THREE NATIONS ONE ENEMY

The results of the "devolution" campaign launched by the Labour Party last year put the Labour government in an awkward position. For a simple majority of voters opted for a Scottish Assembly. The Westminster Parliament, however, said that there should be at least a 50% majority in favour before it could agree to devolution.

If the law required parliament to accept the will of a majority only then it could claim support. But in fact, a large percentage of their constituents' votes before they became MPs, the House of Commons would be three-quarters empty.

Because Labour won't deliver the goods on devolution, the Welsh and Scottish movements are planning a wave of strikes. The Tories and some others in the vote of no confidence which has forced an earlier general election.

In Wales, a large majority voted against devolution.

Labour's vote-catching tactics

On this question the capital parties all showed their rotten nature, but by far the worst was the Labour Party.

The Tories took a fairly consistent, straightforward reactionary stand, claiming that devolution would break up Britain, and paying no attention to the national wishes of the Welsh and Scottish peoples.

The Liberals have supported devolution for a long time, but have never used their strength was drawn from Celtic areas, and they had to pay some attention to Scottish demands to keep their support.

Labour was only 'converted' to devolution as a result of the Labour Party's general election. For the Labour Party, the question was not one of the national rights of the Scottish and Welsh peoples, but how to get votes and keep seats.

The bigger threat to Labour was in Scotland, where the Scottish Nationalists (SNP) had won mainly Tory seats in the 1974 general elections, but are now threatened by any swing to the SNP are Labour.

In Wales, Plaid Cymru (PC - the Welsh National Party) does not represent such a threat to Labour seats, which are concentrated in the industrial South Wales, whereas the Welsh Nationalism consciousness is far weaker than in West and North West Wales.

Labour's answer to the Nationalist challenge took account of this difference between Wales and Scotland. It offered a Scottish Assembly to both, but proposed to give the Scottish one greater powers than the Welsh.

Meanwhile, of course, in both cases, real parliamentary power would remain at Westminster while the Welsh and Scottish constitutions would hold state power over all three nations. It was therefore small wonder that many nationally aware peoples of Wales and Scotland didn't consider it worthwhile turning out to vote.

Labour's MPs in Wales

Some Labour MPs in Wales campaigned for a 'Yes' vote in the referendum. Among them was Michael Foot, as "Minister for Employment", was responsible for the closing down of a steel works at Port Talbot in constituency which got a great many of his constituents out of work. He therefore had good grounds to fear that Plaid Cymru would cash in on local discontent - and might unseat him at the next election.

Instead, six other Labour MPs in the industrial districts of Wales (where the Labour Party still has a lot more influence than the rest of the rest of Britain) campaigned against a "Yes" vote, and thus contributed to the heavy defeat of the devolution proposals in Wales.

The Labour leadership tolerated these MPs' action, and made no real effort to counter the great pressure of devolution in the labour ranks. Labour's leaders weren't really interested in devolution for Wales anyway.

Labour's manoeuvres over devolution show that they are only interested in the peoples of Wales as a land as voters, and nothing more.

National oppression in Wales and Scotland

If Wales and Scotland had won assemblies as a result of the referendum, the working peoples of the two countries would have found out very quickly that it made very little difference to them, and would have seen the worst possible outcome of the whole affair.

The national question in Britain, however, has not been resolved, nor would the social problems faced by Welsh and Scottish workers.

We in the Communist Workers Movement place no trust in the 'solutions' peddled by capitalist parties. In the British Isles, there is not just one nation, there are two (English, Scottish and Welsh) and part of a fourth (the Irish) under the direct rule of the British state. Wales, Scotland and the occupied six counties of Ireland suffer national oppression.

The question of Ireland is of course a different matter from the question of Wales and Scotland, and should be resolved by the Irish people themselves, without withdrawal and the formation of a genuinely independent 32-county Irish state.

Suppression of Welsh and Scottish national movements

In Wales and Scotland the British ruling class actively tried for centuries to stamp out Welsh and Scottish cultures, and in particular the Gaelic and Welsh languages.

For example in Scotland, the wearing of the kilt was banned after the 1745 rebellion. In Wales, Welsh people were allowed to use their own language in law courts from Tudor times right into this century. But before compulsory education (in English, of course) was introduced, 80% of everything they wrote was in the Welsh language, and most of the population of the Scottish Highlands and Western Isles spoke Gaelic.

For years in Scotland, people speaking their own language in school were punished and treated like idiots.

Things are changing now, thanks to the resistance put up by Welsh and Scottish speakers, but English education, radio, TV, and the necessity of being able to 'get on in the world' have taken their toll, and today only just over a fifth of the population of Wales speak Welsh and Gaelic only remains strong in the Western Isles.

In Wales and Scotland, the rate of unemployment is higher than in England. Much of their industry is in decline and is not being replaced by new industries.

For a socialist federal Britain

Devolution within the British imperialist state is no answer for Wales and Scotland.

In the short term, the British government's stance on the GNU's programme concerning Wales and Scotland should be fought for.

In the long term, the GNU must ensure the national question in Wales and Scotland can only be solved by the establishment of an independent Socialist Republic of Britain, in which England, Wales and Scotland are sister republics with control over their economic development, education, legal practices, militia and cultural life.

Such a federal union of the three peoples will be voluntary and strong because of that.

The federal institutions will represent the common interests of the workers of the three nations, and will control the currency, the main body of the armed forces, and foreign policy. They will work to co-ordinate economic planning, and strengthen the political unity (i.e. unity of the commitment to socialist development) of the peoples of Wales, Scotland and England.

Because the federal republic will be socialist, and the workers will hold the power in it, government will be able to put into effect policies which serve the working class as working people as a whole, while taking into account the national characteristics of the three nations.

The republic will face the task of formulating policies of economic development which will provide full employment for the peoples of the three nations. Such policies would stop the drift from Wales and Highland Scotland to England and the Scottish lowlands. It is only possible to put policies like this into effect under a socialist government which produces to satisfy people's needs, not for profit.

The republic will need to provide ample funds for the production of a whole literature in Welsh and Gaelic. It will also need to encourage the growth of English-speaking workers in Scotland and Wales to learn the native languages of those countries (by persuasion, not law or force of compulsion) so that the unity of the working people in these lands will be strengthened, not weakened.

For multi-national communist party

Although the national question in Britain is important, it is not the central question. Searing the working people of the three nations (unlike in Ireland) the class conflict between workers and capitalists counts for more.

The communists of all three nations must form one party to fight the same main enemy. To win, imperialism of the same stage of revolution, the socialist class. They must fight for the unity of the three peoples.

There should be a 'division of labour' between English communists and Welsh and Scottish communists. English communists should take on the work of fomenting English unity. Welsh and Scottish people that Wales and Scotland should have the right to leave Britain if they choose. Welsh and Scottish communists should mainly work to persuade the working people of their nations that although they should have the right to decide whether or not to remain within the British state, they will lose their right in favour of staying with the English working class in the same state.

The national question in Britain can only be resolved through the socialist revolution of the English, Welsh and Scottish workers, along with the workers of all other nationalities living in Britain, under the leadership of their united revolutionary working class party. The capitalist class will never give Wales and Scotland their full national right.

Following are some important demands put forward on the subject of the national question in the previous edition of Foot:

• The right of self-determination for the peoples of Wales and Scotland, by and including secession.

• Equal status with English-speaking Wales and Scotland respectively, and the vigorous promotion and safeguarding of cultural and national languages and nationalities under the British state.

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