

EDITORIAL

THREE NATIONS ONE ENEMY

The results of the 'devolution' referendum in Scotland 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 40% of the electorate in favour before it could agree to devolution.

If the law required parliamentary candidates to get such a large percentage of their constituents' votes before they could become MPs, then the House of Commons would be three-quarters empty!

Because Labour won't deliver the goods on devolution, the Scottish Nationalists joined 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 capitalist 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, largely because a lot of their strength was drawn from Celtic areas, and they had to pay some attention to Welsh and Scottish demands to keep their support.

Labour was only 'converted' to devolution as a result of the last two general elections. 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 National Party (SNP) had won mainly Tory seats in the 1974 general elections, but where most of the seats 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 East, where Welsh national 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 Assemblies to both nations, but proposed to give the Scottish one greater powers than the Welsh one.

Meanwhile, of course, in both cases, real parliamentary power would remain at Westminster, while the British capitalist class would hold state power over all three nations. It was therefore

small wonder that many nationalist-minded people in 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 devolution referendum, including Michael Foot.

Foot, as "Minister for Unemployment", was responsible for the closing down of a steel works in his constituency which put 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.

However, six other Labour MPs in the industrial heartlands of Wales (where the Labour Party still has a lot more influence than in most 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 these opponents 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 and Scotland as voters, and nothing more.

National oppression in Wales and Scotland

If Wales and Scotland had worked assemblies as a result of the referendum, the working people of the two nations would have found out very quickly that it made very little difference to them, and this would have been the best positive outcome of the whole affair. The 'national question' in Britain would not have 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 are three nations (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 questions of Wales and Scotland, and should be resolved by complete British withdrawal and the formation of a genuinely independent 32-county Irish state.)

Suppression of Welsh and Scottish ways of life

In Wales and Scotland the British ruling class actively tried for centuries to stamp out Welsh and Scottish culture, 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 not allowed to use their own language in law courts from Tudor times right into this century. In 1870, before compulsory education (in English, of course) was introduced, 80% of the population of Wales, and most of the population of the Scottish Highlands and Western Isles spoke Gaelic. For years children who spoke their own language in school were punished and treated like idiots.

Things are changing now, thanks to the resistance put up by Welsh and Gaelic speakers, but English education, radio, TV, and the necessity of speaking English in order to 'get on in the world' have taken their toll, and today only just over a fifth of the population of Wales speak Welsh, while 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 republic of Britain

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

In the short term, the immediate demands in the GWM's programme concerning Wales and Scotland should be fought for. In the long term, the GWM believes that the national question in Wales and Scotland can only be solved by the establishment of a socialist, federal republic of Britain, in which England, Wales and Scotland are sister republics with control of their own economic development, education, legal practices, militia and cultural life.

Such a federal union of the three nations 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 in their commitment to socialist development) of the peoples of England, Scotland and Wales.

Because the federal republic will be socialist, and the working class will hold state power in it, its government will be able to put into effect policies which serve the working class and 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 economy which produces to satisfy people's needs, not for profit.

The republic will need to provide ample funds for the publication of a wealth of literature in Welsh and Gaelic. It will also need to encourage those English-speakers who live in Scotland and Wales to learn the native languages of those countries (by persuasion, not by law or any form of compulsion) so that the unity of the working people in these lands will be strengthened, not weakened.

For a multi-national communist party

Although the national question in Britain is important, it is not the central question facing 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, British imperialism, in the same stage of revolution, the socialist stage. 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 convincing English working 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 should use that 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 immediate demands put forward on the subject of the national question in the programme of the GWM:-

- * The right of self-determination for the peoples of Wales and Scotland, up to and including secession.
- * Equal status with English for Welsh and Gaelic in Wales and Scotland respectively, and the vigorous promotion and safeguarding of the cultures of all nations and nationalities under the British state.
