



# **Whispers of a Forgotten Nation**



**The Writings of Dr D. Ceri Evans**

**(1965-2002)**

**Edited with an Introduction by Dr James Luchte**

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# Biography of Dr D. Ceri Evans

Soon after the tragic death of Ceri Evans in 2002, there was a widespread expression of grief, first, at a memorial gathering held in Wales two weeks after his suicide, secondly in a touching eulogy by some of his closest friends and associates, and thirdly in tributes by two of his comrades, published in the influential publication *Socialist Outlook* in 2002.

It would be difficult and indeed presumptuous for an editor of his collected work to attempt to displace the words of those who knew him and his work the best. In this spirit, I will simply reproduce these previously mentioned materials, the eulogy and the tributes by those who felt the loss of this unique and gifted individual most intensely.

In this way, my contribution to these biographical materials will be editorial only, as these tributes speak for themselves about a man who will be missed by thousands of people who still seek to realise the goals and dreams of this important revolutionary thinker and activist. I will place my assessment of the intimate relation of the revolutionary activity and writing of Dr Evans in my *Introduction* to his collected writings below.

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## I. Ceri Evans (1965-2002) - An Obituary

*Ed George, Darren Williams, Leanne Wood and Brendan Young - 29 August 2002*

It is difficult to make an objective assessment of the life of someone who has only just died, especially when that someone was as close to us - as a friend and comrade - as was Ceri Evans, who took his own life at the beginning of August at the age of 36. Nevertheless, it is necessary to mark his passing.

Ceri was first drawn to revolutionary politics as a teenage activist in the anti-missiles movement of the early 1980s. He joined the *International Marxist Group* (IMG), the British Section of the Fourth International, in 1981 - in the same month as his sixteenth birthday. From then until the day he died, he remained a revolutionary socialist, an internationalist, a Marxist, and an irreconcilable atheist.

As a revolutionary socialist in Wales for over twenty years, Ceri participated in a range of struggles. He played a prominent role in CND and Youth CND in the early 1980s. He was arrested on the picket line during the 1984-5 Miners' Strike. He worked full time for *Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg*. He acted as secretary of the Cardiff Miners' Support Group during the fight against pit closures in 1992. He was active in the struggle against the Poll Tax and against the Blair clique's re-write of Clause Four.

For Ceri, revolutionary socialism was nothing without internationalism. He was a consistent opponent of British imperialism's presence in Ireland, which led him to oppose the *Good Friday Agreement*. He was infuriated by the suffering inflicted on the Palestinian people. He recently came to the view that Palestine occupied the same place for the Left today that Spain

had in the 1930s and suggested the setting up of a *Medical Aid for Palestine* campaign in Wales.

But, Ceri was not just an 'activist', pursuing one 'good cause' after another. He wrestled with Marxist theory and came to a deep understanding of its fundamentals. For Ceri, not only was it true that 'without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary practice'. He further held that Marxist theory, divorced and separated from practical living struggles, would only finish as meaningless dogma. The dialectical unity of theory and practice - the heart of the Leninist conception of revolutionary organisation - was at the core of his understanding of politics.

Ceri's foremost political contribution is in relation to the national question: both in general and specifically with regard to Wales. The IMG had taken - almost uniquely among the English-dominated revolutionary left in Wales - a serious and enquiring approach towards Welsh national identity, its history, and its consequences for revolutionary socialism.

Ceri built upon the work of the IMG and related it to the rise of national movements both in Western Europe and in the former Soviet Union and the European 'people's democracies'. Aided by other comrades and by the work of the late Raymond Williams, he developed an understanding of how the struggle against national oppression lay at the heart of the struggle for socialist revolution.

Ceri favoured Welsh self-government, expressed in his demand for a Constituent Welsh Assembly: an Assembly which would have full power to decide on all aspects of its functioning and its international relations, without being subject to a veto from London. His theoretical understanding was matched by a commitment to practical work. Ceri fought for a serious position on Welsh self-government within the Welsh Labour Party. Ceri was also a key instigator of Welsh Labour Action, a pressure group within the Labour Party set up to deepen policy on democratic accountability and representation, and on the powers that the Assembly would have. Ceri was also a key figure in the 'Socialists Say Yes' campaign, and he campaigned hard in the 1997 referendum itself. Such was his role that figures within Welsh Labour Action, Plaid Cymru and the Welsh Labour Party - including First Minister Rhodri Morgan - have acknowledged that without Ceri's efforts, it is moot whether Wales would have an Assembly at all today.

Moreover, Ceri vigorously opposed the fake 'regional' politics of the European Union with its meagre hand-outs and sham structures of representation. The united Europe that he fought for would be one in which there would be real democracy - with self-determination for the peoples of Europe guaranteed - and in which regional inequalities would be addressed on the basis of the needs of working people, not capital. To this end, he was one of the central organisers of the demonstration held to counter the June 1998 EU Summit in Cardiff.

Ceri was not alone among socialists to be disappointed at the aftermath of the 1997 Assembly referendum - and especially with the way that the Labour left failed to use the positive result to consolidate a socialist politics in Wales. He decided that the Welsh Labour Party was no longer the best place for his energies. Last February, he publicly broke with Labour and joined Plaid Cymru - with the intention of organising with the Left in Plaid to advance working class and national struggles throughout Wales. His letter of resignation from the Labour Party can be read in the collection below.

The degree to which the Left in Plaid will build struggles - and the correctness of Ceri's decision - remain to be proven. But, to characterise his move as some kind of 'break from socialism' would be a travesty: a knee-jerk response based on a Greater British chauvinist economism which can only see in national struggles a diversion from the 'pure' 'class' struggle. Revolutionaries must make tactical decisions about which mass organisations they participate in, flowing from their assessment of how best to advance the class struggle in specific social and political conditions.

Ceri, who was Welsh-English bilingual, was brought up in Ynystawe and Swansea. He lived his adult life in Pontypridd and Cardiff, and briefly in the Rhondda. He worked as a researcher and lecturer in electronics at the University of Glamorgan. He was regarded as an expert in his field - control systems for gas turbines - and won prizes for his work in international academic competitions. Although he was no saint - he could be irascible in argument - he was also sensitive, witty, intelligent and engaging.

Ceri had been ill for over four years when he died. In 1998, he was diagnosed with Repetitive Strain Injury, which developed as an occupational injury - he couldn't get his department to give him a proper typing chair until it was too late. This was followed by the onset of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. Over the past two years, he suffered from depression - possibly as a consequence of his other illnesses. From March to June of this year, he suffered a severe manic episode and although depressed, he appeared to be recovering recently. On 2 August, however, he killed himself. It appears from his last actions that this was a considered decision. A note he left says that what prompted his suicide was despair brought on by fear of a future that could be filled with physical and mental pain.

Such are the facts of his death. But, his closest friends believe he was let down badly by the mental health system, which provided no follow-up after his breakdown in March. He was particularly let down by the 'specialist' he went to for treatment of chronic fatigue. This man put him on a combination of anti-depressants, something regarded as dangerous in clinical psychiatry because of the risk of triggering a manic attack - including by the so-called 'safe' SSRI's (the Prozac-type drugs). But, this 'specialist' would not take calls from Ceri's partner when he reacted badly to the doubling of a drug dose in February.

This negligence was exacerbated by the stigma attached to mental illness, which inhibits discussion of mental ill health, drug treatments and their associated risks. If we are to avoid similar tragedies in the future, the Left must take up the fight for user-centred mental health services; and deal with mental illness if it arises in our own lives and the lives of our friends in an informed and candid way.

The mark of Ceri's contribution, and the deep respect and love with which he was held by friends and comrades alike, was evident at a memorial meeting held in Pontypridd just two weeks after his death. Close to 100 attended. Moving and often inspiring tributes were paid to his memory; and messages of condolence from all over the world were read out. A *Ceri Evans Memorial Fund* was launched, with a view to publishing a collection of his writings.

Where do we go from here? One of Ceri's closest comrades reminded us at the memorial of Trotsky's words, written shortly before his assassination in 1940, with which Ceri, even right at the end, would have agreed: 'Life is beautiful. Let the future generations cleanse it of all evil, oppression and violence, and enjoy it to the full.' Honouring Ceri's memory surely means taking this message to our hearts, and fighting to realise it.

## **II. Terry Conway - 'The Most Complete Welsh Revolutionary' - *Socialist Outlook*, 57**

The celebration of Ceri's life that took place in Pontypridd two weeks after his death heard an array of speakers from very divergent backgrounds pay tribute both to the enormous political contribution that Ceri made to Welsh politics, but also to the personal impact he had on everyone who had the privilege to know him as a friend.

The irony was that almost no one else could have brought together so many leading members of Plaid Cymru and of the Welsh Labour Party with militants of the Fourth International from both Wales and England, as well as messages from further afield. Ceri would have loved to have joined in the conversations.

The Fourth International and the International Socialist Group are weakened by Ceri's death. While for us, an understanding of the national question is key to our Marxism, those who can develop a concrete analysis of their own countries and so enrich our overall understanding are a particularly valuable asset.

I treasure the book of the Spanish anti-Fascist poet Lorca's writings Ceri gave me when I visited him earlier this year in the Rhondda. Here too was someone who had a passionate relationship with the place he was from, but was also a confirmed internationalist. Here too was someone for whom political ideas were not just found in theory, but in song, in dream, in all the small things of everyday life.

I remember Ceri as someone who was never satisfied that he fully got his message across, impatient to know that he had fully convinced me of his argument. I, on the other hand, always wanted more time to reflect.

I remember him as a friend as well as a comrade. I hope he knew how much he meant to so many people.

## **III. Gerry Foley - 'A Thread is Broken' - *Socialist Outlook* 57**

I lost one of the basic threads of my life with Ceri's death. He was the first Welsh fighter I met and the most complete Welsh revolutionist. I learned Welsh at the age of 13 or 14 back in the early 1950s. It was part of my self-education in the cultures of the oppressed. Welsh was the first language I learned from a book. I made the acquaintance of a Welsh bookseller who took it on himself to teach me about the world of Welsh culture and books.

I learned the dilemma of the Welsh people early and saw it in connection with the dilemma of my own people, the Irish, as did Ceri, who as his understanding of the Welsh national question deepened, took up the study of the Irish language. I think that he had this in common with the best radical Welsh cultural activists.

When I started coming to Britain in the 1970s and 1980s, I looked for Welsh revolutionists. I was directed to Ceri, and we started a life-long friendship and correspondence. A shared knowledge of an oppressed culture also provided an intimate bond. When I was working as a full-timer for the Fourth International in Europe, I sometimes wrote to him in Welsh.

He was delighted to be able to communicate with an international revolutionary centre in his own language. He had a deep sense of the oppression of Welsh speakers in imperialist and racist Britain. He came to understand it more and more consciously as he grew older.

In the last few years of his life, he came to a more complete understanding of the revolutionary meaning and potential of the fight for Welsh national liberation. He was excited about his conclusions, which he shared with me. He wanted me to come to Wales and help him to discuss them with the influential figures in the liberation movement that he was meeting, and help to put the question in a broader international context for them. I and he were disappointed that I could not come. My expulsion from Britain some years ago under the Thatcher regime made travelling to Wales just too difficult when the opportunity was there.

All working class and progressive movements have suffered blows from the reactionary governments put in power by the capitalist offensive that began in the 1970s. The Welsh nation suffered grievous wounds from Thatcher's crushing of the Miners' Strike. There is no telling how many people have suffered because of the running down of the National Health Service, which the reactionaries hate, but do not dare to destroy outright. This seems to be what finally cost Ceri his life.

When the workers and the oppressed regain their breath and fight back against this capitalist offensive, there are many wrongs that will have to be avenged. But, some losses cannot be recovered. One of them is Ceri's life. Yet, I look forward to meeting the Welsh revolutionists who will arise to take his place. Having known Ceri makes me confident that they are coming.



# Introduction: The Writings of Dr D. Ceri Evans

Dr James Luchte

*As I have not worried to be born, I do not worry to die.*

Federico Garcia Lorca (1898-1936)

Ceri Evans died in the same month, in August, as the Spanish poet Federico Garcia Lorca, who was murdered by the Fascist regime in 1936. In one of the tributes to Ceri Evans after his death, Terry Conway tells of a gift of a book of Lorca's poetry which she had received from Dr Evans. Terry Conway makes this comparison of Lorca and Evans:

Here too was someone who had a passionate relationship with the place he was from, but was also a confirmed internationalist. Here too was someone for whom political ideas were not just found in theory, but in song, in dream, in all the small things of everyday life. (*Whispers of a Forgotten Nation*, p. 7)

In her elegant brevity, Conway captures both the spirit of Ceri Evans and his dialectical method in relation to the national and international movements for social justice and freedom. Evans lived the slogan 'Think globally, Act locally.' He fought simultaneously for historical justice in his native Wales, and, in the context of his perspective as an international socialist, for the eventual realisation of a global democratic socialist community, in which nations would enjoy equality, mutual aid and peaceful cooperation. Indeed, for Evans, the national question was inseparable from the struggle for international socialism.

Ceri Evans was a unique and creative thinker, at once a philosopher and activist (and with the mind of an engineer). He was a revolutionary socialist who wished to learn from the revolutionaries of the past, such as Lenin and Trotsky, but never merely to turn these 'Great Men' into dogmatic idols. He repeats this mantra over and over again in his theoretical and practical writings – that there is much to learn from these revolutionaries of the past and present, who have more experience and knowledge with respect to the building and enactment of revolutionary transformation. Yet, Ceri Evans had a mind of his own and assertively set forth his criticisms of these 'Great Men'. In this way, he has enduring relevance as an original thinker and practical example for the understanding and practise of Welsh politics, and revolutionary politics as such.

This collection contains nearly thirty essays, discussion documents, presentations and other pieces from between 1990-2002, arguably one of the most important periods in the history of Welsh politics. These writings range from purely philosophical pieces, such as 'Dialectics', explorations of political philosophy, as in 'Ten Draft Points on the National Question,' to extremely concrete analyses and discussion documents of current political struggles in which he was continuously immersed, as with his writings on the Welsh language, the Welsh Assembly, Europe, Ireland, Israel, and the national struggles in Eastern Europe. In an uncanny manner, reading these essays resembles the experience of opening up a 'time

capsule', one left as a legacy for those of us who would continue the struggle in the future. The 'time capsule' is open, and the documents it contains are a gift from the past.

Not only is the experience of reading these essays a re-awakening of a past obscured by the inexorable movements of history, but it also gives the reader a real sense of suspense as he or she moves from one essay to the next. Of course, we all know now, in 2014, that the struggle for a Welsh Assembly has been partially successful and that the success of the Welsh Language movement is irreversible. Yet, in many of the essays, these questions were still unsettled, still *on the way*, and in this sense, the documents in this collection give us an important insider's perspective upon this monumental period of Welsh history.

These documents, furthermore, highlight the many tasks that are still left *undone*, of the myriad struggles which are still necessary. Such struggles include the enhancement of the powers of the Welsh National Assembly, which is still not as strong as the configuration advocated by Evans. There is also the life and death struggles to preserve indispensable aspects of the Welfare State, such as the NHS and funding for regional sustainable development, which are again threatened by the Tories. The latter serve as the ever-present antagonists in his documentation of the terrible truth of the British state and its persistent suppression of the nations of Wales, Scotland and Ireland. To a large extent, Ceri Evans was way ahead of his time, and many of his writings still have *current* relevance to Welsh, British and European politics - and, more generally, to global politics as such.

In addition to their status as significant documents of political history, and their prevailing relevance to contemporary political and intellectual struggles, the writings of Ceri Evans also provide an invaluable example of the intellectual and political practise of an advanced revolutionary. As he himself sought out the insights of the revolutionaries of the past, we too can learn much from Ceri Evans, especially in his strict embodiment of the *modus operandi* of the unification of revolutionary theory and practise. In his short philosophical piece 'Dialectics,' which he gave as a presentation, he outlines the Marxian notion of the intimate relation of thought and action, and of the necessity of testing thought in the arena of *praxis*. In this way, not only does Ceri Evans demonstrate his independence and originality with respect to the revolutionaries of the past, but he also exhibits, in his writings, his own personal development as a political thinker and practitioner. Between the time-span of 1990-2002, we can witness, up close, the dialectical evolution of his thought and politics as he remained focused upon the concrete conditions and needs of the people - and as he accumulated experience from his own engagement in concrete struggles for social justice.

One thread of this personal evolution is shown in his decision to leave the Labour Party and to join Plaid Cymru. This was a difficult decision for a life-long socialist who worked to make his party more attuned to its allegedly socialist mission. However, with the betrayal of the working class and the goal of socialism by Tony Blair and his acolytes, Ceri Evans could see that not only was the Labour Party no longer a party of the working class, but that Plaid Cymru represented the best hope not only for working people in Wales, but also that the struggle for independence, which he for a long time did not support, was essential to the struggle for the overthrow of the Imperial British state. We can only speculate what Ceri Evans would have done in response to the illegal Gulf War and all the events that have followed, but it is clear that his manner of thinking and acting will continue to provide an excellent example, for the rest of us, of the meaning of a revolutionary socialist. Such a revolutionary remains attuned to concrete conditions and concrete *praxis*, and has the audacity to think for him or herself in the struggle for the liberation of the people.

# A Bydded i'r Hen Iaith Barhau? The Crisis of the Welsh Language and Our Work in the Language Movement

[February 1990; International Socialist Group internal discussion document]

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The Welsh language faces a possibly terminal crisis, brought on by a worsening of the economic conditions which have underscored its decline for many years. Thatcherism has resulted in a further impoverishment of the Welsh speaking areas, forcing migration or acceptance of desperately low paid jobs. The boom in house prices has also been particularly severe in these areas, which coupled with the shrinkage in public sector housing has created a chronic homelessness problem. Conversely Thatcherism has created an affluent, largely English, middle class eager to acquire 'bargain' homes for holiday or even permanent use often buying a small business for the price of an inner London flat.

These newcomers overwhelmingly possess a chauvinist attitude to the Welsh language and regard it as an imposition. Almost without exception they have attempted to anglicise their chosen area in education, public sector and business life. We have to be completely clear that these reactionary and chauvinist immigrants, who seek to impose dominant Great British Chauvinist values, culture and language are completely different in character to Black immigrants to the British state. Immigrants from an oppressed nation, driven largely by economic necessity to live in the oppressor nation become socially oppressed within the oppressor nation. This cannot be said of these English middle class immigrants, who move largely for economic benefit and certainly do not become oppressed as a social layer or group because of it. In reality their presence exacerbates the oppression of the native Welsh, whose linguistic and national rights are further eroded. It is in this context that we demand that they respect the rights of the Welsh minority, a fundamental element of this being to learn and use Welsh in everyday life. We also defend the right of the existing population to restrict the number of immigrants, to impose the necessity to use Welsh upon them and to demand adequate cheap housing and real jobs.<sup>1</sup>

From this it should be seen that our criticism of Meibion Glyndwr comes from a very different direction to that of the Labour Party and Plaid Cymru. We criticise them and oppose their strategy not because they dare to act, or dare to attack private property (so sacred to the bourgeoisie) but because their strategy keeps the majority of Welsh-speaking Wales as passive, if sympathetic, onlookers. What is required is a strategy for active, mass defence of language and communities.

From where might such a strategy come? Given its history certainly not from the Labour Party. True to its pro-imperialist, Great British chauvinist past the Welsh Labour Party has condemned the Meibion campaign in the most reactionary terms. In the forefront of this attack, now extended to include S4C and the language movement, have been Kim Howells (MP for Pontypridd) and Dr Alun Thomas (MP for Caerfyrddin/Carmarthen). They have branded the Meibion racist, slandered both Plaid and Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg/The Welsh Language Society by suggesting possible links and consistently demanded greater

police repression. This position effectively brands all demands in defence of the language as illegitimate, since a hidden link with the 'terrorist' Meibion is immediately implied.

However, a campaign of slander is clearly no answer to the very real crisis and the Labour Party has been forced to respond with a policy statement on Rural Wales and a commitment to a regional Assembly for Wales. It is also noticeable that Dr Thomas (a Welsh speaker representing a Welsh speaking area<sup>2</sup>) may have placed himself out on a limb with the ferocity of his attacks. He has noticeably toned them down recently and attempted to gain credibility by making noises about the provision of children's programmes on S4C and opposing the building of a new housing estate in his area, listing language as a deciding factor. Clearly, such a mash of chauvinism and opportunist mouthing hardly amounts to a strategy: indeed Labour refuses to even acknowledge that there is a problem. No other response is compatible with Kinnockism, which cannot make concessions to the national question since it seeks to drive the party to the right and increasingly encourage a passive role to the party membership and working class as a whole. Nationalist consciousness threatens this, since it poses possible action (even on the elementary level of learning Welsh) and since it cuts across the Great British chauvinism which has been historically used by the bureaucracy in Wales to divide and demobilise the working class. The paternal attitude of the bureaucracy to the class exactly mirrors the attitude of the imperialist bourgeoisie to the 'lesser nations', including the perfidious, thieving, un-enterprising Taffies. Hence, Fabian gradualist socialism assumes an added malignancy where the bureaucracy serves to transmit dominant nation ideology into the oppressed nation's working class.

A more fruitful standpoint might be expected from Plaid Cymru. It was founded on a programme committed to restoring Welsh as the language of Wales and gained all three MPs from Welsh-speaking Gwynedd at the last election. The present frontal attack on the language as a living medium might be expected to produce a radical response. The exact opposite is true. The scale of immigration has been a major factor in Plaid's rightward shift as the leadership, worried about electoral implications, has attempted to accommodate to its new base. This reflects not only the historical lack of confidence of Welsh nationalism (faced with what was the most powerful bourgeoisie in the world) but also the heterogeneous nature of Plaid's electoral support. Dafydd Elis Thomas has revealed himself to be a classic petty-bourgeois politician, who became rapidly disillusioned with waging a principled fight to win the South Wales working class and now yearns to prove his respectability and law-abiding nature to none other than the British imperialist state. He has publicly demanded extra funding for the North Wales police and branded R S Thomas, a nationalist poet who openly supports the Meibion, as a Welsh Le Pen. Plaid's document on immigration proposes no method or focus to develop a campaign. More tellingly perhaps, its weak and woolly proposals are actively contravened by Plaid officials and elected representatives at all levels.

Such an abject failure of leadership means that Plaid had failed to benefit from the rise in nationalist consciousness seen most clearly in the Welsh speaking areas but also throughout Wales. The party lurches from crisis to crisis and desperately grabs at alliances with the Democrats and the Greens, while the members vote with their feet. It is also noticeable that the Plaid left has not yet recovered from or drawn any conclusions from Dafydd Elis' betrayal in any large numbers. Having said all this, caution is needed before drawing any catastrophic conclusions about the demise of Plaid: it is likely to remain a force and hold its three seats because to many it remains the only defender of their interests as Welsh speakers.

Of the Welsh Liberal Democrats suffice is to say that their positions mirror that of Plaid (or vice versa?). Welsh liberalism has historically used nationalist rhetoric and this element was played up at their recent conference where proposals for a separate Welsh party were discussed. Tom Ellis MP has frequently repeated his wish to see votes cast for 'good Welshmen' [*sic*] from the Liberal Democrats, Plaid and even the Labour Party at the next election. On the crisis of the language however, they have very little to say.

The British Conservative and Unionist Party has, not unsurprisingly, shown little sympathy for the Welsh language. Since being forced to concede a Welsh fourth channel in 1981 they have cleverly employed the tactic of establishing powerless, puppet bodies, with quasi-national camouflage, in response to pressure for action. In particular the Welsh Education Development Body and Welsh Language Board have been used by the Tories to divide and confuse the Opposition whilst in reality conceding nothing.

What then of the response of *Cymdeithas yr Iaith*, Wales' foremost language pressure group of some 25 years standing? Born out of the coming together of student radicalism and nationalist upsurge in the 60s it has maintained a principled and radical struggle in defence of the language since then. Whilst we would not agree with many of its tactics, or the politics of many of its leaders, it has achieved many vital successes and set the agenda for the Welsh language debate. The Welsh language Act of 1967, the increase in use of Welsh by public bodies, bilingual signs, the incredible growth of Welsh medium education and above all the Welsh Fourth Channel are all results of *Cymdeithas*' work. Spin-offs from the resulting legitimisation of Welsh include an increased pride and combativity amongst Welsh speakers, the massive growth of the learners movement, the growth of Welsh publishing and a thriving Welsh pop scene.

*Cymdeithas* reached a particularly low point in '84-'85. The combined effects of the devolution defeat, a loss of direction after the channel victory and the defeat of the miner's strike reduced membership to around 500. Growth has been steady since then and in the last two years has accelerated rapidly. This is clearly a result of the depth of the crisis as *Cymdeithas* finds itself at the head of the growing opposition to the influx.

*Cymdeithas*' response has been twofold. It has maintained campaigns around its demands for:

- 1 A New Welsh Language Act to give Welsh speakers legal equality within Wales and ensure natural bilingualism.
- 2 A Welsh Education Development Body to increase spending on Welsh medium education at all levels and ensure that all in Wales have an opportunity to learn the language.
- 3 Extending and improving the Welsh radio and TV service, including bringing it under democratic control.

The campaign for a New Language Act has been particularly active, organising a demo of over 1,000 people in Cardiff a year ago.

The second part of their response was to re-launch its 'homes and jobs' campaign under the slogan 'Nid yw Cymru ar werth' (Wales is not for sale). This has been the main response to the influx and has four main demands:

- 1 That Local Authorities purchase houses in their areas and offer them at fair rent to local people.
- 2 That Local Authorities also purchase small businesses and farms for the same purpose and press for an end to milk quotas.
- 3 That local planning committees make 'local need' the main factor in approving planning applications.
- 4 Opposition to any privatisation of Welsh industry or public services.

The campaign has received widespread support and organised a conference of 13 of the 14 Welsh Rural District Councils, who agreed to organise a delegation to the Welsh Office to demand extra money to buy houses. It has also successfully opposed many local developments, organised pickets of estate agents, disruption of property auctions and holiday home occupations. Whilst this has been the only positive (and largely correct) response it has always faced a problem of how exactly to mobilise for mass action out of the very real opposition that exists. This has led some in Cymdeithas to argue for a new direction, that of demanding a 'Property Act' to ensure 'community control of the property market'. This position was adopted at the last conference but will result in a damaging diversion to the campaign if acted upon as such a demand will fail still further to mobilise mass action.

Two smaller groups with supporters in *Cymdeithas* are *Cyfamod Y Cymry Rhydd* (Covenant of the Free Welsh) and *Cymru Goch* (Red Wales). The Cyfamodwyr declare themselves nationalists committed to full independence and berate Plaid Cymru for their lack of confidence in the Welsh people. They are the only political current to openly support Meibion Glyndwr. However, when confronted with the argument that mass action not conspiracy tactics are needed they too reveal the very same lack of confidence, declaring such mass action impossible. Cymru Goch resemble a Welsh version of the SWP. These 'Welsh Marxists' provide no direction for the struggle and do little more than propagandise on the superiority of socialism whilst attacking the Welsh middle class and Kinnock's Labour Party. As a result they do little service to Marxism or the language movement.<sup>3</sup>

It is worth stressing that simple left-right divides are very difficult to draw inside national movements. Groups with very reactionary positions (e.g. Independent Monarchical Wales) are often driven by these positions to very radical actions, whilst groups purporting to be more 'Marxist' or 'Internationalist' often deny or give up the national struggle in practice (the Official IRA being a classic example). It is their actions, their 'attitude to their national destiny' that can in the end be decisive.

Notably absent from the language movement, both historically and at present, is the 'Trotskyist' left in Wales. The Militant and SWP are thoroughly imbued with Great British Chauvinism on this question. They do not produce any bilingual material. They condemn petty-bourgeois nationalism, deny the existence of a National Question and dismiss the language struggle in arrogant phrases barely distinguishable from those of the Labour bureaucracy. With breath taking confidence an SWP student with some two months residence in Wales informed me that: one, most Welsh speakers are middle class; two, Meibion Glyndwr are medievalist maniacs; and three, that all those radicalised around the language struggle should join the SWP and effectively give up any thought of speaking Welsh for the rest of their lives.

Little wonder that such 'British' Trotskyism has a bad name in the language movement.

The only positive positions that we can refer to are those developed by the IMG in Wales on the Assembly and Fourth Channel. They took the right side on both these issues and their documents, whilst weak in places, can serve as a serious and useful starting point for further work. Unfortunately, these positions failed to enter the political culture of the organisation. Thus, when I joined I was asked by one comrade whether I thought in Welsh. I replied that I did and was told that I should try to learn to think in English as soon as possible.

All this points to the need to be constantly vigilant for expressions of Great British Chauvinism, even within our own organisation. This can subtly manifest itself as ignorance ('You have a different version of Channel Four in Wales, don't you?', 'Are there any Welsh revolutionary leaders?'); arrogance ('The British revolution will not be made without London!') or liberal paternalism ('It's so lovely to hear the Welsh children babbling away'). Particularly rife is a disregard for the particularities of the Welsh political situation (i.e. for Wales read Greater England).

## **Conclusions and some proposals**

Most commentators point to two counter-posed trends affecting the Welsh language:

- 1** The threat to the Welsh speaking 'heartlands' caused by economic decline, holiday homes and immigration.
- 2** The remarkable growth in the learners' movement in the English speaking areas and a growing mood of confidence amongst learners that they can reach fluency.

These contradictory factors will be the motor force for a continued radicalisation and struggle around the language. The radicalisation is particularly broad amongst youth and students and extends to the Welsh speaking middle class and increasingly the working class across the whole of Wales. This involvement of middle class forces, even in large numbers, should not worry us. Here we see the National question forcing a section of that class towards radical positions in opposition to the British state. The language will increasingly be a factor in Welsh politics, extending into questions of housing, economy, education and broadcasting. The housing issue poses the possibility of unity between the Welsh and non-Welsh speaking working class, based on a common experience of bourgeoisification and exclusion. Homelessness is as much, if not more, a problem in the rural areas as in the cities. Thousands of holiday homes lie empty for 10 months of the year whilst local families remain homeless. Thus, the housing issue expresses itself simultaneously as a class and national question and cannot be addressed without addressing both elements.

The language will also be a line of divide within the Labour movement. Kinnock and his puppet Howells have made their anti-language positions quite clear. Howells used his recently launched campaign for an English language TV service in Wales as a platform to attack the language movement in the most virulent way. These positions flow from the rightist, anti-working class and Great British chauvinist nature of Kinnock's project. We must hammer this fact home to those lefts who take ambivalent or wrong positions on the language. Any future Labour movement left seeking to challenge Kinnock and build on an all-Wales basis will have to adopt a correct attitude to the language. Thus, our entire project in Wales has the added dimension of combating Great British chauvinism and winning the

left to active defence of the language. This is a precondition, and the only principled basis, for any attempts to win the Plaid left to Labour or to challenge Plaid for positions that they hold (e.g. for leadership of UCMC-NUS Wales).

The character of the present radicalisation poses new challenges for the language movement. The effects of holiday homes and immigration call for a far more decisive response than at present. What is at stake is the continuation of the language as a living language in every part of Wales. On the other hand, the growing learners movement and support for the language in what was 'lost territory' poses the need for new methods of organising and campaigning to tap this support and turn it into a politically active section of the movement.

The language movement has responded in a number of different ways. An organisation called Pont ('bridge') was formed recently under the patronage of Gwynfor Evans. Its aim is to integrate the newcomers into the Welsh communities by gently illustrating the wonderfulness of Welsh language and culture to them. Cefn ('support' or 'back'), the right wing split from Cymdeithas, continues to champion the rights of individual martyrs rather than build political campaigns.

Cymdeithas, on the other hand is growing, is open and has responded largely correctly to the present crisis. It is still committed to an individualist NVDA strategy and this presents its own problems. Most of the new members have not been pulled into activism and this has forced a re-examination of the movement's structure and operation, with proposals for a more mass orientation. This debate will not be resolved on a theoretical level but in practice, as one or other strategy produces results. Cymdeithas thus faces a crossroads: to remain a pressure group or seize the opportunity to become some kind of mass movement. When it has done so in the past, notably around the road signs and Welsh channel campaigns, it has received mass support and mobilised thousands. Both these campaigns were largely successful.

We have to aid this process in a positive direction with proposals for action around the key issue facing the Welsh language today - holiday homes and the influx to Welsh speaking areas. We will have to oppose making a 'Property Act' the centre of such a campaign and counter-pose instead a strategy of occupation of holiday homes by local homeless families. Such occupations would not only graphically illustrate the real effects of second homes but also allow for a mass defence campaigns to be built around them. Such a strategy would need to be thoroughly worked through beforehand and have the active support of a majority of Cymdeithas, as it involves placing groups of local people on the line.

The other important campaign at present is that for a New Welsh Language Act. The Tory appointed Welsh Language Board recently announced their weak and toothless proposals for such an Act. The response from the Welsh speaking communities has been one of near unanimous opposition. This reflects the pressure of immigration as people clearly see that only a strong and comprehensive Act can be of any use in defending the language and enforcing its status in their areas. Such an Act is also of vital importance to learners and the ex-pupils of Welsh medium schools in ensuring their right to see and use the language in their predominantly English-speaking areas. As such it must enshrine not only formal equality and natural bilingualism but also err on the side of favouring Welsh to compensate for the massive preponderance of English and the inequalities of the past. To all who claim that this amounts to compulsory Welsh we should reply: No to compulsory English! For positive action in defence of the Welsh language and communities!



Effective action around the two campaigns outlined will only be achieved by vigorously prioritising them. At present Cymdeithas runs Language Act, Property Act, Wales is not for sale, broadcasting and education campaigns along with a youth freedom movement and school students unions. This has the effect of dissipating its work and restricting consistent activity to some dozen hyper-activists in each field. Prioritisation would begin to overcome this along with centring the campaigns on the local groups or *celloedd* (cells). Most local groups are in a very poor state at present, precisely because the campaigns are not structured around them.

A long term strategy for the language movement will need much further discussion. In brief, it will have to be based on the reality that Welsh speakers are a minority within Wales (18 per cent) and an even smaller minority within the British state. In addition Welsh is mainly spoken in the West and North and not in the mass South Eastern concentrations of the Welsh working class. This section of the class is however increasingly sympathetic to the language, as shown by the growth of Welsh medium education and the learners' movement. Hence, it will be necessary to build alliances between the Welsh-speaking working class and the non-Welsh speaking working class and oppressed to begin with and from this with the wider British working class. These alliances should be based on the struggles and demands of Welsh speakers themselves.

Before addressing some proposals, it is necessary to conclude by saying that it is a remarkable achievement of the working class and rural poor that Welsh exists as a living language today. That the language question still animates Welsh politics and is a focus for radicalisation and struggle is testimony to a will on the part of a section of these speakers to see it continue. It is a stark illustration of the inability of the bourgeoisie to solve national-democratic tasks even in the heartlands of imperialism. Revolutionary Marxists in Wales must play a part in the language struggle. We can learn from it, respond to its challenge and deepen our understanding of Welsh politics and history and in so doing can contribute to the debates in the language movement - in a patient, thoughtful and sympathetic way - with a Marxist analysis of the language question and a line of march for the movement. We can show in practice that revolutionary socialists are the best defenders of the oppressed, including linguistic minorities.

In this our links with the Fourth International are an invaluable asset, not only in providing the lessons of similar experiences elsewhere (e.g. the LKI in Euskadi) but also in showing that we are not just another British sect but part of a wider international movement.

Our work and positions on the language and national questions, combined with our orientation to the Labour Party, gives us a unique character in Wales. It allows us to address militants in the language and labour movements in a way no other Trotskyist group can. Our aim over the next few years must be to deepen our understanding of these questions and make them part of the political culture of the organisation in Wales and throughout the British state.

To develop this process I suggest that we:

- 1 Adopt the general line in the document for our work in the language movement. Schedule a further discussion in preparation for the Cymdeithas Easter School on 'A Manifesto for 1992'.
- 2 That all public material produced in Wales must be bilingual and that we defend and advocate bilingualism in the campaigns, Labour party and trade unions.

**3** That learning Welsh be seen as a political task and that all comrades are encouraged to do so.

**4** That we establish a Welsh Commission to more fully develop our positions on the national question and politics in Wales. The aim being to develop a full position on the national question and a series of transitional and democratic demands related to this. These could be integrated into the discussions on the 'programme for Britain' passed at the last conference.

**5** Produce a bilingual pamphlet of G Foley's introduction at our recent meeting on the national question in the Soviet Union, along with Trotsky's writings on the Ukraine, as a contribution to the discussion on this issue in the language/national movement and amongst the left. This would be nothing less than historic since none of Trotsky's writings have ever been published in Welsh.

**6** Ensure regular articles on the Welsh political situation and language movement appear in the journal along with reviews of suitable books. To discuss the idea of a Welsh/bilingual column with the Editorial Board.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This was the position adopted by the Bolsheviks, and defended by the Left Opposition, on non-Russian languages:

... the strictest rules must be introduced on the use of the national language in the non-Russian Republics of our union, and these rules must be checked with special care. There is no doubt that our apparatus being what it is, there is bound to be, on the pretext of unity in the railway service, unity in the fiscal service and so on, a mass of truly Russian abuses. Special ingenuity is necessary for the struggle against these abuses, not to mention special sincerity on the part of those who undertake this struggle. A detailed code will be required and only the nationals living in the republic in question can draw it up at all successfully. ['The Question of Nationalities or "Autonomisation"', Russell Block (ed.), *Lenin's Fight Against Stalinism* (New York, 1975), 137]

Russian Communist Party members on Ukrainian territory must put into practice the right of the working people to study in the Ukrainian language and to speak their native language in all Soviet institutions; they must in every way counteract attempts at Russification that push the Ukrainian language into the background and must convert that language into an instrument for the Communist education of the working people. [V I Lenin, 'Draft Resolution Of The C.C., R.C.P.(B.) On Soviet Rule In The Ukraine', *Collected Works*, 4th English Edition, Vol. 30 (Moscow, 1965), 164]

Bureaucratism, sustained by the spirit of great-power chauvinism ... has carried bureaucratic tutelage over the autonomous republics to the point of depriving the latter of the right to settle land disputes between the local and Russian population. To the present day this great power chauvinism, especially as it expresses itself through the state machinery, remains the chief enemy of integration and unity among workers of different nationalities.

We should draw the working masses into the economic and cultural work of construction, particularly by promoting the development of the local language and schools, and by the "nationalisation" of the Soviet machinery. [Leon Trotsky, 'Platform of the Left Opposition', *Challenge of the Left Opposition (1926-27)* (New York, 1980), 344-5]

It will be interesting to see to what degree such positions are legitimised by similar demands being put forward by the Baltic Popular Fronts:

As a result of excessive immigration, for the first time in history, the Latvian people are becoming a minority on their ethnic territory, and this threatens their future existence and self- government. The Latvian Peoples' Front stands for an immediate halt to immigration but opposes the expulsion of inhabitants of any nationality ... [ From the 'Programme of the Latvian Peoples' Front', published in *International Viewpoint* 169, September 18 1989]

<sup>2</sup> 'I also fear that comrade Dzerzhinsky, who went to the Caucasus to investigate the 'crime' of these 'national-socialists', distinguishes himself there by his truly Russian frame of mind (it is common knowledge that people of other nationalities who have become Russified overdo this Russian frame of mind).' [Lenin, 'The Question of Nationalities or "Autonomisation"', 134]

<sup>3</sup> This assessment must be modified in the light of the recent Wales against the Poll Tax Conference. Cymru Goch have responded positively to the introduction of the tax, building community based, democratic non-payment groups. It remains to be seen how this may effect the rest of their practice, particularly in the language movement. It certainly allows us to approach them with proposals for joint work on the Poll Tax and discussions on wider issues.

# The Challenge of Nationalism in the USSR

[November 1990; *Socialist Outlook* 28, 13-18]

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The pre-1917 Bolshevik position on the national question, developed largely by Lenin, consisted of two key elements. Firstly, recognition of the right of oppressed nations to self-determination up to and including complete independence; secondly, a struggle against all forms of nationalism - and above all Great Russian nationalism. These were advanced with the aim of establishing the complete equality of all nations within the Tsarist empire, thus facilitating a free and voluntary union between them. This Holy Russian empire, declared, 'one and indivisible' by the Tsars, was to Lenin a 'prison-house of nations' and its revolutionary overthrow could not but have a national as well as a social content.

The February 1917 revolution aroused great expectations amongst the imprisoned nations, awakening many to conscious national life for the very first time. Yet, in the national sphere, the Provisional Government did little more than annul some of the more archaic Tsarist laws. The voices of the oppressed nationalities grew louder as the months passed and these national movements contributed to the increasing instability of the regime. In this context, the Bolsheviks' defence of the right of nations to self-determination contributed in no small degree to their victory in October.

Yet, the national question presented a number of problems to the new government. The national movements might have hastened the downfall of the February regime, and in many cases actively opposed it; but this did not inevitably mean that they all supported the government of October. Social contradictions within the oppressed nationalities were generally less developed than in the centre. In addition the 'national bond' between the bourgeoisie and peasantry also tended to blur these social contradictions.

The class differentiation of the national movements in Latvia, Estonia, Belorussia and to a lesser extent the Ukraine was well developed by October. In other areas, this was far from the case. Thus, in many areas the Bolsheviks found themselves very weak outside the urban centres. The bourgeois nationalist Dashnaks were strong in Armenia, the Mussavat Party in Azerbaijan. After October, the Georgian Mensheviks, staunch defenders of unity under Kerensky, declared themselves for independence.

Such nationalist developments were hardly surprising. The masses of the oppressed nationalities, awakening for the first time to political life, were doing so in their own languages. Predominantly peasant, they were overwhelmingly concerned with solutions to their national and agrarian plight. In such circumstances, the new government had to show that not only 'formal' but also practical, material equality with the former ruling nationality was possible under the Soviet system. An attentive and serious attitude to their national demands was necessary to overcome suspicions and resentments arising from long years of oppression.

Another problem presented itself almost immediately - the civil war. A war launched by the counter-revolution aided by international imperialism with scant regard for any principles of self-determination. Waging such a war demanded the most ruthless methods for the new state to survive. These were not without their consequences in the national sphere. As Trotsky

pointed out in a 1923 article for Pravda:

A harsh military regime cannot but bear heavily on cultural life in general and national culture in particular. Contributing to this was the fact that in particular cases the backwardness of a Red Army unit, the chauvinism of certain elements in the Communist organisation in such a unit, and the inadequate efforts of the political commissars concerned gave rise to ignoring and even rough trampling upon national feelings and moods.<sup>1</sup>

He describes these problems as 'isolated and passing' but the passage also illustrates a deeper problem within the Bolshevik ranks which existed before the rise of Stalinism. It can best be illustrated by the following examples:

Russian Communist Party members on Ukrainian territory must put into practice the right of the working people to study in the Ukrainian language and to speak their native language in all Soviet institutions; they must in every way counteract attempts at Russification that push the Ukrainian language into the background, and must convert the language into an instrument for the Communist education of the working people.<sup>2</sup>

In Ukraine urban culture is Russian; Ukrainian culture is rural. The proletariat has an urban, Russian culture. The future belongs to the proletarian culture, i.e. to the urban culture, i.e. to Russian culture. Life itself will effect an assimilation of the Ukrainian language to Russian ... though at present the Communist Party helps the peasant to develop his rural Ukrainian culture, it ... must ... work towards the inevitable victory of Russian culture...<sup>3</sup>

Both statements are by Bolsheviks; both were written in 1919; the first is by Lenin, the second by Dmitri Lebed, secretary of the Ukrainian Communist Party.

Such a 'struggle of two cultures' had been the unofficial policy of the Bolshevik administration in the Ukraine before 1919. It found an active expression in sometimes the most extreme forms. The communist Zatousky recounted how red guards had at times shot people for speaking Ukrainian, or professing Ukrainian nationality, considering this to be counter-revolutionary!

How could such positions arise? They clearly echo Plekhanov, the founder of Russian Marxism and a formative influence on many of the Bolsheviks:

The abolition of serfdom, universal conscription, the development of commerce and industry, the steady growth of the homeless agrarian proletariat, the influence of the administration, railroads and schools ... have definitively merged the rural population of the Ukraine, even linguistically ... into a sphere of influences shared with Russia.<sup>4</sup>

Looking deeper, they reflect the influence of Great Russian nationalism even within the revolutionary movement. Such positions were far less prevalent amongst the Bolsheviks than the Mensheviks, Social Revolutionaries or bourgeois Cadets, whose chauvinism was multiplied a thousandfold; but they nevertheless existed. Great Russian tendencies were further exacerbated by the national divide between town and country in the oppressed nations. The towns, including the working class, were largely Russified and nationalist

consciousness was generally low. Thus, the national question was easily downgraded or ignored due to chauvinism or impatience. Such national nihilism often cloaked its chauvinism in fine, fake-internationalist phrases.

Mistakes on the national question raised the possibility of losing the civil war in the Ukraine and a wrenching re-assessment had to be made. Trotsky's statement to the Red Army on the eve of their Ukrainian offensive against Denikin is resoundingly and genuinely internationalist:

The Ukraine is the land of the Ukrainian workers and working peasants. They alone have the right to rule in the Ukraine, to govern it and to build a new life in it ... Keep this firmly in mind: your task is not to conquer the Ukraine but to liberate it. When Denikin's bands have finally been smashed, the working people of the liberated Ukraine will themselves decide on what terms they are to live with Soviet Russia ... Long live the free and independent Soviet Ukraine.<sup>5</sup>

This position contributed not only to the victory against Denikin but also facilitated the fusion of the Ukrainian Bolsheviks with the Borotbist organisation. The Borotbists were the extreme left wing of the Ukrainian Social Revolutionaries who had moved towards communism but favoured a completely independent Ukraine.

The nationalities problem took a more sinister turn in the Caucasus where the growing influence of the central bureaucracy became evident. Georgia was formally independent from 1918 to 1921 and served as a base for both the Germans and the British. It was invaded by the Red Army in 1921, a move authorised by the Politburo based on information from Stalin, Commissar of Nationalities, and Ordzhonikidze, military commander on the Caucasian front.

The Red Army was meant to assist a Bolshevik uprising, which according to Stalin and Ordzhonikidze would receive widespread support. The reality was very different and was seen as an act of aggression by much of the peasantry and even sections of the working class. Both Lenin and the Georgian Communists were very concerned about the status of the new republic and anxious to respect the rights of the Georgians as a formerly oppressed nationality. Lenin proposed a block with Jordania, whose Menshevik government had been overthrown, and cautioned the Georgian Communists:

I really want you to keep in mind that both the internal and international conditions in Georgia require that Georgian communists do not implement Russian formulas but develop skill-fully and flexibly an original tactic based on a more conciliatory attitude towards petty-bourgeois elements of all sorts.<sup>6</sup>

Ordzhonikidze, Stalin's man in the area, paid little attention to these words or the pleas of the Georgian Communists, and continued to act in a heavy handed manner.

When in 1922 Stalin put forward his 'autonomisation' plan proposing 'entry' of the non-Russian republics into the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR), opposition was centred in Georgia. At first Lenin sided with Stalin and Ordzhonikidze in the face of the Georgians' complaints, proposing at the same time that 'entry' should be amended to 'Formal union with the RSFSR in the Union of Soviet Republics of Europe and Asia'. He explained that:

The spirit of this concession is, I hope, clear: we see ourselves as equals in law with the Ukrainian SSR and the others and enter with them into a new union, a new federation.<sup>7</sup>

Lenin was obviously worried and soon afterwards he sent a note to Kamenev declaring, 'war to the death on Great Russian Chauvinism'. His final article on the question, and the last of his life, was suppressed until 1956 by the Stalinist bureaucracy. It is a textbook of revolutionary method on the national question. It shows how Lenin's position developed and changed through the experience of the Russian revolution.

He clearly sets the Great Russian chauvinist campaign of Stalin and Dzerzhinsky (who investigated the matter) in the context of the rising Soviet bureaucracy:

It is said that a united apparatus was needed. Where did that assurance come from? Did it not come from that same Russian apparatus which ... we took over from Tsarism and slightly anointed with Soviet oil?<sup>8</sup>

International isolation, civil war and famine had prevented the young Soviet state from developing an apparatus that was anything more than a 'bourgeois and Tsarist hotchpotch' and in such a situation:

The 'freedom to secede from the union' by which we justify ourselves will be a mere scrap of paper unable to defend the non-Russians from the onslaught of that really Russian man, the Great Russian chauvinist, in substance a rascal and tyrant, such as the typical Russian bureaucrat is.<sup>9</sup>

How the non-Russian nationalities were to suffer at the hands of such rascals and tyrants, Lenin could never have imagined.

Lenin also addressed the question of how revolutionaries should approach nationalism:

... an abstract presentation of the question of nationalism in general is of no use at all. A distinction must be made between the nationalism of an oppressor nation and that of an oppressed nation, the nationalism of a big nation and that of a small nation.<sup>10</sup>

He also modified his previous position which favoured a formal equality between nations in the union:

... internationalism on the part of the oppressors or 'great' nations, as they are called (though they are great only in their violence, only great as bullies), must consist not only in the observance of the formal equality of nations but even an inequality of the oppressor nation, the great nation, that must make up for the inequality which obtains in actual practice.<sup>11</sup>

Trotsky expanded on this theme in his Pravda article, by drawing a powerful parallel with women's oppression:

A feeling of national resentment has been accumulated in the formerly oppressed nations over decades and centuries. And this heritage, as with the oppressed position of women it should be said, cannot be disposed of merely by declarations, however

sincere they may be and even if they are given legislative character. It is necessary that a woman should feel, in ordinary life, in everyday experience, that there are no external restrictions upon her and no contemptuous or condescending attitude is being taken towards her ... It is necessary that a small nation should feel that a radical and irreversible change has taken place in the consciousness of the former 'ruling' nation.<sup>12</sup>

This is much more than an accommodation or appeasement to nationalism: it goes to the root of what is really meant by international working class solidarity. Lenin and Trotsky did not propose separatism; they remained in favour of strengthening the union: but only through winning the voluntary agreement of the other republics. The question also had an international, strategic importance, given the Bolsheviks' perspective of developing national, anti-colonial revolutions in the East. As Lenin explained:

It would be unpardonable opportunism if, on the eve of the debut of the East, just as it is awakening, we undermine our prestige with its peoples, even if only by the slightest crudity or injustice towards our own non-Russian nationalities.<sup>13</sup>

These positions won the day at the 12th Congress of the Communist Party, but the ascendant bureaucracy had little intention of carrying them out. The petty-bourgeois outlook of this social stratum naturally drew it to the culture of the old bourgeoisie and Tsarist Bureaucracy. Great Russian Chauvinism rose like a scum on the tide of the Stalinist counter-revolution and came naturally to the bureaucracy's social base of ex-Tsarist bureaucrats and professional functionaries in the non-Russian republics.

It fell to the Left Opposition to continue the struggle for a revolutionary policy on the national question. The Platform of the Left Opposition argued that the key task was not to suppress national awakening, but to direct it along socialist channels. This meant promoting the development of local languages and schools and 'nationalising' the state machinery ('Nationalising' was an official policy of transforming the local party, state, trade union and co-operative structures to use the local language and staff). This Ukrainianisation, Turcification, etc., could not succeed by bureaucratically relying on experts, but by relying on the working class and the lower stratum in the countryside, in a struggle against Kulak and chauvinist elements. The Left Opposition also proposed a special 15 year plan to address the economic needs of the non-Russian republics.<sup>14</sup>

The consolidation of the bureaucracy brought dire consequences for the national minorities. Whilst it is true that the 'regime of the guardhouse' weighed heavily on the whole of the USSR, it weighed disproportionately on the non-Russian nationalities, just as it did on Soviet women. Imposition of Russian methods, particularly forced collectivisation, caused massive devastation and widespread famine, with millions dying in the Ukraine alone.

Resistance was met with mass deportations and the elimination of virtually all the local communist leadership. In the Ukraine, for example, ex-Borotbists won the leadership of the party and carried out Ukrainianisation policies until the late 1920s. They were driven from the party and most were killed in the purges. The scale of repression in the Ukraine reflected the scale of opposition to it; leading Trotsky to call for an independent Soviet Ukraine in a series of articles in the late 1930s. Anti-religious persecution was also particularly brutal amongst non-Russian nationalities, in an effort to prevent the Churches or Mosques from acting as national unifiers. The USSR extended its borders in 1939 by occupying Latvia,



Estonia, Lithuania, Finland and parts of Poland.

The Great Russian chauvinism of the Soviet bureaucracy reached new heights during the Second World War. This was portrayed as a 'Great Patriotic War' to defend the 'socialist motherland' against the Germans, who were condemned, as a people, as reactionary and fascist. This chauvinism was no mere rhetoric, however, and during and after the war the bureaucracy punished those peoples whom it considered had betrayed the USSR with mass executions and deportations. The Crimean Tartars are still campaigning to this day for the right to return to their homeland in the Ukraine - a demand supported, to its credit, by the Ukrainian Popular Front, since its implementation would mean at least a partial evacuation of the present population.

Since the war the non-Russian nationalities have to varying degrees faced a policy of cultural and linguistic assimilation, along with discrimination in the allocation of jobs, housing and land. Assimilation was openly advocated by Khrushchev and adopted as a goal by the 22nd Party Congress in 1961. The consequences of this policy for the Ukraine were well documented by the communist dissident Ivan Dzuba in his book *Internationalism of Russification?*, for which he was jailed and later forced to recant. A similar fate faced others who raised their voices against the cult of the 'Soviet nation', a term adopted by the 24th Party Congress. It is significant that the largest single group of political prisoners in the pre-Gorbachev USSR were Ukrainians jailed for the 'crime' of nationalism.

The present situation in the USSR must be analysed in the light of this long and sorry history of national oppression under Stalinism. It is little wonder that mass nationalist movements have emerged in the space provided by Glasnost, expressing extreme dissatisfaction on the part of these oppressed nations with their national fate.

How then should revolutionary socialists respond? The first thing to appreciate is that in the oppressed nations all questions, those of democracy, the environment, anti-militarism and the economy, have a national colouring. In Moscow, the demands are for greater democratic rights, in Vilnius they are for greater national democracy - the right to decide their own national future. Thus, the struggle of the oppressed nations must be seen as an important, and advanced, component of the inevitable struggles around democratic demands that can pave the way for political revolution. We must be careful to avoid the idea that the political revolution is something that will be centred in Moscow or Leningrad and be fought around purely 'class' demands. The revolutionary struggle of the oppressed nationalities against their oppression will be a key component of any political revolution in the USSR.

The declaration of independence by Lithuania, followed by Latvia and Estonia, has placed their national struggle firmly at the centre of the world stage and demands a response. The key question for socialists must be: have the Stalinist bureaucracy and the present Gorbachev leadership convinced the Latvian, Lithuanian and Estonian masses of the superiority of Stalinist centralism over Baltic independence? The answer is clearly no.

This must be our point of departure, and socialists have to not only support but advocate independence for these countries. Any other option will leave us by-passed by events and completely isolated from a dialogue with the masses. We must avoid any worthless, abstract schemas of defending self-determination whilst arguing for the Baltic states to remain within the USSR on the basis of some common anti-bureaucratic fight. The Baltic peoples do not want an improved form of union - they want independence! To offer them self-determination

on paper whilst arguing that they should not secede is to do nothing more than to parrot the positions of the bureaucracy for the last 60 years. As Trotsky pointed out when dealing with the Ukraine in the 1930s:

We must proceed from facts and not ideal norms. The Thermidorean reaction in the USSR ... must be paid for in genuine currency in all spheres, including that of the Ukrainian question.<sup>15</sup>

We must admit to the fact that the national dignity of the oppressed peoples has been fundamentally and systematically trampled upon by the bureaucracy, and develop our positions accordingly. Of course, our task as socialists is not merely to comment on or analyse a situation but to develop a strategy to take it forward. To move from the power of the bureaucracy to the power of the elected Soviet - that is our goal. The key to such developments in the oppressed nations will be the struggle around national rights and self-determination. The revolutionary left, both internationally and within the USSR, should actively advocate an independent soviet Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Ukraine. It is only through an unambiguous commitment to such positions that socialists can hope to gain a hearing within the national movements.

Such a position is not a sop to nationalists, or a 'trick' to get them to support socialism, but an honest recognition of their national rights. We have to show by our actions that the aim of our socialism is not to 'abolish' the oppressed nations but to give them the fullest space for their national development. Our failure to champion these demands leaves the field open to fundamentalist, clerical and pro-bourgeois forces whose voices are growing louder by the day.

Some will argue that to advocate independence is in effect to advocate independent capitalist states, given the nature of the Popular Fronts. Such positions reveal both a profound pessimism and a lack of clarity on how socialists should support national movements. Of course, we have something to say on the nature of post-independence states; we are for nationalised property relations and the rule of democratic workers' councils (not least because genuine independence under capitalism is a fiction). But, we can only win the masses to such a position if we adopt a correct attitude to the question that justifiably preoccupies them - the national question. It should also be emphasised that none of the Popular Fronts that exist have a finished, finalised pro-capitalist programme. Only the Azeri front has succumbed to chauvinism, and there the demand for independence has even greater potency since it points the finger at the real enemy: the Moscow bureaucracy and its local allies, not the Armenian people.

Many socialists, including an editorial in *Socialist Outlook*, have pointed to the illusions of the Baltic fronts that Western imperialists will defend them. The last months have shown the imperialists themselves going out of their way to destroy any such illusions. It should be increasingly clear to the Baltic peoples that the USA is no more concerned with self-determination in the USSR than it is in its Central American 'back yard'. The capitalist press has been full of warnings to the hasty Baltic that they are endangering Gorbachev's rule. Such an unholy alliance gives revolutionary socialists clear space to advance a different position - that of a common struggle against the Stalinist bureaucracy and imperialism - through building active solidarity with the struggle for independence. It is only in this way that we can show in practice who the best allies of the Baltic republic are.

Events are also clarifying the positions of the Soviet Left, many of whom were initially extremely sectarian and antagonistic to the national movements. The Lithuanian declaration of independence has forced them to take a clear stand: either for Gorbachev and blockade, or for independence. At the 1990 May Day demonstration, they overwhelmingly chose the correct position. This shows most clearly how the different struggles within the USSR run parallel to each other and exert influence upon each other, in this case in positive direction. Important links have been established between radical deputies in Moscow and Leningrad and the Front leaderships. A recent conference of independent workers' movements and organisations held in Novokuznetsk adopted a resolution of support for independent Lithuania and called on workers' collectives to break the blockade. The Supreme Soviets of Moldavia, Georgia and the Russian republic have also begun to make encouraging overtures to the Baltic republics.

In this context it is not so helpful to suggest that the Fronts should tactically curb or moderate their demands. Such a move would be disastrous, giving breathing space and new confidence to Stalinist organisations in the Baltic and demoralising those who look to the Baltic for a lead. Revolutionary socialists would never give such 'moderating' advice to oppressed nationalities in difficult or minority positions under imperialism, such as the Palestinians within the Israeli state, the six county Irish republicans or the Kanaks of New Caledonia. Rather, we would advocate a strategy to build solidarity and spread and deepen the struggle. The same should be true of the national question in the USSR and we should be careful not to apply a double standard.

A defeat for Baltic independence would be a defeat for the whole multiform, multi-national process of radicalisation and struggle within the USSR. The Baltic peoples may be numerically small but they have an important influence. This is particularly true of the developing national movement in the Ukraine, a national question with decisive significance for the whole USSR. It is inconceivable that a mass national movement will not develop here given the history of repression and the high level of resistance to it, right through to the dissidents of the 1960s and 1970s.

The national question is of strategic importance within the USSR. Seventy years of Stalinist rule have not solved the national question but exacerbated it. In addition the remnants of the early Leninist policy and subsequent industrialisation have created significant, nationally conscious, working classes in most oppressed nations. This reality has to be addressed by any international revolutionary left which seriously wishes to see an anti-bureaucratic political revolution in the USSR. Our starting point in this must be to learn from and popularise the revolutionary heritage of the Bolsheviks and the Left Opposition on the question. It is a heritage of which we can be proud.

We must guard against ignoring these movements for the bright lights of the simpler, more obviously 'socialist' anti-bureaucratic fight in Moscow and Leningrad. The struggle of the oppressed nationalities for self-determination will be a key element of the unfolding political revolution. The attitude of revolutionary socialists, both internationally and within the USSR, will be decisive in deciding whether the national current flows towards reaction or revolution. An immediate international campaign of solidarity with the Baltic states is needed, through existing solidarity structures or by creating new ones, around the demands of: 'Self-determination for the Baltic states!', 'All Union troops out!' and 'Workers' organisations - break the blockade!'

The question also has domestic relevance. The British labour movement is heavily influenced by Stalinist and Great British chauvinist ideas. The Mid-Glamorgan Labour councillor who recently declared the Welsh language; 'a nauseating irrelevance to an international socialist like me', stands in a long line of 'socialists' who cloak chauvinism in internationalist rhetoric. Our attitude to the national movements in the USSR and the lessons we learn from them can help to show that nothing could be further from genuine revolutionary internationalism. Trotsky summarised this internationalism with the following analogy when advocating an independent Soviet Ukraine in the 1930s:

The Kremlin bureaucracy tells the Soviet woman: Inasmuch as there is socialism in our country, you must be happy and give up abortions (or suffer the penalty). To the Ukraine they say: Inasmuch as the socialist revolution has solved the national question, it is your duty to be happy in the USSR and to renounce all thoughts of separation (or face the firing squad).

What does the revolutionary say to the woman? 'You will decide yourself whether you want a child; I will defend your right to abortion against the Kremlin police'. To the Ukrainian people he (sic) says: 'Of importance to me is your attitude toward your national destiny and not the 'socialist' sophistries of the Kremlin police; I will support your struggle for independence with all my might!<sup>16</sup>

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> 'The National Question and the Education of the Party Youth', Russell Block (ed.), *Lenin's Fight Against Stalinism* (New York, 1975), 143.

<sup>2</sup> V I Lenin, 'Draft Resolution Of The C.C., R.C.P.(B.) On Soviet Rule In The Ukraine', *Collected Works*, 4th English Edition, Vol. 30 (Moscow, 1965), 164.

<sup>3</sup> Dmitrii Lebed, cited by Roman Rosdolsky, *Engels and the 'Nonhistoric' Peoples: The National Question in the Revolution of 1848* (n.p, 1987), 142.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Leon Trotsky, *How the Revolution Armed Itself*, vol. 2 (London, 1979), 439.

<sup>6</sup> 'Letter To G. K. Orjonikidze', *Collected Works*, 4th English Edition, Vol. 32 (Moscow, 1965), 160.

<sup>7</sup> 'Letter to L. B. Kamenev for Members of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks)', *Lenin's Fight Against Stalinism*, 130.

<sup>8</sup> 'The question of Nationalities or "Autonomisation"', *Lenin's Fight Against Stalinism*, 133.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 134.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> 'The National Question and the Education of the Party Youth', 143-4.

<sup>13</sup> 'The question of Nationalities or "Autonomisation"', 138.

<sup>14</sup> Leon Trotsky, 'Platform of the Left Opposition', *Challenge of the Left Opposition (1926-27)* (New York, 1980), 344-9.

<sup>15</sup> Leon Trotsky, 'Independence of the Ukraine and Sectarian Muddleheads', *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1939- 40)*, (New York, 1973), 48.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

# Dialectics

[1991; written for a south Wales International Socialist Group education meeting]

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It is said that men are the logical sex, whilst women possess greater intuition. Intuition is an inexplicable hunch or feeling, whilst *logic* is a system with definite rules and outcomes. In this way bourgeois ideology attempts to label women as emotional and irrational whilst men are controlled and methodical. At the same time, this myth implies that there is something lacking, something lifeless and unfeeling, in the so-called logical approach. So what is logic?

There are three fundamental laws of *formal logic*:

- **Identity** - an object is always equal to itself
- **Formal contradiction** - objects of one type are distinct from objects of another type
- **Excluded middle** - no object can belong to two opposing categories at the same time

These laws are used by all of us, women and men, every day. They are the *axioms*, or basic assumptions, of most mathematics and of digital computing. They are very useful for many practical purposes and all correspond to reality - if we omit *motion*.

However, if we look around us we see that in reality everything is in *perpetual motion*. All things, be they plants, animals or social systems, are born, develop, age and die. We therefore need laws that reflect this and approximate to reality more closely than formal logic. This is what *dialectical logic* attempts to do, though matching laws totally to reality is impossible, precisely because reality is in continuous motion. Dialectics is therefore an open and continually developing system, part of the endless process of acquiring and refining knowledge. It does not reject formal logic but absorbs it as a useful tool, whilst being clear about its limits. *Dialectics* can be summarised as:

The great basic thought that the world is not to be comprehended as a complex of ready-made things, but as a complex of processes, in which the things apparently stable [...] go through an uninterrupted change of coming into being and passing away. [...] If [...] investigation always proceeds from this standpoint, the demand for final solutions and eternal truths ceases once and for all; one is always conscious of the necessary limitation of all acquired knowledge, of the fact that it is conditioned by the circumstances in which it was acquired. (Engels)

Everything comes into being and exists as a result of definite, or *determinate*, conditions and causes. But this is only half the truth: things also develop and pass away, a process called *negation*:

All things... meet their doom; and in saying so, we have a perception that Dialectic is the universal and irresistible power, before which nothing can stay, however secure and stable it may seem itself. (Hegel)

The fundamental cause of all motion, or *self-movement*, is the internal contradictions of the changing thing. *Contradiction* is the co-existence of elements opposed to each other, called *opposites*. The *unity and interpenetration of opposites* is a keystone of dialectics. There is a struggle within everything, between that which exists and that which is coming into being. This struggle gives rise to change and is eventually resolved by negation, whereby the previously subordinate qualities become dominant.

Contradiction, above all things, is what moves the world: and it is ridiculous to say that contradiction is unthinkable. The correct point in that statement is that contradiction is not the end of the matter but cancels itself. (Hegel)

Negation is not simply about destroying, it is also its own opposite. It is sometimes termed *transcendence*, to signify elements of conservation and development as well as destruction. Out of a negation comes a new *affirmation*, which in turn contains the seeds of its own negation. *Negation of the negation* implies returning, via two negations, to the original affirmation, though at a higher level.

Changes which maintain the structure of a thing are called *quantitative*. At a certain point these changes transform the object: a *qualitative* change has occurred. This is called the transformation of quantity into quality.

The coexistence of opposing elements within a structure is not random but forms a *structured totality* or whole, governed by specific relations. These elements at the same time struggle to break up that whole. When studying an object it is necessary to not only *analyse* its contradictory elements but also how these *synthesise* to form a *totality*. Dialectics attempts to look at an object in all its aspects and understand its movement in its totality. We must look at things not in isolation but in all their *interconnections* and indirect connections, or *mediacies*.

The truth is always concrete, never abstract. (Lenin)

How well any theory corresponds to reality can only be determined by practice.

In the beginning was the deed. [...] The proof of the pudding is in the eating. (Engels)

# Labour, Plaid Make gains in Wales

[With Ed George; May 1991; Draft Article submitted to *Socialist Outlook*\*]

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The recent local elections produced important changes in the political geography of Wales. In the Labour heartlands of the South valleys, Plaid Cymru, the Welsh nationalist party, made significant gains from Labour. For the first time since its formation 17 years ago Labour lost control of Taff Ely council. It also lost seats to Plaid in the Rhymni, Cynon and Lliw valleys and in Neath. Anti-poll tax activists who formed a 'Council of Action' unseated the Labour deputy leader of Merthyr council. In these areas of almost monolithic Labour dominance, local councils had implemented poll tax collection in a most brutal fashion. The swing to Plaid represents a sharp rebuff to many Labour councillors for their slavish obedience to Conservative government policies. This follows a pattern set in the recent Pontypridd and Neath by-elections, where Plaid sharply cut large Labour majorities. Plaid also regained a number of seats in Gwynedd in North Wales, particularly in Blaenau Ffestiniog.

In more metropolitan Cardiff, Labour had previously ruled as a minority in a hung council. Here the result was very different, with Labour making large gains from both Conservatives and Liberal Democrats and winning overall control of the city. In the key Canton ward of the city, which saw a massive swing to Labour unseating the three sitting Conservatives, anti-poll tax activists mounted a prominent 'Don't Vote Conservative' fly-posting campaign based on a spoof of the Conservative election leaflet.

There is a clear pattern as to where the anti-Tory vote fell in South Wales. Where Labour was monolithic and slavishly right wing voters looked outside it to register a protest. Where it was a minority, as in Cardiff, they turned towards it to more thoroughly put it to the test.

The Cardiff result is a significant victory. Now the task of poll tax activists and others on the left is to bring pressure on the Council to stop it doing the Government's dirty work as it has done so often in the past. Labour councillors can no longer use the excuse that their hands are tied by the lack of an overall majority.

This must be the approach throughout South Wales and its valleys: to bring local Labour councillors to book. We must be clear that Plaid is no alternative to Labour. In Taff Ely they have already indicated that they will form a council with the Liberal Democrats and Independents, hardly the action of a genuine left opposition to Labour. The party remains unable to comprehensively confront right wing Labourism. Plaid itself has shifted significantly rightwards in recent years, as its refusal to back mass poll tax non-payment illustrates.

Paradoxically, both the increased vote for Labour in Cardiff and for Plaid in the valleys represents a left swing by sections of the Welsh working class. Although the left is not well placed to take the initiative, there are a number of opportunities open to it coming out of the local elections. The local activists, who provided the backbone of the campaign against the poll tax, in the face of Labour's abstention and Militant's sectarianism, now need to link up with the left inside the Labour Party. They can find common cause in a campaign against the continued effects of the poll tax on jobs, services and local democracy. Equally, left wingers



inside the party need to join forces with activists outside to strengthen their position and bring their own leaders to account.

Alongside this the rise of Plaid Cymru presents a new challenge. Although voting for Plaid in opposition to corrupt local Labour Councils is not a viable alternative, the swing to Plaid is clearly a swing to the left. We must address the issues that prompted this swing and engage Plaid activists in fraternal dialogue; ensuring that our alternative comes from the left. Unfortunately, student supporters of the Campaign Group, the only organised left group in the Welsh Labour Party, have a record of consistently attacking Plaid inside UCMC/NUS Wales from the right. Their chauvinistic, anti-nationalist approach has more in common with Kinnockism than the type of left wing we need to build in Wales.

In the coming months the poll tax and its effects on local government jobs and services will continue to be felt as the recession deepens in an already depressed area. It must be a time of organisation and preparation by left wingers in Wales both inside and outside the Labour Party. Many of the key issues that will confront us were spelled out in the local election results.

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\*The version of the article finally published - in *Socialist Outlook* 2 (18 May 1992) - suffered badly at the hands of the sub-editors. To clarify the points made in the original draft (reproduced above), the following letter appeared in *Socialist Outlook* 5 (6 July 1992):

Readers may have gained the wrong impression of our view of Welsh nationalism from our article in *Socialist Outlook* 2. We feel that the essential point about Plaid Cymru is that the Welsh nationalist movement, of which Plaid Cymru is a part, represents a new challenge to the British left. Whilst we believe that Plaid is not an alternative to Labour it is not enough to baldly state this as some kind of definitively finalised fact, which is unfortunately the practice of most the left. Our approach must be to address issues that have created Welsh nationalism, recognising both its weaknesses and its progressive content, and engaging Plaid activists in an open dialogue. It is in this context that our remarks on Campaign Group Students in Wales make sense. We argue that they do exact the opposite: they adopt chauvinistic, anti-Welsh language, anti 'all-nationalisms' stance, which is coincidentally that of Neil Kinnock. The contrast between this and their slavish support for the ANC is stark but illuminating. We hope that this letter clarifies our arguments.

# We Must Maintain Our Strategic Orientation to the Labour Party: Why and How

[With Ed George; October 1991; International Socialist Group internal discussion document]<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction<sup>2</sup>

This document is a contribution to the discussion on our Labour Party work which began in earnest with the Walton by-election and is developing in the pre-conference period. It is clear that there is widespread dissatisfaction with our entry tactic inside the organisation and a number of documents have argued for a turn to fraction work. We feel that this is a mistaken response to the very real problems that we face working in the Labour Party at present. It is caused in no small part by our failure to adequately discuss our Labour Party strategy and the abstract, routinist way that the leadership has presented its positions, which often bear little resemblance to the real problems faced by our comrades on the ground. Developing a real discussion on our strategic understanding of the Labour Party is now an urgent task

A number of documents have stressed the importance of Trotsky's writings on the Labour Party in the 1930s. Our starting point in putting this document together was to return to the writings of Lenin and Trotsky on the British labour movement in order to try and understand the method that they applied. Our first section is the result of this reading and we have tried to present the positions of Lenin and Trotsky in their own words, along with the necessary background information. We do this not to try and line up these 'great men' on our side but because we believe that their writings contain many helpful insights and an important general method. The clarity and precision of their positions reflects their practical involvement in the October revolution and the building of the Communist International. Our limited experience by comparison means that we have in no way 'gone past' Lenin and Trotsky and that we still have much to learn from them. We would very much welcome comrades' opinion on our selection of material and suggestions of any additional material that we may have missed.

## Lenin and the Communist International

Lenin prepared the pamphlet *Left Wing Communism - an Infantile Disorder* for the Second Congress of the Third International held in 1921. He argued strongly against the idea that communists should lay down abstract principles such as: 'no to the old trade unions', 'no links with reformism' or 'no compromises'.

In the section on Britain he welcomed the disgust and anger felt towards the reformist leaders by thousands of revolutionary workers. For Lenin this was: 'truly the "beginning of all wisdom", the basis of any socialist and communist movement and of its success.' But such sentiments were not sufficient in themselves to win the mass of workers from reformism. For this Lenin argued:

That the British Communists *should* participate in parliamentary action, that they should, from *within* parliament, help the masses of the workers see the results of a Henderson and Snowden [i.e. Labour - eds.] government in practice, and that they should help the Hendersons and Snowdens defeat the united forces of Lloyd George

and Churchill. To act otherwise would mean hampering the revolution, since revolution is impossible without a change in the views of the majority of the working class, a change brought about by the political experience of the masses, never by propaganda alone.' [1920, 'Left Wing Communism - an Infantile Disorder', in *Lenin on Britain* (Moscow, 1973), 397]

Lenin suggested that the British communists should propose an electoral block with the Labour Party, with the seats shared out on the basis of a special ballot. The sole condition for such an alliance would be to:

retain *complete freedom* of agitation, propaganda and political activity. Of course, without this latter condition, we cannot agree to a block, for that would be treachery; the British communists must demand and get full freedom to expose the Hendersons and the Snowdens in the same way (*for fifteen years* - 1903-17) the Russian Bolsheviks demanded and got it in respect of the Russian Hendersons and Snowdens, i.e., the Mensheviks.' ['Left Wing Communism', 399]

Should the Labour leaders reject such a block:

We would put up our candidates in a very few but absolutely safe constituencies, namely, constituencies where our candidatures would not give any seats to the Liberals at the expense of the Labour candidates. We would take part in the election campaign, distribute leaflets agitating for communism, and, in *all* constituencies where we have no candidate, we would urge the electors *to vote for the Labour candidate and against the bourgeois candidate*. [...]

At present, British Communists very often find it hard even to approach the masses, and even to get a hearing from them. If I come out as a Communist and call upon them to vote for Henderson and against Lloyd George, they will certainly give me a hearing.

[...] with my vote, I want to support Henderson in the same way as a rope supports a hanged man [...]. ['Left Wing Communism', 400-401]

Lenin was at this time undecided about whether the Communist Party should seek affiliation to the Labour Party as he felt he lacked the necessary information.

I have too little material at my disposal on this question, which is highly complex because of the unique character of the British Labour Party, whose very structure is so unlike that of the political parties usual in the European continent. It is beyond doubt, however, first, that in this question, too, those who try to deduce the tactics of the revolutionary proletariat from principles such as: 'The Communist Party must keep its doctrine pure, and its independence of reformism inviolate; its mission is to lead the way, without stopping or turning, by the direct road to the communist revolution' - will inevitably fall into error.

[...] the task consists in learning to apply the general and basic principles of communism to the *specific relations* between classes and parties, to the *specific features* in the objective development towards communism, which are different in each country and which we must be able to discover, study and predict. ['Left Wing Communism', 402]

A major debate on affiliation then took place at the Second Congress, with the British Socialist Party, which favoured affiliation, represented by McLean and the anti-affiliationists

by Pankhurst and Gallagher. During these discussions Lenin came out strongly in favour of the British Communist Party affiliating to the Labour Party. He made the following points in a speech.

We must say frankly that the Party of Communists can join the Labour Party only on condition that it preserves full freedom of criticism and is able to conduct its own policy. [...] With regard to the British Labour Party, it is simply a matter of collaboration between the advanced minority of the British workers and their vast majority. Members of the Labour Party are all members of Trade Unions. It has a very unusual structure, to be found in no other country. It is an organisation that embraces four million workers out of the six or seven million organised in Trade Unions. They are not asked to state what their opinions are. [...] Here we have collaboration between the vanguard of the working class and the rear-guard, the backward workers. [...] If the minority is unable to lead the masses and establish close links with them, then it is not a party and worthless in general.

[...] If the majority [of British communists - eds.] is against it, we must organise a separate minority. [1920, 'Speech on the Role of the Communist Party', in *Lenin on Britain*, 449-50]

In a later speech at the same Congress he stressed:

[...] we can consider a party to be a workers' party only when it is really linked up with the masses and fights against the old and quite corrupt leaders. [...]

the conditions now prevailing in Britain are such that, should it so desire, a political party may remain a revolutionary workers' party even if it is connected with a special kind of Labour organisation of four million members, which is half trade union and half political and is headed by bourgeois leaders. In such circumstances it would be highly erroneous for the best revolutionary elements not to do everything possible to remain in such a party. [...]

The British Communist Party must retain the freedom necessary to expose and criticise the betrayers of the working class, who are much more powerful in Britain than in any other country. [1920, 'Speech on Affiliation to the British Labour Party', *Lenin on Britain*, 462-64]

The motion to propose affiliation was included in the Theses on the Fundamental Tasks of the Communist International, drafted by Trotsky (but attributed to Lenin in *Lenin on Britain*!, 423-24), and passed by 54 votes for, 24 against and 2 abstentions. The newly formed British Communist Party duly applied and was turned down. Individual membership of the Labour Party by communists was still possible until the Liverpool Conference of 1925.

## Trotsky on the British Labour Movement

Trotsky provided this succinct analysis of the nature of the British labour movement in a debate with French syndicalists:

Up to now, we have not mentioned the Labour Party, which in England, the classic country of trade unions, is only a political transposition of the same trade union bureaucracy. The same leaders guide the trade unions, betray the general strike, lead

the electoral campaign and later sit on ministries. The Labour party and the trade unions - these are not two principles they are only a technical division of labour. Together they form the fundamental prop of the British bourgeois. The latter cannot be overthrown without overthrowing the Labourite bureaucracy. [1929, 'The Errors in Principle of Syndicalism', in *Leon Trotsky on the Trade Unions* (New York, 1969), 29]

Such a view did not lead him to downplay the importance of the trade unions in any way: he stressed their importance in *Where is Britain Going?*, written in 1925; and again in 1933:

The trade union question remains the most important question of proletarian policy in Great Britain, as well as in the majority of old capitalist countries. The mistakes of the Comintern in this field are innumerable. No wonder: a party's inability to establish correct relations with the class reveals itself most glaringly in the area of the trade union movement. [1933, 'The ILP and the New International', in *Trotsky's Writings on Britain*, vol. 3 (London, 1974), 75]

In 1925 the Soviet trade unions formed an alliance with the leadership of the British trade unions called the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Unity Committee (ARC). The betrayal of the 1926 General Strike by these very same leaders, the lefts included, caused Trotsky to call for a break with the ARC. In the subsequent debates Trotsky elaborated his approach to united fronts and alliances with left reformists.

A basic principle of this tactic is: 'With the masses - always; with the vacillating leaders - sometimes, but only as long as they stand at the head of the masses.' [1926, 'Resolution on the General Strike in Britain', in *Leon Trotsky on Britain* (New York, 1973), 255]

In particular cases, the tactic of the united front can lead to temporary agreements with this or that left group of reformists against the right wing. But such agreements must not in any circumstances be transformed into a lasting political block [...]

While giving all-round support to the movement of the truly revolutionary minority and particularly while giving support to acceptable candidacies of representatives of this minority for this or that position in the trade union movement (always on the basis of a specific practical programme), the British Communist Party must not in any circumstances or under any conditions identify itself with the Minority Movement or merge the organisations. The British Communist Party must maintain full freedom of criticism with respect to the Minority Movement as a whole as well as with respect to its individual leaders, their mistakes and vacillations. [1927, 'Amendments to the Resolution on the Situation in Britain', in *Leon Trotsky on Britain*, 260-2]

The possibility of betrayal is always contained in reformism. But this does not mean to say that reformism and betrayal are one and the same at every moment. Not quite. Temporary agreements may be made with reformists whenever they take a step forward. [1928, 'A Balance Sheet of the Anglo-Russian Committee', in *Leon Trotsky on Britain*, 300]

He summed up this period, and made a perceptive observation on the thinking of the British working class, in a letter written in 1931:

The British proletariat, the oldest, with the most traditions, is, in its thinking methods, most empirical, carries in its chest two souls, and turns, as it were, with two faces to

historical events. The contemptible mercenary and servile bureaucrats of the trade unions and the Labour Party give expression to all that is rotten, humiliating, serf-like and feudal in the British working class. Against this, the task of the Communist Party consists in giving expression to the potential revolutionary qualities of the British working class, which is very great and capable of developing immense explosive powers. But in the very critical period of British history, 1925-27, all the policies of the British Communist Party and the Comintern consisted in the slave-like assimilation of the trade union leadership, its idealisation, blotting out its treason, and fastening the confidence of the working class to it. The young British Communist Party was because of this deeply demoralised. [...]

The British workers think slowly, since their consciousness is filled with the rubbish of centuries. But they think. Single articles, appeals, slogans, generally pass them unnoticed. However, whole periods of politics (Anglo-Russian Committee, 'Third Period') in no respect pass without trace, at least, with the most progressive, militant, critical and revolutionary section of the working class. [1931, 'The First British Trotskyists' [Letter to Reg Groves], in *Trotsky's Writings on Britain*, vol. 3, 61-63]

In a later article, he further examined the attitude of many workers to their trade unions.

The trade unions were formed during the period of growth and rise of capitalism. They had as their task the raising of the material and cultural level of the proletariat and the extension of its political rights. This work, which in Britain lasted over a century, gave the trade unions tremendous authority amongst the workers. The decay of British capitalism, under the conditions of decline of the world capitalist system, undermined the basis for the reformist work of the trade unions. Capitalism can continue to maintain itself only by lowering the standard of living of the working class. Under these conditions trade unions can either transform themselves into revolutionary organisations or become lieutenants of capital in the intensified exploitation of the workers. The trade union bureaucracy, which has satisfactorily solved its own social problems, took the second path. It turned all the accumulated authority of the trade unions against the socialist revolution and even against any attempts of the workers to resist the attacks of capital and reaction.

From that point on, the most important task of the revolutionary party became the liberation of the workers from the reactionary influence of the trade union bureaucracy.

[...] As was said, the trade unions now play not a progressive but a reactionary role. Nevertheless, they still embrace millions of workers. One must not think that the workers are blind and do not see the change in the historic role of the trade unions. But what is to be done? The revolutionary road is seriously compromised in the eyes of the left wing of the workers by the zigzags and adventures of official communism. The workers say to themselves: the trade unions are bad, but without them it might be even worse. This is the psychology of one who is in a blind alley. Meanwhile, the trade union bureaucracy persecutes the revolutionary workers ever more boldly, ever more impudently replacing internal democracy by the arbitrary action of a clique, in essence, transforming the trade unions into some sort of concentration camp for the workers during the decline of capitalism.

[...] It is absurd to think that it would be possible to work against the trade union bureaucracy with its own help, or only with its consent. Insofar as it defends itself by

persecutions, violence, expulsions, frequently resorting to the assistance of government authorities, we must learn to work in the trade unions discreetly, finding a common language with the masses but not revealing ourselves prematurely to the bureaucracy. It is precisely in the present epoch, when the reformist bureaucracy of the proletariat has transformed itself into the economic police of capital, that revolutionary work in the trade unions, performed intelligently and systematically, may yield decisive results in a comparatively short time. [1933, 'The ILP and the New International', in *Trotsky's Writings on Britain*, vol.3, 75-77]

## The ILP Split from the Labour Party

When Labour leader Ramsey MacDonald formed a coalition government with the Tories and Liberals in 1931, the Independent Labour Party (ILP) split from Labour. Trotsky devoted considerable energy to winning the ILP's base to revolutionary Marxism. His comments touched on many aspects of revolutionary strategy and concrete application in Britain at that time. He began by examining whether it was correct for the Trotskyists (who called themselves Bolshevik-Leninists at this time) to join, or enter, the ILP.

I shall try to examine the principled conditions *for* and *against* the entry [...]

In its present state, the ILP is a left-centrist party. It consists of a number of factions and shadings that are indicative of the different stages of evolution from reformism to communism. Should the Bolshevik-Leninists enter into the official Communist Parties, which they had long designated, and with full reason, as centrist organisations? For a number of years, we have considered ourselves Marxist factions of centrist parties. A categorical answer - yes, yes; no, no - is insufficient also in this case. A Marxist party should, of course, strive to full independence and to the highest homogeneity. But in the process of its formation, a Marxist party often has to act as a faction of a centrist and even reformist party. Thus the Bolsheviks adhered for a number of years to the same party with the Mensheviks. Thus, the Third International only gradually formed itself out of the Second.

Centrism, as we have said more than once, is a general name for most varied tendencies and groupings spread out between reformism and Marxism. In front of each centrist grouping it is necessary to place an arrow indicating the direction of its development: from right to left or from left to right.

[...] Left flanks have separated from the reformist camp, which has grown considerably in numbers. These flanks also have a centrist character, but they move towards the left and, as demonstrated by experience, are capable of development and yielding to Marxist influence. Let us recall once more that the Third International originated from organisations of this sort. (1933, 'Letter to the British Section', in *Trotsky's Writings on Britain*, vol.3, 87-88]

The ILP broke away from the Labour Party. That was correct. If the ILP wanted to become the revolutionary lever, it was impossible for the handle of this lever to be left in the hands of the thoroughly opportunist and bourgeois careerists. *Complete and unconditional political and organisational independence of a revolutionary party is the first prerequisite for its success.*

But while breaking away from the Labour Party, it was necessary immediately to turn towards it. [...]

The Leninist method of the united front and political fraternisation with reformists exclude each other. *Temporary practical fighting* agreements with mass organisations even headed by the worst reformists are inevitable and obligatory for the revolutionary party. Lasting political alliances with reformist leaders without a definite programme, without concrete duties, without the participation of the masses themselves in militant actions, are the worst type of opportunism. [1934, 'For the Fourth International', in *Trotsky's Writings on Britain*, vol.3, 94]

The ILP split from the Labour Party chiefly for the sake of keeping the independence of its parliamentary faction. We do not intend here to discuss whether the split was correct at the *given moment*, and whether the ILP gleaned from it the expected advantages. We don't think so. But it remains a fact that for every revolutionary organisation in England its attitude to the masses and to the class is almost coincident with its attitude to the Labour Party, which bases itself upon the trade unions. At *this time* the question of whether to function inside the Labour Party or outside it is not a principled question, but a question of actual possibilities. In any case, without a strong faction in the trade unions, and, consequently, in the Labour Party itself, the ILP is doomed to impotence even today. Yet, for a long period, the ILP attached much greater importance to the 'united front' with the insignificant Communist Party than to work in mass organisations. The leaders of the ILP consider the policy of the opposition wing of the Labour party to be incorrect out of considerations which are absolutely unexpected: although 'they (the Opposition) criticise the leadership and policy of the party but, owing to the block vote and the form of organisation in the party, they cannot change the personnel and policy of the Executive and Parliamentary Party within the period necessary to resist capitalist reaction, fascism and war'. The policy of the opposition in the Labour Party is unspeakably bad. But this only means that it is necessary to counter-pose to it inside the Labour party another, correct Marxist policy. This isn't so easy? Of course not! But one must know how to hide one's activities from the police vigilance of Sir Walter Citrine and his agents, until the proper time. But isn't it a fact that a Marxist faction would not succeed in changing the structure and policy of the Labour party? With this we are entirely in accord: the bureaucracy will never surrender. But the revolutionists, functioning inside and outside, can and must succeed in winning over tens and hundreds of thousands of workers. The criticism directed by the ILP against the left-wing faction in the Labour Party is of an obviously artificial character. [1935, 'The Middle of the Road', in *Trotsky's Writings on Britain*, vol.3, 107]

United fronts [with the CP - eds.] for certain specific actions could have been of some use, of course, *but the most important united front for the ILP is with the Labour Party, the trade unions, the co-operatives*. [1936, 'Once Again the ILP' in *Trotsky's Writings on Britain*, vol.3, 123]

By 1936 Trotsky was convinced that the ILP was a lost cause and that the Trotskyists should focus their attention on the Labour Party. He began by explaining the relationship between the Labour Party, the mass of workers and the revolutionaries.

It is argued that the Labour Party already stands exposed by its past deeds in power and its present reactionary platform. For example, by its decisions at Brighton. For us - yes! But not for the masses, the eight million who voted Labour. It is a great danger



for revolutionists to attach too much importance to conference decisions. We use such evidence in our propaganda - but it cannot be presented beyond the power of our own press. One cannot shout louder than the strength of his own throat. [1935 'Once Again the ILP' in *Trotsky's Writings on Britain*, vol.3, 118-119]

He explained how the revolutionaries should join the Labour Party and work within it.

Labour leader Ramsey MacDonald formed a coalition government with the Tories and Liberals in 1923. Finally, a point from a discussion with C L R James on how revolutionaries should advocate a Labour government, without spreading illusions about it.

**James:** We have had difficulty in Britain with advocating a Labour government with the necessary reservations.

**Trotsky:** In France in all our press, in our archives and propaganda, we regularly make all the necessary reservations. Your failure in Britain is due to lack of ability; also lack of flexibility, due to the long domination of bourgeois thought in Britain. I would say to British workers, 'You refuse to accept my point of view. Well, perhaps I did not explain well enough. Perhaps you are stupid. Anyway I have failed. But now, you believe in your party. Why allow Chamberlain to hold power? Put your party in power. I will help you all I can. I know that they will not do what you think, but as you don't agree with me and we are small, I will help you put them in. [1939, *Trotsky's Writings on Britain*, vol.3, 144]

## A Summary

It is possible to draw out a number of themes from the previous sections:

1. Rejection of any abstract principles and the need to make a real analysis of relation of class forces, the existing mass organisations, the consciousness of the masses and strength of the vanguard.
2. Having made this analysis the task of a revolutionary group is to find the most effective way to draw closer to the masses and fight the right-wing leaders.
3. In Western Europe this means a central strategic orientation to the existing workers' parties and trade unions. This may not always involve entry but it does mean a consistent political orientation to these organisations. The reformist parties may stand exposed to us, the revolutionary minority, but they are not to the mass of workers. It is only through their own practical experience that these workers will break from reformism.
4. The mass organisations gained their credibility from their reformist work during the rise of imperialism and the more recent post-war boom. Imperialism in crisis can no longer grant such reforms. Fearful and unwilling to break with capitalism, the bureaucracy is forced to attack the very gains it previously secured. Such a policy will inevitably produce political crises in the workers' movement, which will eventually find organisational expression in the form of splits and fusions.
5. Where legitimate hatred of reformism leads newly radicalised workers to draw incorrect tactical conclusions, we reserve the right to comradely criticism. Our aim is to win them to the most effective strategy and tactics to take their struggle forward.

6. Temporary agreements with left reformists are acceptable and necessary. They should be organised on a clear basis and should not be turned into lasting political blocks.

7. The revolutionary group must always maintain full freedom to criticise the reformists and centrists. Temporary suspension of a public profile is nevertheless acceptable in order to prevent premature expulsion from the mass organisations without having made gains. A concrete assessment must be made in each case.

8. In Britain our strategic orientation must address the special nature of the labour movement. We struggle against a single Labourist bureaucracy which operates a technical division of labour. The specific focus of this struggle will shift between the Labour Party and the trade unions - but it remains a political fight against the bureaucracy as a whole.

9. The ineffectiveness of the left reformists is not a sufficient reason to reject Labour Party work. This only means that we should advance a more effective method of conducting the fight in the Labour Party.

Of course there is a danger of taking the above as a series of timeless principles. The Britain in which we now work is very different from that analysed by Lenin and Trotsky. The mass illusions in reformism which previously existed have given way to cynicism in many workers. The rise of the Scottish and Welsh national questions and the autonomous movements of women, black people and lesbians and gays present new challenges and opportunities. All these developments must be integrated into our politics and practice. We would argue that this can best be done within the general framework outlined above.

## Appendix

There is an ancient, evolutionary-liberal epigram: every people gets the government it deserves. History, however, shows that one and the same people may in the course of a comparatively brief epoch get very different governments (Russia, Italy, Germany, Spain, etc.) and furthermore the order of these governments doesn't at all proceed in one and the same direction: from despotism - to freedom, as was imagined by the evolutionist liberals. The secret is this, that a people is comprised of hostile classes, and the classes themselves are comprised of different and in part antagonistic layers which fall under different leadership; furthermore every people falls under the influence of other people who are likewise comprised of classes. Governments do not express the systematically growing 'maturity' of a 'people' but are the product of the struggle between classes and different layers within one and the same class, and, finally, the action of external forces - alliances, wars and so on. To this should be added that a government, once it has established itself, may endure much longer than the relationship of forces which produced it. It is precisely out of this historical contradiction that revolutions, coup d'etats, counter-revolutions, etc. arise.

The very same dialectical approach is necessary in dealing with the question of the leadership of a class. Imitating the liberals, our sages tacitly accept the axiom that every class gets the leadership it deserves. In reality leadership is not at all a mere 'reflection' of a class or the product of its own free creativeness. A leadership is shaped in the process of clashes between the different classes or the friction between the different layers within a given class. Having once arisen, the leadership invariably rises above its class and thereby becomes predisposed to the pressure and influence of

other classes. The proletariat may 'tolerate' for a long time a leadership that has suffered a complete inner degeneration but has not yet had the opportunity to express its degeneration amid great events. A great historic shock is necessary to reveal sharply the contradiction between the leadership and the class. The mightiest shocks are wars and revolutions. Precisely for this reason the working class is often caught unawares by war and revolution. But, even in cases where the old leadership has revealed its internal corruption, the class cannot improvise immediately a new leadership, especially if it has not inherited from the previous period strong revolutionary cadres capable of utilising the collapse of the old leading party. [1940, 'The Class, the Party and the Leadership', in Leon Trotsky, *The Spanish Revolution (1931-39)* (New York, 1973), 357-358]

## **The Political Forces in the Workers' Movement<sup>3</sup>**

Any attempt to relate the method outlined above to the present situation must begin with an assessment of the political forces within the workers' movement. Without this any application of specific tactics outlined by Lenin or Trotsky would become an abstract application of the dogmas of 'great men'.

It is clear that Kinnock and Willis represent a new low in class collaboration and capitulation for British working class leadership in recent times. Whilst they have not yet committed betrayals of the scale of 1914 or 1926 the consequences of their politics lead inevitably in that direction. The continued decline of British imperialism in the context of a world recession allows no place for consensus labourism. Having solved their own social problems, the Labour Party and trade union leaderships now clearly take the side of the bourgeoisie. In defence of the present system they have become reformists without reforms. They gladly accept an increased police role in the workplace through deals with management and in the councils through enthusiastic implementation of Tory policies. But the bankruptcy of their methods constantly undermines their position, many workers are leaving the trade unions and Labour Party, their illusions replaced by a bitter cynicism.

Yet, it would be wrong to deduce from these twelve years of betrayals any fundamental change in the nature of the TUC or the Labour Party. The Labour Party remains a 'bourgeois workers' party' and still retains that unique feature which motivated Lenin and Trotsky to give it such close attention - the membership of millions of workers through their trade unions. Sections of the leadership may well make moves to weaken these links, or even to break them, but this has not happened yet. Given the material and subjective obstacles, however, such a development would be highly unlikely in the short term.

This is not to deny that enormous changes have taken place within the party. The political shift to the right has been accompanied by increasing attacks on party democracy. Since the early eighties various sections of the left have been the target of witch-hunts; this is currently reaching new proportions. We have seen supporters of *Militant* and *Socialist Organiser* witch-hunted along with poll tax and anti-war activists. This trend is set to deepen with the exclusion of Fields and Nellist and the wholesale expulsion of hundreds more *Militant* supporters (if they don't leave first!). There is a very real possibility of the complete elimination of the democratic space which still exists within the Labour Party, a possibility which we must discuss and prepare for now.

The defeat of the two most significant mass struggles against Thatcherism was key to creating this situation in the Labour movement. The miners' strike was the most significant challenge to new realism that we have yet seen. Its defeat not only weakened the left and destroyed the NUM as a political force but greatly strengthened the new realist right. Similarly the poll tax posed the possibility of widespread struggle by millions of workers outside the control of the bureaucracy. Yet, an organised and effective mass movement was only sustained in Scotland and this weakness allowed the Tories to effect an orderly retreat. Whilst they were in a sense defeated, their army remains intact. The victorious army, which was never more than a rabble, is however completely disintegrated and directionless. These two key struggles, both defeated, were key to the consolidation of the current right wing leadership. This has produced two effects amongst activists and the broader working class:

(1) Demoralisation - membership of the Labour Party has declined and the active membership still further. People have been ground down by ten years of Thatcherism and see no way of fighting back. Within the broader working class a similar desperate demoralisation has occurred, which in the current economic situation is accompanied by lumpenisation and petty-bourgeoisification of whole strata, particularly the youth.

(2) Leftism - Lenin observed that 'Anarchism was not infrequently a kind of penalty for the opportunist sins of the Labour movement'. Never was this more true than today. The growth of Anarchist groups, again particularly amongst the youth, and their role in the poll tax movement testify to this. Anyone who has read *Class War* recently will see a marked change from the left wing *Viz* of some years ago. The growth of the SWP indicates a similar phenomenon along with *Militant's* new left turn.

Of these latter developments by far the most important for us is the left turn of the *Militant*. We have previously characterised the *Militant* as a rightward-moving centrist organisation whose main strategy was winning the leadership of the Labour Party. They coupled serious accommodations to British chauvinism with deep seated sectarianism to groups and movements outside their control. Maintaining entry through the 70s made them well placed to take advantage of the left developments in the Labour Party in the early 80s and they grew parasitically out of Bennism. Despite this the current learnt none of the positive lessons of this period such as the need for the Labour movement to struggle for women's and black liberation and the need for building united fronts. Notwithstanding these major weaknesses the *Militant* has always had a larger working class base than the other left organisations and have shown considerable political acumen in their chosen areas of work.

They saw the potential of the Poll Tax as a motivator for real struggle much earlier than any other group and enthusiastically turned towards it. Despite their initial successes, particularly in Scotland, the campaign soon grew too big for them. After a severe fright with the Trafalgar Square riots they effectively closed down the British Federation. Unable to see mass mobilisations through to the end they began resorting to increasingly ultra-left tactics in the regions. Working in this way for over a year and increasingly recruiting on this basis could not but leave its mark on an organisation such as the *Militant* which lacked a sound programmatic basis. A temporary position of working outside the Labour Party due to the failures of the Labour Party leadership quickly became the norm. The centre of gravity of the organisation swung away from the Labour Party and trade unions and their politics were bound to follow suit.

When the Tories retreated on the Poll Tax the *Militant* were forced to call it a major victory. They did this in order to save face, motivate their new base and cover up for the fact that they were in no position to inflict a real defeat on the government. We must be clear that this

position is totally false, this was no defeat for the government, still less a rout and can best be described as a forced retreat. Thus the whole political analysis on which the *Militant* base their new turn is completely false.

We would characterise this new position as an ultra-left reflex by a centrist organisation, carried out under the worst possible conditions. It is in no way a positive break from the Labour Party by a class-struggle or revolutionary group. Analogies with the ILP in the 30s are not appropriate in our opinion. We lay the blame for such leftism on Kinnock and Willis, it is their failure to act in the struggle against the Poll Tax that creates some support for such desperate acts in the working class. Nevertheless it would be completely wrong of us not to explain why we think *Militant* are making a big mistake, which could be very damaging for the left and effectively aid and strengthen the right wing leaders. It is very difficult to say how far *Militant* will take their new project or how effective it will be in winning some small forces. With the exception of Scotland and Liverpool it seems unlikely that they will get very far.

The seriousness of this development and the very real possibility of a split in the organisation demands a specific orientation to the *Militant* and its base. This means discussions with their new periphery on their completely mistaken assessment of the political situation and the importance of the labour movement and discussions with their more experienced cadre on how their new turn breaks with the one positive aspect of *Militant's* politics, their orientation to the Labour Party. If we can show ourselves to be a small but serious group which attempts to develop its programmatic clarity, which tries as far as possible to root itself in the Labour Party and trade unions and which seeks to fight the right wing in the most effective way possible then we can expect to make small but significant gains from the *Militant*. Should their project find support, with a new influx of people changing the character of the organisation, then we should consider fraction work but we don't think this is currently posed.

The most important left reformist current which exists at present is the *Socialist Movement* (SM). It will be an important element of our work in the short term and as such demands careful analysis. Its leadership on a British state level is composed of left Labour MPs, left intellectuals around the Socialist Society, individual left activists and ourselves. There is also input from left greens and some Scottish and Welsh nationalists. As such the organisation is extremely heterogeneous and its politics remain very unclear. Such lack of clarity and purpose is reflected in its inability to organise action around key issues such as the Poll Tax and the Gulf War. The nature of the SM in Scotland appears to be very different and is excluded from the following comments due to a lack of information on our part. (This is true for the whole document, though the situation in Scotland seems to be of a very particular and advanced nature which demands urgent prioritisation by our organisation.)

The terminal crisis of Stalinism has further contributed to muddying the thinking of many activists in the SM. The ideas of 'open structures', 'broad movements', 'consensus' and 'anti centralism' dominate its political thinking, reflecting the ideological confusion of this period. Of course these reactions are in some ways healthy. Many people will turn to the SM as an antidote to the bankruptcy of Stalinism and the chauvinism, tedium and lack of democracy in the official labour movement. But if the SM is truly to break with the bad practices of the past and serve as an effective instrument to fight the right-wing its leadership must be placed under the control of its activists. Leaving the effective leadership of the movement in the hands of an unrepresentative London clique, which 'knows best' what to do, is just as undemocratic and ultimately stifling as the 'old' methods. Whilst the SM remains in its

present state, lacking any centralising political priorities around which to organise campaigns, the building of local SM groups will be impossible.

The debates around the SM paper illustrate many of the problems that exist. The first two issues are frankly dreadful. The last thing the British left needs is an attractive looking but politically vacuous paper with special offers on organic wine. The paper in its present form reflects and gives voice to all the worst aspects of the SM, the best aspects, particularly the Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee (SMTUC), are completely swamped. It was a mistake to support the launch of the Socialist before even minimum clarity about its political basis was achieved. We certainly should not be accommodating to this lack of clarity by supporting its campaign for an 80% reduction in arms spending in an editorial of our paper. Our position remains, 'not a penny not a person for imperialism's wars', and not '20 per cent of a penny 20 per cent of a person for imperialist defence'.

The real strength of the SM is the SMTUC. This is an excellent project which shows in exemplary fashion how to work with left reformists to most effectively attack the right-wing. The initiative would not have been possible without the support of the Labour MPs and illustrates how our Labour Party and trade union work can complement each other. Its strength lies in having a clear campaigning priority which directly addresses the key issue facing trade union activists. It is the only organised force opposing new realism in the unions today, around which left trade unionists can regroup in order to fight back. We should take pride in the fact that we were central to launching this initiative, which finds a real resonance with trade union activists. It is striking that the SWP, with many times as many members, is completely unable to develop such a campaign, hampered as it is by a false understanding of the British labour movement.

Despite our criticisms we are in no way suggesting that we should withdraw from the SM, the demise of which would be a defeat for the left and mean the end of important campaigns like the SMTUC. Neither are we suggesting that we should simply work in the SMTUC. What we do need is to more openly voice our differences with the SM and its leadership, whilst making clear what we see as its strengths and proposing a way forward. At present we acknowledge major problems in our pre-conference bulletins but act as completely uncritical cheer-leaders for the SM and its press in our own newspaper. This mis-educates our periphery on the nature of the SM and our role within it.

## **Appendix: Trotskyist Tactics in the 1930s**

A discussion of the early history of British Trotskyism is fraught with difficulties. The subject is very poorly documented. Contemporary accounts of factional disputes are often obscured by their over-heated polemical style. Equally, more recent histories, often written by participants in the events they describe, can be highly partisan and subjective.

Despite these problems we agree with Barclay *et al*<sup>1</sup> of the need for a 'serious attitude to the history of the struggle in Britain to build a Trotskyist organisation.' The early British Trotskyists had to grapple with many problems that have relevance for us today. What attitude to the Labour Party? How do you survive as a revolutionary organisation of tens or hundreds of people - 'against the stream' - in an advanced capitalist country? On what basis do you fuse with, or split from, other (would-be) revolutionary groups?

Barclay *et al* go on to draw on the experiences of British Trotskyists in the 1930s to illustrate their own understanding of the nature of our own Labour Party work. They state that the:

Revolutionary Socialist League, the British section of the Fourth International [...] was able to combine harmoniously in one leadership the 'open work' of C L R James and the Marxist Group (with their paper Workers' Fight) with the 'entry work' of Harber and Jackson (with their paper Militant).

And that:

In summer and autumn of 1938, the British section of the Fourth International, the Revolutionary Socialist League (mark one) used its resources to present its line by two separate methods simultaneously. The 'open work' was around the journal Workers' Fight, which C L R James edited. It openly reported the formation of the Fourth International. [...] The paper devoted to [entry] work, on the other hand, the [...] Militant, devoted attention to the conflicts in the working class as they expressed themselves in the Labour Party in order to hold together the left there.

This is not quite the whole picture. The Revolutionary Socialist League (RSL), 'mark one', was founded in February 1938. It was the result of a fusion of two groups: the Marxist Group of C L R James, which had recently turned from entry in the ILP to an 'open group' perspective and the Marxist League of Harry Wicks and Reg Groves, which had been engaged in entry in the Labour Party, specifically in the Socialist League and its successor the Socialist Left Federation. Wicks was later to comment that the fusion '[...] was not politically prepared.' [Sam Bornstein and Al Richardson, *Against the Stream* (London, 1986), 269]

There were another three significant Trotskyist organisations in Britain at this time: the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP), a syndicalist-influenced organisation based in Scotland; the Militant group of Harber and Jackson in the Labour Party, formed in 1936 out of the Marxist Group, and the Workers' International League (WIL), a split from the Militant group which had emerged by the end of 1937.

In the summer of 1938, in the run-up to the founding conference of the Fourth International, James Cannon and Max Shachtmann arrived in Britain from the international leadership to try and sort out this mess and form a unified British section. After discussions with the individual groups a conference was called in 1938 where they were presented with a 'Peace and Unity Agreement'. The RSP, RSL and the Militant group all signed; the WIL refused. The new organisation took over the name Revolutionary Socialist League. This RSL (actually mark 2) is the one referred to by Barclay *et al.*

The WIL were highly critical of the fusion process:

At this conference the 'Peace and Unity Agreement' was drawn up and presented by the American comrades. There was no political discussion of the differences of tactics and perspectives for Britain, which had separated the groups for years [...]

We [the WIL - eds.] claimed that the so-called 'unification' was not a unification at all but was merely a prelude to further splits because of two fundamental factors: there was no unified tactic and therefore no unified body; with two tactics in operation without a majority decision, it was impossible to work as an unified body. ['The WIL View', *Revolutionary History*, Spring, 1988, 23]

The cracks soon began to appear. The RSP never even made it as far as the first conference in February 1939, having been excluded from the new organisation for making sharp criticisms of the leadership. The conference itself began with the

expulsion of a number of leading comrades, prompting a walk-out of 16 delegates, to set up a new organisation comprising a majority of the 'open' section. They were soon followed by Gerry Bradley, Henry Sara and Harry Wicks, all serious cadre who had been active in the movement for many years. The subsequent evolution of the RSL was dogged by factionalism, splits, expulsions and resignations. At the fusion conference the membership stood at 170, one account puts the figure for the summer of 1943 at 23 [Sam Bornstein and Al Richardson, *War and the International* (London, 1986), 42].

The degeneration of the RSL cannot be put down solely to the difficulties of operating in war-time. The other major Trotskyist organisation, the WIL, managed to grow, build a base and avoid the factional chaos that dogged the RSL. In March 1944 the WIL and what was left of the RSL fused to form the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP). The WIL current was by far and away the dominant section of the new organisation, both numerically and in terms of political maturity.

Barclay et al present their view of 'fraction work' (a legitimate tactic under the right conditions) by calling on the example of the RSL. Our reading of the facts suggests that this particular combination of 'open' and entry work was not an example of a carefully thought out tactic to enable the best intervention in the class struggle but rather an organisational compromise which failed to address and resolve deep political differences within a common organisation.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Written in October 1991 for the pre-conference discussion period of the International Socialist Group (ISG), the then British section of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International, this text was reproduced in 1994 for a *Socialist Outlook* discussion meeting on the subject of how revolutionaries should orientate to the British Labour Party, and also in 1995, when it was again submitted to an ISG pre-conference. In its original 1991 form the text contained a discussion of other positions being put forward in the pre-conference debates, as well as some practical proposals regarding education and propaganda - omitted here, as they were in the text's 1994 and 1995 incarnations, because of their ephemeral nature. The bibliographical appendix, incorporated in the later versions of the text, has here been omitted since it is now out of date. The appendix referring to the early history of the British Trotskyist movement, a subject in the original - 1991 - debates to which the text addresses itself, although omitted from the later versions, has here been retained. The section of the original text which drew a balance sheet of the political forces within the contemporary labour movement was updated for the 1994 version of the text, but omitted from its 1995 version: the section included here is that from the original document - the 1994 updated version is appended as a footnote. The 1994 version of the text opened with a different introduction to the other versions: this latter is here appended as a footnote. The references for all the previous versions of the text were in-text: all footnotes to be found here, therefore, have been subsequently added by ourselves - either to clarify issues of the nature of those addressed in this note, or to give additional background information that may not be readily known by the present-day reader, or the reader from outside the British state.

<sup>2</sup> The 1994 version of the text carried the following introduction:



There is now a widespread discussion on the left about the changes being imposed on the Labour Party by the Blair leadership. For some organisations, such as the Socialist Workers' Party, Tony Blair is just another example of a reformist, sell-out Labour leader. Whilst for others, including Militant Labour, Blair is in the process of transforming the Labour Party into a new liberal party.

Our starting point in writing this document was to return to the writings of Lenin and Trotsky on the British labour movement in order to try and understand the method that they applied. We have tried to present the positions of Lenin and Trotsky in their own words, along with the necessary background information. We do this not to try and line up these 'great men' on our side but because we believe that their writings contain many helpful insights and an important general method.

The clarity and precision of their positions reflects their practical involvement in the October revolution and the building of the Communist International. By comparison, our limited experience means that we have in no way 'gone past' Lenin and Trotsky and that we still have much to learn from them. We would very much welcome comments upon our selection of material and suggestions for any additional material that we may have missed.

<sup>3</sup> In the 1994 version of the text this section was updated as follows.

It is clear that Blair and Monks represent a new low in class collaboration and capitulation for British working class leadership in recent times. Whilst they have not yet committed betrayals of the scale of 1914 or 1926 the consequences of their politics lead inevitably in that direction. The continued decline of British imperialism in the context of a world recession allows no place for consensus labourism. Having solved their own social problems, the Labour Party and trade union leaderships now clearly take the side of the bourgeoisie. In defence of the present system they have become reformists without reforms.

They gladly accept an increased police role in the workplace through deals with management and in the local councils through enthusiastic implementation of Tory policies. But the bankruptcy of their methods constantly undermines their position, many workers are leaving the trade unions and Labour Party, their illusions replaced by a bitter cynicism.

Yet it would be wrong to deduce from these fifteen years of betrayals that there has been a fundamental change in the nature of the TUC or the Labour Party. The Labour Party remains a 'bourgeois workers' party' and still retains that unique feature which motivated Lenin and Trotsky to give it such close attention - the membership of millions of workers through their trade unions. Sections of the leadership are moving to weaken these links, or even to break them, but this has not happened yet. Given the material and subjective obstacles, however, such a development is highly unlikely in the short term.

This is not to deny that enormous changes have taken place within the party. The political shift to the right has been accompanied by increasing attacks on party democracy. Since the early eighties various sections of the left have been the target of witch-hunts; this is currently reaching new proportions. We have seen supporters of *Militant* and *Socialist Organiser* witch-hunted along with poll tax and anti-war activists. There is a very real possibility of the complete elimination of the democratic space which still exists within the Labour Party, a possibility which we must discuss and prepare for now.

The defeat of the two most significant mass struggles against Thatcherism was key to creating this situation in the Labour movement. The miners' strike was the most significant challenge to new realism that we have yet seen. Its defeat not only weakened the left and

destroyed the NUM as a political force but greatly strengthened the new realist right. Similarly the poll tax posed the possibility of widespread struggle by millions of workers outside the control of the bureaucracy.

Yet an organised and effective mass movement was only sustained in Scotland and this weakness allowed the Tories to effect an orderly retreat. Whilst they were in a sense defeated, their army remains intact. The victorious army, which was never more than a rabble, ended up completely disintegrated and directionless. These two key struggles, both defeated, were key to the consolidation of the current right wing leadership. This has produced two effects amongst activists and the broader working class.

(1) Demoralisation - membership of the Labour Party has been declining and the active membership still further. People have been ground down by ten years of Thatcherism and see no way of fighting back. Within the broader working class a similar desperate demoralisation has occurred, which in the current economic situation is accompanied by lumpenisation and petty-bourgeoisification of whole strata, particularly the youth.

(2) Leftism - Lenin observed that: 'Anarchism was not infrequently a kind of penalty for the opportunist sins of the Labour movement' (in *Left Wing Communism*). Never was this more true than today. The growth of anarchist and new age protest groups, primarily amongst youth, was initially focused on the anti-poll tax movement. The new protest movements have complete contempt for established political parties and have vigorously campaigned on environmental issues, in defence of raves and against the Criminal Justice Act. The growth of the SWP indicates a similar phenomenon along with *Militant's* left turn.

The terminal crisis of Stalinism has further contributed to muddying the thinking of many left-wing activists. The ideas of 'open structures', 'broad movements', 'consensus' and 'anti-centralism' dominate their political thinking, reflecting the ideological confusion of this period. Of course, these reactions are in some ways healthy, many people turn to these ideas as an antidote to the bankruptcy of Stalinism and the chauvinism, tedium and lack of democracy in the official labour movement. The fact remains that they are inadequate to meet the tasks ahead.

Despite all this, the Labour Party remains of central importance. Developments in the party have a direct influence on the trade unions and the wider protest movements. It is only necessary to consider issues like Clause IV and one-member, one-vote to see how the Labour Party influences the debates in the trade unions.

Similarly, as the beginnings of a public sector strike wave seem to be developing, the ASLEF [British train drivers' trade union] strikers look to the Labour Party for support, and are disappointed when it is not forthcoming. In Wales, the key battles on the Assembly question will be fought within the Labour party and affiliated trade unions.

Despite the many and varied attacks on party democracy in recent years, there remains a democratic space in the Labour party which we should utilise. The left which exists is small but in many ways it is far more serious, and better linked to the trade unions and outside struggles, than in previous years. The real prospect of a Blair government and the many hopes and illusions that this engenders, makes this the very worst time to leave the Labour Party. Whatever the outcome of the next election, it will have enormous ramifications in the British labour movement. Now is the time to stay in and fight the right wing leaders, not let them off the hook.

<sup>4</sup> One of the currents in the ISG at the time, led by the late John Archer.

# The General Election and South Wales: A Draft Document

[February, 1992; internal south Wales International Socialist Group discussion document]

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It is now nearly certain that the General Election will be held on 9 April. At present Labour and Conservatives are neck and neck in the polls and there is a real chance that Labour will win. This election presents a challenge to our young and small organisation in South Wales. A failure to work around it and to be seen to actively support the Labour Party will cause us real problems in the future. On the other hand it gives us an opportunity to reach activists and ordinary workers in a way that has not been possible in recent times. If carried out correctly our work can contribute in a small way to preparing the ground for a new left in Wales of which we will be a part.

## Our General Approach

We completely reject parliament as a form of government or any idea of achieving socialism through parliamentary majorities. Our socialism will be built on the complete destruction of the existing bourgeois state and the creation of a new kind of state based on directly elected workers' councils. It will be fought for through mass struggle, the self-activity of the working class and the building of a revolutionary party. So why should we take an interest in elections at all?

Put simply, because under capitalism the ruling class cannot rule without the masses. The bourgeois must seek the support of the working class, through lies, flattery, bribes and the promise of reforms. Lenin termed this form of rule 'Lloyd Georgism' after the Welsh Liberal who started his political career making 'revolutionary' speeches and ended up as Prime Minister of Imperial Britain. Such an approach has real dangers for the ruling class, it makes discussing politics acceptable, if only for a brief period, and the result can go against them. Revolutionaries can utilise this process for their own ends as a means of reaching new forces. It would be complete foolishness to reject participating in parliament in the name of some abstract principle, leaving the way open for other political forces to fight for their ideas amongst the masses. Boycotting elections or parliament is only viable when an alternative form of government is clearly posed.<sup>1</sup>

In addition we are a small organisation facing a large labour movement dominated by a right-wing bureaucracy. This bureaucracy gained credibility from its reformist work at the end of the last century and more recently during the post-war boom. It is no longer able to deliver these reforms but the working class will not break with it in favour of a small, untested organisation simply on the basis of our propaganda. As Trotsky explained:

It is argued that the Labour Party already stands exposed by its past deeds in power and its present reactionary platform. For example, by its decisions at Brighton [Labour Party Conference, 1935]. For us - yes! But not for the masses, the eight millions who voted Labour. It is a great danger for revolutionists to attack too much importance to conference decisions. We use such evidence in our propaganda - but it

cannot be presented beyond the power of our own press. One cannot shout louder than the strength of his own throat.

The working class will support and build a new leadership only through testing out the old one and drawing conclusions from their experience. We have to go through this process with them and prove in practice that our ideas are superior. We therefore advocate and campaign for a Labour government, whilst openly expressing our reservations:

I would say to British workers, 'You refuse to accept my point of view. Well, perhaps I did not explain well enough. Perhaps you are stupid. Anyway I have failed. But now, you believe in your party. Why allow Chamberlain to hold the power? Put your party in power. I will help you all I can. I know that they will not do what you think, but as you don't agree with me and we are small, I will help you put them in.'<sup>2</sup>

## **The Position of the Last Conference**

The main document passed at conference placed a special emphasis on the coming election, as we face a special situation following 13 years of Thatcherism. The British working class is completely exhausted on the industrial front after multiple defeats under Conservative rule. The Poll Tax movement is now by and large demobilised. In this situation we see the election of a Labour government as crucial in breaking the logjam, raising class confidence and creating better conditions for struggle. We certainly do not support Labour for its policies, they are the most right wing for decades, and promise little or nothing in improvements for working people. Neither do we accept the arguments of the right and soft-left that we should not rock the boat in an election period. We have a dual approach:

**1** Maintain those struggles that are going on - concretely this means continuing to build the SMTUC Unshackle the Unions initiative and maintaining anti-racist activity, whilst promoting any local struggles which do occur.

**2** Using our newspaper and Socialists for Labour to critically support the Labour Party and campaign for a Labour vote. The marginalisation of the left in recent years means that this campaign will be quite small - it is however extremely important. The initial statement outlines a set of basic demands that we place on a Labour government. This will be followed by a number of broadsheets to sell in the election period.

In addition our recent aggregate decided to give critical support to Fields and Nellist in opposition to the witch-hunt.

## **The Situation in Wales**

Nowhere has the Labour Party dominated the working class more completely than in Wales. Between 1945 and 1966 Labour got close to 60% of the vote in every election. A steady decline has occurred since then, reaching a post-war low of 37% in 1983. The vote rallied at the last election to 45%, and Labour remains the dominant party in Wales. A significant element in the erosion of the Labour vote has been the rise of Welsh nationalism, with Plaid Cymru getting 7-10% of the vote in the 70s and 80s.

Wales now faces an economic situation which can be fairly described as the Second Great Welsh Economic Disaster. The first having occurred during the Depression of the 1930's. Unemployment topped 15% in the mid-eighties, fell back to around 7% in 1990 and has been steadily rising since then: standing at 9.2% in November last year. 'I am the 1 in 10' was an anthem for the early eighties: its bitter message is back with a vengeance in the early nineties. Other underlying trends are similarly negative. Wales has attracted considerable inward investment in the last few years but the jobs created have been mainly for part-time, low paid women workers. Male weekly earnings are rapidly falling behind the British average. Neither is investment a guarantee of jobs. The largest single investment in 1988 was at Fords in Bridgend and this factory is now making 350 workers redundant.

A final figure sums it up: the highest item of government expenditure in Wales in 1990 was social security. Three billion pounds were spent on keeping the poor and unemployed from starving and this is in a wealthy Western country! Can there be any question that capitalism simply isn't working? Is in fact rotting, and has outlived its usefulness?<sup>3</sup>

Politics in the labour and nationalist movements remains dominated by the defeat of the miners in 1985. This destroyed the NUM as a political force and demoralised those who actively supported it. The positive development of autonomous women's organisations during the strike has now completely disappeared. Coupled with the rightward drift of the NUPE leadership this removed the main left-reformist wing of the labour movement. Kinnockism has since asserted its complete dominance in close alliance with the new-realist Trade Union leaders. They have implemented an openly class-collaborationist policy, discouraging strikes and concluding single union deals behind the backs of their membership. Their failure to defend workers interests should be clear from the figures given above and Trade Union membership continues to decline.

The effect on the 'left' nationalist leadership around Dafydd Elis Thomas was similar. They became rapidly disillusioned by their failure to win more support in South Wales during the strike and swung towards Marxism Today style image politics. Plaid Cymru now hope to jump over the British state and win an 'Independent Wales in Europe' as a favour from the Brussels bureaucracy. The political failures of both Labour and nationalist leaderships, particularly in the Poll Tax campaign, have led to a growth of anarchist, syndicalist and right-wing nationalist tendencies. In addition the economic crisis is forcing more and more of the working class into wheeler-dealing and petty crime just to keep going. There are dangers of petty-bourgeoisification and cynical disillusion which offer fertile ground for the new far-right.

In this situation we should still call for a Labour vote in every constituency in Wales. In the first place the Labour and nationalist movements are not of equal size or social weight. Labour remains dominant. But we certainly do not attack the nationalists simply for being nationalists. Their rejection of the British state and their campaigning around issues like housing and the language are positive features which we support. Where we differ with them is on how these things will be fought for and won. We say the place to struggle is inside the Labour movement and the necessary alliances are with the oppressed in England not the Brussels bureaucrats. We fight to commit a new left in Wales to positive positions on the national question. It is only on this basis that we call for a vote for Labour, any socialist who does not do this runs the risk of descending into chauvinism.

This obviously raises many questions. We simply don't know enough about the economy and the state of the Labour and nationalist movements. What are the real economic trends and how will they be effected by 1992? What is the significance of the rise in the number of women workers? What is the real state of the Wales TUC? How are black people organising in Wales, how many minority languages are there? Have we got any answers on housing, the NHS, the language and an Assembly? Part and parcel of getting involved in this election must be to begin to define ourselves on the left in Wales. We do have a distinctive approach and tradition - our task is to apply that concretely to the present situation. Our Marxism must be a real tool of analysis and guide to action. Neither are we starting completely from scratch on this. The old IMG developed analyses of the economy and the national question and these documents provide a firm basis on which to develop our positions.

## Proposals

The two main themes of this document should be clear by now: we must actively involve ourselves in the general election and at the same time begin collectively to develop an analysis and viewpoint on the Welsh situation. If differences of opinion emerge then fine, it is better that they are out in the open and freely discussed. Our organisation is already committed to a discussion on the Scottish question and possibly an on-going commission on the national question within the British state. We should feed the results of our work into this process.

At the same time we have to establish realistic targets, given our small numbers and commitment to other work, in particular the educationals, anti-racism and WOSA solidarity. It may also be possible to link our election work with anti-racist activity, particularly in Cardiff. Practical proposals are:

- 1** Immediately get involved as an organisation in the Labour Party, under the pretext of wanting to help in the elections. This work is never easy, especially for women and black comrades and must be supported by regular discussions and sharing of experiences. We should hold specific discussions on how to work in the Labour Party and on canvassing without telling lies.
- 2** Approach the Campaign Group Wales and Swansea Labour Left to sponsor Socialists for Labour (SfL) and proposing a meeting on 'Socialist policies for Wales'.
- 3** Distribute SfL and SMTUC material to activists and collect sponsors for the SfL appeal. We should target key people for this as a matter of urgency and also try and win students to canvassing.
- 4** Aim to put together a short Programme for Wales in the run up to the election, outlining our draft positions. We must do this collectively: I suggest pairs of people responsible for: economy, IMG positions and attitude to nationalism, state of the trade unions and past examples of such programmes. We should also feed this information into the paper in the election period, aiming for articles on general politics, the economy, housing and lesbians and gays in Wales. The last two to be commissioned from contacts.

To sum up: let us actively campaign for a Labour government. In that process, let us try and reach 20 labour movement activists with our draft programme, three times that many with SfL material and a hundred times that many in canvassing for Labour. (13th February, 1992).

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> A fascinating account of the Bolsheviks' election tactics is given in the Pathfinder pamphlet *Lenin as Election Manager* by Doug Jenness, and by Lenin himself in *Left-wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder*, sections III and IV.

<sup>2</sup> Both quotes from Trotsky's *Writings on Britain*, New Park, vol. 3, pp. 118 and 144.

<sup>3</sup> Sources are: *United Kingdom Facts* by R. Rose and I. McAllister, *Employment Gazette*, January 1992, *Welsh Social Trends*, No.8, 1991 and *Welsh Economic Trends*, 1990.

# An Assembly for Wales?

[Spring 1992; unpublished draft]

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An elected assembly is now supported by 47 per cent of the Welsh people, according to a recent opinion poll, with 31 per cent against. Support is particularly strong in the Welsh speaking areas and amongst young people. When asked how they would vote in a referendum on such an assembly, 62 per cent of those polled said they would vote in favour with 30 per cent against. These figures are in stark contrast to the result of the 1979 devolution referendum, when only 20 per cent voted in favour.

What lies behind this dramatic turn around? Thirteen years of Conservative rule have certainly had a big impact on the way Welsh workers view Westminster. Wales has never once voted Tory but has had to suffer three consecutive Conservative governments. The consequences of Tory rule have been particularly severe in Wales. The destruction of steel and coal production dealt body blows to the economy and the much vaunted 'recovery' has been largely based on low-waged, low-skill jobs. Many Welsh workers feel increasingly dissatisfied with a British centralism which provides them with little benefit and over which they have no control. This mood is reflected in recent opinion polls: Labour support in Wales is running at 53 per cent but less than half of Labour supporters think their party will win the election.

International factors have also had an influence, particularly the example set by small nations within the Soviet Union in their struggle for independence. The propaganda, if not the reality, of the European Union also makes greater Welsh autonomy within a federal Europe appear a credible option. But undoubtedly the biggest influence comes from developments in Scotland. When asked if they would support a Welsh assembly if such a body was established in Scotland, the figure in favour jumped to 61 per cent, with only 24 per cent against. Clearly the struggle in Scotland following this election will have a big impact on Welsh politics.

Given their stated support for such an assembly you might expect Labour to be on the offensive on this issue. In fact the opposite is the case. Welsh Secretary David Hunt made clear that the Tories completely oppose any form of devolution and challenged the opposition parties to debate the issue in a special session of the parliamentary Welsh Grand Committee. Plaid Cymru and the Liberals readily accepted but Labour ducked and weaved and in the end declined, making vague excuses about the date. Labour leaders wanted to avoid such a debate because their policy is more of a sop than a real commitment. Neil Kinnock was one of six Welsh Labour MPs who broke ranks to oppose devolution in 1979, using the most reactionary British chauvinist arguments. His latter day conversion is paper thin and an assembly is very low on his list of priorities.

Whilst Scotland is to have an assembly within a year of Labour gaining office, the Welsh Assembly will be part of a package of devolution to the English regions enacted within the lifetime of the government. 'We march to the rhythm set by the Welsh people - not to any nationalist stopwatch' was Kinnocks' message to the Welsh Labour Party Conference held at the beginning of this month. A number of resolutions on an assembly were placed before the conference, including one from Cardiff North which called for it to be established within the



first year of a Labour government. Pressure from above ensured that this motion was not discussed. Many people will be justifiably sceptical about Labours' commitment to an assembly, even within five years. Brian Gould has already admitted that elections to an assembly might not occur until a second term.

The main Tory arguments against an assembly are the same as those employed by Kinnock and co in 1979. Firstly, that the union benefits Wales as it receives a net subsidy from England and secondly an assembly would cost too much. The first point is debatable and the second a good argument for getting rid of even the limited democracy which exists under Western capitalism! The *Western Mail*, once the mouthpiece of Tory coal owners, now berates the Tories for their attitude. According to the *Mail* the events in Scotland are 'tinged with revolution' and a gradual devolution of power is necessary to prevent similar developments in Wales. In this the paper speaks for sections of the Welsh state bureaucracy and intelligentsia squeezed by Tory cutbacks in public spending and regional aid and exasperated by Wales' continued drift into the economic periphery of Europe.

What attitude should the left take to these developments? In the first place we should be clear that we have no interest in defending the existing British imperialist state. We should be equally unequivocal in defending the right of the Welsh people to decide for themselves their relation to the rest of Britain. But simply stating these positions is not enough. Whatever the outcome of the elections, we need to campaign for the immediate establishment of a Welsh Assembly, elected by proportional representation with quotas for women. If Labour is elected it will be a demand on the government, if the Tories get back in we should demand that the Welsh Labour MPs convene an assembly. Such a demand could provide an important catalyst and focus for struggles in Wales. It would also be a basis for rebuilding a left in the Welsh labour movement whilst developing a dialogue with left nationalists. It is an achievable goal which at the same time begins to pose the question of what policies are necessary to confront the specific inequality imposed on the Welsh nation by international capitalism. The struggle for an assembly provides a context for the left to begin to develop such policies and build a new leadership which has answers, not excuses, for the Welsh working class.

# Wales: Tory Dream and Workers' Nightmare

[April 1992; *Socialist Outlook* 19]

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The 1980s will be remembered as the years when the Welsh coal industry was finally destroyed. Wales entered the decade with over 30,000 people employed in coal and left it with less than a thousand. This butchery was made possible by the defeat of the 1984-85 miners' strike, a defeat with far reaching political and economic consequences in Wales.

Additional job losses in steel and other manufacturing industries pushed unemployment above the UK average in the early eighties. It peaked at over 15 per cent in 1986 but then began to steadily decline and the gap between Wales and the UK average began to narrow.

Wales attracted a fifth of all foreign investment in the late eighties, despite containing only a twentieth of the UK workforce. Welsh secretary Peter Walker claimed a major success, and declared 'Wales entered the 1990s with remarkable economic prospects ... the 1990s therefore do not contain the downside risk of the 1980s.'

A glance behind the rhetoric reveals another story. Welsh workers slipped to the bottom of the UK income table in the 1980s, earning only 88 per cent of the UK average in 1990.

The Tories have been more successful in Wales than any other part of Britain in pushing down wages while increasing productivity. They have created a low waged, low skill economy based on the entry of large numbers of women into the workforce.

Two factors made this possible. First, the huge pool of unemployment made it relatively easy to put the squeeze on wages. Second, the defeat of the miners' strike had a devastating impact. It destroyed the South Wales NUM, without doubt the union with the strongest traditions of militancy in Wales, and demoralised supporters of the strike.

The Wales TUC has enthusiastically supported the view that inward investment is the only answer. Affiliated unions have pursued a policy of single union deals and no strike agreements. Many of the US and Japanese companies which have invested in Wales do not recognise unions in any of their other locations. But they are happy to accept a workforce disciplined by their own organisations.

Following a brief, left wing flourish in the early eighties the Plaid Cymru leadership has also been moving steadily rightwards. Daffyd Elis Thomas moved the writ for Bobby Sands MP in 1981, but by 1990 he was calling for a ban on a visit by Sinn Fein councillors! Plaid also opposed mass non- payment of the Poll Tax and so failed to capitalise on the issue in the way the SNP did in Scotland.

The challenge is to build a new left in the Welsh labour movement with an alternative to the inward investment line of the right wing leaders. We need a left which positively addresses the national question and defends the Welsh language.

These demands can be focused in a call for a Welsh Assembly with real powers to defend Welsh workers, which will only be won through struggle. In this process we will need to draw on the rich history of working class organisation in Wales. Significantly, 1992 marks the eightieth anniversary of the publication of the syndicalist *Miners' Next Step* in the Rhondda. One sentence remains as fresh and vital as the day it was written: 'The old policy of identity of interest between employers and ourselves be abolished, and a policy of open hostility be installed.'

# For a Democratic Welsh Assembly!

[Autumn 1992; unpublished draft]

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An elected assembly is once more on the political agenda in Wales. The idea has widespread support amongst working people and is the official policy of the Welsh Labour Party and Wales TUC. Yet thirteen years ago it was overwhelmingly rejected in the devolution referendum. What lies behind this turn around?

These have been no ordinary thirteen years. Wales has never once voted Tory but has suffered four consecutive Conservative governments. The consequences of Tory rule have been particularly severe in Wales. The destruction of steel and coal dealt body blows to the economy and the much vaunted 'recovery' has been largely based on low-waged, low-skill jobs. Wales and Northern Ireland are now the poorest parts of the British state. The decline of industry has meant an increasing reliance on services, particularly the public sector, to provide work. This makes the Welsh economy especially vulnerable to further cuts in public expenditure.

As a consequence many Welsh workers feel increasingly dissatisfied with a British centralism which provides them with little benefit and over which they have no control. There is also a feeling that if the Scots can kick up a fuss, then so can we! Developments in Scotland, be they positive or negative, will have a big impact on the mood and confidence of those supporting an assembly in Wales.

The Wales TUC conference held in April passed an emergency motion on the assembly. It called on the Wales TUC to establish a Constitutional Convention, in collaboration with the Campaign for a Welsh Assembly. The general council is now divided over implementing this policy, with lack of money due to British TUC cuts being used as one excuse for inaction. The Wales LP executive has since voted against participating in the Convention and has set up its own 'Policy Forum' on the issue. The Campaign for a Welsh Assembly is organising its own committee of the 'good and the great' to look at options for an assembly.

In this context the conference on a 'New Agenda for the Valleys', called by Peter Hain MP, is a welcome initiative. The Neath Declaration, published to coincide with this event, poses some real questions about Labour and TUC policies in Wales to date: on foreign direct investment as the cure for economic ills; on Maastricht and its effects on Wales; on the assembly and its role.

One thing is clear: we can't suffer another five years of Tory rule in silence. We need an active and united campaign for a Welsh assembly, led by the Welsh Labour movement. This should demand an assembly elected by proportional representation, with small constituencies and quotas for women. As for the powers such an assembly should possess - let the Welsh people themselves decide! Let them decide through their actions and through voting for the parties they support in elections to the assembly. Let the first meetings of that assembly, elected by the whole of the Welsh people, decide its own powers and its relationship to the British parliament.

# Nationalism, Marxism and the Irish Question

[February 1994; a shorter version of this article appeared in *Socialist Outlook* 57]

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All too often the study of historical documents and debates, whilst apparently pointless, allows us to look beyond current truisms and gain a view of the broader picture. So it is with the timely publication of *The Communists and the Irish Revolution*, edited by the Irish Trotskyist D R O'Connor Lysaght. The book contains an exhaustive collection of articles and excerpts by Russian revolutionaries, spanning the years 1899 to 1924.

Recent events have emphasised the scale of reaction that we face in the six counties of Northern Ireland. In England, Scotland and Wales we see the boots and clubs of the British National Party as a serious menace but in the North armed neo-fascist gangs roam the streets and kill Catholics at random. These gangs have links with the security forces and sections of the Unionist bourgeoisie. This bourgeoisie is the most reactionary section of the British bourgeoisie and yet commands the support of a large section of Protestant workers. The Northern Irish trade unions are in turn solidly right wing and have a tremendous backward influence on the British labour movement. Little is changed by the announcements and agreements of the last few weeks. This is indeed the 'carnival of reaction' that James Connolly predicted over 70 years ago.

The collection contains a wealth of information and insights on the struggle in Ireland, which can be grouped into three main themes. Firstly, Lenin's defence of the right of nations to self-determination prior to 1916, secondly the debate about the nature of the 1916 Dublin rising and thirdly the positions of the Soviet government and Communist International on Ireland after 1917.

Lenin's defence of self-determination prior to 1916 was aimed at refuting the positions of Rosa Luxembourgh and Karl Radek from the Polish social-democrats and figures such as Nikolai Bukharin and Grigory Piatakov in his own party. Lenin drew heavily on the writings of Marx and Engels about Ireland in this defence, and in so doing, not only ably defended the notion of self-determination but also showed how Marx's viewpoint was rooted in a concrete analysis of the political situation in Britain and Ireland, and hence changed with time.

Marx began by believing that Irish liberation would only be won through the victory of the British working class movement. But by 1847 he was expressing the view:

I used to think the separation of Ireland from Britain impossible, I now think it inevitable, although after separation there may come federation. [34<sup>\*</sup>]

Marx argued that the British working class should make repeal of the union with Ireland a central part of its program. This change of views was based on the understanding that whilst the British working class had fallen under Liberal influence and was little more than a tool of the capitalists, a liberation movement had developed in Ireland, the Fenians, which had assumed revolutionary forms. Under these conditions, it was the duty of British socialists to support Irish independence, not only in the interest of the Irish struggle but also with the aim of educating British workers in the spirit of democracy and national equality.

In advocating independence Marx's aim was not the permanent separation of Ireland, but a democratic federation, freely entered into by both sides. This predisposed a change of government in the oppressor nation, an event which he hoped would be greatly accelerated by

a successful independence struggle. His remark that 'after separation may come federation' was always faithfully repeated by Lenin, who understood that the aim of independence was greater unity, on an equal basis, between the working people of both countries.

## **Self-Determination and Separation**

There is an important distinction between defending the right of nations to self-determination and actively advocating that a given nation should separate. The example of Britain and Ireland in the mid-nineteenth century is an illustration of the conditions under which socialists should not only defend the right to self-determination but actively campaign for independence. This occurs when the working class of the oppressor nation is dominated by reactionary ideas and leadership, which prevent it from making common cause with the oppressed nation, whilst the national struggle of the oppressed nation has assumed a mass character.

Two further examples will serve to illustrate the point. After the defeat of the 1905 Russian revolution national movements emerged in a number of the oppressed nations within the Tsarist Empire and demands for independence were raised. The strength of national feelings influenced many socialists within these nations. Yet Lenin was opposed to supporting independence, he maintained that the Russian working class was not dominated by bourgeois or reformist ideas, and could thus be won to a common fight with the oppressed nations against Tsarism. By conducting such a common fight and sincerely opposing all forms of national oppression Lenin hoped that the Russian workers would win the confidence of the masses of the oppressed nations. This confidence would lay the basis for a genuinely free and equal unity with the Russian workers and peasants, within a common state.

In contrast, when national sentiment grew within the Ukraine in the 1930s, Trotsky actively advocated an independent Soviet Ukraine. He did so because he understood that the rise of Stalinism had shattered the national hopes of the Ukrainian people. The Ukrainian language was suppressed, local Communists were purged for the crime of 'nationalist deviation' and millions had died during the forced collectivisation of agriculture. Under these conditions, with the Russian working class atomised and crushed by the weight of the bureaucracy, Trotsky actively supported the Ukrainian struggle for independence. He hoped that such a struggle would act as a beacon to the Russian working class and help to awaken it to political life. But to postpone the struggle until this occurred, in the name of working class unity, would have been criminal.

## **The Test of Practice**

Lenin was always ready to subject his ideas to the test of practice, and when the Irish rose in rebellion in Easter 1916 he seized the chance with relish. The opening shots in the debate were fired by Karl Radek, who saw the defeat of the rising as conclusive proof that: 'The Irish revolution [...] has come to an end'. For Radek, the Irish question was essentially a land question, which had been solved by the land reforms of 1903. This meant that the Irish farmers abstained from the rising, reducing the struggle to a 'putsch' by an isolated group of petty bourgeois idealists. In common with Luxembour and Piatak, he believed that the division of the globe amongst a few imperialist nations meant that the days of progressive national movements were over, since economic independence and the creation of new

bourgeoisie states on the European model of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was now impossible.

Trotsky took a more sympathetic view of the rising and understood that the working class, as well as the petty bourgeoisie, had participated. But, Trotsky also felt that the basis for an Irish national revolution had disappeared. It was left to Lenin to defend the rising. He did so by explaining that the division of the world between a few super-powers would exacerbate, not extinguish, national struggles. 'Imperialism breathes new life into the national question', he wrote in notes for a lecture on imperialism. Lenin understood that the question of self-determination was a question of political democracy, of a nations' right to decide which state it wished to be part of. Such questions of politics have a relative autonomy from economic questions.

Anyone who called this momentous event a 'putsch' was, he said, 'either a hardened reactionary or a doctrinaire hopelessly incapable of picturing a social revolution as a living thing'. Since precisely such abstract, doctrinaire socialism dominates the British revolutionary left, it is worth quoting his repudiation in full:

For to imagine that social revolution is conceivable without revolts by small nations in the colonies and in Europe, without the revolutionary outbursts of a section of the petty bourgeoisie *with all its prejudices*, without a movement of politically non-conscious, proletarian and semi-proletarian masses, against landlord, church, monarchical, national and other oppression - to imagine that means repudiating social revolution. So one army will line up in one place and say, 'We are for socialism', while another will do so in another place and say, 'We are for Imperialism', and that will be the social revolution! Only from such a ridiculous pedantic angle could one label the Irish rebellion a 'putsch'. [62]

Our doctrinaire friends may still wish to mutter that this is irrelevant to Britain, where the working class overwhelmingly predominates. They should take care; we have national questions in Scotland and Wales. In addition, it was Lenin himself who drew a parallel in later years between the alliance of the working class and peasantry which laid the basis for the October revolution and the alliance which would have to be built between the proletariat proper and the petty bourgeoisified, semi-aristocratic layers of workers in the imperialist countries, who would enter the battle 'with all their prejudices'.

In Lenin's eyes the mistake of the Irish was not in having risen, but in having risen prematurely. Even so, they had contributed by their actions to developing the experience and knowledge necessary for the 'general onslaught'. Subsequent history has shown that both Radek and Trotsky were wrong in dismissing the Irish national question. Lenin stood head and shoulders above them all in the depth of his analysis and his sympathy for the Irish movement.

## Soviet Power

The third main theme of the collection is the response of the young Soviet government and the Communist International (Comintern) to the Irish struggle. The documents are marked by an uncompromising denunciation of British rule in Ireland. The example of Ireland is further used to expose the hypocrisy of the imperialist rulers, who demanded that the Soviet state unreservedly respect the right to self-determination whilst actively oppressing their own

colonies. Trotsky is particularly pointed in his reply to the British Labour MP, Arthur Henderson, who had served in the War cabinet, and in 1920 was loudly demanding a Soviet withdrawal from Georgia. For Henderson, he said, the domination of one quarter of the human race by the British ruling class was not a question of politics, but a fact of natural history:

These democrats, with all their Fabian, emasculated [*sic*] and feeble socialism, have always been and always will be slaves of public opinion. They are thoroughly imbued with the anti-democratic exploiter, planter, and parasite views on races which are distinguished by the colour of their skins, by the fact that they do not read Shakespeare, or wear stiff collars.' [85]

The collection ends with an exchange of letters between Nora Connolly O'Brien, daughter of James Connolly, and Leon Trotsky, where Trotsky makes the following observation:

The revolutionary tradition of the national struggle is a precious good. Would it be possible to imbue the Irish proletariat with it for its socialist class-struggle, the working class of your country could, in spite of the numerical weakness of your population, play an important historical role and give a mighty impulse to the British working class now paralysed by the senile bureaucracy. [95]

Excerpts from the writings of Karl Kautsky and Joseph Stalin are then incorporated as appendices. The quotes include Stalin's stupid observation that British oppression in Ireland had worsened during World War I because 'power had passed to the landlords'. According to Stalin's schema, national oppression was a product of feudalism and landlordism, and hence, if it had worsened, this could only mean that the landlords were back in charge. A wonderful example of forcing reality to fit your theory, a method which all too often masquerades as Marxism.

## Three Trends

This book illustrates very clearly that there are, broadly speaking, three historical currents amongst Marxists on the national question. The first, represented by such figures as Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Radek, denies the validity of the national question in the name of an abstract internationalism. Such national nihilism preaches an indifference to nationality which can easily lead to an indifference to oppression and to the national feelings of oppressed nations. To paraphrase Marx, those socialists of an oppressor nation who deny 'all nationality' often unconsciously understand the unity of nations to mean the absorption of other nations into their 'ideal' nation.

The second trend is that of national opportunism, which takes the guise of either denying the importance of the national question in order to draw nearer to one's own bourgeoisie (Kautsky) or elevating the national question above all others and imposing permanent national divisions on the workers (Otto Bauer). The third approach, that of Lenin, maintains the importance of the national question and of the need to struggle against all national inequality and national superiority. Such an approach accepts that nations may need to separate, in order to grow closer at a later date. It sees the need for working class unity but stresses that this unity must be built voluntarily, and must address the demands of the oppressed nations. At the same time it says plainly that national liberation is impossible within a patchwork of independent capitalist states, all of which face a world market



dominated by a few oppressor nations. The key to liberation remains the socialist revolution and building a voluntary socialist federation.

Anyone interested in the Irish struggle or the national question will learn a great deal from this book. Above all else it illustrates how Marxist should proceed from the facts in analysing the national question, as in all others. Marx's call for Irish independence, resurrected by Lenin and the Communist International, was based on a real assessment of the state of the working class movements in Britain and Ireland. There is much to be learnt from this approach in our study of the many national struggles and conflicts which are proliferating today.

\*All page numbers refer to: *The Communists and the Irish Revolution*, edited by D R O'Connor Lysaght, Literéire Publishers, Dublin, 1993. The book can be obtained from the publishers by sending a cheque for £7.99 to Brookside Publishing Services, 2 Brookside, Dundrum Rd, Dundrum, Dublin 14.

# From Dreyfus to Auschwitz

[February 1995; *Socialist Outlook* 77]

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One hundred years ago a large crowd gathered in Paris to witness the public humiliation of Captain Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish officer in the French army who had been convicted of spying for the Germans. The crowd spat and shouted 'kill the Jews' as Dreyfus was stripped of his insignia and his sword ritually broken. Once deported to Devil's Island his case unleashed a violent outpouring of anti-Semitism across France. It took 11 years for the French government to admit that he had been framed and to admit his innocence.

Fifty years after the case Dreyfus' granddaughter died at Auschwitz. Such is the dreadful unity of these two events, which mark the beginning and mid-point of our imperialist century. With hindsight the Dreyfus case can be seen as an ominous foretaste of the power and ferocity of anti-Semitism in this century. Not least because it occurred not in feudal Russia - the land of the pogroms - but in modern industrial, democratic France.

It led Theodor Herzl, who witnessed the affair, to write his famous book *The Jewish State*, which has become the founding text of modern Zionism. He concludes that it is impossible for Jews and non-Jews to live together: instead an exclusively Jewish State should be established.

The social democrats of the time rejected this. They saw it as a self-imposed isolation - a diversion from the socialist struggle. They saw anti-semitism as a feudal product destined to die away. Under conditions of advanced capitalism the Jews would be gradually assimilated and absorbed: eventually they would cease to be a distinct group.

This assimilation was seen as a desirable outcome. The Jews were not considered a nation because they did not possess a common language and territory. Such an outlook was shared by socialists as diverse as Kautsky, Luxemburg, Lenin and Trotsky.

Russian social democrats assumed that assimilation would proceed in their country in the same way as Western Europe and North America. Opposition to this approach came mainly from the Jewish Bund. This organisation developed a programme opposed to assimilation demanding recognition of the Jews as a nation. At the 1903 congress of Russian social democrats, they demanded the right to be recognised as the sole representatives of the Jewish workers within the party, proposing to turn it into a federation of national groups. This was bitterly opposed by the majority and led to a split.

It seems today that the assimilationists were wrong - the Nazi terror of the 1930s indicates the exact opposite of the process. The crisis of capitalism, linked to the failures of the revolutionary wave that swept through Europe in the century's second decade, produced a new kind of anti-semitism: a product not of feudalism but of imperialism.

This deepening wave of anti-semitism led Trotsky to re-evaluate his views on the whole matter during the 1930s. He saw that the expected assimilation had not occurred and that the Jews had developed further the Jewish language and created a vibrant Yiddish press. He

decided that therefore the Jews could be called a nation and that they therefore had the right, if they chose to exercise it, of a homeland of their own. Nevertheless he continued to oppose both Zionist and the Bundist ideas. He opposed colonisation of Palestine because 'there is no such thing on our planet as the idea that one has more claim to land than another'. He argued that the only way a Jewish nation could be brought into existence on the basis of mutual understanding would be under international socialism.

To those who argued that this was utopian Trotsky replied that the immediate task was to campaign for the right to asylum for all those Jews menaced by fascism. This call was taken up by a number of socialist groups under the slogan 'open the gates'. Suffice to say the western governments chose to keep them closed.

For Trotsky, the rise of anti-semitism was a product of the crisis and decay of capitalism, further proof that it could no longer contribute to human progress - 'anti-semitism is today one of the most malignant convulsions of capitalism's death agony'. In a prophetic statement of 1939, Trotsky predicted that the next stage in its development may result in the 'physical extermination of the Jews'.

These views are of particular importance because they combine a commitment to a homeland for the Jewish people with a total opposition to the Zionist colonisation of Palestine.

The choice between assimilation and Zionism is shown to be false. Neither complete denial of Jewish identity nor its affirmation on a racist colonialist basis is necessary.

# Mobilise for a Democratic Welsh Parliament

[1995; *Socialist Outlook* leaflet]

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Wales is at a turning point. Unemployment is at catastrophic levels and the majority of new jobs are appallingly low paid. The WDA is consciously advertising Wales as a low wage, high productivity area. The public sector, now the largest employer in Wales, is threatened with vicious cut-backs.

We face a return to the 1930s.

Fifteen years of Tory rule have left many people deeply dissatisfied with the centralist British state. It is clear that decisions which affect the very fabric of the Welsh economy and society are being made by people who have scant regard for the majority of the Welsh people. There is a growing mood that we need more democracy, more control, here in Wales. People want a Welsh parliament to represent them and begin to redress the balance.

But what sort of parliament do we want? What would it do? And how will we get it? Democracy is the watchword here. The last thing we need is a miniature version of the present British parliament. We need a parliament which is both genuinely representative and accountable. To that end, we propose:

- *A parliament elected by proportional representation, based on small constituencies.*
- *A 50% quota for women.*
- *All representatives to be paid the average wage in Wales.*
- *Frequent elections.*
- *The right of constituents to recall and replace their representatives.*

Who should decide the powers of the new parliament? We believe that the parliament itself should decide. Its decisions should not be subject to any veto from Westminster. Ultimately it is the Welsh people themselves - through the candidates and parties that they support - who must determine what the parliament will do.

We do not advocate an independent Wales. We favour Welsh autonomy within a democratic federation on British and European levels. But we do believe that the parliament must be free to decide its relationship to the British state. This includes the right to declare independence, if that is the will of the majority.

A parliament in itself will not solve any of our problems in Wales. It is not the solution, only the beginnings of a solution. To begin with, the parliament would have to break with the present strategy of relying on inward investment to create jobs. It would also have to break with the market driven economic policies being implemented across Europe, codified in the Maastricht Treaty, which are leading to greater centralisation of wealth and greater impoverishment of peripheral regions.

The parliament would have to take specific measures to defend the rights of Welsh speakers - such as passing a comprehensive Welsh Language Act - in open defiance of Westminster.

None of this will be granted by the present government without a struggle. The Tories have made their position abundantly clear: they are committed to maintaining the United Kingdom in its present form. If a parliament is to be won, it will only be won through active campaigning and mass mobilisations. Neither can we rely on the election of a future Labour government. We must begin campaigning immediately.

It is clear that Labour has the support of the majority of the Welsh people and that a Welsh parliament will be a Labour parliament. But this must not lead to complacency and inactivity. We must take the lead in the campaign for a Parliament, by building a mass movement that will force the Tories to give way. Our failure to act leaves the initiative with the Tories.\*

The burning question in Wales today is one of democracy: who decides? who controls? At the same time, the Welsh working class faces a daily struggle to maintain jobs and services in the face of recession and cut-backs. The campaign for a parliament must champion all these struggles if it is to win. It is up to us to seize this opportunity and actively mobilise for a truly democratic and accountable Welsh parliament.

*\* In some versions of the leaflet, this paragraph was replaced by the following:*

This does not mean we should downplay the importance of the Labour Party and the Trade Unions. Like it or not, they still command the support of the majority of the Welsh people. And if we look to the base of these organisations, we will find enthusiastic support for a parliament. We must pressure the Labour and Trade Union leaders into turning their paper positions into a concerted mass campaign for a parliament.

# Ten Draft Points on the National Question

[August 1995; Document presented to a *Socialist Outlook* Summer School held in the summer of 1995]

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## Why do we need a discussion?

- They are waving those flags again! The resurgence of great power nationalism within the imperialist countries.
- The national movements of small nations within the imperialist countries and the rise of regionalism in Europe.
- The national question in the post-Stalinist states.

## Ten Draft Points

**1** The question of defining a nation has been a constant problem for Marxists. In opposition to the idealism of Bauer and the schematic materialism of Stalin, the definition offered by Trotsky is both materialist and dialectical: 'An abstract criterion is not decisive in this question; far more decisive is the historical consciousness of a group, their feelings, their impulses. But that too is not determined accidentally but rather by the situation and all the attendant circumstances.'<sup>1</sup>

**2** A sharp distinction must be drawn between the nationalism of the oppressor and the nationalism of the oppressed. We are completely hostile to the first, whilst to the second we take a sympathetic and patient attitude. Our approach to the nationalism of small nations within larger imperialist states is also a sympathetic and patient one, though they may not suffer direct national oppression.

**3** It is important to distinguish between nationalism as an ideology and nationalism as a mood or sentiment amongst the masses. Nationalism as an ideology is expressed in the platforms and programs of nationalist parties and movements, which offer a specifically national solution to the problems of a given nation. National consciousness can on the other hand be channelled in a socialist direction. It is perfectly conceivable that a nationalist movement could be led by revolutionaries on a non-nationalist program.

**4** Whilst whole-heartedly opposing the nationalism of an oppressor nation, this does not mean that revolutionaries should adopt a completely a-national attitude. It is vital that revolutionaries in the oppressor nations draw on all the best traditions of the oppressor nation, its socialist, feminist and working class movements, in order to become truly rooted within the working class and the oppressed of that nation.

**5** Marxists defend the right of nations to self-determination, i.e. the right of all nations to form a separate state, if they desire. This does not mean that we advocate independence at all times, as a universal solution to national problems. What we do promise is that if a nation desires to separate, we will support them with all the means at our disposal. Our program is one of federation and the drawing together of nations. However, under specific circumstances, we will support or even advocate a struggle for independence. In doing so we support the struggle but not the illusions,<sup>2</sup> explaining that independence which leads to national isolation is not a path to national liberation.

**6** The fact that we are not generally advocates of national independence does not mean that we are indifferent to the fate of nations. On the contrary, we believe that real national liberation is possible only through federation and unity on a socialist basis. It is only in this way that the full economic and cultural freedom of the nation can be secured. Whilst advocating federation, we also maintain the right to self-determination; whilst advocating unity, we also support extensive autonomy for national districts, if that is their wish.

**7** We completely oppose the Austro-Marxist approach of imposing compulsory nationality on the workers of a given state and of structuring the state institutions and workers' organisations on a purely national basis. We defend the unity of the workers organisations, particularly the revolutionary party, on a non-national basis, whilst defending the right to caucus for national minorities and autonomy for party units.

**8** The advent of socialist society will not solve the national question or lead to a rapid or immediate merging of nations. Indeed, for many small and oppressed nations, socialism will be an opportunity for the full flowering of the nation. 'In the sphere of the national question there must be no restraint; on the contrary there must be an all-sided material assistance for the cultural needs of all nationalities and ethnic groups. If this or that national group is doomed to go down (in the national sense) then this must proceed in the same way as a natural process, but never as a consequence of any territorial, economic, or administrative difficulties.'<sup>3</sup>

**9** The nation state, created by capitalism in its infancy, is now completely outmoded and must be eliminated. Our goal is nothing less than an end to the political differentiation of peoples, that is, an end to their separation into a myriad of nation states. It is only on this basis that real national liberation can be ensured. 'The national problem merges everywhere with the social. Only the conquest of power by the world proletariat can assure a real and lasting freedom of development for all nations of our planet.'<sup>4</sup>

**10** In order to intervene on the national question we need a revolutionary party and that party needs a national program, just as much as the Bolsheviks did in 1917. I propose that the key elements of such a program should be:

(i) Total opposition to British and English great power chauvinism, whilst drawing out all the positive aspects of the English nation and its history, in order to better combat the dominant chauvinism.

(ii) Support for full national autonomy for Scotland and Wales. The autonomous bodies to have the right to decide on all questions, including state relations. This means campaigning for Constituent Assemblies, which define their own powers. At the same time we participate in campaigns which demand lesser powers, 'without sharing the illusions'. We also defend the right to autonomy for other national minorities, if they so desire.

(iii) For a United States of Europe, without borders and without passports, in which extensive national autonomy is guaranteed for all nations who desire it, along with the right to self-determination. For an inclusive Europe, from Norway to the Balkans. Such a Europe would stand in complete contrast to the Europe of Maastricht and its pathetic Committee of the Regions.

24 August, 1995.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Leon Trotsky, *On Black Nationalism and Self-Determination* (New York, 1980), 28.

<sup>2</sup> Leon Trotsky, *The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International* (New York, 1973), 90.

<sup>3</sup> *Trotsky on the Jewish Question* (New York, 1980), 19.

<sup>4</sup> Leon Trotsky, 'War and the Fourth International', *Writings of Leon Trotsky 1933-34* (New York, 1975), 306.



# What Assembly for Wales?

[February 1996; *Socialist Outlook* 97\*]

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Labour's proposals for a Welsh Assembly have moved to the centre-stage of Welsh politics in the last few weeks. This follows an agreement amongst Welsh Labour MPs that there will be no further discussion on the powers of an Assembly before the next election. This has attracted intense media attention and accusations that Labour's current policy is an unworkable fudge.

These developments can be traced back to last year's Welsh Labour Party Conference, which adopted a policy document on an Assembly, entitled 'Shaping the Vision'. This proposed a body with no law-making or tax-raising powers, elected by the first-past-the-post system. No provision was made for equal representation of women in such an Assembly. This stands in stark contrast to Labour's proposals for a Scottish Parliament, which will have extensive law-making and tax-gathering powers, be elected by the additional member system and ensure that 50 per cent of the seats will be held by women.

The document engendered widespread dissatisfaction within the Welsh Labour Party and led to the formation of Welsh Labour Action (WLA). Modelled on the group Scottish Labour Action, WLA aimed to strengthen the powers of an Assembly in line with those of the Scottish parliament. At the same time Ron Davies, MP for Caerffili and shadow Welsh Secretary, let it be known that he favoured electing the Assembly using proportional representation (PR).

Whilst never a character associated with the left, Ron Davies is seen by many in Wales as an antidote to the worst excesses of Blair-ism. In particular, his comments on education led many to conclude that a Welsh Assembly would be empowered to reject opting-out and selection on an all-Wales basis. Their confidence in Ron was further bolstered by his good showing in the recent shadow cabinet elections. However, at no time did he conduct an open fight within the party, preferring instead to try and change policy from within the Welsh Executive.

The weakness of this approach has now become apparent. A meeting of seven Welsh Labour MPs was convened in response to his attempts, who made it clear that any move to change the existing policy would be met with an all-out fight. Most of those involved were opposed in principle to any kind of Assembly, whilst a few were roped in on the basis of opposition to PR.

To his discredit, this motley band of seven included Llew Smith, the only Campaign Group MP in Wales. He has been a consistent opponent of a Welsh Assembly, representing as he does a tradition of left labourism in South East Wales which is both bureaucratic and British centralist. However, his current plumed new lows, as he argued that the debate could not be reopened because Tony Blair had instructed the last Welsh conference to unite behind the current policy! He went on to explain that people could not pick and choose which parts of the policy they liked and which parts they did not.

Unsurprisingly enough, Ron Davies and his supporters did not rise to the challenge thrown down by the seven, preferring instead to capitulate. Everyone agreed to unite happily behind the current policy. Ron Davies felt confident enough to declare that there would be no discussion on a Welsh Assembly at this year's Wales Labour Party conference. And this despite there being several motions to conference demanding a strengthened Assembly.

It is now more vital than ever that Welsh Labour Action maintains its stance of opposition to the current policy and pushes the debate to the floor of conference. It is also vital that we continue the task of taking the debate into the Welsh labour movement and building a network of supporters. We must also reach outward: to those in Wales outside the Labour Party who are campaigning for an Assembly and to socialists in Scotland, whose debates and experiences are far in advance of our own. Whilst it is only the Labour Party which can deliver an Assembly for Wales, the current proposals fall far short of the kind of Assembly we need.

\*The version of the article here is the original draft rather than the slightly sub-edited final print version.

# For Welsh Self-Government!

[June 1996; International Socialist Group discussion document]

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The question of a Welsh Assembly is without doubt a key issue in Welsh politics today. It has created the greatest ferment in the Welsh Labour Party for many years and promises to be an on-going source of problems for the party's Welsh Executive. This document attempts to locate these developments within an overall historical context and to offer a Marxist analysis of the question.

A brief look at the various organisations on the left in Wales reveals a wide variety of positions on the nature of Wales and the type of Assembly, or Parliament, we need. The socialist republicans of Cymru Goch see Wales as nothing less than a colony of England: they are thus engaged in an anti-colonial struggle, with complete independence as their final goal. The approach of Plaid Cymru is far more measured, though they too see Wales as a suffering 'Tory colonial suppression from Westminster' and seek independence within Europe as their final aim.

The range of views within the Labour Party is of course extremely broad. For some, Wales is little more than an administrative region and the Welsh language an irrelevance. Others take a more positive view but still see the establishment of an Assembly as simply a constitutional reform, which can be carried through without threatening the existing British state.

The Communist Party of Britain view the establishment of a People's parliament as a key issue and favour 'a bold and innovative type of Welsh Parliament, one with real teeth'. On the far-left, there has been a positive development in the position of Welsh Militant Labour in recent times, under the pressure of their own organisation in Scotland, itself under pressure from the Scottish National Party. This leaves the Socialist Workers Party, epitomising as they do so many of the weaknesses of 'British' Trotskyism, to defend the integrity of the British state in the name of workers' unity.

So where should we stand? This document will attempt to answer that question. It is worth beginning with a brief re-cap of Welsh history, in order to better answer the question: What is Wales?

## Wales in History

The year 1536 is felt to be pivotal by many people in Wales. This is the year in which the first Act of Annexation was passed, which stated that: 'Wales ... is and ever hath bene incorporated, annexed, united and subiecte to and under the imperialle Crown of this Realme'. The act formally incorporated Wales into England and forbade the use of the Welsh language in government.

Did this make us a colony? If colonialism is understood to be a specific, political relationship between two states, then quite the opposite in fact. It formalised our status as an oppressed nation, without doubt, but as Gwyn Alf Williams has pointed out, it actually rescued us from colonialism. From being a disenfranchised and colonised people, the Welsh, or at least their ruling class, were made politically equal to their English counterparts.

From this time on, Wales became very much a border country and little changed until the late eighteenth century, which saw the development of industrialisation and the tentative

beginnings of a working class response. The industries developed first around metal extraction and processing, later around coal. The outstanding dates from this period are the Merthyr rising of 1831 and the Chartist march on Newport in 1839. The development of Chartism in Wales was particularly significant, given the preponderance of physical-force of Chartists in the Gwent coalfield and the use of the Welsh language as a means of organising conspiracy.

Here was a social mobilisation of enormous scale which led to a direct, armed attack on the state. The government of the time was severely rattled and once the rising had been decisively quelled, it set about finding the roots of the problem. A commission of enquiry was despatched which discovered that, lo and behold, the Welsh language was a major contributor to the degenerate state of the Welsh.

The commission recommended a series of measures for the eradication of the language, which remain the source of nationalist propaganda to this day. In truth, they were never really implemented because they were never really needed. Something far bigger came along - it was called coal. Coal eclipsed everything that had gone before it in Wales and placed Wales at the centre of the imperial expansion of the British empire. Britannia ruled the waves and the Welsh kept digging the coal.

In the process, sections of the Welsh working class became corrupted by the profits of empire. The working class of Chartism gave way to the working classes of Victorian Britain and in the process 'the Welsh working class lost its memory'. It was not until the end of the century that a working class movement began to re-emerge and then at a far lower level than Chartism. Trade Unions were formed and very moderate they were too. They eventually formed the Labour Party, also very moderate, but still an enormous step forward in working class organisation.

By 1911, a new mood had developed in South Wales, exemplified by the Tonypandy riots. The new activists were impatient with their reformist leaders and The Miners' Next Step, published in Tonypandy in 1912, demanded that: 'The old policy of identity of interest between employers and ourselves be abolished, and a policy of open hostility installed.' What followed is more familiar history: the influence of the Russian revolution; the formation of the Communist Party; the defeat of the 1926 General Strike; company unionism and the struggle against it; the huge mobilisations against the means test in 1935; the sending of volunteers to Spain.

It is striking that in all this period the national demands raised by Welsh workers were minimal. The Welsh Nationalist Party, formed in 1925, was completely irrelevant, and indeed hostile, to the best developments in the Welsh working class. A tradition of support for Welsh home rule survived within the Welsh Labour movement until the Second World War but was in the main a carry-over from Liberalism and was thus supported by sections of the right wing. The attitude of Welsh workers to the Welsh language also seems to have been little more than benign indifference at this time. Certainly, they seemed in the main happy to accept a transition to English, without any means of compulsion having to be used. This applied equally to the more combative sections of the class, who could hardly be accused of being servile lackeys of the English ruling class.

And yet, as we approach the end of the twentieth century, the demand for a Welsh Assembly is a key question in Welsh politics. Plaid Cymru has emerged as a modern nationalist party, with the consistent support of around 10 per cent of the electorate, and the Welsh language is enjoying a revival across Wales.

How can this be explained? Each of these phenomena can be understood as reactions to both the continued economic marginalisation of Wales and the failure of the Labour Party to consistently address this problem. Labour emerged from the Second World War with a staggering dominance of Welsh politics. Welsh workers had huge illusions in the ability of reformist socialism to transform Britain and ensure that there would never be a return to the 1930s.

The post-war boom certainly brought improvements to an impoverished Wales but the regional aid policies of both Labour and Conservative governments were never able to address the uneven economic development within the British state. When the 1974 recession finally burst the bubble, Wales was the first to suffer. Since then the history of the Welsh economy has been a catalogue of cutbacks, closure and low pay. Little wonder that an increasing number of Welsh workers are becoming dissatisfied with a centralised British state which is increasingly unable to deliver the goods. What is more, the repeated mantra of the Labour movement, that 'nothing can be done until the next general election', becomes less credible with each successive defeat.

Developments in Wales and Scotland mirror those in a whole series of European countries which have seen the re-emergence of the national question in the last 30 years. These developments cannot be understood without seeing the nation as a dynamic and constantly changing phenomenon.

## **A Peculiar Nation**

The Welsh are undoubtedly a peculiar nation. In fact, it could hardly be otherwise. Wales became the mining annex of the world's greatest imperial power and shared in the profits of empire, however unequally. Coal was the crude oil of its day and when the market for coal collapsed, the Welsh were left high and dry. Our response as a nation has been shaped by this remarkable roller coaster ride.

For a period of roughly 100 years, from 1848 to the 1950's, the Welsh nation voluntarily accepted union with England and to a large extent gave up any concern for nationhood. A real process of assimilation took place, on a completely voluntary basis, with the decline in the Welsh language a major symptom of this process. It is only after this period that the first real development of a nationalist sentiment began to emerge.

The Welsh are not an oppressed nation: we have not been for at least 150 years. No significant coercion has been necessary to compel the Welsh to be part of the union with England or to give up their language. The Welsh nationalist myth of the use of the 'Welsh Not' in education is simply that, a myth. For many labourist leaders and intellectuals, chief amongst them the revolting Tim Williams, these facts seal the fate of the Welsh nation forever. We have renounced nationhood and the Welsh language and ever more shall do so. The reality is quite different; the Welsh people have a choice.

The re-emergence of the Welsh national question is a symptom of the historic decline of British imperialism and of Labour dominance in Wales. As Marxists we must analyse what is progressive and what is retrogressive in this development. As a rejection of British nationalism and the centralist British state, Welsh nationalism is undoubtedly progressive; inasmuch as it argues that separation is the key question for Welsh workers, it is retrogressive.

In truth, the Plaid Cymru position in favour of an independent Wales in Europe is an uneasy compromise between different wings of the party. It is at the same time logically incoherent since it is simply not possible to be both independent and part of Europe. If they actually mean an autonomous Wales within Europe then we can agree with them, but they do not say that. (ed. But that would mean that no Nation in Europe is in fact an independent nation, which is false since there remains the option of departure. Plaid Cymru seeks national rights).

Of course, it would be a mistake to restrict the growth of national sentiment to the support for Plaid Cymru. It is important to distinguish between nationalism as an ideology, expressed in the programs and platforms of nationalist movements and parties, and nationalist moods and sentiments. A national sentiment exists in Wales today which is far broader than the organised national movement. It reflects a pride in being Welsh, in the Welsh language and aspects of Welsh culture and above all in the desire for greater control on a Welsh level.

It is precisely this sentiment that Labour is trying to address with its half-hearted plans for a Welsh Assembly and which Plaid Cymru are not able to address, given their fixation with independence. Welsh workers understand perfectly well that an independent Wales is simply not a viable option. We are a peripheral and marginal nation, with scant natural resources, who will remain so under any form of independence.

Of course, many good people will be drawn to Plaid Cymru out of frustration with the Labour Party in Wales. It is also very much the case that people make best use of the political resources that they find around them. Given the huge weakness of authentic socialist ideas in Wales today, many people will attempt to express their radicalism through Plaid Cymru or the language movement. This means that many of the most important and dynamic elements in Welsh politics will be found in Plaid Cymru and *Cymdeithas yr Iaith* in the near future - we need to be talking to them.

At the same time, we should not over-emphasise the importance of Plaid Cymru and the other nationalist organisations. The decisive movement in Wales remains the Labour movement, which still retains the support of a majority of the Welsh people and is, in terms of social weight, decisive. It will remain the focus for our intervention for the foreseeable future.

Our position is that Wales is neither a colony nor an oppressed nation, but this does not prevent us from addressing the Welsh national question. We view the Welsh nation as suffering specific economic and linguistic inequalities which can be best addressed by Welsh autonomy within a European federation. The problems of Wales simply cannot be solved on a Welsh level, they are the problems of Europe. At the same time, we affirm the right of the Welsh people to self-determination up to and including full separation. If the Welsh people desire independence and the British state tries to stop them, we are unequivocally on the side of the Welsh people. We have no interest in defending the existing British state, which is corrupt and outmoded in every way.

The language question is of key importance in Wales. The broadest and most successful political campaigns of the nationalist movement have been around the language. It motivates some of the most radical sections of the movement, organised within *Cymdeithas yr Iaith*, who maintain a healthy distrust of Plaid Cymru's parliamentarism. At the same time, the language engenders a deep mistrust from sections of the non-Welsh speaking working class. We stand for a democratic solution to the language question, which ensures equal status for the Welsh language in all walks of life. Given the enormous preponderance and weight of the English language, this must involve the positive promotion of Welsh in disproportion to the

number of its speakers. We must, of course, assure those who do not speak the language that it will not be forced upon them.

The attitude of many people within the Labour Party to the Welsh language is nothing less than appalling. This ranges from indifference to outright hostility and is often cloaked in a fake internationalism, such as that of the Ogwr Labour councillor who declared: 'The Welsh language is a nauseating irrelevance to an internationalist like me.' It is also often stated that the less languages there exist, the better, since a multiplicity of languages is a barrier to human communication. Proponents of this view conveniently forget that the reason the world's main languages enjoy their dominance is that they are the languages of the world's main oppressor nations. Our approach does not begin from an abstract premise but from the concrete needs and aspirations of those who speak minority languages.

Many socialists still have a real problem with addressing the national question and insist on counter-posing class and nation with the immortal words: 'You need a class analysis, comrade!' In truth, a class analysis has to incorporate all the questions which face the working class, such as those of gender, race, sexual orientation and nation. Anything less is not a class analysis at all, since it does not apply to large sections of the working class.

Neither is raising demands for an Assembly and in defence of the Welsh language a concession to nationalism. Quite the reverse in fact: the nationalist movement will grow to the extent that the Labour movement does not address the question. We oppose nationalism, not because everything about it is bad but because it simply does not offer a path to the national and social liberation of the Welsh people.

The hopes and aspirations of many small nations have been bitterly disappointed by the reformist and Stalinist politicians who claim to speak in their name. Against this, we affirm a different vision of socialism, where a national future is guaranteed for all those nations who desire it. In discussing the fate of the Jewish nation in 1930's, Leon Trotsky described it thus

In the sphere of the national question there must be no restraint; on the contrary there must be an all-sided material assistance for the cultural needs of all nationalities and ethnic groups. If this or that national group is doomed to disappear (in the national sense) then this must proceed in the same way as a natural process, but never as a consequence of any territorial, economic, or administrative difficulties.

It is on this basis that the fundamental slogan of Marxism remains: **Workers of all countries, unite!**

## **The Demand for an Assembly**

Almost all the forces currently supporting a Welsh Assembly see it as a stable constitutional reform, which will be granted by Westminster. Some of the best of them also see it as a chance to re-invigorate Welsh politics. For us, this is the crux of the matter. We understand that no reform of the current British state is going to solve the problems of the Welsh working class. This will require a head on confrontation with capitalism and the overthrow of the British state.

There are at present massive illusions in what a Welsh Assembly, even with legislative powers, can achieve. We must be careful not to foster these illusions in any way. However, the mass of people will not give up their illusions simply because a small group of Marxists tell them so. They will have to go through the experience of testing out their ideas in practice and we must go through that experience with them. This is why we support the limited

demands for an Assembly, without sharing the illusions, and try to push the struggle as far as possible.

In so doing, we aim to draw people as much as possible into active politics, awakening their criticism of their politicians and strengthening their control over the actions of the ruling class. Support for an Assembly reflects a deepening distrust of the British state on the part of many Welsh workers - this is a healthy attitude which we seek to deepen. On this basis, our demand is for a Constituent Welsh Assembly. By this we mean an Assembly which has full power to decide on all aspects of its functioning and its international relations, without being subject to any veto from Westminster. The Assembly should freely decide what powers it transfers to a British or European level. This position is the same as that of the recently formed Scottish Socialist Alliance (SSA), whose aims state:

5. The SSA stands for the right of the people of Scotland, Wales, Ireland and England to self-determination and will fight for a sovereign Scottish Parliament which has the right to decide which powers to retain in Scotland and to determine its relationship with the rest of Britain and Europe.

It is necessary to find a popular way of expressing the Constituent Assembly idea. In the past, we have used the formula - for an Assembly which decides its own powers. But this is precisely a formula and not a slogan. I would propose that we adopt a new slogan: For Welsh Self-Government! This popularly and succinctly expresses our support for a sovereign body, without falling into sterile arguments over the need for an Assembly or Parliament.

## **The European Dimension**

Given the centrality of Maastricht and moves to a Single European Currency, this slogan should be linked to the demand: Should Wales adopt the Maastricht Treaty - let the Welsh Assembly decide! The importance of Maastricht in relation to a Welsh Assembly cannot be over emphasised. Given the Tories' little-Englander campaign against the European Union, it is far too easy to respond with a glibly pro-European line. But, the Europe currently being constructed by the French and German governments is not our Europe, it is the Europe of big capital, the Europe of our enemies.

Through their support for Maastricht, both the Labour Party and Plaid Cymru are leading the Welsh people straight into a hurricane of unprecedented ferocity. Implementation of Maastricht will be nothing short of a catastrophe for Wales, given our reliance on social spending and public sector employment

Both Plaid Cymru and the Labour Party cover their tracks by promising to sign up to the Social Chapter of the treaty. Events in countries which are already signatories to this chapter, such as France, should make it clear that its value is virtually nil. Plaid makes the additional demand for direct representation for Wales on the Council of Ministers. Once more, while the dynamics of European integration are dictated by the banks and finance institutions, this really has very little meaning.

Whatever type of Welsh Assembly is finally established, we will demand that it discusses and rejects the Maastricht Treaty!

## **A Truly Representative Assembly**

Against those in the Labour Party who wish to control the Assembly from the outset by undemocratic means we affirm the need for a truly representative Assembly. In practice, this



means elections using proportional representation and positive action measures to promote the involvement of women and youth. Along with the usual arguments in favour of PR, we should keep in mind that it will facilitate the participation of any new socialist party in the future.

The gross under-representation of women in Welsh politics is plain for all to see. One woman MP out of 38 and at a local government level, only 17 per cent of councillors are women. Women find their paths blocked at every turn: by the reactionary male dominated culture within political parties, which favours white, male, middle class candidates; by low pay and lack of financial independence; by the pressure of a double working day and by the responsibilities of childcare. This situation is self-perpetuating and will only be altered by positive action in favour of women, in order to counteract the deep inequalities which currently exist.

A representative Assembly must also reach out to the youth of Wales. Working class youth have borne the brunt of the Tory offensive in the last 17 years and left stranded by all the political parties. After being kicked in the teeth so often, it is little wonder that many sink into despair, disillusion, drug-abuse and crime. At very least, we should demand the right to vote at 16. Old enough to work, or rot on the dole, old enough to vote!

## **The Need to Mobilise**

The whole idea of re-invigorating Welsh politics around a struggle for a Constituent Assembly is premised on one thing - struggle. The kind of Assembly we want will never be granted by Westminster, not even by a Labour government. The Labour bureaucrats will do everything in their power to stop such a struggle developing. Against this, our task is to facilitate this development as much as possible, if only on a small scale at first.

The prospect of a broad re-mobilisation of the Labour movement may seem very unlikely at present but last year's events in France show how quickly the situation can change. We are undoubtedly living through a reactionary period in world politics. Two decades of defeats have left workers cynical and demoralised in Wales and throughout Europe. The collapse of the Stalinist states has discredited not only those bureaucratic regimes but the idea of socialism in general.

Without a turn in the sentiment of a broad mass of workers, no slogans, however correct, will change the situation. But this turn can, and will, arrive and will be best facilitated by the election of a Labour government. In the interim, we face a preparatory period of propaganda and education, preparing ourselves and those around us for the struggles ahead.

## **In Summary**

Our work around the Assembly should focus on four key elements:

- (1) Development and promotion of our own position, popularised by the slogan: For Welsh Self-Government! Linked to this will be the demand for the Welsh Assembly to decide on Maastricht.
- (2) Active participation in campaigns which promote lesser powers, crucially Welsh Labour Action, without sharing or fostering any illusions.

(3) The promotion of discussion around the politics of a Welsh Assembly, which should include dialogue with people outside the Labour Party, principally those in Plaid Cymru, *Cymdeithas yr Iaith* and the Communist Party of Britain.

(4) Exploring every avenue to facilitate active mobilisations around the demand for an Assembly.

# Where for Wales?

[June, 1996; *Socialist Outlook* 104]

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The Welsh Assembly and Maastricht were key issues at this year's Welsh Labour Party conference, the most animated for many years.

Tony Blair's speech to conference struck a strange note, given Labour's recent emphasis on a Welsh Assembly: 'You still believe in British values, in decency, hard work and fairness ... You are proud to be British but too much of that pride depends on history and nostalgia and not on what Britain is today.' Little wonder that many delegates complained that the speech was 'too British' and of little relevance to Wales.

Conference voted against the executive, affirming its opposition to any kind of selection in education and its commitment to a comprehensive system. A vote on renationalising the public utilities was lost 2:1 on a show of hands. Strikers from Cardiff County Unison who were opposing the Labour council's cuts in housing staff picketed the conference and moved an emergency resolution.

Welsh Labour Action (WLA), which is campaigning to strengthen Labour's Assembly policy, was extremely active and effective, with a successful fringe meeting and a good intervention into the assembly debate, despite attempts by the conference platform to demonise and marginalise the campaign. Evidently deep divisions exist on the Assembly within the Welsh Executive. On one wing Anita Gale, Ken Hopkins and Terry Thomas represent the worst kind of arrogant, complacent and bureaucratic labourism. The other wing consists of Ron Davies and his supporters, including a large number of Welsh MPs who favour change but shy away from an open fight. Differences over Proportional Representation reflect these divisions. Ron Davies spoke at the IPPR meeting of the need for an 'inclusive assembly' and for a 'consensus amongst pro-devolution parties to make it a truly Welsh Assembly and not simply a Labour Assembly'. He also expressed his support for PR and his view that the policy might change between the general election and the elections for an Assembly.

While *Socialist Outlook* disagrees with Ron's approach - we believe that more would be gained by staging an open fight within the party - it is clear that he was giving the green light for others to campaign around the issue. Of course, our vision of the Assembly must also go much further. Cardiff councillor Sue Essex said in the fringe meeting: 'the Assembly that we offer must be something genuinely new, which wakens and enlivens Welsh politics.'

The issue of Maastricht arose at another fringe meeting, organised by Llew Smith MP to oppose the Single European Currency. Its economic consequences will spell disaster for peripheral regions like Wales, which rely so heavily on social spending and public sector employment. The *Socialist Outlook* view is that the Welsh Assembly should decide whether Wales joins up or not - and that it should decide to reject Maastricht. The Assembly should be able to choose what powers to retain in Wales and what to pass on to a British or European level.

We favour electing the Assembly on a proportional basis and allowing it to decide on all the key questions which affect the Welsh people. In this way it could express Welsh autonomy within a wider British and European federation.

# Yes - Ie! For a Welsh Assembly

[With Brendan Thomas; September 1997; *Socialist Outlook* 8 (new series)]

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One of the positive consequences of the election of a Labour government has been the decision to call referenda on a Scottish Parliament and a Welsh Assembly.

The proposed Welsh Assembly will be a 60 seat body, with limited powers. It will be elected by an additional member system, 40 seats being elected by first-past-the-post based on the Westminster boundaries and 20 seats allocated from Party lists, based on the vote gained across the 5 Euro constituencies.

Democracy is central to the arguments being put in favour of a Welsh Assembly. During their 18 years in office the Tories constructed a highly undemocratic quango-state in Wales. Fourteen hundred appointees sit on Welsh quangos, in contrast to 1,273 councillors elected to Welsh local councils. The Welsh Office currently has a budget of £7 billion, £2.3 billion of which is spent directly by the quangos.

Under the Tories, the post of Secretary of State for Wales was increasingly used as a testing ground for young hopefuls, such as John Redwood and William Hague. Far from being representatives of Wales in London, they were very much the representatives of London in Wales. Labour's current proposals for Wales, though limited, would at least give control over most Welsh Office functions to an elected body. Socialists should support any measures which extend the control of ordinary people over their politicians and the state. Perhaps more importantly, the Assembly has the potential to become a focus for the demands and struggles of Welsh workers. With around 50 per cent of the Welsh vote in the last two general elections, Labour will more than likely have a majority in the Assembly. The dominant political force in the Assembly will therefore be elected by and claim to speak in the name of the Welsh working class, so we must demand that it speaks and acts to defend our interests.

Many in the Labour Party support the Assembly proposals for very different reasons to these. The traditional core leadership of the Wales Labour Party, based on local government and the trade union bureaucracy, has grudgingly conceded that an elected body should be set up. This is due to a steady growth of support for an Assembly at all levels of the labour movement in Wales. They hope to turn it into little more than a glorified county council stuffed with the kind of yes-men who populate Labour councils in most valleys.

The Blairite project is more sophisticated. They acknowledge the need to address the demand for greater democracy in Wales and the Assembly proposals are designed to do this in a minimal fashion. But, the Assembly has a second political function. Labour lacks an economic strategy that would begin to deal with mass unemployment and has to fall back upon Peter Hain's suggestions that under the Assembly a new 'economic powerhouse' development agency will revitalise the Welsh economy.

The new agency will have no increased funding however, since the Maastricht targets for European Monetary Union require reductions in state spending. Nor is there any proposal for a serious break from the existing (Tory) regional economic strategy of infrastructural

development and investment incentives. This strategy has failed to alter the pattern of uneven economic development both within Wales and across Britain as a whole with mass unemployment and low wages in Wales and the North of England and relative prosperity in the South-East.

So the Assembly proposals are part of a move towards the creation of regional assemblies across Britain in a strategy that seeks to spread the blame for the difficult times that lie ahead.

Neither of these scenarios should cause the left to reject a Welsh Assembly. On the contrary, our task is to subvert both these projects, in an effort to create a genuinely representative, popular and campaigning Assembly, unafraid of criticising the right-wing policies of the current Labour government. The demand that women are equally represented in the Assembly is crucial in this respect.

Support for an Assembly is now almost universal on the left in Wales. A conference was held in Cardiff on July 19, entitled 'Socialists and a Welsh Assembly'. The purpose of this event was to begin to develop a socialist agenda for a Welsh Assembly and to debate whether socialists should call for a Yes vote in September. The conference was attended by activists from the Labour Party, Plaid Cymru, the Communist Party, trade unions, pensioners' and unemployed workers' organisations and the far left. It was found that broad agreement existed on our approach to the Assembly and a statement, dubbed the 'Cardiff Declaration', was adopted.\* The conference organising committee is continuing to meet in order to produce campaigning material under the slogan: 'Socialists say YES!'.

The No campaign, after several shambolic false starts, has now found a sponsor in the form of Sir Julian Hodge, a multi-millionaire living in tax-exile in Jersey. He is joined by a few members of Rhondda Labour Party and by Lord Tonypandy - who supported the Referendum Party in the last election - and an assortment of other reactionaries. These people share a common hatred for any expression of Welsh-ness which goes beyond the stereotypical male voice choirs, leeks and rugby! Their campaign consists of little more than scare-mongering - about who will control the Assembly: 'North Wales under the thumb of South Wales' - and how much will cost: 'Welsh taxes soaring by £1,200 a head'.

Anti-Assembly Labour MPs have been careful not to associate themselves with this rag-tag bunch. Nevertheless, left wing MP Llew Smith needs to explain how he can support a No vote, a position which only the Tories support in Wales! Socialism is inconceivable without widespread national and local autonomy and yet Llew Smith seems to prefer the existing British state, which is both centralist and anti-democratic, to the limited democratic gain which a Welsh Assembly would represent.

There are a number of differences between this campaign and that of 1979, when Labour's devolution proposals were voted down in the Welsh referendum. The 1979 proposals were those of a deeply unpopular Labour administration, while the current proposals come on the back of a landslide Labour victory. This is acknowledged in the present Labour emphasis on a Yes vote being a loyalty vote.

The creation of the quango state, and the economic and political marginalisation of Wales under the Tories, have fuelled support for a Welsh political institution, both to address the problems of the people of Wales and to promote Welsh interests in the EU. And crucially, majority opinion within the Welsh labour movement is clearly in support of the Assembly. In

1979 the No campaign was led by a group of prominent Welsh Labour MPs. It also received serious funding from a number of trade unions in Wales and significant opposition to devolution existed in Welsh local government. Today there is no significant labour movement opposition to the Assembly. On the contrary, the Labour leadership, the Wales Labour Party and the Wales TUC are all calling for a Yes vote, while support in the labour movement for the No campaign is weak and fragmented.

It is vital that socialists, in particular the Labour left, support the call for Yes votes in Wales and Scotland. Socialists in England must raise the issues within the English Labour and trade union movement. A victory in September will be a gain for the working class throughout the British state.

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## **\*The Cardiff Declaration**

### **Socialists Say YES!**

This Conference declares its support for the right of the people of Wales to self-determination and calls for the establishment of a Welsh Assembly with the right to decide for itself which powers to retain in Wales and to determine its relationship with the rest of Britain and Europe.

Such an Assembly will need to have the law-making and financial powers necessary to begin to overcome the damage inflicted upon Wales by 18 years of Tory rule from Westminster. It should pursue policies for full employment, the expansion of public services and for greater democracy. As a first step, it should cancel proposed hospital closures, abolish the quangos in their present unaccountable form, and take back into public ownership Hyder and other privatised utilities.

Its electoral system should ensure that it is representative of the whole of Wales, through a system of proportional representation for the election of all seats in the Assembly, and is composed of equal numbers of women and men. Members of the Welsh Assembly should not be able to hold simultaneously any office as MP, MEP or councillor, even though councillors are not waged.

Labour's proposed Assembly falls short of these objectives but at least offers the people of Wales some measure of democratic control over the decisions which affect their lives. Furthermore, it will be an important line of defence against any future right-wing government at Westminster. It is therefore essential to win a substantial YES vote in the referendum on September 18th.

We call upon all socialists in Wales to campaign actively to maximise that vote.

We completely reject the standpoint of those in Wales who advocate a No vote on supposedly socialist and internationalist grounds. It is a hollow internationalism that cannot recognise the

specific needs and aspirations of the people of Wales, a strange socialism that is so fond of the centralist and outdated British state.

This Conference resolves to publicise this declaration under the slogan: Socialists Say YES!; to work with all existing Yes campaigns and to argue the socialist case for a Yes vote throughout the labour movement and the left in Wales. We will aim to take every opportunity to fight for a strengthening of the proposals, in line with the objectives set out above.

We call upon the Labour Party to conduct a vigorous mass campaign in support of the Assembly proposals. Victory will only be assured if Welsh working people are convinced that an Assembly will give them a real democratic voice.



# Wales: It's Yes by a Whisker!

[October 1997; *Socialist Outlook* 9]

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On 11 September, the Scottish people voted, calmly and overwhelmingly, for a Scottish Parliament with significant legislative and tax-varying powers. Thus ended nearly 300 years British constitutional history. On 18 September, the Welsh people with a great deal more trepidation narrowly voted for a Welsh Assembly. This heralds the greatest change in the governance of Wales since its annexation to England in the 16th century. The British state will never be the same again.

The decisive results in Scotland cannot be questioned. Support for a Scottish Parliament is clearly the settled will of the Scottish people. The Welsh result is more contradictory and, taken superficially would appear to beg more questions than it answers. A more detailed analysis shows some extremely important patterns in voting and consequently consciousness.

The Welsh result is, in some ways, the most remarkable of the two, given that the 1979 Welsh referendum was lost by such a large margin. Only 20 per cent of those who voted were in favour at the time, compared to 52 per cent in Scotland. It was only the artificial barrier that 40 per cent of the electors had to vote yes which prevented Scottish devolution from proceeding then.

It is clear from the voting patterns that support for an Assembly is very uneven in Wales. It is concentrated in the working class areas which suffered most under 18 years of Tory rule. Contrary to the claims of No campaigners, it is not simply linguistically based, since predominantly English speaking valleys and areas contributed as much to the victory as did Welsh speaking areas. Indeed, Welsh speaking Ynys Môn (Anglesey) only narrowly voted in favour.

Large majorities in favour were delivered in Labour's working class heartlands. Neath and Port Talbot voted 2 to 1 in favour, Rhondda by a majority of 15,000 and Caerffili by a majority of 6,000. The final result, which narrowly clinched victory, came from Carmarthen. This includes important working class areas like Llanelli, the Gwendraeth Valley, Ammanford and Carmarthen town itself. It registered a vote of 65 per cent in favour, based on a comparatively high turnout, allowing the Yes vote to scrape home by a majority of 6,721.

It is also striking that in every one of the areas in which rebel Labour MPs campaigned for a No vote, or cast doubts on the proposals, the vote was overwhelmingly in favour. This is a firm rebuttal for Allan Rogers in the Rhondda, Llew Smith in Blaenau Gwent, Ray Powell in Ogmore and Alan Williams in Swansea, along with doubters like Denzil Davies in Llanelli and Ted Rowlands in Merthyr.

Two areas with large working class populations which did register significant votes against were Cardiff and Newport. This reflects the much lower level of Welsh national consciousness in these areas and, in Cardiff at least, a strong feeling that a Welsh Assembly would be a bloated version of the increasingly unpopular Cardiff Labour council.

The role of Llew Smith in the No campaign is particularly problematic, since his appalling stance on this question has done a great deal to discredit the Labour left. He is the only Campaign Group MP in Wales and his stance has allowed opponents to lump together all his positions as: 'old-style state centralist socialism'. This could have particularly damaging consequences for any effort to build a campaign against the next European Inter-Governmental Conference, to be held in Cardiff next year. There are currently huge illusions within both the Wales Labour Party and Plaid Cymru about the prospects for Wales in a Maastricht Europe. Llew's stand on the Assembly will make it all the easier for people to dismiss his arguments against EMU as emanating simply from a London-centred, British nationalist perspective. There are already calls for his de-selection, with the most likely replacement being a pro-Assembly Blairite.

It is also instructive to examine the motivation of other key figures in the No campaign. Two Labour Party members from the Rhondda, Carys Pugh and Betty Bowen, achieved national prominence by being the first to launch a No campaign. Carys Pugh excelled herself with rabid comments about Peter Hain's South African background and the suggestion that he should return there. Betty Bowen was a little more measured but revealed a great deal with her comment that: 'I was born Welsh, I'm a Rhondda girl through and through, but I'm still a British subject'. That word 'subject' - it says it all. Such a sentiment brings to mind Lenin's comments that: 'Nobody is to be blamed for being born a slave; but a slave ... who justifies and eulogises his slavery ... arouses a legitimate feeling of indignation, contempt, and loathing.'

Despite the closeness of the result, the vote on September 18 is a massive step forward for the people and the politics of Wales. The creation of an Assembly gives socialists an exciting opportunity to reinvigorate and enliven political life in Wales. It will give us an elected body which can be both a forum for debate and a focus for demands and campaigns.

Activists in Cardiff West CLP have proposed a number of key points for debate on the nature of the Assembly. Based on their experience during campaigning, they have called for an Assembly which:

- Abolishes the vast majority of the quangos. Those that remain, such as the Welsh Development Agency and the Welsh Tourist Board, must be under tight democratic control.
- Dismantles the huge bureaucracy created by the Tories in the Health Service and opposes further hospital closures.
- Ensures that women are equally represented in the Assembly and that black people are fairly represented.
- Ensures that members of the Assembly do not enjoy any special privileges, while cuts are being made in other areas. Assembly members should be paid the average wage of a skilled worker in Wales.

These positions form a useful contribution to the public debate which must now develop, a debate which was so conspicuously absent before the vote. Strenuous attempts were made to stifle any disagreement, in an effort to maintain a facade of party unity. That false unity very predictably collapsed in the week before the vote, with extremely damaging consequences for the Yes campaign.

We very nearly paid the price on September the 18, when defeat could so easily have been snatched from the jaws of victory. A thorough discussion of both the Assembly proposals and the conduct of the campaign is now essential in the Welsh labour movement - and beyond.

# A Whisper from a Forgotten Nation

[November 1997; *International Viewpoint* 294]

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In September voters in Wales approved the Labour government's plans for decentralisation. Despite its limited powers, the Welsh Assembly is a step forward for Britain's smallest nation.

Conservative killjoys might suggest that the vote was only a half victory. The September 18 referendum on a Welsh Assembly was won by a margin of about 0.6 per cent. Only 51.3 per cent of the electorate bothered to vote at all. And the new Assembly will not have any powers of taxation.

Support for decentralisation was stronger in Scotland. In the 11 September referendum an incredible 74 per cent voted in favour of a Scottish Parliament and 63 per cent in support of tax-varying powers. Indeed opinion polls taken a few days before the Scottish vote showed that a majority of Scots would vote to give the new Parliament tax-raising powers, fully expecting that the first Scottish administration will increase taxes. In 1979, only 52 per cent voted for a Scottish assembly.

The Welsh Assembly is a much weaker body than that offered to Scotland. It will not be able to make laws or raise taxes. It will simply take over control of the existing budget of the Welsh Office which is the government department currently responsible for Welsh affairs. It will also be able to pass 'secondary legislation' in areas approved by the London Parliament. The proposals fall far short of the wide ranging autonomy that most socialists in Wales would support. But, given a choice between the status quo and some measure of greater control over our politicians and the state - the need to campaign for a Yes vote was clear.

The first results, from North Wales constituencies close to the English border showed significant majorities against. There was also a large No vote in the capital Cardiff.

Then the results began to trickle in from the South Wales Valleys, Labour's working-class heartland. Neath and Port Talbot voted 2 to 1 in favour, Rhondda by a majority of 15,000 and Caerffili by a majority of 6,000

With only one result still to be announced, the No vote was still short of the winning post. That final result was from Carmarthen, an area which includes important working class areas like Llanelli, the Gwendraeth Valley, Ammanford and Carmarthen town itself. These areas registered a massive 65 per cent in favour, based on a high turnout, and the Yes vote scraped home by a majority of 6,721.

What is most significant about these results is the pattern of support which they reveal. Unlike Scotland, support for a Welsh Assembly is very uneven. It is concentrated in the working class areas which suffered most under 18 years of Tory rule. Contrary to what the No campaigners claimed, it is not simply linguistically based, since the predominantly English-speaking South Wales valleys contributed as much to the victory as did Welsh

speaking areas in the North and West. Indeed, Welsh speaking Ynys Môn (Isle of Anglesey) only narrowly voted in favour.

Two areas of Labour support which did register significant No votes were the capital Cardiff and nearby Newport. This reflects the much lower level of Welsh national consciousness in these areas and, in Cardiff at least, a strong feeling that a Welsh Assembly would be a bloated version of the increasingly unpopular local Labour council. Another point comes through very clearly in the results. In every one of the areas in which rebel Labour MPs campaigned for a No vote, or cast doubts on the proposals, the vote was overwhelmingly in favour.

The role of Llew Smith MP is particularly problematic. He is the only member of the left-wing Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs in Wales, and his stand against the Assembly has done a great deal to discredit the Labour left, allowing opponents to lump together all his radical positions as representing 'old-style state centralist socialism'. This could have particularly damaging consequences for any future socialist campaign against Maastricht and EMU.

Both the Wales Labour Party and the left-nationalist Plaid Cymru have deep illusions about Wales' prospects in a Maastricht Europe. The mythical 'Europe of the Regions' is seen as a means of bringing power and prosperity to peripheral regions like Wales. The reality, of course, will be exactly the reverse. However, Llew Smith's stand on the Assembly will make it all the easier for people to dismiss his arguments against European Monetary Union as emanating simply from a London-centred, British nationalist perspective. But despite the closeness of the result and the problems for the left, the vote on September 18th was a massive step forward for the people and the politics of Wales. The creation of an Assembly gives socialists an exciting opportunity to reinvigorate and enliven political life in Wales. It will give us an elected body which can be both a forum for debate and a focus for demands and campaigns.

The Left must not squander this opportunity by confirming the fears of so many voters that the Assembly is simply about 'jobs for the boys'. Women must be equally represented in this Assembly and the voice of Black and Asian people must also be heard.

If Wales deserves a full-time Assembly it also deserves the full-time attention of its Assembly members. Dual-membership, whereby people can be both London MPs, Euro MPs, Lords or local councillors and also members of the Assembly, makes a mockery of the whole process.

Activists within the Wales Labour Party have proposed a number of key points in relation to the Assembly which we are confident enjoy broad popular support. We will continue to campaign for an Assembly which:

- Abolishes the vast majority of the quangos (semi-independent government bodies which blossomed under the Conservatives). Those that remain, such as the Welsh Development Agency and the Wales Tourist Board, must be under democratic control.
- Dismantles the huge bureaucracy created by the Conservatives in the Service and opposes further hospital closures.

- Ensures that women are equally represented in the Assembly and that black people are fairly represented.
- Assembly members should be paid the average wage of a skilled worker in Wales, in order that they stay in touch with ordinary people.

The narrow Yes vote presented all enormous challenge to radicals in the Labour Party, Plaid Cymru and beyond. People voted Yes for an Assembly that would break with the past and make a real difference to their lives - the left must fight to make that happen.

# What Price a Europe of the Regions?

[June 1998; *International Viewpoint* 301]

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The regional policy of the European Union (EU) was grandly designated in the Maastricht Treaty as a commitment to 'economic and social cohesion and solidarity among the member states'. The two main mechanisms proposed to facilitate this cohesion were the structural funds and the cohesion funds.

Structural funds were directed at poor regions across the whole of the EU, while the cohesion funds were specifically targeted at the four poorest member states – Ireland, Spain, Portugal and Greece.

And yet, despite many years of funding, the EU's own figures, published earlier this year, show that enormous inequalities still exist.<sup>1</sup> GDP per head ranges from nearly twice the EU average, for the port of Hamburg, to around half the average in regions of Greece, Spain, Italy and eastern Germany.<sup>2</sup>

The poorest regions in Britain are Merseyside and South Yorkshire, which stand at 70% of the EU average. Wealth remains concentrated in and around state capitals, with Greater London enjoying a GDP per head at 139% of the average.

Indeed, it is possible to talk of a 'golden banana' of wealthy regions, stretching from London, across to Brussels and Paris, down through the Rhinelands of western Germany and into northern Italy. Of the poorest states, which have been receiving the additional cohesion funds, only Ireland has made significant progress. The position of both the Spanish and Portuguese states has only slightly improved, while Greece has actually declined.

The Irish experience is held up as a model by many in Plaid Cymru and the Scottish National Party, with regard to benefits of statehood and a seat at the Council of Ministers. Suffice it to say that while Ireland has enjoyed a mini-boom in the last few years, the need for matching funding for all EU grants has meant cuts in many other areas of government spending. And the benefits of the cohesion fund bonanza have been very unevenly distributed, contributing to a deepening of inequality within the country.

The central approach has been to use spending on infrastructure and significant corporate tax breaks to attract inward investment – hardly a model of equitable and sustainable development which other small nations could or should try to emulate.

Thus, EU regional policy is condemned as a failure by its own figures. There has been no fundamental change in the pattern of regional inequalities since the early 1970s, when regional funds were first established. In fact, the situation has deteriorated. And, the concentration of wealth and investment in the core regions of Europe is set to continue, facilitated by the free movement of capital and labour enshrined in the Single European Act and the shake-out of less profitable branches and enterprises under a single currency.<sup>3</sup>

More far-sighted observers warned of these trends when the Maastricht treaty was first signed.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, even some supporters of Maastricht, such as Wayne David, leader of the British Labour group in the European Parliament, have openly acknowledged that such trends are inevitable.<sup>5</sup>

According to an analysis common to many social democrats, Maastricht contained two trends. The first was a move towards concentration of ownership and the centralisation of production in a few core regions, driven by economic and monetary union. The second, a counter-tendency towards regional decentralisation, facilitated by regional funds, the creation of the Committee of the Regions and the principle of subsidiarity.

The funds have clearly failed, so what of the political manifestation of this approach, the Committee of the Regions? This body was established by the Maastricht Treaty and first met in 1994. It is composed of 222 delegates from regional and local authorities across the EU and must be consulted by the Council and Commission on certain areas where regional interests are deemed to be involved.

It can also deliver opinions on its own initiative, but has no powers beyond this. However, the real problem with the Committee is not only that it is powerless but the wide, and sometimes contradictory, interests which it represents.

It is only necessary to consider the diversity of small nation and regionalist politics across the EU to appreciate this point. At the risk of being schematic, the small-nation nationalism of poorer nations is most often to the left, such as in Wales, Scotland and the Basque Country. This is not least because it is often in direct competition with a more centralist social democracy for working class votes.

On the other hand, the ascendant nationalism of more prosperous small nations, such as Catalonia and Flanders, is predominantly to the right, though with an important left-wing component. The relatively new phenomenon of right-wing regionalism is most spectacularly illustrated by the Northern League in Italy, but also by significant votes for the Republican Party in Baden-Wurttemberg in the early 1990s.

It is inconceivable that right-wing politicians from Europe's richest regions, which benefit from the current inequalities, will find common cause with those from the poorest, who are obliged to support a more redistributive approach.

Such are the dilemmas and contradictions of EU regional policy as we approach the creation of a single currency. Since the current meagre resources allocated to regional assistance have clearly failed and the existing centralist economic tendencies will be accelerated by monetary union, it might be expected that an increase in regional funds would be in order. In fact, the opposite is the case, as regional funds are to be reduced in order to release funds for EU enlargement to the East.

The proposals are contained in a document from the European Commission entitled Agenda 2000<sup>6</sup> and have serious implications for regional funds and the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The reform of the CAP is outside the scope of this article but while the present system cannot be defended, the alternative being proposed, of opening EU agriculture to the 'free' market, will be equally detrimental to small farmers, rural workers and the environment.<sup>7</sup>



The terms of enlargement are also likely to be detrimental to the workers and poor of the new member states to the East. Existing Association Agreements between the EU and the eastern states already work to boost EU exports to those countries, while restricting the import of textiles, coal and steel into the EU.<sup>8</sup>

The continued imposition of austerity measures is also a precondition for EU membership, which will cause further erosions in social provision and an increase in unemployment. Despite this, the new élites in Eastern Europe express an almost desperate desire to get on the right side of the borders of 'Fortress Europe' as laid down by the Schengen agreement.

In the words of Igor Bavcar, Slovenia's minister for European affairs: 'I'm afraid that there will be a new line drawn in Europe. It will be the Schengen line, and there is no line harder. But then, that's life.'<sup>9</sup>

The budgetary framework for Agenda 2000 has been set by the Council of Ministers, which has fixed the total EU budget at 1.27% of Union GDP for the period 1999 to 2006. This figure has been described as 'woefully inadequate' by many commentators.

Since no significant increase in cash will be available after the year 2000, the money for enlargement has to come from the existing programmes. The table shows a breakdown of the regional budget for the period 2000 to 2006.

<b>Agenda 2000: Regional expenditure 2000 - 2006</b> (billion ECU) <sup>10</sup>	
Regional Assistance	218.4
Cohesion funds	20.8
Enlargement (Of which pre-Accession aid)	46.8 21.8)
<b>Total</b>	<b>286.0</b>

Under the new proposals, the present five categories of regional assistance will be reduced to three:

**Objective 1** – The poorest regions, with GDP less than 75% of the EU average.

**Objective 2** – Industrial and rural areas with unemployment above the EU average.

**Objective 3** – Replaces the European Social Fund, aiming to tackle high unemployment, combat poverty, anticipate economic change and promote opportunities for women.

Funding at pre-Agenda 2000 levels will only be automatic for Objective 1 areas. Areas which lose Objective 1 status will have their funding phased out over six years; those that lose Objective 2 status over four years.

The document is committed to promoting labour flexibility, in line with the decisions of the Luxembourg Summit last November, stating that 'a key task of structural policy will be to underpin the reform of labour market policies and practices'. The convergence criteria are also invoked, in that control over the allocation of cohesion funds will be 'strengthened to prevent excessive public deficits in the context of the stability and growth (sic) Pact.'

With the current summit being held in Cardiff, it is appropriate to take Wales as an example of the effects of Agenda 2000. Under the current system, most of the country is covered by either Objective 2 or Objective 5b status. This has resulted in annual funding of around 100 million Ecu (£150 million) a year for the period 1994-99.

This is indeed a small amount of money, compared to the British state's allocation of over £7 billion to the Welsh Office budget! But most of this is set to disappear by the year 2003, since Wales does not currently qualify for Objective 1 status and only small parts of the country will qualify for Objective 2.

The proposals have predictably raised a storm of protest from governments and politicians across the Union, worried about the effect that such drastic cutbacks will have on their electorates.<sup>11</sup>

The response in Wales, which mirrors that in Britain as a whole, has been threefold:

- To argue that using unemployment levels to establish Objective 2 status does not take account of the real poverty of a nation or region. This has some justification, since the claimant unemployment rate in Wales is below the EU average, while the average household income is the lowest in the British state.
- Frantic efforts have been made to re-draw the 'poverty maps' prepared by the EU statistics agency Eurostat, so that smaller sub-regions can qualify for Objective 1 status, or at least be guaranteed Objective 2 status.
- An intensification of the long-standing argument that Wales must become more efficient and effective in its lobbying and bidding operations,<sup>12</sup> through improved professional support, better co-ordination between local authorities and an enhanced role in Europe for the new National Assembly for Wales.<sup>13</sup>

Each of these approaches, in their own way, misses the point. The key issue is that regional funds were inadequate to from the beginning. The cash pot has suddenly got much smaller, and any attempts to redefine criteria or redraw maps will only result in some regions securing funds at the expense of others.

Far too much money and effort is already spent by poor regions in competing for scant EU funds: to intensify this scramble still further is a desperate lunacy.

All of the approaches accept the logic of taking part in an enormous competition amongst the poor for a shrinking pot of EU assistance. A competition both within the existing member states and between the poorest regions, East and West, within an enlarged EU.

The starting point for the left must be to reject this whole approach and in so doing, to reject Agenda 2000 as a basis for enlargement.

The Marxist Left has generally given insufficient attention to the regional dimension of EU politics.<sup>14</sup> This reflects, perhaps, its concentration in the metropolitan centres, where regional aid is less of an issue. And yet at present, 51% of the EU population lives in areas covered by regional programmes.

The funds involved are indeed small, in financial terms, but their real importance lies in the ideological gloss and justification which they provide for social democratic and left politicians to support the Maastricht process. Hence, the visible outrage (and thinly disguised panic) in response to the current proposals.

It is clear that the European left needs a wide ranging discussion on how to respond to Agenda 2000. It is perhaps useful to propose at the outset some general points on which the discussion should be based:

- The left should not oppose EU enlargement to the East. We must stand for an inclusive Europe and mount a struggle over the social and economic basis on which such a Europe is constituted.
- We should, however, oppose Agenda 2000 as a basis for enlargement. We should demand that all social democratic and left parties vote against this proposal in the European Parliament and the Committee of the Regions.
- Pro-Maastricht politicians of the left have in the past hidden behind the excuse that the EU is dominated by right-wing governments. There are now social democratic governments in both France and Britain, with the prospect of a third in Germany. The time for excuses is over! We should demand that they formulate a Europe-wide plan to tackle unemployment.
- We demand a massive increase in regional aid, both from state governments and the Union, to fund regional development and enlargement. Regional spending should not be restricted to infrastructure projects and promoting small and medium sized enterprises but predominantly aimed at directly creating jobs through a programme of public works.
- Any moves towards further privatisation or erosion of the welfare state must be opposed.
- These measures must be paid for by direct progressive taxation across the whole EU and a Europe wide tax on foreign exchange transactions unrelated to trade.

Of course, none of these demands will be won, or even forced onto the agenda, without a concerted effort. It is time that the leaders of our trade unions and the left parties gave some real content to their talk of a social Europe, by mounting active campaigns on demands such as those above.

It is also vital that we continue to develop the existing Europe-wide campaigns on these issues, such as those which have successfully mobilised for the Summits in Amsterdam, Luxembourg and Cardiff.

The Single European Act, the Treaties of Maastricht and Amsterdam and the Dublin Stability Pact were each, in their own way, blows against the workers and poor of Europe. Agenda

2000 threatens to further reinforce a 'Europe of the core regions' at the expense of an impoverished periphery to its south, west and east. It must be opposed.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> 'GDP in the Regions', Eurostat Report, April 1998.

<sup>2</sup> Gross domestic product (GDP) is a measure of the total goods and services produced in a given region.

<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed discussion of uneven development in Europe, see Brendan Young, 'Wales in Europe: The Poor Relation?', Conference Papers, 'Socialists and a Welsh Assembly,' Cardiff, July 1997.

<sup>4</sup> Ash Amin and John Tomaney, 'EC policy muddle will fail the poorer regions', *The Guardian*, 13 July 1992.

<sup>5</sup> Wayne David, 'Building on Maastricht: A Left Agenda for Europe', *Tribune Group of Euro MP's*, March 1993.

<sup>6</sup> 'Agenda 2000: The Legislative Proposals,' The European Commission, Document IP/98/258, March 1998.

<sup>7</sup> 'The Common Agricultural Policy', *International Viewpoint*, Special Issue on the EU, No 290, 1997.

<sup>8</sup> Catherine Samary, 'Can the EU absorb the east?', *International Viewpoint*, No 278, June 1996. Also, 'The EU's eastward expansion', *International Viewpoint*, No 290, 1997.

<sup>9</sup> Marc Champion and Tim King, 'Long road ahead to the EU for eastern supplicants', *The European*, 1-12, April 1998.

<sup>10</sup> One Ecu = 0.65 British pounds, 0.79 Irish punts or 1.1 US dollars.

<sup>11</sup> Martin Walker and David Gow, 'Poorer UK regions face 'colossal' Europe aid cut', *The Guardian*, 19 March 1998. Also, 'Agenda 2000 - Protests at Regional Reform Plans', *European Parliament News*, April 1998.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Victoria Winkler, 'Strategic Partnerships and a Communitaire Spirit', *Agenda*, Institute of Welsh Affairs, Summer 1996.

<sup>13</sup> The National Assembly provides a limited measure of autonomy for Wales, though its powers fall far short of those granted to the Scottish Parliament or regional governments in Catalonia and the Basque Country.

<sup>14</sup> A notable, and interesting, exception is the article by Claude Gabriel, 'The crisis of citizenship and the future of Europe', *International Viewpoint*, No 228, May 1992.

# Blairites Complete Stitch-up in Wales

[March 1998; *Socialist Outlook* 23]

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The recent battle for the Labour leadership in the Welsh Assembly has highlighted the lengths to which Tony Blair will go to retain control over the Welsh Labour Party.

Not only did New Labour have to rely on very 'Old Labour' to deliver the victory of Alun Michael, it was also ready to sacrifice electoral advantage in the event that Blair's candidate did win.

The recent contest arose after a 'moment of madness' committed on Clapham Common by Ron Davies, the previous Secretary of State for Wales and prospective Assembly leader. Ron secured the almost unanimous support of both the trade union and the local government bureaucracy in the previous contest.

However, the method of his election caused some consternation amongst rank-and-file Labour Party members, a consternation which was further exacerbated by the blatant political vetting of prospective Assembly candidates and the imposition of an English MEP above sitting Welsh MEPs on the party's Euro list.

Thus, when the new leadership contest was unexpectedly required, the wounds of recent events were still fresh. Anger was further heightened by the decision to reopen the nominations procedure for Assembly candidates, simply to allow Alun Michael to stand.

It was therefore much more difficult for the Welsh Executive of the Labour Party to stitch up the result in the same way as previously. Voting by OMOV was introduced in the Labour Party members' section of the electoral college and a number of unions declared their intention to consult their members before casting their vote.

Previous to his appointment as Welsh Secretary, Alun Michael, the MP for Cardiff South and Penarth, had shown no interest in the Welsh Assembly. He played no part whatsoever in the campaign to secure the 'Yes' vote in September 1997.

He was selected simply because he would unquestioningly carry out the bidding of Tony Blair.

Peter Hain, currently a Welsh Office Minister, immediately threw his support behind Alun Michael and became his campaign manager. What little shreds of 'left' credibility that Hain had retained before this episode have now been swept away by his conduct in this campaign.

Ron Davies was also quick to offer his support to Alun Michael, still mindful of a possible future role in the Welsh Assembly. It is difficult to square this action with the image that many people in Wales have of Ron Davies - that of an outspoken and committed advocate of Welsh autonomy and 'inclusive' politics.

While Alun Michael's campaign was stuffed with ministers and Labour bigwigs, Rhodri Morgan attracted genuine popular support, particularly on the basis of his consistent work in exposing the corruptions of the quango state in Wales under the Conservatives.

Most of the left-leaning Welsh MPs supported his campaign, as did many left-wing Assembly candidates. A number of prominent academics and dissident members of the Welsh Executive also supported him.

Rhodri's main campaign slogan was 'an Assembly for the people, and not the *crachach*' - *crachach* being a colloquial and derogatory Welsh word for the upper class.

While Rhodri stood for the greater autonomy of the Welsh Assembly, the weaknesses of his campaign were very apparent. He placed great stress on the fact that there were no major policy differences between himself and Alun Michael. This position was criticised by many within the Rhodri camp.

Despite his failure to stand on a left platform, it was very clearly the case that Rhodri Morgan should have been supported against the candidate imposed by Tony Blair.

After an extended period of campaigning, necessary to provide some kind of profile for Alun Michael in Wales, the result was announced on 20 February. The overall result gave Alun Michael 53 per cent of the vote against Rhodri Morgan's 47 per cent.

The breakdown of the votes for each section of the electoral college were: 64 per cent versus 36 per cent for Alun Michael in the trade unions; 58 per cent versus 42 per cent for Alun Michael among the MPs, MEPs and Assembly candidates; and 65 per cent to 35 per cent for Rhodri Morgan among party members.

The scale of Alun Michael's victory in the trade union section was ensured by three of the four largest unions in Wales: the TGWU, AEEU and GMB, which together accounted for 17.5 per cent of the overall vote.

None of these unions carried out a comprehensive consultation with their members. The AEEU and GMB carried out partial consultations, conducted in such a way as to ensure that the required result was achieved.

When George Wright, leader of the TGWU in Wales, was questioned as to why his union was backing Alun Michael, he replied: 'because he's Secretary of State for Wales'. Whoever Tony Blair had selected for the post, he clearly implied, the TGWU would meekly have given their support.

The only major union to conduct an OMOV ballot was UNISON, and the result showed an overwhelming majority in favour of Rhodri Morgan. This pattern was repeated in all the smaller unions which conducted OMOV ballots.

There is now a danger that the backlash against union involvement might be used, quite cynically, by the Blairites to weaken union links after their objective has been achieved. This must be vigorously resisted, though measures to give union members greater control over how their votes are cast in the Labour Party should be supported.

Tony Blair and his supporters in Wales went to enormous lengths to ensure the victory of Alun Michael in this contest. It revealed once again the brutality of Blairism in dealing with any opposition within the party, however timid.

Blair had to rely on those bastions of 'Old Labour', the very union bureaucrats he had attacked so vigorously in the past, in order to deliver the result.

Opinion polls conducted before the result was announced showed that the Labour Party would lose 10 per cent of its support if Alun Michael was elected rather than Rhodri Morgan.

Thus, Blairism, which was founded on the basis of making every concession to the right necessary to ensure electability, became turned on its head. This loss of electoral support is particularly significant in the case of the Welsh Assembly, since it will be elected with an element of proportionality.

One thing is very clear: the furore caused by this campaign is only a foretaste of far greater struggles within the Welsh Labour Party once the Assembly is established.

It also shows how the relationship between the Labour Party and the trade unions is not simply a one-way street: events in the Labour Party can have the effect of revitalising and politicising the trade unions.

Following the result, Alun Michael made very clear in which direction he planned to lead the Assembly. He claimed that Labour's Assembly manifesto, a vacuous document full of empty phrases, was a solid basis on which to run Wales.

He also attacked what he called the 'black, negative side of the Welsh character', and said that Labour in Wales should be positive and 'look to the future'.

It is clear that the role of the Assembly for Blair and his supporters is one of a buffer between the Welsh people and Parliament and a propaganda instrument for the Labour Government. What little powers have been relinquished to the Assembly will be controlled by means of greater centralism within the Labour Party.

The blatant rigging of the election has left many party members in Wales feeling both distrust and anger towards the Labour leadership. This provides the left with a far greater scope for activity than in very many years.

The two main tasks in the coming months will be to try and channel this discontent into an effective campaign to extend democracy within the Welsh Labour Party, and also to encourage a wide-ranging debate on policies for the Welsh assembly.

Such policies must stand in stark contrast to Labour's existing Assembly manifesto, if they are to serve the vast majority of the people of Wales.

# Welsh Labour Plumbs New Depths

[April 1999; *Socialist Outlook* 24]

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The election of Alun Michael as Welsh Labour leader had one immediate and spectacular result - Labour support in the opinion polls dropped by a remarkable 10 per cent.

Peter Hain, Michael's campaign manager, was quick to blame this on the leadership campaign, claiming that the party had been 'looking inwards ... to an excruciating degree'.

In reality, it was not the leadership contest that caused the drop in support, but rather the undemocratic way in which it was conducted, and the consequent outcome.

Most of the 10 per cent transferred their support to Plaid Cymru, leaving Labour on 51 per cent, Plaid on 23 per cent and the Tories on 16 per cent. The response of the Labour leadership was to launch a vitriolic attack on Plaid, entitled 'The A to Z of Nationalist Madness'.

This is a truly dreadful document, reminiscent of the worst kind of negative campaigning conducted by the Conservatives and the 'No' campaign during the Assembly referendum.

It attacks Plaid Cymru for many left-wing policies, which socialists in the Labour Party would equally support, such as the abolition of student loans and prescription charges.

The document reaches the level of farce with the final heading, 'Z is for zealots', where Plaid are attacked for wanting Wales to have its own seat at the UN, under the name Cymru, which the document disparagingly points out would fall between Cuba and Cyprus.

While the 'A to Z' is quick to attack the Welsh nationalism of Plaid Cymru, it makes no mention of the British nationalism of the Labour Party, which is all too ready to cloak itself in the union jack, to talk of 'One Nation Labour', and to parade bulldogs in election broadcasts.

This latest campaign has shown clearly what Michael and Hain mean by 'a new, inclusive politics in Wales'.

According to Hain., 'It marks the death knell of the weary, gladiatorial style of British politics, where petty point scoring invariably triumphs over sensible debate'.

The 'A-Z' is exactly that kind of petty point-scoring and illustrates what the new 'inclusiveness' really means: inclusive to the right and the Liberal Democrats; abusive to the left, in this case Plaid Cymru.

Many Labour supporters in Wales were appalled by the blatant stitch-up of the Labour leadership. They should be equally concerned by the latest turn in the campaign.

This is no basis on which to campaign for the Assembly, it does nothing to foster the debates needed in Wales or develop policies to answer people's real concerns - on jobs, education and the health service.



The antics Labour's leadership have led many people to consider abandoning the Party in disgust. *Socialist Outlook* supporters believe that this is premature. Now is not the time to turn away from Labour, when the campaign against the right wing leadership is only just beginning.

The events surrounding the leadership contest are only a foretaste of much bigger struggles to come. It is vital that the left is fully involved in these debates and does not hand victory to the right simply by walking away from the Party at this stage.

This is why we call for a Labour vote in these elections - with the idea of giving Labour a clear majority to ensure it can be held accountable for its actions in government.

Recent events have led many people to consider voting Plaid as a left-wing alternative to Labour. In response, it is not enough to attack Plaid Cymru by counter-posing socialist internationalism to its Welsh nationalism. Internationalism has too often been used as a cover for the worst kinds of British chauvinism. And, the internationalist credentials of the Labour Party are very dubious indeed.

It is necessary to look at both the positive and the negative aspects of Plaid's politics.

The positive aspects are its rejection of the centralist British state, its long-standing anti-militarist and pacifist tradition and its defence of the Welsh language.

More negative is the widely propagated view that policies 'made in Wales' will be inherently better than those 'made in England', and a consistent failure to identify international capitalism as the real culprit in the impoverishment of the people of Wales. Other problems include the extremely heterogeneous nature of the party, particularly at local government level, where it often acts more as an anti-Labour bloc than a socialist opposition. On a European level, Plaid shares with Labour a support for the Maastricht Treaty and the single currency. The contradiction between supporting monetarist policies on a European level and Keynesian policies on a Welsh level are left unresolved. As a result, there has been no real debate in Wales on the future of the European Union.

There is also a danger that Plaid will not function as an effective opposition in the Assembly, given their stated aim of trying to 'make the Assembly work', in order to establish their own legitimacy among the Welsh people.

The other group standing to the left of Labour in the Assembly elections are the United Socialists, an electoral alliance composed of the Socialist Party (formerly Militant), Cymru Goch and the SWP and various non-aligned socialists. *Socialist Outlook* does not believe that such a group offers a credible alternative to Labour, not least because the groups involved do not appreciate the centrality and importance of the Labour Party in Welsh politics.

*Socialist Outlook* supported the establishment of the Welsh Assembly, in part because of its potential to reinvigorate Welsh politics. It has certainly begun to do this, even if this is largely restricted to a party-political level at present. It is also a fact that despite recent reverses, Labour retains the support of 50 per cent of the Welsh electorate. This support expresses the hopes and aspirations of working class people in Wales for a better society. The Yes vote for the Assembly was a vote for change and a Labour majority in the Assembly must be forced to deliver that change.

# Post-Mortem Needed as Welsh Voters Punish Labour

[May 1999; *Socialist Outlook* 25]

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The results of the first Welsh Assembly elections were a shock to everyone in Wales. Plaid Cymru achieved success beyond the hopes of even their wildest dreamers, while Labour activists were left stunned, 'crushed' in their own words, and without a majority in the Assembly.

The Assembly was elected using an additional member system, with 40 constituency seats and 20 additional seats used to ensure greater proportionality. Welsh voters had two votes in these elections, the first for their constituency representative and the second used to allocate the additional seats.

The election was characterised by a low turnout, a collapse in the Labour vote and a significant upsurge in Plaid Cymru support. It was Labour's lowest share of the vote in Wales since the 1930s, with Plaid Cymru only five per cent behind. Plaid's most astonishing successes were in winning constituency seats in the Rhondda, Islwyn, Llanelli and Conwy. These results show that not only did Labour voters stay home in significant numbers, but that many voted Plaid. It had been predicted before the election that Labour voters might use their second vote to protest against New Labour by voting Plaid. In the event, many Labour voters gave both their first and second votes to Plaid, and also voted for them in the council elections, held on the same day.

This led to Plaid Cymru taking control of Rhondda, Cynon Taff and Caerffili councils, both of which lie in Labour's valley heartlands. Consider these facts:

In the 1997 British general election, Labour's share of the vote was greater than 60 per cent in 15 Welsh constituencies. In the first Welsh general election, this share remained above 60 per cent in only two constituencies, Blaenau Gwent and Cardiff West. Cardiff West, held in Westminster by Rhodri Morgan, was the only constituency which registered a swing to Labour.

In the 1997 British general election, the Plaid Cymru vote was greater than 10 per cent in only 10 constituencies. In 1999, there were only two constituencies in which it remained in single figures: Monmouth and Brecon and Radnor. The swing to Plaid Cymru was greater than 30 per cent in a swathe of valley constituencies.

The parties standing to the left of Labour and Plaid Cymru polled poorly. The United Socialists also stood in nine first-past-the-post seats, where they achieved somewhat better results.

Their best results were achieved in Merthyr Tydfil and Clwyd South, where they obtained 2.3 per cent of the votes. On this occasion the votes of disillusioned Labour supporters went to

Plaid Cymru and not to the small left-wing parties.

Why? As the votes were counted on May 7, Labour's well prepared spin on the results gradually fell apart. Both Peter Hain and John Prescott were interviewed early in the day and blamed complacency and the 'politics of contentment' for the low turnout!

As the day wore on, it became increasingly untenable to argue that complacency and contentment had caused such large numbers of Labour voters to switch to Plaid. It became apparent that Labour's main strategy in these elections, of frightening voters away from Plaid with talk of 'nationalist madness', had abjectly failed.

Writing in *The Western Mail* after the result, Peter Hain began by blaming the two Labour leadership contests for alienating voters. He went on to claim that this was in no way a protest against New Labour, but simply that the Government had failed to motivate its Old Labour base to vote. He also blamed the result on the unpopularity of some Labour councils and that the lack of a perceived Tory threat in Wales. His conclusion: Welsh Labour needs to be more New Labour.

An article by Paul Flynn, MP for Newport West, took issue with Hain's view, and identified the blatantly undemocratic imposition of Alun Michael as a major factor in Labour voters' discontent. It was, he said 'A case of dragons led by poodles.' His conclusion. Welsh Labour needs to be less New Labour, not more.

Paul Flynn is undoubtedly correct in identifying the election results as a protest vote against the right-wing policies of the Blair Government and its arrogant and undemocratic practices.

The vote may also reflect a deeper development in Welsh politics, that of a growth in support for Plaid Cymru as a reaction against the practice of Welsh Labour, at both council and parliamentary level.

Opinion polls have indicated that Welsh voters will vote differently in British and Welsh general elections. At a British state level, they will vote against the Tories and for a Labour government.

On a Welsh level, they are far more prepared to support Plaid Cymru, since the Tories do not pose a threat.

The Labour leadership in Wales has tried to blame everyone but themselves for this disastrous result. The left in the party must try to ensure that a thorough post-mortem be carried out which fixes the blame squarely where it belongs.

# Swings and Roundabouts: What *Really* Happened on May 6

A Report on the First Welsh Assembly Elections

[With Ed George; November 1999; Welsh Labour Action Pamphlet, No. 1]

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## Introduction

1. The Basic Picture
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## Introduction

This report is an attempt to look beyond the spin at what *really* happened in the first Welsh Assembly elections on May 6, 1999. We look at the voting figures on a national and constituency basis, and go on to study the extent and nature of the swings from Labour to Plaid Cymru. The Assembly elections and the Euro elections which followed in June are then set in their historical context. The last part of the report examines the various explanations which have been offered for Labour's poor performance. We discuss them and offer our own interpretation of the results.

The report was first presented to a meeting of Welsh Labour Action in June. It was submitted to the Debriefing Team established by the Labour Party Welsh Executive to look into the Assembly election results. Following its initial distribution, we received considerable positive feedback on its contents and suggestions for improvements. We have incorporated these into this final version and are grateful to all those who contacted us.

The main thrust of our arguments can be summarised as follows:

Our analysis shows very clearly that the biggest swings from Labour to Plaid Cymru were in the south Wales valley constituencies which make up Labour's traditional heartlands. Local factors may have had some influence in the Rhondda and Islwyn but this does not explain the huge swings across the whole south Wales valleys.

We are seeing myth-making on a grand scale in the explanations being offered for these results. The first grand myth is that the two leadership contests were the cause of Labour's poor showing. In reality, it was not the contests but the undemocratic way in which they were conducted, and the eventual outcome, that cost us votes. We have not met a single party member, or a member of the public, who objected to the leadership being contested: what they did object to, particularly with the second contest, was the blatant stitch-up engineered to ensure that Alun Michael won.

The second grand myth is that Labour failed to get its message across. Peter Hain has argued that Labour is implementing a radical socialist programme on the quiet but that the core vote in Wales failed to realise this. If the Labour Party really was implementing such a programme, which was making a real difference to people's lives, then there would be no need to spell it out to Labour voters. The truth is that Labour voters in Wales understand only too well what the Labour government is doing and they do not like it.

This is why hundreds of thousands of Welsh Labour voters did not vote in the Assembly and Euro elections and why tens of thousands of them switched to Plaid Cymru.

You may not, as yet, be convinced of these points. We hope that you will be after reading the report.

**Ceri Evans and Ed George**

November, 1999

## 1. The Basic Picture

### 1.1 Percentage of votes cast for the main parties, and Assembly seats won.

	First vote (%)	Second vote (%)	Const. seats	List seats	Total seats (number)	Total seats (%)
<i>Labour</i>	37.6	35.5	27	1	28	46.7
<i>Plaid</i>	28.4	30.6	9	8	17	28.3
<i>Liberal</i>	13.5	12.6	3	3	6	10.0

<i>Conservative</i>	15.9	16.5	1	8	9	15.0
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## Comments

1. Note the similarity between the first and second votes for each party. Despite some predictions to the contrary, most voters tended to vote for the same party on both ballots.
2. With the exception of the disastrous result of 1983, this is the lowest Labour share of the vote in Wales since 1918. As far as the Conservatives are concerned, the European election of 1994, the general election of 1997, and now the Assembly election, mark by far their worst performance in Wales since the appearance of anything resembling the modern Conservative Party in 1832. The Liberal share of the vote held up. Plaid's return gives them their highest share ever - by a very long way.
3. The strange, hybrid electoral system we found ourselves landed with did in the end achieve a fair degree of proportionality: largely a product of the fact that Plaid gained so many constituency seats. However, as can be seen, the real gainers from the system were the Tories, with a nine-fold increase in seats.
4. Of course, since the overall turnout was so low, looking at the percentage share of the votes does not tell the whole story. We need also to take a look at the total numbers of votes cast.

## 2. Who Stayed Home?

### 2.1 Total votes cast: 1997 and 1999 compared.

Total votes cast				
	1997	1999 (first ballot)	1999 (second ballot)	% change 1997-1999 (first ballot)
<i>Labour</i>	886 432	384 671	361 657	-57
<i>Plaid</i>	161 030	290 572	312 048	+80
<i>Liberal</i>	200 020	137 657	128 008	-31
<i>Conservative</i>	317 127	162 133	168 206	-49
<i>Turnout (%)</i>	74	46	46	-28

## Comments

1. From table 2.1, we can see that on a national basis, Liberal, Conservative and - in great numbers - Labour voters stayed home.
2. The turnout may have been low overall, but the total number of Plaid votes cast is up 80 per cent compared to 1997. Their previous highest share of the vote (17.1 per cent in the 1994 European election) and their previous highest total number of votes (175,016 in the 1970 general election), were both far and away surpassed.
3. Thus it is on a national scale. Now we need to look at the election at the level of the constituencies.

## 3. Labour and Plaid's Returns: 1997 and 1999 compared

### 3.1 Labour and Plaid's returns: 1997 and 1999 compared.

Constituency	Labour				Plaid			
	Votes		% total votes		Votes		% total votes	
	1997	1999	1997	1999	1997	1999	1997	1999
<i>Aberavon</i>	25 650	11 941	71.3	51.3	2 088	5 198	5.8	22.3
<i>Alyn &amp; Deeside</i>	25 995	9 772	61.9	51.4	738	2 304	1.8	12.1
<i>Blaenau Gwent</i>	31 493	16 069	79.5	61.8	2 072	5 501	5.2	21.2
<i>Brecon &amp; Radnor</i>	11 424	5 165	26.6	17.7	622	2 356	1.5	8.1
<i>Bridgend</i>	25 115	9 321	58.1	37.2	1 649	4 919	3.8	19.7
<i>Caernarfon</i>	10 167	6 475	29.5	22.7	17 616	18 748	51.8	65.8
<i>Caerphilly</i>	30 697	12 602	67.8	44.2	4 383	9 741	9.7	34.2
<i>Cardiff Central</i>	18 464	7 769	43.7	30.0	1 504	3 795	3.6	14.7
<i>Cardiff North</i>	24 460	12 198	50.4	38.7	1 201	4 337	2.5	13.8
<i>Cardiff South &amp; P</i>	22 647	11 057	53.4	48.0	1 356	3 931	3.2	17.1
<i>Cardiff West</i>	24 297	14 305	60.3	61.6	1 949	3 402	4.8	14.7
<i>Carm E &amp; Din</i>	17 907	10 348	42.9	31.7	14 457	17 328	34.6	53.1
<i>Carm W &amp; Pem S</i>	20 956	9 891	49.1	35.1	5 402	8 399	12.7	29.8
<i>Ceredigion</i>	9 767	5 009	24.3	15.7	16 728	15 258	41.6	47.8
<i>Clwyd South</i>	22 901	9 196	58.1	42.2	2 500	5 511	6.3	25.3
<i>Clwyd West</i>	14 918	7 824	37.1	31.0	5 421	6 886	13.5	27.3
<i>Conwy</i>	14 561	8 171	35.0	30.2	2 844	8 285	6.8	30.6
<i>Cynon Valley</i>	23 307	9 883	69.7	45.6	3 552	9 206	10.6	42.5
<i>Delyn</i>	22 300	10 672	56.1	44.7	1 558	4 837	3.8	20.3
<i>Gower</i>	23 313	9 813	53.8	35.4	2 226	6 653	5.1	24.0
<i>Islwyn</i>	26 995	9 438	74.2	39.4	2 272	10 042	6.2	42.0
<i>Llanelli</i>	23 851	11 285	57.9	39.8	7 812	11 973	19.0	42.2

<i>Meirionnydd N C</i>	5 660	3 292	23.0	17.4	12 465	12 034	50.7	63.8
<i>Merthyr T &amp; R</i>	30 012	11 024	76.7	43.9	2 334	6 810	6.0	27.1
<i>Monmouth</i>	23 404	10 238	47.7	32.3	516	1 964	1.1	6.2
<i>Montgomeryshire</i>	6 109	2 638	19.1	12.3	1 608	3 554	5.0	16.6
<i>Neath</i>	30 324	12 234	73.5	45.5	3 344	9 616	8.1	35.8
<i>Newport East</i>	21 481	9 497	57.7	49.4	721	2 647	1.9	13.8
<i>Newport West</i>	24 331	11 538	60.5	47.6	648	3 053	1.6	12.6
<i>Ogmore</i>	28 163	10 407	74.0	48.2	2 679	5 842	7.0	27.1
<i>Pontypridd</i>	29 290	11 330	63.9	38.6	2 977	9 755	6.5	33.3
<i>Preseli</i>	20 447	9 977	48.3	34.3	2 683	7 239	6.3	24.9
<i>Rhondda</i>	30 381	11 273	74.5	40.5	5 450	13 558	13.4	48.7
<i>Swansea East</i>	29 151	9 495	75.4	45.6	1 308	5 714	3.4	27.4
<i>Swansea West</i>	22 748	8 217	56.2	34.6	2 675	6 291	6.6	26.5
<i>Torfaen</i>	29 863	9 080	69.1	38.0	1 042	2 614	2.4	10.9
<i>Vale of Clwyd</i>	20 617	8 359	52.7	37.7	2 301	4 295	5.9	19.3
<i>Vale of Glam</i>	29 054	11 448	53.9	35.0	1 393	7 848	2.6	24.0
<i>Wrexham</i>	20 450	9 239	56.1	53.1	1 170	2 659	3.2	15.3
<i>Ynys Môn</i>	13 275	7 181	33.2	22.9	15 756	16 462	39.5	52.6

## Comments

1. The Labour vote was down in every seat in Wales.

2. In 1997 Labour's share of the vote was greater than 60 per cent in 15 Welsh constituencies. In 1999, the share remained higher than 60 per cent in only two: Blaenau Gwent and Cardiff West. The only percentage increase in the Labour vote - of 1.3 per cent - was in Cardiff West. Yet even here, the Labour vote was down by 41 per cent.

3. The Plaid vote was up everywhere, except in two of the seats they hold at Westminster: Ceredigion and Merionnydd Nant Conwy.

4. In 1997, the Plaid share of the vote was above ten per cent in only ten constituencies; in 1999 there were only two constituencies where it remained in single figures: Monmouth and Brecon and Radnor.

5. The safest Assembly seat belongs to Plaid Cymru: Dafydd Wigley's seat in Caernarfon. The safest Labour seat is held by Rhodri Morgan in Cardiff West. Who would have predicted this a year ago?



## 4. Plaid's Gains

A comparison is made of the voting figures in 1997 and 1999 for the five constituency seats gained by Plaid. The method used to calculate the swing is explained in Section 5 below.

### 4.1 Islwyn

	1997	1999	% change
<i>Labour</i>	26 995	9 438	-65
<i>Plaid</i>	2 272	10 042	+341
<i>Liberal</i>	3 064	2 351	-23
<i>Conservative</i>	2 864	1 621	-43
<i>Turnout (%)</i>	71	47	

*Swing (Labour to Plaid): 25.0 %*

### 4.2 Rhondda

	1997	1999	% change
<i>Labour</i>	30 381	11 273	-63
<i>Plaid</i>	5 450	13 558	+149
<i>Liberal</i>	2 307	1 303	-44
<i>Conservative</i>	1 551	774	-50
<i>Turnout (%)</i>	72	50	

*Swing (Labour to Plaid): 24.0 %*

### 4.3 Llanelli

	1997	1999	% change
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<i><b>Labour</b></i>	23 851	11 285	-53
<i><b>Plaid</b></i>	7 812	11 973	+53
<i><b>Liberal</b></i>	3 788	2 920	-23
<i><b>Conservative</b></i>	5 003	1 864	-63
<i><b>Turnout (%)</b></i>	71	49	

***Swing (Labour to Plaid): 14.4 %***

#### **4.4 Conwy**

	<b>1997</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>% change</b>
<i><b>Labour</b></i>	14 461	8 171	-55
<i><b>Plaid</b></i>	2 844	8 285	+191
<i><b>Liberal</b></i>	12 965	4 480	-65
<i><b>Conservative</b></i>	10 085	5 006	-50
<i><b>Turnout (%)</b></i>	75	49	

***Swing (Labour to Plaid): 10.7 %***

#### **4.5 Carmarthen East and Dinefwr**

	<b>1997</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>% change</b>
<i><b>Labour</b></i>	17 907	10 348	-42
<i><b>Plaid</b></i>	14 457	17 328	+20
<i><b>Liberal</b></i>	3 150	2 202	-30
<i><b>Conservative</b></i>	5 022	2 776	-45

<b>Turnout (%)</b>	79	61	
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**Swing (Labour to Plaid): 9.8 %**

## Comments

1. In Carmarthen East and Dinefwr, Llanelli and the Rhondda, Plaid were second in 1997.
2. Despite Plaid being fourth in Islwyn in 1997, the Rhondda and Islwyn results in 1999 are in fact quite similar:
  - a huge drop in the Labour vote, to nearly a third of its 1997 level
  - a large drop as well in the Liberal and Conservative vote
  - a massive surge to Plaid

The result: a massive swing from Labour to Plaid in each case, of a roughly similar magnitude. Simple logic tells us that in Rhondda and Islwyn large numbers of former Labour voters *must* have voted Plaid.

3. In Llanelli, the Plaid vote increased by a little over 4,000 in 1999: in Carmarthen by a little under 3,000. In Llanelli, the Labour vote collapsed, as opposed to merely doing badly as it did in Carmarthen. Perhaps, the relatively small size of the Labour majority in Carmarthen in 1997 (3,500) compared to that in Llanelli (16,000) provides an explanation.
4. Conwy was a three-way marginal in 1997 with Plaid not even in the running. Yet, the dramatic surge for Plaid resulted in the fourth-placed party in 1997 taking the seat.
5. The point needs reiterating. The results above demonstrate that, in large numbers, former Labour voters *must* have voted Plaid. This is confirmed by a NOP opinion poll conducted for HTV, which showed that 38 per cent of Plaid voters switched from Labour.
6. It is difficult to discern a general pattern in the five Plaid gains. In order to see if a pattern is discernible on a national scale, it is worth comparing the swing from Labour to Plaid on a constituency by constituency basis.

## 5. The Swing from Labour to Plaid

The coalfield area of the south Wales valleys has historically been the repository of a concentrated Labour vote practically without equal in Britain (the only other areas that begin to compare with it in political character are 'greater' Merseyside and 'greater' Glasgow). If, as we suggest, the surge in the Plaid vote is the result of a protest vote on the part of traditional Labour voters, it is in this region that its effects should be expected to be most sharply visible.

The following key has therefore been adopted in the table below:

**\*\*** = south Wales coalfield constituency

**\*** = 'semi'-south Wales coalfield constituency

**p1** = constituency in which Plaid were the largest party in 1997

**p2** = constituency in which Plaid were the second largest party in 1997

By 'semi-coalfield' constituency, what we mean is either a constituency immediately adjacent to the coalfield itself which incorporates a part of the coalfield within its territory (e.g. Gower), or a constituency immediately adjacent to the coalfield which is notably similar in socio-economic profile (e.g. Swansea East).

A word on methodology: the swing has been calculated using the standard simple swing calculation (often called the 'Butler' formula, after its inventor), but with the modification that instead of using as raw data the percentage share of the vote for each party expressed as a percentage of the *total votes cast*, the raw data we have used is the percentage share of the vote for each party expressed as the percentage share of the *electorate*. The reasons for this should be clear from sections **2**, **3** and **4** above. While the overall turnout in the election was low, the parties were not equally effected by it. Indeed, one of the unique phenomena of this election is the fact that alone of the parties the Plaid vote, in absolute terms, is up very substantially. By calculating the swing in this way, the turnout becomes a factor in the overall swing, along with the change in votes for each party.

### 5.1 Constituencies ranked by size of swing From Labour to Plaid in descending order (using as raw data votes cast as percentage of *electorate*)

<i>Constituency</i>		<i>Swing (%)</i>	
<b>**</b>	Islwyn	25.0	
<b>**</b>	Rhondda	24.0	<b>p2</b>
<b>**</b>	Neath	22.0	
<b>*</b>	Swansea East	21.0	
<b>**</b>	Merthyr Tydfil & Rh	20.8	
<b>**</b>	Ogmore	20.1	
<b>**</b>	Cynon Valley	19.7	<b>p2</b>
<b>**</b>	Pontypridd	19.3	
<b>**</b>	Torfaen	18.6	
<b>**</b>	Caerphilly	18.2	
	Vale of Glamorgan	17.9	

**	Blaenau Gwent	17.1	
*	Aberavon	16.8	
	Bridgend	16.0	
	Clwyd South	15.6	
*	Gower	15.6	
	Swansea West	15.5	
	Alyn & Deeside	15.4	
	Newport West	14.5	
*	Llanelli	14.4	<b>p2</b>
*	Newport East	14.1	
	Delyn	13.9	
	Preseli	13.9	
	Vale of Clwyd	13.5	
	Cardiff North	12.9	
	Carmarthen W & Pem S	12.6	
	Wrexham	12.6	
	Monmouth	12.2	
	Cardiff South & Penarth	11.4	
	Cardiff Central	10.7	
	Conwy	10.7	
	Cardiff West	9.8	
	Carmarthen East & D	9.8	<b>p2</b>
	Clwyd West	8.1	
	Brecon & Radnor	7.6	
	Ynys Môn	6.5	<b>p1</b>
	Montgomeryshire	6.3	
	Caernarfon	4.5	<b>p1</b>
	Ceredigion	2.9	<b>p1</b>
	Meirionnydd Nant Conwy	2.8	<b>p1</b>

## Comments

1. The coalfield and 'semi-coalfield' constituencies stand out in sharp relief at the top of the table, with the Plaid gains in the east and central coalfield registering the largest swings. Note also the non-coalfield south Wales constituencies which register in the top half of the table: the Vale of Glamorgan, Bridgend, Swansea West, even Newport West (but not Cardiff). Here the two features of the Labour voters' protest - a large abstention plus a smaller but still very significant positive vote for Plaid - is most sharply expressed.

2. The bottom of the table contains the four Plaid and two Liberal seats won in 1997. In the former case, as we can note from section 3, the Plaid vote did not display the huge rises we can see elsewhere, but still more or less held up (itself a better result than any of the other parties). In these constituencies, the Labour vote is badly down in absolute terms (by between 33 and 50 per cent), but, compared to the coalfield at least, is in relative terms merely dreadful rather than catastrophic. In 1999, the Liberal seats of Montgomeryshire and Brecon and Radnor, the Plaid vote is up substantially, and the Labour vote has collapsed, yet both parties start from a relatively small base of support in 1997, and consequently do not register high in terms of swing, since we are only dealing with relatively small numbers of votes.

3. We can see that the five Plaid gains are spread fairly evenly across the table. In Llanelli, Conwy and Carmarthen East, Labour's 1997 majority was sufficiently small, and/or Plaid's 1997 base was sufficiently large, for a relatively small (but still huge under 'normal' conditions) swing to be sufficient to take the seat. The point is this: in most of the other south Wales seats in the top third of the table, Plaid have come from virtually nowhere in 1997 to being a strong second party in 1999. These seats are not quite 'marginals' yet, but the position Plaid enjoys in 1999 would have been difficult to conceive of on the basis of a study of the 1997 vote.

4. This table gives the lie to the idea that local factors were mainly responsible for the Plaid gains in the Rhondda and Islwyn. Local factors may have helped to tip these seats over the edge but huge swings were recorded across the whole south Wales coalfield.

5. In many ways, this is the most important table in the report and goes a long way to explain what really happened on May 6.

## 6. Parties to the Left of Labour and Plaid

The United Socialists, the Socialist Labour Party and the Communist Party stood on platforms to the left of both Labour and Plaid Cymru.

### United Socialists

#### 6.1 United Socialist constituency vote

Constituency	Vote	Percentage of votes cast
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<i>Aberavon</i>	517	2.2
<i>Caerphilly</i>	412	1.5
<i>Cardiff Central</i>	338	1.3
<i>Cardiff South and P</i>	355	1.5
<i>Clwyd South</i>	508	2.3
<i>Islwyn</i>	475	2.0
<i>Merthyr Tydfil and Rh</i>	580	2.3
<i>Neath</i>	519	1.9
<i>Swansea West</i>	263	1.1

## 6.2 United Socialist regional vote

<b>Region</b>	<b>Vote</b>	<b>Percentage of votes cast</b>
<i>North Wales</i>	828	0.4
<i>South Wales Central</i>	602	0.3
<i>South Wales West</i>	1 257	0.7

## Socialist Labour Party

### 6.3 SLP regional vote

<b>Region</b>	<b>Vote</b>	<b>Percentage of votes cast</b>
<i>Mid &amp; West Wales</i>	3 019	1.4
<i>South Wales Central</i>	2 822	1.3
<i>South Wales East</i>	4 879	2.4

## Communist Party

### 6.4 CP constituency vote

Constituency	Vote	Percentage of votes cast
<i>Alyn &amp; Deeside</i>	329	1.7
<i>Pontypridd</i>	280	0.9

### 6.5 CP regional vote

Region	Vote	Percentage of votes cast
<i>South Wales Central</i>	652	0.3
<i>North Wales</i>	714	0.3

## Comments

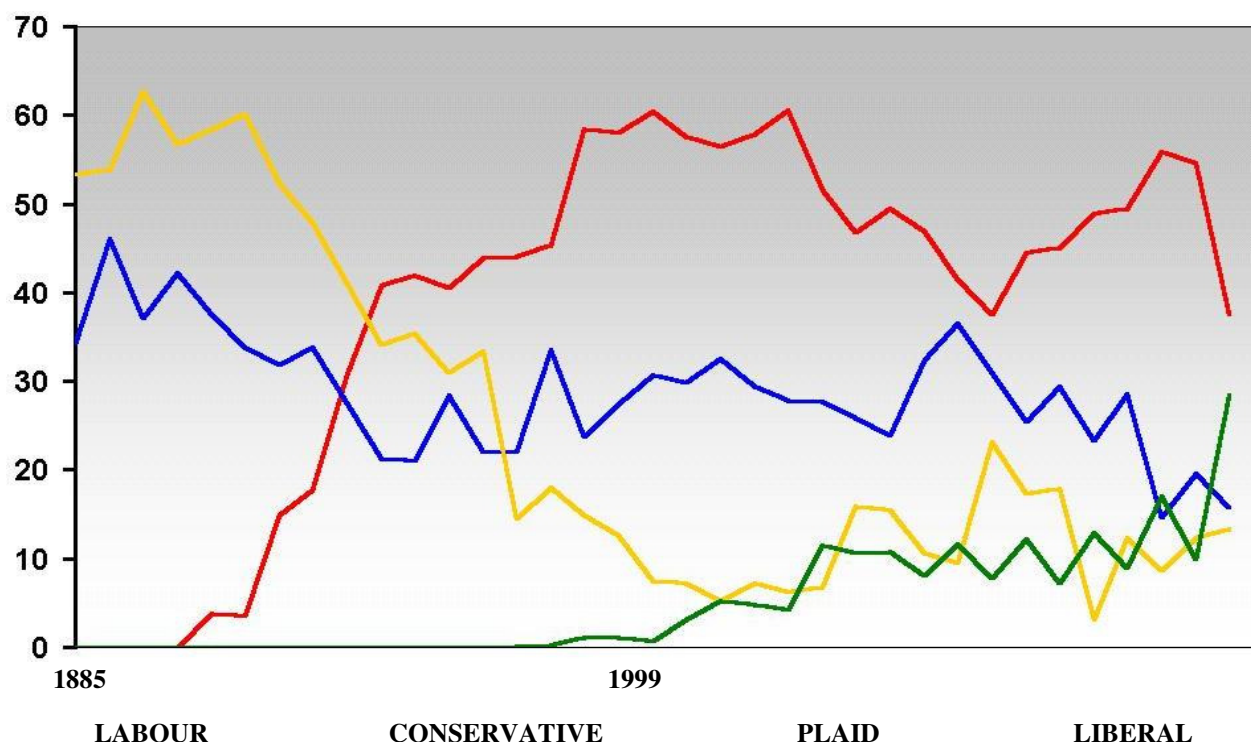
1. Given the complete lack of either a campaign or a party organisation the SLP did relatively well.
2. The United Socialists did very badly in the regional votes, but fared a little better in the constituency votes.
3. Having noted all this, it is clear that - even taken together - these results indicate that, unlike Scotland, there is no political space of any significance to the left of Labour and Plaid. The Labour protest vote went overwhelmingly to Plaid and not to its left.

## 7. The Historical Context

It is important to place these results within a historical context: the graph shows the percentage share of the vote for each of the four main parties, from 1885 to 1999. The actual figures on which the graph is based are listed in Appendix A below.

### 7.1 All Welsh national elections since 1885: percentage of votes cast for the major parties





## Comments

1. It can be seen that from the end of the Second World War to the end of the 1960s the Labour Party achieved a degree of electoral dominance equivalent to that of the Liberals over the latter half of the nineteenth century. From the 1970s, Labour's share of the vote is proportionally similar to the 1920s and 1930s. The two 1999 results pose questions with regard to long term trends that will only become more clear following the next British general election.
2. From the peak of the early 1970s, Plaid's share of the vote in British general elections has hovered below 10 per cent, although Plaid fares notably better in European elections. It is against this backdrop that 1999 is so remarkable. Again, we await the next British general election with interest.
3. The Liberals, from the near hegemonic position they enjoyed over the latter half of the nineteenth century, have, since 1945, occupied a rather marginal position in Welsh politics (with the exception of the flash in the pan that was 1983). Interestingly, they significantly under-achieve in European elections, which suggests that rather than being a recognisably distinct national political force, Welsh Liberalism owes much of its actual electoral position to its myopic indulgence in local, 'pavement' politics.
4. The Conservative vote - up until 1994 - is rather interesting on two counts. First, it is remarkably stable, consistently hovering more or less between a fifth and a third of votes cast. Second, it has thus been larger than many people think, suggesting a social base for Welsh Conservatism of some solidity, and giving the lie to any claim that up to the mid-1990s, Wales had in any meaningful sense been a Tory-free zone. The 1999 European election would appear to offer some crumbs of comfort to the Tories, if you look at the share

of the vote. But take a look at the absolute numbers in Appendix A. The 1994 European election result was the worst ever result for the Tories; yet in the 1999 European election, while the share of the vote looks relatively healthy, the party gained less than 5,000 additional votes.

5. The historical approach is a useful one in evaluating the significance of the 1999 European election. We can discern the following patterns:

- For the Tories, as we have seen, supposedly a triumph. Yet in terms of numbers of votes 1999 was little better than the historic low of 1994, and significantly down on every other European performance.
- Once again, Labour voters stayed home in droves: the 1999 vote is barely more than a third of that achieved in 1994 (and half that achieved in the Assembly election).
- The Liberal share of the vote looks relatively respectable compared to 1994 but the number of votes cast is less than two thirds. With the exception of 1989, the lowest number of votes for Liberalism this century.

Once again, Plaid's experience is different. While the number of votes is down on the Assembly election, it - uniquely of the Welsh parties - exceeded the total won in 1994 (and in fact the totals won in every other national election in the party's history bar that for the Assembly).

## 8. The View Beyond the Spin

**‘We give him an assembly in Wales, and he still complains... It would be good once in a while to get a bit of gratitude.’**

*Tony Blair, replying to a question from Dafydd Wigley in the House of Commons about the limited powers of the Assembly*

It seems that ingratitude was a widespread problem in Wales on May 6. As the votes were counted on the following day, it became increasingly difficult for Labour politicians to blame the results on 'complacency' and 'the politics of contentment'.

Plaid canvassers campaigning in the south Wales coalfield constituencies during the 1997 British general election reported that a common response from Labour supporters ran along the lines of, 'Sorry, love, we have to vote Labour to get rid of this government; but if we had two votes, we'd definitely give you the second one.' So when the election procedure for the Assembly was unveiled, many predicted that a phenomenon of split voting was likely in many areas. As we now know, this is not how it turned out. Labour voters dealt New Labour a particular double-whammy of a protest vote on May 6. In their hundreds of thousands, Labour voters refused to vote Labour; and in their tens of thousands, Labour voters voted Plaid - in both ballots.

While the contours of this voting pattern should not perhaps have surprised us, its sheer scale absolutely did. And while many Labour activists were left, in the words of one, 'feeling

crushed' by the experience, the politicians, the pundits, and the spinners began to seek an explanation.

But, which version are we to believe? Did the Assembly result really herald a new dawn for Plaid in Wales? Was this that much-heralded yet elusive inroad into Labour's heartland vote? Or rather, do we follow Peter Hain, who has suggested that Labour's performance was in fact an unfortunate consequence of the government's approach of 'reform by stealth', resulting in a failure to 'spell out to voters that Labour is following a radical socialist programme'? Or is it the case that Labour's strategy was doomed from the start? That, fatally weakened by two acrimonious leadership contests, an undemocratically imposed leader, and a campaign run by the London-based party apparatus, the tentacles of the Millbank octopus had strangled Labour's prospects from the outset?

Each of these explanations, taken by itself, is inadequate. It is urgent that the left in Wales develops an interpretation of the events of May 6 that really explains what happened, and why. The following observations, we would suggest, form a critical element in this task.

### **The Leadership Contests and 'Control Freakery'**

The leadership contests have been widely blamed for Labour's poor showing. According to Peter Hain MP, the contests showed a divided and inward-looking party, which was unattractive to voters. In our view, the problem lay not with the contests themselves but the undemocratic manner in which they were conducted.

Some people will undoubtedly argue that the elections were conducted according to the rule book and that Alun Michael was elected by the same method as Tony Blair. This ignores the fact that different rules were used for each of the Welsh leadership elections - which suggests that the rules are not set in stone - and that the election of Tony Blair involved OMOV ballots in all of the affiliated organisations: a far cry from Alun Michael's case. Of course, blaming the contests or blaming the way the contests were conducted can lead to very different conclusions. If you blame the contests, the obvious solution is to hold as few as possible; if you blame the conduct, the solution is to conduct them more democratically in the future.

Hain has also conceded that Labour may have given 'an impression of control freakery' in its pre-election activities. The evidence suggests that this impression was based on fact. Party members were appalled by the procedure used to select the Euro-election candidates, the conduct of the second leadership contest and the selection of the Assembly top-up lists. 'Control freakery' was evident in many aspects of Labour's Assembly campaign: from the printing of leaflets to the orchestration of photo-opportunities. What has not been adequately discussed is why such 'control freakery' was necessary in the first place. The simple answer is that the membership of the Welsh Labour Party could not be relied upon to choose the 'correct' candidates for the job. This 'control freakery' was a symptom of a much deeper political problem, not its cause.

Political differences, free debate and elections are, in and of themselves, not the sign of a weak party, but a necessary precondition for a vibrant and a healthy one. The worst thing that we can do now is shy away from debate. The discussion over the events of May 6 and their aftermath cries out for an urgent injection of politics: it is more political debate that we need, not less.

## **We Failed to Get Our Message Across**

This is one of the main arguments in Peter Hain's celebrated *New Statesman* interview. He argues that the source of New Labour's troubles in Wales was not its practical programme but the failure to spell out to voters the real benefits of that programme. This argument at least has the merit of acknowledging a political problem for New Labour in Wales, rather than simply blaming the leadership contests for the outcome of the election. Yet, despite his protests to the contrary, Hain deflects the problem from the policies themselves to their presentation.

Now, never mind Hain's macho bluster about 'never having been a yes man', this is, make no mistake, the Millbank message for Wales. And it is a message that is both patronising and offensive. If Labour's 'radical socialist programme' really was working for the people of Wales then it wouldn't be necessary to spell it out to them. People would see it and feel it in their everyday lives. Labour voters did not turn away from Labour on May 6 because they didn't know what the New Labour government was doing but precisely because they did. The people of Wales, contrary to Hain, are neither complacent, nor stupid.

## **Valley Voters Have Not turned Nationalist**

More of an observation than an explanation, this line was used repeatedly by Glenys Kinnock after both the Assembly and European elections. It is certainly true that the shift to Plaid Cymru does not represent a move away from socialism and towards nationalism by valley voters. And why? Because Plaid did not run a particularly nationalist campaign and more importantly, the Labour Party did not run a particularly socialist one either.

## **Why Vote Plaid Cymru?**

This brings us to the question of why people did vote Plaid. In our view there are two main reasons. The first was the lack of a Tory threat in Wales and the fact that voters were not deciding on the government at Westminster. Most valley voters understand, quite correctly, that the governance of the British state is a straight fight between Labour and the Conservatives. Given such a choice they will naturally tend to vote for a Labour government, whatever their misgivings about the direction of New Labour.

On a Welsh level, this pressure did not exist in the same way. Plaid Cymru themselves have acknowledged this factor and according to Karl Davies, Chief Executive of the party: 'Usually in a General Election the swing stops once the campaign gets under way. This time there was a significant swing late in the day. In many ways, it was more similar to a by-election than a general election.' He went on to say: 'In a national by-election, we held all the trump cards. We succeeded in bringing in the presidential element by promoting Dafydd Wigley. The poster showing Alun Michael as a poodle worked because people already believed it.'

The second reason for Plaid's success was their policies, which were clearly to the left of Labour on issues such as health, education and welfare. Labour's 'nationalist madness' campaign failed so abjectly because its authors failed to understand that the appeal of Plaid to Labour voters lay not in its 'nationalism' but rather in the perception that Plaid were better defenders of their interests - were, in fact, better 'Labourites' - than New Labour itself Paul Flynn NW spelled this out very precisely: 'Plaid Cymru ... want pensions to be increased by

earnings level and student loans to be replaced by grants. The Labour voters of Islwyn, Rhondda and Llanelli found that "insanity" irresistible.'

The whole New Labour project was premised on the idea that working class Labour voters had nowhere else to go if Labour moved to the right and embraced many Conservative policies. The reality of what happened in the Assembly and European elections has been well described by Anthony King, Professor of Government at Essex University:

The best single explanation for Labour's poor performance is that Labour did badly because large numbers of erstwhile Labour supporters feel let down by Labour's performance in office. The Labour Party - 'their' party - has not delivered for them. It has scarcely dented long-term unemployment. It has not raised the pay of workers in the public sector. It has not perceptibly improved either the NHS or the education system. Most Labour supporters in this frame of mind are not yet ready? to vote Tory, but they have other options: in Scotland to vote SNP, in Wales to vote Plaid Cymru, in all parts of the country simply to stay at home.

## **Low Turnout**

As our analysis has shown, there is little to reassure the Labour Party in these results. The only small comfort that can be drawn is that Plaid's success was based on a very low turnout. There would only need to be a small recovery in the Labour vote to wipe out many of Plaid's gains. It is also possible that some of those who didn't vote did so more out of lack of interest in the Assembly than disillusion with the Labour Party. Such voters could be expected to return to Labour in the next British general election. But it would be very foolish to take any such recovery for granted or to ignore the clear lessons of these results.

## **Conclusion**

Does May 6 thus mark a watershed, a point of no return in Welsh politics? We can only reply that it is 'too early to say'. It is, of course, difficult to imagine the next British general election taking the form of a simple re-run of May 6. Welsh elections and British elections differ in a number of respects. On a Welsh level, no matter how limited the actual powers of the Assembly are, Plaid can present itself as a potential 'party of government' in a way that it cannot in a British election. On a British scale, the vivid and recent experience of Conservative rule at Westminster poses the Tory threat much more sharply, prompting a tendency for the Labour vote to rise at the expense of Plaid.

But the next British general election will not be a simple re-run of 1997 either. The question will not be, as it was in 1997, the need to remove a hated Conservative government, but the rather different matter of maintaining in office a palpably hostile New Labour one. It will thus, to put it mildly, be something of a surprise if Plaid does not do significantly better (at the expense of Labour) in the next British general election than it did in the last one.

Of course, what will happen at the next British general election is not predetermined. It will depend on the lessons that the Labour Party learns from these setbacks and the changes it makes to both its policies and practice at local government, Welsh Assembly and

Westminster levels. To paraphrase James Connolly: 'Elections are not the battle, they are the echo of the battle'. But the electors of Wales have sent a very clear message, which was eloquently described by a Mrs S. Phillips from Pontyclun in a letter to the Western Mail:

I belong to a very large, close-knit family with roots in the Rhondda Valley, who have voted Labour since the party first came into being. Not any more... we voted Plaid Cymru because we are so disillusioned with the so-called New Labour Party.

What has Mr Brown, Mr Blair or any other member of the Cabinet done for the people who fought in two world wars and lived through the depression of the 20s and 30s? They have turned their backs on us and are more interested in people who (like we used to be) can do something for them - I think they may have a bigger shock in store for them in two years' time.

The collapse of the Labour vote in Wales and the pronounced swing to Plaid, especially in the south Wales coalfield, were the result of a conscious and deliberate rejection of New Labour by a very large swathe of Labour voters. This was a very real political failure of the New Labour project. Any attempt to move forward, in the context of both British and Welsh politics must begin we would suggest with this fundamental conclusion at its heart. If the Labour Party in Wales is to meet the challenge of devolution it must conquer greater autonomy and democracy for itself and develop policies which meet the needs of the majority of the people of Wales.

## **Appendices**

### **A. Historical Context**

Table A.1 gives the votes cast for each of the four main parties from 1885 to 1999; table A.2 gives these figures as percentages of the votes cast, which are the raw data for the figure in Section 7 above.

#### **Note on Methodology**

Naturally, in an exercise such as this some degree of over-simplification is inevitable, as parties evolve, split, merge, form alliances, etc. over time; and often decisions over interpretation can be rather marginal (and with which readers are welcome to disagree).

For the record, for both tables listed in this Appendix; over 1886 to 1910 the Conservative vote is an aggregate of the Conservative and the Liberal Unionist vote and from 1900 to January 1910 the Liberal vote is the aggregate of the Liberal and the Liberal-Labour vote. The election of 1918 defeated our attempts to draw out distinct Liberal and Conservative components, hence the blank space.

In 1922 the Liberal vote is the sum of the Liberal and National Liberal votes. The 1931 Conservative vote is that of the distinct Conservative component of the national government vote, the same is true for 1935 and 1945. The Liberal vote is the distinct Liberal component of the national government vote, and the National Liberal vote is disregarded. From 1950 to

1966 the Conservative vote is an aggregate of the Conservative and the 'National Liberal and Conservative' votes. In 1983, 1984 and 1987 the Liberal vote is that of the Liberal Party and the SDP votes combined, while from 1989 onwards the Liberal vote is that of the Liberal Democrats.

It should be noted that for comparative purposes, the Labour vote before 1918 in both tables is of little value as a national indicator since Labour candidates only stood in a small number of Welsh constituencies. The same point can be made with regard to Plaid before 1966, if not before 1970.

It should also be noted that the period under consideration witnessed a number of alterations to the franchise: of a significant character in 1918 and 1928, and of a rather less fundamental nature in 1948-9 and 1969. Despite our comments in Section 2, it is in the analysis of long term electoral patterns that the figure of percentage votes cast really comes into its own. Why the long term patterns detected should be relatively immune to alterations in the franchise is a phenomenon often commented upon but beyond the scope of this particular discussion.

**A.1** Total votes cast for the major parties in Welsh elections since 1885. (G = general election; E = European election; A = Assembly election)

<i>election</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Plaid</i>	<i>Cons</i>	<i>Liberal</i>
<b>1885G</b>			79 690	119 231
<b>1886G</b>			60 048	70 289
<b>1892G</b>			78 038	141 465
<b>1895G</b>			103 802	144 216
<b>1900G</b>	9 598		63 932	105 837
<b>1906G</b>	11 865		65 949	128 461
<b>1910(Jan)G</b>	61 947		116 769	195 288
<b>1910(Dec)G</b>	47 027		81 100	117 533
<b>1918G</b>	180 414			
<b>1922G</b>	363 877		190 919	306 905
<b>1923G</b>	355 172		178 113	299 874

<b>1924G</b>	321 118		224 014	244 885
<b>1929G</b>	578 225	6 09	290 009	442 623
<b>1931G</b>	454 924	2 050	240 861	159 701
<b>1935G</b>	397 598	2 534	204 099	159 887
<b>1945G</b>	779 184	16 017	220 780	203 792
<b>1950G</b>	887 984	17 580	418 668	193 090
<b>1951G</b>	925 848	10 920	471 269	116 821
<b>1955G</b>	825 690	45 119	428 866	104 095
<b>1959G</b>	841 450	77 571	486 335	78 951
<b>1964G</b>	837 022	69 507	425 022	106 114
<b>1966G</b>	863 692	61 071	396 795	89 108
<b>1970G</b>	781 941	175 016	419 884	103 747
<b>1974(Feb)G</b>	745 547	171 364	412 535	255 423
<b>1974(Oct)G</b>	761 447	166 321	367 248	238 997
<b>1979G</b>	795 493	132 544	526 254	173 725
<b>1979E</b>	294 978	83 399	259 729	67 962
<b>1983G</b>	603 858	125 309	499 310	373 358
<b>1984E</b>	375 982	103 031	214 048	146 947
<b>1987G</b>	765 209	123 599	501 316	304 230
<b>1989E</b>	436 730	115 062	209 313	28 785
<b>1992G</b>	865 633	156 796	499 677	217 457
<b>1994E</b>	530 749	162 478	138 323	82 480



<b>1997G</b>	886 935	161 030	317 125	200 020
<b>1999A</b>	<b>384 671</b>	<b>290 572</b>	<b>162 133</b>	<b>137 657</b>
<b>1999E</b>	199 690	185 235	142 631	51 283

**A.2** Percentage share of votes cast for the major parties in Welsh elections since 1885. (G = general election; E = European election; A = Assembly election)

<i>election</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Plaid</i>	<i>Cons</i>	<i>Liberal</i>
<b>1885G</b>			38.9	53.3
<b>1886G</b>			46.1	53.9
<b>1892G</b>			35.6	64.5
<b>1895G</b>			41.4	57.5
<b>1900G</b>	5.3		35.6	59.1
<b>1906G</b>	5.6		31.2	60.8
<b>1910(Jan)G</b>	16.4		30.9	51.7
<b>1910(Dec)G</b>	19.1		32.8	47.6
<b>1918G</b>	34.0			
<b>1922G</b>	40.7		21.4	34.3
<b>1923G</b>	41.9		21.0	35.4
<b>1924G</b>	40.6		28.3	31.1
<b>1929G</b>	43.8	0.0	21.9	33.6
<b>1931G</b>	41.7	0.2	22.1	14.6
<b>1935G</b>	45.4	0.3	23.3	18.3
<b>1945G</b>	58.3	1.2	16.5	15.2
<b>1950G</b>	58.1	1.2	27.4	12.6
<b>1951G</b>	60.5	0.7	30.8	7.7
<b>1955G</b>	57.6	3.1	29.9	7.3
<b>1959G</b>	56.4	5.2	32.6	5.3

<b>1964G</b>	57.8	4.8	29.4	7.3
<b>1966G</b>	60.7	4.3	27.9	6.3
<b>1970G</b>	51.6	11.5	27.7	6.8
<b>1974(Feb)G</b>	46.8	10.8	25.9	16.0
<b>1974(Oct)G</b>	49.5	10.8	23.9	15.5
<b>1979G</b>	48.6	8.1	32.2	10.6
<b>1979E</b>	41.5	11.7	36.6	9.6
<b>1983G</b>	37.5	7.8	31.0	23.2
<b>1984E</b>	44.5	12.2	25.4	17.4
<b>1987G</b>	45.1	7.3	29.5	17.9
<b>1989E</b>	48.9	12.9	23.5	3.2
<b>1992G</b>	49.5	9.0	28.6	12.4
<b>1994E</b>	55.9	17.1	14.6	8.7
<b>1997G</b>	54.8	9.9	19.6	12.3
<b>1999A</b>	<b>37.6</b>	<b>28.4</b>	<b>15.9</b>	<b>13.5</b>
<b>1999E</b>	31.9	29.6	22.8	8.2

## B. Sources and Methodology

### 1. The Basic Picture

*Barn*, May 1999, p.14.

### 2. Who Stayed Home?

1997 votes cast and turnout: Beti Jones, *Etholiadau'r Ganrif - Welsh Elections* (Talybont, 1999).

1999 votes cast: *Barn*, May 1999, p.14.

1999 turnout calculated from raw data supplied by: *The Guardian*, 8 May 1999.

The percentage change in the party vote is established by:  $(100(V_2 - V_1)/V_1)$ , where  $V_1$  = number of votes cast in 1997 and  $V_2$  = number of votes cast in 1999.

### **3. Labour and Plaid's Returns: 1997 and 1999 Compared**

1997 constituency figures: Befi Jones, *Etholiadau'r Ganrif - Welsh Elections* (Talybont, 1999).

1999 constituency figures: *Western Mail*, 8 May 1999.

### **4. Plaid's Gains**

Raw data sources as above.

As in 2.1 above the percentage change in the party vote is established by:  $100(V_2 - V_1)/V_1$ , where  $V_1$  = number of votes cast in 1997 and  $V_2$  = number of votes cast in 1999.

The swing has been calculated using the 'Butler' formula, only using as raw data votes cast as a percentage of the electorate rather than percentage of overall votes cast.

Thus:  $\text{Swing} = ((L_1 - L_2) + (P_2 - P_1))/2$ , where  $L_1$  = the 1997 Labour vote expressed as a percentage of the electorate,  $L_2$  = the 1999 Labour vote expressed as a percentage of the electorate,  $P_1$  = the 1997 Plaid vote expressed as a percentage of the electorate, etc.

NOP poll quoted in: 'Welsh Politics in the New Millennium', John Osmond, *Institute of Welsh Affairs*, August 1999, p.24.

### **5. The Swing to Plaid**

Swing calculated as in 4 above.

### **6. Parties to the Left of Labour and Plaid**

1999 constituency figures: *Western Mail*, 8 May 1999.

### **7. The Historical Context ( also Appendix A)**

All figures from Beti Jones, *Etholiadau'r Gannf - Welsh Elections* (Talybont, 1999), except 1999 Assembly election: *Barn*, May 1999, p.14; and 1999 European election: *Welsh Agenda*, Summer 1999, p.36.

## **8. The View Beyond the Spin**

Tony Blair quote: *Searchlight*, March 1999, pp. 26-27.

Peter Hain quote: *New Statesman*, 7 June 1999, pp. 18-19.

Karl Davies quote: *Golwg*, 13 May 1999, p. 7.

Paul Flynn quote: *Tribune*, 14 May 1999.

Anthony King quote: *Left Labour Briefing*, July 1999, p. 6.

## **Conclusions**

S. Phillips quote: *Western Mail*, 19 June 1999.

# Objective Problems

[February 2000; *Socialist Outlook* 31]

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OBJECTIVE 1 is currently the big issue in Welsh politics. Having secured Objective 1 status for West Wales and the valleys, from 2000 to 2006, Labour is under pressure to provide funds to match those being allocated by Brussels.

If this funding is not announced in the final Assembly budget on February 8, the three opposition parties have threatened to vote together on a motion of no confidence in Assembly first secretary Alun Michael. Under the Assembly rules, Michael will be obliged to resign.

So what is all the fuss about?

Objective 1 status is awarded by the European Union (EU) to those regions whose Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is less than 75 per cent of the EU average.

By dividing Wales on an East-West basis, rather than the traditional North-South divide, then all of the western seaboard and the South Wales valleys qualify.

This reflects a very real growth in inequality between those areas and more prosperous parts such as Cardiff and Newport in the south and Flintshire and Wrexham in the north.

A report written in support of Wales' Objective 1 application by Kevin Morgan and Adam Price highlighted the depth of social problems in what they called 'The Other Wales'.

In terms not only of GDP but of other, more socially sensitive indices, such as economic activity levels and household incomes, then the west and the valleys are falling behind.

In their words: 'Wales is the poorest part of Great Britain [and] the west contains what can properly be called "the poorest of the poor".'

But securing Objective 1 status was only half the battle, as many people now realise. In order to fully utilise the available funds, the British government, or in this case the Welsh Assembly, must provide matched funding.

With £1.2 billion allocated to Wales over six years, the Assembly will have to find between £0.5 and £1 billion of additional funding.

At present, the block grant allocated to the Welsh Assembly is allocated according to the Barnett formula. The Treasury has made it very clear that there will be no automatic increase in this amount to meet the needs of Objective 1.

The Labour administration is refusing to give any assurances on matched funding ahead of the announcements on the comprehensive spending review, expected next October.

This leaves the very real possibility that money will be cut from other, already over-stretched parts of the Assembly budget to release matched funds.

In this, Wales would be emulating one of the worst aspects of the Irish experience of EU funding, where cash was diverted from health and social spending to finance infrastructure and economic development projects.

This approach, of robbing the poor to pay the 'poorest of the poor', is completely unacceptable. The campaigning group Welsh Labour Action and a number of senior Labour figures have already raised their opposition to this course of action.

Local Labour parties and trade union branches must begin to add their voices to the protest. Nothing less than full matched funding, over and above the Barnett formula, is acceptable.

At the same time, it is important not to overplay the significance of Objective 1 money, not to foster illusions in what the money can achieve.

Plaid Cymru have made great political capital out of matched funding, and justifiably so. But they have also talked of a 'Euro cash bonanza' and a 'once in a lifetime chance to transform the Welsh economy'.

Objective 1 is not a cash bonanza, amounting to some £350 million a year compared to the Assembly budget of over £8 billion. Such a quantity is not sufficient to address the long term social and economic problems in Wales.

While maximum unity is required in demanding full matched funding, the debate on Objective 1 must not deflect from the very necessary discussion on developing truly redistributive social and economic policies for Wales.

The Welsh Assembly does not have the power to implement such policies: this does not mean that it shouldn't talk about them.

# Lessons of Blair's Welsh Setback

[March 2000; *Socialist Outlook* 32]

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After weeks of uncertainty and back-room dealings, Alun Michael was forced to resign as First Secretary of the Welsh Assembly by a vote of no confidence supported by the three opposition parties. Rhodri Morgan was selected as Labour's alternative nominee for the post and subsequently appointed by the Assembly.

Coming just a week before the debate on his future, the Ceredigion by-election result was a bitter blow to Alun Michael. All his efforts to bolster his administration and talk-down Labour's disastrous Assembly and Euro election results were reduced to nothing, as Labour slumped to a humiliating fourth place.

Calling the by-election at this time was a political masterstroke by Plaid Cymru's Cynog Dafis - the result turned out to be the final nail in Alun Michael's political coffin.

Even the most thick-skinned and slow-witted of Labour's Assembly Members (AMs) could not fail to understand the implications of the result. According to Carole McKeown, the secretary of Ceredigion CLP, 'The message from Ceredigion voters is loud and clear. We, like the rest of Wales, want more socialist policies, with health, education and welfare at the top of the agenda.'

As was reported in the last issue of *Socialist Outlook*, the issue which finally led to Alun Michael's demise was that of matched funding for Objective 1 projects in Wales.\*\_The opposition parties gave February 8 as a deadline for Alun Michael to deliver the goods.

On the day, Michael tried to prevent a vote of no confidence being tabled by tendering his resignation in advance. This caused considerable confusion in the Assembly chamber, since only Michael's closest allies in the Labour Party were aware of his cunning plan.

It was only on the insistence of the more far-sighted AMs that the vote of no confidence was eventually tabled and passed. Under the Assembly's rules, this left Alun Michael with no option but to resign.

It has now emerged that Michael hoped to prevent the vote being taken by offering his resignation, and then to win re-nomination as Labour's candidate for First Secretary.

Unbeknown to him, there was by then a clear majority of Labour Assembly Members in favour of his removal. Out of a group of twenty-eight, Michael was left with five hard-core supporters, with a further eight AMs wavering between supporting him or Rhodri Morgan.

Michael's plan quickly unravelled as it became clear that he would not receive the support of the Labour group. His forced resignation then became permanent, leaving Tony Blair floundering for an explanation as the Tories made the most of his discomfort in Parliament.

It is clear that Blair had full knowledge of Michael's plan and expected him to survive the day - more evidence, if any were needed, of Blair's contempt for the Welsh Assembly and the democracy of his own party in Wales.

The role of the Liberals in these events is particularly interesting. Described by one senior Labour figure as 'six characters in search of an author', the Liberal AMs resisted pressure from Charles Kennedy to do a deal with Alun Michael and prop up his administration.

Their refusal was motivated by a desire not only to get rid of Michael but also to continue attacking Labour in the hope of electoral advantage.

Bolstered by their success in winning Cardiff Central in the Assembly elections, the Liberals hope to further capitalise on the unpopularity of Cardiff's Labour council in the next parliamentary and council elections.

Rhodri Morgan's appointment was greeted with enthusiasm throughout Wales. This reflected both relief at the removal of Michael and the expectations raised by the appointment of his successor.

An impromptu party organised by Rhodri's Cardiff West constituency was described by one London journalist as 'Blair's nightmare party from hell'.

Rhodri was quick to make clear that he would not be Blair's puppet in Wales. He also promised to be a tough negotiator in talks with the Treasury on Objective 1 matched funding. One of his first moves was to appoint leading left-winger Sue Essex to his cabinet. He ruled out a coalition with any party for the time being but would not be drawn on possible developments in the future.

Echoing the call to let a thousand flowers bloom, Rhodri urged Wales to 'uncork the Welsh champagne bottle and let it fizz'. One of Rhodri's undoubted strengths is his willingness to allow debate and discussion to take place, in sharp contrast to Alun Michael's paranoid and anti-democratic style.

One ominous development is the appointment of Gordon Brown to head an inquest into the events which led to Alun Michael's resignation.

Brown has threatened to 'knock heads together', and his intervention may be an opportunity for the more reactionary forces in Welsh Labour to regroup and stage a fight-back. Though, as Rhodri said in response, 'If he gives us the Objective 1 money he can knock as many heads together as he likes'.

While analogies have been drawn between Ken Livingstone and Rhodri Morgan, it is important to understand that Rhodri is no left-winger. He has always been more of a practical than an ideological politician, who earned the respect of the people of Wales by his tenacious exposure of the corruption and ineptitude of Tory quangos such as the Welsh Development Agency.

Rhodri was one of those who promised a 'bonfire of the quangos' before the last general election. Now that he has finally achieved a position of power, he will be expected to deliver.



The significance of Rhodri's victory and the setback that this represents for Blair's plans in Wales, lies as much with the current he represents as with the man himself. Rhodri's supporters are a heterogeneous and growing band of Labour supporters who are becoming increasingly disillusioned with Labour in Government.

They are equally unhappy with the politics and practice of Welsh Labour in its local government and trade union strongholds. There is a real desire to break with the bureaucratic and paternalistic mentality which so dominates Welsh Labour.

Rhodri's election can only help to politically clarify this current, as it moves to deal with the real problems and limitations of the Welsh Assembly. This is a process with which all Labour left-wingers should enthusiastically and constructively engage.

A lesson in how not to respond has been provided by the Blaenau Gwent constituency of Llew Smith, the only Campaign Group MP in Wales. They voted to oppose a coalition with the Liberals and also to oppose the use of PR in the Assembly elections.

Opposition to a coalition with the Liberals is important, and undoubtedly correct, but opposing PR is a big mistake. Can anyone argue that Labour's problems in the Assembly elections were mainly caused by the PR system?

Can socialists seriously claim that Labour should have won 68% of the seats on the basis of 38% of the vote, as would have occurred under first-past-the-post? If socialism is to regain its democratic credentials, this is not the road to follow.

Events in Wales have implications for the left across the British state. Those on the left who expected opposition to Blair's right-wing government to take the form of growing protest movements and strike action, particularly in the public sector, have so far been disappointed.

What we have seen is a growing dislocation of British politics, as different patterns of voting develop in Scotland, Wales and parts of England.

This was most clearly illustrated in the Euro elections, which saw the rise of the SNP and Scottish Socialist Party in Scotland, Plaid Cymru in Wales and the Greens and UK Independence Party in the south of England.

Blair's on-going problems in Wales and Scotland suggest that this trend will continue. It is also likely that Labour's difficulties will predominantly manifest themselves on the political level, at least in the near future.

Of course, these political problems do not simply manifest themselves on the periphery, but also at the very centre of the British state. Labour's problems in London are uncannily similar to those in Wales.

They stem from a broad consciousness among Londoners in opposition to privatisation and in sympathy with the policies of the old GLC, which translates into support for Ken Livingstone.

While Blair is unlikely to be swept out of office by a growing strike wave, he may yet be undone by political problems of his own making.

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\* The issue of Objective 1 funding is likely to be debated at this year's Wales Labour Party Conference, to be held at the end of March. At least four constituency parties have submitted contemporary resolutions on the subject : Caerffili, Bridgend, The Vale of Glamorgan and Cardiff West. The text of the Cardiff West resolution reads:

This conference congratulates the Labour Government on achieving Objective 1 status for West Wales and the valleys. This makes available £1.2 billion of funding over the next six years.

Conference calls on the Government to guarantee that the required public funding will be made available for all Objective 1 projects approved by the European Commission. This money must be over and above that already allocated under the Barnett Formula.

Failure to provide full matched funding will mean that Objective 1 money will not come to Wales, or that money will have to be taken from the Welsh Assembly's existing budget. This will lead to cuts in other publicly funded services, with detrimental effects on the people of Wales and the image of our new Assembly.

We call on Tony Blair and the cabinet to 'Listen to Wales' and provide the required additional funds.

# Consequences of Closing Down Debate

[Winter 2000; Institute of Welsh Affairs - AGENDA]

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Ask yourself a question. After six months of its existence, is this how you expected the National Assembly to be? Or, perhaps more importantly, how you hoped it would be? The answer is probably no. Indeed, outside a few charmed circles still bubbling along on their own rhetoric, there is a palpable disappointment across Wales.

What our new Assembly has revealed, above all else, is the political weakness of Labour in Wales - a weakness that was exposed more quickly than expected by Ron Davies' resignation as Secretary of State and the events which followed. It is of particular concern that the party is failing to learn the lessons of the Assembly elections and to change direction accordingly.

Labour's poor showing sparked a vigorous debate within the party, which included a highly critical report on the conduct of the election by Welsh Labour MPs. A debrief team was appointed by labour's Welsh executive to conduct a consultation and prepare a report. The viewpoint of Welsh Labour Action (WLA) was presented in a report, co-authored by myself and Ed George, which both analysed the election results and discussed the explanations being offered by Labour politicians.

The election statistics speak eloquently of Labour's setback. The Labour vote more than halved compared to the 1997 general election result while Plaid Cymru's votes nearly doubled. The highest swings from Labour to Plaid were all in the south Wales valley seats which were considered Labour's heartland. The safest Assembly seat is held by Dafydd Wigley in Caernarfon and Labour's safest seat is held by Rhodri Morgan in Cardiff West.

But contrary to the popular expression, the facts are not being allowed to speak for themselves. Instead, they are being shrouded in myths woven to suit their makers. Paul Flynn, MP for Newport West, wryly remarked in his typically individualistic account: 'The only thing that is certain in the Welsh Labour Party is the future, the past is constantly changing' (*Dragons Lead by Poodles: The Inside Story of a New Labour Stitch-up*, Politico's, 1999).

Peter Hain, MP for Neath and Alun Michael's campaign manager was quick to offer his interpretation of events. He blamed the leadership contests and 'an impression of control freakery' for Labour's poor showing. According to Hain, the leadership contests showed a divided and inward-looking party which was unattractive to voters. This suggests that it would have been better to avoid the contests altogether. Our WLA report argues that the problems arose because of the undemocratic way in which the contests were conducted. This was particularly true of the second contest and its outcome.

No one can doubt that Labour exhibited an excess of 'control freakery' prior to the elections: from the leadership contests themselves to the selection procedures for Assembly candidates, the ranking of Euro-election candidates, and the selection of the Assembly top-up lists. What has not been sufficiently discussed is why such levels of control were necessary. In our view, they were necessary because the membership of the Labour Party could not be relied upon to choose the 'correct' leader or the 'correct' candidates.

It is also becoming clear that over-zealous control was not simply a one-off problem associated with the elections but is a major feature of Labour's approach to running a minority administration. Kevin Morgan of Cardiff University, co-author of a forthcoming book on the Assembly, has commented: 'The book will describe Alun Michael's style as anally retentive, by which we mean he is rather obsessed with control and tends to hold things to himself. If he doesn't change, the consequences for Welsh devolution could be dire' (*Wales on Sunday*, 31 October 1999). This goes hand-in-hand with a style of Prozac politics, which simply wants us to feel better without talking about the real issues.

Peter Hain also claimed that Labour performed poorly because it failed to get its message across. In Hain's view Labour is implementing a radical socialist programme but has not convinced working-class voters that this is the case. Hence, the problem lies not with the policies but with their presentation. Our report takes the contrary view - that the problem lies precisely with the policies - both at Westminster and in Wales. Labour's Assembly manifesto was, to put it mildly, strong on graphics and weak on politics.

Labour's problems can be traced back over many years. They stem from a failure to conduct an open debate within the party on the Assembly proposals and to politically defeat those who opposed devolution. The failure to establish a Constitutional Convention, similar to that in Scotland, meant that the debate was not joined with the other political parties or representatives of civic society in Wales. These failures have two direct consequences. They mean that there are too many people, at all levels of the Labour Party in Wales, whose commitment to devolution is highly questionable. They also mean that the debates which were conducted in Scotland *before* the establishment of their Parliament now have to be conducted in Wales *after* the establishment of our Assembly.

How the Labour Party responds to this challenge is very important: it can welcome the opportunity created by the Assembly for debate and constructive criticism, or it can attempt to manage and close down debate as it has done in the past.

The report on the Assembly election results presented to Labour's Welsh Executive by the debrief team is certainly a step forward. It acknowledges the divisions caused by the selection procedures for candidates and the second leadership contest. The report also proposes that the constituency section of the Welsh Executive should be expanded and directly elected by Labour Party members, which is similar to the reform advocated by the CYFLE group within the party.

Alun Michael's recent speech to the Institute of Welsh Politics has reopened the debate on the nature of devolution. While arguing in favour of dynamic devolution, Michael also chose to emphasise Paul Murphy's phrase that the current form of devolution is 'the settled will of the Welsh people'. This phrase echoes that used in Scotland but is patently not the case in Wales. Elsewhere in his speech Alun Michael concedes that many people 'remain to be convinced' of the merits of devolution.

Recognising that devolution is 'a process rather than an event' is important. But processes do nothing, they do not decide anything, or change anything. It is people who make processes happen. Without the political will to develop further, the Assembly will remain stunted in its present form, which is dangerously close to a 'democratic' version of the old Welsh Office. Our Assembly is too important, too valuable a gain for the people of Wales, for that to be allowed to happen.

So, where next for Labour in Wales? Very many people, both individuals and in organisations like CYFLE and WLA, see the need to change the Labour Party. WLA in particular argues for Welsh Labour to press for greater autonomy and democracy. The constitutional proposals put forward by CYFLE are an important step forward in this regard. It is also vitally important that the party begins to address the vacuum at the heart of its Welsh policies. To this end, the WLA report on the Assembly elections will be the first in a series dealing with different policy areas. We hope there will be a positive response to this initiative from within the Labour Party, and also from all those outside the party with a genuine concern that the Assembly must deliver for the majority of the people of Wales.

# Letter of Resignation from the Labour Party

[February 2002]

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Dear Rhodri

A little over a year ago, I wrote to you expressing my concerns about the political direction of Welsh Labour. In particular, I questioned the undemocratic nature of the pact with the Liberals and the tone and direction of Labour's attacks on Plaid Cymru. I'm afraid to say that subsequent developments have justified many of my concerns.

More than that, I have a growing sense that the launch of 'Welsh Labour' under your leadership has been largely a rebranding exercise. The same is true of 'New Wales'. The New Wales that I see around me looks all too similar to the old Wales, with some new Assembly labels attached.

At a British level, Tony Blair has shown that New Labour in government is determined to follow strictly neoliberal economic policies. This approach is directly damaging to a peripheral nation like Wales, with its weak economy and consequent over-reliance on the public sector.

What is more, radical political reforms have been gutted of any real content by New Labour ministers. A Welsh Assembly - with wholly inadequate powers; a reformed House of Lords - with appointed peers; a minimum wage - which condones youth poverty; a freedom of information act - bristling with restrictions; proportional representation - but with closed party lists. Blairism is revealed as an ideology of surface radicalism, devoid of any authentically radical content.

I realise that you and other Labour cabinet members are sincere in their efforts to make the best of the Assembly's current powers and finances and to resist the worst excesses of Blairism. Unfortunately, these efforts are conducted in almost complete isolation from both party members and wider Welsh society. Our Assembly is in danger of remaining a rootless body, destined to offer little more than palliatives to the Welsh people. **In short, Welsh Labour in government is not radical enough, not socialist enough and not Welsh enough.**

This is why I have decided to resign from the Labour Party, after 20 years of membership, and to join Plaid Cymru - the Party of Wales.

No one person or party has solutions for all the problems that we face in Wales. But we certainly won't develop lasting and sustainable policies unless we discuss our problems, and the restrictions preventing us from fully addressing them, in an open and honest way. I am told, for example, that Assembly plans to expand the rail network in Wales are severely restricted by the body's lack of powers over Railtrack. And yet not a single Welsh Labour AM saw fit to support a Plaid Cymru resolution calling, quite correctly, for the Assembly to have such powers and for public control of Railtrack.

This, and many other issues confirm what I have felt for some time, that the debates that took place in Scotland *before* the establishment of their Parliament will have to take place in Wales *after* the establishment of our Assembly. I have said this to you and others, many times. Yet, your government and your party show no urgency in initiating and encouraging such debates. Still worse, some sections of Welsh Labour are actively involved in 'policing' the subject areas that we are allowed to debate in Wales and in demonising Plaid Cymru. I feel an increasing revulsion towards the petty, opportunist antics of many Welsh Labour politicians. Let me give you a couple of recent examples.

A discussion magazine was launched in December by the left-wing of Plaid Cymru, called *Triban Coch*. The launch attracted support from both the left and the centre of the party. Your business manager, Andrew Davies, used an Assembly short debate to pour scorn on the new publication and on Plaid's 'internal mess'. I have known Andrew for many years and he has always been a 'practical' politician, of limited vision. Since his election as an AM he has shown himself willing to serve many masters. And yet, despite this, he obviously feels well qualified to make facile comments about the important debates taking place within Plaid Cymru. Here are some edited highlights:

When I listen to Plaid Cymru having to those internal debates I am reminded of some fundamentalist sect - a cross between the Muppets and the Munsters - who (sic) has emerged blinking into modern civilisation, but is still obsessed with the beliefs and values laid down by its founding fathers in the 1920s and 1930s.

... Plaid Cymru - The Party of Wales believes in bilingualism, as I quoted earlier. That is why it is called Plaid Cymru - The Party of Wales. If Plaid were to apply the principle of bilingualism to all matters it would also apply to personal names. I am not a Welsh speaker, but I was told the other day that the English translation of Ieuan Wyn's name is 'Jimmy White'. However, that is as far as the similarity goes. The main difference between Ieuan Wyn and Jimmy White is that Ieuan Wyn has not got a cue.<sup>1</sup>

As a further example, consider the New Labour response to comments made by Plaid Cymru's Adam Price on Wales and the Euro.. Adam has, quite rightly, raised some serious questions about the effect of the single currency, implemented under the rules of the Maastricht Treaty and Stability Pact, on public services in Wales. This is a carefully considered position, shared by many on the left across Europe, which I wholeheartedly support. And yet, how did Chris Bryant, the *überBlairite* MP for the Rhondda, think it appropriate to respond? By dismissing the substantive points and claiming that Adam had stolen his ideas from Iain Duncan Smith! This, of course, proved once and for all that Plaid Cymru and the Tories were simply one and the same. Poor Chris, he has a lot to learn about Welsh politics, but is this *ysgol meithrin* logic really the best he could come up with?

These sorry tales illustrate the poverty of what passes for public Labour politics in Wales. They show a complacent party, large sections of which will do anything to avoid a debate. But they also point to deeper historical problems, bigger even than Welsh Labour itself.

Tribalism, parochialism, promotion of mediocrity and anti-Welsh-language Welsh-ness are all the legacies of many centuries of defeat and subordination. I have struggled for many years to understand this aspect of Wales. The most complete description that I have found to

date is that given by Raymond Williams in his seminal essay, 'Wales and England', published in 1985.

While always alive to 'the more substantial and interesting process of certain autonomies hard won within a subordination', Raymond Williams also emphasised the negative consequences of the historical Welsh experience:

At its most negative, this has led, on the one hand, to archaic or residual types of nationalism, ... on the other hand, to pseudo-modernist rejections of the specificities of Welshness and the Welsh situation ... *The pseudo-modernist rejections have typically included, also, a particular spitefulness against all or any countervailing Welsh specificities; a distinguishing Welsh form of anti-Welshness, finding only partial and insufficient excuse in the excesses of romantic nationalism.* It is within these negative forms of the central complexities that much of the surface politics of contemporary Wales is still conducted, and the negative effects have to be reckoned as still predominant (as the Referendum on devolution so damagingly showed).<sup>2</sup>

He is referring to the 1979 debacle, of course, but his words could equally apply to the dangerously close result in 1999. In both referenda the 'No' campaign appealed precisely to the negative sentiments that Raymond Williams discusses. It is truly saddening that so many New Labour politicians are also happy to appeal to these attitudes in the hope of making short-term gains against Plaid. The long term damage they are causing is considerable.

In my view, a genuinely *pan-Welsh* approach to politics is urgently needed, based on a commitment to all parts of Wales, without exception. To have any real meaning this must also be an unbreakable commitment to those who are poorest and most marginalised in all communities. Contrary to many political myths, these people live in every part of our class-divided country.

At its most elementary, a pan-Welsh position must mean a refusal to perpetuate, in any form, the tribalism and language-antagonism that so clearly exists. To your credit, you have strenuously avoided doing this. But the same cannot be said for many Labour AMs, MPs and MEPs, to say nothing of Transport House or the Welsh Mirror. The Mirror's 'Plaid voices of hate' campaign was truly despicable. I disagree with many of the things said by Seimon Glyn and other members of Cymuned, but simply labelling them as racist does nothing to clarify the debate or engage with the issue. And far worse than that, the whole campaign has diverted attention away from the real and pressing issue of racism in Wales, that of the racism of white Welsh and English people towards all those of the 'wrong' colour. How 'England' and 'Britain' feed into all this are also taboo subjects under New Labour.<sup>3</sup>

**I can no longer remain a member of a party that uses anti-Welsh-language prejudice to shore up its predominantly English-speaking voting base in the south.**

The Welsh language is under threat in many different parts of Wales as a living language, one through which people can largely live their lives. This includes villages like Ynystawe and Brynaman, where I grew up. This is deeply troubling to me as a native Welsh speaker.

*Felly, dwi'n gofyn i ti, fel un Cymro i'r llall: a wyt ti'n fodlon gweld tranc yr iaith, fel iaith byw, mewn sawl ardal o Gymru, tra bo ti'n Brif Weinidog ar y wlad? Dyna fydd y canlyniad*



*os wyt ti'n parhau â'r polisi o wneud cyn lleiad a phosib, ac o beidio cydnabod fod yna broblem yn y lle cyntaf.*

*Rydym mewn peryg o golli agweddau unigryw o'n diwylliant: y safbwyntiau, hanesion a doethineb sydd yn byw ym mhob iaith. Gobeithio dy fod ti, fel fi, yn teimlo'r colled yn bersonnol. Mae hybu dwyieithrwydd naturiol yn dasg sylfaenol i'r Cynulliad. A, gan mae diwedd y gân yw'r geiniog, os oes angen mwy o arian i sicrhau hyn bydd rhaid mynnu bod Lundain yn ei ddarparu.*

A resignation letter is of necessity a letter of parting. But I must emphasise that I remain in favour of the widest possible unity on all issues of agreement. Perhaps the most pressing of those is the need to revise the Barnett formula. This need is acknowledged across a broad political spectrum in Wales. What is an essentially arbitrary formula needs to be replaced with a financial settlement based on a social, economic, cultural and linguistic audit of real needs, problems and opportunities. It offers us a chance to form a progressive united-front between Welsh Labour, Plaid Cymru and the Liberals. Such unity would emphasise the fundamental importance of the issue and strengthen the hand of the Government of Wales in negotiations with Downing Street and the Treasury. I do hope that you give this issue the attention it deserves.

I find it important to periodically remind myself why I got involved in socialist politics in the first place. This is particularly apposite on the occasion of leaving one party and joining another. Once again, Raymond Williams has expressed it far better than I can:

If I am asked finally to define my own position, I would say this. I believe in the necessary economic struggle of the organised working class. I believe that this is still the most creative activity in our society ... I believe that it is not necessary to abandon a parliamentary perspective as a matter of principle, but as a matter of practice I am quite sure that we have to begin to look beyond it. ... [N]o foreseeable parliamentary majority will inaugurate socialism unless there is a quite different kind of political activity supporting it, activity which is quite outside the scope or the perspective of the British Labour Party or of any other likely candidate for that kind of office. Such activity involves the most active elements of community politics, local campaigning, specialised interest campaigning.

I know that there is a profoundly necessary job to do in relation to the processes of cultural hegemony itself. I believe that the system of meanings and values which a capitalist society has generated has to be defeated in general and in detail by the most sustained kinds of intellectual and educational work.

People change, it is true, in struggle and by action. Anything as deep as a dominant structure of feeling is only changed by active new experience. But this does not mean that change can be remitted to action otherwise conceived. On the contrary the task of a successful socialist movement will be one of feeling and imagination quite as much as one of fact and organisation. Not imagination or feeling in their weak senses - 'imagining the future' (which is a waste of time) or 'the emotional side of things'. On the contrary, we have to learn and to teach each other the connections between a political and economic formation, a cultural and educational formation, and, perhaps hardest of all, the formations of feeling and relationship which are our immediate resources in any struggle.<sup>4</sup>

These are fine words. To subscribe to them is to be truly ambitious for Wales. I find greater hope that they will be realised by Plaid Cymru than by Welsh Labour. And that, in the end, is why I have to resign.

Cofion gorau

Dr. D. Ceri Evans

11 February, 2002

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Davies, *Y Cofnod - The Record, The National Assembly for Wales*, Thurs 13 December 2001, Short debate: 'Who is governing Wales?' 11.58 am - 12.35 pm.

<sup>2</sup> Raymond Williams, 'Wales and England', in John Osmond (ed.), *The National Question Again* (Gomer: Llandysul, 1985), p. 28.

<sup>3</sup> Arun Kundnani, '"Stumbling On": Race, Class and England', *Race and Class*, April-June 2000, vol. 41, No. 4, pp. 1-18. (<http://www.sagepub.co.uk>)

<sup>4</sup> Raymond Williams, 'You're a Marxist, Aren't You?', in *Resources of Hope* (Verso: London,) pp. 75-76.

# Letter to a Comrade on the Jewish National Question

[E-mail; written February 2002]

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Dear — ,

Thanks very much for visiting and the prompt sending of documents.

I am delighted that the pre-conference is only the beginning of the discussion, far better to vote on immediate tasks and continue the discussion.

Time, and the test of practice, will show that we are basically in agreement. You still stress the differences and problems of Jewish and/or proto-Israeli-Jewish nationhood. While I am trying, tentatively and with only Ed George and Gerry Foley actively helping me, to move 'beyond English Marxism' AND the specifics of the Welsh experience. Hence, my ideas about the broad grouping of nations, such as the European Jews (your clarification, thanks), the Welsh, Romanies, Basques, the Scottish (maybe, or partially) and perhaps others.

I am motivated to examine the question in this way because I see so many similarities, not in the specifics of the oppression and political-historical context but in the nature, flavour even, of the millenarian religious-national revivalist response of both the Welsh and European Jews. And is it not the very duty of revolutionary socialists to respect the differences but also to CELEBRATE WHAT IS IN COMMON IN THE RESPONSES OF THE OPPRESSED (Lenin's 'carnival of the oppressed').

You wish to deny that Israeli Jews form a nation (or, at least, a 'proto-nation in decomposition'). What is more, you assert, in an abstract and ahistorical way, that Israeli-Jews ARE NOT AND WILL NEVER BE A NATION - STATUS DECISIVELY DENIED. You imply that such a status can never exist, which I charge is an idealist anti-materialist position, since no-one can know the future (though we are allowed to best-guess and your and my best-guess is that the Zionists will not succeed in creating an Israeli-Jewish nation in any practical sense).

What I suspect this debate is really about is the fact that you are violently (and entirely correctly) opposed to the Zionist-inspired Israeli-Jewish national project. Your problem, which may be unique (but probably isn't), is that you cannot pose an alternative national project at the level of the existing neo-apartheid STATE.

This is another way of saying that there is no national solution for the Jewish nation under capitalism, since the Jewish question is by its very nature an international one. The European Jews certainly show all the characteristics of an authentic 'historical nation', with a remarkable radical and revolutionary history on which to base a progressive-revolutionary Jewish project of national liberation. This is only practically conceivable after socialist revolutions in several countries, which would allow a national-flourishing or renaissance of the

(European?) Jewish nation. How the 'other Jews' fit in to all this I simply don't know, that is a job of detail and is down to you.

Furthermore, I repeat what I said in our meeting - you cannot deny nationhood to anyone on some spurious 'material' or 'political' basis - that is a job for history, struggle and national endeavour. Also, there are no 'ideal' or 'model' nations to which the Jews, or Welsh, need to refer. There are only nations who have established states in their name and those who have not.

Re-read Ed's piece again carefully - 'The Secret of the Woods is in the Trees' - this is not a tautology but an expression of a real contradiction.

I will read the material that you have sent me carefully.

Warmest revolutionary greetings

Ceri