SOCIALISTS & THE NEW RISE OF SCOTTISH NATIONALISM February 1977

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Explanatory Note by ecosocialist.scot: This article was originally published in February 1977 as a supplement to Red Weekly, the then newspaper of the British Section of the Fourth International, the International Marxist Group (IMG). The article represented a period of reflection within the ranks of the Scottish members of the IMG and the wider left in Scotland about the "National Question" and marked a decisive shift towards a position of support for Scottish Independence by the British Fourth Internationalists, reviving the tradition of communist leader John MacLean in the 1920s. The marxist left in Scotland was then divided on the issue with the majority either supporting unionism or arguing that the national issue was irrelevant. By the time of the launch of the Scottish Socialist Party, 20 years later, the ideas originally expressed by the IMG had become mainstream on the Scottish marxist left. The article was written by Neil Williamson a highly talented young leader of the IMG and FI who tragically died in a car crash in October 1978, cutting short his significant contribution to marxism in Scotland (obituary here). We are grateful to the website redmolerising for the original scanning of the article which can be found here, but this is the first publication of a transcription of the article. April 2021

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Introduction

SEVEN YEARS AGO the Labour Party unveiled what at the time were regarded as daring proposals for changing the relationship between the Westminster Parliament and Scotland. The 1969 Scottish Council of the Labour Party recommended: ‘If fears and risks are guarded against … Edinburgh sittings of the Scottish Grand Committee (of the House of Commons) could be tried. We remain open minded … to further non-divisive steps in the long term future.'[1].

The long term future of course proved to be much shorter than anything the Scottish Council of the Labour Party could guess. In less than a decade the Scottish National Party’s vote rose from 5 per cent to today’s 30 per cent.

Now, in the midst of Britain’s deepest ever economic crisis, a

sudden and radical change is to be made to a system of Parliamentary institutions which have evolved over centuries. Both the Labour and Tory parties have embraced at least the ‘principle’ of devolution for Scotland, suffering public splits in the process. But the revolutionary left was no more perceptive than its reformist or bourgeois enemies in grasping the scope of events north of the border. For example, both the International Socialists [2] and unfortunately the Fourth International [3] produced extensive analyses of the crisis and decay of British Imperialism, where the entire question of Scotland and the Assembly did not merit even a single sentence.

In many ways, this lack of understanding of the national question in Scotland was a surprising weakness of the revolutionary left. In the era of ‘classical’ Marxism of Engels, Lenin, Luxemburg and the Austro-Marxists, the national question and the problems associated with it were the source of extensive and sometimes brilliant debate. [4] However, at that time it was the impending breakup of the Russian and Austrian empires which gave the urgency to these polemics. Socialists have been slow to realise that today’s map of Europe demonstrates much of the political instability discussed by Otto Bauer or Rosa Luxemburg.

The rise of mass working class struggle since 1968 is, just as before the First World War, going to be faced four-square by the question of nationalism and national self-determination. In this issue of the ‘Battle of Ideas’, NEIL WILLIAMSON looks at the most basic questions which confront revolutionary socialists in considering the national question in Scotland.

The History of the New Nationalism

THE STARTING POINT of an analysis of the national question has to be a review of the changing relation of Scotland to the Union – a relation which now seems so fragile. Although it is the post-war situation which is crucial to an understanding of Scottish nationalism, it is necessary to note in passing some of the features of Scotland's earlier development.

The Union of 1707 was probably unique in European history, for it produced neither rebellion not assimilation for the new British state. The intelligentsia of Smith and Hume, writers like Scott, proletarians like Keir Hardie, landlords like the Duke of Sutherland and the industrialists who saw Glasgow grow into the 'second city of the Empire' – all found their economic, social and political life tied up with British society as a whole. [5]

But the Union, and the British state born from it, preserved intact many of the specifically **Scottish** institutions of social life and civil society – institutions distinct from those in England. The Church, law, education, and later, civil administration, remained alive and functioning, inhabited by a species of upper petty bourgeois renowned for both their intense British patriotism and their Scottish parochialism. In the first 250 years of the Union there was no contradiction between the two, and the possibility of reviving an independent Scottish state based on these institutions was never seriously raised. Scotland's evolution in the post-war decline of British imperialism was to dramatically change this situation.

Since the Second World War, the legacy of Scotland's partnership in Britain's world economic role is only too evident. The dismal picture of the thousands of Scottish workers living in London or Birmingham are all too familiar features of post-war Britain. Scotland of course has not been alone in suffering from these 'regional' problems.

By its very nature, capitalism develops unevenly,

concentrating its productive power and labour without planning or rationality. The ensuing polarisation is exemplified by Italy with the sharp division between the underdeveloped south and the industrialised north. Like southern Italy, the most useful index of Scotland's underdevelopment has been its massive loss of labour, above all in the manufacturing sector.

The industries which built the expansion of the nineteenth century find themselves ground down under foreign competition. In ship-building the Clyde is now building less than half the tonnage of the early years of this century. This involved a post-war loss of 30,000 in its labour force. In steel production, Scotland's share of the British total has slumped from half its total in the same period, with a similar loss of labour to that in shipbuilding. Mining completes the pattern with two-thirds of its jobs lost since the late 1950s. The end result has been a net fall in the male labour force in Scottish manufacturing, with migration running at 30,000 per year throughout the 1960s. [6]

In the first fifteen years of the post-war era the Scottish economy was growing between 10 and 15 per cent slower then the British economy as a whole (29 per cent between 1948-57 as opposed to a national average of 38 per cent). The precipitous decline could not continue indefinitely without some response. As 'second city of the Empire' visibly shrunk in population, and the unemployment rate ran at double the national average, the vision of Scotland as an industrial desert, a sort of urban Brittany, became a serious one. A product of the decline was the draining away of the dynamism and weight of the Scottish employing class.

This was the context for the formation of bodies like the Scottish Council for Development and Industry [7], uniting both trade unions and employers in a frantic search for jobs – at any price. Reports, surveys and plans proliferated , and 'regional policy' was born. Support for regional policy and blanket aid to industry were the joint slogans of the Scottish

TUC ans Scottish CBI. For the trade union bureaucrats there was an advantage of their acceptance in the corridors of power, no matter how tatty the furniture.

Regional powers staggered into life in the mid-’60s in a veritable plethora of legislation. The Local Employment Act of 1960, the Industrial Development Act of 1966 and the Regional Employment Premium passed onto the statute book. Over a decade later it is possible to make some assessment of the success of the policies. Even on the aims they set themselves – creation of employment – the record is a pretty bleak one. Migration actually rose in the period of regional policy, and the manufacturing industry lost over 70,000 jobs. But this is only half the story, for regional policy was directly responsible for what can only be described as a new phase in the Scottish economy.

The bribes paid to industrial investment were massive. By the 1970s one half of the depreciation on new plant and machinery was covered by grants; 40 per cent of costs were being paid as an initial allowance on new building. Altogether, these sort of grants were taking up 35 per cent of Britain’s total expenditure on regional aid. But it was not the older sections of Scottish industry who were best placed to take advantage of this. With such lucrative inducements to invest, and enthusiastic support from the STUC for industry at any price, the multinationals moved in.

The list of plants starting up in Scotland in the early 1960s reads like a *Who’s Who* of international big business. Rootes opened up in Linwood in 1960, followed by the British Motor Corporation three years later. Cater pillar opened up their first UK operation with their tractor plant just outside Glasgow. Ferranti, Burroughs, Personna, STC, McLarens Controls, all moved north, with a final count of about 70 electronics firms operating mainly in Fife by the end of the 1960s.

Fortunes were made by building subsidised factories, using the Regional Employment Premium to pay the wages, then shifting to countries with lower wage rates. Firms like Personna and STC were to become famous as ‘get rich quick’ merchants, but others like Chrysler stayed to openly blackmail the Government for an increased subsidy to ‘save jobs’.

Side by side with the decimation of the male labour force in the previous bastions of labour movement strength (iron foundries, shipyards, mines), went the ‘new’ industries – unskilled, badly unionised, often employing mainly women employed in assembly work.

The role of the state was becoming indispensable to nearly every section of Scottish employment. Without regional policy there would be no Bathgate, no Linwood and no Marathon. The older sectors were so decrepit that eventually even the pretence of private ownership was thrown away and the Government nationalised them. Even in ‘healthy’ firms like Weirs or at Yarrows, it was Government contracts that provided the gravy.

Confronted with this Government-sponsored rip-off by the employing class, the labour leaders were unable to act, for this new investment had been their own stated goal throughout the 1960s. The influential Scottish Council for Development and Industry concluded its 1974 conference with the dire warning that ‘redundancy has to be accepted as a normal occurrence’ and projected a further 50,000 jobs permanently lost by the mid-1980s. [8]

It was this type of thinking which lay behind the decision literally to ‘butcher’ the UCS shipyards in 1971. 8,500 workers were directly employed there, and an estimated 20,000 others were involved in supply and related industries. When this course was met by over 100,000 workers demonstrating on the streets, the ‘logic’ of regional policy was at least temporarily defied.

But the lessons were never learned, for the failure of the policy lay deeper than the unemployment statistics. The underlying malaise of Scottish urban society remained as before; the atrocious housing, the urban poverty, the resulting waves of migration. In housing schemes like Blackhill in Glasgow, male unemployment is 34 per cent, 40 per cent of the population live in overcrowded conditions and 11 per cent are annually referred to the social work department. [9]

This was the social and economic situation which saw the discovery of what was to be hailed as Scotland's salvation – North Sea oil.

The Impact of North Sea Oil

THE RISE of the plant economy from the early 1960s was cut across by the discovery of oil in the North Sea. With projected investment of some £10,000 million by 1980, the oil attracted some of the largest and most predatory companies in the world – the so-called 'oil majors'. The sheer scale of their operations dwarfed anything previously seen in Scotland.

BP could raise privately in one loan, for one oil field, the sum of £400 million, when the projected Scottish Assembly will have a total budget for all departments of about £2000 million. Scottish industry was well used to being marginalised by foreign competition, but oil gave this process a massive boost. British industry was only able to win around 25 per cent of the orders for the rapidly expanding market in boats, production and exploration platforms, pipe laying and other supply industries. The puny scale of British (and even more, Scottish) industry compared to its foreign rivals has never been clearer.

It is no exaggeration to say that the British state, once all-powerful, was now totally at the mercy of the commercial whims of the oil companies. Allocation of oil sectors was by Government 'discretion' not auction. A taxation system was evolved which even the Public Accounts Committee of he Commons had to point out was a 'major commercial misjudgement' and systematic and collusion was exposed at Public Enquiries. [10]

Again it was the working class who paid the price for economic 'policy'. Some 40,000 workers are now employed directly or indirectly in the oil industry, but the lonely construction sites of Loch Kishorn or Nigg Bay, the mushrooming service firms of Aberdeen or the Spanish migrant labour on the rigs themselves are a far cry from the collective strength of the Lanarkshire iron foundries or the Clyde engineering industry. Barely unionised, with few of the social costs arising from permanent employment (schools, housing and other facilities), the multinationals can cash in on a genuine bonanza.

Only one sector of Scottish capital has managed to pick up more then a few crumbs from this. The same Scottish banking system which pioneered the first overdraft system and once formed the most advanced branch banking system in the world was quick to smell money. All three Scottish clearing houses have extensive investments in equipment leasing and in hire purchase transactions. The Bank of Scotland has gone further with its stake in the International Energy Bank and its investments in the Piper oil fields.

But it was the investment trusts which made the biggest splash. With combined assets of some £2,000 million they had traditionally been linked to the old British pattern of 'White Dominion' investments (for example Argentinian ranching, Pennsylvanian steel). [11] Again it was oil which provided the incentive for change, for it has been these investment trusts which have been giving backing to a variety of oil related investment companies (parts of the Ranger Oil group), supply and service companies (North Sea Assets, Scottish Offshore

Investments), exploration companies (Pict Petroleum, Caber Oil), and new merchant banks (Bates, Noble Grossart, James Finlay).

The development of a Scottish finance sector as an autonomous force in its own right has been discussed at considerable length. [12] This sector shows a dynamism and political aggression conspicuous by its absence in the rest of British capital. Certainly some sections of this finance sector are at least attracted by some of the ideas of the Scottish National Party. The plummets on the foreign exchange market and the all time lows of the stock market turn the sympathetic attentions of the most astute financiers toward the variety of projects for a Scottish pound, and independent Central Bank in Scotland and an autonomous credit system.

Despite the attractions of these propositions, the context of the disastrous economic decline of British imperialism, together with one of the best organised labour movements in the world, means that the political situation is too fraught with dangers and uncertainty for much unanimity to emerge amongst Scottish capital. An example of this was the recent reaction of the three clearing house banks to the SNP's latest revised financial proposals. The SNP's policy was of 'such a fundamental political and emotional nature' [13] that the banks declined to make any comment.

But certain elements in Scottish capital do at least appear to have reached a firm political conclusion. On the one hand there is the newly formed 'Scotland is British' campaign, which draws support from the Scottish CBI, the Scottish Chamber of Commerce, and leading industrialists like Lord Toothill (Ferrantis) and Viscount Weir (Weir Engineering). Devolution to these gentlemen is at best irrelevant, at worst a dangerous experiment which could sabotage the 'regional policy' lifeline between Westminster and the Scottish economy discussed above. On the other hand there is the open and well publicised support of some merchant bankers for the SNP, with

directors of Seaforth Maritime Investment and Dalscot Merchant Bank both containing SNP members on their boards.

But as the three Scottish banks put it, the question is ‘fundamentally political’ and it is on this political criterion that the ruling class is split. For much of British big business, at least as expressed in their ‘own’ organs like **The Times** and the **Economist**, the necessity of devolution has reluctantly been accepted, if only because of the real and visible pressure of the Scottish masses. [14]

Their problem is to ride the tiger, and to above all prevent the worst possible option – the formation of **an uncontrollable executive** of the Edinburgh Assembly. For this reason they (and the bulk of Scottish capital) are not either for or against the Assembly, but preoccupied by such questions as whether the Assembly should have control over the Scottish Development Agency or any future Scottish banking system, both of which they are vehemently against. For the same reason, proportional representation is now enthusiastically embraced by many British and Scottish industrialists, in the hope of blocking any ‘extremist’ government, be it nationalist or socialist.

It will be overtly **political** attitudes which will guide the changing views of capital, in Scotland, Britain and internationally, towards the Assembly and its executive. Can it guarantee access to the EEC and North America, can it guarantee political stability and can it root out the ‘labour inflexibility’ inherent in Scotland’s strongly organised labour movement? The political uncertainty surrounding these questions means that for the next period capital will continue to hedge its bets, with public splits and continuing political crisis as the immediate result.

The Rise of the Scottish National Party

THESE SPLITS inside the ruling class, and the emergence of some sections of capital in Scotland prepared to give serious attention to the plans of the nationalists, was a vital factor in transforming the SNP into a coherent political force. The confidential plan of its Financial Committee leaked to the press envisaged ‘an industrial structure closer to that of Switzerland then Detroit’. The absence of any shipyards or heavy engineering in Switzerland could not be lost on any trade unionist reading the report! No longer a party of cranks and romantics, the SNP had elbowed its way into the inner circles of big capital in Scotland.

Despite these important links between capital and the SNP, it would be a profound mistake to reduce the rise in support for some form of self-government to some deal cooked up in the boardrooms of Edinburgh’s Charlotte Square. The sweeping victories of the SNP at Hamilton and the local elections of 1968 pre-date the so-called oil boom and the SNP’s slogan – ‘It’s Scotland’s oil’ – by three or four years.

The discovery of oil gave the nationalists a massive boost, but it’s main importance does not lie inside the ruling class. Much more importantly, it gave credibility to the idea of independence, and transformed the SNP in the eyes of the **Scottish middle class**. The idea of a Scandinavian-type social democracy, cushioned from Britain’s decline by Scottish oil, was carefully cultivated by the SNP leaders. The 1974 elections were the clearest proof of the success of this orientation, with the SNP gaining directly from the previously Tory-voting petty bourgeoisie. Its party leadership of Boy Scout leaders, small businessmen, and ‘sons of the manse’ personify its solid middle class base. [15]

But no political party can win support of over a third of the

electorate, gaining seats in areas so socially distinct as the rural Moray and Nairn and Glasgow Govan, purely on the basis of gimmicks and catchy election slogans. The speed and abruptness of the growth of the SNP, now the fastest growing party in Western Europe, has led some Scottish socialists to see Scotland as a link in the chain of 'new nationalisms' stretching from Corsica to Euzkadi (Basque country), from Brittany to Wales. [16] But such an analogy hides more than it illuminates.

This is at its clearest in any comparison with the Basque country. In mid-September 17 mayors from that region presented a petition to the Spanish Interior Minister. It demanded local control of the police to prevent the now common shooting of nationalist demonstrators, permission to fly the then-banned Basque flag, official acceptance of the teaching of Basque history in schools and transfer of nationalist political prisoners nearer home.

Even with the limitation and caution of these demands from part of the Spanish state apparatus itself (they did not include amnesty or election of an Assembly) they illuminate quite well the 'socialist dynamic' of the national question in Spain. The most timid and conservative expression on the Spanish equivalent of devolution has to address itself directly to a confrontation with the Spanish state; the essence of the national question, that of **political democracy**, is written in the blood of workers on the streets of Vitoria or Pamplona.

In France, without thirty years of dictatorship behind it, the centralism of the Fifth Republic still means official discrimination against the Breton language, the illegality of flying the Breton flag without an accompanying tricolour and the familiarity of seeing carefully chosen non-Breton CRS riot police on demonstrations or in occupations.

There is no political discrimination or political oppression

aimed at the Scottish nation. Scottish history is not banned in schools, the St Andrews Cross flies quite peacefully over Scotland, and English cops are not needed for industrial or political trouble spots. The corresponding constitutionalism of the nationalist movement has therefore quite definite material roots. There is no focus for a national revolt, no discrimination to march against, no flag to defiantly and illegally fly.

The absence of any focus for national political oppression produces a very distinct and, at first sight, strange form of nationalism in Scotland. For the atomisation and passivity of the nationalist forces in recent years reflected the fact that the ballot box was the **only** form that the movement could take. Self-activity, mass mobilisations and collective organisation on the scale of Catalonia or even Quebec could find no opportunity to arise.

The same distinct features mark the SNP, a party riveted to 'British' parliamentary rules, containing all the worst features of petty bourgeois electoral cretinism. In the same way it explains the absence of any form of nationalist culture; Scotland must be unique in having no mass folk festivals, no literary revivals to parallel its nationalist growth.

This strange form of nationalism is also reflected in the absence of any historical self-organisation to draw upon. [17] Even in the 1930s, with the combination of both functioning institutions of national life (Church, sport, law etc) and the stark reality of chronic and abrupt regional decline, the nationalists has zero impact on Scottish life. In fact it was at the height of Scotland's economic collapse in 1931 that the Scottish TUC were to finally jettison their position of home rule.

To understand why it is today and not forty years ago that an Assembly is being set up, it is necessary to look more closely

at the specific elements involved among the mass of the Scottish people themselves.

Bourgeois Democracy and Devolution

THE BRITISH STATE is unique in Europe, its stability virtually unchallenged by military invasion, coup d'etat, or peasant insurrection for over two centuries. The material roots of this stability lay in the world role of investment and plunder by nineteenth century expansion, but despite the fact that these material underpinnings are all but undermined, that experience of bourgeois democracy has left an indelible imprint on the consciousness of the British working class.

Even in European countries which have seen bourgeois democracy confronted by coup d'etats, civil war and pre-revolutionary situations (France, Spain, Italy), the dynamism and tenacity of reformism and its explicit commitment to bourgeois democratic projects (Union of the Left, Democratic Rupture, Historic Compromise) is an eloquent warning against the naïve idea that such deep seated illusions among working people can be challenged by propaganda in favour of soviet democracy. It is only by linking such propaganda to the real agent of social change, to the direct experience of the working people themselves, that such illusions can be broken. But this direct experience can only originate at their present level of consciousness, not at some arbitrary point which socialists would prefer. As Lenin put it:

'You are duty bound to call their democratic prejudices what they are – prejudices. But at the same time you must soberly follow the actual state of class consciousness and preparedness of the entire class (not only of its communist vanguard) and of all the working people (not only their

advanced elements).’ [18]

What is the ‘actual state of class consciousness’ today in Scotland, and what does the demand for an Assembly represent? No ‘sober’ analysis can conclude that a wave of reactionary nationalism is sweeping the country. To our knowledge, the only struggle involving nationalist demands has been in the steel industry, but even there the SNP has been kept at arm’s length by the local shop stewards. More importantly, the campaign to stop the political levy to the Labour Party initiated by the nationalists has been a dismal failure. Nowhere has this demand for an elected Assembly translated itself into an attack on the organised strength of the labour movement.

A sober analysis leads us to very different conclusions. Decades of urban deprivation, of unemployment and of political and financial corruption of the Labour Party has built up a dam of frustration among the Scottish working class. For reasons explained earlier, the traditional labour movement was not only unable to challenge that frustration, it played the role of willing accomplice to the decades of failure. In a society with deep rooted illusions in Parliamentary democracy, it was inevitable that this desire for change from the Scottish ‘working people’, spanning the petty bourgeoisie to the heart of the labour movement, would be put forward in terms of **an innovation, an extension, of bourgeois democracy itself.**

Ironically, it was the previous ‘success’ and durability of Westminster which has produced the model in Edinburgh which in the future may undermine the Mother of Parliaments. It is this demand for the renovation of bourgeois democracy as the **content** of Scottish nationalism which gives the SNP its classical petty bourgeois vagueness and ambiguity on every issue. The SNP tries to appear as useful a vehicle for the aspirations of a farmer in Perthshire as it does for an engineer in Clydebank.

In this situation it is not enough to be in favour of self-determination for Scotland – a 'negative' right by definition. For every socialist in Scotland must have something to say about what sort of future Scotland has a 'right' to determine.

In Scotland today it is necessary to link up with this profound desire for change, no matter how confused and ambiguous its expression. This was certainly the method used by Trotsky in his 'Action Programme for France' written in 1934. [19] In a programme whose central points included disbanding of the police, monopoly of foreign trade, and workers control, he argues emphatically for an extension of bourgeois democracy, for the setting up of a single Assembly, elected by universal suffrage, with deputies revocable by their constituents. 'This', according to Trotsky, 'is the only measure that would lead the masses forward instead of pushing them backwards. A more generous democracy would facilitate the struggle for workers power.' [20]

To turn your back on bourgeois democracy is to turn your back on the actual consciousness of the masses, a stupidity from the point of view of Lenin or Trotsky. But at the same time their entire lives were spent fighting for a higher form of democracy, that of the rule by the working people over the sphere of social existence inside a socialist democracy. It is the writings of Trotsky on Germany which give the clearest guide to the link between the two opposing systems of democracy:

'In the course of many decades, workers have built up their own organisations **within bourgeois democracy, by utilising it, by fighting it,** their own strongholds and bases of proletarian democracy, the trade unions, the political parties, the educational and sports clubs, the co-operatives, etc. The proletariat cannot take power within the formal limits of bourgeois democracy, but it can only do so by taking the road of revolution. This has been proved by both theory and

experience. And these bulwarks of workers democracy within the bourgeois state are absolutely essential for taking the revolutionary road.' [21]

The Assembly in Edinburgh will of course be a representative body of bourgeois power, complete with a separation between legislative and executive, and the built in divorce between the masses and effective political power. Even without Westminster's vetoes it is no more likely to organise the working class in an active and effective control of society than Westminster has been. Any illusions on that score are precisely what Lenin called 'prejudices'. But the question will be posed: how is it possible to both 'utilise' and 'fight' this new Assembly and the considerable enthusiasm the working population have in it?

The new Assembly on Calton Hill is more than a mini-Westminster, or a maxi-sized City Chambers. It appears to the mass of the population as a radical step away from the decay of Westminster or the corruption of Glasgow's City Council. As long as the mass of the population remain committed to bourgeois democracy, it is inevitable that their demands for change will be articulated through the forum of the Assembly.

Every vulgar democrat will be fighting tooth and nail to ensure that the masses relate to the Assembly through the passivity and atomisation of the ballot. **Socialists have exactly the opposite aim.** Our aim is to encourage and promote the masses to relate to the Assembly, using their own self-organisation, their own collective weight, their political organisations, and through this to encourage the maximum distrust in practice of constitutionalism and electoralism.

Proletarian democracy cannot be proclaimed or artificially created. Its shell, its 'nucleus' (to use Trotsky's words) exist today inside bourgeois democracy, but extending and developing these 'nuclei' can only be the work of the masses themselves, learning from their own experience of the

necessary conflict between the two different forms of political rule. Normally bourgeois society operates to ensure that this dies not happen. Either working class democracy is shunted into the form of ‘industrial disputes’, or is both politically and physically paralysed by the higher law of the land. The setting up of the Assembly provides an opportunity to break that practice.

In supporting the setting up of an Assembly, it is possible to urge that the constitutional legalism of Westminster’s votes should be swept aside and legislation which will introduce punitive taxation on private capital in Scotland. It will be possible to demand that the Assembly’s executive sabotage the spending cuts or wages policy of Westminster, and that workers should be brought on to the streets, as they did during the UCS struggle, to defend that policy.

The cornerstone of this fight will be a consistent struggle within the labour movement for an Assembly which will assume the powers to implement a socialist programme. At all times this will mean throwing the active strength of organised working people trade unions, tenants committees, local action committees or political parties against the restrictions and legal boundaries of the Assembly and the conservatism of the reformists who sit there, demanding that they base themselves on this active strength.

It is an inability to understand this relation between proletarian and bourgeois democracy which has caused much of the crisis of the European extreme left. Confronted with the dynamism and resilience of bourgeois democracy, organisation like Lotta Continua or Avanguardia Operaia in Italy vacillate between the ultra-leftism of ‘sovietism’ and opportunism of tail-ending class collaboration.

NEW SECTION?

THE REBIRTH of nationalist movements in Britain and elsewhere in Europe is explained away by the social democratic and a large part of the Marxist left solely by reference to the localised economic deprivation produced by the uneven nature of capitalist development. [22] This analysis of the rebirth of national movements, however, leads to directly political conclusions.

If the problem is an essentially economic one, then the 'solution' to the new forces throw up in Scotland, almost a laboratory-pure specimen of regional decline, can be found purely at the level of economic demands and palliatives. In the peculiar vocabulary of most of the British left, long accustomed by traditions of syndicalism to analysing and acting upon only the most direct questions connected with factory process, 'economic' questions equal 'class' questions. [23]

It is this identification of 'class questions' and 'economic questions' which shoves parts of the extreme left into a strange alliance with the Tribune group, whose members make up the bulk of the 70-odd Labour MPs opposed to devolution. But the 'anti-nationalism' of the Tribunites is of a remarkably phoney kind, with anti-devolutionists like Eric Heffer or Neil Kinnock screaming for import controls to defend 'British' industry against the foreigners. Opposition to an elected Assembly in Scotland is only the logic of their overall political positions, that of some distant socialist society achieved with the success and Parliamentary legislation. It is this Parliamentarism and electoralism which forces them onto their knees to worship at the shrine of the Palace of Westminster.

Sovereignty of the Mother of Parliaments forms the very core

of their political philosophy and anything which appears to weaken it, including an elected Assembly in Edinburgh, will provoke the most vehement opposition. Compared to defence of the rights of Westminster, the new problems throw up by the national question in Scotland are just as irrelevant to the Tribune group as they are to the economism of the far left. [24]

This economism combined with ultra-leftism characteristic of organisations such as Lotta Continua is revealed in the position of the Socialist Workers Party, previously the International Socialists. In a recent pamphlet on Scotland [25] they explain correctly the futility of the Assembly as a vehicle for socialism. However, they argue as an alternative that: '… The kind of independence and power we need is that which links together control over our day to day lives through workers councils with international control over production for human needs.' Unfortunately such workers councils do not exist yet. So in the meantime …. 'this means developing the Rank and File Movement.'

So, counterposed to the Assembly, the first Parliament in Scotland for over two hundred years, supported by the vast majority of the Scottish working people, we are given the Rank and File Movement. This is surely absurd posturing of the most infantile kind, which can, and does, result in political paralysis. In a pamphlet of over 7,000 words on Scotland, the comrades of the SWP even leave us guessing on the relevant question of whether they would vote against the setting up of an Assembly in any referendum! The real world of bourgeois democracy which the workers of Scotland live in, complete with elections, referenda, and directly elected Assemblies is conjured away by the magic of the Rank and File Movement.

But the SWP are not even consistent, for they do not answer what form these 'international workers councils' would take. We all have learned from the experience of Stalinism in the Ukraine or among the Tartars that the principle of self-

determination would be integral to any new international workers democracy constructed on the ruins of capitalism. Inside the framework of economic planning we would welcome the greatest possible decentralisation of decision making, as the very backbone of proletarian rule.

Lenin's maxim still stands: socialism will bring the end of all national partitions but at the same time it will increase and develop the differentiation of humanity. What place would an elected (soviet) Assembly have inside the context of some international workers councils? Presumably the SWP would maintain their opposition, but the total abstractness and sloganising of their notion of socialism leaves you none the wiser.

The Danger of Accommodation to Nationalisms

IN THE MIDST of so much confusion on the far left, one socialist stands out as an exception in stressing the national question. Despite our deep and probably growing disagreements with Tom Nairn, it must be acknowledged that his writing have focussed attention on questions long ignored by the workers movement. However, his analysis of Scotland's political and social life is overshadowed by the confused and occasionally reactionary conclusions he draws from them. [26]

Today Nairn is the foremost defender of independence for Scotland among the Scottish left. To defend this position he launches into a critique of the basis of the socialist movement. In the past, he claims, 'socialists have pinned too much faith on the rationality of working class struggle'. Therefore, 'today it is inadmissable to oppose such tendencies (nationalism in general, Scottish nationalism in particular)

in the name of abstract internationalism, a universal socialist or class struggle that exists only in aspiration'. [27]

Thus Nairn constructs the same counterposition between the 'class struggle' and the national question as the SWP – borrowing the economist division between the two from the extreme left that he is often pouring scorn upon. Apparently for Nairn, 'such tendencies' as the general strikes in Pamplona or the social convulsions shaking Catalonia have nothing to do with the 'class struggle'. [28]

But it is his scepticism towards not only Marxism, but more importantly towards what he calls 'the rationality' of working class struggle, which gives him the biggest problems, for it forces him into a notion of socialism in which the self-organisation of the masses has no visible role to play. Discussing the problems of socialism operating inside an independent Scotland, he explains that our biggest problem '… (is not) concerned with the real or imaginary inner potential of a self-governing Scotland, but its external relations.' He goes on to explain that he means by this '… the election of a European Parliament based on universal suffrage … not the Europe of liberalism or commerce, but a Europe of peoples and regions'. [29]

In this scenario the struggle for socialism is somehow reduced to a deft manipulation of national boundaries and of state structures, either in the form of the 'external relations' of Scotland and/or the transformation of the EEC into 'real' European unity. But his rosy view of Europe is utopian, for Nairn's Europe of peoples collapses in the face of growing inter-capitalist competition brought on by economic slump.

His Europe of regions is heading directly for an open and prolonged crisis of government and state rule, above all in France, Spain and Italy. The possibility of a peaceful community of small nationalities only makes sense if the real

world of Europe, a world of naked and growing class conflicts (at the level of the economy and political life), is ignored.

Nairn does more than ignore them, for instead of the class struggle as the motor force of history, his view is that the uneven development of capitalism and the nationalist movement it spawns today constitute the 'dominant contradiction' of world society. The development, in thought and action, of socialism over the last century has been 'premature' struggling against successive waves of nationalism that it had no chance of transcending or defeating. [30]

The conclusions of this theory relate to the very conception of socialism itself. Tom Nairn is forced to reject the basic starting point of socialists since Marx: **That the socialist society we fight for is prefigured in the material reality of capitalism's class structure,** in its formation of the urban proletariat, and in the unfolding of its own contradictions in every sphere of social life. For Nairn, socialism is instead a moral crusade, a sort of left over from the best values of the Enlightenment. To paraphrase another writer, his conception of socialism is analogous to the idealism of nationalism itself. All it omits is the brute, material struggle for class power – strikes, demonstrations, riots, insurrections or civil wars – the stuff of terrestrial revolution.

The entire premise of this article has been that it is possible and imperative to both base yourself on that 'terrestrial revolution' **and** relate to the developing political crisis in Scotland. Decades of defeats and demoralisation among the left, combined with the dead hand of Stalinism, have stunted the development in theory and practice of creative Marxism. Despite the continuing weaknesses of revolutionary Marxism, it is no longer possible to evade the new problems that decaying capitalism throws in our faces. The national question in Scotland is only one of these problems, but every indication points to the fact that it will not be the least important.

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1. Submission to the Crowther Commission on Constitution: 1968-71
2. The Crisis, **Tony Cliff** (1975)
3. **‘United Secretariat These on Britain,** International, **Vol. 3, No.1 [Spring 1976]. However, the perspectives document of the IMG adopted that year included a substantial section on the crisis in Scotland [see** International, **Vol. 3, No. 2].**
4. **An excellent short review of many of these positions is contained in Michael Lowy’s article in** New Left Review 96.
5. **The exception was obviously the peasants of the Highland clan system. But the Clearances which destroyed their mode of production were organised by Scottish chiefs, and applauded by the Scottish Lowland gentry and bourgeoisie.**
6. **All figures for the Scottish economy are taken from** Scotland – the New Future **by G. Murray [1973],** Structure and Growth of the Scottish Economy **by Johnston/Buxton and Mair [1971] or from various** Scottish Economic Bulletins**. As the figures are well-known, no detailed references are necessary.**
7. **The body was actually formed in 1948, but only developed into a real force in the 1960s.**
8. **Fourth Forum [1974], Scottish Council. Published in** Scotland’s Goal.
9. **See ‘Glasgow: Area of Need’ by Vincent Gable in** The Red Papers **[1975].** The Red Papers **brought together a mass of previously unpublished material on Scottish life. They remain essential reading for anyone interested in**

Scotland.

10. Political Economy of North Sea Oil **by MacKay an MacKay [1975].**
11. **65 per cent of investment was still in North America, despite this turn to oil. See** Investors Chronicle, **October 1975.**
12. **See for instance** Investors Chronicle **quoted above. Also see Scott and Hughes in** The Red Papers **on 'Finance Capital'.**
13. The Scotsman, **11.1.77. Also it is worth noting that the Trustee Savings Banks in Scotland are now publicly opposed to the SNP's financial schemes.**
14. **The same motivation lies behind the recent support for the Government's Bill from the three ex-leaders of the Tory Party.**
15. **See Scottish** Nationalism **by H.J. Hanham [1969] for the origins and development of the SNP.**
16. **For the clearest expression of this view see** Calgacus No.1. **But also see tom Nairn's article in** The Red Papers, **especially pages 22-24.**
17. **Unfortunately there is no space here to assess John Maclean's position of fighting for a Scottish Workers Republic after 1919. Any definitive analysis of Scottish politics will have to take account of both the extraordinary strengths of Maclean as a revolutionary and the weakness of some of his political views, above all on Scotland.**
18. Left Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder. Selected Works, **Vol 3, page 369.**
19. Writings of Leon Trotsky **[1934-35]**
20. Ibid, **page 31**
21. **'Germany – What Next', Trotsky** [International Socialism, **38/39].**
22. **Even Ernest Mandel in his** Capitalism and Regional Disparities **[1969] often underestimates the political problems behind the rebirth of nationalist movements in Western Europe.**

23. Workers Action **[see for instance 8 December 1976 issue] seem to think that all these problems are 'Scottish particularisms', demonstrating a paradoxical form of parochialism faced with genuine international developments.**
24. **While they feel unable to join the 'lefts', the Communist Party are also compelled to make obeisance. It was the CP through the STUC General Council who came up with the proposal that the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council should have final veto powers over the Assembly.**
25. Nationalism or Socialism: the SNP and SLP Exposed, **by Alan Armstrong [1976]**
26. **Tom Nairn's position on the expulsions of the left from Sillars' SLP was to declare the whole affair 'irrelevant'. However, he chose to do so in the magazine** Question **whose editorial line was to urge Callaghan to learn from Sillars and get rid of his own left wing!**
27. The Red Papers, **page 49**
28. **He makes the same counterposition in** Question, **19 November 1976.**
29. The Red Papers, **pages 50-51. The passage on the EEC is quoted approvingly from a Breton socialist.**
30. New Left Review 94, **page 21.**