IS THERE A SCOTTISH SOLUTION?

The working class and the assembly debate

Mick Hume and Derek Owen

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Preface

The idea for this book was born in the 1987 general election campaign. Anybody who spent those busy weeks arguing for anti-capitalist politics in Scotland continually met the same response, with minor variations. People said that England was a lost cause for socialism, that Scotland was special, and that Scots would have to solve their own problems. The difference between the Scottish and English election results seemed to confirm this view. The idea that Scotland's salvation lies down a different road from the rest of Britain has since gathered strength in the campaign for a Scottish assembly. This is a development in which both of us, from different vantage points, see dangers for the Scottish working class.

One of us, working as a teacher and a trade union activist, grew alarmed at the way in which Labour and trade union leaders presented their assembly campaign as the single solution to every social problem from unemployment to health service cuts. The long and bitter teachers' dispute had been ended by a shabby deal done between Scottish Labour council employers and Scottish trade union officials. It was only the latest episode to suggest that Scots could not afford to entrust their futures to an assembly run by these same bureaucrats.

The other, taking a close interest in Scottish affairs as a left-wing political journalist in London, saw the development of a 'Scotland stands alone' outlook as a potential problem for the whole British working class. The election results had confirmed that Scotland was a vital base of resistance to the Tory government. Yet the assembly campaign threatened to turn Scottish militancy in on itself, and to cut off the fighting Scots from important allies down south.

We got together in Glasgow to write this book in the autumn of 1987. Our aim was to clarify the real issues at stake in Scotland today, and to point out some problems with the assembly campaign approach. But when we began, we found that most of the current arguments about Scotland and the assembly had deep roots in the distant or recent past, from the 1707 Act of Union to the discovery of North Sea oil. To deal with these issues, we had to examine how modern Scotland and its working class have developed. But this is not a history book. Although it spans almost 300 years of Scottish history, its real starting point is the present, and its conclusions point towards the future.

The first chapter looks at the 100-year history of the Scottish devolution debate in British politics. It questions the widespread assumption that supporting an assembly has always been a principle for the labour movement, and suggests instead that the demand for devolution has been alternately used and discarded by the Labour, Liberal and Tory parties for their own purposes.

The second chapter examines the idea that Scotland has long been more progressive than England, and that Scottish workers would do better to concentrate on their own affairs in an assembly. It discusses working class struggles from the revolutionary years of Red Clydeside to the battle to save jobs at Caterpillar, to assess whether they have been helped or hindered by this belief in the unique benefits of 'Scottishness'.

The third chapter confronts the argument that Scotland is a separate nation, by looking at Scotland's history, institutions and traditions from Culloden to the Kirk and the kilt. It questions the idea that Scots are oppressed by the English, and points the finger instead at the British capitalist class.

The final chapter makes a thorough and critical examination of the claims about what an assembly could do today. In outlining the problems with the assembly campaign approach, it suggests an alternative solution for the Scottish working class.

Our book contains some important criticisms of the parties and the policies associated with the assembly campaign. But it was not written as a negative attack on devolution; it is a positive assertion of the case for a working class campaign against the British capitalist system. We hope it will be read and discussed in the same spirit.

Mick Hume
Derek Owen
Glasgow, January 1988

Introduction

In October 1987, Margaret Thatcher climbed on to the platform at the Tory Party conference in Blackpool and reached the pinnacle of her power. That night we were in Heraghty's, a bustling, smoky bar on Glasgow's South Side. When pictures of Thatcher soaking up the applause of the Tory faithful for her third election victory flashed on to the television screen, the Heraghty's regulars gave her a standing ovation of a different sort. They crowded around the screen to boo her off, and saved their cheers for when the landlord changed channels to avoid further unrest on the premises. The episode brought home the bitterness which many ordinary Scots feel towards the Tory government which has swept all before it down south—a feeling well-illustrated in the June 1987 general election.

On 11 June, Scottish electors stepped out of line with much of England and registered a dramatic anti-Tory vote. While the Tories were returned to power with a 102-seat majority, their support in Scotland plunged. The number of Scottish Tory MPs was cut to 10—down by more than half from June 1983. The Labour Party made by far the biggest gains from the Conservative collapse. The 50 Labour MPs returned in Scotland represented the most important anti-Tory block in the new parliament. It is not hard to see why the Scottish working class should have spoken against the government with such a united voice; the only wonder was how the Tories managed to retain almost a quarter of all Scottish votes.

	Seats 1983	Seats 1987
Tories	21	10
Labour	41	50
Alliance	8	9
SNP	2	3

	% of votes 1983	% of votes 1987
Tories	28.4	24.0
Labour	35.1	42.4
Alliance	24.5	19.2
SNP	11.7	14.0

Scotland has been hit hard over the Thatcher years. Traditional industries like engineering, shipbuilding, mining and steel have continued to crumble away. Scotland has lost more than 40 per cent of its manufacturing jobs over the past decade. North Sea oil has not delivered on its promises to most Scots. The new technology sector centred in Silicon Glen has been hyped to the heavens by the Tories, but only Thatcher's friends in the business community have felt the benefit. The vast majority of the new jobs created in Silicon Glen are poorly paid, dangerous drudgery. Almost one in five Scots live below the official poverty line. Despite the attempts to give Scottish cities a facelift, housing conditions in parts of Glasgow are horrific and getting worse. Scottish people have been singled out to start paying the Tory poll tax as early as April 1989.

All of this has helped to create a widespread impression that Scotland is being picked on by a vindictive government which draws its support and strength from elsewhere. It has convinced many Scottish people that they need to pursue a solution of their own, and avoid the unwanted attentions of the unrepresentative regime in Westminster. This idea has found its focus in the demand for a devolved Scottish assembly, to which end the Labour Party published a parliamentary Bill in November 1987.

The cause of the assembly is now supported by all the major opposition parties in Scotland, by some Scottish Tories, and by most groups on the left. The arguments in favour of the assembly are couched in many different terms.

For example, the joint Labour Party/Scottish TUC 'Statement on Devolution' says that 'a devolved assembly will be good for the government of Scotland—and therefore good for the United

Kingdom.' More left-wing supporters of an assembly seem to take an opposite view of the government and unity of the UK. Two Labour Party members on the executive of the Campaign for a Scottish Assembly have announced that, because most Scottish people voted for pro-assembly parties, 'the views of the English majority are irrelevant.' Further left, the Socialist Workers Party has expressed support for devolution because it could mean 'the break-up of the British state'.

Ask what the function of a Scottish assembly would be, and you are likely to get a similarly mixed response. Many activists in the Scottish labour movement are convinced that an assembly would ease the burden on the working class by abolishing the Tory poll tax. Yet the Labour Party's Scottish spokesman, Donald Dewar, has said that the assembly's main function would be to raise Scottish revenues and taxes. And while Labour leaders in local government see an assembly as a device for protecting them against further Tory attacks, Scotland's top Tory councillor supports a Scottish senate as a body to shake up local government, sweeping away 'hundreds' of councillors and 'thousands' of bureaucrats.

Beyond a general feeling that it would be a good idea if Scottish people had more control over their own affairs, there remains a striking lack of clarity among those demanding an assembly. This book aims to cut through the confusion. It is written from an unashamedly working class perspective. Our sole concern has been to work out what is the best way forward for ordinary people in Scotland. In particular, we have set out to assess whether a campaign for an assembly can provide an adequate defence against an aggressive Tory government. It is vital that this matter be cleared up, if the anti-Tory anger of the Scottish people is to become a genuine challenge to the government.

The 1987 election results thrust the Scottish working class into the frontline of the fight for democracy and a decent life. We want to make sure that our movement is using the best weapons at its disposal.

1. The Scottish dimension in British politics

First it was home rule for Scotland, then Scottish devolution, and now it's the Scottish assembly. Under one label or another, the idea of setting up an administration in Edinburgh to run Scottish affairs has been a political football in Britain for more than a century. Every major political party has championed the cause of devolution at times and dropped it at others. Politicians from the right and the left of the parliamentary spectrum have frequently switched sides on the devolution issue, according to their judgement of the state of popular opinion.

The changing positions of some of the key figures in today's assembly debate reflect the shifting political alignments around the devolution issue. In the seventies, Malcolm Rifkind resigned from the Tory Party frontbench because he supported the Labour government's devolution proposals. Now, as secretary of state for Scotland, Rifkind is the widely despised 'governor general' who leads the Tories' rearguard resistance against the assembly campaign. When Rifkind was an enthusiastic assembly supporter 10 years ago, up-and-coming Labour MP Neil Kinnock was leading a public campaign against his own government's plans for devolution. Today, as Labour Party leader, Kinnock has sworn his commitment to the cause of a Scottish assembly.

Why have the major political parties picked up and then dropped the devolution issue again and again over the past century? Let's look more closely at the records of the major parties on the question of home rule for Scotland.

A Liberal ploy

Like many other Labour Party policies, Scottish devolution was originally part of the Liberal programme. Between the 1880s and the First World War, the Liberal Party used the demand for Scottish home rule in a way which has subsequently been followed by other parties.

By 1885 Liberal prime minister William Gladstone had come out in favour of home rule for Ireland and Scotland, and a year later the Liberal Party inspired the formation of the Scottish Home Rule Association. Gladstone's Liberals were then the dominant party in Scotland, and an important part of the British establishment. The Liberal Party favoured Scottish home rule as an administrative convenience for the British state.

The Liberals argued that a Scottish assembly would reduce the burden on London by dealing with local affairs from Edinburgh. This would ease the congestion in the house of commons, and allow Westminster to concentrate on running the wider Empire more efficiently. The Liberals hoped that the demand for devolution would win votes among the Scottish middle classes. They also hoped that the offer of home rule would help to contain the revolt of the impoverished crofters of the Highlands.

The crofters had suffered terribly at the hands of their aristocratic landlords, who were mostly Scottish, but lived in the home counties around London. In the 1880s the crofters launched land-raids and rent strikes against their local tyrants, often involving fierce fighting with the police. They also stood independent parliamentary candidates whose success became a threat to the established parties. Gladstone's party sought to coax the angry crofters away from militant tactics and to persuade them to vote Liberal. The Liberals promised the Highlanders land reform, together with two constitutional measures which the crofters believed could protect them from the absentee landlords—a curb on the power of the hated house of lords, and home rule for Scotland.

Gladstone's policy succeeded in swinging the crofters back behind the Liberal Party by the 1906 general election, in which the Liberals won a landslide victory. The Liberal government subsequently introduced a series of land reforms and put the house of lords in its place after the constitutional crisis caused by its refusal to pass Lloyd George's budget in 1910-11. But the Liberals failed to deliver home rule for Scotland.

Up to the First World War the Liberals made periodic gestures of

support for a limited form of Scottish home rule. In 1894 the house of commons passed its first resolution on the subject, which stated: 'That it is desirable, while retaining intact the power and supremacy of the Imperial Parliament, to establish a legislature in Scotland for dealing with purely Scottish affairs' (JD Mackie, *A History of Scotland*, 1973). Similar motions were passed in 1895, 1912 and 1919, and devolution Bills reached the floor of the commons in 1908, 1911, 1912 and 1919. But each time, home rule was shelved as Westminster turned its attention to more serious problems facing the Empire: the Boer War, the First World War and, most often, unrest in Ireland.

The Liberal establishment regarded the constitutional reform of the British state as 'desirable' and it recognised that Scottish home rule was popular at the polls in the Highlands. Yet devolution was never a pressing political issue. The crofters' real concern was always land, not the constitution. Their demands could be accommodated without interfering with the system of government. The Scottish Home Rule Association, meanwhile, insisted that its demand for devolution did not imply any desire to undermine the stability of the British state. The key point that was always emphasised in the home rule debates in parliament was the commitment to protect 'the power and supremacy of the Imperial Parliament'. The loyal and generally low-key character of the Scottish home rule lobby meant that the ruling class could afford to ignore it at times of crisis.

The home rule association complained that the way the government responded more urgently to the demands of violent Irish rebels than to the pleas of respectable Scottish parliamentarians 'appears to set a premium upon disorder' (K Webb, *The Growth of Nationalism in Scotland*, 1977). By their own admission, the demand for Scottish devolution did not threaten to create disorder in the Empire. The simmering revolt against the Crown in Ireland, however, which exploded into an armed rising at Easter 1916 and open warfare soon afterwards, certainly did. The difference in political importance of the two issues for the British establishment was reflected in the domination of parliamentary debate by Irish issues, while Scotland received little attention. Similarly, parliament could not spend time discussing the administration of local affairs in Scotland during the First World War, when Britain's capacity to administer its imperial possessions around the world was under threat.

Many Scottish supporters of home rule shared the priorities of the British establishment. They accepted that the resolution of the debate about Scotland's place within the British state would have to wait until that state had been secured against its rivals from overseas.

Most home rulers lined up with the Tories to condemn the Easter Rising in Ireland, and many gave their support to British imperialism in the First World War. On the outbreak of war in 1914 one group of staunch home rulers, organised around the journal *Thistle*, summed up the mood among those who sought devolution under the authority of the 'Imperial Parliament' at Westminster:

> 'We of Scotland...freely admit and duly acknowledge that in this great crisis we must place our national wrongs to a great extent in the background, and allow our Scottish patriotism to be submerged, to a large extent at least, in that of the wider current of British patriotism.' (J Hunter, 'The Gaelic Connection: The Highlands, Ireland and Nationalism 1873-1922', in *Scottish History Review*, Vol 54, 1975)

Supporters of home rule in the Labour Party took a similar position. George Barnes, a Glasgow MP and a leading member of the early Labour Party, joined the war cabinet. Whether they were in Whitehall or the west of Scotland, supporters of the state never allowed their desire for Scottish devolution to stop them swimming with 'the wider current of British patriotism'.

From the 1880s, the Liberals used the home rule issue to win Scottish votes and compensate for their decline in England. They demanded devolution to court electoral support, and to encourage disaffected Scots to put their faith in the parliamentary process rather than direct action. But the Liberals never took Scottish home rule so seriously as to let it interfere with their drive to defend the capitalist order in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. When the Liberals faded from prominence after the First World War, the other parties took up this approach of manipulating Scottish home rule to serve their needs in wider British politics.

Labour and land

We now turn to survey the Labour Party's attitude to Scottish home rule. Labour has long been the party most prominently associated with the demand for devolution. Today, Labour leaders often assert that they have consistently supported the call for a Scottish assembly ever since the party was founded in 1900. The record, however, suggests that Labour has followed a less consistent and more cynical course.

In the late nineteenth century the early Scottish socialists were prominent in the small band of devolution campaigners. The socialists' sympathy with the call for home rule reflected their complicated relationship with the powerful Scottish Liberals. Scottish left wingers were heavily influenced by the Nonconformist

religious traditions of radical Liberalism. They supported the disestablishment of the Church, prohibition of alcohol, and 'home rule all round' within the 'UK'. When the Liberals formed the Scottish Home Rule Association in 1886, it was staffed by radicals who were later to become prominent figures in the Scottish labour movement. Ramsay MacDonald, later the first Labour prime minister, was secretary of the Scottish home rulers' London branch-in-exile. The founding father of Scottish Labourism, Keir Hardie, was a vice-president of the home rule association, as was Robert Smillie, the Scottish miners' leader.

The Scottish socialists took up Liberal ideas, but became increasingly disenchanted with the conduct of the Liberal Party leadership. In 1888, Hardie formed the Scottish Labour Party and stood independently for parliament. He won support from radicals in the Scottish Home Rule Association, and groups of lowland supporters of the crofters soon affiliated to his party. The first seven of the 18 points in its programme concerned constitutional matters—including the Liberal policy of home rule under the ultimate authority of the 'Imperial Parliament' at Westminster.

The radicals' concern with home rule partly reflected their lack of influence in the Scottish working class, which remained loyal to the Liberals. Unable to make much headway in working class areas, Hardie and his followers were encouraged by the success of crofters' candidates in Highland elections during the 1880s. They hoped that, by emphasising demands for land reform and home rule, they could appeal to those who sympathised with the crofters' cause and build a base of support. The socialists shared this ambition with various middle class Gaelic cultural enthusiasts in the lowlands. Working class Scots showed little active interest in devolution. The only significant working class support for home rule came from areas like Aberdeen, where the established skilled workers feared that if the crofters were kicked off the land they could form a pool of cheap labour and undermine the skilled men's status. The close similarity between the socialists' proposals and those of the Liberals, however, ensured that they made little progress at the polls.

The emergence of large-scale trade unions at the end of the nineteenth century changed the focus of left-wing activity. Instead of attempting to link up with marginal Scottish forces such as the crofters or Gaelic revivalists, the socialists now sought to establish an all-British party of labour. The Independent Labour Party was formed in 1893, and affiliated, together with the unions, to the Labour Party at the turn of the century. The demand for Scottish

home rule rapidly faded from prominence. Indeed, its validity was hotly disputed by some in the emerging labour movement, who wanted all energies devoted to social issues which were of more immediate concern to the working class.

In the 1900s, the labour movement came to regard the call for home rule as a mere electoral ploy in areas like the Highlands, where the ILP had little influence. In 1909 Tom Johnston, the editor of the Scottish ILP paper *Forward,* tried to set up a new Highland Land League, which would be 'absolutely free from the coat-tails of the Liberal Party' (Hunter, 'The Gaelic Connection'). His scheme came to nothing: the crofters remained firm supporters of either the Liberals or the Tories. Figures like Johnston continued to carry home rule around as part of the ideological baggage packed for them by the old Liberals.

The Labour leaders retained their links with lowland Gaelic enthusiasts, largely for pragmatic reasons. For example, *Forward* had one patron, Roland Muirhead, who was a wealthy home ruler. A friend of Johnston's remarked that he always knew 'when the *Forward* was in exceptionally deep water; it would then come out with a specially strong home rule issue: that would be preparatory to touching Mr Muirhead for a loan' (M Keating and D Bleiman, *Labour and Scottish Nationalism,* 1979). Such was the low status of devolution in the Scottish labour movement in the years before the First World War. Yet it was soon to return to prominence, as the leaders of the Scottish TUC (STUC), the ILP and the Labour Party looked for ways to increase their own influence in British political life.

A short cut to socialism?

In 1914, the STUC conference passed its first motion in support of home rule. Similar motions were rubber-stamped by the STUC every year until 1923. There were various factors involved in the trade union movement's new interest in devolution around the First World War. One, which we shall examine in the next chapter, was the role of the British government and of London-based trade union executives in defeating the militant struggles of 'Red Clydeside'. But this was more a concern of the rank and file than of Scottish union officials. For its part, the leadership of the STUC had a more selfish motive in lobbying for a devolved administration. The top union bureaucrats wanted a taste of the new influence being enjoyed by their TUC counterparts south of the border.

The STUC had long been annoyed at being treated as a poor relation of the British TUC. The Scottish body was set up after the British TUC voted to exclude local trades councils in 1895, as a device to curb the influence of the left. This was a blow to the Scottish movement, which relied heavily on the left-wing trades councils from Scotland's few industrial areas. The STUC was formed in a spirit of socialist activism and wounded parochialism. But, while the government began to consult the British TUC and to include its members on state commissions, it refused to grant official recognition to the top Scottish union officials. By their 1898 conference, Scottish trade unionists were already passing motions of protest against the authorities' dismissive attitude. 'The congress', announced one delegate, 'would be shorn of its usefulness if a cabinet minister were allowed to refuse to hear them' (Keating and Bleiman, *Labour and Scottish Nationalism*). For the early Scottish trade union leaders, the primary 'usefulness' of trade union organisation was not as a means of rallying resistance against a capitalist government, but as a device for achieving consultation. It was in this spirit that the STUC took up the call for devolution after 1914.

A wave of industrial militancy shook British capitalism between 1910 and 1914. The explosion of strike action raised the status of the trade union movement, and prompted the frightened authorities to speed up the process of integrating trade union officials into the machinery of government. During the First World War, union chiefs were given more prestigious roles in running the war machine at home. But while British TUC bureaucrats were mixing with Tory and Liberal coalition ministers and discussing important affairs of imperial statesmanship, Scottish union officials largely remained out in the cold. They became strong supporters of home rule because it appeared to offer Scottish union bureaucrats a backdoor route into the corridors of power.

To the Scottish union leaders it appeared that an Edinburgh assembly would treat them as partners in running Scottish affairs, and grant them privileged access to government. When a delegation from the STUC met the prime minister, Lloyd George, in 1918, the request for home rule was top of the agenda. The union leaders could also have assured Lloyd George that, like the home rulers in his own Liberal Party, they had no wish to challenge the authority of the imperial British state. Impressed by the models of Canada, Australia and South Africa, the STUC had already suggested that Scotland should become a Dominion of the Empire.

The Labour Party established a distinct Scottish department, the

Scottish Advisory Council, in 1915. This body passed resolutions in favour of home rule every year until 1923. At first, these amounted to little more than sentimental gestures in honour of the nineteenth-century socialists. Labour leaders like Ramsay MacDonald, James Maxton and John Wheatley had been schooled in the traditions of radical Scottish Liberalism and carried the home rule policy around in their back pockets throughout their careers. But events in Scotland soon gave the demand for devolution a new importance. As Labour's support in Scotland grew around the end of the First World War, the leaders of the movement came to see devolution as a short cut to the first Labour government—even if it was only a local Labour administration for Scottish affairs.

The First World War and, after 1917, the Russian Revolution, stimulated a new mood of militancy in Britain, most notably on Clydeside (see chapter two). The parliamentary socialists of the official labour movement struggled to channel the anger and energy which workers displayed on the streets and picket lines into constitutional action to return a Labour government. In Scotland, the ILP was the mainstay of the Labour Party's organisation. It waged a fierce struggle against militant trade unionists, who were influenced by the syndicalist doctrine that the way to working class power lay through strikes rather than the ballot box.

Early in 1918 John Wheatley put Scottish Labour's case in a series of articles in *Forward*. He argued that revolution was 'the very wildest dream' and insisted that 'the people of this country may have socialism when they consider it worth their vote' (cited in G Brown, *Maxton*, 1986). Wheatley's 'wildest dream' had already become reality in revolutionary Russia. But the idea of the workers by-passing parliament and seizing power was a nightmare for the leaders of the Labour Party. They used the demand for devolution to help head off revolution.

The demand for home rule gave an added edge to Scottish Labour's case for prioritising constitutional action. The promise of a devolved administration made a Labour government seem a more attractive and immediate prospect to Scottish people. Labour promoted the home rule theme with vigour from 1918, when sections of the Scottish working class appeared to be moving left faster than most English workers. Although the results of the 1918 general election were disappointing for Labour, the advance in Scotland was more significant than in England. Scottish Labour leaders now argued that Scotland could achieve socialism more rapidly if it had its own assembly, free from the restraints imposed by the

backward English.

The Labour leaders encouraged the view that the Tories and Liberals were not just the defenders of British capitalism, but were also an unrepresentative *English* government. Labour left wingers were often the most outspoken in linking capitalist exploitation with English interference. James Maxton told his Scottish audience after his election as a Labour MP that he wanted 'to make English-ridden, capitalist-ridden, landowner-ridden Scotland into the Scottish socialist commonwealth' (Brown, *Maxton*). The fact that most of the capitalists and landowners who lorded it over his listeners were themselves Scottish seemed to slip his memory. Such arguments had the effect of directing workers' desire for socialism into a nationalist campaign for a Scottish assembly.

Once Labour had begun to promote home rule as a short cut to socialism, it re-opened relations with Gaelic revivalist groups. This move was encouraged by the renewed conflict over land in the Highlands in 1918 and 1919, as demobbed soldiers returned to the poverty of the crofting areas and began a new wave of land seizures. In the November 1918 general election, the Labour Party and yet another revived Highland Land League agreed to stand joint candidates in crofting constituencies. Labour and the Gaelic enthusiasts issued a joint statement, calling on the Scottish people to support candidates 'pledged to the re-establishment of a Scottish home rule parliament, and the ownership and control of the land of Scotland by the Scottish state'.

The 1918 joint statement combined socialist and nationalist themes. It asserted what was to become a familiar argument about the difference between Scotland and England: 'The English people show a marked disposition to conservatism, while the Scottish people, on the other hand, are undoubtedly progressive in political thought and action.' It also included a traditional complaint of middle class nationalists, about the effect of the Union on 'Celtic culture and Scottish ideals', and the way in which, it claimed, an alien English culture had been 'thrust upon our country' (Hunter, 'The Gaelic Connection'). Five years later, leading Scottish nationalists like Hugh MacDiarmid were to use the same arguments to call for the creation of a fascist Scotland with a 'national culture', along the lines pioneered by Mussolini in Italy. But in 1918, middle class nationalists were happy to support the Labour Party's attempts to use Scottish nationalism for its own ends.

Although the Scottish Labour leadership called for devolution, it never produced any detailed plans about what such an assembly

would do for Scottish workers. Its concern was not with policy, but with getting into power in a devolved local administration. In 1919, the Scottish Labour executive presented a draft parliamentary home rule Bill to its annual conference. This contained nine lengthy clauses setting out the methods by which a Scottish assembly would be elected. By contrast, the functions which the asssembly would carry out were passed over in a single clause. Labour's home rule proposals confirmed that the Labour leadership had no intention of using a Scottish assembly to challenge the British ruling class. It stated, in terms which could have been borrowed from earlier Liberal plans, that the proposed assembly would bow to Westminster on matters concerning the 'Army, Navy, Civil, Diplomatic, Colonial and other Imperial services'.

The narrow electoral ambitions behind the Labour Party's sudden enthusiasm for devolution were revealed in its attitude to the Scottish Home Rule Association, which was re-formed in 1918. Labour's Scottish council told its affiliates to keep the SHRA at arm's length, because the party wanted devolution to be its exclusive stepping stone to office. Despite this, ILP activists maintained links with the home rulers into the twenties.

In the 1922 general election, the Labour Party finally arrived as a major force in British parliamentary politics. The breakthrough was most marked in Scotland, where Labour secured proportionately twice as many seats as in England or Wales. Labour's Scottish contingent in the house of commons leapt from six MPs to 29. The new Labour MPs included the ILP Clydesiders—Wheatley, Maxton and Davie Kirkwood among them—the most left-wing Labour representatives ever to sit in the house. On his arrival in London to take his seat, Wheatley told reporters gathered at Euston station that the desire for Scottish devolution had been the big factor in Labour's success. 'There is no subject', he assured them, 'which arouses such enthusiasm there as the subject of Scottish home rule' (Brown, *Maxton*). In fact Wheatley overestimated the importance of devolution and underestimated the consequences of the defeat of the post-war upsurge of trade union militancy.

Labour's success owed much to the industrial setbacks suffered by the working class in Scotland, England and Wales between 1918 and 1921. The experience of defeat in the workplace convinced many that militancy could not win. They turned to express their bitterness against the British ruling class through a vote for Labour. The home rule agitation had, however, played a part in convincing Scottish workers that the constitutional road was open to them. Labour's

1922 success was a high-point for the movement's home rule campaign. It is ironic that it should also have marked the end for devolution as a priority issue in the Labour Party for the next 50 years.

The British connection

Labour had latched on to home rule to boost its electoral fortunes in Scotland, and to provide a possible opening for a local Labour government. Now that it had made the breakthrough at the centre of British politics, however, the Labour leadership lost interest in devolution. The 1922 elections may have shown support for devolution. But they also, for the first time, raised the possibility of Labour winning a future British election and taking government office. With the prospect of running British capitalism beckoning, Labour was unwilling to be sidetracked into demanding a devolved assembly for Scottish affairs. The short cut no longer seemed necessary.

When the first Labour government took office in 1924, the party's loss of interest in devolution soon became apparent. Although MacDonald was prime minister, and there were five Scots in the cabinet, the government did no more than suggest a commission of inquiry into the possibility of an assembly. When a Labour MP, Buchanan, put forward his own home rule Bill, the Tories used up all the time available. Buchanan's Bill was talked out, and the Clydesiders protested loudly in the commons. The Labour government fell within a year without making any progress towards Scottish devolution.

When Labour activists on both sides of the border got down to discussing how to win again it was clear that Scottish home rule would play no part in their plans. Having tasted power in London once, no section of the Labour Party had much enthusiasm for discussing proposals for devolving power to Edinburgh. There was no mention of home rule at the 1925 Scottish Labour conference, and the Scottish TUC stopped passing devolution motions.

When a second devolution Bill was raised in the Tory-dominated commons in 1928, by Liberal-turned-Labour MP the Reverend James Barr, it fared even worse than the first. One provision in Barr's Bill, drafted by the home rule association, proposed withdrawing Scottish MPs from Westminster once an assembly was established. The Bill effectively put the demand for Scottish home rule before Labour's British election prospects. This clause ensured that it lost the support of previously sympathetic Scottish MPs and the Scottish

trade union leaders, all of whom now had their sights firmly set on managing the British state.

MacDonald's second minority Labour government, elected in 1929, made no moves towards devolution. After its ignominious collapse and MacDonald's defection to form a coalition with the Tories in 1931, the Labour Party was decimated at the polls. In Scotland it was reduced to a rump of seven seats. The ILP split from the main party the following year. Even then, when Labour picked up the pieces, its aim was to work out a system of British state planning which could counter the capitalist slump. Labour expressed support for special economic aid for Scotland in the thirties, as part of its overall British plan. Political devolution, however, was not even discussed at Scottish Labour conferences between 1930 and 1937.

Traditional Scottish radicals like Barr and Kirkwood carried a flickering torch for home rule through the twenties and beyond, but the issue offered little advantage to the Labour leadership. The Scottish working class lost interest in devolution, as it faced the employers' offensive in the twenties and economic recession from the early thirties. Now the emphasis was on defensive struggles on an all-British scale, of which the 1926 General Strike was the classic example, rather than militant struggles on the Clydeside model. Take the case of the Scottish miners. Their support for devolution faded when the 1921 British miners' strike brought home the need to unite with English and Welsh miners to fight a common battle against employers who were backed by the British state. By the time of the 1926 mining dispute, the Scottish mine*owners* were arguing for home rule, as a device to divide the union and allow them to cut Scottish miners' wages in isolation.

The small Scottish unions suffered badly from rising unemployment, and the labour movement became more concentrated in big unions organising across Britain. By 1925, two out of every three Scottish trade unionists were members of all-British unions. The STUC developed closer links with its British parent. It threw out a motion proposing Dominion status for Scotland at its 1931 conference, after even the mover had been forced meekly to admit that 'no one suggested it would make any difference to the workers' lives' (Keating and Bleiman, *Labour and Scottish Nationalism*). The old Labour/nationalist coalition fragmented under this pressure and in 1929 the Scottish Home Rule Association dissolved itself. In the same period the Scottish National Party (SNP) was formed with support from Tory dissidents. Home rule became the preserve of middle class intellectuals inspired by the Gaelic literary revival of Hugh

MacDiarmid and his elitist clique.

'I can so I won't'

In 1945 the A-bomb ended the Second World War. The election of the first-ever majority Labour government that year had a similar effect on the devolution debate. The Labour Party, under Clement Attlee, at last had the power to create a Scottish assembly. But now that it could grant home rule to Scotland, it no longer had the will to do so. Around the First World War, a weak Labour Party had encouraged devolutionist sentiments as a way of winning support and putting pressure on the British establishment. But by the end of the Second World War in 1945, Labour leaders were His Majesty's ministers, with all the recognition and influence they craved. The Labour Party now regarded devolution as a petty diversion from its grand plans for restructuring British capitalism. Labour ministers became increasingly hostile to those who badgered them about fulfilling the party's past commitments to Scottish home rule.

In the years before 1945 the Labour Party had retreated from offering even rhetorical support for working class struggle, and became committed to 'consensus politics'. Labour sought to bring the government, the employers and the trade unions together with a common commitment to solving the problems of the system through economic planning. When solving those problems required going to war against the rival powers of Germany and Japan in 1939, the Labour Party dutifully supported the slaughter as the home rulers had done in 1914. Tom Johnston, the old ILP home ruler, became secretary of state for Scotland in Winston Churchill's wartime coalition government. He now criticised political home rule as inadequate, and set about building a 'Scottish lobby' of businessmen, statesmen and union leaders to win special economic treatment for Scotland within a centralised British state. Johnston's changed attitude to devolution summed up the new mood in the Labour Party. His moderate ideas on 'regional planning' were to form the basis of Labour policy towards Scotland for the next 30 years.

The SNP won its first parliamentary seats in wartime by-elections. But this was largely because the major parties had agreed not to stand against each other for the duration of the coalition government. The Scottish nationalists were thus the only opposition at the polls. Labour evidently felt no real pressure from the nationalists and its 1945 election manifesto made no mention of devolution. Labour was returned with a clear majority of Scottish

seats, while the SNP won none and only managed to save two deposits. Some Labour activists in Scotland, however, still felt uneasy about the potential threat from the nationalists. Their unease was increased by the activities of the nationalist Scottish Convention in the late forties. Convention supporters collected two million signatures (but far fewer genuine ones) on a covenant calling for Scottish self-government. Labour's Scottish lobby pressed the government to reclaim the devolution issue for the party. Attlee's administration at first responded with another half-hearted promise of a committee of inquiry into devolution, and then dropped the pretence and went on to the offensive against the home rulers.

The Labour government could see no need and no way to give ground to the devolution lobby. The nationalists had proved incapable of converting the covenant signatures into votes. This confirmed that, while many Scottish people were sympathetic to the idea of devolution, few saw it as an important issue at election time. In any case, Labour could no longer afford to concede the arguments of the Scottish Convention. In the past, the Labour Party had encouraged Scottish feeling against the 'English' or 'London' government. Now the Convention used the same terms, but there was a crucial difference: the 'English' government it attacked was a Labour government. If the Labour Party were to give any ground to these criticisms, it would undermine its own right to rule Scotland as part of the British state. Recognising this contradiction, the Labour leadership set out to crush the devolutionists in its own ranks. Its 1949 policy document, *Labour Believes in Britain,* made no mention of any inquiry into devolution. In 1950, for the first time, Labour entered a general election without any commitment on Scottish devolution. It retained all 37 of its Scottish seats.

Labour was ousted from office in 1951, and the '13 years of Tory misrule' began. Yet, during its long years in opposition, Labour made no attempt to revive the home rule issue. Labour's priority remained winning British elections. It retained a commitment to centralised state planning, and confined itself to criticising the Tories for not giving Scotland enough financial support. In 1958, the Scottish Labour conference overwhelmingly backed an executive motion ruling out the idea of a Scottish parliament. Labour had finally torn up the policy of its founding fathers and declared its formal abandonment of devolution.

Yet, by the late sixties, devolution was back on Labour's agenda. Another decade after that, a Labour government tried to implement devolution and split the party in the process. And a further 10 years

on, devolution is now the central issue which unites the official Scottish labour movement. The instability of Labour's line on devolution reflects the changes in the party's electoral fortunes since the sixties.

The Winnie factor

In a November 1967 by-election, Winifred Ewing of the SNP unseated the sitting MP in Hamilton, the 'safest' Labour seat in Scotland. Her shock victory put the devolution cat back among the Labour Party pigeons.

Labour had entered the sixties with Scotland safely under its control. It was winning a bigger share of both seats and votes than in England, pushing the Tories out of the cities and central Scotland, and arguing for increased economic assistance. Harold Wilson's Labour government, elected in 1964, granted Scotland a bigger slice of central government support than any other region of Britain. In the 1966 election, Labour promised more of the same and emerged with 46 of the 71 Scottish seats. That same year, however, the British economy hit serious financial difficulties and Labour's plans were abandoned. The Hamilton result was the first serious sign of Scottish discontent. No doubt it was partly the sort of protest vote to be expected against a government in mid-term presiding over unpopular austerity policies. But the fact that the seat went to the Scottish nationalists suggested to the government that there were peculiar Scottish factors involved. Wilson detected an early expression of anger at the continuing decline of traditional Scottish industry under Labour. The problem was—what could be done about it?

The knee-jerk reaction of some activists at the 1968 Scottish Labour conference was to demand that the party should head off the nationalist challenge by reviving its old devolution policy. But the Labour leadership was wary. The Labour machine now included powerful figures with vested interests in opposing devolution. The Labour government had promoted the Scottish office in importance, giving Scottish Labour leaders privileged access to the centre of British power. They were fearful of losing this status if Scotland's administration was relegated to an Edinburgh assembly. The Wheatley Commission on local government, which reported in 1969, proposed dividing Scotland among a few prestigious regional councils. The biggest of these (which became Strathclyde regional council) would cover Glasgow and the west, including half the

Scottish population, and have an in-built majority of Labour voters. This promised the party a permanent hold on the heartland of Scottish local government, and made Labour's local politicians suspicious of proposals for an assembly which might rob them of their new powers.

The most important factor for the Labour leadership, however, remained the fear that Scottish devolution could impair its capacity to win future British elections. Without the party's Scottish seats, Labour could not have returned to government in 1964. Any devolution scheme which reduced Scottish representation at Westminster might well end Labour's hopes of again winning government office. Under these conflicting pressures, the Labour government set up a commission of inquiry into devolution (which its predecessors had first promised in 1924) and hoped that the whole nationalist issue would just disappear.

It did disappear, briefly, in the 1970 general election; but so did the Labour government. Under Edward Heath's new Tory administration the political focus shifted back to all-British affairs, particularly to trade union militancy and the government's ultimately unsuccessful attempts to contain it. But the Scottish issue remained close to the surface. The problems of Scotland's old industries were highlighted by the famous work-in at the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders in 1971. The promise of North Sea oil amid the economic gloom of the early seventies heightened the sense that Scotland was being denied the wealth it was due. Britain's entry into the EEC in 1973 gave another boost to nationalist sentiment. The popular idea that Britain would soon be 'ruled from Brussels' encouraged Scottish people to demand more control over their affairs.

In the February 1974 general election, the SNP took seven seats and established itself as a serious force in British politics. After the second election of October that year, it had 11 MPs. A minority Labour government now had to look to the nationalists for its survival. Labour was back in some trouble in Scotland, and devolution quickly came back into fashion.

Shocked by the Scottish nationalists' February success, the Labour leadership forced through proposals for a legislative assembly to win back support at the polls. But Labour had never expected to have to deliver on this promise. It had hoped that, as in the twenties, the devolution policy could be discarded once it had served its purpose on election day. In 1974, however, the precarious position of the minority Labour government meant that it had to keep on the right side of the Scottish lobby. Over the next five years,

there followed a flurry of devolution white papers, parliamentary Bills and internal Labour Party wrangles, as the government wrestled with the contradiction between its commitment to a centralised British state and its endorsement of demands for limited Scottish home rule.

'The idiotic idea'

The Labour Party would doubtless have liked to bury devolution. But each time it showed signs of wavering, support for the Scottish nationalists increased. At the end of 1975, the Labour government produced a timid white paper, *Our Changing Democracy* (Cmnd 6348). Labour was widely criticised over the narrow powers it proposed to grant to a Scottish assembly, and the SNP's standing in the opinion polls soared to a peak of 37 per cent. Once the government had amended its proposals, to give the assembly a little more clout, Labour's position improved. But in February 1977, the government's attempt to force through its first devolution measure, the Scotland and Wales Bill, was voted down with the help of dissident Labour MPs. The SNP again shot up in the polls, only to plunge again once Labour's second devolution Bill finally became law in 1978.

The pressure to implement some measure of devolution between 1974 and 1979 came from a Labour leadership concerned about the rising nationalist threat at the polls. The Labour Party in Scotland, which was much less enthusiastic about home rule, had to be whipped into line. In June 1974, the Scottish Labour executive threw out all the government's devolution proposals. (Only 11 of the 29 executive members were at the meeting which kicked the political football of devolution back into touch; the rest were watching a Scotland match in the World Cup.) In response, Labour's National Executive Committee (NEC) forced the Scottish party to hold a special conference on the issue, and lined up the big British trade union votes to ensure that the conference endorsed its proposal for a legislative assembly.

For Wilson and his successor as Labour leader and prime minister, James Callaghan, devolution was not a matter of principle. For example, Labour never proposed an assembly with the power to legislate in Wales, because the Welsh nationalists did not pose such a threat to Labour as the SNP. Neither did the Labour leaders draw up any detailed policies for their proposed Scottish assembly. They simply wanted to make whatever nationalist gestures were necessary

for the Labour government to survive.

Again and again, the Labour leadership reminded its dissidents that the real issue at stake was not devolution, but Labour's ability to hold on to the Scottish seats it needed to form a government at Westminster. 'If we were to renege on devolution now,' Scottish secretary Bruce Millan warned the 1976 Labour Party conference, 'I do not believe that the Labour Party would be a credible force at the next general election' (W Miller, 'The Scottish Dimension', in Butler and Butler (eds), *The British General Election of 1979*). The terms for devolution finally included in the 1978 Scotland Act carefully avoided interfering with either the election of a future Labour government or the authority of Whitehall. Scottish MPs would remain at Westminster, the Scottish office would still function, and the assembly would have no independent revenue-raising powers. The only reason why the Act did not repeat the old Liberal assertion about bowing to 'the Imperial Parliament' was that much of the old Empire had gone. Labour's Act retained the Victorian home rulers' respect for the central state power of the British capitalist class.

Labour's devolution proposals may have been tame enough, yet they provoked fierce internal opposition. The rebellious Scottish Labour faction was led by maverick MP Tam Dalyell, and supported by northern English MPs who feared Scotland would get preferential treatment in government aid. (In fact, Scotland was already getting it.) In 1976, the anti-devolutionists pressed the government into conceding that devolution would be put to the test of a referendum. In 1977, they prevented the government from getting a guillotine motion through the commons which would have allowed the Scotland and Wales Bill a speedy passage. When Callaghan's ministers returned with separate Bills for Scotland and Wales, they again met opposition. On Burns Night in January 1978, the Labour anti-devolutionists forced through an amendment which demanded that the referendum must return a 'yes' vote of 40 per cent of the total Scottish electorate before devolution could be implemented. This measure was finally to kill off Labour's attempt at devolution, and help to bring down the government.

The referendum campaign was a disaster for the Labour government. It coincided with a slump in the party's support, and in Callaghan's personal popularity, over the industrial unrest of the 1978-79 'winter of discontent'. Labour's own anti-devolutionists ran far more spirited campaigns than the government. In Scotland, the campaign featured speeches by MPs Tam Dalyell and Robin Cook.

In Wales, Neil Kinnock was prominent in the 'Gang of Six' Labour MPs campaigning against devolution. Kinnock argued that devolution was 'a ludicrous attempt to offset the pressures of separatism' and laughed at 'the idiotic idea of transferring powers from the house of commons'. His fancy footwork over the devolution Bill was quite a performance, even by Labour's standards of shiftiness on the issue. Kinnock, as one commentator noted, 'spoke against the Bill throughout the debates in the house of commons, abstained on the second reading, voted in favour of it thereafter, and led one of the two campaigns against it at the referendum' (D Foulkes (ed), *The Welsh Veto,* 1983).

In the referendum on 1 March 1979, on a 63.7 per cent turn-out, support for devolution in Scotland was only marginally greater than opposition. At 32.9 per cent of the electorate, it fell short of the 40 per cent needed to establish the assembly.

	Votes	%Electorate	%Votes
Yes	1 230 937	32.9	51.6
No	1 153 502	30.8	48.4

36.4% did not vote

The referendum result was the last straw for the stricken Labour government. After the March result Callaghan refused to put the Act to the vote in the commons. The Scottish nationalists tabled a motion of no confidence. By now all of the opposition MPs, from Tories to Welsh nationalists and Ulster Unionists, had their own reasons for opposing Labour. They combined to vote the Labour government out. In the general election which followed, Labour did better in Scotland than the devolution debacle might have suggested. The party proved to have outflanked the SNP to win the pro-devolution vote. Labour also retained the support of working class Scots who had not voted for devolution, but who were fearful of the prospect of a Thatcher government. Labour increased its total of Scottish seats slightly to 44, the Tories won 22, and the SNP was reduced to a rump of two MPs. But Labour's continuing support in Scotland contrasted sharply with the overall British picture, where Thatcher's Tories marched to power. This gap between Scottish and British politics has widened through the Thatcher years. It has encouraged Labour to strengthen its support for devolution.

Thatcher's Britain

In the eighties Labour has been pushed out of the south and back into its northern, Welsh and Scottish bunkers. Just as the Liberals supported home rule to secure Scottish votes when they were losing in England a century before, so Labour in decline has become keen on devolution as a demand which could consolidate its support in Scotland. Since it became clear that even a big majority of Scottish seats was not enough to win Labour a British election, the party leadership has returned to campaigning for an assembly as a way of getting into government in its Scottish stronghold. In the June 1983 general election, Labour's manifesto reflected the creeping conviction that, given Thatcher's lead in the polls, a majority in a Scottish assembly was now the best Labour could hope to win. Thus it proposed to give an assembly the tax-raising powers denied by the devolution Acts of the seventies.

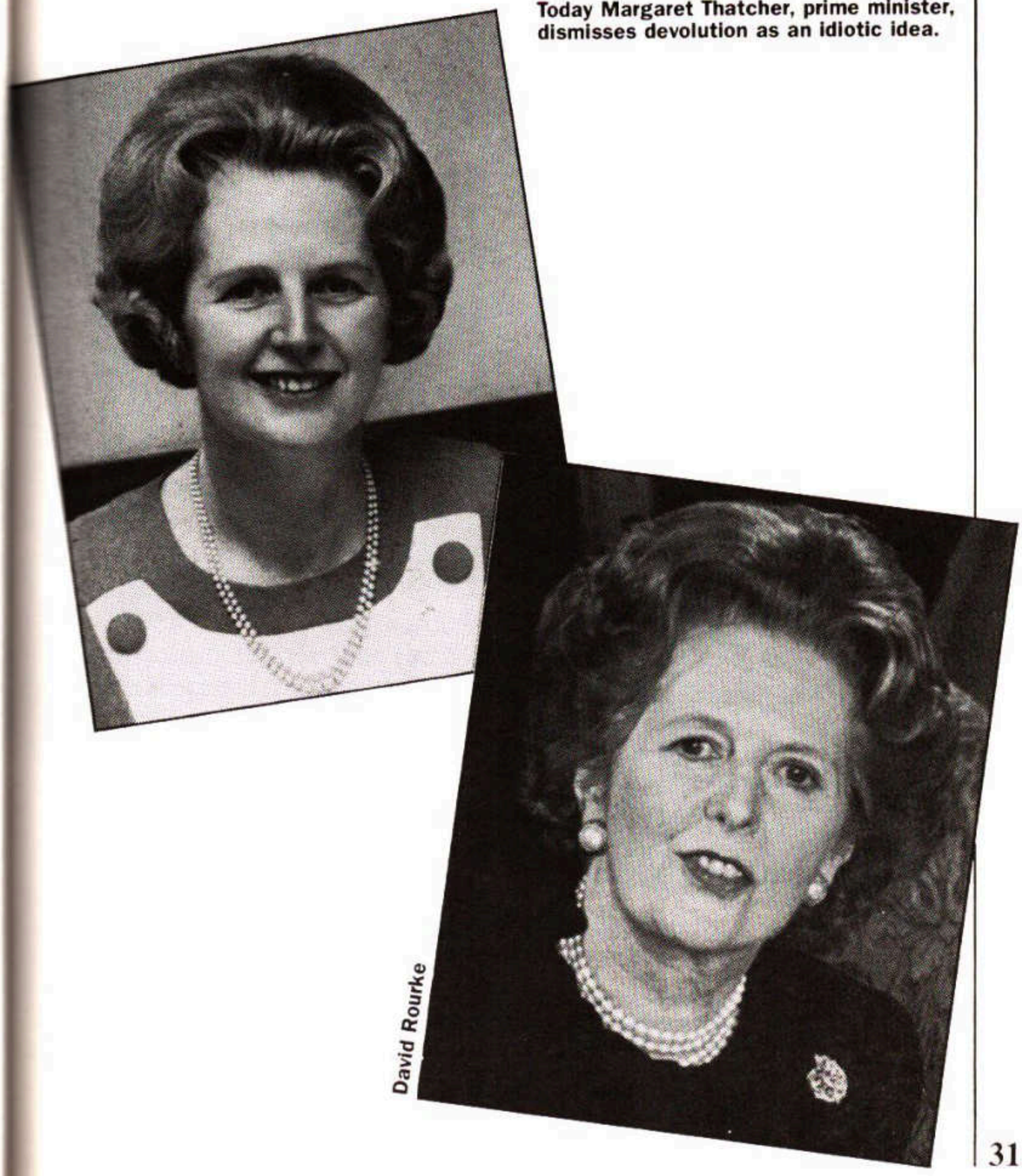
Labour lost three Scottish seats to the Alliance in the 1983 general election, but this setback was nothing compared to the hammering the party took in England. Now sections of the Labour Party began to push the Scottish angle harder, as it became clear that a devolved assembly offered Labour by far its best chance of forming any sort of government. A group of MPs tried to get the party to take up a 'no mandate' position, arguing that the Tories' lack of support in Scotland meant they had no right to rule north of the border. But the new Labour leadership under Neil Kinnock was reluctant to go down that road. Kinnock feared that the 'no mandate' argument, by separating Scottish politics from the rest of Britain, would undermine Labour's own right to form a future British government on the strength of its Scottish seats. The post-1983 discussion signalled the return of the old tension between Scottish home rule as a short cut to office, and running the British state as Labour's ultimate ambition. Writing at the time, two radical academics sympathised with Kinnock's plight:

> 'It was the old dilemma for Labour in Scotland but with a vital difference. In the past, Labour had chosen the UK strategy because it was advancing; now the party leadership holds to it in defeat.' (B Jones and M Keating, *Labour and the British State*, 1985)

Kinnock's 'dilemma' was eventually to be resolved by the third Thatcher victory in the June 1987 general election, which seemed to confirm that the 'UK strategy' was beyond Labour's reach.

In 1975, the new Conservative Party leader, Margaret Thatcher, declared that 'an assembly must be a priority.'

Today Margaret Thatcher, prime minister, dismisses devolution as an idiotic idea.



David Rourke



Pandora Anderson

Ten years ago, a young and upwardly mobile Labour MP called Neil Kinnock said devolution was an 'idiotic idea'.

Today Neil Kinnock, leader of Her Majesty's Opposition, says a Scottish assembly is a priority for socialists.

Back to the future?

At the 1986 Scottish Labour conference Kinnock gave a firm, if unenthusiastic, commitment to an assembly. Yet as the general election drew nearer, Labour leaders seemed unsure about pushing the issue too hard in case it re-opened old internal squabbles. At the 1987 Scottish Labour conference, the devolution debate was kept to a minimum and Dennis Canavan, perhaps the Labour MP most strongly identified with the call for an assembly, was prevented from speaking. The general election which followed soon afterwards removed these lingering doubts about devolution. The Tories gave Labour another thrashing in England, while Labour capitalised on the anti-Tory mood across much of Scotland to win a record 50 Scottish seats. In August 1987, the Labour Party officially launched its campaign for a Scottish assembly. In November it called a special Scottish conference, to which the executive announced that 'the assembly will be the focus of our campaigning over the period of this parliament.' In the same month, Labour published its parliamentary Bill to set up an assembly for local Scottish affairs.

The demand for devolution which Kinnock once called 'idiotic' and 'ludicrous' is now his party's first principle in Scotland. Labour spokesmen now openly proclaim the 'no mandate' argument which their leaders fought shy of using only a couple of years ago. Robin Cook, a close Kinnock supporter and now a shadow cabinet colleague, has publicly apologised to the Scottish people for his earlier anti-devolution campaign. Tam Dalyell has yet to go that far. But Dalyell, the MP who ran a barnstorming campaign across Scotland and took the Labour government to court to stop devolution in 1979, no longer condemns the assembly campaign.

Once again, Labour says little about what an assembly would do for Scottish people. But once again, it is advising Scottish workers who come into conflict with the employers or the government—at Caterpillar, at Scott Lithgow, over the poll tax—that the solution lies through constitutional action for a Scottish assembly. Labour's latest devolution Bill contains the traditional deference to Westminster on important matters of state. In many ways the Labour Party's attitude today is very close to that of 70 years ago, though its Scottish leaders are incapable of the fiery anti-capitalist rhetoric which characterised the home rulers of Red Clydeside.

Despite the claims of its leaders, Labour cannot claim a record of consistent support for a Scottish assembly. The party line has switched back and forth according to its wider concerns. Around the

First World War, the young Labour Party looked to Scottish home rule as a stepping stone to government. Around the Second World War, when Labour was the biggest British party, it wanted nothing to do with devolution. Today, Labour in decline has returned to the battle-lines drawn up by the Liberals in the nineteenth century. The truly consistent themes have been a concern with the party's electoral prospects, and an abiding respect for the ultimate authority of the British state.

The left switches sides

Later on we will examine the relationship between socialists and nationalism in Scotland. Here we look briefly at the way in which parties on the left have matched Labour's instability over devolution.

When the Communist Party of Great Britain was founded in 1920, Red Clydeside proved one of its most successful areas of recruitment. The very name of the new party reflected its rejection of Scottish nationalism in favour of a strategy based on uniting the whole of the British working class against the British state. Glasgow shop stewards' leader Willie Gallacher was one of the most prominent founding members and he remained in the party leadership for the next 30 years. At the height of the home rule agitation after the First World War, Gallacher firmly opposed demands for Scottish separation. When his fellow Clydeside revolutionary leader John MacLean argued for a distinct Scottish communist party, Gallacher questioned his sanity. Yet the CP did not develop any critique of the demand for home rule and by the mid-twenties the pressures to adapt to nationalist sentiments were intensified by the influence of the Stalinist leadership in the Soviet Union.

During the Moscow-dictated 'Third Period' from the end of the twenties, the official Communist parties around the world condemned their opponents in the working class movement as 'social fascists'. In Scotland, the Communists carried this attitude over to the middle class nationalist groups of the time. In 1932, Gallacher called on the party to expose 'the fascist demagogy of the Scottish nationalists' (Keating and Bleiman, *Labour and Scottish Nationalism).* Within five years, however, the Communist Party had gone over to courting the nationalists.

In the mid-thirties the line from Moscow switched from the Third Period to the Popular Front. Now the Communist Parties were encouraged to form broad fronts with other, often pro-capitalist, organisations. Scottish Communists sought to widen their support,

which was concentrated among the unemployed, by appealing to middle class nationalists. The nationalists had just ended a short and unhappy liaison with Lord Beaverbrook and the right-wing *Scottish Daily Express.* They were willing to go to the other end of the political spectrum to take advantage of the Communist Party's new turn.

In 1936 the CP came out in support of a Scottish parliament. Party spokesman Aitken Ferguson wrote a pamphlet, *Scotland,* arguing for a devolved assembly. The introduction was written by a nationalist, John MacCormick, who had no Communist sympathies and who went on to found the Scottish Convention in the forties. The CP backed the Convention when it seemed popular, but by the fifties it had dropped the devolution lobby and was echoing Labour's policies on centralised planning. In 1964 the Communists sought to tap the new undercurrent of Scottish unrest by coming out in support of full national self-determination for Scotland. Thus they came to tail-end the demand of those nationalists whom they had once condemned as 'fascist demagogues'. Since then the CP has often acted as a pressure group seeking to push the Labour Party into a more serious commitment to devolution. Today the party is a firm supporter of the assembly campaign, emphasising the need for it to involve Scots from all social classes.

On the left of the Labour Party, the Militant Tendency is another group with a chequered history on the assembly. In the early seventies, Militant opposed devolution as divisive. At the special 1974 Scottish Labour conference called to ratify the leadership's devolution policy, delegates from the Militant-controlled Labour Party Young Socialists voted against an assembly. By 1979, however, the future of the Labour government had come to depend on the destiny of its devolution Act. The Tendency dutifully discovered the virtues of Scottish nationalism, concluding that 'recognition of the national aspirations of the Welsh and especially the Scottish people are vital democratic demands and Labour has rightly supported this step forward' (*Militant,* 2 March 1979). Today *Militant* remains solidly behind Neil Kinnock's attempt to get Labour back into government via an assembly. It has justified this with an argument in the tradition of Labour's devolution double-speak, insisting that 'even on a capitalist basis' a Scottish assembly could help 'to transform the Scottish economy in a socialist direction' (*Militant,* 3 July 1987).

Further out on Labour's fringe, the Socialist Workers Party held to its position of opposing the assembly campaign for a little longer. In 1979 it dismissed the demand for devolution as something of a joke

and a distraction from the class struggle. 'The real problem with the assembly', it said, 'is that it is hard to be serious about it. If you accept these arguments then you are with *Socialist Worker* in seeing the assembly as totally irrelevant to the fights of the working class' (24 February 1979). Like the Communist Party of old, the SWP sneered at the devolutionists without confronting their arguments. Since the 1987 general election, however, it has stopped sneering and started backing the Labour leadership's call for an assembly. 'Concretely,' the SWP now argues, 'socialists should in the present situation support Labour's demand for a Scottish assembly' (*Socialist Worker*, 11 July 1987). The British left's close links with the Labour Party have led it to champion the cause which it once derided as 'totally irrelevant'.

Tartan Tories

Despite its current stance as the one major party opposed to an assembly, even the Tory Party has been willing, when necessary, to support Scottish devolution. The Tories' twists and turns confirm, perhaps most clearly of all, that the issue has never been one of principle for British politicians.

As its traditional title would suggest, the Conservative and Unionist Party has always been a firm defender of the integrity of the 'United Kingdom'. In the years before and after the First World War, the modern Tory Party became the political machine of the British capitalist class largely by uniting the forces most hostile to the idea of home rule for Ireland. The Victorian Tories extended their support for the unity of the British state to opposing Scottish home rule. As Tory leader Arthur Balfour put it: 'We are opposed to home rule whether it begins with Wales and ends with Ireland or begins with Ireland and ends with Wales' (Webb, *The Growth of Scottish Nationalism*).

But the Tories have never pursued their opposition to Scottish devolution with the same vigour as their campaign against Irish home rule. They disliked devolution because of its associations with the early radicals and the Clydeside left. The Conservatives also had close links with the Highland landlords. However, the Tories drew a distinction between the importance of upholding the authority of the Crown in Ireland and what was considered the more minor matter of constitutional reform in Scotland. In 1914, Tory leaders backed an army mutiny at the Curragh in Ireland and threatened to use force against the elected government at Westminster to keep Britain's Irish

colony within the Union. No Conservative ever threatened military revolt to stop Scotland acquiring a devolved assembly. Indeed after the Second World War, when the Labour Party dropped the devolution issue, the Tories picked it up and tried to use it to their own electoral advantage.

When Labour rejected devolution in the 1950 general election campaign, the Tories quickly took up the Scottish cause. Winston Churchill's party gave devolution a Tory twist by counterposing Scottish 'freedom' under the Conservatives to the centralised state planning carried out by the 1945 Labour government. 'Until the socialist government is removed,' declared the Conservative manifesto, 'neither Wales nor Scotland will be able to strike away the fetters of centralisation and be free to develop their own way of life' (Miller, 'The Scottish Dimension'). Churchill himself, who had toyed with Scottish home rule as a leading Liberal at the turn of the century, declared that the Labour government had centralised British government 'in a manner not hitherto experienced or contemplated in the Act of Union':

> 'If England became an absolute Socialist state, owning all of the means of production, distribution and exchange, ruled only by politicians and their officials in the London offices, I personally cannot feel Scotland would be bound to accept such a dispensation.' (AC Turner, *Scottish Home Rule*, 1952)

The impact of Tory opportunism on the Scottish electorate is unclear; the Tories did gain three Scottish seats in the 1950 election, though not from Labour. What is clear is that, after the return of a Conservative government in the 1951 general election, the Tories said no more about home rule until the emergence of the SNP in the sixties. In 1968, after Winnie Ewing's dramatic victory at Hamilton, Tory leader Edward Heath made his famous Perth Declaration for devolution. The Tory scheme, drawn up by Heath and former Tory premier Sir Alec Douglas (later Lord) Home, was included in the party's Scottish manifesto for the 1970 general election. Once Heath had won that election, however, the Tories adopted the familiar practice of forgetting all about the devolution promises which they had made on election day.

Heath called an election in February 1974 on the issue of the miners' strike, and lost it. The Scottish nationalists' strong showing at the polls encouraged the Conservatives to dredge up their devolution ideas again. Their manifesto for the October 1974 general election included a commitment to a Scottish assembly, to be indirectly elected by the regional councils. When they lost again and the SNP made more gains at their expense, the Tories decided they

had not gone far enough and announced that they favoured a directly elected assembly. In 1975, the new leader of the Conservative Party went to Glasgow and told a City Hall rally that 'an assembly must be a top priority to ensure that more decisions affecting Scotland are taken in Scotland by Scotsmen' (Miller, 'The Scottish Dimension'). That leader's name was Margaret Thatcher.

In 1975 Thatcher did not yet have the authority to crack the whip and bring the entire Tory Party into line. The party leadership's accommodation to the devolution lobby was too much for many die-hard Tory Unionists to stomach, and sharp divisions started to appear. Thatcher and Home resolved the problem by turning the Labour government's devolution Act into a party political issue. The Tories then combined tacit general support for the idea of devolution with vocal opposition to Labour's specific proposals. The trick worked well.

Since they returned to power in 1979, the Conservatives have proved uninterested in devolution. The party's increasingly miserable performance in Scotland has prompted some leading Scottish Tories to ask the government to consider some sort of an assembly, and old-timers like Heath have spoken up for Scottish devolution. But Thatcher's interest has been in centralising state power. The fact that the assembly campaign is associated with her political opponents has helped to harden her heart against it. Her Scottish secretary, Malcolm Rifkind, a past campaigner for Labour's devolution Act, now rejects the idea as unimportant. Yet the Conservative leadership has been careful not to rule out devolution on principle, leaving the way clear for the Tories to take it up once more should it ever appear useful in the future.

Scottish devolution has not just been another unfulfilled election promise. There is no major issue on which the Tories and Labour have felt able to reverse their policies and swap positions in the way they have on the Scottish assembly. What are we to make of the way in which the devolution football has been kicked about over the past 100 years? Certainly, it says much about the cynicism and opportunism of politicians from all sides—including the Labour politicians who have most consistently posed as the friends of the Scottish people. But it also raises important questions about the assembly campaign itself. The British capitalist class has never considered the demand for devolution to be a threat. Politicians have never seen it as more than a vote-catching gimmick. So why should such a campaign provide a solution to the problems facing the Scottish working class today?

2. Is Scotland special?

Many Scottish people are scornful of the way in which the issue of an assembly has been manipulated by political parties. Yet they still consider that this does not discredit the demand for devolution itself. They believe that Scotland's distinctive character could best be expressed through a Scottish assembly. For the moment, we shall leave aside the cultural and institutional aspects of the arguments about 'Scottishness'. The most familiar left-wing arguments for an assembly concern Scottish politics. The most important of these is that Scotland has always been more socialist than the rest of Britain, but is held back by England, and needs to organise its own affairs to make progress. An additional argument is that the recent pattern of election results means that the Tory government at Westminster has no mandate to rule in Scotland. Let's look at these in turn.

Socialist 'Scottishness'

The view that Scotland has a special affinity for left-wing politics which justifies an independent assembly has featured in home rule demands over the past century. Many Scots are justly proud of the militant traditions of the Scottish working class. From the days of Red Clydeside, through to the more recent struggles of the Scottish miners, shipyard workers, steelworkers, engineers and others, the workers' movement in Scotland has often been in the frontline of the fight against employers and governments. Scottish women have

played a leading part in working class conflicts such as the First World War rent strikes, the Lee Jeans occupation of 1981, and the miners' strike of 1984-85. These episodes have helped to create a tradition in which people in Scotland are still proud to call themselves working class, to a greater extent than in other parts of Britain. Yet too often the struggles of Scottish workers have ended in tragic defeat, not because of a lack of militancy but because of the political weakness of the labour movement.

The Scottish labour movement has been most successful when its struggles have been confined to economic issues directly affecting the working class—wages, working conditions and rents. The weaknesses are apparent in the pattern of events which recurs when wider political issues intrude into such disputes. When the British establishment launches a political offensive, Scots have often been ready to lead other British workers in taking up the challenge. The leaders of the Scottish labour movement, however, have been more likely to answer such a political assault by demanding devolution, or by stressing the limited and local character of their objectives. They insist on the distinctive 'Scottishness' of the workers' movement. The damaging results of this attitude among Labour and union leaders is best shown in two periods when Scotland has been prominent in British class conflict—during the time of Red Clydeside, and over the past 15 years.

Covenanters against capitalism

The dramatic history of Red Clydeside has helped to create the impression that Scotland has always been more radical than England. Yet up to the First World War, most Scots voted to the right of the English. The Liberal Party dominated Scottish politics, won much support from the Scottish working class, and heavily influenced the programme of the Scottish left.

The Labour Party emerged as an electorally viable force later in Scotland than elsewhere in Britain. As late as 1910 Labour only had two parliamentary seats in Scotland compared to 33 in England and five in Wales. Even those two did not represent any real challenge to Liberalism. Dundee, which Alexander Wilkie won for Labour, was a two-seat constituency in which people could vote Liberal first and Labour second. Wilkie even advised Labour supporters to cast their second vote for Winston Churchill, then the local Liberal MP. The other Labour seat was in the Gorbals, Glasgow—the one area where Scottish Labour did a successful deal to prise the Irish Catholic vote

away from the Liberals. Other early Labour leaders from Scotland, like Keir Hardie and Ramsay MacDonald, had to move to England or Wales to win parliamentary seats.

The Scottish Liberals were a radical bunch. In the 1890s Frederick Engels described them as the most progressive section of the British ruling class. They were also fiercely anti-socialist. When the British Labour leaders made a pact with the Liberals in 1905, it excluded Scotland; there were no Lib-Lab candidates north of the border. The establishment parties were to carry their hostility to Scottish socialists throughout the Red Clydeside years. In the 1922 election, after the disintegration of Lloyd George's coalition government, the Tories and the Liberals maintained their anti-Labour pact in Scotland, and only stood against each other in two Scottish seats. By then, the surge to Labour could no longer be contained. But on the eve of the First World War, the anti-socialist home rulers of the Liberal Party still dominated Scottish politics.

The animosity of the Liberals helped to push the early Scottish labour movement to the left on economic issues, as it sought to outflank the ruling party. In 1899, both the British TUC and the Scottish TUC passed motions calling for the establishment of political parties of labour. The British TUC's proposal to set up the Labour Representation Committee, which was to become the Labour Party, made no mention of the new party being politically independent of the Liberals, nor did it state any policy objectives. The STUC motion, by contrast, called for a new working class party to fight for socialism, which it defined as 'the nationalisation of the land and the means of production, distribution and exchange' (J Young, 'The Rise of Scottish Socialism', in G Brown (ed), *The Red Paper on Scotland,* 1975). Thus the economic policy of the organised Scottish labour movement was to the left of its English counterpart. It was also considerably to the left of most of the Liberal-voting Scottish working class. Further to the right, a substantial number of working class voters remained loyal to the Conservative and Unionist Party.

On political questions, the isolated Scottish socialists had few independent ideas. Instead they accommodated to the dominant trend in Scottish politics—Liberalism. We have already noted how those who were to lead the Labour Party, like Hardie and MacDonald, marched behind the Liberal banner in the Scottish Home Rule Association. They also inherited Liberal ideas strongly influenced by radical presbyterianism. Many on the Scottish left championed Sunday schools and prohibition of alcohol alongside home rule and opposition to

the house of lords. This was how one contemporary observer, writing in the heat of the struggles on Red Clydeside at the end of the First World War, described the origins of Scottish socialism among the poets, historians, romantics and religious figures of history:

'The Scottish labour movement was not founded on materialism. The instinct for freedom and justice which animated the Covenanters and Chartists also inspired the pioneers. Their teachers and prophets were Jesus, Shelley, Mazzini, Whitman, Ruskin, Carlyle and Morris. The economics took a second place. The crusade was to dethrone Mammon and to restore spirit, and to insist that the welfare of the community should take precedence over the enrichment of a handful.' (D Lowe, *Souvenirs of Scottish Labour*, 1919)

The socialist movement based its beliefs on the political, religious and moral standards it lifted from Scotland's past. It was influenced more by righteous Protestant indignation at the sins of the idle rich than by the socialist critiques of capitalism produced by Continental revolutionists.

The Bible rather than *Das Kapital* was the main inspiration of many Scottish socialists. Their crusade was for a moral society and just reward for hard work, rather than for a new system that would liberate the working class. They adopted a more radical version of the puritan principles which had been the property of the ruling Scottish Liberals throughout the nineteenth century. Thus, what came to be accepted as the distinctive 'Scottish tradition' of the labour movement really reflected the abiding influence of ideas discarded by the Scottish capitalist class. This lack of ideological independence was to have serious consequences in the turbulent years around the First World War.

While the outlook of the Scottish labour movement remained rooted in the past, the British establishment was adopting ruthless new methods to secure its class rule in the future. Labour movement leaders largely confined themselves to the familiar local issues of Scottish politics, such as home rule. The ruling class, meanwhile, was fighting fresh struggles on an international scale. Into the 1920s and beyond, the Clydeside socialists of the ILP insisted that they stood in the tradition of the crusading seventeenth-century Protestant Covenanters. This was a strange and inadequate starting point from which to face the modern era of imperialist world war and proletarian revolution. The dead heroes of Scottish history were no match for the living power of the British capitalist class.

In the period around the First World War, Britain came closest to a workers' revolution, and Scottish workers led the way. But the labour movement's backward-looking 'Scottishness' had a negative impact at three key moments: during the unskilled strike wave before

the war, during the wartime strikes and protests, and in the years from 1918 to 1924 when Red Clydeside reached its peak.

Between 1910 and 1914 Scotland, like the rest of industrial Britain, experienced mass strikes on an unprecedented scale. These took much of the Scottish left by surprise. The strikes were often led by unskilled and unorganised workers like the Glasgow match girls and those at the Clydebank Singer sewing works. The left had previously dismissed these workers as impossible to organise and indifferent to socialist propaganda. The Nonconformist socialists concentrated their attention on the mainly Protestant skilled workers who fitted their image of Scottish respectability—especially the blue-suited, bowler-hatted engineering craftsmen. 'You take my branch of the ILP when I first joined it,' remembered Harry McShane, a rare Catholic among the early activists and later a leading Communist. 'I don't think there was a labourer in it; mostly engineers.'

The Scottish ILP paper, *Forward,* was very hostile to those it called 'the ignorant people' from 'the slums', who were out of step with the Calvinist tradition of the 'canny' Scot. When these 'ignorant people' took it into their heads to strike for a decent life, the left was apprehensive. Some sought to impose their own puritan standards of 'Scottishness' on to the unskilled workers. This was how William Stewart of the ILP tried to describe 3000 strikers at a Vale of Leven turkey-dye works in 1912:

> 'They were an example of frugality and respectability to the entire world....They went to the Kirk on Sundays and won football matches on Saturdays. Scottish thrift found its apotheosis in the Vale of Leven.' (JD Young, *The Rousing of the Scottish Working Class,* 1979)

The unskilled workers rejected these attempts to portray them as a sporting version of the Pilgrim Fathers. They insisted that they could not survive on 'Scottish thrift' and took militant strike action for higher wages. The established Scottish left and the official labour movement often frowned upon the militancy of the rough and untutored masses. Robert Smillie, the Scottish miners' leader, did a lot more than frown. Smillie had been a founder member of the Scottish Home Rule Association, and remained at the forefront of labour movement agitation for home rule. Workers' militancy was an embarrassment to his efforts to win political recognition for the respectable Scottish Labour and union leaders through devolution. In 1912, when Ayrshire miners joined the strike wave and were involved in violent clashes with baton-charging police, Smillie condemned his own members for organising 'a riot'. He also launched what amounted to a no-strike campaign, demanding 'Do strikes pay?' in an article in the *Morning Post* in September 1913.

Struggling workers were patronised and insulted by the socialist home rulers of the ILP. They were condemned and cajoled back to work by the home rulers' associates in the union bureaucracy. They could not have been blamed for asking if the strait-laced 'Scottishness' of the established labour movement paid for ordinary Scots.

From red to tartan

Many Scottish histories of Red Clydeside emphasise the extent of opposition to the First World War and sympathy for the 1917 Russian Revolution. This was indeed a great step forward for the Scottish working class movement, and one which the British establishment recognised as a genuine threat to its power. But it would be a wild exaggeration to claim, as some have done, that Scots almost instinctively took a progressive attitude against the war. Nor was there any necessary connection between support for Scottish home rule and opposition to the slaughter in Europe. When the demand for home rule was raised in the labour movement, it served mainly to distract attention from the great issues of war and revolution facing the Scottish working class.

We have already noted that many middle class Scottish home rulers backed British imperialism in the First World War. They allowed their Scottish nationalism to be 'submerged in the wider current of British patriotism'. The Scottish labour movement was not immune from the infection. When war broke out in 1914, leading labour movement figures who supported Scottish devolution within the framework of the British capitalist state saw no contradiction in supporting that state against its foreign rivals.

In 1913, the Socialist International held a conference in Glasgow at which delegates representing labour movement parties from all the big capitalist powers threatened a general strike in the event of war. When the war came, they dropped their promises and each lined up behind their own ruling class in the conflict. In his autobiography, Robert Stewart, who was later to become the CP's first Scottish organiser, summed up the impact of the war on the workers' movement internationally and in Scotland:

> 'Roughly speaking, on the first real test for socialist internationalism, the red flags turned to tartan with the complete collapse of the Second International and the triumph of the right-wing pro-war people in the British labour movement.' (R Stewart, *Breaking the Fetters*, 1967)

In England in 1914 the Labour leaders took up the Union Jack and rallied support for British imperialism; in Scotland many of 'the red flags turned to tartan' for the same purpose. Sections of the

labour movement who opposed the government on Scottish issues were willing to support Britain on the international stage. Their attitude of 'Scottishness' was not an alternative to British chauvinism; it was subordinate to it. By February 1915, 20 per cent of Scottish miners had volunteered to cross the Channel and fight 'the Huns'. Throughout the war, the two areas in which there was most unrest—South Wales and Clydeside—also provided the highest number of army recruits in Britain. The ILP took a vacillating pacifist line in the early days of war fever, but was wary of going too far in an anti-British direction. Its Scottish paper, *Forward,* even felt obliged to carry a gory pro-war column alongside its pacifist coverage. This jingoistic trash was published under a pen-name borrowed from the Scottish folk hero, 'Rob Roy'.

There was, of course, another side to the story. From the early days of the war, Glasgow was always the city in Britain most likely to give an anti-war speaker a hearing, even if he sometimes had to be escorted through a mob of patriotic protesters. As early as 1915, the thousands of workers who gathered for the annual May Day rally in Glasgow gave the best-known Scottish revolutionary of all, John MacLean, a warm reception for his speech against the war. As the slaughter progressed, these sentiments grew in important sections of the working class community on Clydeside. The workers of Clydeside began their wartime protests, not as Scots opposed to an 'English' government, but as workers angered by the social consequences of the war—rising rents, deteriorating working conditions and, later, the fear of unemployment. The events which inspired working class activists came not from the mists of Scottish history, but from the smoke of wartime Europe where the Bolsheviks in 1917 showed that workers' revolution could become a reality.

Soon after the war began, sections of the Scottish working class rose up against its consequences. The first big grievance was Glasgow's rents. Housing was the one area in which the conditions facing the Scottish working class were undeniably worse than in England. The grim tenements of Glasgow often hid a second row of the same, built in the airless shadows behind them. In 1904 one in four Glasgow households contained three people to each room. Ten per cent had four to a room; the equivalent figure in England was less than one per cent. The influx of armaments workers into Glasgow in the First World War made a bad situation far worse. In 1915, when the landlords tried to exploit the wartime housing shortage by raising rents, women organised a rent strike and formed

gangs to chase off the bailiffs. By November 1915 there were 20 000 people on rent strike, and 4000 industrial and armaments workers staged a one-day stoppage in support. The ILP activists, who had always made a priority of the housing issue, were also behind the strike. The government took fright and rushed an Act through parliament within a month, freezing rents for the duration of the war. But even before the authorities had contained the rent protests, they were faced with the first action by engineers against the dilution of their skilled trades.

Dilution meant the introduction of unskilled workers, often women, to do engineering work which had been the preserve of time-served male craftsmen. The government also attacked the skilled men through the Munitions of War Act, which ruled that no worker leaving one job in armaments could get another without a 'leaving certificate' signed by his former employer. Workers regarded the 'leaving certificate' as a charter for victimising militants and a device for forcing engineers to put up with worse conditions. Both the conservative leaders of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers and the militant shop stewards of the unofficial Clyde Workers' Committee opposed dilution and leaving certificates. Workers took strike action against the government's measures from late 1915 through to the spring of 1916.

Housing and industrial disputes were often sectional and lacking in political direction. Left-wing engineers were divided among themselves, and expressed their determination to preserve their craft status at the expense of women workers. Yet thousands took industrial action in support of the women's rent strike. The rent strikers were also protesting against the impact of the war. But they did not take an explict anti-war line; they often declared that, while their menfolk were fighting the Germans abroad, they had to take on 'the Huns at home'—the unpatriotic landlords.

The Clydeside struggles may have lacked political coherence but they were still a serious threat to the government. In the middle of a world war, with its Empire under threat, the British ruling class could not tolerate rebellion on the home front—especially in the armaments industry. The deteriorating situation in Ireland, which exploded in the Easter Rising in Dublin in March 1916, emphasised the danger of rebellion within the borders of the British state. The British authorities moved in hard to crush the Clydeside militants.

In November 1915, several engineers were briefly jailed for striking against the Munitions of War Act. On Christmas Day, the prime minister Lloyd George and Labour Party leader Arthur

Henderson went to Glasgow to impress upon the shop stewards the importance of dilution for the war effort. Both were shouted down by the Clyde Workers' Committee, and had to leave hurriedly while some of the stewards broke into a chorus of 'The Red Flag'. The newspapers were issued with a tame official report of the meeting and told to print nothing else. When the ILP paper, *Forward,* published a fuller account of the confrontation it was suppressed. The state also shut down John MacLean's paper, *Vanguard.* Then, in February 1916, it closed down the Clyde Workers' Committee paper, *The Worker.* Willie Gallacher and two other members of the committee were arrested and charged with sedition. MacLean had already been hauled in on the same charge.

Attempts to organise protest stikes against state repression were undermined by divisions among the engineering factories. But in March, engineers came out again, after Davie Kirkwood had been barred from acting as convenor of the shop stewards at the Parkhead works. The Parkhead strikers were joined by others, including workers from the all-important gun departments of some firms. The government responded by raising the political stakes, declaring that the strike was the result of a Clyde Workers' Committee plot against the state. Official propaganda linked the strikers with the Irish rebels and spread rumours about the involvement of German spies. At the end of March 1916, the government ordered the military to deport Kirkwood and eight other shop stewards to Edinburgh.

Reporting the cabinet discussion of the Clydeside crisis to King George V, Lord Crewe expressed the anxiety the authorities felt about the possible spread of the protests:

'The principal danger of the situation depends not so much on the proceedings of the small (by comparison) number of workmen holding syndicalist and revolutionary aims, as on the fear that the vastly larger body of patriotic and loyal trade unionists may be deluded by misrepresentation of the facts into expressing sympathy with the minority, believing them to be unjustly treated.' (I McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside,* 1983)

The ruling class recognised that the leading Clydeside militants had the potential to inspire more widespread resistance. They were then in the forefront of the class struggle in Britain. The government understood that the conflict was about more than a Scottish industrial dispute. It treated the strikes as a challenge to the British state. The Scottish activists, however, were not ready for such a power struggle.

The political perspectives of a leading militant like Kirkwood went no further than demanding traditional reforms such as Scottish home rule. He was mainly concerned with industrial matters. Far

from wanting to take on the power of Whitehall, Kirkwood's horizons did not extend as far as the Scottish border. As he told his colleagues on the Clydeside committee when he broke their solidarity and signed a dilution deal with the Parkhead bosses in 1916, he was 'concerned with Parkhead alone'. To further his narrow concern with the welfare of one skilled workforce, Kirkwood was prepared to aid British imperialism in its war efforts. When he presented the government's Dilution Commissioners with his dilution plans, he reassured them about his commitment to the war effort:

'You want shells to blow the Germans over the Rhine...then we will do all in our power to meet your requirements. We will produce the guns, the shells and all the other armaments...we will give the production and keep the engineers safeguarded.' (McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside)*

Sectional craft unionism was by no means peculiar to Scotland—the British labour movement was riddled with it. Its Scottish variant was, however, reinforced by the notion of the skilled 'canny Scot' who held the unskilled 'ignorant people' in contempt. To safeguard the craft advantages of a few Scottish workers, Kirkwood was willing to service the armaments machine of the British state. His parochial views provided little solace when that same state called him a German agent and deported him.

The more politically aware leaders of the Scottish labour movement were not much better prepared for a showdown with the state. The ILP protested against the deportations and James Maxton was jailed for recommending a strike in support of the deportees. Yet the socialist home rulers were preoccupied with Scottish affairs. They lacked the breadth of political vision displayed by the British establishment. The government had recognised that the Clydeside unrest was not simply a Scottish matter; its coincidence with the Easter Rising raised the spectre of a combined assault on the British state from Dublin and Glasgow, two of the major cities of the United Kingdom. But the ILP never dreamed of stepping outside its Scottish parliamentary tradition and forming an alliance with armed Irish rebels.

Forward editor Tom Johnston joined the Unionists in condemning the Easter Rising. He was puzzled by the involvement in the Dublin events of his former Irish correspondent, James Connolly: 'The most mysterious and astounding part of the insensate rebellion', wrote the leading ILPer, 'was the fact that James Connolly was not only implicated in it, but seems to have been one of its organisers' (Hunter, 'The Gaelic Connection'). For the Scottish left (with the exception of MacLean), the struggle of the Irish people for self-determination was

'insensate' and the idea that a revolutionary like Connolly could take up arms against British imperialism was 'astounding'. Thus the socialist home rulers lost an historic opportunity for broadening out the battle with the British government. Dublin was laid waste by the British 'guns, shells and other armaments' which Kirkwood had committed Scottish workers to producing, Connolly was executed, and the protest strikes against the Clydeside deportations fizzled out. Scottish workers had given the British war cabinet an early warning that they were prepared to fight. But the inward-looking character of the Scottish labour movement allowed the government to get off the hook.

'The Petrograd of the West'

By 1917 the mood of the Scottish working class was changing fast. The February and October revolutions in Russia culminated in the creation of the world's first workers' state and sent shock waves through war-weary Europe. In 1916 some 10 000 people had marched on the May Day rally in Glasgow; in May 1917 there were 100 000. That same month, 10 000 people were locked out of a meeting in support of the first revolution in Russia at Glasgow's St Andrews Hall. Groups of workers such as the miners and engineers voted by large majorities for an immediate end to the war. In January 1918 the government passed the Manpower Act, to harness the energies of the entire working class to the war effort. Clydeside resisted it. When a cabinet minister came north to persuade the Scottish workers to submit to the Act, a mass meeting sent him packing. The meeting passed a motion committing Clydeside to 'do nothing at all in support of carrying on the war but to do everything we can to bring the war to a conclusion' (Brown, *Maxton*).

For May Day 1918, the most militant Clydeside shop stewards proposed an all-British strike against the war. This was eventually toned down to a one-day strike and march. Again, 100 000 workers marched through Glasgow—but this time on a weekday—and the rally sent greetings to the new revolutionary Soviet state. In July 1918, 10 000 marched in protest against the imprisonment of John MacLean for anti-war agitation. Bolshevik leader Lenin dubbed Glasgow 'The Petrograd of the West' and named MacLean as Soviet consul to Britain. The upsurge on Red Clydeside reached its climax around the great 40-hours strike of January 1919. Thousands of workers fought with police in Glasgow's George Square, and the government sent in tanks to occupy the city's cattle market and to

aim their guns at the working class.

The new climate of political militancy on Clydeside pushed the organisations of the labour movement to the left. In June 1917, the ILP and Glasgow Trades Council sent delegates to the Leeds conference which voted in favour of setting up workers' and soldiers' councils. All of the Scottish Labour Party bodies soon adopted policies of opposition to the war. By the end of 1917, ILP membership in Scotland had increased by 300 per cent from the outbreak of war. Many leaders of the left, however, had not overcome their old prejudices about Scottish politics.

In the turbulent years of 1918 and 1919, the British ruling class regarded Red Clydeside as the most likely starting point for a revolutionary uprising. Their fear was not simply for the future of capitalism in Scotland; they believed that Clydeside could trigger off revolt in other parts of Britain. In December 1918, Basil Thomson, head of the Special Branch, wrote a report for the cabinet on the rising tide of working class unrest: 'Bolshevism, or rather the state of disaffection that might foster it, has never been so high in England as at the present time.' In Scotland, Thomson warned them, things were even worse: 'The industrial workers of Scotland are of a deeper red than the usual red-flaggers' (McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*). Later, Thomson was to remember early 1919 as 'the high-water mark' of unrest, when Britain was 'so near revolution', as the working class went on to the offensive and 'there were extensive strikes on the Clyde of a revolutionary rather than an economic character.'

The British government shared the apprehensions of their top political policeman. During the cabinet meeting which discussed the 40-hours strike of January 1919, Tory Party leader Bonar Law declared that it was 'vital for the war cabinet to be satisfied that there was a sufficient force in Glasgow to prevent disorder'. He considered that this was necessary because 'it was certain that if the movement in Glasgow grew, it would spread all over the country.' It was the government's keen understanding of the wider significance of events in Scotland that led to the despatch of troops and tanks on to the streets of Glasgow.

Some historians have accused the British government of over-reacting to 'the myth of Red Clydeside'. These commentators produce detailed evidence to prove that the Scottish working class was not a united community of fully-fledged communists. This is undoubtedly true; but it is also beside the point. The same could have been said of the Russian working class on the eve of revolution in

1917. What mattered was that in Scotland, as in Russia, there was a core of anti-capitalist militants who had the potential, in conditions of general social crisis, to draw the less politically aware workers into battle. The key difference was that the Scottish workers had no party like the Bolsheviks with a clear strategy for seizing state power. Yet, at a time of revolution in Europe and revolt in the colonies, the British ruling class rightly perceived Red Clydeside as a mortal threat to its authority and moved rapidly to suppress it.

The main reason why the British establishment succeeded where the Tsarist oligarchy failed was that the Scottish movement lacked a political leadership with the clarity of purpose to carry it to victory. While the British authorities fought from an all-British perspective, the Clydeside leaders demanded home rule and emphasised the Scottish character of their struggles. Instead of providing a coherent anti-capitalist direction for Scottish workers' struggles, the prominent figures in the shop stewards' movement and the socialist groups generally restricted their scope and diverted them away from the crucial political issues.

The Scottish Labour Party often declared its commitment to socialism and its disgust at the right-wing antics of the Labour leadership. In 1917, the Scottish party secretary Ben Shaw warned the Labour leaders in London that 'no leaflet north of the Tweed would find acceptance...unless it contained an attack on the policy of the party at headquarters, not to mention its personalities' (Brown, *Maxton*). The tension was illustrated at the 1918 general election, when only 41 of the 52 Scottish Labour candidates were endorsed by the party's NEC. When John MacLean stood on a Labour ticket in the Gorbals while he was still in jail, the London leadership was furious. The important political question, however, was how did the *policies* of the left-wing Labour Party in Scotland differ from those of the party bureaucracy in London?

The November 1918 general election took place in the midst of the conflicts of Red Clydeside. In this key contest, Labour's Scottish manifesto included three distinct policies for Scotland—land reform, prohibition of alcohol, and home rule under the watchful eye of Westminster. Within three months, the British government sent tanks into Glasgow to crush a strike. On the eve of that crisis, Labour offered workers an assembly which, it pledged, would recognise the government's right to use its army in Scotland. Within two years, unemployment in Scotland leapt from two to 18 per cent. Anybody reading Labour's Scottish manifesto might think that alcoholism and the lack of land were the main causes of working class unrest.

The old platform of Scottish Liberalism which Labour presented in 1918 could contribute nothing to solving the pressing problems facing working class Scots.

The perspectives of the Scottish trade union movement were equally remote from the realities of working class life. When STUC delegations met the prime minister in 1918 and the Scottish secretary in 1919, the British Empire was under pressure throughout the colonial world—from India and Egypt to Ireland. By linking the Scottish workers' movement with colonial liberation struggles, the union leaders could have struck a hefty blow against the British ruling class. But the anti-imperialist upsurge might have been happening on Mars as far as the Scottish trade union leaders were concerned. The major demand they put to the government ministers on both occasions was for a devolved Scottish assembly, which would respect the ultimate authority of the 'Imperial Parliament'.

The outdated ideas of 'Scottishness' upheld by the leaders of the Scottish labour movement indicated a retreat from the struggle against the British state. The only part of their programme which had any appeal to the working class in Scotland was the demand for home rule. From 1918 onwards, labour movement leaders from left and right made devolution a major campaigning focus in Scotland. They sought to use the militancy of Red Clydeside to provide electoral support for a future Labour government of Scotland. Labour's eventual success in winning working class support for the home rule campaign owed much to the confusion and demoralisation which followed defeat in the industrial sphere. The turning point was the 40-hours strike of January 1919.

When the First World War ended in November 1918, the rundown of the armaments industry and the return of millions of demobilised soldiers brought the threat of mass unemployment back to Scotland. The labour movement demanded a cut in the working week which could accommodate the returning workers without displacing those already in work. But a dispute arose over how big a cut was required. The British executive of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers signed a deal with the employers to cut the week from 54 to 47 hours. This was not nearly enough for the Clydesiders. The unofficial Clyde Workers' Committee, now reactivated as the Ways and Means Committee, raised the demand for a 30-hour working week. The Scottish Advisory Committee of the Labour Party, the Scottish ILP, the STUC and the engineers' district committee came up with a compromise demand for 40 hours.

It is worth noting that the shop stewards' call for a 30-hour week,

which still seems unreal 60 years later, was not confined to any handful of 'extremists'. In a ballot of Glasgow workplaces and branches, 104 voted for 30 hours, 83 for 40 hours, just 13 for 47 hours and one remained undecided. The militant mood of Scottish workers forced the official bodies of the Clydeside labour movement—the parliamentary committee of the STUC and local engineering union officials—to join the unofficial shop stewards on the committee which called a strike for the 40-hour week, to begin on 27 January 1919.

The 40-hours strike was a famous display of working class power. By the second day, 70 000 workers were out. Sympathetic action by electricians cut off the power supply to many industries. The strikers toured the city to win wider support, and in the process invented the tactic of mass picketing. Between 5000 and 10 000 workers would line up outside a targeted works, forcing strikebreakers to run a fearsome gauntlet—many important factories were closed down by this technique. Militants produced daily strike bulletins and circulated them widely. Although the leaders of big unskilled unions refused to support the strike, bearing a grudge against the skilled engineers who had often acted sectionally in the past, some of their members did come out. In the coalfields thousands of Scottish miners came out on strike for a 30-hour week. Strikes also brought Edinburgh and Belfast close to a standstill.

The Scottish workers lacked a leadership which could have redirected the sectional struggles of Clydeside into a political challenge to the British establishment. This shortcoming allowed the strike to be defeated by the combined opposition of two forces—the British government and the leadership of the engineering union. The state was willing to go to any lengths to crush the movement. Thousands of demonstrating workers clashed with baton-wielding police in Glasgow's George Square on 'Bloody Friday', 31 January 1919, and the tanks rolled into the cattle market. The strikers were left isolated and facing the might of the British state with no clear idea of what to do next. The drift back to work began and ten days later the strike committee issued a call for an orderly return to work.

The executive of the engineering union was equally keen to maintain its authority over its members by stamping on the unofficial strike. The London-based union leaders refused strike pay and suspended the Glasgow district committee for daring to back the strike. When the radical London district committee declared its support for the Clydeside strikers, it too was suspended. The union leadership called the police to protect its London offices against

possible protests. Other engineers in England who expressed sympathy with the strike were threatened with the same treatment.

The 40-hours strike provided irrefutable evidence of the need for Scottish militants to reach out to other sections of the British working class. It confirmed that the Scottish establishment operated as one part of the British capitalist class, with no qualms about calling on the central power of the state to deal with local problems. The strike leaders had gone to see the Lord Provost of Glasgow, to ask him to put their demands to the government. Instead, he sent a warning to Whitehall and urged the government to act against the strike; the cabinet replied to his request with tanks. The ruling class also planned its military intervention on an all-British basis. Because the government was unsure of the loyalties of the troops stationed in Glasgow, it sent soldiers in from England and the Highlands to occupy the city. No movement confined to Scotland, however militant, could have defeated such opposition.

The 40-hours strike also showed the need for a political movement which could go beyond industrial disputes and parliamentary politics. It indicated that neither a militant strike nor a cross on a ballot paper was enough to contend with the power of the capitalist class. The traditional demands of Scottish Labour, like home rule and prohibition, were simply irrelevant to Glasgow workers faced with military occupation.

Willie Gallacher was a leading Clydeside shop steward who rejected political action in favour of the syndicalist strategy of achieving socialism through strikes alone. Later, as a leading Communist Party member and then an MP, he reviewed the potential and the problems of the 40-hours strike. Gallacher had by then adopted the corrupted version of communism preached by the Stalinists. But his comments on January 1919 remain valid insights into that momentous struggle of the Scottish working class, and are worth recalling at some length. He begins by describing a great demonstration at which the workers carried red flags through the streets of Glasgow:

'But for those of us who were leading the strike, we were strike leaders, nothing more; we had forgotten we were revolutionary leaders of the working class and while we cheered the flying of our flag, it had not for us the significant meaning it had for our enemies. They saw it as the symbol of an actual rising; we saw it as an incident in the prosecution of the strike. We were all agreed on the importance of the strike for the 40-hour week, but we had never discussed a general line against capitalism, and never could have agreed on it, even if we had discussed it....

'We were being isolated and encircled with enemies, but we had possibilities of winning great new forces to our side if we had only the necessary revolutionary understanding and audacity. Revolt was seething everywhere, especially in the army.

We had within our own hands the possibility of giving actual expression and leadership to it, but it never entered our heads to do so. *We were carrying on a strike when we ought to have been making a revolution.*'

After the fighting in George Square, during which Gallacher earned the distinction of belting the chief constable of Glasgow on the jaw (which was to earn him three months in jail), the workers staged a protest march to Glasgow Green. Gallacher remembered this as another underestimation of the situation:

'Had we been capable of planning beforehand, or had there been an experienced revolutionary leadership of these great and heroic masses, instead of a march to Glasgow Green there would have been a march to Maryhill Barracks. For while troops, mostly young raw recruits, with tanks, machine guns and barbed wire were being brought forward for the encirclement of Glasgow, the soldiers of Maryhill were confined to barracks and the barrack gates were kept tightly closed. If we had gone there we could easily have persuaded the soldiers to come out and Glasgow would have been in our hands.' (W Gallacher, *Revolt on the Clyde,* 1978 edition)

The British ruling class had recognised the revolutionary potential of the situation; the leaders of the Scottish workers' movement had not. There could only be one result of such a political mismatch. But the fact that there was no 'experienced revolutionary leadership of these great and heroic masses' meant that nobody was equipped to explain the defeat of 1919 in this way. Instead, very different conclusions were drawn. The home rulers in the labour movement encouraged the idea that the strike had been beaten, not by the British capitalist class but by the 'English government'. They argued that the engineers' leaders had not betrayed the strike merely because they were bureaucrats, but because they were 'English' bureaucrats. Scotland had been attacked by English rulers, and let down by the English labour movement.

The narrow, Scottish interpretation of the Clydeside events even influenced some of the most left-wing activists. In the early days of the struggle, the strike bulletins proclaimed the cause of internationalism and reported workers' struggles from around the world. 'A victory in Scotland', argued one issue, 'will help our comrades in India, who are with us in heart and soul.' By the end of the strike, however, the bitterness of defeat had altered the tone. In his contribution to the final strike bulletin, John MacLean expressed the way that workers' anger at the treachery of the union leaders had become bound up with Scottish nationalist sentiments:

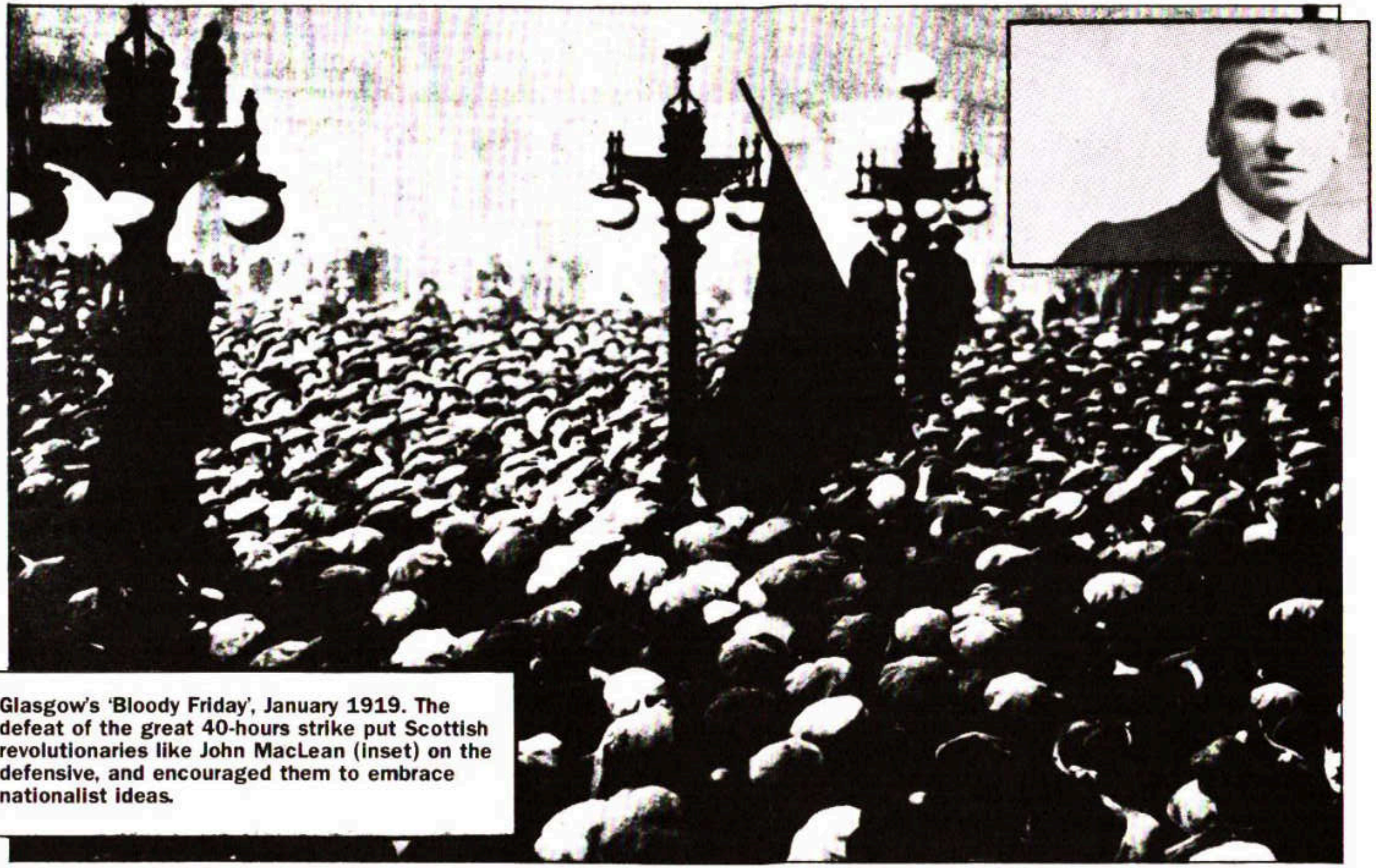
'London executives don't understand our aspirations here, and never take the trouble to find out what is wrong when a strike occurs. We have to emancipate ourselves from the dictatorship of the London juntas by building an organisation which will be under our control and function when we want it to function.' (N Milton, *John MacLean,* 1973)

MacLean could never have written an article with such anti-English undertones two years earlier. Then, his only thoughts had been about uniting the British working class for revolution. But January 1919 altered things for MacLean and many other left-wing Scots. The experience of defeat encouraged a defensive outlook. Lacking an effective political strategy, Scottish workers went into retreat. They looked for somebody outside their ranks to blame, and found the English. It is not unusual for workers to lash out like this when a political problem denies them the support they need and no solutions are on offer. When the miners' strike of 1984-85 was hit by divisions, activists grabbed at all sorts of irrational explanations. One of the most popular was that Nottinghamshire miners were somehow 'born to scab'. A similar defensiveness took hold of many Scottish workers from 1919.

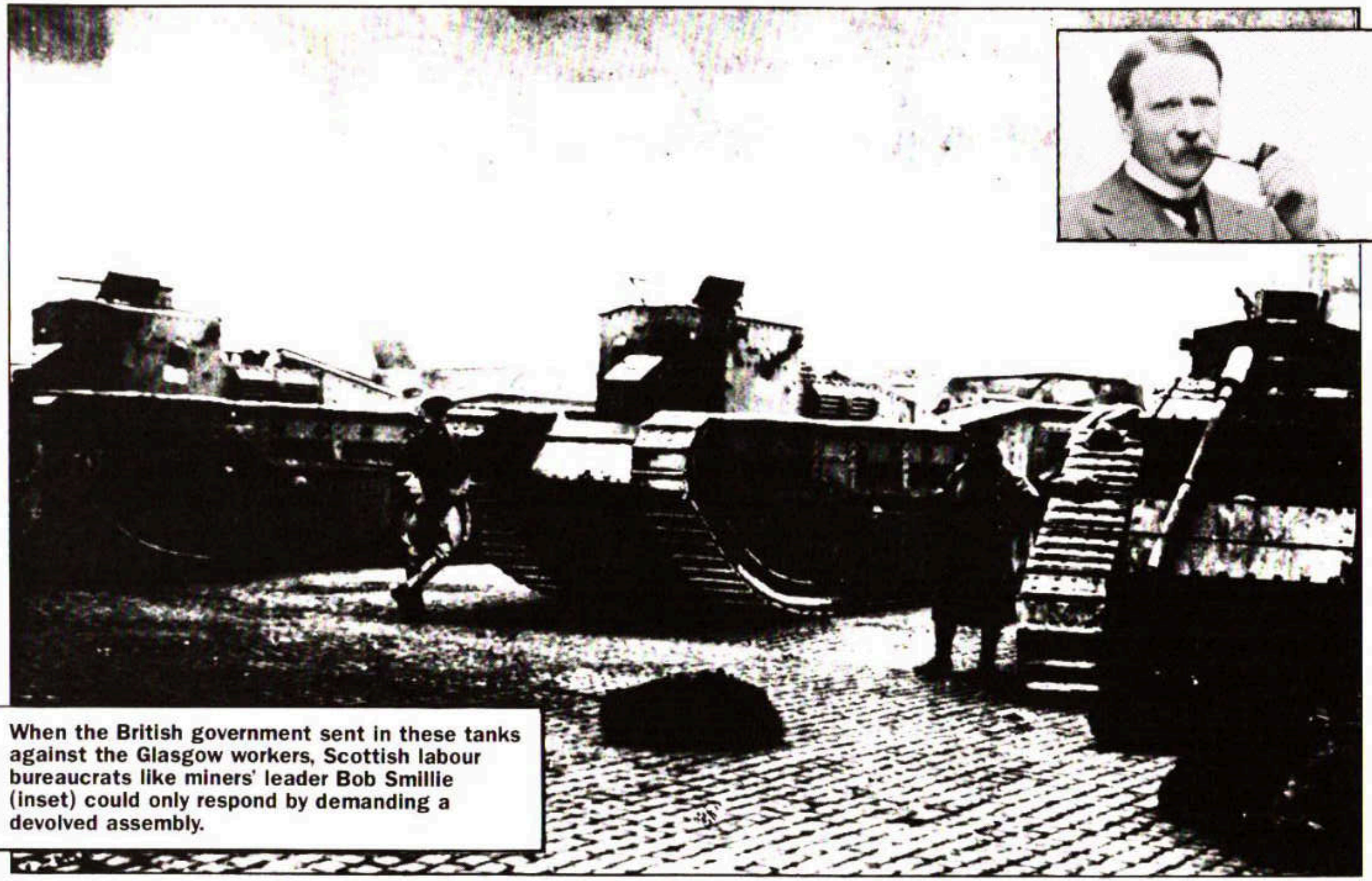
The Labour leadership took advantage of the demoralisation of the Clydeside militants to step up its home rule propaganda. The fact that the political shortcomings of these same leaders were largely to blame for the crisis was buried beneath the complaints that the English working class had failed the Scots. The idea that Scotland was special had little influence when the working class was going forward. But when the advance was halted, the home rulers fed off the disillusionment that followed defeat.

The notion that the reactionary English character of the 'London juntas' of the labour movement was to blame for Scottish defeats gathered strength over the next two years. The break-up of the Triple Alliance of transport, rail and miners' unions and the consequent defeat of the miners in 1921 was again blamed on the 'great Englishmen' in the union head offices down south. Scottish labour movement spokesmen argued that workers should put their trust in the progressive Scottishness of their local leaders. They called on Scots to send Labour MPs to Westminster and, more immediately, to demand a devolved assembly where Scottish Labour and union leaders could operate free from backward English influence.

Scottish workers, like militants elsewhere in Britain, had certainly been stabbed in the back by the union leaders. But the criminal behaviour of the union officials was the result of their position as professional bureaucrats, not the fact that they were born in England and sat in London. Their concern was to stamp on conflict and to win a place in the capitalist machinery of government through compromise and conciliation. This was as true of Scottish union leaders as of English ones. The best (or worst) example of this was Robert Smillie, the Scottish miners' leader and most prominent



Glasgow's 'Bloody Friday', January 1919. The defeat of the great 40-hours strike put Scottish revolutionaries like John MacLean (inset) on the defensive, and encouraged them to embrace nationalist ideas.



When the British government sent in these tanks against the Glasgow workers, Scottish labour bureaucrats like miners' leader Bob Smillie (inset) could only respond by demanding a devolved assembly.

home ruler in the union movement.

Smillie had been a leading advocate of Scottish devolution since the 1880s. In 1918 he pledged labour movement support for the re-formed Scottish Home Rule Association. He campaigned for a devolved assembly, which he argued was needed to preserve the uniquely progressive character of the Scottish labour movement. Yet Smillie was as unwilling to take on the British ruling class as any English union official. The limitations of his militancy were revealed in 1919 when, as the representative of the British miners, he went with the leaders of the other arms of the Triple Alliance—the railwaymen and transport workers—to confront the prime minister, Lloyd George. Smillie's version of the meeting was later retold by the Welsh Labour leader, Aneurin Bevan. Lloyd George admitted to them that unrest was rising, that the government was at the mercy of the Triple Alliance, that he could not rely on the army, and that 'in these circumstances, if you carry out your threat and strike, then you will defeat us':

' "But if you do so," went on Mr Lloyd George, "have you weighed the consequences? The strike will be in defiance of the government of the country and by its very success will precipitate a constitutional crisis of the first importance. For, if a force arises in the state which is stronger than the state itself, then it must be ready to take on the functions of the state, or withdraw and accept the authority of the state. Gentlemen," asked the prime minister quietly, "have you considered, and if you have, are you ready?" "From that moment on," said Robert Smillie, "we were beaten and we knew we were." ' (A Bevan, *In Place of Fear*, 1978 edition)

At the time of that famous meeting, key sections of the working class were in revolt, and British capitalism was in danger. But leaders like Smillie were not prepared to take on the British state. His advocacy of a Scottish assembly as the solution for the working class distracted attention from the true cause of the setbacks experienced by the trade unions. The leaders of the Scottish labour movement, like their colleagues in England, were neither willing nor able to challenge the power of the capitalist class. The lack of an alternative, anti-capitalist leadership allowed Smillie and Co to lay the blame at the door of English workers. The effect of their revived home rule campaign was to encourage Scots to line up behind Scottish labour movement leaders who could be beaten by a quiet word from a prime minister.

In their eagerness to promote the cause of Scottish devolution, Scottish Labour leaders proved willing to link up with diverse middle class Gaelic enthusiasts. Typical of this trend was a statement issued in 1919, calling for home rule on the usual basis that Scotland was more politically and culturally advanced than England. It was signed

by Labour MPs, by leading Scottish left wingers like Maxton—and by Erskine of Marr, a Scottish aristocrat with a romantic attachment to a mythical feudal Celtic past. Labour home rulers went to bizarre lengths to encourage socialist/nationalist relations. A *Highland News* report of a Greenock branch meeting of the Highland Land League in October 1919 noted that 'the "Internationale" by the choir and two Gaelic songs by Mr HM MacEachen were well-received' (Hunter, 'The Gaelic Connection'). The combination of the anthem of revolutionary workers around the world with songs derived from ancient Highland bards aptly symbolised the confusion caused by defeat and compounded by Labour's cult of Scottishness.

In the Red Clydeside years Scottish workers often led the way in the British class struggle. They did so not just as Scots, but as proletarians. When their efforts faltered, they became more receptive to those offering a nationalist solution. The Labour leaders' demand for devolution and their insistence on the traditional Scottishness of the movement did nothing to resolve the great issues facing Scottish workers. These policies simply helped to divide Scottish workers, particularly against English workers. The Labour leaders identified the wrong targets for working class anger. They diverted the movement away from the path to working class power, into the quest for a local assembly in which the bureaucrats might hope to gain influence. We will shortly examine how Scottish workers' hopes in the Clydeside MPs elected in 1922 were dashed. But before we pass on, a few words about the legend of John MacLean.

Today, some left-wing supporters of the assembly campaign claim to stand in the tradition of John MacLean who, they say, combined revolutionary socialism with Scottish nationalism. But MacLean's story is not so straightforward. A schoolteacher by profession, MacLean was an untiring opponent of capitalist exploitation and imperialist war. His anti-war agitation earned him jail sentences in 1915, 1916 and 1918. Lenin named him as Soviet consul, and a Leningrad dock was called after him. At the prime of his political career MacLean was an angry critic of the outdated traditions which passed for 'Scottishness'. In 1914 he was instrumental in a socialist campaign against the teaching of a romantic version of Scottish history in schools, and against the commemoration of the 1314 Battle of Bannockburn, which he said was fought 'by serfs for the benefit of a few barons' (Young, *The Rousing of the Scottish Working Class*). He was equally dismissive of attempts to win working class support for a Scottish assembly. Discussing Liberal proposals for devolution in 1912, MacLean insisted that such an assembly would act as 'a buffer

betwixt us and our goal, or a brake to curb our revolutionary fervour':

'The establishment of a Scottish Babel would...be a retrograde step and should meet with opposition and ridicule. What is good or bad for England is good or bad for Scotland.' (D Howell, *A Lost Left: Three Studies in Socialism and Nationalism,* 1986)

By contrast, MacLean was a firm supporter of the struggle for Irish freedom from British imperialism. His was a worldwide vision of working class struggle, not a concern with narrow Scottish matters, as he explained in his paper *The Vanguard* in 1915:

'Our object is the education of the workers into a clear knowledge of the slave position they hold over all the globe today...nothing but world socialism will do. This monstrous war shows that the day of social pottering or reform is past.' (J Broom, *John MacLean,* 1973)

MacLean carried his revolutionary philosophy into the Red Clydeside years. But the war and the defeats which followed it took a heavy toll.

The years MacLean spent rock-breaking or in solitary confinement in prison broke him physically and, as his friends and associates recalled, encouraged a sense of paranoia. More important was the blow dealt by the defeat of the 40-hours strike, from which he drew nationalist conclusions. MacLean became disillusioned with the prospect of a British revolution. He refused to join the new Communist Party of Great Britain in 1920, and instead declared the need for a separate Scottish Communist Party and Scottish independence. Gallacher, a founding member of the CP, had fought a long and bitter personal feud with MacLean. He dismissed his old adversary's new nationalist ideas as the raving of a madman, but failed to refute MacLean's arguments.

MacLean found little real popular resonance for his demand for a Scottish republic. He continued to agitate in solidarity with the Irish freedom struggle, and sought to organise the unemployed. But he withdrew more and more into personal campaigns, such as his attempt to get workers to undermine the capitalist finance system by burning all the paper money in their possession. He also formed links with Gaelic nationalists like Erskine of Marr. Now MacLean declared that 'the socialist revolution is possible sooner in Scotland than in England.' His 1920 leaflet: 'All hail! The Scottish Communist Republic!' gave a flavour of the sort of Scottish socialist revolution he had come to envisage:

'The communism of the clans must be re-established on a modern basis. (Bolshevism to put it roughly is but the modern expression of the communism of the Mir.) Scotland...must have one clan, as it were—a united people working in cooperation and cooperatively using the wealth that is created.' (J MacLean, *In the Rapids of Revolution,* 1978 edition)

MacLean's attempts to link the Bolsheviks with feudal clans are a long way from the spirit of internationalism with which he had inspired Scottish workers during the war. For John MacLean, as for the best Scottish workers, the real drift towards glorifying a separate 'Scottishness' came only after the defeats suffered by the working class, which left him isolated and frustrated. Even then, MacLean never went so far as to support devolution within the British state. The idea of a Scottish assembly remained for him a 'Scottish Babel' and 'a barrier betwixt us and our goal'. He died in 1923, not long after the Labour home rulers who sought to erect that barrier enjoyed their moment of triumph.

From fear to laughter

On Sunday 20 November 1922, a crowd variously estimated at between 40 000 and 100 000 gathered around St Enoch's station to send off the new Labour MPs who had just taken Glasgow and the west of Scotland by storm in the general election. Among the group of 18 MPs were men like *Forward* editor Tom Johnston, but at the centre were the five Clydesiders: John Wheatley, Campbell Stephen, Davie Kirkwood, George Buchanan and James Maxton. The waving red flags and singing crowds which covered the station gave the impression of the dawn of a new era. In fact, it was the end of one. There would be few more such demonstrations of working class enthusiasm on Clydeside. By 1924, when the first minority Labour government was in office, Willie Gallacher and Harry McShane were to lead a May Day march that mustered barely 100 people.

Labour's dramatic breakthrough in the 1922 election owed much to the defeats on the industrial front. The end of the 40-hours strike undermined the syndicalists' case for industrial action. The new CP proved too politically immature to convince workers of the need for a political struggle against capitalism. It was left to left-wing Labour and ILP candidates to reap the benefits of the earlier setbacks. Voting Labour seemed the only realistic form of defence for many working class people—a view encouraged in Scotland by the agitation for a devolved assembly. Local election results showed a fairly steady growth in Labour support in Scotland after the defeats of 1919. Economic recession and rising unemployment undermined militancy but added to the pool of people who would passively vote Labour. This included unskilled workers and, for the first time in any numbers, Irish Catholics.

Several factors helped Labour to win the Irish vote. One was the defeat of the struggle for Irish self-determination after Britain partitioned Ireland in 1921. The temporary suppression of the Irish national question left the Irish in Scotland to involve themselves more fully in British politics. For a predominantly working class community whose traditional allegiance to the Liberals had been sorely tried through the drawn-out home rule crisis, voting Labour was the logical next step. As with the Clydeside strikes, a success story for the British ruling class proved to have a beneficial spin-off for Labour in Scotland.

It soon became apparent that sending left-wing MPs to Westminster made little difference to working class life in Glasgow. The Clydeside MPs were committed to parliamentary socialism, but the talking shop of the house of commons was no place to take on the aggressive Scottish employers who were sacking thousands and slashing wages. Nor were the new members for Clydeside the men for the job. They were angry about the injustices inflicted on working people, and capable of denouncing capitalism in a way that shames many on the left today. Their disruptive tactics made a dramatic impact on the British political scene. Yet they were still weighed down by the conservative political baggage inherited from the past.

The Clydesiders' sectional 'Scottishness' often tainted their attacks on the exploiting classes. In a famous outburst which got him barred from the commons in 1923, Maxton accused the Tory government of being 'murderers' when they moved to cut off free milk to Scottish children. This could have been an excellent example of how to use parliament as a propaganda platform from which to reach the working class outside. Yet when he returned to Glasgow to address a rally of thousands, Maxton marred his opposition to Tory cruelty with narrow nationalism. 'We mean to tell them,' he declared, 'they can do what they like about English children but that they are not going to suffer Scottish children to die' (Keating and Bleiman, *Labour and Scottish Nationalism*). Such outbursts were unlikely to encourage the spirit of class solidarity on either side of the border.

In addition to housing and education, the Scottish Labour MPs often raised old Nonconformist causes such as the prohibition of alcohol or Scotland's religious heritage. Their adherence to these ideas may seem unimportant, but it signified a broader attachment to obsolete traditions which distracted from pressing modern problems. The Scottish working class of the twenties would find no solutions to mass unemployment in the Covenanters' version of

Psalm 124, which the Clydeside MPs had adopted as a sort of theme tune. Scottish Labour's 1924 home rule Bill illustrated the problem. In supporting the Bill, Tom Johnston spoke of Scotland's need for separate treatment on matters of land, religion and education, and talked in glowing terms about Rabbie Burns and the battle of Bannockburn. At a moment midway between the battles of Red Clydeside and the General Strike, Scottish workers needed a political lead into the future, not another lecture on fourteenth-century wars and eighteenth-century poetry.

Writing at the time, the Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky pointed out how the deep-seated conservatism of the British labour movement leaders was reflected in the respect they paid to such established institutions as the Church, the Crown and parliament. We shall give him the last word on the archaic ideas of the Labour home rulers who had carried the hopes of the Clydeside workers in 1922:

'Let us now take one or two of the left or semi-left Labour MPs. Certain property rights of the Scottish Church were being discussed in parliament. A Scottish Labour MP, Johnston, invoked the Act of Union of 1707 to deny the right of the British parliament to interfere with the solemnly acknowledged rights of the Scottish Church. Yet the Speaker refused to remove the matter from the order paper. Then MacLean, another Scottish MP, stated that if such a Bill went through he and his friends would go back to Scotland and call for the Act of Union to be revoked and the Scottish parliament restored (laughter from the Conservatives and cheers from representatives of the Scottish Labour Party). Everything is instructive here. The Scottish group, which stands on the left wing of the Parliamentary Labour Party, protests against ecclesiastical legislation, not starting out at all from the principle of the separation of Church and state, or any practical considerations, but basing themselves on the sacred rights of the Scottish Church as guaranteed to it by a treaty which is now over two centuries old. In retaliation for the violation of the rights of the Scottish Church these same Labour MPs threaten to demand the restoration of the Scottish parliament, which would, of course, be quite useless to them.' (L Trotsky, 'Where Is Britain Going?' in Trotsky, *Writings on Britain*, Vol 2, 1974 edition)

The Scottish lobby

The demand for devolution and the theme of the distinctiveness of Scottish politics have both returned to prominence since the seventies. As we will be examining the current arguments about the working class and the assembly in depth in chapter four, we can deal with these matters briefly here.

The struggles of the Scottish workers in recent years have taken place in a very different atmosphere from that of Red Clydeside. Then, the working class went on the attack, revolution seemed

possible, and even parliamentary socialists felt obliged to denounce capitalism from every available soapbox. Now, Scottish workers have their backs to the wall, fighting to save what little they have. The fiery rhetoric of their forebears must sound like a foreign language to today's tame labour bureaucrats like Labour's Scottish spokesman Donald Dewar and Scottish TUC chief Campbell Christie.

The Thatcher years have brought bitter defensive battles in Scotland. The big steel strike of 1980 and the great miners' struggle of 1984-85 are the biggest and best-known. Through such struggles, the Scottish working class has retained its place in the front rank of the British labour movement. But the lack of success in such all-British struggles, and the failure of workers elsewhere to support Scots in dispute, has encouraged a retreat back beyond the border. Once more, Scottish workers' leaders put the emphasis on organising separately to protect the unique radicalism of Scotland. The idea that Scotland is special has been reinforced by the widening gap in Scottish and English election results since 1979. The leaders of the Scottish Labour Party and trade unions have seized upon these defensive sentiments to win support for their assembly campaign, which could get them back into government at least within Scotland. They have applied the same inward-looking 'Scotland alone' approach to industrial disputes.

The Labour leaders' arguments for a distinctly Scottish defence of jobs have now been stripped of much of the socialist rhetoric which was used in the past. Instead, the talk is of the need to unite Scots of all classes—workers, capitalists, church ministers and Tory rebels included—in a 'Scottish front' to defend Scotland's 'industrial heritage'. In disputes over threatened closure at places like Upper Clyde Shipbuilders (UCS), Gartcosh steelworks and the Caterpillar tractor factory, the union officials involved have sought to join forces with employers and other members of the Scottish establishment to lobby the government for help. All of these plants are now closed with the loss of thousands of jobs. This suggests that there is something seriously wrong with a strategy based on mobilising an all-class alliance under the banner of 'Scottishness'. Indeed this approach violates the basic principles of trade unionism.

Trade unions exist to organise workers collectively and thus to maximise their capacity to defend their interests against the employers. When workers become involved in a strike or dispute with their boss, militants will instinctively seek to win active support from workers elsewhere. Blacking action, joint picketing and boycotts are just some of the established tactics used to widen

support for the strike and increase the pressure on the employer. This is the ABC of working class solidarity—it does not require any grasp of communist or even socialist politics. Workers share a common interest in protecting jobs, wages and working conditions. A victory for one group of trade unionists can strengthen us all. Contrast this with the idea that workers in dispute should appeal for support to another *employer.* It goes against the very nature of trade unionism.

The strategy of relying on close relations with employers rather than on other workers is customarily known as class collaboration. It is like collaborating with an enemy in time of war. Most Scottish militants would consider British union officials who pursue such methods, like the leaders of the electricians or the breakaway miners' union, as scabs. Yet in Scotland, a similar strategy has been given legitimacy by the idea that Scots, whether workers or employers, are special. Under the cloak of the labour movement's Scottish lobby, the left often advises workers threatened with redundancy not to seek solidarity action, but to line up with employers and other 'progressive' members of the Scottish establishment to appeal for clemency from the British authorities. This has made the methods of class collaboration respectable, and it has cost the working class dear.

Threatened workers can achieve nothing through seeking an alliance with sections of the same capitalist class which is sacking them. You cannot court the employers and fight them at the same time. The Scottish labour movement's attempts to unite with Tory dissidents, middle class churchmen and other dignitaries have meant restricting working class struggles within limits acceptable to these pillars of the establishment. It has held back the movement and wasted opportunities for widening the battlefront by involving other workers. Two dramatic and painful examples of the problem are the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders' sit-in, where the strategy was pioneered in the early seventies, and the recent Caterpillar occupation.

The UCS was an unwieldy amalgam of old yards, brought together by the Labour government in 1968 and largely state-owned. This integration had been organised by Tony Benn who, as a left-wing contemporary put it, had made sure 'that all the old yardowners were generously compensated and given seats on the new board' (A Barnett, 'Class Struggle and the Heath Government', *New Left Review*, Jan/Feb 1973). When the Tories returned to office, they did not show the same courtesy to shipyard workers as Labour had shown to the owners. In July 1971, Edward Heath's Tory government announced its intention to close the company and keep

on at most 2500 of the 8500 workers. The planned closure threatened up to 20 000 related jobs. Tory MPs cheered the closure announcement, while Labour could only complain that 'the government has made the class struggle respectable' (A Buchan, *The Right to Work: The Story of the Upper Clyde Confrontation*, 1972). Instead of whining about the class struggle, the UCS workers got on with fighting it. They occupied the works to save their jobs.

The long and determined UCS occupation excited plenty of support. The fighting fund received around £500 000 from across the world. On 23 June 100 000 workers on Clydeside joined a protest strike in support of UCS and against unemployment. On 18 August 150 000 Scottish workers did it again. The UCS sit-in inspired other threatened workers to follow suit. Occupations soon followed at nearby Plessey Alexandria, at the River Don works in Sheffield, at Fisher Bendix on Merseyside and subsequently at numerous engineering factories in the Manchester area. At a time of large-scale union protests against Heath's Industrial Relations Act, and the victory of the miners' strike at the start of 1972, the UCS sit-in could have been the beginning of a rank and file uprising against the Tories. The Communist Party militants who led the dispute, Jimmy Airlie and Jimmy Reid, talked of it in those terms. Reid said the dispute was 'a portent of the future' which showed how 'workers...will write the most glorious pages in the history of our country' (M Poole, *Towards a New Industrial Democracy*, 1986). The actions taken by Airlie and Reid, however, were more of an inglorious attempt to ally the UCS workforce with the upper classes 'of our country'.

The Communist Party concentrated on spreading support for UCS, not to the rank and file at other firms, but to the employers and the Scottish establishment. The leaders of the UCS workforce set out to prove to the government and the employers that the works could be run efficiently and at a profit. Thus their sit-in became a work-in. Having helped to persuade the workers to labour for free as a gesture of good faith towards their exploiters, in February 1972 the CP used its influence at the Scottish TUC to call a Scottish People's Assembly. This brought together trade union officials and Tories, MPs and church ministers, student unions and the bosses' CBI, to discuss UCS and the Scottish economy. 'It was obvious', remarked Hamish Grant of the Scottish CBI after the assembly meeting, 'that there is a call for greater devolution and responsibility through the institutions of Scotland' (Keating and Bleiman, *Labour and Scottish Nationalism*).

Outside in the real world, Scottish workers like the miners and the shipyard workers were fighting for their livelihoods against the Tory

government and such 'institutions of Scotland' as the courts and the police. But in the unreal atmosphere of their mock parliament, the union officials and Communists were trying to coax Tories and bosses to join them in a Scottish lobby. The chance to spark a fire in the Scottish working class was thus turned into an opportunity for exchanging opinions with the millionaire brewers of the Younger family, who came within the definition of 'Scottish people' at the Scottish People's Assembly. This approach wasted the opportunity to involve other workers and stifled the impact of the UCS sit-in. It also ensured that the workers' success in stopping the closure was shortlived.

The approach established at UCS has been repeated in several disputes since. The most recent example was during the occupation of the Caterpillar tractor works at Uddingston, after the American employers announced plans to pull out early in 1987. The Caterpillar workforce occupied the factory to save 1200 jobs. They stayed there for three months, defying court orders to get out. During the occupation, the Caterpillar workers expressed their instinctive sympathy with those suffering elsewhere by building a tractor for War on Want. The massive support for the strikers in the Scottish labour movement was displayed through the financial donations which poured in week after week. But to make their action bite, the Caterpillar workers needed to convert that sympathy into active solidarity, in the form of blacking action and blockades against the police offensive which could well have followed. Instead, union officials like Campbell Christie of the Scottish TUC and Jimmy Airlie of the engineers sidetracked the campaign into another narrow 'Scottish front' affair. In their pursuit of an alliance with the Scottish establishment, the union leaders invited Tories on to rally platforms. They told their members at Caterpillar to stop embarrassing them in front of their new friends, obey the capitalist courts and end the occupation.

The only 'action' the union officials organised were parliamentary lobbies led by tartan pipers. They entrusted the task of getting Caterpillar to change its mind to the Tory Scottish secretary, Malcolm Rifkind. Rifkind's response summed up the cynicism with which the ruling class viewed such a low-key campaign: 'I do not accept the inevitability of Caterpillar's withdrawal from the plant and will continue to use every opportunity to persuade them to reconsider,' he said. Then came the punchline: 'Clearly, however, it would be foolish to imagine that they will do so' (*Glasgow Herald*, 12 March 1987). Foolish it may have been, but it was the entire



The failure of the campaigns to save Upper Clyde Shipbuilders and Caterpillar (bottom picture), should be a warning of what happens when the labour movement squanders opportunities to win working class solidarity, and instead seeks to form a 'Scottish front' with members of the establishment.



Pandora Anderson



Scottish miners stood up to the might of the British state in the 1984-85 strike. But when militant areas like Scotland and Yorkshire stopped fighting for active support from workers elsewhere, it led to divisions, defeat and victimisations.



Joe Boatman

strategy of the labour movement leaders who claimed that their Scottish alliance could prevail through persuasion alone.

The campaign's inevitable lack of progress led to demoralisation among the strikers, who voted to end their occupation in April 1987 without the guarantee of a single job. The Scottish TUC had assured them that if they ended the sit-in, its joint working party with the Caterpillar bosses, the Scottish Development Agency and the CBI would find them alternative employment. Shortly after the workers came out of occupation, Caterpillar dismissed the working party as a purely advisory body, and ordered its managers in Scotland to sell everything at the Uddingston plant, down to 'the knives and forks' (*Glasgow Herald*, 6 May 1987).

The tragedy at Caterpillar shows what happens when workers march to the tune of the Scottish establishment. The strikers' failure to fight for active solidarity left them isolated. They fell prey to the union leaders' idea of a moderate Scottish lobby as the way ahead. As a result, the defiant demand for no redundancies was twisted into a polite request for a kind word from Malcolm Rifkind.

Since the seventies, the Labour and trade union leaders have offered Scottish workers a campaign for devolution as a solution to their problems. This is another form of the argument that the working class should forget about independent action and unite with other sections of Scottish society. The demand for devolution has acted as a distraction from important struggles.

From February 1974, the new Labour government continued the Tories' wage restraint policies. Scottish workers from many sectors responded with unofficial strike action. By the second general election of October 1974, more than 40 000 had been involved in wage disputes. The top union officials told their members to return to work and stop rocking Labour's boat. The Labour government used troops to break the Glasgow dustmen's strike. Meanwhile the Labour and union leaders were pointing to their re-conversion to the cause of devolution, to try to secure Scottish support at the polls and stop the swing to the Scottish nationalists. At a time when Labour was launching economic, political and even military attacks on Scottish workers, the labour movement needed to organise the widest possible opposition to the government. Instead, the devolution lobby advised workers to support the government in its plans for intensifying Scotland's political isolation through devolution.

In the years that followed, labour movement discussion of Scotland often focused on how to achieve devolution without disturbing the Labour government's British economic plan. This

plan was better known as the social contract, under which Labour and the union leaders 'planned' the biggest cuts in living standards since the Second World War. The working class needed to wreck the social contract, not to worry about whether it was compatible with the demand for a Scottish assembly. The idea of separating Scottish affairs from the rest of Britain had other negative results for the workers' movement. As a top Communist Party member, Scottish miners' leader Mick McGahey was a prominent supporter of Scottish devolution. In this spirit he agreed to Tony Benn's area incentive scheme in the late seventies—a divisive plan which shattered the unity between areas of the National Union of Mineworkers, and laid the basis for the divisions that defeated the 1984-85 strike.

Today, Scottish workers who come into conflict with their employers and the government are once more being advised to look to the assembly campaign. In August 1987, the already ravaged workforce at Scott Lithgow shipyard was told to expect the loss of another 1200 permanent jobs and the replacement of 800 more by contractors. The Scottish TUC organised a meeting of 150 west of Scotland shop stewards to discuss the crisis. But all Campbell Christie could offer them was a few words of sympathy and advice to turn out for the forthcoming pro-assembly Festival for Democracy in Glasgow—a harmless 'day out for all the family' which nobody could claim would save a single job.

The revival of claims about the distinctive 'Scottishness' of the labour movement's politics has led many workers into the dead ends of class collaboration and token industrial gestures. How has it affected other political and social issues in Scotland?

There is a common idea that Scotland has rejected the values of Thatcherism. 'These values', write the editors of *Radical Scotland,* 'which now seem to hold sway to such an extent in the south should concern us very deeply....We are faced with not just a political and constitutional problem but with a complete clash of cultures in the broadest sense of the word' (October/November 1986). This assessment is based on a superficial view of society. Some people in the south certainly appear to be more keen than many Scots on the Tories' hyped-up home-owning/share-buying revolution. (Though this often means little more than a basic desire among working class people to have a decent home and a higher standard of living.) But Scotland is not entirely free of the prejudices of the British ruling class—it has its own local variations. Scottish public opinion has its own points of agreement with the Tory right.

Take the issue of Northern Ireland. Because of the high level of Irish immigration into its west coast in the nineteenth century, Scotland has its own tradition on Ireland. It has a long history of sectarian discrimination against Irish Catholics—a prejudice that even extends into the labour movement. In 1986 Sam Campbell, Labour's convenor on Midlothian district council, was exposed as a bigot when he addressed an Orange Order rally in Edinburgh on the crimes of Catholicism, and declared that 'the Protestant people are the chosen people' (*the next step*, 11 July 1986). Campbell is no isolated individual in Scotland. The annual 12 July Orange Walk through Glasgow is the largest ritual display of sectarianism in Britain. Loyalist reaction is an influential part of the distinctive character of Scottish society which some supporters of Campbell's party like to portray as unambiguously progressive.

Women's rights is another issue on which Scotland has its own brand of right-wing values. The influence of both Protestant and Catholic churches has prejudiced many Scots on issues such as abortion. The right to have an abortion is a vital part of women's struggle for equality in society. Scotland has long been a bastion of the anti-abortion lobby. Some important recent attempts to introduce further restrictions on the legal right to abortion originated in Scotland. When he was Labour MP for Pollok in 1975, James White introduced an anti-abortion Bill in the house of commons. In 1979 John Corrie, a Scottish Tory, brought forward another Bill. It was supported by most Scottish Labour MPs, including such radical leaders of the assembly campaign as Dennis Canavan. In 1985 Enoch Powell proposed a Bill to restrict embryo research which would have serious repercussions for abortion rights. Nine of the 12 Scottish Labour MPs who were later to bring forward the assembly Bill were present for the Powell Bill debate; they all voted for it. The abysmal record of the Labour devolutionists on questions of women's rights is an indictment of the not-so-progressive aspects of their Scottish traditions.

The Scottish working class has often forged ahead of its English counterparts. It has fared best when it has escaped from the inhibitions of a narrow focus on Scottish affairs. But from 1918 to 1988, when workers' ideas or actions have been influenced by those who preach the unique virtues of a separate Scottish politics, or who demand devolution as the priority, it has always been for the worse. What Scottish workers have always needed is a political strategy which can free them from old traditions, build on their class instincts and anger, and reach out to the rest of the British working

class for an effective assault on the capitalist system. What they have often got instead is a strategy which holds them back within Scotland and limits their political outlook to glorifying 'Scottishness'. That, in effect, is what is proposed today by the advocates of the 'no mandate' argument.

'No mandate'?

The 'no mandate' argument arises out of the Tories' poor electoral performance in Scotland. Left wingers claim that this means that they have no moral or political right to implement their policies north of the border. In these circumstances, the argument continues, the only democratic alternative for Scotland is a devolved assembly. Devolution was supported in one form or another by parties which won around three quarters of Scottish votes in June 1987.

For the Labour Party, the 'no mandate' argument is a weak and dangerous ploy. It is all too easy for the Tories to make Labour look inconsistent and opportunist by pointing to previous election results and Labour's past record. Labour has not won a majority of English votes since 1951. Does this mean, ask the Tories, that Labour is admitting it had 'no mandate' in England throughout the 11 years of Labour governments in the sixties and seventies? This embarrassing observation is one reason why the Labour leadership has fought shy of using the 'no mandate' argument in the past. Neil Kinnock and Donald Dewar are wary of relinquishing Labour's right to form a future British government on the strength of its Scottish seats for the sake of a majority in an Edinburgh assembly. The fact that many leading Labour figures have finally set aside their doubts and plumped for shouting 'no mandate' reflects their recognition that their party is very unlikely to win power in Westminster in the foreseeable future. Thus for Labour, 'no mandate' is a sign of defeatism and pessimism. What does it mean for the Scottish working class?

The 'no mandate' argument is not really an argument at all. It is simply an assertion that most Scottish people don't much like Margaret Thatcher or many of her policies. It offers slogans for armchair anti-Tories, instead of strategies for action. 'The Tories have no mandate for the poll tax in Scotland,' declared a delegate from Paisley North at Labour's special Scottish conference in November 1987, 'people in Scotland do not want it.' This is hardly news to the Tories; nor will it shake them from their course. They are not interested in what working class people want, and they cannot be

shamed in this way into dropping policies which they consider to be necessary for British capitalism. Scottish workers can take up the 'no mandate' argument, turn their backs and refuse to recognise the Tories' right to govern. But Thatcher will go on governing regardless. The British establishment has never allowed pleas about mandates to interfere with its actions.

In recent years, left-wing opinion poll watchers have pointed out that a majority of British people opposed the siting of Cruise missiles, supported the existence of the Greater London Council, were against apartheid and thought that Britain should withdraw from Northern Ireland. Yet the government has welcomed the missiles, abolished the GLC, backed PW Botha's racist regime in South Africa and prosecuted the war in Ireland. The British ruling class only defers to 'the democratic wishes of the people' when it suits its purposes, or when it is forced to do so. The 'no mandate' approach of arguing that the Tories are not playing fair will not force them to do anything. They do not care about the rules, only about *who* rules. They will do whatever is necessary to ensure that they remain in control, whether they have a formal mandate or not.

Take a workplace situation as an example. If an individual employer decides to make hundreds of workers redundant, and they vote to reject his scheme, he clearly has 'no mandate' to implement it. But he is unlikely to comply with the workers' wishes. He will fight them to force the sackings through, and if necessary bring in outside help from the police and courts to help him win. The workers cannot win by sitting at home saying 'we don't want it'. Their only hope is to organise to win outside support of their own to resist the employer's redundancy package. That is also the approach the Scottish working class needs to beat back the Tory government's attacks.

Parroting 'no mandate' in response to each new Tory offensive reduces working class activists to echoing the existing state of public opinion, instead of mobilising militant resistance. 'No mandate' is a slogan for no action. It also sets a dangerous precedent for the workers' movement. What if the Tories did have the left's treasured mandate, and had won 51 per cent of Scottish votes? Would that mean that socialists were obliged to submit to the poll tax, accept spending cuts and put up with the militarisation of the police? Of course not. Our attitude to such formal expressions of democracy should match that of our enemies. Even if Thatcher won 90 per cent of the vote, socialists would still have a responsibility and a right to fight for the real interests of the working class.

The lack of responsiveness of the ruling class to the needs of

Scotland is an argument for challenging the British state. Setting about that task is a far more positive use of workers' energies than pursuing the utopia of a mandate for our aims. In the immediate term, who gets what in society is decided by the struggle between classes, not on the basis of percentage points in a poll. The 'no mandate' approach threatens to waste an opportunity for Scots to give a lead to other sections of the working class. Using the anti-Tory vote in Scotland as a justification for an assembly to administer local Scottish affairs amounts to a retreat from the field of battle. It means saying: 'We have the most coherent base of opposition to the Thatcher government; therefore we are going to opt out of the battle against the Tories in Britain, and concentrate on Scottish issues.' This is a shabby abdication of the role which recent events have given the Scottish movement in the struggle against the Tory government. It flies in the face of everything we should have learned about the way a group of workers can win.

Scotland is not the only place in Britain with a proud tradition of militancy. Areas such as South Wales or Yorkshire can also claim to have led the British working class in important confrontations. Such regional differences are an inevitable consequence of the uneven way in which capitalist industry has developed. Yet to win lasting gains, workers from the militant areas need to mobilise support from more moderate workers elsewhere. When militant areas have fought in isolation, they have often suffered defeat. The miners' disputes of 1972 and 1974, for example, were won through all-British action. Militants toured the country picketing and winning solidarity. In 1984, Yorkshire and Scotland were the first areas to declare the miners' strike official. But the failure to organise a rank and file campaign to fight for nationwide support helped to consolidate divisions among the miners, particularly in Nottinghamshire. The go-it-alone attitude of the militant areas helped to isolate them from moderate areas and undermined the potential for vital solidarity action among transport and power station workers. The result was that the strike failed to stop the national economy, the miners drifted back to work, and the union suffered a heavy defeat.

If the most left-wing regions of Britain simply adopted the 'no mandate' attitude and turned inwards to look after local matters, it would mean the best militants retreating into splendid isolation. Again, it is worth contrasting this to the approach of the British establishment. It is unimaginable that the ruling class would keep its strongest forces at home while battles raged elsewhere. When one part of its system is under threat, the state moves in to prop things up.

We noted earlier how the government sent outside troops to occupy Glasgow in 1919. The Tories implemented a similar plan during the miners' strike. They did not leave the country coppers of the mining areas to battle alone; they sent their first-class thugs from the Metropolitan Police into Yorkshire, and moved the hard men from the Scottish cities out to the pit villages. There were also reports of troops in police uniforms being seen on Scottish miners' picket lines. The capitalists do not divide the power of their state into sectional or geographical pieces. They wield it as one solid weapon against the working class, and they always ensure that the sharpest blade available is at the cutting edge. By contrast, the 'no mandate' approach of separating Scotland from British politics means locking up our battle-hardened Scottish brigades in their barracks, cut off from workers elsewhere.

The ruling class does not relish such large-scale confrontations as the miners' strike. It fears the prospect of fighting on more than one front at once. The Thatcher government has taken great care over the past nine years to pick out its targets and tackle them one at a time. Such a selective attack as the early introduction of the poll tax in Scotland, for example, is not a sign of an obsessive anti-Scottish vendetta in Whitehall. It is a rational attempt by the Tories to limit the extent of opposition to this exploitative measure, by picking off the Scottish working class before going on to impose the tax in England and Wales. If we respond to such an offensive with the Scottish 'no mandate' argument, we will walk into the Tories' divide-and-conquer trap.

Many Scottish workers are cynical about the prospects of winning support for action from workers in England who, they believe, have been bought off by Thatcherism. But we should be wary of falling for Tory hype about a yuppie culture down south. Conditions in the North of England, Wales and the inner cities are at least as bad as in Scotland. Even the South-east is not merely the stronghold of estate agents and stockbrokers which the media would have us believe. Indeed, the truth is that the majority of the British working class now lives in the South. Many of these workers do vote Tory or Alliance. But the trend towards moderation among the Southern working class stems largely from their negative experience of the official labour movement. They are still workers, who live under the same tyranny as all those who survive by selling their labour-power. They are always just a week away from the dole and the breadline. It would be foolish to allow the image of relative prosperity to obscure the fact that every worker from Ipswich to Aberdeen shares an interest in

challenging exploitation, whether they recognise it today or not. Let's not forget how recently it was that the media were assuring us that young miners and their families were now too preoccupied with their mortgages, cars, videos and Spanish holidays to go on strike. Shortly afterwards those supposedly bought-off men and women became the shock troops of the fiercest class battle Britain had seen for 60 years.

Slogans such as 'no mandate' and 'Scotland is special' mean Scottish workers turning their backs on the rest of Britain and standing alone. But Scots cannot afford to write off such a large and powerful group of potential allies as the English working class in this dismissive fashion. Instead, activists in a militant area such as Scotland should set about developing a strategy which can win others over to the anti-Tory cause. 'No mandate' may look good on leaflets and sound good in speeches; but it can do nobody but the Tory splitters any good on the battleground of modern British politics.

The 'no mandate' argument is the precise opposite of the attitude which the Scottish working class needs. It is divisive, and a recipe for docility. Scottish people cannot afford a political leadership which just sits back and repeats 'Scotland says no' while the Tories get on with imposing their policies throughout Britain. An alternative approach would be to insist that, no matter what election results and opinion polls say, we do not accept that the ruling class has the right to exploit or oppress workers in any part of the British isles. Our objective should be to seek to maximise active opposition to the Tories on every front.

There is, however, one coherent argument against the need to broaden the struggle on an all-British basis, and one perspective from which 'no mandate' makes some sense. That is the argument that Scotland is a separate nation from the rest of Britain, which has been oppressed by the English for nearly 300 years, and must break away to determine its own future. The argument of straightforward Scottish nationalism, then, is the next one which we must confront.

3. A nation once again?

The argument that Scotland is a separate nation is rarely raised openly in the assembly debate. The relatively poor showing by the Scottish National Party in the 1987 election confirmed that few Scots regard the demand for self-determination as a key issue. Yet opinion polls continue to show that around a quarter of all Scottish people would prefer independence. The idea that Scotland is a nation in its own right runs as an underlying assumption of many of the arguments of the supporters of a Scottish assembly.

Nobody can deny that Scotland is different from England or Wales. It has its own institutions in the spheres of law, religion and education. Scottish customs, speech and social life have a distinctive character. Any Englishman who tries to order a pint of bitter in a Scottish bar, or Scotsman who asks for a pint of heavy in a London pub, knows at once from the quizzical look on the barman's face that he is not at home. The Scot is likely to attract even greater suspicion if he pays for his drinks with pound notes, now banished from the English economy but preserved in Scotland. There are many similar culture clashes between the two sides of the border. The media and the advertisers certainly recognise a distinct Scottish identity. One company calls its matchboxes 'England's Glory' down south and 'Scottish Bluebells' up north. Press barons try similar tricks to ingratiate themselves with Scottish readers. One sticks 'Scottish' in front of its paper's title (*Express*), another alters its masthead slogan from 'Forward with Britain' to 'Forward with Scotland' (*Record*), and the *Sun* simply prints a badly designed thistle on its front page.

There are evidently differences between Scotland and England. But do these mean that Scotland is a separate nation with its own historic destiny? Or are the Scots, despite their unique characteristics, a part of the wider British nation?

Most Scots with a sense of national grievance today point to what they regard as the discriminatory economic policies of the present government in England. The point of departure for committed Scottish nationalists, however, lies in history. According to the nationalist interpretation, the 1707 Act of Union was imposed on Scotland, Scots rebelled against it and were butchered by the English at Culloden in 1746, and Scotland has been used and abused by the English ever since. Nationalists often proclaim the continuity of Scotland's distinctive institutions and culture—from the Kirk to the kilt—as evidence of a Scottish nation constrained within the 'United Kingdom'. They explain Scotland's modern economic problems as the latest adverse effect of English interference. There is no space here to conduct a detailed survey of 300 years of history. But we need to establish a few points, starting with the Act of Union which brought Scotland into the British state.

A marriage of capitalist convenience

Modern nation states only came into existence with the development of capitalism. One of the first tasks of the emerging capitalist class, as it fought to overcome the restraints imposed by the old order dominated by the big landowners, was to stake its claim to a home market. The bourgeoisie needed a unified and open economy in which money, commodities and labour could move around to the best advantage of the new profit system. This meant sweeping away the archaic rules and restrictions imposed by the aristocracy, the monarchy and the Church, and establishing a clearly defined territory under the central authority of a single capitalist state.

In some countries, the bourgeoisie sought to create a national base for capitalism by fighting for independence from a foreign power. The American bourgeoisie took on Britain (successfully) in the War of Independence from the 1770s, and the weak Irish bourgeoisie tried to follow its example (unsuccessfully) in the United Irishmen's rebellion of 1798. In Scotland, however, things were different. The Scottish bourgeoisie never staged an insurrection against the Crown. Instead, it decided that its best chance of prosperity lay in throwing in its lot with its larger English neighbours. The 1707 Act of Union did not ratify an English conquest of Scotland. It was a unique and

voluntary coming together of two capitalist elites within the British state, for the mutual benefit of their developing market economies.

Late seventeenth-century Scotland was an economically backward and predominantly rural country with minimal industry. Capitalist relations—the employment of dispossessed wage labourers by owners of capital in the form of raw materials and machinery—had yet to penetrate large areas of Scotland. Semi-feudal arrangements like crofting, or even more backward subsistence farming, still prevailed in much of the country. The Scottish bourgeoisie regarded the Act of Union as offering the best prospect of rapid economic advance. The English never colonised Scotland in the way they did many other countries. Indeed by 1700, when the Scottish bourgeoisie was debating its best way forward, some local entrepreneurs set sail and established a Scottish colony in Central America. But the majority opted instead for a Union which gave the Scottish capitalists unrestricted access to the English market and access to Britain's colonies under the protection of British naval power.

Scotland's rulers signed the 1707 Act of Union as a merger contract, not a surrender note. The deal was to pay off handsomely. Over the next two centuries, the British ruling class rampaged around the world, building and exploiting a mighty capitalist Empire. Scotland was not part of that Empire; it was a part of the conquering imperial power.

Scottish capitalists lost a local parliament but gained a stake in Britain's world dominance. Their voluntary fusion with the British state brought prosperity and prestige within the Empire. The contrast with the 1801 Act of Union which brought Ireland into the United Kingdom by force is stark. Britain imposed the Union in response to the United Irishmen's rebellion led by Wolfe Tone, which was crushed with the slaughter of 50 000 Irish people. After Union, the British state abolished the tariff controls which had previously protected the Irish economy. British manufactures flooded into Ireland and destroyed all industry outside the loyal province of Ulster. Ireland was converted into a market garden, providing food for Britain while Irish peasants starved. Through the nineteenth century the Irish population was decimated, and much of the country reduced to ruin by British landlords. Many Irish emigrants sought to escape from their troubled country by coming to Scotland, which was then regarded as a land of opportunity.

In Scotland, there was no armed rising before the Act of Union. Far from wiping out Scottish industry, Union removed all tariffs in England and allowed Scottish capitalism to take off. Scotland reaped

the benefits of Britain's foreign influence and growing control of the seas. While Liverpool and Bristol flourished on the proceeds of transporting slaves from Africa to the Americas, Glasgow prospered through the tobacco trade. Other export industries, such as the linen trade, developed in Scotland; the value of Scottish exports more than trebled between 1755 and 1770. Great wealth was also accumulated in the countryside. Clearly most of this went to the landlords rather than ordinary Scots. But, again in contrast to Ireland, the Scottish population as a whole expanded, and famine became less of a problem than it had been before the Union.

When Britain became the workshop of the world in the nineteenth century, Scotland was an integral part of the firm. Scotland's industrial revolution came slightly later, but it proceeded at such a pace that it soon caught up. In 1830, Scotland's share of the total British output of pig iron was about five per cent; within 15 years Scottish firms were producing one quarter of the British total. Scottish shipbuilding enjoyed the most spectacular rise to prominence. In the 1820s around 14 per cent of British steam shipping was launched on the Clyde; in the 1860s that figure was 66 per cent.

Industrial capitalism in Scotland did not develop in competition with its English counterpart. The two sectors established a division of labour under the umbrella of the British imperial state. Scottish and English capitalists ran one system, and they became one class—the united British bourgeoisie. Within this framework, capitalists in Scotland, as in some parts of England, concentrated on the heavy metal industries such as engineering and shipbuilding. This division of labour was to have important consequences. It meant that Scotland's economic welfare was heavily dependent on Britain's position as the world's leading industrial power. Scotland was reliant on the imperial order under which Britannia—and Scottish-built shipping—ruled the waves. While the British Empire expanded and prospered in the nineteenth century, the Scottish economy reaped rich benefits. Far from being an English economic outpost, Scotland was setting up industrial outlets of its own in the colonies from the 1850s. When Britain went into decline during the twentieth century, however, the sectors of industry concentrated in Scotland were to be among the hardest hit.

Scotland's modern economic decline has created a widespread sense of national injustice, which nationalists have tried to portray as part of a centuries-old resistance to 'English rule'. Yet the truth is that, in the long years of imperial plunder which followed the Act of

Union, Scotland did not join Ireland or America or India in rebellion against the Crown. Instead the Scottish economy benefited greatly from the subjugation of the colonies by the British state. To nail the myth of the historical oppression of the Scottish nation, let's look at the revolts which ended on the bloody field at Culloden.

The story of the eighteenth-century Jacobite rebellions, 'Bonnie Prince Charlie and all that', is central to the mythology of Scottish nationalism. The Jacobites supported James II of England and VII of Scotland, and his Stuart heirs, after he was dethroned in 1688. But Jacobitism was never a national movement of Scots aiming to overthrow English tyranny. It was, at root, the final revolt of the pre-capitalist order against the growing power of the bourgeoisie in Scotland. The Scottish bourgeoisie, concentrated in the lowlands, subsequently swore its loyalty to the Hanoverian Kings sitting in London. It was also deeply committed to the Presbyterian Church, which after more than a century of ecclesiastical strife finally replaced Roman Catholicism as the official Scottish religion in 1693. The thoroughness of the Protestant reformation in Scotland played a key role in undermining residual feudal interests.

The Jacobite project of restoring the Catholic Stuarts to the throne united those elements of Scottish society which opposed the process of capitalist modernisation. It brought together the defenders of the outdated and backward-looking Highland clan system, and other disaffected religious groups who were loyal to Rome. The Jacobites were opposed, not only by the English, but by many Scots who had invested their future in the Union. Some of the biggest clan chiefs—Campbell, Mackay, Munro—opposed the 1745 rebellion. In the lowlands, Forbes, the Scottish Lord President and Earl of Culloden, organised against Charles Edward Stuart. In the final confrontation at Culloden, many Scots took up arms against the Jacobites; three Scottish regiments joined in the mass killing of the Highland clansmen. This confrontation was no national struggle. It is best described as a civil war between the modernising Scottish bourgeoisie and the fragmented defenders of the old regime.

After Culloden, the victors set out to remove all obstacles to capitalist expansion. This meant crushing the Highland strongholds where the past was preserved. Rebellious chiefs were executed or dispossessed, Highland dress outlawed, estates confiscated and opened up to the capitalist market. The government body overseeing these 'annexed' lands made clear its intentions to set about 'civilising the inhabitants upon the said estates':

'promoting amongst them the Protestant religion, good government industry and manufactures, and the principles of duty and loyalty to His Majesty....' (T Dickson (ed), *Scottish Capitalism*, 1980)

The job of spreading the gospel of 'good government industry and manufactures' in Scotland was taken on jointly by the British state and the Scottish bourgeoisie. Capitalist landowners like the Duke of Argyll took the land of deposed clan chieftains. Meanwhile the Church of Scotland, which had been a fierce opponent of all the rebellions, set about 'civilising' the Highlanders by educating them in the ways of the Union. The Highland tradition was never a general 'Scottish way of life' and had always been separate from the lifestyles and social ways of other Scots. After the suppression of the Highlanders, the Scots at last became a more or less unified block—but within the British nation.

The conventional nationalist version turns Scottish history on its head. The Jacobite rebellions were not national risings, but sectional attempts to prevent Scottish society being pulled together under the unified power of the British bourgeoisie. Culloden and the Highland clearances were far from the last time that Scots would take up arms on behalf of British capitalism.

Imperial Scotland

'I warn the great white chief of Downing Street: "Get off our backs". Scotland and Wales can no longer tolerate English domination. Scotland and Wales are not, and have never been, part of the white man's burden that England has repeatedly assumed for reluctant subject peoples.'

This is Scottish history according to Gordon Wilson, chairman of the Scottish National Party, speaking at his party's conference in September 1987. The phrase 'white man's burden' is derived from a well-known racist poem written by Rudyard Kipling in 1899, which sought to portray the colonial exploits of British imperialism as a civilising mission. It is true that the Scots have never been one of the 'subject peoples' of the Empire; but not in the way that Wilson means. Far from being victims of imperialism, Scots have played an active part in the British imperialist state itself.

Scots have participated fully in Britain's oppression of large areas of the globe. They have also provided their own apologists for the Empire, who could match Kipling's racist arrogance any day. Thomas Carlyle was a Scottish philosopher and historian whose early radical puritanism is often identified as a formative influence

on Scotland's presbyterian socialism. But he too became a firm believer in the white man's burden. In his 1849 work, *Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question,* Carlyle insisted that the recently liberated slaves of the West Indies must be forced to work for the British: 'Decidedly you will have to be servants to those that are born *wiser* than you; servants to the whites, if they are (as what mortal can doubt they are?) born wiser than you' (cited in L Curtis, *Nothing but the Same Old Story,* 1984). The white men who carried the burden of being 'wiser' than those they enslaved were just as likely to be Scottish as English.

Scottish statesmen, military commanders and ordinary soldiers helped to carve out and sustain the Empire from which Scottish capitalists profited. The Scottish establishment was, and remains, proud of its role as a patriotic partner in the bloody exploits of Britain abroad. This is how one popular modern historian boasts about Scotland's record of helping to enslave colonies and fight wars for imperialism:

> 'In the Crimea, in those long "Kaffir Wars" which are so much forgotten now, in the Gold Coast, in Egypt, in the Sudan and in India, the Scots regiments played their part. Their part in India is better known; the names of Napier and Colin Campbell (Lord Clyde) are conspicuous as is also that of Sir Hugh Rose. But many others are worthy of mention, and it is with the Highland regiments that the valiant Gurkhas feel themselves most akin.' (Mackie, *A History of Scotland*)

Scotland's record of bloody imperial glory is scarcely the history of an oppressed nation. It is the story of Scotland as one part of the oppressive British state. Such Scottish exploits are not merely a feature of the past. The regiments and politicians of Scotland have been involved in all of Britain's more recent conquests and colonial wars, from East Africa to the South Atlantic. The conflict in Northern Ireland is a constant reminder of Scotland's involvement in British state terror. Until quite recently, two members of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders were the only regular British soldiers to be convicted of murder in the Irish War (although the authorities claimed, falsely, that they were off-duty at the time). They carried out the infamous Pitchfork Murders in Fermanagh in 1972, when a farmer and a farm worker were butchered with their own tools and tossed into a ditch. To this day, Scottish soldiers are regarded with a special dread by the nationalist community in Northern Ireland.

The figurehead of the state, the British monarch, is widely despised in many parts of the world where British imperialism has left its mark. But a characteristic feature of Scottish society has long been its loyalty to the British Crown. The establishment has never

allowed the distinctive features of Scottish life to override what the same historian has called 'this essential unity':

> 'Of this essential unity the Crown is the symbol, and in the monarchy Scotland has an interest second to none. She is well aware that Royal House descends from Kenneth MacAlpine as well as from Alfred; she is proud that she gave to the steadfast King George VI the brave Queen who stood by him in the evil day, and proud that scions of the Royal Family bear Scottish names and Scottish titles.'

Many Scots do not regard themselves as the boot-licking royalists they are depicted by historians and media commentators. Yet when the Queen Mother—'the brave Queen' who stood by George VI—makes her frequent trips to Scotland's Balmoral Castle she is, she says, at home. A little over a century ago, Queen Victoria would escape to the safe refuge of Balmoral at a time when royal processions were likely to be jeered through the streets of London. Today Scotland still kneels before the British royal family just like other parts of the United Kingdom. Even the Scottish National Party makes clear that it supports Scottish independence 'under the Crown'. This deference is significant. It indicates the loyal place which Scotland has occupied in the creation of the British nation state. It is symbolic of the authority which a single *British* ruling class, united behind the Crown, has exercised over this island.

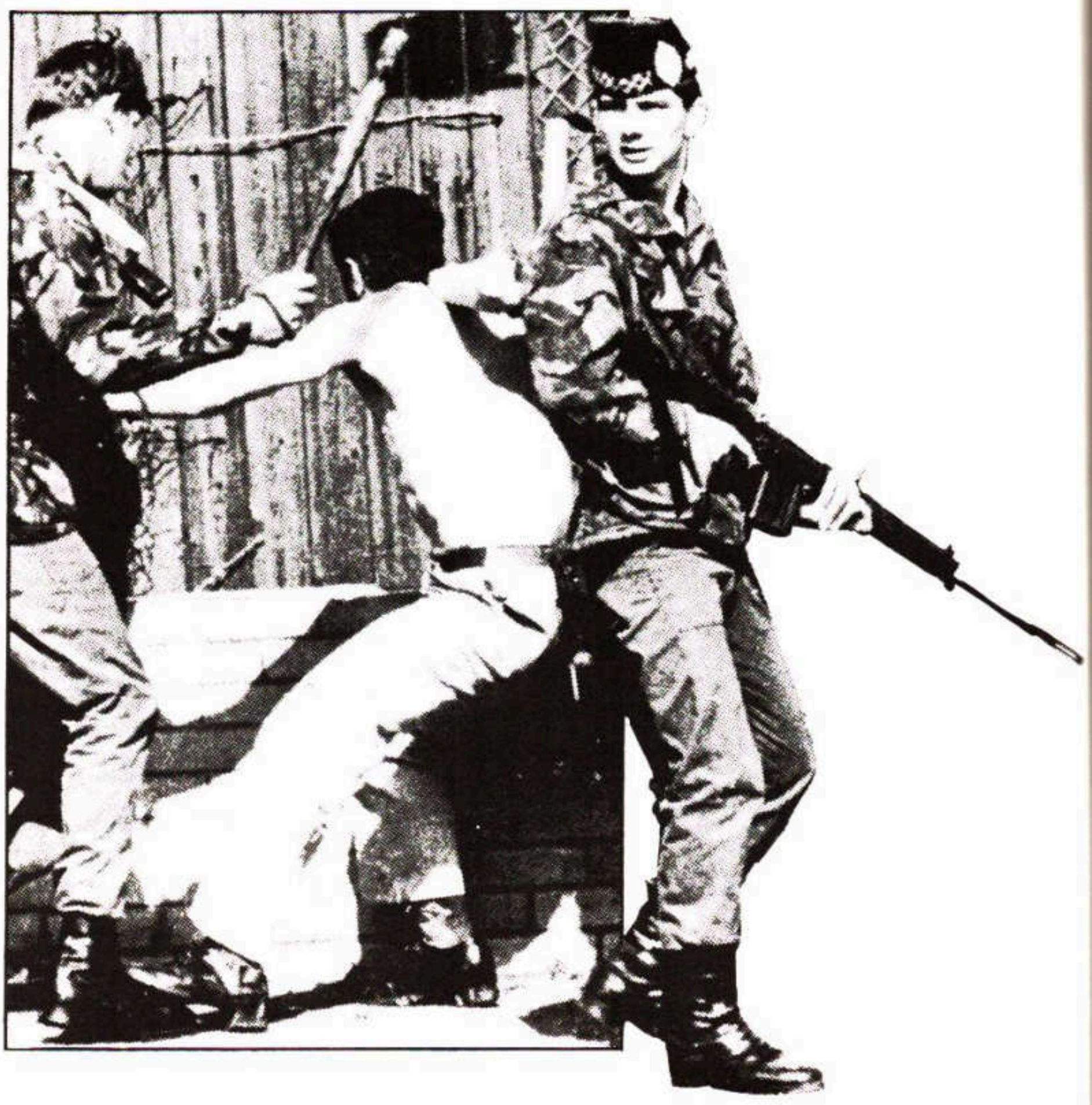
Modern Scotland developed as an integral part of Britain. The Scottish bourgeoisie became an important section of the British capitalist class. The working class that was created by the development of capitalism in Scotland was from the beginning an integral part of the British proletariat. Scottish workers were dominated by the same capitalist state which ruled over the exploited masses of England.

Left wingers who insist that a distinct Scottish nation remains intact try to discover some continuity between pre- and post-Union Scotland. Two leading Scottish Labour Party members, who sit on the executive of the Campaign for a Scottish Assembly, have argued that Scotland has the right to national self-determination because of its 'distinctive political culture'. They claim that Scotland's culture is the product of '800 years of history as an independent state' before the Act of Union, and 'the continuing existence of separate Scottish institutions' today (B McLean and A Smart, 'Labour in Scotland: What Now?' *Left Review*, Autumn 1987). So why have the legal, educational and religious structures of Scottish society been kept distinct from those in the rest of Britain? Are the cultural aspects of Scottish life, the kilt and the pipes for example, signs of an enduring national identity?



'Bonnie' Prince Charles Edward Stuart: a divisive symbol of the Highland past who was opposed as a reactionary by most Scots even 250 years ago.

Scottish troops have long been a bulwark of the British Empire, and they still terrorise Irish nationalists in defence of the Crown's colonial power.



Kirk's law

The Scottish establishment has preserved its own institutions to assist in the consolidation of British capitalism. At the time of the Act of Union, the Scottish bourgeoisie was keen to smooth its passage into the new arrangement with the British state. It wanted to minimise the disruption which such a far-reaching constitutional and political adjustment might cause within Scotland. One aspect of this problem was the need to give as many Scots as possible a stake in the Union. Retaining intact important Scottish institutions such as the Kirk and Scottish law helped the bourgeoisie to win popular approval for its merger deal with the English. It was a way of showing Scots that they could hold on to their separate customs and identity within the structures of the United Kingdom.

The careful preservation of the Scottish heritage enabled the local bourgeoisie to argue that people could be Scots and loyal Britons too. The persistence of familiar institutions confirmed that there was no need to oppose the Crown or the ruling class to preserve Scottish civil society. It is ironic that modern nationalists should point to the existence of distinct institutions as proof of Scottish nationhood. In reality these institutions were incorporated into the Union to help reconcile Scots to their place within the British nation, under the British state. This strategy was highly effective in the eighteenth century—and it has served the establishment well ever since.

The Kirk, and the education system which it influences, have long been important agencies of social control in Scotland. The Scottish bourgeoisie had no wish to abolish its moral police force after the Union. Scottish Calvinism came to prominence alongside the rising bourgeoisie in seventeenth-century Scotland. The Presbyterian Church espoused frugality, discipline, the Protestant work ethic, and the need for people to take individual responsibility for their own welfare. These principles were ideally suited to the bourgeoisie in its battle to unseat the parasitic landowning classes. They were also key propaganda weapons in schooling the emerging Scottish proletariat to accept the harsh discipline of the wage labour system.

The Kirk became the official Church of Scotland. Its central and local organisations became deeply involved in the state and in the exercise of political power. Its teachings provided a divine justification for capitalist exploitation and class rule in Scotland. 'The people are sober, regular and industrious in their different possessions and employments; and live in peace and harmony with each other,' declared one parish minister in 1793 (Dickson, *Scottish*

Capitalism). The Kirk encouraged Scots to be 'sober, regular and industrious' in labouring for their masters, and to 'live in peace' with those who ruled over them. These values were promoted in the schools, and in the small churches that were the focal point of many Scottish communities. It was not surprising that the Scottish bourgeoisie wanted to hang on to its allies in the Kirk by keeping a separate Scottish Church.

The growth of the Scottish working class changed the role of the Kirk. In the early nineteenth century, the Church appeared increasingly remote and complacent at a time when the rapid influx of workers into the cities threatened to undermine the old mechanisms of social control. Bourgeois concern that the Church was going soft and losing its influence led to a movement that split the old Kirk and established a new Free Church in 1843. The Free Church returned to traditional fire-and-brimstone preaching, and restored the influence of religion within the working class. It preached that people should act as responsible individuals within a harmonious community, rather than as members of a class in a divided society.

When Scottish workers did take political action, in the Chartist movement for democracy in the mid-nineteenth century, religious principles exerted a significant dampening effect—there were even Chartist churches in Scotland. The influence of religion ensured that the Scottish movement adopted the moderate approach of using moral rather than physical force, thus blunting its challenge. We have already discussed the restraining influence of the puritan tradition on the workers' movement in the turbulent years of the early twentieth century.

The Kirk, Scottish law and education have all helped the ruling class to integrate Scotland into the British capitalist system. The separate institutions are not symbols of Scottish nationhood. They have been adapted and used to consolidate Scotland's position under the British state. The fact they are different from their equivalents in England does not mean that they are any better for working class people.

For all their distinctive procedures, Scottish courts have dealt just as harshly with strikers and protesters as judges in English courts. The rules of arrest and prosecution often give the Scottish police and courts more repressive powers and suspects fewer rights than down south. It is up to the authorities in Scotland, for example, whether or not a suspect gets the benefit of a jury trial or has to submit to the mercy of a judge alone. The British ruling class recognises Scottish

law as its own. In 1987, when the Tory government stepped up its 'law and order' drive, Thatcher chose Scotland's top lawyer to be her Lord Chancellor.

The modern Kirk has now overcome the 'Wee Frees' and confirmed its dominant position among Scottish Protestants. The Kirk often claims to be more free and democratic than the Church of England. It ordains women ministers, and supports the assembly campaign. Yet the doctrinaire outlook of the Kirk has provided little succour for oppressed groups in Scotland seeking basic democratic rights. The Kirk is opposed to abortion absolutely, even in cases where a woman has been raped. This stand has helped to create a moral climate in which it is generally more difficult for Scottish women to gain access to abortion facilities than it is in England. Homosexuality is still entirely illegal under Scottish law.

There is nothing progressive about the existence of separate bourgeois institutions in Scotland. Their continuity simply shows that the British ruling class is flexible enough to alter its approach to suit local conditions, and to gain the greatest advantage in different parts of Britain.

Inventing a Scottish culture

Few Scots take much active interest in the dress, music or games which are upheld as traditional Gaelic culture. But these emblems of Scottishness are still used whenever somebody wants to emphasise the need to defend Scottish nationhood. When union officials and church leaders lobbied parliament about the closure of the Caterpillar tractor works in 1987, for example, their procession was led by a piper in a kilt. There is a common idea that kilts and the rest of the Celtic paraphernalia are ancient features of Scottish society, which demonstrate the historic continuity of the Scottish nation. Yet the truth is that much of this culture is modern. It was created and popularised after 1707, sometimes by Scots and sometimes even by Englishmen, but never as a symbol of real Scottish defiance of the Union.

The short kilt as it is worn today did not exist before the Union. The Highlanders wore a full-length plaid robe, belted around the waist and pleated to form a skirt, and their chiefs wore trews, a combination of breeches and stockings. They did not wear distinct tartans according to their clan. The chieftains wore coloured plaids over their trews, the ordinary Highlanders wore brown plaids over bare legs. These modes of dress did not extend outside the Highlands.

The clansmen were generally thought of as rogues to be avoided, not citizens to be emulated, by the majority of Scots. The Highlands always had closer links with Ireland than with the centres of power in the lowlands.

The kilt did not arrive until British capitalism expanded into the Highlands in the eighteenth century. The idea of different clan tartans was not finally accepted until the state visit of a British King to Edinburgh a century after that.

After the suppression of the first Jacobite rebellion of 1715, the bourgeoisie began the process of opening up the Highlands. In 1727 a Quaker iron-master from Lancashire called Thomas Rawlinson built a furnace in a timber-rich region near Inverness. For the Highlanders he employed to work it, it was the first time they had worked in a workshop rather than on the open moors. Rawlinson soon decided that their plaids, which were well-suited to their former life on the land, were cumbersome and useless for factory work. So, with the aid of a military tailor, he invented a more practical outfit. They cut the skirt off from the plaid, sewed pleats into it, and called it the philibeg or short kilt. The new kilt was cheap and practical and quickly caught on among the poorer Highlanders. After Culloden, however, it was banned along with the other emblems of Jacobitism. By the time the ban was lifted in 1780, the old ways of the clan had been destroyed, and ordinary Highlanders saw no reason to return to the kilt or the tartan.

Two other factors, however, ensured that the kilt made a comeback elsewhere, as part of a mythical Gaelic culture. The first was the Highland regiments of the British army. After the routing of the clans, the British ruling class set about using the Highlanders' fierce fighting reputation for its own purposes. As prime minister in the 1750s, William Pitt (the Elder) recruited many Highland troops to fight in Britain's foreign wars. These soldiers were excused from the ban and dressed in kilts, which they made famous on battlefields around the world. Their division into regiments is thought to explain how the patterns of tartans first came to be differentiated in an organised way. According to one thorough historical account, this was how the kilt 'having been invented by an English Quaker industrialist, was saved from extinction by an English imperialist statesman' (H Trevor-Roper, 'The Highland Tradition of Scotland', in E Hobsbawm and T Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition*, 1984).

The second factor was the romantic movement, the cult of the 'noble savage' threatened by civilisation, which flourished among the upper classes of Europe in the second half of the eighteenth century.

Once the Highlanders were no longer any threat to the Scottish bourgeoisie, they could safely be depicted as romantic figures on windswept hills, struggling to preserve their proud traditions against the modern world. The Scottish bourgeoisie began adopting what they claimed were Highland ways, as a badge of their own Scottish identity within the British ruling class. Societies sprang up in London and the Scottish lowlands to promote an invented Highland way of life, and the wearing of the kilt became fashionable in upper class social circles. Various unprincipled academics, army officers and straightforward con men sought to give the movement a spurious historical legitimacy. They rewrote Scottish history, or dredged up earlier falsifications, to 'prove' that this 'Scottish culture' had existed since ancient times.

The Scottish charade reached its peak in 1822, when King George IV became the first Hanoverian King to visit Edinburgh. The arrangements for receiving him were entrusted to the most famous lowland romantic, Sir Walter Scott, who turned the event into a pageant based on a fantasy. Pride of place was given to the remaining Highland Lords, who were presented as the true Scots. The chiefs and their entourages all dressed up in kilts to meet the King. This was the occasion when, with the aid and encouragement of entrepreneurial cloth manufacturers, they finally agreed that their clans must each appear in a distinct tartan—more than a century after the Union. The fashionable cult of the Highlands continued into Queen Victoria's reign, and was given an added romantic interest by her relationship with John Brown, who had formerly been a gillie, the retainer of a Highland chief.

Scottish dress and culture were embellished, popularised and projected backwards into history by members of the Unionist bourgeoisie, not as a sign of Scottish defiance but as a form of entertainment for themselves and the British King. This was how a modified version of the Highland dress, once despised as the 'uniform of thieves' by most Scots, has come to be celebrated as Scotland's 'national costume'.

'Titanic England'

For most of the last 300 years, Scottish nationalists have languished on the fringes of Scottish society. Even 25 years ago, they were holding festivals, circulating petitions and standing parliamentary candidates with little active support and less hope of success. Yet since the sixties, Scottish national feeling has enjoyed a resurgence.

This has little to do with any new surge of support for the Kirk or enthusiasm for wearing the kilt. It stems from the economic problems which have hit many Scottish people hard in recent years. Nationalist ideas did not provoke the unrest in Scotland. But the existence of nationalist myths about Scotland's independent traditions has provided some Scots with a ready-made focus for their anger over rising unemployment and poverty. It has helped to channel popular discontent in a nationalist direction. Although, with the exception of 1974, this has not been translated into votes for the Scottish National Party, nationalist sentiments have become more widespread. They now exert considerable influence over the labour movement.

Nationalism has flourished on the conviction that the Scottish economy has been discriminated against by 'English' governments and foreign companies. Nationalist politicians often argue that Scotland has a basically sound economy with bright prospects, but is being dragged down by England. 'Scotland is like a self-sufficient small ship drawn along by a tow rope in the wake of the Titanic,' argues Jim Sillars, who has progressed from being a Labour MP to forming his own Scottish Labour Party to joining the Scottish National Party. 'The choice for us in Scotland is to either cut the rope which binds us to Titanic England, or go down with her' (J Sillars, *Scotland: The Case for Optimism*, 1986).

In recent years the main justification for the argument that Scotland would be better off alone has been the discovery of oil in the North Sea. There is a glaring contrast between the massive amounts of oil wealth generated off Scotland's coast and the poor conditions in which many Scots live. The nationalists present this as an issue of conflict between the Scottish people and their greedy 'English' rulers. In fact it is an example of the wider contradiction between the potential that exists to improve living standards for everybody and the way in which the capitalist system functions.

The debate about whether North Sea oil belongs to Scotland, Britain or the fish misses the point. The presence of natural resources has never been the deciding factor in how a country fares under capitalism. The oil wealth in the Middle East puts the North Sea's output to shame. Yet it has not significantly altered the industrial backwardness of many Arab states. Japan, on the other hand, has few natural resources. Yet it is the world's most dynamic capitalist economy. What matters is a capitalist country's ability to produce goods for sale at a profit, in competition with others. This is where Britain, including Scotland, has fallen behind. Britain has plenty of

natural and industrial resources as well as North Sea oil. But the stagnation of British capitalism means that it is no longer able to compete with the Japanese or Germans on the world market. It is the deep-seated crisis at the foundations of the British free enterprise system, rather than the squandering of oil wealth on the surface, which accounts for the problems Scotland faces today.

Scotland is not a self-sufficient small boat being pulled along behind 'Titanic England'. It is part of the flagship of British capitalism. Far from being stronger than the rest of the British economy, Scotland is particularly vulnerable. It is heavily dependent on the very heavy industrial sectors in which British capitalism has fared worst. When Britain was exporting steel, machinery and shipping around the world, Scotland prospered. But British supremacy in these sectors was under threat before the First World War and it has been decisively lost since the end of the Second World War. British manufacturers have long been unable to compete with the dynamic capitalists of America, Japan and West Germany; they can now no longer compete with South Korea, Taiwan or Hong Kong. Since 1983 the former workshop of the world has been importing more manufactured goods than it exports. Britain has become more and more dependent on services, financial deals in the City and speculative investments abroad.

Britain's manufacturing decline has been bad news for Scotland, where much of British heavy industry has always been concentrated. The outdated methods and technology of Scottish industry, which had changed little since its Victorian heyday, have been hopelessly outpaced by foreign competitors. Scottish heavy industry was devastated by the end of the seventies. The Tories claimed that North Sea oil and the new industries of 'Silicon Glen' made Scotland the fastest growing sector of the British economy in the early eighties. Electronics has come to employ more Scots than coal, textiles and shipbuilding combined. But these electronics firms are largely low-skill enterprises, employing cheap labour to assemble kits made up of foreign technology. They could not compensate for the destruction of Scotland's industrial base. The slump in world prices of both oil and semiconductors in the mid-eighties killed the myth of booming Scotland and exposed the underlying problem.

Britain has the oldest and one of the most stagnant economies in the advanced capitalist world. It can no longer cope with its more dynamic and more efficient rivals. If British industry cannot survive then why should the smaller and even more stagnant Scottish economy, with its crumbling heavy metal base, do any better alone?

The argument that North Sea oil could solve all Scotland's problems does not carry conviction. Unemployment and industrial decline are not the result of material shortages—they are the result of a capitalist crisis that cannot be reversed simply by a flow of oil. Capitalists have closed down factories, shipyards, mines and steelworks because they have discovered that they cannot exploit the resources of raw materials, plant and labour at their disposal and make a profit. Similarly, problems in the NHS are not caused by a genuine lack of nurses, building materials or drugs. Labour and Tory governments have cut real spending on health and welfare to prevent taxation from squeezing capitalist profits still further. From Aberdeen to Addis Ababa, people are denied access to the world's resources by the laws of the profit system. These laws would still apply to the Scottish economy, whether or not there was a border post at Berwick-on-Tweed.

It may seem 'fair' that North Sea oil revenues should be invested in saving Scottish jobs. But capitalism is not a charity. Under the system of exploitation, the drive to make a profit is the only reason for investing in any industry. If there is no prospect of making a decent return, capital will move out and look for new openings, often abroad. Any capitalist, whether English, Scottish or Lithuanian, understands the need to invest where he can best make a profit, or go out of business. Much of the damage in an industry like Scottish shipbuilding, for example, was done by the old Scottish yardowners, who refused to re-invest in their clapped-out enterprises. Today, Scottish capitalists gathering for the annual conference of their association are wined and dined by promotional teams encouraging them to invest in profitable enterprises overseas. There can be little doubt that Thatcher's narrow-minded Tory government is more worried about jobs in its southern strongholds than in such hostile territory as Scotland. But if there was money to be made, the British capitalist class would not allow any such prejudices to prevent it from investing in Scotland. The only border which matters to the bosses is the line between red and black in their account books.

Our analysis of Scotland's economic crisis points towards the necessity to challenge British capitalism, and its strongest defender, the British state. To do that effectively, Scottish workers will have to link arms with the working class in England. The nationalist interpretation of economic decline, however, seeks to turn Scots away from these goals towards a campaign for self-government. Such an approach can do nothing to alter the realities of capitalist exploitation. The fact that the nationalist perspective has gained

support among Scottish workers in recent years is largely attributable to the failings of the Labour Party.

In the past, the Scottish working class expressed its dissatisfaction with British capitalism by demanding socialism. It voted for left-wing Labour and even Communist Party candidates. But the failure of successive Labour governments to deliver on their promises left many Scots disillusioned. When the Labour administrations of the sixties and seventies held down wages and failed to halt industrial decline or rising unemployment, some Scots lost patience. Seeing little prospect of progress in British politics, they reacted defensively and turned to the Scottish National Party. Labour has since won back most of this support. But it has done so by benefiting from the widespread desire to get the Tories out, not because workers are enthusiastic about Labour politics.

The Labour Party has fought off the electoral threat from the SNP without challenging the underlying nationalist sentiments which now influence important sections of the working class. Instead, through its campaigns for an assembly and insistence that Thatcher has no mandate in Scotland, Labour has accommodated to nationalism. It has tried to show that it is a better defender of the Scottish 'national interest' than the Scottish nationalists. This may have helped the Labour Party in the short term. But in the longer term it is a dangerous and divisive policy for the working class. The ideas of Scottish nationalism can only benefit the British ruling class, by burying important social divisions.

Scotland divided

'Elaine C Smith, star of Wildcat Theatre Company's *The Steamie*, proved to be the people's authentic voice. She said the way they had actually submerged differences of religion or class to agree on something—the need for a parliament in Scotland—was "a wonderful thing".'

The *Morning Star's* front-page report on the September 1987 Festival for Scottish Democracy clearly agreed with the actress that it was a wonderful event. The daily paper of the breakaway faction that upholds the old traditions of the British Communist Party has been taken in by the idea that all Scottish people are united by what Elaine C Smith calls 'the Scottish psyche'. In fact Scottish people are fortunately a long way from being of one mind on the question of nationality.

Scottish nationalism distracts attention away from the important

divisions in Scottish society—'the differences of religion or class'. These differences may have appeared 'submerged' to Smith as she stood on that rally platform in a tent on Glasgow Green, alongside the Reverend Maxwell Craig from the Kirk and Bryan Gould from the Labour Party frontbench. But for those who are arguing for change in the workplaces and on the streets, they are the vital issues of Scottish politics.

The religious divide in Scotland is deeper and more bitter than in most other parts of Britain. Sectarianism has a long and nasty history of discrimination, intimidation and riots. The Kirk fought a long and fierce battle against the old Catholic Church 300 years ago. Since then, the pattern of migration back and forth between Scotland and both communities in Ireland has helped to consolidate the Catholic/Protestant conflict. Scotland's strict religious traditions, and its geographical and social proximity to the North of Ireland, ensured that sectarianism remained a social force long after it had become submerged in England.

The nature of sectarian divisions has altered over the years. In the seventeenth century, Presbyterianism was a force for progress in Scotland, which helped to break the stifling grip of the old regime and brought Scotland into the modern age. But as the bourgeoisie rapidly outlived its historic usefulness and became a brake on progress, its religious ideology became a bulwark of reaction. From the middle of the nineteenth century Protestant preachers ceased denouncing Papist aristocrats and turned their fiery sermons to justify discrimination against impoverished Irish Catholic immigrants.

The public profile of religious strife has also changed. Today religious differences are not an open issue of political debate as they once were. They are an undercurrent which everybody knows about, but which established politicians from all sides avoid for fear of unleashing old demons and disturbing the peaceful façade of Scottish society. They would rather pretend that sectarianism does not exist, by talking about an imaginary united Scottish nation. It is time this Scottish skeleton was brought out of the cupboard and buried.

Religious sectarianism today takes many forms. Some are serious, some are not, but they add up to a powerful force for division and strife among sections of the Scottish working class. There is a tradition of discriminatory employment practices in industries like shipbuilding, largely in favour of Protestants. Sectarian job discrimination in Scotland is much less systematic than in Northern Ireland, where privileged access to jobs has long ensured Protestant

loyalty to Britain. Nevertheless, sectarianism has proved an important source of friction in Scotland. There are also many social divisions between the religious communities in parts of Scotland, where each has its own clubs, bars and housing areas. Best known of these is, of course, the antipathy between supporters of Glasgow Rangers and Glasgow Celtic football clubs. The rivalry between 'the old firm' is often portrayed as a rather quaint sporting ritual. But there is nothing sporting about the tapes of songs like 'Rangers cannae sign a Catholic' which are best sellers among the Protestant supporters at Ibrox Park.

The religious divide in Scotland is a source of reactionary ideas and internal divisions which have held back the working class. It must be confronted politically. It is easy for Elaine C Smith, the Labour Party, the Scottish National Party or anybody else to say that sectarianism has become 'submerged' because people from both sides of the divide support a Scottish assembly. But this is irrelevant. The demand for Scottish devolution can be acceptable to all because it does not confront the political issues which divide them—most importantly, their differing attitudes to the British state's involvement in Ireland. The longstanding connection between Ireland and Scotland means that many Scots have strong affiliations with their co-religionists in Ireland. It is well-known that during the Tan War for Irish independence between 1918 and 1921, Catholics and Protestants from different Scottish mining communities sent money and arms to the republicans and the Unionists respectively. Today Scotland is home to some of the strongest supporters and fiercest opponents of Irish unity anywhere in Britain. The only way to tackle this bitter division is by shifting the debate from religion to politics, and arguing for the one result in Ireland which Scottish workers have a real interest in seeing—the defeat of the British state.

The state represents the centralised power of the British capitalist class. The troops in Ireland are part of the same repressive state machinery which has smashed strikes by dustmen and firemen in Glasgow, and which established a year-long reign of terror in the Scottish coalfields. Any setback to the state on the other side of the Irish Sea can only be to the advantage of workers who face the same enemy at home. The British ruling class has fought to protect the power of its state in Ireland, by dividing the nation in 1921 and creating the sectarian state of Northern Ireland under 'a Protestant parliament for a Protestant people'. The minority Unionist community in Ireland was turned into a phoney majority within the new 'province' of Northern Ireland. The Ulster Loyalists have since

acted as allies of Britain, and they have been the beneficiaries of discrimination against Catholic nationalists. Whatever emotional or social ties some Scottish Protestants may have with the Unionists they cannot alter the fact that Loyalism is a backward glorification of oppression.

The campaign for the immediate withdrawal of British troops from Northern Ireland can make a vital contribution towards ending the influence of sectarianism in Scotland. It can confront Scottish workers with the fact that their enemy is not each other, but the British state. Of course such a campaign will not make easy headway among some Protestants—certainly not as easy as the demand for a Scottish assembly might. It could never hope to convert the diehard Loyalists. But it could contribute to the creation of a different climate of debate, by identifying the British ruling class as the common enemy of all, regardless of religion. In such a climate the more politically aware Scottish workers would be better able to isolate the committed sectarians. The alternative is to ignore the Irish issue as too controversial and go along with the easy rhetoric about a united Scottish nation. That is a guarantee that many working class people will remain under the influence of reaction.

Campaigning in solidarity with the Irish freedom struggle in Scotland must be resolutely secular and political. It cannot in the slightest degree imply support for Catholicism over Protestantism. The religious leaders of both communities in Scotland have popularised prejudices which hold back the working class on a wide range of social issues. During the days of Red Clydeside, the Catholic Church weighed in on the side of the establishment. Priests organised a mob to burn an effigy outside the home of Catholic socialist John Wheatley. More broadly, the Presbyterian and Catholic churches have championed anti-communism and preached backward ideas about women's role in society. A working class movement for progress will need to shrug off all of these old hang-ups and popularise a new way of looking at the world. What is required is a political challenge both to the entrenched sectarian divide in Scotland, and to the narrow ideas which the churches hold in common. Neither requirement is met by windy declarations about the 'wonderful' character of the 'Scottish psyche'.

The class differences in Scottish society are quite different from religious divisions. Whereas religion divides worker from worker, class emphasises what all workers have in common against the class of the employers and all their allies. This is one divide which workers have no interest in 'submerging', as supporters of Scottish

nationalism would like to do. The working class needs to separate itself entirely from the establishment, if it is to be able to conduct an effective fight against its enemies. There can be no common ground between the exploiter and the exploited simply because both have Scottish names and accents. Every time Scottish workers have been drawn into a political alliance with Scottish bosses, the consequences have been disastrous. Such campaigns are always run on terms dictated by the dignitaries. This rules out any chance of a challenge to the capitalist class, and reduces the workers involved to voiceless lobby-fodder.

The closure of Gartcosh and Caterpillar, after campaigns run in conjunction with members of the Scottish establishment, should warn workers of the hazards of fudging class lines in the name of 'defending the Scottish nation'. Despite such uninspiring precedents, leading figures in the Scottish labour movement still insist that upper class Scots are more progressive than those down south. Jimmy Reid, the former Upper Clyde Shipbuilders work-in leader and Communist Party militant, even offered up one such Scottish employer as a symbol of hope for the working class shortly after Thatcher's third election victory in June 1987:

> 'A few months ago a Scottish businessman in his late thirties, a millionaire with offices in Edinburgh and London, told me of his concern for our country. Most of his kind in Scotland, he said, didn't want further reduction in income tax. They would rather the cash was used to create jobs and improve public services. On his weekly visits to London he was appalled by those in the City who didn't give a damn and wanted to grab everything for themselves.' ('But (S)he Does Not Understand', *New Statesman*, 19 June 1987)

Such a story does not alter the reality of the class divide. The economics editor of the *Glasgow Herald* has a more realistic assessment than Reid of such Scottish businessmen: 'They want economic devolution, yes. By which they mean an opportunity to capture more business from the City of London.' As far as an assembly is concerned, however, many Scottish capitalists 'see political devolution as a restriction on their ability to sell their wares to the wider world' (*Glasgow Herald*, 4 November 1987). In other words, winning business and making profits is all that matters in the end, and the employers wouldn't let any notions about a Scottish nation stand in their way. Chris Baur was welcomed as a spokesman for devolution when he became editor of *The Scotsman*, 'Scotland's national newspaper'. But in a dispute about cutting costs in the summer of 1987, he sacked his editorial staff and produced a scab paper behind closed doors. And the Scottish establishment also has its share of hardline Thatcherites. Lord Goold, the chairman of the

Scottish Tory Party, is a director of the Morgan Grenfell merchant bank that was at the centre of the Guinness shares scandal in 1987.

A Scottish capitalist with a social conscience is still a capitalist, who has to survive on his class instincts. We can be sure that Reid's millionaire acquaintance would not show the same enthusiasm for any of the basic things which Scottish workers need. Would he approve a big increase in wages, raising unemployment benefit to a similar level, or uphold the right of workers to a job regardless of whether or not the boss is making a profit? The Scottish working class should know that allying itself with Scottish employers means marching into line behind an enemy general. Whatever its views about taking twopence off income tax, the Scottish establishment is still part of the British ruling class.

If the working class buries its differences with the employers, and tries to hold hands with them in a Scottish assembly, it will undermine its ability to take on those same forces in a struggle for jobs or democracy. We need both hands free for an effective fight. The idea of an all-class Scottish nation denies a basic principle of working class politics: only the working class can free itself and to do so it needs to take an independent stand on every issue. Scottish nationalism is not simply a diversion, it is reactionary. We can illustrate this by looking at its relationship to the broader trend of British chauvinism.

Scots against 'Argies'

Modern Scotland developed as part of the British nation. Hence, Scottish nationalism could never be more than a variant of British nationalism. A distinct structure of Scottish society, such as the law, is essentially the legal system of the British ruling class adapted to local circumstances. The same relationship holds true in the realm of ideas. The outlook of Scottish nationalism is the worldview of the 'Great' British nation tinged with tartan. British nationalism is a chauvinist creed which has justified imperialism and racism against oppressed peoples around the world. Scottish nationalists have many complaints against England. But their leaders have never allowed these differences to get in the way of supporting the British state against its foreign enemies. In two world wars and countless other conflicts, Scottish nationalists have lined up behind the British ruling class. When the Thatcher government launched its imperialist adventure in the South Atlantic in 1982, leading Scottish nationalists refused to take sides against the government. Some have quibbled

about the methods used by the Tories against Argentina or Libya. But their more common concern has been to add a Scottish dimension to the chauvinism against victims of British militarism.

Since 1982, an idea has developed that there was no 'Falklands Factor' in Scotland. Scottish Labour Party members have used this argument as another example of Scotland being more progressive than England—and as another argument for an assembly:

> 'Discussing devolution for Scotland with the average English person makes good training for interplanetary communication between alien life forms. The nearest equivalent for the Scots was when they were trying to understand the imperialist passions engendered among the English by the Falklands War.' (J Boyack and K Carmichael, *New Socialist*, December 1986)

People can forget a lot in a few years—especially if it suits their political purposes. There was opposition to the war among working class Scots, perhaps more than in most of England. There was also plenty of support in Scotland for sending the British task force. The 'imperialist passions' were not confined to the south. Support for the task force was reflected in a swing in Scottish opinion. In England the South Atlantic War boosted the Tory government from its lowest-ever standing in the opinion polls to an unassailable lead. In Scotland the deep dislike of Thatcher ensured that the turnaround was not so spectacular. But it was still significant. In December 1981, the Tories in Scotland had the support of just 17 per cent of the electorate. In the May 1982 local elections, as the fleet headed for the Falklands, they won more than 25 per cent of the votes. The fall-off in Labour's Scottish support during the binge of British patriotism was more dramatic. In 1981, Labour stood at a very impressive 55 per cent in Scottish opinion polls. By the time of the May 1982 local elections, Labour was down to 39 per cent.

Scottish nationalism boosted Britain's position in the debates around the war with Argentina. The Tory government justified its military adventure on the grounds that the Falkland Islanders were British citizens with the right to self-determination. In reality the Falklanders are colonial settlers, planted by Britain in that barren outpost of Empire after the Royal Navy had robbed Argentina of its Malvinas Islands more than 100 years ago. The fact that many of the planted Falklanders had come from Scotland's Presbyterian community gave some nationalist spokesmen an excuse for supporting them, and the British task force, against Argentina. Scottish National Party president William Wolfe went furthest in adapting British chauvinism against 'the Argies' for his Scottish audience. In a letter to *The Scotsman*, Wolfe declared that most of the islanders were descended from Scots and proud of their heritage, and

that Britain could not allow them to come under the control of 'the cruel and ruthless fascist dictatorship of a Roman Catholic state' (15 April 1982). The party dissociated itself from its president's sectarianism, but not from his desire to see Britain reconquer its colony.

More left-wing Scottish politicians joined English radicals like Tony Benn in protesting that Britain should not fire the first shot, but should beat Argentina with international diplomatic and economic sanctions instead. Yet they all stopped short of opposing Britain's war aims, and agreed that Argentina must give up its rightful claim to the Malvinas. The Scottish MP best known for harassing Thatcher over her conduct of the war, in particular over the cold-blooded sinking of the Argentinian ship the *Belgrano*, is Tam Dalyell—the most virulently anti-nationalist Labour MP in Scotland. Scottish nationalism played no part in building opposition to the war. It only provided local—if sometimes more radical—versions of the desire to see the Union Jack flying once again over the Falklands.

Scottish nationalism has consistently proved to be subordinate to the wider current of British chauvinism. Some Scots claim that the racism which patriotic thugs direct against black people in London or Birmingham does not exist north of the border. They should try telling that to the Asian families in Glasgow who have had their homes and mosques attacked with increasing frequency over the past few years. Scottisn commentators also claim that football fans in Scotland don't share the violent jingoism of their English counterparts. But the Celtic supporter who ran on to the pitch in a European Cup match a couple of years back and attacked a Rapid Vienna player was displaying a similarly fierce anti-foreign feeling to that which led Liverpool fans to charge Italians in the Heysel stadium in 1985.

There are also those in Scotland who link Scottish nationalism with the struggle for Irish self-determination. They extend their opposition to imperialism in Ireland to demanding that Scotland, too, should be free from British rule. Their hatred for British militarism meant they were also the Scots most likely to take sides against Britain in the South Atlantic War. Some made a point of wearing Argentinian football strips during the conflict. These are positive anti-imperialist instincts, but they are corrupted by their association with Scottish nationalism. There can be no parallel between Scotland and the victims of British imperialism in Ireland, Argentina or anywhere else. Scotland is part of the imperial nation which has been guilty of oppression around the globe. Scottish

nationalism is logically opposed to the anti-British nationalism of the Irish. Anybody who wants to make a real contribution to freeing Ireland from British imperialism must recognise Scottish nationalism as part of the problem, not part of the solution.

Scottish nationalism offers nothing to the working class. It encourages workers to line up with sections of the Scottish establishment and, through them, with the British ruling class. It ignores important divisions in Scottish society, while dividing ordinary Scots from those with whom they truly share a common interest—the working class in the rest of Britain and beyond. Scottish workers cannot build a better life on historical myths and modern delusions about the 'Scottish psyche'. They can only do so by exercising their power against the source of their problems—the profit system, and the united British capitalist class which rules over it. They need to adopt an outlook of internationalism. This does not mean ignoring Scottish events. At root it means declaring that we have everything in common with workers in England and beyond, and want nothing to do with the ruling class and its state within Scotland. Creating a working class movement on that basis may seem an idle dream to many Scots in the grim political climate of the late eighties. But it holds the only realistic prospect of progress. It is certainly far more realistic than the idea that a devolved Scottish assembly could come up with the solutions.



Festival for Scottish Democracy, September 1987: Scottish labour movement leaders told workers worried about unemployment or health cuts to turn out and listen to an actress, a minister of the Kirk and a Labour Party spokesman talking about 'the Scottish psyche' in a tent on Glasgow Green.

Hugh Cameron

4. The case against the assembly campaign

Whether or not it is expressed as obvious nationalism, the idea that Scots of all classes share a common interest dominates Scottish politics today. It is a central theme in the campaign for a Scottish assembly. The old argument that 'if it's Scottish it must be progressive' has been resurrected in a modern guise to justify the demand for devolution. This celebration of a sectional 'Scottishness' raises worrying spectres from the past and avoids the real problems of the present.

The demand for devolution and the idea that Scots should turn in on themselves have often hampered rather than helped the working class. Campaigns which encourage Scottish workers to line up behind employers, church leaders and establishment politicians to defend Scotland's 'national interest' have never benefited those under attack from the capitalist class. In fact, the assembly campaign seems to champion many of the worst features of Scottish politics, which have been the undoing of militant workers' struggles for decades. Yet the official labour movement declares that it is the solution for the modern Scottish working class.

The leaders of the Labour Party and trade unions insist that their all-class assembly campaign is the way ahead for ordinary Scots today. What do they claim that such an assembly can offer the working class?

One constant theme in the pro-devolution arguments is that an assembly would allow Scottish people to control their own lives. 'Devolution gives people a greater say in a collective way, rather than

what they are being offered by Thatcher through individual share ownership' says Scottish TUC chief Campbell Christie (*Glasgow Herald*, 19 October 1987). The idea that an assembly could give Scottish people the collective power and freedom to take decisions for themselves has undoubted popular appeal. Workers in Scotland are increasingly coming into conflict with hostile employers and interfering state authorities. The desire to overcome the widespread sense of isolation and helplessness, by challenging the Tory government and taking control over working class affairs in at least part of the United Kingdom, expresses a positive and constructive sentiment. But a devolved Scottish assembly would not offer any such control and it would not be under the influence of the working class. It would simply be a reorganised department of the British state.

The state is the administrative machine of the British capitalist class. It incorporates many different bodies, from the police force and parliament to local councils and the welfare services. The various departments of the state have different functions and they operate in different ways, but they all ultimately serve the interests of the establishment. Anybody who has ever tried to get enough money to survive on out of the social security system, for example, will know that even the 'soft' side of the welfare state is much more interested in snooping on people and saving cash than in serving the community. A Scottish assembly would be one more official institution presiding over the system.

The parliamentary Bill which the Labour Party presented in November 1987 makes clear that a Scottish assembly could not interfere with the power of central government on important British issues. It would be another layer of local government within the structures of the state. It would be run by the same civil service which administers the rest of the system, and be as unresponsive to people's real needs as any of the bureaucratic state agencies that already exist. No matter which parties occupied the seats in the Edinburgh assembly, such an arm of the state could not challenge the interests of the British establishment. Scottish people have already learned that, whoever has a majority in the house of commons, the profit system grinds on regardless. Some of the most devastating acts of de-industrialisation in Scotland took place under past Labour governments. A localised Scottish talking shop under Labour control in Edinburgh would be no more likely than any of the past Labour governments at Westminster to take on the capitalist system.

The claim that a devolved assembly would give Scottish people

collective control over their lives is a cruel joke. We can illustrate this by looking at some of the specific proposals about what it would do.

Jobs for Scots?

'The assembly will assume responsibility for the Scottish Development Agency and the Highlands and Islands Development Board, along with other powers that the secretary of state has to make a direct intervention in Scottish industry and help to build the Scottish economy for the future.' (Scottish Council of the Labour Party and Scottish TUC, 'Statement on Devolution')

The idea that an assembly could 'help to build the Scottish economy for the future' is out of step with reality. Capitalism is now a more international system than ever before. Economies are connected by an ever-expanding network of trading and investment links. Huge amounts of capital can be switched from one side of the world to the other by tapping a few keys at a computer terminal. The stock market crash of October 1987 provided striking evidence of how tightly integrated the world economy has become. When share prices slumped on Wall Street, markets from Hong Kong to London collapsed within hours. Faced with an international crisis, the mighty American government proved incapable of resolving its economic problems. Yet Labour and the Scottish TUC claim that intervention from an Edinburgh assembly could succeed where the power of the White House has failed. In today's global marketplace, no assembly can hope to have much real influence on its domestic economy—especially not if it is based in an outdated industrial country like Scotland.

Labour movement leaders claim that a Scottish assembly, working together with union officials and employers, could revive the economy and create jobs through its own investment and job creation schemes. This is a non-starter. An assembly could not make Scottish industry competitive on the world market. Such a provincial approach to economic development belongs in the Victorian era of small-scale enterprise. It is hopelessly out of step in the modern age of industrial collapse and mass unemployment. For example, the Scottish TUC has declared that the Scottish Development Agency should invest in a ski-slope at Aonadh Mor, and that the Highlands and Islands Development Board should encourage the growth of crofting communities. These imaginative initiatives will scarcely make Scotland a market leader in the world economy of the late twentieth century—or provide many jobs for redundant miners, steelworkers or shipbuilders.

The only money Labour's envisaged assembly would have to

spend on industry (or anything else) would come from a central government grant and local taxation. Scotland already receives 30 per cent of all regional aid in Britain. That grant, which would be transferred to an assembly, is barely enough to prop up the Scottish economy in its present parlous state. New initiatives would have to be funded through the assembly's proposed power to 'vary' income tax rates in Scotland. Let us suppose that a Labour administration in Edinburgh followed its party's policy at the 1987 general election and reversed the Tories' latest tax cuts. This would raise Scottish income tax by twopence in the pound. The *Economist* estimates that this would raise around £300m for the Scottish assembly. That is not even a down payment on what would be needed to rebuild Scotland's obsolete economy. It could do little to create real jobs—and the Labour and trade union leaders know it.

In the 1987 general election, Labour could only promise to cut Scottish unemployment by 100 000—less than a third—over two years. Most of these jobs were to be 'created' through Tory-style cheap-labour schemes. A local Scottish assembly could do even less than a Labour government at Westminster. Labour's assembly Bill says ominously that such a body would assume 'responsibility for training and retraining, including youth and other programmes'. A revamped Youth Training Scheme is the only job creation Scottish workers could expect from an assembly.

Left-wing Labour politicians in Scotland insist that an assembly could alter the fate of the Scottish economy. They point to the achievements of Ken Livingstone's Greater London Council as evidence that a local government body can provide the resources to help industry overcome its problems. 'Parts of England have recently been privy to the exciting initiatives in relation to jobs...pioneered by the metropolitan councils and the GLC,' according to Jack McConnell, a Labour councillor in Stirling and parliamentary candidate. He continued, proclaiming his vision of a GLC-style assembly transforming the Scottish economy: 'While the 1980s has seen their extermination by the Tories, the decade could end with a similar experience being created in Scotland' (*Radical Scotland*, February/March 1987).

Perhaps we can excuse McConnell's faith in the GLC on the grounds that Stirling is a long way from London. Those who lived under Livingstone's council seem to have less happy memories. The GLC was a large authority, presiding over as many people as a Scottish assembly would, with millions of pounds to spend. Yet it could do nothing to alter the laws of capitalism or reduce

unemployment in London. Its 'exciting initiatives' of investing in declining local enterprises were a disaster for the workers involved. They served only to undermine resistance to redundancies, by urging workers to put their trust in the future success of the firm rather than fight for their jobs. An account of one such experience should act as a warning to Scottish workers with any illusions in the ability of local assemblies to make capitalism work for them:

'At the end of 1981 GEC chief Arnold Weinstock announced the closure of Associated Automation, a subsidiary employing 400 people making pay telephones in Brent, North-west London. The workers voted to fight the closure but the local AEU branch and Brent Labour Party members had an alternative idea. They proposed approaching the newly elected left-wing GLC to sponsor the formation of a workers' co-op....

'Behind the scenes negotiations dragged on for months. The workers became more and more pessimistic about the prospects of successfully fighting the closure and more than 200 took offers of redundancy payments. By summer 1982 the GLC reached agreement on the formation of a co-op. It gave a hand-out of £83 000 to Weinstock for the obsolete plant and equipment and set up the co-op to carry on producing pay phones under contract to GEC. Weinstock laughed all the way to the bank and 120 workers invested their redundancy money in the hope of clinging on to their jobs in the new venture.

'Within a year Third Sector (as the GLC named the co-op) had collapsed with the loss of all jobs. There were bitter protests and rumours and allegations about corrupt "worker-directors" and handouts to local MPs. But the simple fact was, as Weinstock had advised the GLC, the firm could not compete in the market, even with reduced wage rates and worse conditions. The GLC and the local Labour left offered workers a co-op, saying "at least it will save some jobs". In fact it made certain that every job would go.' (M Freeman, *Taking Control: A Handbook for Trade Unionists*, 1984)

Scottish workers have little reason to look forward to the decade ending 'with a similar experience being created in Scotland' under an assembly.

The second way in which the assembly might stimulate the Scottish economy is through attracting more foreign capital to Scotland. This has been the main function of the Scottish Development Agency since it was set up (on a shoe-string budget) by the Labour government in 1975. For Scottish businessmen, this offers a slightly more realistic option for getting new investment than trying to generate it internally. But the harsh terms on which overseas capital can be coaxed into Scotland today make it no more attractive for the working class.

'We require new policies for attracting "inward investment" which will ensure, through negotiation, lasting benefits for the Scottish people' declares Campbell Christie of the Scottish TUC (*Scottish Trade Union Review*, February 1987). Perhaps he could explain the

'lasting benefits' which Scottish people gained from the negotiations between the Scottish Development Agency, union leaders and the Ford Motor Company over the American corporation's new plant at Dundee in 1987. Gavin Laird, leader of the engineers' union and a director of the development agency, signed a single-union no-strike deal with Ford. The agency backed Laird's deal, declaring that 'stable industrial relations' were vital to attract overseas investors. A Scottish union leader and his associates on the agency went cap-in-hand to a capitalist corporation, and signed away the basic trade union rights of Ford workers before they even pulled on their overalls for the first time. This is an example of the sort of 'benefits' Scots could expect from the tie-up between the official labour movement, employers and Scottish state bodies in attracting investment under an assembly. It makes a nonsense of Christie's claims that devolution would give Scottish people more say over their lives.

Accountants and administrators

'Social services: It will be up to the people of Scotland to decide on their own priorities. A Scottish assembly would not have been sidetracked into arguments about privatisation. Neither would it have gone down the road of supporting privileged education. The Scottish health service and Scottish housing will be better dealt with by a Scottish assembly. The people of Scotland, through their elected representatives, are better placed to decide their own priorities.' (Scottish Council of the Labour Party and Scottish TUC, 'Statement on Devolution')

The 'people of Scotland' are certainly 'better placed to decide their own priorities' in social services than any Tory government. Scotland's 'elected representatives', however, are another matter. At British and local levels, Labour politicians have proved willing to administer health, housing, education and other services in Scotland according to the strict requirements of capitalist accountancy. They have consistently obeyed Tory spending restrictions, making the cuts and redundancies necessary to balance the books and stay within the law. There is no reason to imagine that they would behave any differently within a Scottish assembly.

There is much public concern in Scotland about the crisis in the NHS and the dangerous deterioration in healthcare under the Tories. Labour uses this as an argument for an assembly to control healthcare in Scotland. Yet when British capitalism ran into trouble in the mid-seventies, the last Labour government acted along the same lines as Thatcher. It set about making cuts in the NHS to ease the pressure which public spending puts on profits. Labour slashed

capital spending in the health service by 23 per cent between 1974-75 and 1978-79 (Public expenditure white paper, February 1979). The Tories are going further because the problems of the British economy are now more profound. If Labour were in power in Edinburgh today, however, its record suggests that it would be making similar economies.

Where locally run services such as housing and education are concerned, Scottish people have enough experience of Labour's penny-pinching administration to know what to expect from an assembly.

The Labour-controlled district council in Glasgow is probably the biggest slum landlord in Europe. Scotland has a higher concentration of council houses than anywhere else in Britain, and housing conditions in Glasgow have been notorious for a century. People live in grim council flats and tower blocks from Greenock to Dundee. The Labour council has launched a cheap-skate modernisation programme, pushing families into one room while the rest of their home is taken apart around them.

In 1987 Glasgow council held an exhibition entitled 'City renewal through partnership'. But bitter housing groups and tenants associations set up a rival show called 'Some partnership, some renewal' to give guided tours around the crumbling housing schemes and show the ugly reality behind the Labour council's facelift. There is little sign here of Labour allowing angry local people to 'decide their own priorities' as the party claims it would through a Scottish assembly. The 25 000 homeless people in Scotland's Labour-run central belt have even less reason to be enthusiastic about an assembly controlled by the same party which lets them live on the streets. At the special Labour and Scotland conference in November 1987, the 'Campaigning Initiatives' section of the executive's report did not mention housing.

The claim that an assembly would defend and improve education in Scotland rings equally hollow. Cost-cutting Labour councils are already taking an axe to education facilities. Strathclyde regional council's 1987 plan, 'Adapting to Change', amounts to a scheme for closing many schools, busing pupils miles to those that remain open, and redeploying teachers. 'Thatcher closes our factories, Labour closes our schools' banners have appeared at protests in the East End of Glasgow.

Scottish teachers are still bitter about the deal which ended their long dispute over pay and conditions in 1987. That stitch-up carried a distinct air of assembly-style politics. It was based on a report on

teachers' pay and conditions by Sir Peter Main, a member of the executive of the development agency. It was signed by two staunch supporters of the assembly campaign—the general secretary of the leading Scottish teachers' union, John Pollock, and Strathclyde Labour councillor Malcolm Green who led the employers' side. The worse pay and conditions which Scottish teachers have been forced to accept are another indication of what workers could expect from such liaisons between union officials, Labour administrators and Scottish dignitaries like Main under the umbrella of an assembly.

There are many other recent examples of local Labour politicians in Scotland making cuts at workers' expense. Strathclyde regional council leader Charles Gray has even threatened to use troops as scabs if firefighters took action against job cuts. The Labour councils claim that this is all the fault of the Tory government. It is certainly the case that the Tories have imposed ruthless restrictions on public spending through devices like rate-capping. But Labour authorities have proved willing to accept the Tories' terms and administer the cuts. Labour has shown that it is more concerned with running the system than with defending Scottish people. The party has proved its commitment to working within the limits laid down by the bosses' accountants. Why should all this change if Labour is running a local state body called 'assembly' rather than 'council'? As former Edinburgh councillor Alex Wood, who resigned in protest at Labour's cuts, told the Labour in Scotland conference, 'We've accepted the legitimacy of Tory cuts in local government, and above all we've accepted the poll tax.'

The poll tax is probably the best example of why we should not believe Labour's claims about what an assembly could do. The party has made public opposition to the Tory tax a focus of its programme in Scotland, and its strongest argument for an assembly. Yet in practice, Labour-run regional councils like Strathclyde are already preparing to implement the poll tax in April 1989. In September 1987 these councils became legally obliged to set up the poll tax machinery. They dutifully began hiring snoopers to check up on every Scottish adult and ensure that nobody dodges the poll tax. While the Labour Party holds press conferences against the poll tax beneath a banner demanding 'Stop it!', the local Labour administrators are busy starting it across Scotland. Labour's parliamentary Bill states that an assembly would have the power to replace the poll tax. But the assembly does not exist. The councils do—and they are doing the Tories' dirty work.

Labour's two-faced attitude to the poll tax shows what we could

really expect from an assembly. An assembly created to manage the affairs of a declining capitalism in Scotland could not create the jobs, build the houses or provide the services which Scottish people need. This is why Labour spokesmen have been unwilling to spell out the details of what an assembly would do under their control. Instead they have had to talk in generalities about 'Scottish people determining their own priorities'. Labour fears that if Scottish people found out how little was really on offer, then an assembly would not be one of the priorities they would want to determine.

A Scottish assembly holds out no hope for the future of the working class. The assembly campaign, however, is more than just a waste of time. It has popularised a political approach which contains great dangers. This is another version of the 'Scottish lobby' idea we discussed earlier in relation to UCS, Gartcosh and Caterpillar. The assembly campaign begins from the idea that Scottish affairs should be separate, and that Scots from all walks of life have a special interest in uniting across class lines. Its supporters have spread this message not just in relation to devolution, but in every debate about the economic and political problems facing Scottish people.

Every leading voice in the assembly campaign, from the Kirk to the Communist Party, emphasises the need to involve 'a broad cross-section of Scottish society' in political campaigns around issues like the poll tax. The campaign for a Scottish assembly may not frighten the Tory government. But its attempt to embroil workers in another doomed alliance with members of the Scottish establishment should terrify anybody who is serious about beating back the Tory attacks. Here too, Labour's attitude to the poll tax provides the best evidence of how destructive such an approach can be.

A 'responsible' retreat

The poll tax has infuriated thousands of Scottish people with its plans to make every adult, whether an elderly laird or a teenage apprentice, pay the same local rate for the privilege of breathing the Scottish air. The poll tax must become the central focus for any resistance against the Tory government and there can be no doubt of the potential to mobilise a truly mass movement around this issue. After its success in capturing the anti-Tory vote in the 1987 general election, Labour was ideally placed to organise working class opposition to the poll tax on such a scale as to make Thatcher sorely regret selecting Scotland for its first test case. Labour, however, chose instead to adopt the moderate model of the assembly campaign.

Labour criticised the poll tax more as an insult to Scotland's dignity than as an attack on ordinary people. The party collected together representatives of respectable Scottish society, to put polite pressure on the government. It thus squandered the opportunity for a militant campaign, and reduced the mass of Scottish people to the role of spectators of a public relations exercise fronted by Lords, Churchmen, actresses and other assorted notables.

At the Labour Party conference in Brighton in October 1987, some Scottish delegates wanted direct action to block the poll tax. They proposed a motion which called on 'tenants associations and trade unions to boycott the implementation and collection of the poll tax'. This showed how angry many Labour activists were about the tax and how they were ready to take action against it. Their proposals amounted to a highly practical approach to stopping the poll tax machine in its tracks. Yet the motion was thrown out on the recommendation of the National Executive, and replaced with one which limited Labour's commitment to 'resisting the implementation *by all legal means*'. *This was meaningless: the poll tax was already* law in Scotland, so resisting it 'by legal means' was impossible. Indeed the Scottish Labour councils had already taken their legalistic position to its cynical conclusion, by starting to recruit poll tax snoopers.

A fortnight later, after the Tory Party conference which confirmed plans for the poll tax, Labour's Scottish spokesman Donald Dewar held a press conference to protest at the measure. He assured the media that Labour was only interested in 'a campaign of responsible opposition' involving such prestigious opponents of the poll tax as John Banham, director of the bosses' organisation, the Scottish CBI. Dewar dismissed any idea of refusing to implement the tax in Scotland as 'sabre rattling'. The following week Labour held another press conference, this time in Glasgow, to launch its 'Stop it!' campaign against the poll tax. It featured a selection of Dewar's idea of responsible protesters. Reverend professor Murdo Ewan McDonald kicked off by condemning the poll tax as 'a heinous sin'. Lord Morton of Shuna was there to look important. And Elaine C Smith turned up to sing a version of 'The Wild Rover', suitably adapted for the occasion.

Press conferences featuring dignitaries have been the main feature of Labour's 'campaign' against the poll tax so far. There has been no attempt to organise active opposition among the many Scottish people looking for a way to hit back at the Tories. This is the sort of media-politics which Labour employed during its British general

election campaign. Then, however, the speeches were at least accompanied by glossy press-packs detailing Labour's alternative to Tory proposals. Now, because the Labour Party has yet to work out what it would put in place of the poll tax, there are no such hand-outs. Thus Labour's opposition to the poll tax is not even worthy of the name 'paper campaign'.

Labour's retreat on the poll tax is directly linked to its orientation towards a respectable Scottish alliance. Donald Dewar's favourite Scottish dignitaries would want nothing to do with a campaign involving militant action. Hence potentially effective tactics, such as organising trade unionists in local government to boycott the implementation procedure, were ruled out from the start. Nor are Scottish Reverend professors and peers of the realm too keen on being called criminals by the Tories. To keep in with their establishment patrons, the official labour movement campaign had to stay the right side of the law—including the poll tax legislation. Labour was left incapable of doing anything except telling the press that the poll tax was not very nice.

The Labour Party was so preoccupied with winning approval from the Scottish establishment that it never even considered mobilising support from the wider British labour movement to fight the poll tax. England and Wales should be fairly fruitful areas in which to spread resistance to the poll tax. People there are next in line for the Tory law. But Labour did not attempt to address the English working class. That would have gone against the spirit of its moderate approach in Scotland. Instead, the Labour Party appealed to the natural allies of its responsible Scottish lobby—the English Tory wets.

'Because it is already law in Scotland it is up to a campaign in the south to organise against it,' declared Strathclyde regional council leader Charles Gray. What sort of campaign did Gray have in mind? 'Only the Tory Party and the government can do anything about it now.' Since the summer of 1987, Labour's opposition to the poll tax has centred on trying to encourage splits in the Tory ranks. The Labour leaders tremble with excitement every time Edward Heath or some other veteran anti-working class Tory says a bad word about the poll tax. The sole attempt to involve any Scottish workers was an invitation to walk around Glasgow Green at the Festival for Scottish Democracy in September. It was an uninspiring invitation which few outside the ranks of Labour activists accepted. But Dewar was not unduly worried, because he had just had word that some Scottish Tories were unhappy about the details of how the poll tax was to be

implemented and about the government's refusal to even enter the devolution debate. 'I only hope', said Dewar, 'that those voices within the Tory Party which support an assembly will not be gagged.' For the leadership of the Labour Party in Scotland, hearing from a few Tory whingers is more important than giving a voice to the thousands of workers who want to block the poll tax. The inevitable consequence of this absurd idea of a campaign is that the poll tax is well on course for April 1989.

Labour's poll tax initiative left Scottish workers sitting at home watching press conferences on the evening news. Meanwhile, Labour leaders promoted Edward Heath—the man who took on the workers at Upper Clyde Shipbuilders and twice tried to crush the miners—as the saviour of Scots. Scottish militants would usually shun the bosses' men on the Tory backbenches. Yet in the guise of constructing a respectable Scottish alliance, Labour has encouraged working class opponents of the poll tax to turn to the Tories for a lead. This is the consequence of the influence of the assembly campaign within the labour movement.

Labour has perfected the all-class alliance approach over devolution. Now it has extended this strategy to other issues. Today Labour politicians encourage Scottish workers confronted with any problem from unemployment to acid rain to cultivate respectable middle class allies. While Labour advises workers to seek friends in the ranks of the enemy, the Tory government—which knows the difference between its friends and its enemies—is getting on with the job of attacking the working class movement.

One slogan which has become popular among leaders of the Scottish left and labour movement is: 'No to the poll tax, Yes to the assembly'. These are supposed to be complementary demands which Labour hopes will capture the mood of Scottish people. In fact the two demands are contradictory. The assembly campaign approach guarantees that the Tories will win and impose the poll tax. The government is setting up a 'Big Brother' surveillance system and preparing to use all its power to implement the poll tax. Against such opposition, Dewar's campaign is useless. No member of the Kirk, the house of lords or the Scottish CBI is capable of taking action against the British state. Only the working class, organised under its own banners, can hope to win such a confrontation. The assembly campaign's banner of 'Scottishness' can only demobilise and disorient the labour movement and guarantee the Tories a walkover on any issue they choose.

Left for an assembly

The assembly campaign is a consequence of the Labour Party's decline. It signals that Labour and trade union leaders recognise that they cannot beat Thatcher, and that the best they can hope for is to secure their base in Scotland. For them, the demand for devolution is a lifeline, a last hope of gaining some sort of influence. For Scottish people, it is a demand which threatens isolation and defeat. It reduces them to a stage army for the 'important people' who star in Labour's campaign. It diverts workers from tackling urgent problems and destroys the potential for Scotland to give a lead in a wider British resistance movement against the Tories. Many on the left recognise that a Scottish assembly provides no real answers for the working class. Yet the left's close links with the bureaucracy in the labour movement make it difficult for it to stand against the assembly campaign. Where Labour leads, the left follows.

Some left wingers have sought to excuse their backing for an assembly as a radical socialist position. They have invented political arguments which, while admitting that devolution provides no immediate solutions, claim that an assembly could inspire the working class and help to weaken British capitalism. A closer look at these arguments throws some more light on the dangers of working class support for the assembly campaign.

One argument which is popular on the left today is that the creation of a Scottish assembly would be a threat to the British state. 'If nationalist pressures cause it [the British state] to disintegrate into several fragments, we shall shed no tears' writes Alex Callinicos, leading theoretician of the Socialist Workers Party (*Socialist Worker*, 11 July). Callinicos is right to identify the break-up of the British state as a central aim of anti-capitalists. But he is wrong to suggest that the creation of a Scottish assembly involves any such threat.

The idea that the Scottish assembly implies the break-up of the British state rests on a fundamental misunderstanding of what the campaign is demanding. The call for an assembly simply proposes the *extension* of the existing system of parliamentary government from London to Edinburgh. The campaign, and the Labour Party Bill which it aims to promote, accept without question that the existing machinery of the British state in Scotland should remain intact.

Labour's assembly proposals envisage little change in the organisation of the state. Some local powers would be transferred from the secretary of state to the assembly, and Labour might consider the

abolition of one tier of local government. This is scarcely likely to shatter the British state apparatus. The monarchy, the legal system, the police and the military would still rule Scotland, like the rest of Britain, under any of the devolution measures now being proposed. Even the most left-wing supporters of the Scottish assembly today accept that the Queen will still reign in Scotland and holiday in Balmoral, and that Scottish regiments will continue to rampage around Northern Ireland or the South Atlantic at London's command.

In fact adding another parliamentary tier in Scotland could only strengthen the British state by giving it greater legitimacy in a part of the realm where popular respect for Westminster is at a low ebb. By promoting the illusion of democratic involvement and local accountability, a Scottish assembly could make the measures required by British capitalism north of the border more acceptable to Scottish people. Indeed, this is the explicit ambition of the Labour figures leading the campaign. 'A devolved assembly will be good for the government of Scotland—and therefore good for the UK,' declares the Labour/Scottish TUC 'Statement on Devolution': 'Doubts about the present system of government in Scotland are bound to reflect badly on the UK's government as a whole. We hope this step will be a prelude to...further strengthening the United Kingdom.' Far from weakening the British state in Scotland, the assembly campaign seeks to give it more local appeal to strengthen the authority of state institutions over Scottish people.

If a Scottish assembly implied any challenge to the state, we can be sure that it would receive no support whatsoever from middle class and establishment figures. When Edward Heath was prime minister in 1972, his government presided over the Bloody Sunday massacre in Derry in which 14 unarmed Irish demonstrators were shot dead by British paratroopers. That is how a British statesman such as Heath has allowed the state to deal with Irish nationalists who really demand the break-up of the United Kingdom. The idea that his support for Scottish devolution implies a conversion to the cause of dismantling the state is plainly absurd. In backing the campaign for a Scottish assembly, left-wing groups are lining up with some of the British state's loyalist supporters—not only the Scottish TUC and the Labour Party, but also the Kirk, the Liberals and many Tories.

A second argument put forward by the left is that the creation of a Scottish assembly could inspire the working class to fight more militantly in the workplace and in other arenas of the class struggle. This idea has also been endorsed by Labour politicians. The assembly campaign, according to Scottish Labour Party chair Bill

Speirs, 'will assist the resistance to the Tories throughout the UK. If the government with a majority of 102 is forced to move on a major constitutional question, that cannot fail to give new heart to, for example, the fight against anti-union legislation, privatisation and the poll tax throughout the country' (*Scottish Trade Union Review*, Summer 1987).

How can setting up a talking shop for politicians in Edinburgh restore workers' confidence or inspire their struggles? The existence of the Palace of Westminster has never had a conspicuously beneficial effect on workers' conduct of the class struggle in England. In fact the contrary is the case: the official labour movement's faith in parliament has consistently held back workers' attempts to take matters into their own hands. The left now seeks to create a Scottish version of the historic weakness of the British labour movement. From Red Clydeside to the fight to keep the Ravenscraig steelworks open in the eighties, Scottish Labour and union leaders have promoted devolution as an alternative to the class struggle, not an aid to it. They have tried to direct working class energies into a campaign for constitutional reform, and away from an active fight against the capitalist class. Yet in their search for an excuse for supporting the assembly campaign, many on the left now portray this as a positive contribution to working class politics.

The fact that an anti-assembly Tory government has a majority of 102 may appear to render academic any debate about the impact devolution might have on workers' attitudes in the future. But the assembly campaign is having an important impact on the working class in the present. Far from boosting confidence, the campaign can only have the opposite effect. Instead of promoting initiative, the assembly campaign pushes activists into an alliance dominated by establishment politicians, clergymen and labour bureaucrats. We have noted how the assembly campaign has encouraged a parallel approach in response to attacks on workers' jobs or living standards. The idea of trusting in a Scottish lobby to influence the state has paralysed workers' initiatives and led to disaster at Caterpillar, over the poll tax, and elsewhere. By supporting the assembly campaign, the left condemns Scottish workers to be dragged down to further defeats under the dead weight of this political approach.

When confronted with all the arguments against the assembly campaign, many left wingers will finally shrug their shoulders and say that, if the Scottish working class wants devolution, it should have it. In fact the demand for an assembly has not arisen spontaneously from Scottish workers. It has been promoted by the

official labour movement to provide a focus for the anger and resentment of millions of Scottish people at the effect of nine years of Tory government on their lives. The fact that there is considerable popular sympathy for the assembly campaign does not necessarily justify left-wing support for this bureaucratic initiative.

Those who aspire to build a working class movement against the system cannot reduce their role to echoing the demands of the labour movement as it currently exists. The political climate in British society today means that the ideas of the establishment exert a strong pull over sections of the working class, even in Scotland. Militant workers, meanwhile, are influenced by the outlook of the leaders of the Labour and trade union movement. Under these pressures, the demands which take off among workers will inevitably have a confused and often contradictory character. Such demands will often express the interests of one section of the working class, perhaps at the expense of another. They will often endorse the official labour movement's faith in state intervention on behalf of the working class. The role of activists is to identify the positive kernel in these demands, extract it and reformulate it in a way that expresses the interests of the working class as a whole.

There is a positive side of the popular demand for devolution. It expresses workers' desire to free themselves from Tory rule and take more control over their own affairs. This is an important aspiration, without which no progress is possible. But to make such a desire mean anything, it has to be extricated from the redundant approach of the assembly campaign. Left wingers who are tailing the campaign are helping to ensure that progressive instincts among Scottish workers are neutralised. Instead, they should be arguing *against* the assembly as a step towards establishing the real basis for workers' control.

The way ahead often lies through arguing against the ideas which emerge from the labour movement as it is currently constituted. This may well mean that those who point out the way forward experience a degree of isolation from the mainstream of working class opinion. But it is only by challenging the prejudices that hold back the working class, *especially* among an important militant section like the Scots, that an effective movement can be built. The assembly campaign is a test case for the left. If it cannot face being out of step with the Church of Scotland, how can it ever hope to challenge British capitalism?



Labour's Scottish spokesman Donald Dewar (top) has been more interested in cultivating tired old Tory critics of the poll tax like Edward Heath, than in organising the energies of thousands of Scots who want to smash the Tory tax.

Another solution

Ten years ago, in the thick of his campaign against the Labour government's devolution legislation, Neil Kinnock had some interesting things to say about a Scottish assembly. In listing the problems facing the labour movement, he asserted that 'not a single one, whether economic problems, repression or illiberality, will be resolved by this kind of constitutional change. It will not change economic realities' (reprinted in *Glasgow Herald*, 11 March 1987). Whatever Kinnock's motives for making that statement, he never said a truer word.

The economic, political and social problems facing the Scottish working class today are the consequence of the crisis of British capitalism. The Tory government is attempting to resolve the system's problems at workers' expense. The stock market crash at the end of 1987 signalled that a full-scale recession is not too far away. We are going to see more cuts, more attempts to hold down wages and shake out jobs, and more state repression. The demand for a Scottish assembly does not even address the problems facing Scottish workers, never mind provide an answer. So what is the alternative?

Scottish workers' support for the assembly reflects the defensive outlook which has been created by the setbacks of recent years. As the government and the employers have pressed forward, taking on and beating important groups of workers, anti-Tories around Britain have retreated and tried to save at least something. This defensiveness takes a different shape in different parts of the country. It has led militants in parts of England to defend cost-cutting Labour councils or bureaucratic trade union leaders whom they would once have condemned. In Scotland, many working class activists have retreated behind the border. Seeing little chance of winning solidarity from English workers, they have been willing to seek support from middle and upper class Scots. The assembly campaign sums up the view that any change would be better than what we're suffering now. This is a big mistake. It is one thing to recognise that we cannot reverse the defeats of the last decade in a day. But it is another thing altogether to entrust our future to a campaign which promises nothing except further disillusionment and defeat.

The way to beat the Tories is not by backing off and seeking refuge in a Scottish lobby. This only plays into Thatcher's hands, by consolidating the divisions within the British working class and allowing the establishment to call the shots. Instead, Scots who want to turn back the Tories need to get organised to meet their political

challenge with a movement which is as determined to defend our class as Thatcher is to defend hers.

The first thing we need to do is forget about appealing to all sections of Scottish society. Instead, we need to organise those Scottish workers who are looking for a way to fight back, but who have little faith in the ability of the Labour Party to take on the Tories. These militants must declare their independence—not from the English or from any other section of the working class, but from the establishment within Scotland. There is little hope of breaking the mould of British politics while we are constrained by alliances and links with the representatives of the old order.

The Scottish working class is the only section of Scottish society with an interest in taking on the Tories, not simply as an unrepresentative government, but as the defenders of a system built on exploitation and oppression. It is also the only section of Scottish society with the power to challenge the system. We cannot afford to waste that power in campaigns tailored to suit the needs of middle class politicians or Scottish businessmen. It must be unleashed to serve the needs of the mass of Scottish people, and to defend them from the British establishment in Scotland.

Scottish activists need to play a leading role in forging a united workers' movement across Britain. Scottish employers and state officials operate as part of the British ruling class. That united class will not hesitate to use all the resources at its disposal to crush resistance in any part of its realm. We have to be prepared to do battle on a similarly wide scale. Making links with activists in England and Wales, encouraging militancy among the more passive sections of the British working class and, perhaps most importantly, leading by example, are all ways in which Scots can prepare for the political struggles to come.

In Scotland, we need to recognise the common interests of the entire British working class. This does not mean going to England to lobby support every time a local problem arises—although there are many situations in which such a response is appropriate. Most immediately, it means adopting a broad political outlook, and not becoming transfixed by narrow Scottish concerns. In the period ahead, as the crisis of capitalism unfolds, Scottish workers will face their biggest challenge since the days of Red Clydeside. We should remember the important lessons of that historic period. The Scottish movement came closest to seeing off the capitalist class when it looked outwards and identified with the international working class. Its struggles were doomed when it fell back on the inward-looking

traditions of 'Scottishness'.

In practical terms, there are some clear-cut issues around which we need to organise a new anti-capitalist movement in Scotland. The poll tax is one. There is a startling contrast between what needs to be done, and the attitude of the official labour movement in Scotland today. While the Labour Party's campaign concentrates on recruiting respectable celebrities, we can set about organising direct action among trade unionists in local government to prevent the poll tax from ever coming into operation. While the assembly supporters sit patiently in Scotland hoping that English Tories will delay the poll tax, we can launch a fight against it in Scotland that could inspire an active struggle to stop it throughout Britain.

This approach has been pioneered by the Smash the Poll Tax Campaign, initiated in Glasgow by supporters of the Revolutionary Communist Party in autumn 1987. The campaign has concentrated on involving working class Scots, and has brought together trade union and other activists to debate the issues at stake. It has sought to encourage the sort of action by workers in local government which could cripple the machinery for imposing the poll tax now being built and used by Labour authorities. The Smash the Poll Tax Campaign's demands are the basic requirements of an effective movement, which need to be taken up throughout Scotland and beyond:

'• Break the Tory law: a commitment to defy Tory legislation and defend those victimised for non-implementation or non-payment of the charge must be the starting point of opposition to the scheme.

• A working class campaign: the campaign must be based on working class action, not appeals to middle class sympathy, and should involve trade unionists, community groups, women working in the home and the unemployed.

• United action by council workers and the community: the campaign must be built around united action in defiance of the poll tax by the council workers who are being told to implement the poll tax procedures, and working class people who are expected to pay it.'

Apart from the poll tax, there are other important issues for the Scottish labour movement. Supporting Irish self-determination, as a democratic right and as a blow against the British state, must be a priority if we hope to unite Scottish workers on a political basis and overcome old divisions. Campaigning for women's rights, especially the right to have an abortion, is also vital if we hope to free the Scottish working class from the religious ideas and loyalties that have helped to hold it back in the past.

We need to challenge the prejudices of Scottish nationalism at every turn. The working class has nothing in common with the Scottish establishment. Nor does it have any interest in blaming the English, the Americans, the EEC or anybody else for the problems created by the British capitalist system of which Scotland is an integral part. When Scottish workers accept that they are not oppressed by the English nation, they will have taken an important step towards liberating themselves from their real oppressors—the British capitalist class.

All these issues, and others like unemployment and housing, are important in their own right. But to make them count, we need to bring them together in a movement which aims to end the tyranny of the exploiters. This cannot be done overnight. But by organising the existing anti-capitalist activists, we can begin to change the climate of opinion and the balance of forces. The anti-Tory stronghold of Scotland provides a solid foundation on which to build such a movement.

To the future

In the middle of Sauchiehall Street in the centre of Glasgow, there is a flyover which lives up to its name—but only just. It flies over the busy roads below, then stops. There is no road attached to either end of it. It looks impressive, and a lot of resources and effort have gone into building it. But it is going nowhere. It is a fitting symbol for the Scottish assembly. The Scottish working class has important places to go. It has no time to stand around and be impressed by such a useless structure.

The Scottish working class should be heading for the road to power. The economic decline which has devastated Scottish industry indicates that capitalism is obsolete. The British ruling class, like its counterparts elsewhere, can only preside over the wreckage. The coming recession puts a struggle for control over the future on the agenda. The historic task facing the British working class is the seizure of state power and the creation of a new society. Scottish workers must look to the future and strive towards that goal. It is a long way from the trudge back into the past represented by the campaign for a local assembly, which belongs in the programme of Scottish Liberalism, circa 1888.

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Mick Hume is the editor of *the next step*.
Derek Owen is vice-convenor of the Scottish Federation of Socialist Teachers, and on the Ayrshire executive of the Educational Institute of Scotland.

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