

Idris Cox

IT may be that the normal procedure would be to accept the reply of Bert Pearce (*Marxism Today*, December 1968) on the national problem in Britain as the final word on this subject. I hope this is not the case, for this is far from being a "normal" subject and there will need to be far greater political clarity on many of its aspects before we can hope to solve this complex problem.

However, I am in complete agreement with most of Bert Pearce's conclusions: (1) on the recognition of the national rights of the Scots and Welsh, (2) their right to self-determination, to manage their own affairs, and (3) the need for working class unity throughout Britain to secure separate Scottish and Welsh parliaments as an essential part of the advance towards Socialism in Britain.

No matter how seriously we disagree on other aspects, those on which we do agree are the most important from the standpoint of a successful

struggle towards a solution of the national problem in Britain and are an essential aspect of the advance to Socialism.

Not Nations at Present

My contention that neither the Scots nor the Welsh at the *present time* are nations has been strongly contested. Moreover, it has been interpreted as a denial that they have a national outlook and aspirations. Nothing was further from my mind. From my early days in the movement I have been acutely aware of Welsh national aspirations and the need to fight for their national rights. For many years, I strove within the Party to get this recognition in face of strong opposition to this view within the Party leadership. So I am by no means a new convert to the need to fight for Welsh national rights.

In his reply Bert Pearce uses the terms (as in his

original article) "nation" and "nationality" as synonymous. This leads to confusion, in my view. The Welsh and Scots are nationalities and can become nations, but this will depend on future developments. A nation develops at a particular stage in historical development, and has its own characteristic features. These were outlined by Lenin and Stalin, and while every nation has its own specific features I am not convinced we need to depart from the general guiding lines which they laid down.

Of course, it is easy to avoid making any political analysis of this complex problem, as did Jimmy Reid in the *Morning Star*: "By whatever definition one cares to use Scotland is a nation". And that is that! No analysis. No argument. No explanation. Bert Pearce adopts a similar attitude. We must avoid "... a Philadelphia lawyer's interpretation of a dry formula". I am not aware that any Philadelphia lawyer has concerned himself with a definition of a nation. Lenin and Stalin *did*, and they were not Philadelphia lawyers. This kind of cheap retort really does not help to reach clarity on what constitutes a nation.

Bert Pearce applauds Barbara Ruhemann for "showing that the classical definition of a nation is not so rigid and unhistorical as some interpreters would have it." Does she? In her contribution she asserted that "... the Welsh nation was historically formed long before the conquest by Norman England ...". In an earlier discussion on this subject (*Marxism Today*, March 1959) she asserted that nations have "... existed from the dawn of history". Bert Pearce is entitled to describe this as "... not so rigid and unhistorical". For my part it has no resemblance to any scientific political analysis of historical development.

Wales North and South

When did the Welsh become a nation? Was it before the Normans conquered England? Was it before the Act of Union in 1536 or after? Did it become a nation when capitalism began to develop in Wales? Bert Pearce gives no clue as to when the Welsh became a nation. In my view they were on the way to becoming a nation before 1536, but the process was retarded because English rule prevented the growth of those characteristics which constitute a nation. But Welsh national aspirations still remained and were expressed during subsequent periods in the history of Wales, and are now stronger than ever.

It is not so much a matter of the rising Welsh bourgeoisie becoming integrated with the British

capitalist class (which Bert Pearce quite wrongly claims was my main point) but the distortion of Welsh economy by British capitalism, the artificial separation of north and south, the exploitation of Welsh resources for the benefit of British capitalism, and the suppression of equal opportunities for Welsh language and culture.

The economy of the north (such as it is) has closer relations with north-west England and the Midlands than with South Wales, while the water and electricity resources are exploited for the benefit of the big cities in those parts of England. The economy of South Wales is also more closely related to that of the Midlands, West of England and London than it is to North Wales. It is easier to travel from North Wales to most parts of England than it is to South Wales, and easier from South Wales than it is from north to south. Between north and south there is a vast "no man's land" a virtual boundary between two parts of the country.

British capitalism has divided Wales into two regions and two economic communities and prevented Wales *as a whole* becoming a "community of economic life". Even the trade unions in the north are linked, not with the south, but with those in north-west England, and unlike Scotland, there is no Welsh TUC.

Despite all this there is a Welsh national outlook and consciousness, a "community of culture", an affinity of language between north and south. It has many of the distinct features which make up a nation, but it still has to fight to achieve all the conditions necessary to constitute a nation. In my view it is the *struggle* to achieve Welsh national rights (economic, democratic, linguistic, and cultural) that will transform the Welsh (*all* the people of Wales) into a nation.

England Omitted

My last point is the relation of all this to Britain as a whole. The title of Bert Pearce's articles (like those in this discussion) is "The National Problem in Britain", but England, the strongest sector, is left out of account. In practice it is treated as a Scottish and Welsh problem, as if England is even less developed as a nation than either Wales or Scotland. We shall make little headway in this matter unless it is tackled as a British problem. This means also an English Parliament with a Federal British Parliament for all three countries, one which expresses the common interests of all three peoples in their struggle against British monopoly capital and imperialism, and assists them on the road to Socialism.