

After the Referendum: Scotland

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On the morning after the results of the referendum were announced, press headlines informed us "The Assembly is dead, killed by Scots themselves who wrote it off yesterday as irrelevant to their immediate needs". Is this conclusion in accordance with the fact? Can the historic demand for a Scottish Parliament be written off so easily? Will the national question in Britain disappear so quietly? The new turn in events following the referendum on March 1st has already given rise to a renewal of the debate on Scotland's political future. A majority of the electors who turned out in really atrocious weather on March 1st voted Yes. Out of a total electorate of 3,747,112 in Scotland, 1,230,937 voted Yes; 1,153,502 voted No, a majority of 77,435 in favour of the provisions of the Scotland Act being put into effect.

The hopes of the anti-devolutionists that the ideas of an assembly are dead because 40 per cent of the electors did not vote yes is contrary to all the experiences in the long history of the struggles for greater opportunities to express their mutual economic and political aspirations by an extension of more democratic forms by the Scottish people.

Historical Background

The union of the Scottish and English Parliaments in 1707 was almost immediately followed throughout the succeeding period by demands for more powers to be restored to Scotland to enable the Scots to determine for themselves their economic and social well-being. The Jacobite rebellions of 1715 and 1745 were a manifestation of this desire. When the post of Scottish Secretary which had been abolished in the rebellion was restored in 1885, it was the first move to appease the criticism that not enough consideration was being given to Scotland's affairs. A further move was made in 1906 when the Scottish Grand Committee was set up at Westminster. This allowed the Scottish MPs to consider purely Scottish Parliamentary Bills before they were submitted for approval by the House of Commons and the House of Lords. Respective governments made sure that they had a majority on the Scottish Grand Committee even if they had to add a number of English MPs in order to do so. Another concession was made to Scottish opinion in 1926. The Scottish Secretary was given cabinet status. Since then various administrative boards in Scotland have gradually come under the Scottish Office. The Scottish Secretary has five junior ministers under

him with functions as Scottish Home Secretary, Minister for Health, Education, Housing, Agriculture, Fisheries, Roads, Water, Electricity, Local Government and Planning. A new administrative centre was built in Edinburgh in 1939 at St. Andrews House. This has become the administrative headquarters of the Scottish Office and necessitated the establishment of a Scottish civil service. All these concessions to Scotland's needs created a more urgent need to end the bottlenecks in Scottish affairs at Westminster. They strengthened the need and stimulated the desire for the opportunity to discuss all these administrative affairs in Scotland and take the decision-making out of the hands of civil servants. The sense in having a legislative body to deal with all the functions for which the Secretary of State for Scotland was responsible is becoming clearer to more people. The opposition to this development by the Conservatives and the CBI is in itself proof that such an extension of democracy would be good for the working people of Scotland.

With the deepening of the crisis of capitalism following the first world war, the demand for more devolved powers for Scotland began to take on a mass character. In the early 20s the Scottish TUC was affiliated to the Scottish Home Rule Society. A number of nationalist organisations were formed whose aim in the main was to campaign within the existing parties and organisations in Scotland to win Home Rule. It was out of a combination of those nationalist campaigning parties that the Scottish National Party was born. During the second world war there was a short-lived victory for the Nationalists when Dr. McIntyre was returned in Motherwell in a by-election but lost it in the same year when the first post-war election was held in 1945.

Kilbrandon

The first real victory for the SNP was in 1967 when Mrs. Winifred Ewing won the safe Labour seat in Hamilton. This had a dramatic effect on the major political parties. The following year, Edward Heath, then Conservative leader, proposed a Scottish Convention. Following this the Tory Party Conference in Perth set up a committee, chaired by Sir Alec Douglas Home, to study devolution. In 1969 the Labour government set up a Royal Commission on the Constitution with Lord Crowther Hunt and on his death, Lord Kilbrandon as chairman. The Kilbrandon Report was submitted to Parliament in October 1973.

Prior to and immediately following the publication of the Kilbrandon Report there were intense discussions in all the political parties which had submitted written and oral evidence to the Commission. The Commission examined three forms of self-government: (1) independence, (2) federalism, (3) devolution. It recommended in the conditions of the UK that there should be devolved government with elected assemblies for Scotland and Wales, the Scottish Assembly to have powers to legislate on all devolved matters, the Welsh Assembly to have purely administrative powers on all the matters devolved to it. The positions of the respective parties at the time the report was issued were: the Labour Party was opposed to a separate Scottish Parliament, the Tories were opposed to any form of devolution, the Liberals were for federalism and the Nationalists for independence.

The Communist Party has declared its position as in favour of a Scottish Parliament within a United Kingdom in a number of documents agreed at previous Congresses in Scotland. The 31st National Congress of the Party in November 1969 came nearest to the final recommendations of the Kilbrandon Report than any of the other parties. In the resolution "The National Future of Scotland and Wales", moved by Hugh Wyper it stated, "The best form of relationship in the interests of the English, Welsh and Scottish people will need to be democratically discussed and reviewed in the light of experience. Whether or not a separate English Parliament or some alternative form for the handling of specifically English affairs in the central Parliament will be found most advantageous, it is clear that profound democratic and socialist changes are needed to make the parliamentary system in Britain serve the interests of the people. It is also to the advantage of the three peoples to continue their united struggle for such reforms. To fulfil their purpose the Scottish and Welsh Parliaments must be real extensions of the democratic power of the peoples. They should be single chamber assemblies, directly elected by proportional representation. They will require powers to deal with Scottish and Welsh affairs in the fields of trade, industry, industrial legislation, fuel and power, transport (land, sea and air), water supply and use, land, agriculture, fisheries, forestry, food, scientific research, all social services including housing, town planning, health, education, social insurance and social security, radio and television. Their administrative apparatus should include all necessary ministries and departments, headed by an executive body of government responsible to the Scottish or Welsh Parliament, and with a guaranteed basis of finance and tax-raising powers.

The setting up of Scottish and Welsh Parliaments will not of itself solve the economic and social

problems faced by their peoples. The basic obstacle, both to their democratic rights and to effective power over the economy, is the grip of the powerful British and international monopolies which dominate the industry, finance, land, town planning and press of Scotland and Wales as of the whole of Britain.

After the 1974 Elections

The advance of the nationalist feeling in Scotland was reflected in the February 1974 General Election. The SNP won seven seats with an increased vote throughout Scotland equal to 21 per cent of the total vote. The Labour government responded by publishing a White Paper in September adopting the Kilbrandon framework with the commitment to a real measure of economic power. The Labour Party Manifesto for the October General Election promised a legislative Assembly for Scotland and an Administrative Assembly for Wales. The election resulted in further gains for the SNP who won more than 30 per cent of the total Scottish poll. Scotland's representation to Westminster as a result of the election was: Labour 41 seats, Conservatives 16 seats, SNP 11 seats, Liberals 3 seats.

It has to be noted that in 36 of the Labour held seats, the SNP came second, a real challenging position. It was obvious at that time that the labour movement lost the initiative in the campaign for more legislative powers for Scotland. The government issued another White Paper, *Our Changing Democracy*. In 1975 John Gollan's analysis of Labour's position was published in the *Morning Star* (2.12.75). He stated "The central weakness of the government's approach is that it concedes as little as possible and creates the maximum difficulties. Why is this? Because, all along the grudging, faltering government approach has been the product of political opportunism, belated reaction to nationalist electoral advance, instead of principle.

Devolution is a just national and democratic demand that should be supported in principle. That should be the approach of the British labour movement. This was its attitude between the wars. It should never have abandoned that position. One need only look at Ireland to see the tragedy that arises if Labour neglects the national problem".

Scotland and Wales Bills

When the Scotland/Wales Bill was introduced in 1976 I expressed the view of the Scottish Committee of the Communist Party in the *Morning Star* (15.12.76). "The political and economic conditions that exist today differ radically from those of 269 years ago. Consequently, the form of the relations which have been developing over those years between the Scottish, English and Welsh people have changed too. In this setting, Communists do not

argue for separation. This is not because we regard Scotland as a poor country in relation to a richer neighbour, nor that it could not stand on its own less effectively than other small European nations. We support devolution, a Scottish Parliament within a united Britain as the correct form of relationship between the peoples of the three nations involved." The principled position the Communist Party has maintained will be continued in all the developments that will arise following the referendum. When the Scotland/Wales Bill had to be withdrawn in February 1977 when the government was defeated by 312 votes to 283 in an attempt to impose a timetable the Communist Party, the TUC and the broad labour movement kept up the pressure that brought about the introduction of the Scotland Bill and the Wales Bill in the parliamentary session that started in November 1977. In spite of all the deliberate sabotage of the anti-devolutionists who thought the death-knell of the Scottish Assembly was sounded in February 1977, the two Bills, somewhat battered and torn, finally reached the stage where they became Acts of Parliament.

In the Bill's passage through Parliament on January 25th, 1978, the so-called Cunningham amendment was inserted into the Scotland Bill and subsequently into the Welsh Bill, that if it appears to the Secretary of State that less than 40 per cent of those entitled to vote have voted Yes, or that a majority have voted No, he must lay before Parliament the draft of an Order in Council for the repeal of the Act. Parliament must then decide what to do. The referendum therefore was consultative only. Even if more than 40 per cent had voted Yes, no provision of the Act would have come into effect until the Secretary of State laid an Order before Parliament and it was approved by resolutions in each House. Unsure of carrying a majority in the House of Commons the government funkled the issue and instead of insisting that the Secretary of State place the order before the two Houses, that the provisions of the Scotland Act be made effective and putting on a three-line whip to force the Labour anti-devolutionists to carry out their election pledges, Premier Callaghan manoeuvred with disastrous consequences.

The Circumstances

At this stage in our examination of the events that led up to the disappointing vote on March 1st, we have to apply ourselves to the objective conditions as well as the subjective. It was a Labour government Bill. The referendum was held in the midst of intense dissatisfaction with government policies on incomes and its drastic cuts in the social and health services. In order to keep up their standards of living the petrol drivers and the road haulage men had to defy the government's deter-

mination to keep wages increases to 5 per cent. Although the consequences of those strikes did not reach the disastrous effects predicted by ministers and the media, there was sufficient inconvenience caused to create considerable concern on the part of many of the electors. The actions of the petrol delivery drivers in a period when Scotland shivered, when schools closed and major frost damage occurred due to lack of heating, the government was not popular. The shortages of certain goods in the shops due to the lorry drivers' dispute aggravated the position. The "Low Pay No Way" was at its height in the period leading up to March 1st and Labour's popularity was at a very low ebb. By comparison with the first months of 1978 there was a marked drop in the enthusiasm for devolution partly due to the objective factors described above, but also due to the inactivity of Labour's Yes campaign in comparison to the initiative of the No campaign.

The Campaign

The No campaign was highly effective. It began very early while the Labour Yes campaign held back in order not to bore the electors with too much propaganda about devolution. A major factor was also the decision of the Labour Party not to join with the other Yes forces. This confused many Labour supporters and led to a situation where the enthusiasm, mobilisation and main activity for an Assembly was in the broad Yes campaigns, and the Labour Party's so-called "independent" campaign was a half-hearted affair. In this setting, the No campaign was that much more effective. The No campaign made four simple points against the Assembly that were heard repeatedly by many in the factories and on the streets when we were distributing the Communist Party Yes leaflets. These were: another tier of government, more bureaucracy, more taxes and that an Assembly was a step to separation. By the time Labour came officially into the Yes campaign, they were on the defensive. There was a further factor that only became apparent towards the latter stages of the campaign. The re-organisation of local government took place in Scotland in 1975. It resulted in the setting up of nine regional councils and three island authorities. Two of the regions have between them considerably more than half of the population of Scotland, i.e., Strathclyde has half the population and Lothian almost one-third of the remainder. There was a fear that these two regions, representing the centre belt of Scotland would dominate. This is reflected in the voting. The Borders, Dumfries, and Galloway, Grampian, Highland, Orkney and Shetland returned a majority of No votes. Fife, Central Lothian, Strathclyde, Tayside and the Western Isles returned majorities for Yes. This unforeseen circumstance would not have arisen if

local government reorganisation introduced by the Tories in 1973 had not been brought in before the issue of a Scottish Parliament was settled. The Scottish Committee of the Communist Party argued before the Commission on the Constitution (Kilbrandon Report) that the constitutional question should be settled before local government reorganisation. The Scotland Act empowers a Scottish Assembly to deal with any further local government reorganisation which the experience of the Strathclyde colossus is making a matter of urgency.

There can be no doubt from our experience in the factories and at our campaign meetings that many workers voted No or abstained. It was not because they thought the Act was a bad one, but out of their opposition to the SNP. The government bears a big responsibility for this. Most people do not or cannot read the parliamentary jargon that is contained in parliamentary bills. Prior to the EEC referendum, every householder throughout Britain received a copy of the government's case for staying in. On this occasion there was no explanatory booklet on the Scotland Act available to the public. When the Scotland and Wales Bills were before Parliament the Central Office of Information in 1976 published a booklet *Devolution—The New Assemblies for Scotland and Wales* which was out of date by the time it got into the hands of readers. It dealt with proposals contained in the White Paper *Our Changing Democracy* that was published in November 1975.

SNP's Position

The prestige of the SNP before the Scotland Bill passed through all its stages had fallen considerably. Following their successes in the district council elections in 1977 their votes fell considerably in the regional council elections in 1978. Their challenge to Labour in the Garscadden and Hamilton by-elections on which they had placed great hopes failed. The introduction of the Bills for devolution had given the initiative to the Labour government. The demand for an independent Scotland was dropped or played in a very low key. As a matter of fact, the adoption by the TUC at Brighton on September 9th, 1976, of the General Council's statement in support of devolution for Scotland and Wales which was carried by a majority of 8,761,000 votes to 711,000 asserted the leading position of the labour movement in the struggle for greater democracy in relation to government. There is always the danger now, however, that with the failure of the government to grasp the nettle firmly, that the initiative on the Scottish people's desire for more self-government could pass over to more adventurous elements in the SNP. The failure to achieve the 40 per cent Yes in Scotland is a set-back but not, as the anti-devolutionists claim, "that the assemblies

are dead". The situation in Wales is different from that in Scotland. In both countries the labour movement will have to examine the next stage in accordance with the conditions that operate within their respective countries. There is also an urgent need to continue the examination of devolution as it will apply to England.

Perspectives

The position in Scotland is already clear. The Labour Party Conference in Perth on March 8th-10th has re-affirmed its determination to get the Scotland Act operating, but in the next Parliament, not now. The national executive meeting of the Communist Party meeting the same weekend has also re-affirmed its position to continue the struggle for an Assembly as an essential step in the road to socialism in Britain. Gordon McLennan, in his analysis of the campaign up to March 1st stated: "The Communist Party itself had not in the period up to the referendum fought with anything like sufficient energy and determination for the line of its 31st Congress resolution for Scottish and Welsh Parliaments as the first main step toward solving the varied national problems within Britain today. It was necessary to show the vital relationship of devolution (in bringing political power closer to the people) to everything else on which we were campaigning.

A big job of explanation and winning conviction about the necessity and the benefits of devolution needed to be started now, especially in Wales. A central concept of our case is that this democratic development would reinforce the united fight of the working class and democratic movement of the three countries (England, Scotland and Wales) on a British scale for the alternative strategy of the Left."

The Forward March of Labour

*The discussion on "The
Forward March of Labour
Halted?" will be continued
in the June issue.*

And Wales

Alastair Wilson

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1979 is the centenary of the birth of Niclas y Glais (Rev. Y. E. Nicholas). His 90 years of life formed a bridge from the early socialists Pam Jones, Derfeluum and Keir Hardie, with whom he was joint editor of the Socialist *Mothyr Pioneer* before the First World War, to modern socialist politics. He was also a nationalist and his life extended from the origins of modern Welsh nationalism in the Cymru Fydd movement of the 1880s and 1890s right up to post-Second World War campaigns for a Welsh Assembly.

Niclas, who was a non-conformist minister, was originally a member of the ILP. He joined the British Communist Party in its earliest days. He, like Keir Hardie and the British Labour Party (until 1928), supported the concept of home rule for Wales.

There has just been a referendum to decide on whether the people of Wales should have a Welsh Assembly, with limited powers, and based on the 40 per cent limitation of our normal democratic election practice. The decision has been an overwhelming No.

Is this the end of the national problem in Wales? Should socialists now forget it and concentrate on all British policies?

The Tories, the CBI, the six Labour MPs who supported the No lobby have befogged the issue by presenting the Welsh Assembly Bill as a measure which would increase bureaucracy, cost £12 million annually and lead to the separation of Wales from the United Kingdom. Certain sections of the nationalist movement have encouraged the feeling that a Welsh Assembly would encourage separation.

Reaction on the right and sectarianism on the nationalist left have both tended to bedevil the discussions. The Labour government's inability to win the support of the six Welsh Labour MPs and of a large section of the English Labour MPs for the 1974 Labour election manifesto's policies on Wales and Scotland, was probably the most important cause of the defeat of the Yes campaign.

Wales Needs a Bilingual Eisteddfod

Many of those who claim to represent the traditions of Wales do not appear to have any relationship to 20th century Welsh traditions at all. There is a turning back into a history that is based on illusions—of a classless kind of society without cruel Welsh speaking coalowners. A hankering for some kind of

village co-operative industry while, in fact, Japanese, American, and German industrialists are encouraged to invest in Welsh industry and therefore control an increasing part of the economic life of Wales.

The closest allies of those who seek to maintain and extend the speaking of the Welsh language are surely the English-speaking people of Wales. They must be convinced by reasoned argument that the Welsh language and the Welsh national identity are worth preserving, not just for those who live in Wales and speak Welsh, but also for those who live in Wales and speak English. I don't think a Welsh-only National Eisteddfod, for instance, is the way to win support for the maintenance of our nation, its language, or its national consciousness. It is *isolating* the Welsh-speaking part from the rest of the people—isolating the minority of the nation from the majority.

Has the campaign of obliterating English road signs in Wales really won support or lost it for the Welsh language—for example, in Gwent?

Wales is a bilingual country—and I think that the National Eisteddfod should be bilingual—for why should the majority of the people of Wales be denied participation in its musical and literary competitions?

If there were some kind of bilingual Festival (Eisteddfod) centre with theatre, art gallery, opera, ballet, folk-dancing, disco, leisure activity and permanent teaching of Welsh from infant class level upwards, what a huge reservoir of English-speaking Welsh people there would be to be brought into the cultural life of Wales. They could be encouraged to become Welsh speakers. What a great mass of talent could be released into the world in Welsh or English.

The Welsh language is becoming beseiged and many of those who seek to preserve it are actually helping to destroy it by keeping it within a gradually narrowing space. Is it not time to go forth and evangelise among the English-speaking Welsh to convince them, in English, of the need to speak the other language of Wales?

Moreover, of course, as has so often been written in *Cyffro* (the journal of the Welsh Committee of the Communist Party), there can be no effective preservation of the Welsh language if the communities within which the language is spoken are continually being eroded by the migration of the young to look for work.