monarch after the death of Queen Anne.

The Court party had unsuccessfully opposed the Acts. But support for the two Acts was not the result of a unified opposition. Rather, it was the product of different, and often contradictory, political interests.

The Jacobites, who numbered about 70 in the Parliament, supported the Acts as a step towards blocking the Hanoverian succession and restoring the Stuarts. The first Act left open the question of who would succeed Queen Anne, while the second Act might eventually allow Scotland to conclude a separate peace with pro-Jacobite France.

A group around the baronial laird Fletcher of Saltoun saw the Acts as an assertion of parliamentary rights against royal control.

For the majority of the Country party the Acts were an attempt to secure more favourable terms for Scottish trade and commerce in exchange for support for the Hanoverian succession.

When the Scottish Parliament met again the following year, it re-affirmed the position taken in 1703. A composite motion declared that the Parliament would not "proceed to the nomination of a successor (to Queen Anne) until we have had a previous treaty with England in relation to our commerce and other concerns with that nation," and that the Parliament should also "rectify our constitution and vindicate and secure the sovereignty and independence of the kingdom."

The English Parliament saw the Acts in the same terms as the Jacobite members of the Scottish Parliament: a threat to the Hanoverian succession, and a threat to successful prosecution of the war against France.

In 1704, in response to the Scottish Parliament's Acts, the English Parliament passed an act which stated that unless the Scottish Parliament accepted the Hanoverian succession, then all Scots, apart from those already living in England, would be treated as aliens, all Scottish imports into England would be forbidden, and all estates held by Scots in England would be confiscated. This became known as the Alien Act. It was given Queen Anne's royal assent in February 1705.

The Act also proposed the appointment of commissioners to conduct negotiations about "a nearer and more complete union" between the two kingdoms.

Later the same year, the Scottish Parliament appointed commissioners to discuss a closer union with England.

The rationale behind the Parliament's decision to open negotiations differed from one party and faction to another. As had been the case in 1703, different factions had reached a common position for conflicting reasons.

In November, the English Parliament voted to repeal the sanctions threatened by the Alien Act.

NEGOTIATIONS about a union were back on the agenda. But now the Whigs who controlled the English Parliament, changed their position. Previously, their priority had been to secure the Hanoverian succession, while leaving the question of union to a later date. Now, however, they decided that union itself could resolve the question of the succession. But for that to be the case, the union would have to be a union of the two Parliaments.

The Scottish commissioners initially argued for a federal-type arrangement between Scotland and England, either because they supported this as an end in itself, or because they saw a federal relationship as a tactical step towards a later union of the Parliaments.

The English commissioners, however, were intent on a union of the Parliaments. As one of the Scottish commissioners later wrote: "For the English commissioners were positively resolved to treat of no kind of Union with us but what was to be incorporating and perpetual."

Three months later, in July of 1706, the English and Scottish commissioners reached agreement on the draft Articles of Union. Apart from securing the Hanoverian succession, by validating the English Act of Settlement, the 25 Articles covered Scottish representation in a single British Parliament, the preservation of the powers of the Scottish nobility and of other Scottish institutions, and, at greatest length, economic issues.

Scotland was to have 45 Members of Parliament, and 16 peers in the House of Lords, unrepresentative of the size of Scotland's population.

The Scottish legal system, including the authority and privileges of all Scottish courts and all Scottish laws which were not inconsistent with the terms of the treaty, was to be preserved. The rights and privileges of the royal burghs were also to be preserved, as too were the "heritable offices, heritable jurisdictions, offices for life and jurisdictions for life" of the nobility, whose other privileges would also include exemption from civil actions for debt.

Scottish merchants and traders were to enjoy freedom of trade with England and equal access to the English colonies ("...freedom and intercourse of trade and navigation ... for all the subjects of the United Kingdom of Great Britain").

Although payment of a share of the national debt was to be raised in Scotland — £398,085 and 10 shillings — exactly the same sum, the so-called "Equivalent", was to be paid out as compensation for this.

The contents of the proposed treaty, published in October, triggered popular unrest in Scotland. Demonstrations were staged outside of Parliament House. Presbyterian ministers denounced the proposals as a threat to the Kirk. Riots broke out in Edinburgh and became a daily event. In early November rioting also spread to Glasgow.

In Kirkudbright, Dumfries, and Stirling — all of which, like

Glasgow, were strongly Presbyterian in outlook — the text of the treaty was burnt at the town crosses. In Lanarkshire handbills were circulated calling on Presbyterians to prepare arms and provisions for a march on the Parliament in Edinburgh. Rumours circulated of an armed insurrection.

IN January of 1707, the Parliament voted by 110 to 67 to ratify the Treaty of Union. Three centuries later it is impossible to state with absolute certainty which factors led a majority of the Parliament's members to vote in favour of the Union.

Bribery was not a determining factor. Burns' portrayal of the Union as something "wrought by a coward few, for hireling traitors' wages ... we're bought and sold for English gold — such a parcel of rogues in a nation" might make for good poetry. But it makes bad history.

The "English gold" referred to by Burns was the £20,000 sent to Scotland from the English Treasury in the autumn of 1706. The money was used to pay off debts to nobles on the Scottish civil list. But paying off those debts was also clearly intended to influence the outcome of the eventual vote on the Union.

In the event, the payments changed the voting intentions of, at most, only a handful of members of the Parliament. The bulk of the money, £12,325, for example, was paid to the Duke of Queensberry, the leader of the Court party. But he had always been a supporter of a union anyway. Other payments also went to long-standing supporters of a union. And, by the standards of the time, what today would count as bribery was then simply a commonplace practice.

If the Union could be explained in terms of bribery, why did it not occur on earlier occasions? Bribes were surely no less available, and Scottish nobles no less corrupt, in earlier years than in 1707. Nor does bribing a Scottish noble appear to have necessarily been a particularly expensive affair: five of the bribes paid out were less than the sum paid to the messenger who carried the treaty from Scotland to England.

In any case, "English gold" was not the only currency of bribery in early eighteenth-century Scotland. When the Duke of Hamilton, who had looked to the French court to support his claim to the Scottish crown, met with the French spy Hooke in 1705, he asked for — and, according to contemporaries, obtained and used — money from France in an attempt to bribe members of the Parliament.

THE risk of an English invasion was no more significant than bribery in determining the outcome of the Scottish Parliament's vote on the Treaty of Union. It is certainly the case that while the Scottish Parliament was discussing the draft Treaty of Union, England moved troops to the Border region and to the north of Ireland. How serious the intentions were behind these troop movements is a separate question.

War in Scotland would have undermined the all-important war on the continent. The Duke of Marlborough, the commander of the English forces, had consistently advocated a union rather than a war with Scotland — not least because of the potential impact of such a war on the 10,000 Scottish troops under his command. Nor was Marlborough's a lone voice in wanting to avoid the use of force. Queen Anne was of the same opinion.

If bribery and troop movements were not significant factors in deciding the outcome of the Scottish Parliament's vote on the Treaty of Union, the prospect of access to English colonies and the abolition of duties on Scottish exports to England certainly was a major influence, albeit not the sole influence.

High tariff barriers — erected not just by England, but by all European states — stifled the market for the little which Scotland had to offer by way of exports.

Union with England offered a chance to escape from this dilemma. "The only popular topic produced for rendering it (the Union) palatable was the great advantage that must accrue to Scotland from the communication of trade," as one writer put it.

The author of the pamphlet *Honey Lies in the Trade* likewise explained that the Union "may bring us into the way and knowledge of these places and things which they (the English) have laboured to conceal from us. And having once got a foot, we may possibly screw into the bowels of the hive."

The attraction of screwing into the bowels of the hive was also highlighted by supporters of the Union during debates in the Scottish Parliament: "This nation being poor and without force to protect it, its commerce cannot reap great advantages by it, till it partake of the trade and protection of some powerful neighbour nation, that can communicate both these. By this union we will have access to all the advantages in commerce the English enjoy."

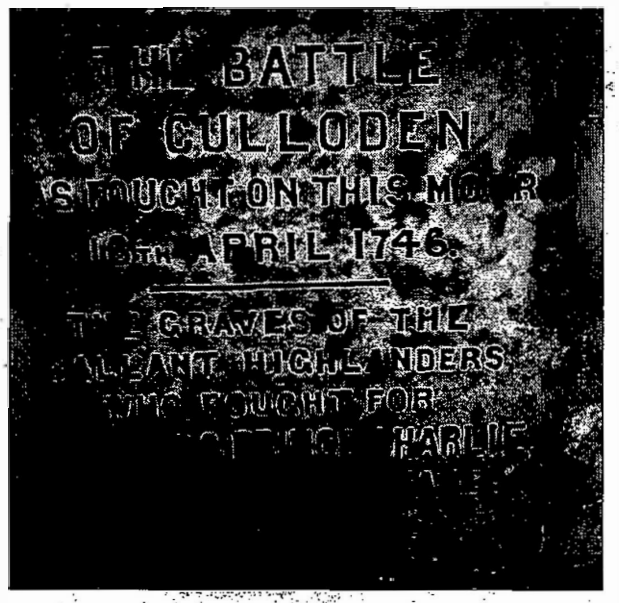
Article IV of the Treaty of Union provided for freedom of trade. When the Scottish Parliament voted on the Article — in its debates on the Treaty of Union the Parliament discussed and voted on each Article separately — it passed by an overwhelming 156 votes to 19. The size of the majority underlined the extent to which "communication of trade" acted as an incentive to support the Treaty of Union.

No less important in securing assent to the Union were guarantees, or apparent guarantees, contained in other Articles that the class structure and institutions of Scottish society — with the obvious exception of the Scottish Parliament itself — would be preserved by the Union: the superiorities and privileges of the nobility, the rights and privileges of the royal burghs, and the existence of a separate Scottish legal system.

Given the domination of the Scottish Parliament by greater and lesser feudal nobles, the preservation of feudal superiorities was a matter of no small significance. The stated guarantees undermined attempts by the Union's opponents to persuade members of the Parliament that the Union would result in the demise of Scotland's feudal nobility.

Fear of higher taxation had been one of the driving forces behind the popular unrest triggered by publication of the draft Treaty of Union in October of 1706: taxes in Scotland were lower, and less efficiently collected, than was the case in England. But subsequent amendments to Articles concerning taxation in the draft treaty protected, for longer or shorter periods, basic commodities from English levels of taxation.

Of arguably greater importance than the amendments made to



the draft treaty in response to concerns about higher levels of taxation were the steps taken to defuse the far more militant and widespread opposition to the Union on religious grounds.

Church of Scotland (which was Presbyterian while the Episcopalian Church of England was Anglican) ministers played a central role in the wave of unrest which had followed publication of the draft treaty. The proposed Union guaranteed the Scottish legal system but made no mention of the position of the Church of Scotland. The Kirk feared that the Union would lead to the re-introduction of bishops into church government, and to the imposition of ministers on local congregations.

In negotiating the draft treaty the Scottish commissioners, as one of them later wrote, had wanted to "make the Presbyterian government and its security the basis of any Union between the two nations." But the final draft omitted any guarantee of the Presbyterian settlement at the insistence of the English commissioners: they feared a Tory backlash in the English Parliament in the event of such a guarantee.

The response of the Scottish Parliament, in November of 1706, was to rush through the Act for Securing the Protestant Religion and Presbyterian Church Government in November. The Act confirmed "the said true Protestant religion, and the worship, discipline and government of this Church (i.e. the Church of Scotland) to continue without any alteration to the people of this land in all succeeding generations."

WHATEVER the precise calculations in the minds of those members of the Scottish Parliament who voted to ratify the Treaty of Union, it is credible to assume that the combination of free trade, guarantees of feudal privileges, recognition of Presbyterian church government, concessions on tax issues, and the allocation of the "Equivalent" sufficed to bring about a majority.

In addition, there was the question of what, if any, was the alternative to acceptance of the Union.

Economically, the likely alternative was further economic stagnation.

Politically, given that the Treaty of Union incorporated confirmation of the Hanoverian succession, the likely alternative was a French-backed attempt by Jacobites to restore the Stuarts to the Scottish throne, bringing civil war in Scotland. Inevitably, England would also be drawn into such a conflict.

A restored Stuart monarchy would take revenge on those sections of the Scottish nobility who had supported the ousting of James II/VII, and also attack Presbyterian church government in Scotland. Alternatively, a victory for England would result in a union anyway — but only after war in Scotland, and on far less favourable terms.

(Pro-Union pamphleteers made great play of the risk — and it was a real risk — of a Stuart restoration if Union with England were rejected: "Men are known by their friends. All the Jacobites are in league with you (opponents of the Union), the Papists are on your right hand, the Prelatists on your left, and the French at your back. ... On what account do these people join with you?")

Although a majority of the Scottish Parliament concluded that their class interests were best served by ratification of the Treaty of Union, some sections of the Scottish ruling classes, as well as other social forces in Scotland, drew a very different conclusion. But they did so on the basis of contradictory considerations.

Jacobites opposed the Union for the obvious reason that it implied a Hanoverian monarch in Scotland.

And of course free trade cut both ways. It was for England as well as Scotland. Scotland was therefore at risk of being overrun by cheaper English commodities and raw materials.

Anti-Union pamphleteers pointed to the threat which free trade might pose to Scottish manufacturing: "Scotland may then bid farewell to the woollen, stuff, stocken, and many other manufactures, especially now in so hopeful a way of thriving among them... All hope of erecting new manufacturies must be lost."

The Glasgow merchant elite was hostile to the Union for a different reason: free trade would lead to the stationing of customs officers in Glasgow, putting at risk the profits accumulated from illegally smuggling tobacco from the American colonies.

Individually, none of these strands of opposition carried enough social weight to frustrate the Union. Nor could they act together in an attempt to secure their common goal: their motivations for opposition to the Union, and their alternatives to the Union, were not only inconsistent but also often mutually exclusive.

THE Treaty of Union formally came into effect on 1st May 1707. According to Adam Smith, writing in later years, "the immediate effect (of the Union) was to hurt the interest of every single order of men in the country."

This was not entirely accurate. Even in the short term, some nobles and merchants profited handsomely from the Union.

Grain and oatmeal exports doubled in the decade and a half following the Union. Commercially oriented cattle-rearing increased, in order to take advantage of easier access to an expanding English market. And, by 1730, Glasgow merchants, having overcome the problem of having to pay duty on their imports, had trebled the volume of their tobacco imports from the Americas.

But while some "orders of men in the country" quickly profited from the Union, other, lesser, orders paid the price for those profits, as well as suffering under the imposition of higher taxes.

The doubling of grain exports to the new markets opened by the Union resulted in severe food shortages in the Lowlands: grain crops were being exported instead of being supplied to local markets. A wave of food riots broke out in 1720. The level of unrest in the Lowlands was greater than in the whole of Scotland during any of the post-Union Jacobite uprisings.

In Galloway the spread of cattle-rearing had similar consequences: tenants were dispossessed in order to make way for enclosures. In 1724/25 the region was swept by the most serious rural unrest — the Levellers' Revolt — anywhere in Scotland in the entire century. Hundreds of armed men tore down the walls of cattle enclosures, mutilated cattle, and fought pitched battles with troops. The revolt lasted for some six months.

The imposition of new taxes and of higher levels of taxation — despite, or even in breach of, amendments to the Treaty of Union during debates in the Scottish Parliament — also provoked widespread unrest in the immediate post-Union years.

From the point of view of the English ruling classes, the Treaty of Union was only partially successful. France failed to secure its aim of territorial expansion in the War of the Spanish Succession. And after Queen Anne's death in 1714 the crown was transferred to the House of Hanover. But the Union failed to eliminate the threat of Jacobitism.

On the contrary, there were attempted Jacobite uprisings of varying degrees of seriousness in 1708, 1715, 1719 and 1745. And it was the Treaty of Union itself which had helped make possible those uprisings.

The social basis of Jacobitism in Scotland was a section of the feudal nobility based predominantly, but not exclusively, in the Highlands. The source of their power lay not in their wealth but in the feudal superiorities and privileges which had been preserved by the Treaty of Union.

They constituted a survival of feudalism in a state increasingly based on capitalist relations of production. Because their exercise of feudal powers, together with the support which they continued to receive from France, allowed them to remain a significant social force.

Eradication of the continuing Jacobite threat was therefore inseparable from abolition of the Scottish feudal superiorities which the Treaty of Union itself had allowed to be carried over into the new British state.

But it was only in 1747 that these superiorities were abolished: following the defeat of the Jacobite forces at Culloden Moor in 1745 Parliament passed the Act for Taking Away and Abolishing the Heritable Jurisdictions in That Part of Great Britain Called Scotland ...and for Rendering the Union of the Two Kingdoms More Complete.

From the point of view of the Scottish ruling classes, the results of the Union were more complex.

On the one hand, at least in the short term, the Treaty of Union preserved their feudal powers. On the other hand the existence of those powers was incompatible with the expansion of capitalist methods of production triggered, albeit only from the middle of the eighteenth century onwards, by the Scottish economy's integration into that of the newly created British state.

The wealthiest faction of the feudal nobility was able to benefit from the emergence of a Scottish capitalist economy. The remainder looked — unsuccessfully — to Jacobitism and France to preserve their feudal privileges. Culloden and the legislation of 1747 sealed their fate. In that sense, pre-Union warnings in the Scottish Parliament that Union would lead to the nobility being "divested of their followers and vassalages" had been proved correct.

Paradoxically, the main beneficiary of the Union in Scotland was a social force which had played little role in bringing it about: the Scottish bourgeoisie.

Unlike in England, there had been no victorious bourgeois revolution in Scotland in the seventeenth century. In the opening years of the following century the embryonic Scottish bourgeoisie was economically and politically weak, and sceptical about a union with England.

Its economic weakness was reflected in the overall weakness of the Scottish economy. Its political weakness was reflected in the domination of Scotland and its Parliament by a feudal nobility. And its scepticism about a union flowed out of fears that Scottish manufacturing would not survive a post-union flood of cheaper and better-quality English imports.

In the event, however, from the 1750s onwards the Union resulted in a rapid capitalist transformation of the Scottish economy: a process which, in England, had required nearly two centuries was concentrated into a period of decades in Scotland. Inevitably, the class which emerged as the dominant class from that capitalist transformation was the Scottish bourgeoisie.

The Scottish bourgeoisie did not rise to the level of a ruling class in an independent Scotland. Just as the Scottish economy had been gradually integrated into a single British economy in the aftermath of 1707, so too the Scottish bourgeoisie had become part of a single British ruling class. In later years the same forces which had created a single British ruling class would also lead to the emergence of a British-wide workers' movement."THE most radical elements in the modern British labour movement are most often natives of Ireland or Scotland. Scotland entered on the capitalist path later than England: a sharper turn in the life of the masses of the people gave rise to a sharper political reaction," wrote Trotsky in 1925.

Scotland "entered on the capitalist path" not only later than England, but also much more rapidly.

Scotland after 1707

SCOTLAND "entered on the capitalist path" not only, as Trotsky wrote, later than England, but also much more rapidly.

Inside a common state with far more advanced England, Scotland from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, underwent in a matter of decades an economic transformation which, in England, had stretched over nearly two centuries. Around the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the rate of capitalist development intensified still further.

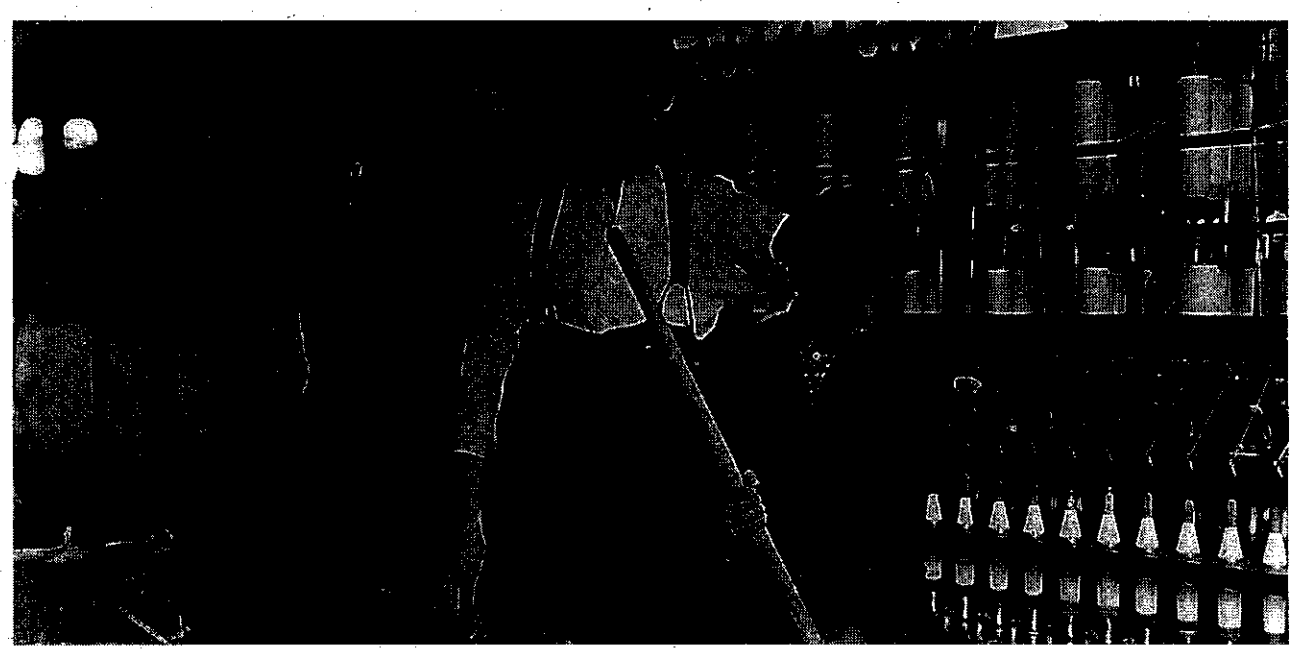
The textiles industry, which employed almost 90% of the total manufacturing workforce by the 1820s, was the motor of economic transformation. Between 1740 and 1780 linen output increased fourfold. Between 1778 and 1810 the number of cotton mills increased from two to 110. Between 1790 and 1830 investment in wool spinning mills increased from £3,000 to £170,000.

There was rapid growth in other areas of the Scottish economy as well. Between 1740 and 1800 the number of paper mills trebled, with the bulk of the growth in the 1780s. Iron-making capacity increased from 4,000 tons in 1780 to 32,000 tons in the early 1800s. By 1800 over 13% of British coal was mined in Scotland.

Between 1785 and 1835 Scottish exports increased ninefold. By around 1850 Scotland had become more industrialised than the rest of Britain: over 43% of the Scottish workforce was employed in manufacturing, compared with 41% in England.

Over the same period Scotland experienced the most rapid rate of urbanisation in Europe. Between 1750 and 1820 the population of the five largest towns in Scotland increased by 300% or more. Glasgow's population increased by more than 400%. By the end of the eighteenth century Scotland had become the fourth most urbanised region in Europe. By 1850 it had become the second most urbanised region.

The majority of workers employed in manufacturing were women and children. In the early 1800s nearly two thirds of manufacturing workers were women, youths, and children as young as six. Children accounted for 84% of the workforce in Renfrewshire's cotton mills in 1809, and for 36% of the workforce in Glasgow's cotton mills in 1833.



Nineteenth century cotton factory: some of the first unions were set up by textile workers

Embryonic trade unions

RAPID economic growth was accompanied, and made possible, by the imposition of new working patterns in the workplace. By the 1830s millworkers typically worked twelve hours a day, six days a week, 306 days per year. Labour discipline was imposed by way of fines, productivity-based rates of pay, detailed contracts of employment, and even physical punishment.

Capitalist economic transformation led to the breakdown of traditional craft corporations. Journeymen and masters increasingly clashed in disputes over pay, working hours and changing workplace practices.

In the early decades of the eighteenth century journeymen began to form their own organisations, albeit mainly in the form of mutual aid societies for welfare and benefits purposes. But combinations for other purposes, mainly to act in defence of rates of pay and working practices, also began to emerge.

These new combinations represented a transitional form of labour organisation: they combined pre-industrial traditions, such as membership oaths and rituals, with what later became the more typical forms of trade union organisation and struggle. Even as late as the 1830s, for example, the United Joiners of Glasgow and other unions still had their own initiation ceremonies and passwords.

Timescales varied from one trade to another. Combinations frequently collapsed in periods of economic slump or were broken by employers' opposition. But in the course of the latter half of the eighteenth century an early form of trade unionism and trade union struggle began to establish itself in Scotland.

Woolcombers' combinations, for example, existed in the north-east of Scotland from the 1740s onwards. "Caballs or societys" were condemned by Aberdeen woollen manufacturers in 1762 for pushing up rates of pay and for encouraging their members to become "lazy and indolent and indifferent about their work."

As in England, Scottish tailors were amongst the first trades to organise. Edinburgh tailors were involved in a series of disputes between 1757 and 1761. A more significant tailors' strike, in 1767, spread to the building trades and shoemakers.

In 1746 Glasgow wrights and masons went on strike to demand a reduction of an hour in their fourteen-hour working day. Employers described their demand as "a species of oppression."

Handloom weavers in the West of Scotland took strike action in defence of rates of pay in the 1750s and 1760s. In 1787 Glasgow weavers responded to falling wages and higher food prices with a city-wide strike, a 7,000 strong rally, and attempts to form a region-wide combination.

By the beginning of the 1800s Scottish cotton spinners were being accused by employers of having formed combinations in order to "raise the prices of labour, and in other respects to bring the masters under the control of the leaders of the combinations in the prosecution of their business."

The spinners had "formed a union for the protection of their trade and ... from time to time have annoyed their employers with vexatious interferences and restrictions, which have induced a great desire on the part of the masters to be able to dispense with their employment."

The first decade of the nineteenth century also saw a Scottish-wide strike by paper workers, a series of strikes by calico-printers in defence of working conditions, and, in 1808, the founding of the General Association of Operative Weavers in Scotland. Their strike in 1812 marked the beginning of more than a decade of intense class struggle in Scotland.

Against attempts to cut pay by dismantling piece-rate structures, the weavers appealed to local Justices of the Peace under a statute of 1661 which empowered JPs to set wages and determine the length and conditions of employment.

The JPs, and also the Court of Session, found in favour of the weavers.

When the employers refused to implement their verdict, 40,000 weavers went on strike over a period of three months. Although the strike's centre was in the west, where the Glasgow weavers' strike lasted seven weeks, it was a Scottish-wide strike.

The strike leaders were arrested. The courts banned the General Association as an illegal combination. (Scottish law had recognised the legal identity of associations.)

Fourteen of the strike leaders were subsequently imprisoned for the 'crime' of combination. And, in the hope of preventing similar disputes in the future, the statute of 1661 was repealed by Parliament.

Further working-class unrest was triggered by increased unemployment after the end of the Napoleonic Wars, by higher food prices as a result of the introduction of the Corn Laws in 1815 and higher taxes on basic commodities after the abolition of wartime income tax.

Economic slumps in 1816/17 and 1819/20 made the situation even worse. Unemployment rose to 50% is some areas. In one trade after another employers imposed wage cuts. Between 1815 and 1819 real wages in Glasgow fell by an average of 10%, while the wages of Glasgow weavers fell by 50% between 1815 and 1818.

Working-class industrial unrest was now combined with increasingly radical political demands: one of the lessons drawn from the weavers' defeat of 1812 was the need to challenge state authorities as well as employers.

Speakers at protest rallies in Glasgow, attended by up to 40,000 people, demanded annual parliaments, universal suffrage, funding for emigration, implementation of the Poor Law, the abolition of pensions and sinecures, and an end to the Corn Laws, high taxes, and to the illegality of combinations.

Violent disturbances became increasingly common in the major towns. Merchants' shops and houses were attacked and looted. Initially peaceful meetings resulted in riots, sometimes lasting several days. Mills in particular were attacked and set on fire.

The various forces of law and order — troops, yeomanry and special constables — were abused and attacked as soon as they appeared. Orders by magistrates banning demonstrations and the carrying of banners and placards were ignored.

The "Radical War"

OATH-BOUND secret societies, organised along the lines of the United Scotsmen of the 1790s, were founded in the weaving districts of Glasgow. Links were established with secret societies in other towns in the Lowlands. The societies stockpiled weapons and organised military drilling for their members.

"Union societies" were founded. Their initial goal was to organise a boycott of goods on which high duties were levied. This would bring down government revenue and, thereby, the government itself.

But increased government repression after the Manchester Peterloo Massacre of 1819 resulted in the transformation of these "union societies" into underground cells committed to overthrowing the government.

The climax of this unrest came with the "Radical War" in the first week of April 1820.

Posters appeared in Ayr, Dumbarton, Glasgow and Renfrew proclaiming the creation of a Scottish provisional government. The "Address to the Inhabitants of Great Britain and Ireland" called on the army to transfer their loyalties from despotism to freedom, and on workers to strike until their rights as free men had been recovered. The address also proclaimed an imminent armed uprising in Scotland and England.

Sixty-thousand workers – mainly weavers and cotton spinners, but also coalminers, machine-makers and foundry workers — struck in and around Glasgow in the first general strike in history. "Almost the whole population of the working classes have obeyed the orders contained in the treasonable proclamation by striking work," wrote the Lord Provost of Glasgow to the Home Office.

Participation in the planned armed uprising, however, involved no more than about 150 weavers and was easily put down. Eighty of the participants were arrested, three were hanged, and sixteen were sentenced to transportation.

The Radical War and the preceding social unrest marked the emergence of the working class as an organised social force in Scotland, and one which, in however a rudimentary form, had already employed the highest forms of class struggle: a general strike and an attempt at armed insurrection.

As Trotsky was to write a century later: "A sharper turn in the life of the masses of the people (had given) rise to a sharper political reaction."

In the face of a continuing employers' offensive over pay and workplace discipline, industrial unrest continued into the 1820s and early 1830s. As the "Glasgow Courier" reported in 1824: "A spirit of opposition to the authority of their masters has sprung up amongst our manufacturing population."

Throughout the 1820s cotton spinners struck for higher pay and in opposition to new forms of labour discipline. Weavers staged a series of strikes over pay in the first half of the 1820s. In the mid-1820s tailors, building workers and calico-printers took part in strike action for higher pay.

Strikes by coalminers in 1824-26 against new working practices were likened by hostile contemporaries to "the worst days of the French Revolution". A further succession of strikes in the early 1830s involved engineers, calico-printers and flax-hecklers.

Backed up by a series of hostile court rulings, employers victimised strikers and used scab labour to break strikes. Strike leaders suffered arrest, imprisonment and transportation. Some of the most powerful unions were effectively destroyed.

After the defeat of their strike in 1824 tailors remained unorganised for the next four decades. The building workers' strikes of the 1820s were likewise defeated. By 1830 rates of pay in the building trade were lower than they had been in 1790.

The weavers' union collapsed in 1829, following the arrest of its leaders after an unsuccessful strike in 1825. It re-emerged in 1832, but in a much weakened form. The miners' strikes of 1824-26 were also defeated. Although the Scottish-wide General Union of Operative Colliers was re-established in 1835, it had already collapsed again by 1837.

Most seriously of all, the cotton spinners were defeated in a major confrontation with employers in 1837. The dispute was a violent one, and the spinners' leaders were arrested and stood trial for murder and conspiracy. Five of them were sentenced to transportation after having been found guilty of lesser charges.

As one unsympathetic contemporary described the situation of unions in the late 1830s: "Of late trade unions have been much in vogue, many of them having rules and practices surpassing the closest corporations, and outvieing the fiercest tyranny of the darkest ages. And it is strange that although these unions have in most of the trades been successively overthrown, still new unions urge the hopeless combat."