

Other Views

Today we hear socialists speak, just like any bourgeois, of "France" or Germany" and of other political and national agglomerations - results of historical struggles - as of homogeneous ethnographic units, each having its proper interests, aspirations and mission, in opposition to the interests, aspirations and mission of rival units. This may be true relatively so long as the oppressed, and chiefly the workers, have no self-consciousness, fail to recognise the injustice of their inferior position and make themselves the docile tools of the oppressors. There is, then, the dominating class only that counts; and this class, owing to its desire to conserve and to enlarge its power, even its prejudices and its own ideas, may find it convenient to excite racial ambitions and hatred and send its nation, its flock, against 'foreign' countries, with a view to releasing them from their present oppressors and submitting them to its own political and economic domination. But the mission of those who, like us, wish the end of all oppression and of all exploitation of man by man, is to awaken a consciousness of the antagonism of interest between dominators and dominated, between exploiters and workers, and to develop the class struggle inside each country and solidarity among all workers across frontiers, as against any prejudice and any passion of race or nationality.

If, when foreign soldiers invade the "sacred soil of the Fatherland", the privileged class were to renounce their privileges, and would act so that the "Fatherland" really became the common property of all the inhabitants, it would then be right to fight against the invaders. But if kings wish to remain kings, and the landlords wish to take care of *their* lands and of *their* houses, and the merchants wish to take care of *their* goods, and even sell them at a higher price, then the workers, the Socialists and Anarchists should leave them to their own devices while being themselves on the look-out for an opportunity to get rid of the oppressors inside the country as well as those coming from outside.

Personally, judging at their true value the mad dog of Berlin and the "old hangman" of Vienna, I have no greater confidence in the bloody Tsar, nor in the English diplomatists who oppress India, who betrayed Persia, who crushed the Boer Republics; nor in the French bourgeoisie who massacred the natives of Morocco; nor in those of Belgium who have allowed the Congo atrocities and have largely profited by them, not to mention what all Governments and all capitalist classes do against the workers and the rebels in their own countries.

Anarchists Have Forgotten Their Principles
Errico Malatesta (Freedom, November 1914)

The federalist idea leads logically to internationalism, the organisation of nations on a federal basis into the "large fraternal union of mankind". Bakunin showed up the bourgeois utopianism of a federal idea not based on international and revolutionary socialism. He called for and desired a "United States of Europe" as the only way "of making a civil war between the different peoples of Europe impossible" while issuing a warning against any European federation based on states "as they are presently constituted". "No centralized, bureaucratic and hence military State, albeit called a republic, could enter seriously and sincerely into an international federation. By its very constitution such a State will always be an overt or covert denial of internal liberty, and hence, necessarily, a permanent declaration of war, a menace to the existence of neighbouring countries".

True internationalism rests on self-determination, which implies the right of secession. Following Proudhon, Bakunin propounded that "each individual, each association, commune or province, each region and nation, has the absolute right to determine its own fate, to associate with others or not, to ally itself with whomever it will, or break any alliance, without regard to so-called historical claims." Anarchists did not regard this principle as leading to secession or isolation. They held (and hold) the conviction that "once the right to secede is recognised, secession will, in fact, become impossible because national units will be freely established and no longer the product of violence and historical falsehood".

Proudhon distinguished the unit "based on conquest" from the "rational" unit and saw that "every organisation that exceeds its true limits and tends to invade or annex other organisations loses in strength what it gains in size, and moves towards dissolution". Bakunin declared "strong sympathy for any national uprising against any form of oppression", believing every people had "the right to be itself and no-one is entitled to impose its costume, customs, its language, its opinions or its laws." However Bakunin also believed that there could be no federalism without socialism and wished that national liberation could be achieved "as much in the economic as in the political interests of the masses". Any revolution for national independence "will necessarily be against the people... if it is carried out without the people and must therefore depend for its success on a privileged class". The national question is historically secondary to the social question and salvation depends on the social revolution. An isolated national revolution cannot succeed. The social revolution inevitably becomes a world revolution.

Anarchism
Daniel Guérin 1970

BIG FLAME



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Devolution & Liberation In Wales

Some Notes On Welsh Nationalism

Wales has never constituted a sovereign political state and unlike Scotland does not have its own legal system. Its early history shows a region divided into a number of warring princedoms which since the departure of the Romans in the fifth century had enjoyed some independence, having their own princes and developing their own church, law and language. This shared culture began to end with the Norman penetration of Wales from the 1090s onwards which ended with the final conquest of Gwynnedd in 1282. The following period saw 'English' rule established with the first Prince of Wales being crowned in 1302 by Edward the First. To the Welsh 'Marches' was now added the 'Principality'. Sharing certain hierarchical aspects of the feudal system, resistance depended on the leadership of the *Uchelwyr*, the influential descendants of earlier princes and chieftains. By the end of the 14th Century the combined effect of heavy taxes and levies and the policy of English kings to exclude the *Uchelwyr* from holding important positions in the Principality eventually led to the last uprising of the 'Welsh' against the English.

The 1300s were the time of the 1st and 2nd Wars of Independence in Scotland and a period during which the culture and power of Brittany (a land sharing much in common with Wales) was at its height. Both lands fought wars with more powerful neighbours intent on conquest - why not Wales? Were there, in reality, no common culture and interests to defend?

The Beginnings of Welsh Nationalism

Many nationalists see the uprising of Owain Glyn Dwr as "having, no parallel in Welsh history". Glyn Dwr

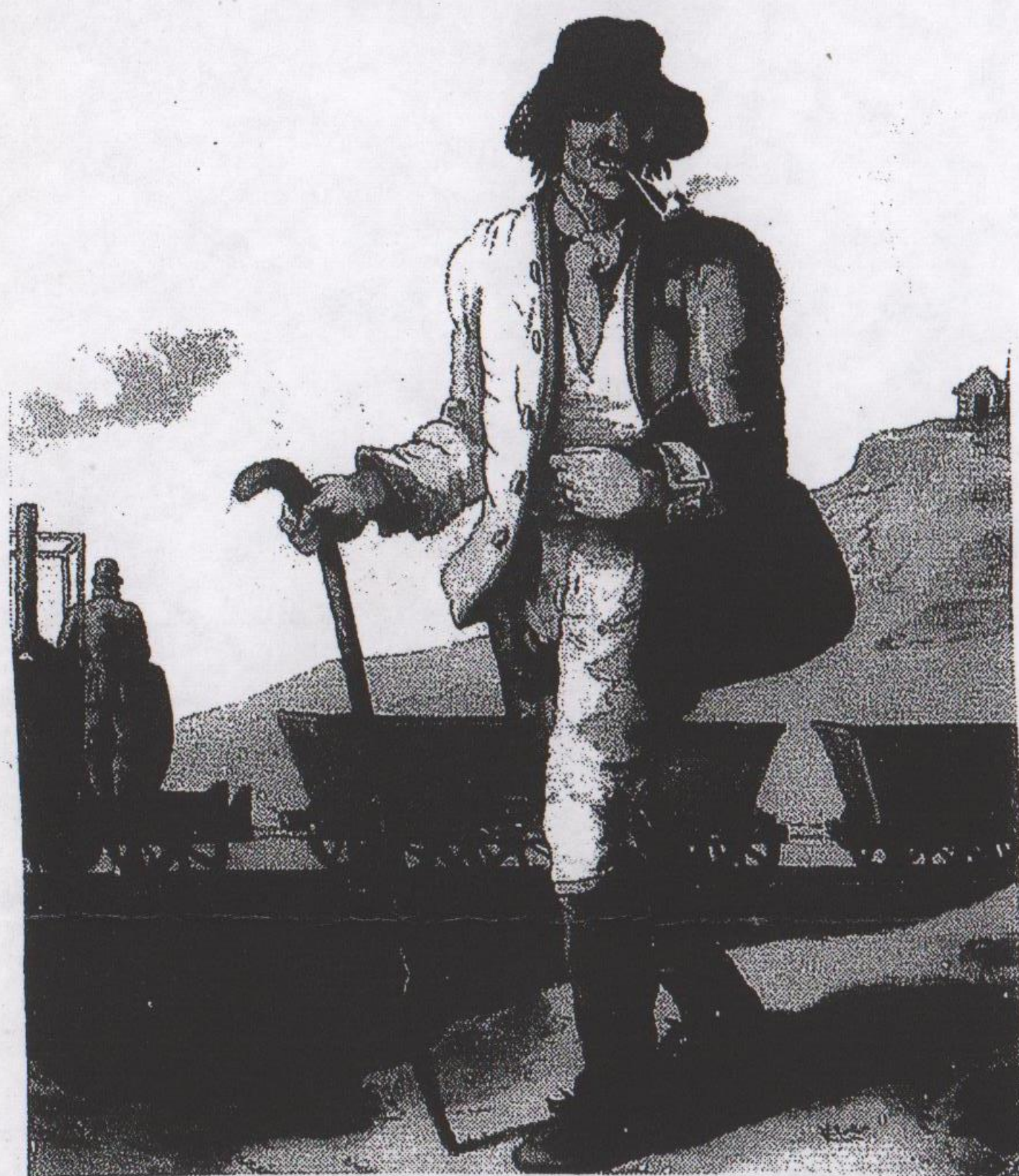
was a Marcher lord and descendent of the royal families of Powys and Dyfed. He led an army of about 10,000 in a revolt which began in 1400 and lasted until 1412. It began in a dispute over land with an Anglo-Norman neighbour and its anti-Englishness attracted a cross section of society including both peasants and class enemies like the clergy. He convened a Parliament in Machynllyth in 1404 and captured land as far east as Worcester by 1408 but was slowly driven back into the fastnesses of Gwynnedd and reduced to guerilla warfare, disappearing in 1412. While Glyn Dwr's revolt achieved a 'national focus' and extent, there is no evidence he wanted to create a separate Welsh nation. Rather he hoped for autonomy from the English crown and an end to anti-Welsh laws. Little was achieved for the poor who supported the uprising but the nobles gained much, abandoning Glyn Dwr in return for hegemony over Wales. The best example is Henry Tudor who was crowned king of England in 1485 despite the fact that his family, the Tudors of Anglesey, had supported Glyn Dwr. The Act of Union of 1536 made Wales officially a part of England with English its language.

Revolution & Reform

The national question dropped from Welsh political history and not even the republican and nationalist ferment of the late 18th Century (in the colonies of Ireland and the New World) reignited it. The Welsh ruling class continued to side with the Crown, supporting the Royalist side in the Civil War and benefitting greatly from the association.

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The divergence in the interests of the ruling and working classes of Wales and the impact of land reform and the beginnings of the Industrial revolution inevitably stimulated working class consciousness. Rather than struggling over land, a source of nationalist unrest in Ireland, rebellion in Wales centred on high rents, toll charges and wage cuts. The best examples of this are the Rebecca Riots (unfortunately split on class lines as landowners condemned the landless labourers who took up the fight), the Merthyr Rising of 1831 (the first time the Red Flag was raised but also when one of Britain's first working class heroes, Dic Penderyn, was hung for his part in the rising) and the Chartist movement of the 1840s. All of these were based around political and social reform located in if not led by the working class and none had anything to do with Welsh nationalism.



Welsh nationalism only awoke with the Victorian Romantic period of the 1880s, stimulated by parallel moves for reform on nationalist lines such as the Irish Land Act of 1881. This was entirely contained within bourgeois political circles such as the *Cymru Fydd*, a faction within the Liberal Party, and a Welsh home rule bill was easily defeated in 1914. Palliatives like the national museum, university and library were all the ruling class was prepared to offer. Even the formation of *Plaid Cymru* in 1925 was the work of conservative middle class groups in Wales seeking more influence in their own interests. Rural and 'traditional', they had a quasi-fascist tinge in the 1930s and 1940s and led campaigns against English military bases and agitated for a Welsh Parliament. *Plaid* achieved its first success in 1966 and has steadily increased its share of the vote without stimulating any real desire for independence. Their "stodgy social democratic reformism" provoked a more direct strategy, the hard-line republican groups such as the 'Free Wales Army' and *Meibion GlyDwr*, two groups prepared to use violence to obtain a 'free' Wales. The expropriation of housing and land and the destruction of

language and culture have been particular targets, highlighted by the burning of holiday homes in North Wales.

Is nationalism solely a vehicle for local bourgeois leaders to improve their conditions vis-a-vis a collaborative group or a colonial or imperial state?

State and Nation

Rudolf Rocker said, "it is the state that creates the nation, not the nation the state" and this appears especially appropriate when applied to Wales. Throughout its history Wales has been defined by those in power, it's conquerors, not by the Welsh themselves. This has enabled nationalists to create a number of myths to support claims for independence, confusing nationalism (a product of state action) with nationality (a product of social processes) in a dangerous way. Wales has a rich and diverse culture and history which does not fit into the narrow constraints of nationalism; there has never been one Wales with a unified history. What is Welsh culture, the Eistedfodd or Catatonia? Is it a thing only definable within the Welsh language? So is Wales really an 'oppressed' nation? The Welsh working class have been oppressed as the working class in all countries have been. Fellow countrymen, the Welsh ruling class, have been the cause of much of this oppression.

Anarchism In Latin America

The countries of Latin America were related to Spain and Portugal by common cultural and linguistic ties and similar social conditions. The earliest anarchist groups appeared in Mexico, Cuba, and Argentina in the 1870s, stimulated by immigrants from Europe and the work of Italian anarchists. There was a Bakuninist League in Mexico City in the 1880s. Anarchists were active in organising craft and industrial workers and most trade unions were anarcho-syndicalist. The success of the Spanish CNT was a great inspiration and there was much exchange of ideas and organisational experiences during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The FORA had 250,00 members and from 1902-09 waged a long campaign of strikes against employers and anti-labour legislation and played a significant role in the revolutionary period following the fall of the dictator Porfirio Diaz in 1910. There was a strong industrial, urban and intellectual bias to anarchism in the region but also a powerful agrarian anarchism, a levelling movement of great strength. Some of the leaders of the urban proletariat established strong links with the Zapatista movement which was extremely idealistic and egalitarian, insisting the people take the land and govern themselves in village communities without politics or the corrupting influence of personal ambition and gain, a vision closely allied to the rural anarchism of Andalusia in Spain.

What conditions encourage revolutionary rural movements, including expropriation of land and self-government?

Towards An Assembly

Nationalist support in the 1960s forced the Labour Government to establish a Welsh Office with its own seat in Cabinet and to grant a Welsh Language Act. Bi-partisan support led to a devolution referendum in the 1970s in which there was a 4:1 vote against. The 'No' vote was championed by the Labour Left (Kinnock, for instance, was active in the 'No' campaign), in fear that the working class would be divided and Labour MPs lost to an Assembly. Additional factors were disillusion with the Labour Government and the fact that the new bureaucracies created would inevitably be paid for by working class taxes. This killed off devolution until the long winter of Thatcherism after 1979 - the local political elites saw their power-base destroyed as they were rendered impotent and chose devolution as a means to get back into control. This cynical manoeuvre possibly explains the low turnout and the wafer-thin majority for an Assembly - just 6000 votes. An alienated and demoralised working class stayed home, unmoved by the urgings of liberal middle class leaders or the 'tribunes' of the working class who had so conspicuously shafted them.

With only 25% of the electorate voting 'Yes', the key question is why was the question put in the first place, in particular at a time of growing Blairite centralization. One reason is the extremely limited powers of the Assembly; the £7.5bn annual block grant is largely already allocated by central government. This pseudo-democratic reform has been 'fixed' in the interests of big business and the political establishment (including the trade unions). The absolute shame of electing representatives to the Assembly is revealed by the power of the non-elected agents of big business directly co-opted onto its industrial and economic committees. The Assembly will fast-track decisions on corporate grants and planning procedures. As all the parties are pro-capitalist and dedicated to a neo-liberalist market philosophy, the lot of the working class in Wales is unlikely to change. Government will remain the shadow cast by big business and 50% of the population will continue to own just 7% of the wealth.

Knowing this, why did groups and parties of the so-called Left such as the Welsh Communist Party, Socialist Alliance, Socialist Labour Party etc actually bother standing in the election when even if they had won seats they would have been powerless? This is a major question for electoralism has always been periodically attractive to those who profess a commitment to radical change. Elections are seen as useful vehicles for spreading propaganda, even the dated labourist propaganda of the 'left' groupings. Such electoralism reveals in no uncertain terms the paralysis and reformism of supposedly 'progressive' marxist, leninist and trotskyist parties.

Workers who refuse to join their groupings (for good reason) must be manipulated by leaders, their demands mediated for their own good by democratic processes. Assemblies are places where the game of politics is played out, where rival elites compete for power. Elections offer these groups the (spurious) opportunity to differentiate themselves from each other and raid the constituencies other groups command. This was particularly apparent within New Labour. Rhodri Morgan was blocked for the leadership in the Assembly by the trade union barons and the voice of the rank-and-file excluded.

THE WELSH ASSEMBLY.



Alun Michael was the visible expression of the Blairite iron fist in a velvet glove and a naked demonstration of where power in the party lies - in London. The sight of Morgan's supporters outside the headquarters of the T&G begging for "one person, one vote" encouraged *Plaid Cymru* and other groups into believing the working class vote could be split off and realigned with themselves but without success. The tendency of such groups to blame the leadership of the trade unions for the situation of the working class serves to reveal their desire to become leaders themselves. They have no real wish for dialogue with the working class (which is a claimed purpose of elections and democratic structures) and fail to understand education can only come from the process of actual change, in the transformation of reality.

Possible Reading

Wales, Class Struggle & Socialism by C.Kimber. SWP pamphlet 1999

Nation States from *Direct Action* #7 Summer 1998

The Scottish National Party & Plaid Cymru in *Against Parliament*, ACF pamphlet 1997

Theses on the Welsh National Question, Workers Power 1996