

# LABOUR, THE ASSEMBLY AND THE POLL TAX

LABOUR BRIEFING - SCOTLAND 80p

# PREFACE

It is 100 years since the foundation of the Scottish Labour Party in 1888. It is also just over 1 year since the Labour Party in Scotland won its most resounding victory at the General Election winning 50 seats.

According to the DOOMSDAY scenario, the election should have precipitated a massive Constitutional crisis. The Tories should by now have conceded a Scottish Assembly and withdrawn the Poll Tax. Alternatively, Scotland should be convulsed by a massive campaign of Civil Disobediance led by the Labour Party.

Neither of these events have occured - at least not yet.

This pamphlet has been produced by LABOUR BRIEFING supporters in Scotland.

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# PART ONE

# RESPONSES TO DOOMSDAY

The outcome of the June 87 General Election in Scotland was in marked contrast to England.

Tories in Scotland lost over half their MPs and received only 24% of the vote. Labour won 50 seats and 42% of the vote. A total of 76% of the electorate voted for pro assembly parties, which between them now hold 62 out of Scotlands 72 parliamentary seats.

In England there was no collapse in Tory support. Thatcher's Government returned to power with a hundred plus majority.

How would Thatcher and her Scottish Secretary Rifkind respond to the vote of the Scottish electorate?

Labour MP George Foulkes predictions were:

> "Malcolm Rifkind is not stupid, he knows concessions are necessary, and he is likely to tell Thatcher that he will not be able to implement some aspects of Tory policy such as the Poll Tax... Scottish people clearly want something done to minimise the effects of Thatcherism. I believe we should be laying down demands as the party that represents the people of Scotland. Rifkind needs no reminding we can create problems for him both inside and outside Parliament".

Chair of the Scottish Labour Executive Bill Speirs speaking prior to its first meeting following the election said:

> "There are suggestions on the table and I dont think anyone will feel let down by Labours 50 Scottish MPs. Scottish Tories are in for a hard time."

After the meeting Speirs said

> "With only 10 MPs Tories will find it impossible to govern Scotland. If a satisfactory response is not forthcoming from the Government Labour will initiate a programme of action aimed at making the Government come to terms with thier impossible position".

Shadow Scottish Secretary Donald Dewar announced this campaign had the blessing of Kinnock and further predicted that Rifkind would try and run the Scottish office by avoiding contoversial legislative proposals for Scotland:

> "We will be governed by inertia."

In the period immediately following the General Election shock despair hesitancy and inertia were all too evident in Scottish Tory ranks. Rifkind's initial reaction was that a reassessment must take place:

"The electorate is always correct."

This position soon changed !

For the opposition scrapping the Poll Tax and creating a Scottish Assembly were generally viewed as the concessions required to prevent a constitutional crisis unfolding.

However Thatcher had already clearly stated that she regarded the Poll Tax as the flagship of her third term in office.

Justifying her opposition to an Assembly, Thatcher recalled

"we (Tory HQ in London) received only 4 letters on this subject during the election campaign".

If we ignore the slaughter of Scottish Tory MPs and the 76% of the electorate voting for pro assembly parties, then possibly a fertile imagination could read much into these 4 letters, certainly Thatcher tried to. But if she could speak from a position of strength, Rifkind her underling at the Scottish office possessed no such privilege.

## THE OPENING SHOTS

It was in the period following the election that Scottish Labour should have unequivocally imposed its demands to scrap the Poll Tax and establish an Assembly. Instead when Dewer met Rifkind 1 week after the election Rifkind said to journalists

"I was not presented with a series of demands, but rather Labour set out the position it will argue at Westminster in the new Parliament".

In a similar response Dewar said

"I did not expect the Government to capitulate in a short term encounter." (What encounter?) "It may have to be decided at the ballot box at some future time".

The electorate in Scotland could be forgiven if Dewar's remarks created some degree of confusion.

Having participated in an election the previous week and given Labour a decisive mandate, here was the leader of these same Labour MPs telling them another election (how many elections?) was required before their views could be adequately represented.

The softly softly long haul strategy adopted by Dewar and the Scottish Executive of the Labour Party would begin with 2 initiatives:

- a pro Assembly rally would be held in Glasgow on 29th August (later postponed to 12th September)

- Labour would present its Assembly Bill to parliament - this would have to wait until after the summer recess.

But the leadership's strategy immobilised these initiatives in advance. It did not pressure Rifkind into making concessions. Instead it removed that pressure and turned Labours own initiatives into useless gestures.

Having assured Rifkind Labour would forgo its Scottish mandate and play loyal Parliamentary opposition, Dewar's prediction of Government by inertia was subverted by his own practice, likewise Foulkes position that concessions would be made.

In the period leading to the 12th September rally it was Labour who became inert. Meanwhile Scottish Tories went through an internal debate which culminated in the entrenchment of a hard right Thatcherite leadership and an attempt to bury the pro devolutionists within their own party.

## LABOUR LISTENS ?

After Labours third defeat at Westminster despite the "Dream Ticket" and a successful media campaign, Kinnock began to revise the party's programme and policies under cover of the euphemism "Labour Listens".

The full extent of this revision is yet to be finally declared. The direction is however, already obvious - it means Labour accepting many of Thatcher's key policies. Opposition to privatisation will become further muted as the market, private enterprise and competition become central to "new realist" economic strategy.

The hapless Brian Gould, one of the architects of this revision was caught short praising the virtues of the market and share ownership when share prices collapsed on the stock markets around the world. A new species of manual workers identifiable by their fat wallets and their regular migration between Britain and foreign owned holiday homes was suddenly discovered by Kinnock and utilised as a rationalisation for not taxing the wealthy.

## A SCOTTISH LABOUR PARTY ?

While Kinnock is engaged in drawing the British Labour Party in this direction it is hardly conceivable that he would sanction a radical campaign being launched by the Scottish Labour Party. For although Dewar is leader of the Scottish party he is appointed by Kinnock and must conform and defend Kinnocks revisionism.

A speaker at an LCC meeting in Edinburgh starkly posed the problem of lack of power in the Scottish Party

> "WE cant even decide the wallpaper in Keir Hardie house (Scottish LP HQ)".

It does seem rather unreral for Scottish Labour to lead the campaign for an Assembly - greater home rule - when it cannot decide when to change the wallpaper in its own headquarters !

William McKelvey MP for Kilmarnock and Louden addressing the same meeting announced he would seek to change the party Parliamentary standing orders so that the Shadow Scottish Secreatary would be chosen by a vote of Scottish MPs. To date no such change has occured.

To replace Dewar like wallpaper in their HQ, first requires that the Scottish Party seeks approval from Labour's main headquarters in Walworth Rd London.

## TORY DECLINE

The election defeat of the Scottish Tories was on such a broad scale, some political analysts saw the vote as primarily a tactical anti Tory vote.

This was partly true. In different parts of the country the party most likely to defeat a sitting Tory candidate was elected. Overall Labour gained six Tory seats, the SNP three and the Alliance two.

Of the 4 main cities in Scotland Aberdeen, Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dundee, only Edinburgh now has any Tory MPs.

But Tory decline is not confined to the inner cities, both rural seats and leafy suburban middle class constituencies were lost.

The scale of the loss came as a shock to the Tory Party. John Corrie one of the deposed MPs was so confident he would retain the Cunninghome North seat after holding it for 14 years that in the week prior to the election he bought a new "very expensive" flat in London.

Thatcher however, cannot take all the blame. Since the election of 1955 when the Tories held the majority vote and had 36 MPs, the Tories have been in steady decline with only slight recoveries in 1970 and 1979.

The '87 result sent shock waves through the party making it confront the possibility that its very survival is now at stake. This produced a reemergence of both pro and anti devolution groups within the party.

## UNIONISTS FOR DEVOLUTION

Struan Stevenson, Tory group leader on COSLA and leader of Kyle and Carrick District Council, said after the General Election

> "Whether we like it or not, constitutional reform has been catapulted to top of the political agenda in Scotland... we must get to grips with devolution and have an Assembly as quickly as possible otherwise it could be electoral suicide."

A meeting of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Association (SCUA) in Perth on 22nd June began an initial post-mortem of the election result.

Councillors Murray Tosh and Struan Stevenson were in favour of rapidly adopting a strong pro devolution stance. In response Allan Stewart MP said that any change in party policy towards devolution would be "over my dead body".

SCUA president James Highgate revealed a committee of enquiry had been set up to conduct a far reaching investigation into the election and would report to the SCUA next meeting in September.

The SCUA is an important conduit between Constituency associations, councillors, and MPs. But real power in the Tory party comes from the top down. MPs and party officials determine policy providing it first meets with Thatchers approval.

In the 70s Rifkind supported an Assembly, but now his political career depends on advancing Thatcher's programme in Scotland.

If Tory fortunes are to revive it must be done as part of this process or not done at all. But to implement Thatcher's program requires a ruthless insensitivity and callous disregard to the interests of the vast majority of the Scottish electorate.

## OPERATION REBIRTH

While pro-devolutionists were busy developing their position, the programme Thatcher would accept "Operation Rebirth" was being determined elsewhere.

Bill Walker MP for Tayside North in an interview with Thatcher early in July, criticised the party machine in Scotland and the image of Tories as absentee landlords and factory owners. The old boy network would have to go.

When it came to policies though, Thatcher could just as well have listened to her echo:

> "Enterprise culture in Scotland has been stultified by the narcotic of public grants and provisions. This must be replaced by savings and investment. Income tax reductions will help stimulate Tory support among the law abiding, mortgage and tax paying members of the community. The business and financial community must become more

vocal in their support for the Tories."

Excuses for the Tory defeat ranged from the usual ones such as "The policy is good its the messenger to blame" Or "a critical Scottish media was the fault" - to more theoretical excuses such as

> "the lack of enterprise culture in Scots results from a client like dependency on socialist paternalism that municipal administrations have instilled over the years".

This latter explanation is the one that has been adopted by most Tory leaders. Its preferance derives from functionalism rather than objectivity. But although it neatly simulates Thatchers programme of emasculating local democracy, it achieves this at a price - telling Scottish people we dont much care for your opinions anyway.

Speaking frankly at a dinner of the engineering Employers Federation on the eve of Thatchers autumn visit to Scotland, Rifkind laid down what he correctly described as the "High Risk" strategy the party was embarking on.

> "Quite consciously and deliberately we are determined to change many attitudes and policies which have determined Scotland for years.. Our real disadvantage (re the South of England) is the anti-enterprise, paternalistic, quasi-socialist culture fostered in Scotland for so long.. A trade unionist in the south has long expected to own his own home; ordinary parents serve as governors of state schools; people with modest means often start up small businesses... Scots have the same aspirations and abilities but for generations have been led to expect benevolent bureaucratic, paternalistic councils and omnipotent governments to assume these responsibilities on their behalf. Such a dependency culture has retarded our economic growth and national self-confidence."

Rifkind then proceeded to spell out their programme - Poll Tax, dismantle local government, privatisation etc.

The vision of Tory fortunes rising like a spectre from the ashes of bureaucratic collectivism as fruits of enterprise culture blossom forth, has a comforting ring to it for a party under siege today.

But when exactly will it be safe to rummage through the ashes without burning your fingers? After the Poll Tax? When we all possess BUPA cards? This is the question futurologist Rifkind cannot answer.

Rifkind can always count on what he calls his "Gatling Gun", the 100 plus Tory majority at Westminster, to deal with Labours 50 Scottish MPs. It is quite another thing to revive the Tory party while Scotland is being force fed on Thatcherism.

Recent statistics show that Scotland's per capita income is second only to South East England. There, however, house prices are many times greater than in Scotland, and this is forcing many people, even those in employment onto the streets.

The Tories intend to achieve their aim of stimulating competition by using necessity as the goad. They aim to achieve bodies on the streets

here too.

The success of this High Risk Strategy depends on two interrelated factors remaining unchanged:

- Dewar or someone with an equally pedantic devotion to Westminster must remain leader of Scottish Labour.
- The SNP must remain marginal.

## TORY SHAKEUP

In the biggest shake up for 50 years, Scottish Tories began their reorganisation by appointing deposed MP John McKay in control of the party machine and five highly paid professional chief executives to head departments. Ironically one of the functions of the reorganisation is to develop more independence from tory HQ in London. Seen as particularly important is the post of communications director who with a deputy and staff will attempt to improve the party's image in Scotland.

## THE SCOTTISH TOUR:

With their new "independence" Scottish Tories will seek to preach a more ideological version of Thatcherism. A hyped propoganda campaign began with the Autumn visit of Thatcher. Avoiding the normal whistle stop tour, she stayed several days to "meet the people" and espouse the virtues of "that great Scot" Adam Smith from whom she took inspiration.

Workers at Howden Engineering plant in Glasgow were not familiar with Adam Smith, but when they heard Thatcher was to visit the works, a walk out was discussed and only "advice" from Union leaders prevented them doing so.

On the same day Thatcher paid a neighbourly visit to a couple who had just bought their new home in Bridgeton. After she had left journalists enquired "how did you vote" to be told "Labour last time, Labour next time." By all accounts popular capitalism was no further advanced by the tour.

After Thatchers visit a series of cabinet ministers were dispatched to the Badlands.

Preaching the new Gospel. Nigel Lawson led the attack on Scotlands "overriding sense of dependence on the state".

His complaint, that Council tenants in Scotland were being "sheltered from market forces" by benevolent local authorities, is a rich concoction coming from a minister whose government has bombarded these same tenants with massive hikes in their rent annually for almost a decade.

For every £1 given in subsidy to Scottish public housing, £90 is spent on subsidy to private housing in England, with almost half the total UK mortgage subsidy being spent on the South East region.

Douglas Hurd was next to arrive. The theme of his sermon was unionism and the danger of devolution. Ken Clarke followed and began by admitting it was completely beyond him why traditional heavy manufacturing had assumed such significance for Scots -

> "Is Scottish public opinion really so reactionary as to believe that these old industries hold the key to Scotlands future? And do some Scots really believe that an obcession with their industrial past sends out the right signals to foreign investors?"

Praising Silicon Glen as the road forward Clarke thought Scots were lucky to have another five years of conservative Government despite themselves. Tory backbenchers and sections of the media got in on the act. MP Phillip Oppenheim complained of

> "Scots constant whingeing for more subsidy and sticking their collective snout in the trough."

Like a fattened animal ready for the abattoir, these MPs relish butchering Scottish Labours .. 50 MPs.

Murdochs androids began trawling the depths of Wapping in search of a suitable headline to match Oppenheims sophistry. The result in Sunspeak was "Stop Your Snivelling Jock!"

After Thatcher's tour a Glasgow daily paper conducted a system Three Opinion Poll. Only 9% of the sample thought Mrs Thatcher was doing a good job for Scotland. When questioned - do you believe the Prime Minister to be very sympathetic to Scotlands needs? - only 1% answered yes.

This predictably negative reaction to being lectured like wayward children led to a swift change in the presentation of tory policy. The lecture was cancelled and replaced by a positive image tactic.

Scots were now to be praised for adopting Thatcherism in practise:

- a hundred thousand have taken advantage of Tory policies to buy their council house;
- Scots hold more stocks and shares than the British average;
- many new companies have been formed recently.

Now all the fickle children had to do was to be consistent with this practise and return to the Tory fold - they didnt.

# PART TWO

# LABOUR AND THE ASSEMBLY

A rally at the TGWU Halls in Glasgow in Nov '86 launched Labours pre-election campaign. Its purpose was to clarify Labour and the STUCs position on the Assembly.

Support for an Assembly arose as a pragmatic response to the SNP growth in the late '60s and early '70s. It was a tactical device to outflank the SNP rather than part of a strategic orientation designed to dismantle and restructure power in Britain away from centralisation at Westminster and Whitehall.

Since Thatchers rise to power in '79 (partially as a result of Labours reneging on its commitment to an Assembly) concentration of power at Westminster and Downing St has intensified alarmingly.

Although Labour's commitment to an Assembly is clearer than the position it held in the '70s major contradictions remain. The Scottish Assembly forms no part of an overall plan. Neither Wales nor the English regions are to have power devolved from Westminster. Scotland is a one off.

The Assembly therefore has no strategic value to the party at a British level, other than to maintain Labours contingent of "North British" MPs at Westminster. It is seen as a concession which will give Scotland an advantage over deprived English regions. Not surprisingly Labour MPs representing these constituencies are not the most vocal supporters of a Scottish Assembly.

At the rally this strategic flaw in Labours' Assembly proposals never surfaced directly. Opposition centred around the related question: How would Scottish Labour advance the demand for an Assembly if the Tories won another Westminster majority?

The platform which included Dewar, Denis Healey and Campbell Christie, Secretary of the STUC, evaded the question by retorting that this was a defeatist attitude. Labour <u>would</u> win the election !!!

These partisans of "realism" are not without their faults.

## THE DOOMSDAY CAMPAIGN

After June 11th, however, the question could no longer be avoided. Labour held a five to one majority over Scottish Tories. Then Donald Dewar threw in the towel allowing Rifkind to press ahead on Thatcher's program.

It seemed the old adage - Labour would sooner commit political suici than lead a struggle - was again in the process of confirmatio Thatcher's programme is after all aimed at destroying Labour's power base - starting with Scotland.

Dewar's hasty assumption - that Rifkind would have to step so cautiousl with the Government programme that in effect it could mean Government b inertia - left out of the calculation Labour's role in organising an leading opposition to the Tories.

When that leadership failed to materialise inertia passed from Rifkin to Dewar.

Prevarication at the top filtered down the ranks. Dewar was incapable o mounting a challenge to the Tories in Scotland while backing Kinnock adaption to Thatcherism.

At a point in British politics when a decisive lead was required fro Scottish Labour, all that was on offer was Dewar whose softly softly lin could inspire no one.

Having rejected a Scottish mandate, Labour's campaign for an Assembl became devoid of any content. both the rally on September 12th and th Devolution bill failed miserably.

The Labour leadership did nothing to build the September Rally. Publicity was abysmal. Then the SNP in a very sectarian fashion pulled ou of supporting the Rally because it called for Devolution not Independence. To cap it all it rained heavily.

Only around 3,000 attended the rally. Rifkind was delighted.

Poor attendance at the Assembly rally clearly assisted Rifkind to crus the incipient opposition within the lower echelons of his own ranks. Usin the rally to good effect, he described Labours campaign for an Assembly a already a flop:

> "Sixty years ago if the clydesiders had wanted a mass demonstratio against a tory government, they would have been able to get 50,00 people on the street. If Saturdays demo was the full strength of the Labour Party in the heart of its power, Glasgow, then its pretty pathetic."

The poor attendance reflected Dewar's pathetic leadership, not lack o support for Labour. With 50 MPs it could hardly be argued that support wa dwindling. Dewar's line had failed. Or more accurately, he never intende to mobilise that support.

In the wake of this fiasco, Labours Assembly Bill was a foregone conclusion. Rifkind had no support on the streets, but in Westminster he could rely on the "Gatling Gun".

# DEVELOPMENTS ON THE LEFT

The election strengthened Dewar's leadership of the Scottish party and produced a brief period of triumphalism in the ranks.

It soon became clear that Dewar had no intention of challenging Rifkind and that the Tories would respond by upping the stakes and redoubling their attacks.

This highlighted the contradictions between the leaderships position and the party's expectations.

For some time the key group in the Scottish Labour Left had been the Labour Coordinating Committee (LCC).

The LCC in Scotland had worked in close alliance with Communist Party members and ex members, in the Trade Union movement. As such it had a significant base at the centre of the Labour Movement and regularly determined the membership of the Scottish Executive of the Labour Party.

When the LCC held a conference in August '87, among the 13 MPs in attendence were Robin Cook, Maria Fyfe, Gavin Strang and George Galloway, Mike Connerty and Mark Lazarowicz the leaders of Stirling and Edinburgh Councils and Campbell Christie and Bill Speirs from the STUC were also there. The discussion paper for the conference was entitled :

"After the General Election : Labour's Scottish Mandate".

Neither this document nor the debate provided a way of implementing that mandate. How could it with Dewar remaining party leader ? The whole affair was an attempt to straddle direct opposites. In practise this meant accepting Dewar's line.

Despite the success of the LCC in calling it and the "influence" of those attending, the conference was marked by its complete inability to mount a challenge to Dewar.

Typical of this period was Robin Cook's suggestion that Labours 50 Scottish MPs establish a provisional forum in Scotland where issues could be debated and voted on. Apologising for his anti-devolution stand in the '70s, Cook said to the conference :

> "Devolution for Scotland could become a battering ram with which we can puncture the blank wall of the British constitution, that has become so repressive, so monolithic, so stultifying, and release a flood of other demands for decentralisation which will weaken the power of London, of Westminster, and ultimately of 10 Downing St."

Cook is one of the more talented Labour MPs, but his conception of the Assembly as a "battering ram against Westminster", is the polar opposite of the Dewar/Kinnock line. To state this position without addressing the question of leadership is at best disingenuous.

In fact Cook incorporates the entire contradiction in his mid '88 role as Kinnock-Hattersley leadership campaign organiser.

## OPPOSITION EMERGES

In the aftermath of Dewar's capitulation Scottish Labour found their mandate usurped with the connivance of their leader. With no one prepared to challenge Dewar, the party went into limbo throughout the Autumn and Winter of '87. There was no mileage in proposals for a Scottish Forum, Constitutional Convention, provisional Assembly and the like while Dewar remained at the wheel.

Would the period of shadow boxing be a rehearsal for the emergence of an alternative or simply the belly aching of frustrated individuals ? This question is still unresolved. A positive answer awaits a re-alignment within the Party left.

In the early '80s, the LCC were linked with Benn's campaign for the deputy leadership. However, in recent years they have moved steadily to the right one step behind Kinnock.

Since the election, Kinnock has accelerated rightwards most significantly with Review Groups presenting recycled Thatcherite policies. The LCC in Scotland stepped back at this stage and declined to follow the English LCC behind their master.

The LCC(S) searched in vain for direction from their allies in the Communist Party. They however, appeared even more disoriented what with Thatcher, the split with the Eurocommunist leaders of the CPGB and Gorbachev's revisionism.

Politically the LCC(S) became extremely heterogeneous with a section searching for solutions and others unwilling to sacrifice positions gained and career prospects for political principles.

## SCOTTISH LABOUR ACTION

All these contradictions came to a head in February '88 with the formation of Scottish Labour Action.

At its first public meeting in March '88 during the party's annual conference in Perth, several speakers attacked the LCC. One described it as little more than a corresponding society :

> "You get the odd letter 3 or 4 times a year, but it has now no platform or objectives other than opposition to the hard left."

The other function of the LCC was as a vehicle to maintain the careerist aims of leading LCC members. With these objectives, the group tended to hibernate for prolonged periods, reappearing at annual conference to organise the soft left slate within the party apparatus.

This inertia and the right wing drift, eroded the LCC base and created the space for a new left alignment.

## SLA PROGRAMME

The Scottish Labour Action founding statement made the following points:

We are resolved to campaign within the party for a strategy aimed at making Scotland ungovernable without the creation of a Scottish Assembly.

To this end we call on the Labour Party in Scotland to :

1) Assert Scotland's right to self determination on such a basis as the people of Scotland themselves decide.
2) Adopt the argument that the Conservative party has no mandate in Scotland and campaign on this basis.
3) Support a policy of tactical non cooperation with the Government in the conduct of Scottish business in the House of Commons.
4) Urge the Party to place more emphasis on initiatives launched in Scotland, where the Tories are in an embarrassing minority, rather than at westminster where they enjoy a massive majority.
5) support mass civil disobedience in Scotland as a legitimate means of protest for the Scottish people.
6) support, in particular, obstruction and civil disobedience in the implementation of the Poll Tax leading to a mass campaign of non payment and to seek early and public declarations of intent not to pay from leading figures in the party and beyond.
7) Encourage the early establishment of an alternative democratic forum in Scotland.

It continued :

"We realise, however, that for the Party to be credible in putting this platform before the Scottish people, then a much greater autonomy must be sought from the Labour Party itself. the Party in Scotland must have the right to appoint its own full time officials and must enjoy full policy and organisational autonomy. Further the Party's Scottish front bench should be elected by the Scottish Group of MPs and not chosen by the London leadership..

We have come to the above conclusions not from the point of view of short term electoral advantage, but rather in a political tradition stretching back over two centuries of Scottish radicalism and in the knowledge that our failure to address the national question will inevitably lead to confusion, division and defeat."

## WHERE DOES THE SLA STAND ?

This platform takes the SLA outwith the orbit of soft left groups in the Labour Party. The concentration on direct mass action and constitutional change is a far cry from the parliamentary cretinism of Labours leadership. This is a significant development on the Left of the Party.

The SLA have posed a programme of action, linked to specific objectives. On other policy issues much debated in the Party they have no position. As a new group they are midstream between the Leadership and the Far Left. What shore they anchor on will depend on the response they receive to

their objectives and initiatives.

## THE NEED FOR DEVOLUTION

Despite Thatchers success in parts of England, there is no reason to believe centralisation of power at Westminster has any popular support.

Cook's "battering ram" may have little relevance under the present leadership. However, a change of leadership although essential is not sufficient. Support for democratic assemblies must be popularised throughout Britain, linking this demand to ongoing campaigns against Tory policies : the Poll Tax, Health care provision, unemployment, social welfare and the like.

Failure to achieve popularisation of local democracy and participation would mean Westminster becoming the "Battering Ram" against a future Scottish Assembly whether Labour held majorities in both Parliaments or not.

The party in Scotland, however, cannot mark time waiting for such a campaign to unfold.

The SLA is absolutely correct to say we must have financial and Political autonomy, but that does not mean we should become disinterested in debates unfolding within the other sections of the party. Complete autonomy is neither possible not desirable - a million threads bind us to the British Labour Movement.

## LABOUR FOR AN ASSEMBLY ?

We are not indifferent to who leads the Party nor to where it is being led. This has a vast impact on the policies of Labour in Scotland, and will continue to do so whether or not autonomy is achieved by Scottish Labour.

A completely negative example of this, was Kinnocks address to Scottish Conference. The equivocation in Labour's Assembly policy was articulated with perfect clarity, when in a 50 minute speech Kinnock made not one single reference to the subject ! When interviewed later on BBC television, he justified this omission by retorting to questions from Kirsty Wark, that he had

"not mentioned weather conditions in the Himalayas either" !

This statement confirmed for those in any doubt Kinnock's base opportunism on the Assembly. Despite the stage management, everyone agreed, it was a disastrous performance. Thatcherite MP for Eastwood Allan Stewart's response was

"I would like to congratulate Mr Kinnock on not mentioning the Assembly in his 50 minute speech. That was the best part of it."

For Kinnock and Dewer, the Assembly remains essentially a tactic devised to outflank the SNP. This hopelessly distorts everything.

## CRISIS FOR THE UNION

The Tory decline and the rise of the SNP are not fleeting phenomena ! They reflect fundamental material developments in the nature of Scotland's economic and social structure.

No longer is there a powerful independent sector of Scottish Capital. The decline of the Empire market dealt a death blow to the Junior partner, who was over dependent on the heavy industrial sectors - steel, shipbuilding, coal and railways. It is from this material base that the 30 odd year decline of the Scottish Tories originates.

Tory Industry minister Kenneth Baker graphically epitomises the dilemma of Scottish Tories when he comes to Scotland and admits that he does not understand why traditional sectors have assumed such importance here. With Ravenscraig's future in the balance and shipbuilding and coals rapid decline - what price a Tory revival ?

Kinnock's opportunism on the Assembly is not shared by the electorate. They see it as a means to rejuvenate Scotland economically, politically and culturally.

However, Kinnock's problem is that the intensifying crisis of Capitalism has reduced the scope for reformist political solutions. The crisis itself is unleashing multiple new social and economic problems. The Tories have used the "windfall" of North Sea Oil to reward their friends and supporters rather than invest in Industry and infrastructure and are now "flogging the Family silver" to the same end.

The political and economic choices facing an incoming Labour Government will be sharper and harder as a result.

## LABOUR LEADERSHIP

For Kinnock this crisis does not highlight the need for a radical socialist alternative - quite the reverse. His response is to ditch the previous reforms that have been gained and to adapt "new realist" fashion to the rapacious needs of British and International Capital.

In Scotland, the decline of independent Capital has favoured the growth of Labour and the SNP.

The Assembly once established will embody the aspirations for political and economic reform. The notion that such an Assembly could straight off justify the removal of existing reforms to suit the interests of a crisis ridden British Capital is completely ridiculous. It would be in total opposition to the voters' perceptions of why an Assembly is required.

Kinnock's "omission" of the Assembly is perfectly understandable. You cant ride the Assembly Horse dressed in hand me down glad rags from Thatcher. Not when the Assembly is seen as a means to alternative social and economic policies to Thatcher's.

The SLA cannot buck this issue. On the leadership, their initial statement had this to say...

> "We respect Neil Kinnock, his achievements to date and support him as the Leader that will take the Party into the next General Election.."

Just what the SLA consider "his achievements to date" is not specified.

What is patently obvious, whether the SLA like it or not is that the Campaign for an Assembly, after June 11th '87, became a campaign against Kinnock and Dewar's leadership of the Party.

The SLA must clear their collective heads of their LCC cobwebs. no amount of fudge can hide the fact that their 7 point objectives run counter to the post election course the Leadership have developed.

The SLA map is restricted to three routes. One takes them back to the soft left swamp. The second leads them forward towards the Campaign Group and Chesterfield left. the third is a side track that zig-zags its way towards the SNP. On this occasion we have no hesitation in advising the centrist direction.

# PART THREE

# A SCOTTISH THATCHERISM

On May 5th between the Scottish Labour and Scottish Tory Party Conferences, District Council elections were held throughout Scotland. This provided the first opportunity to test how party support was developing since the General Election.

The outcome was as follows (General Election in brackets) :

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Labour | 42% | (42%) |
| SNP | 21% | (14%) |
| Tory | 19% | (24%) |
| Democrats | 8% | (Alliance 19%) |
| Independents | 6% | -- |
| Others | 3% | ( 1%) |

This comparison must be limited to indicative trends as differences between Local and general elections render any detailed comparison quite untenable, given the higher turn-out of electorate at the latter and the additional candidates at local elections. With these qualifications, it seems the slump in Democrats support following their post election debacle, favoured growth in support for the SNP. The SNP leapfrogged the Tories into second place for the first time in over ten years.

Although Labour clearly maintained their dominant position in Scottish politics, there is little room for complacency. The unmistakable trend towards growing support for the SNP took them from bronze to silver medallists in many Labour held wards.

## TORY CONFERENCE

May '68 is synonymous with events such as the French General strike; Huge Anti War demonstrations; the Prague Spring; Student occupations and the like.

But in the quiet rural setting of Perth that month, something entirely different was about to happen. Edward Heath was in town to present the leaders address to the Scottish Tory annual conference.

His speech became known as the "Perth Declaration", because within it he called for the establishment of a Scottish Assembly, something no other Tory leader had ever done.

Twenty years on, the Tory Conference revisited Perth. Once again Devolution was the main item of the Conference agenda. This time few had come to celebrate the anniversary of Heath's declaration - quite the

reverse. Of 17 motions on this subject, not one was in support o Devolution.

Rifkind dropped a clanger to the media who asked "What chance a split vote on the Devolution debate ?"

Off the cuff, he replied

"If we thought that we would not have had a debate on devolution" "Err I mean to say." - Too late Malky!

In a witchhunt atmosphere, Devos were labelled as rebels, quasi nationalists, anti-Thatcherite dissenters who had brought the party to its present low ebb.

Reversing this state of affairs demanded their resounding defeat and transfusion of undiluted Thatcherism into the patients veins.

By 500 votes to 12 the Devolutionists were crushed.

Young Conservative donors were on hand, they disrupted the Devos fringe meeting waving banners and wearing stickers proclaiming:

"Devolution SUCKS - Devolution NO - Thatcherism YES"!

## THE ULTRA RIGHT

An onimous sign at Conference was the prominence of the Committee for a Free Britain (CFB) - a far right group who helped organise against the miners strike and last year invited French Fascist leader Le Pen to address a fringe meeting at the British Tory Conference. Leading CFB member Brian Hart shared the platform at a Young Conservative Anti-Devo fringe meeting with local hero Michael Forsyth MP.

CFB see the situation in Scotland in a similar way to the miners strike - potentially a major obstacle for Thatchers right wing programme - one that must be smashed!

Their solution to Thatchers Scottish problem "Integrationism" is no longer a fringe position but is gaining support across a broad section of the party. Put bluntly, "Integrationism" means that Scotland should cease to exist as a national entity.

## A RENEWED UNION

At the zenith of the Empire, the material basis of the Union was real.

The Clyde's heavy engineering and shipbuilding were fuelled through power from coal production. Even the upwardly mobile of the day could always find a comfortable niche for themselves in colonial administration.

During this period of unassailable Unionism, Scottish institutions survived and, in some cases, began to grow (STUC, Scottish Office).

Before Thatcher made her triumphant appearance to Conference what material base could she offer for post-Empire Unionism ?

Before expaining the bases of neo-unionism, she reiterated the positive aim to :

> "strengthen the Union by winning Scotland for the Conservative and Unionist cause".

She cited Adam Smith and John Hume, Alexander Graham Bell and Carnegie as examples of why :

> "Tory values are in tune with everything that is finest in the Scottish character".

and

> "Scots invented Thatcherism long before I was thought of".

This grotesque surrealism may be acceptable for the Hooray Henry brigade - that is their problem - but the matter does not stop there.

What actually legitimises Thatcherism in Scotland is the adaptation of Kinnock to the grave-diggers politics. Not the creaking skeletons of a Scottish bourgeoisie, but the Labour leadership's political cretinism.

If "New Realism" provides scant cover for Kinnock's adaptation to aspects of Thatcherism, neo-Unionism's reliance on a skeleton bourgeoisie for ideological substance presaged the weakness of actual existing material bases for their position.

This dilemna facing Scottish Tories, which has been unfolding since the early 1950's, was resolved by Thatcher with the aid of divine assistance - the "Scottish Miracle" was unfolding before our very eyes.

> "This Government had liberated the energies of the Scottish people and Scotland is on the march again".

What did this divine liberation consist of?

> "Lowered company taxes, and revived market opportunities resulting in nearly 6,000 new businesses registered in the last year alone."

Alf Young, an economist not renowned for anti-Tory bias, studied Thatcher's claim of 6,000 new companies.

He found the last published figures for 1986 showed 5,999 new companies being registered with 5,180 others being removed from the register! Unpublished figures to March of 1988 show 6,323 new companies being registered, 2,748 struck-off, 628 dissolved, and 639 having liquidators appointed - a net growth of 3,000+ - half a miracle!

When the ripples of last October's Stock Market collapse work their way through the economy, its likely that the "miracle" will be as lively as Adam Smith's skeleton.

If Thatcher's claim of an indigenous bourgeoisie reemerging looked problematic after initial investigation, would Silicon Glen come to her rescue instead?

Young's figures show that between 1980 and 1987 employment in all electonics sectors actually fell by 200. The branch factory syndrome, that has developed so markedly in the post-war Scottish economy, is most advanced in ther high-tech industries.

Indigenous Scottish companies employ around 2% of the workforce in this sector. Surplus value extracted from workers in Silicon Glen does not line the coffers of an emergent Scottish bourgeoisie. Mostly it ends back at corporate headquarters in USA and Japan - hardly the spark to set the heather on fire for a Tory revival in Scotland.

## PROPAGANDA AND MYTH

The new Tory line is "Scottish Miracle". Geoffrey Howe blamed Labour's 50 Scottish MP's for perpetuating the myths about Scotland's dependency!

The decline of traditional industries can be explained and is reluctantly accepted by the electorate. But loss of political control through reduction of the economy to branch factory status, as exemplified by Caterpiller's, is not acceptable.

Support for an Assembly reflects the consciousness that only through political control will Scotland's economic social and cultural development be revitalised.

## BENEVOLENT THATCHERISM

With the hollow victory at the Tory Conference, Thatcher left but continued a high profile in Scotland. Next day she attended the Garden Festival and, later, the Scottish Cup Final (where most supporters 'waved' at her with two fingers).

A week later and Thatcher was back again. This time she delivered a statement of her Victorian Values to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. Even for some church ministers, who have witnessed the effects of her government's recent changes in Housing Benefits, this was too much to swallow. They left in protest before hearing Thatcher's solution for the poor:

> "It is not the creation of wealth that is wrong but love of money for its own sake. The spiritual dimension comes in deciding what one does with the wealth."

Yes. Just what have the Tories done with that £68 billion accruing from oil revenues? Not to mention the billions from privatisation. Well we know Chancellor Lawson was handing out £2 billion in tax cuts in the budget which favoured the super rich.

Even Nigel Lawson took the message to heart. In a benevolent spirit he helped the launch of an appeal to collect unwanted foreign coins for 'Help the Aged' by tossing a few of his own into the bucket.

It is unlikely, however, that this will make up for the £4 billion lost by pensioners as a result of his government's breaking the formula which linked pensions to either the rise in prices or the rise in average earnings, whichever was higher! If that formula had been maintained since the Tories first came to power in 1979, pensions today would be 20% higher - which is a heap of Pesetas!

# PART FOUR

# A SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

Kinnock's "realism" has not stooped to the level of beggar bowl politics Thatcher's Victorian Values will eventually necessitate.

A Labour alternative to Thatcher, however, must be built on socialist foundations.

You cannot effectively oppose the logic of Thatcher's politics while accepting parts of the agenda that determines that logic.

Tories have been running scared in Scotland: Poll Tax, Scottish Homes, School Boards and opting out, private tendering in health and local government, to name but a few. They press on regardless only because they are not effectively opposed.

Whichever way you cut it the most burning question comes back to that of leadership and policy. With 50 Labour MP's, it is an affront that Thatcher's Scottish rump should dictate the agenda.

What alternative programme should Labour advance in the Fight For an Assembly ?

The advice of Dewar and others that we should sit it out until there is a Labour Government in Westminster is suicidal. It completely disarms the Labour Movement from an effective response to Thatcher's agenda.

One of the reasons for increased support for an Assembly is diminished faith in Westminster as such. There is increased doubt whether any Government - Tory or Labour - can effectively tackle Scotlands social and political needs.

## FOR POLITICAL DEMOCRACY

Political Democracy must be the central theme in Labour's Campaign for an Assembly.

The Tories are moving more and more towards a strong centralised state

- abolishing the GLC, Metropolitan Councils and ILEA
- curbing the powers of local government through ratecapping etc
- attacks on civil Liberties, Poll Tax etc

In these circumstances the fight for a Scottish Assembly must be seen as a basic democratic demand.

Thatcher is all too aware that a Scottish Assembly could act as a powerful focus of opposition - not just within Scotland - to her policies.

The Tory Government will not easily grant an Assembly. It is obvious that the only way to achieve an Assembly is to link this democratic demand to on going campaigns such as around the Poll Tax.

These demands will have to be fought for using extra-parliamentary class struggle methods. This is what the New Realist Labour leadership will not accept.

They claim that class struggle methods are counter-productive. That they will lose votes. But with the SNP gaining support in Scotland by attacking Labour from the left this is, even from an electoral point of view, contradicted by fact.

The real reason is that a mass extra parliamentary campaign would swiftly move out of the control of the "Leaders". If Politics returns to the People how relevant are Westminster politicians ?

## AN INDEPENDENT SCOTLAND ?

Socialists must have a clear response to the scenario that an Assembly will lead to independance.

We must be especially clear if we accept that an Assembly will only be achieved in the face of determined hostility from the British Government in Westminster.

It is undemocratic for the Scottish people to be denied an Assembly by the Westminster government.

However, to be unconditionally in support of the right of the Scottish people to have an Assembly, does not mean advocating independence and support for the SNP.

This is what confuses many on the left.

Let us be clear: at the moment the overwhelming majority of Scots are for an Assembly but are not demanding total independence. As socialists we would argue that a total separation of the Scottish labour movement from that of the rest of Britain would be a backward, reactionary step.

Also, any attempt to create a purely "Scottish economy" would be utopian and damaging to working people.

We do not, therefore, advocate complete independence.

## THE SNP AND EUROPE

Even the SNP appears to be moving away from its simplistic "Scotland can go it alone" approach. The main line of the SNP is now for an independent Scotland within the EEC.

This is a change. When he founded the SLP, Jim Sillars was asked what differentiates the SLP from the SNP. He replied :

> "The SNP is For an Independent Scotland and against the EEC. The SLP is for an Independent Scotland inside the EEC."

Unfortunately for Jim a majority of the SLP at that time disagreed with his assessment. This was the major debate leading to the break up of the SLP.

Since joining the SNP Jim has obviously changed their minds.

## SOCIALISTS AND EUROPE

Socialists look at the class nature of the EEC. It is a capitalist club with little Democratic Control.

The EEC has been the source of quotas that have caused the drastic closures and job losses in steel, coal and shipbuilding - all industries that have traditionally been at the centre of the economy in Scotland.

This is conveniently ignored by the SNP.

Socialists must counterpose to a Capitalist Club, the need for workers' and socialist unity across Europe to defend jobs, services and living standards. Our vision must be for the creation of a socialist United States of Europe, not support for the reactionary EEC.

Clearly if a Scottish Assembly were granted and Scotland as part of Britain remained in the EEC, we would demand control over EEC representatives and direct representation for Scotland at Brussels. This is a Basic Democratic Demand. The question of withdrawal from the EEC, and establishing Trading links with other countries would then be posed in an Scottish Parliament.

However, such an outcome is not the only one possible. The Faroe Islands and Greenland are part of Denmark but not in the EEC. The way the Assembly was granted would determine these issues.

Indeed many of the problems affecting Scotland, such as Multinationals, Nuclear weapons and NATO can only be effectively addressed in the context of a mass campaign for an Assembly.

Certainly the European Left is far behind the Capitalists in terms of Trans National links.

In 1992, the Single European Act will push forward the dynamic of

a European supra state. This will affect the demand for political democracy in Scotland.

In this Act many of the interventionist measures which National Governments use to regulate their economies will at a stroke be abolished.

Will the demand for an Assembly have missed the boat as power moves towards Brussels ?

We think not. Economic concentration will increase rather than diminish the need for an extension of Political Democracy.

Workers across Europe must unite around specific issues, but also for extensions to Democracy and Workers Control.

# PART FIVE

# LABOUR AND THE POLL TAX

The dominant issue facing Scottish Labour since the Election has been How to fight the Poll Tax ?

Many strategies have been suggested, however, Brian Wilson on 17th Jul 1987 put forward one of the clearest. Under the Glasgow Herald headlin 'Need for Mass Campaign to Defeat the Poll Tax' he stated

> "No mandate exists for implementation of the Poll Tax in Scotlan ... The battle certainly cannot be won in the house of Commons alone The Government has already legislated for the introduction of th Poll Tax in Scotland... I believe there should be a mass Scottis Campaign outside Parliament to defeat the Poll Tax.... The message t Mr Rifkind that the Poll Tax is unenforceable can only come from th people themselves."

This is a very clear indication of the steps needed to defeat the Pol Tax. Labour must help build a mass extra parliamentary campaign i opposition to the Government and ultimately to frustrate the law.

One year after these statements, as Mr Wilson predicted, the struggl has been lost in the Commons. A special Conference of the Party i considering a mass campaign of Non Payment.

Given the above statements, we could be forgiven if we expected M Wilson, now chair of the Labour Party and STUC Stop It Campaign, to b leading the fight <u>for</u> non payment.

Sadly, we would be mistaken. Wilson, Dewar and Kinnock are opposed t Non Payment. Indeed they appear opposed to any Mass Campaign. Sadl again it would appear that by 16 votes to 13 they have persuaded th Scottish Executive of the Party to their way of thinking.

Given the apparent contradictions between speech and deed, it is onl fair to Brian to remind him how he got into this mess.

## WHY A POLL TAX ?

Since 1974, the Tories have been committed to abolition of the rates.

Other parties share their concern over rates and have periodicall looked at alternatives. Whereas, these parties are concerned that rate unfairly tax some people who cant afford to pay, the Tories feel the ta is too equitable.

From the Tory viewpoint, Rates are a form of Wealth Tax - the rich pay more and the poor pay less.

Less abstractly, the Scottish Rates Revaluation in 1985 created an outcry from middle class voters in Tory marginals. Over 15,000 protests were received by the Government. This was the sort of message easily understood.

Fear of a similar reaction in marginals in the South of England led to Tory panic buttons being pressed. The search for an alternative was on.

Unfortunately, most reasonable alternatives had been explored and found wanting. Rates reform was the only promise made back in '79 which Thatcher had failed to deliver to her backers. She was determined not to face another election without change.

Labour took little interest in the Tory dilemma. We had been here before. All alternatives were more complex to administer. It was confidently expected nothing would happen.

The Tory solution was outlined in January 1986. It was deceptively simple. Everyone in a locality would pay the same amount.

In 1979, one of Thatcher's first acts was to increase VAT and extend it to take away food. Like that tax on Eating, they now proposed a Tax on Breathing.

## RESPONSE TO THE PROPOSAL

The immediate reaction was disbelief. No other Government in the world taxed in this way. In many countries, such a tax is illegal. It was a hangover from Feudalism. (see Appendix)

Thus the Society of Local authority Chief Executives described the tax as

> "just not workable... the tax is not related to the ability to pay..."

Virtually from the Green Papers publication, every commentator has designated it 'The Poll Tax', which most interpret as a tax on the Right to Vote. The term 'Community Charge' appears only on Government publications. Even Cabinet ministers utilise the short hand 'Poll Tax'.

Alongside disbelief, was the assumption that the Tax could not be administered.

It would require draconian invasion of privacy, creation of a national identity system, unprecedented controls on movement. Above all it would require a major increase in Local Government Bureaucracy and associated costs - something the Tories must oppose (sic).

Donald Dewar (July 2nd 1986) asked Ancram for an undertaking

> "that before legislation is produced, a detailed account would be provided of how the scheme would work and what the full implications were.."

Parliamentary opposition remained routine. Labour waited for the Tories to "quietly drop" the matter.

There was no extra parliamentary campaign, no debate in the Trade Unions, even Nalgo. In Labour branches it was a non issue, barely even part of a boring Parliamentary report.

Matters were worse as the first Bill would only deal with Scotland. It would be the Test Bed, English Legislation would follow.

Only the SNP Vice Chair Andrew Welsh latched onto the

> "danger that Scotland would now become the guinea pig for a new type of taxation before it is introduced in England."

However, the Tories intentions were clear. They would not face an election in Scotland without Rates Reform legislation on the Statute.

Indeed on August 8th 1986, the Glasgow Herald quoted Malcolm Rifkind

> "We will be proceeding to legislation in the next session of Parliament... We are able to meet that request (for Rates Reform) a year earlier in Scotland than is possible in England. We intend to do so."

From this the Herald concluded that the Tories were planning a June election with Scottish Poll Tax legislation on the statute books.

Yet still Labour didnt treat the Bill seriously. On October 10th Rifkind responded to Dewar's earlier request with the information that the "unemployed and low income groups" would only pay 20%.

Dewar complained that Rifkind chose to speak of the Poll Tax

> "instead of Ravenscraig... (the Poll Tax).. has been condemned as unworkable and totally unrelated to the ability to pay"

## PARLIAMENT — ROUND ONE

At the end of November 1986, the legislation was published. Dewar promised

> "Labour would invoke special measures..(of parliamentary opposition)"

Hogg, the deputy Chief Whip, called a meeting

> "to discuss a filibuster at committee stage to force the Government to guillotine... or .. to fight it line by line"

Despite this bluster, the underlying assumption was still that the tories were somehow the ones in trouble. Thus Dewar's first reaction to the Bills publication was

"ludicrous and menacing... wrong in principle...simply unworkable"

Suddenly a General Election was in the offing. Parliamentary desks were cleared, the English Poll Tax would be presented after the election.

All at once interest in the Scottish legislation evaporated. The main show was after the election and Labour in Power would abolish the Scottish Poll Tax.

Despite the fine rhetoric, little of substance was gained from the Parliamentary Battle. The Bill proceeded sedately onto the Statute Books. The plans for filibusters and disruption came to naught. Parliamentary convention was adhered to.

Even so delays would have been possible. The Lords could have debated at length. Delaying tactics could have been introduced. Days of business could have been lost.

Yet the Government's timetable for June was adhered to.

In the final stages of the session Labour's Parliamentary managers orchestrated with the Government the final debates. The Poll Tax debate was guillotined, publicity shrank to zero.

The Scottish Poll Tax was manoeuvred through Parliament with Labour's tacit assistance just before the election recess.

## DURING THE ELECTION

In England the Poll Tax was barely mentioned. In Scotland it was a Bogey Man with which to ensure a good Labour turnout.

Even in Scotland, however, differences arose. In Labour strongholds publicity was more prominant than in Tory marginals. Labour portrayed the Poll Tax as just another tax with benefits for the Better Off.

There was no national profile of opposition, no stress on the "immorality" of the Tax.

In particular, Labour had no policy over Rates, no alternative to the Poll Tax. The policy was simple - Vote Labour To Stop the Poll Tax.

Time and again, when MPs were questioned on what tactics would be adopted if Labour lost, the reply was unequivocal (and incoherent)

"The only tactic required is to Elect a Labour Government."

Even when the polls predicted defeat, this ostrich strategy was maintained.

# PART SIX
# THE CAMPAIGN

Scotlands Labour leaders woke up after the election with mixed feelings. They had 'won' the election, but had a Tory Government in Westminster.

Amongst the issues discussed at their post election meetings was how to oppose the Poll Tax.

Few realised, certainly not Donald Dewar and Brian Wilson that lack of swift action would have a calamitous effect on the Anti Poll Tax Campaign.

Yet this was precisely what happened.

Even in advance of the Act coming into force, Strathclyde Regional council was

> "proceeding reluctantly with the measures required by law to introduce the Community Charge"

Other Councils followed their lead.

Thus before the first discussion of a campaign by the Scottish Executive, one major weapon - Labour's Local Government base - had conceded the fight.

## WHY DIDNT LABOUR STOP IT ?

Many Labour MPs must in retrospect question the wisdom of their Whips and Party Leaders in allowing the legislation on to the Statute books.

It is not adequate to simply point to the Tory majority. Timing was crucial to getting the Legislation through before the Election and having an Election in June and not October was crucial to the Tory timetable. Imagine the different result had the Election and Stock Crash coincided.

Denis Canavan, an MP not noted for fawning devotion to Westminster, has mentioned his frustration at being warned against delaying tactics in the run down to the Election.

Certainly the levels of debate and questioning of the Scottish Bill was miniscule in relation to that surrounding the English Legislation during 1988.

The official reason for Labour's actions was confidence in a Labour Victory. Labour would repeal the Act but "unseemly" Parliamentary

disruption could antagonise voters.

A further reason was that the Act only affected Scotland. The rea debate and fight was accepted by both front benches to be the Englis legislation.

Yet even these *reasons* dont make sense.

If it was "impossible to administer" and hence an embarassment to th Tories, why not vigorously highlight the Act during the Election?

The only significant amendment "reluctantly" accepted by the Tories wa to shorten the time during which both the Rates Roll and the Poll Tax Rol would have to be maintained. This amendment was hailed by the Labou leaders as a major defeat for the Government plans.

Yet the effect of this amendment was to make the Tax less "impossible t administer".

Labour delights in defeating the Government, even at its own expense.

The Parliamentary Game is everything - the consequences ignored.

Nor was this a single aberration. The timetable for introducing the Act in England was shortened from 4 years to 1 year. Once again Labour claimed a 'Victory'.

Yet if the original timetable had been maintained, it would have ensured that if the Tories persevere with the Tax, it would still be coming into force during the next Election.

Given Labour's leaders now say the only way to get rid of the Act is to Elect a Labour Government, What better way to embarass the Government.

The amendment to cut the timetable to 1 year resulted from pressure from Labour and conservative Authorities concerned about administrative difficulties.

The effect is to give the Tories 3 years to get it right or at least defuse the response before an election.

Even in terms of Electoral Politics, this is a classic own Goal.

The only conclusion we can draw from the above is that Labour had no clear strategy against the Poll Tax in Parliament or for Building a Campaign after the election.

Their 'Policy' was an eclectic response to Parliamentary events, bureaucratic and anti Socialist 'advice' from Council officials linked to a fundamental Policy and Moral Vacuum.

## COUNCILS & UNIONS

Mere weeks after the General Election, Bob Calderwood, the Chief Executive of Strathclyde Region, pressed the Council's Labour Executive to make provisions for the Poll Tax.

The Council took a decision not to defy the Law and to make provisions for collection machinery.

This vote occured several weeks before the Act came into force, and before the Labour Scottish Executive had discussed tactics.

Several other Councils "reluctantly" followed Strathclyde's lead.

Strathclyde NALGO's Finance members stood to gain around 30 extra jobs, several promoted. Given the Council's decision and the generally low key campaign, they "reluctantly" voted to take the Jobs and Money (or at least not to Black them).

By the time COSLA met to discuss tactics, the line of non compliance by councils and Blacking by Unions had been breached. In practise the most effective means of delaying registration had been lost.

As even Brian Wilson admits

> "the issue was confronted at an administrative level rather than a Political level."

By October, Councils were pressing ahead with Computerisation eg Tayside committed £250,000. COSLA meanwhile met to highlight its concerns and point out technical difficulties to the Government.

Lothian Region the last to hold out, agreed to comply with the Act on 27th October 1987

> "in recognition of its legal responsibilities and the inherent dangers of Non Compliance."

Hypocracy reigned. Glasgow District Council voted for non compliance, but within weeks instigated programmes for paying Rebates.

Unions voted for total opposition, whilst members set up collection procedures.

Councils demanded more money (£40,000,000) the better to administer the Act.

All these actions undermined Labour's main argument - that the Tax was Unworkable.

## MIGHT HAVE BEENS

What could have been done ?

Councils should at least have delayed implementation until the Act was in force and until the Scottish Executive issued guidelines.

This guidance should have been that Unions and Councils should refuse to administer the Act.

Various tactics such as mass resignations and the election of only councillors who would refuse to Comply could have been tried.

If a united front allied to a Mass Mobilisation of public opinion had been tried, the Poll Tax could have been stopped there and then.

For those Councillors who anguish over these matters, let them be comforted that no such guidance would have come. Donald Dewar notes

> "We were prepared to consider any effective weapons that came to hand, but a boycott threw up too many practical problems...(arguments for illegality).. are giving a vote of no confidence in the democratic process."

Councils will face the same dilemna over fines for non payment.

What will Donald's advice be then ?

## THE STOP IT CAMPAIGN

The Scottish Executive drew up its Programme of Action in June and July of 1986.

The Poll Tax was one of 5 Campaigns which were prioritised.

SNP activists upstaged Labour by launching their campaign some weeks before Labour's STOP IT launch.

The SNP condemned the Tax as "immoral" and an attack on Scottish People. They didnt rule out non payment.

The launch of Stop It was planned for October. A wide sector of 'worthies' was lined up to back it - from Dewar, Wilson and Campbell Christie, through Right Reverends, to entertainers Terry Neason and Elaine C. Smith.

The Secretary of the Campaign John Rafferty predicted

> "it is going to be the mouse that Roared at the Government on this issue."

A mouse certainly !!

Even at its launch meeting, cynicism was well enough engrained fo
Elaine C. Smith to publicly exhort the 50 MPs to

"Dae something."

## A LEGAL CAMPAIGN

At the first phone in on Radio Clyde after the launch, Brian Wilson
Chair of the Campaign, spent most of the hour denouncing those
particularly the SNP who supported Civil Disobedience and possibly No
Payment. He continued in this vein for months

"The aim of this party should not be to advise people what to do whe
the Poll Tax Bills come through the door - our aim should be to sto
them coming through the door." (November 22)

A pattern had been set. The main fight was to be in Parliament.

Poll Tax committees sprang up in most localities. The main task o
Labour stalwarts was to ensure

a) they affiliated to Stop It
b) they only engaged in 'sensible' activity.

## INACTIVITY

Stop It after the initial Rally and Launch failed to hold othe
meetings.

Activity from the Scottish Stop It Campaign was confined to Rallies an
Press Statements. Essentially no Stop It organised action was take
outside Parliament till the March '88 Conference.

Matters were so low key that on January 6th the Secretary of the STU
Campbell Christie admitted

"I wasnt aware of what stage Stop It was at in their campaign."

Mr Christie had started to engage in talks with the SNP to try and hav
a united Anti Tax Campaign - only to be told Stop It was also trying t
have talks.

A slighly embarassed Mr Christie was responding to pressure to have som
clear guidance on how to fight the Tax.

In practise following the Scottish Conference, the STUC took on the
running of Stop It, financially and organisationally.

One observer commented that the STUC had brought more drive and ideas in
an afternoon than Stop It had in a year.

Those who have experienced STUC campaigns may find this statemen surprising, but it appears warranted.

## LEADERSHIP

Some Labour Party members have expressed surprise at the lack of fervou and dynamism of Brian Wilson. Those who remember his wrecking role in 197 over the Assembly Referendum are less surprised.

Brian was chair of the Vote No Campaign which opposed the Assembly. Hi instincts in taking up the issue were clearly Constitutional and Unionist

Anyone less likely to lead a Scottish Campaign against the Poll Tax and to work sensitively with the SNP to get them to work in a joint campaign is difficult to imagine.

## THE PROPAGANDA WAR

One of the chief weapons the Tories had was an Act through Parliament, but no details of how it would work !

These details only emerged as the English Legislation was developed. From October '87 onwards, people were made aware of the iniquities of the Act eg

- travelling people would have to register in Scotland but could avoid it for a year by travelling to England.
- Battered womens refuges would have residents names on the register, with consequent dangers of violence.
- Poor People in city Areas would generally pay more than wealthy in suburban areas.

Alongside this arguments raged over how much the Tax would be. Conflict between Tory and Labour, £500 - £200 fuelled concern.

The Government responded with a pamphlet explaining the Act.

At last the public were being informed about the Poll Tax and they didnt like it.

Labour at last accepted they needed an alternative to Rates or the Poll Tax. Thus in November 1987 Kinnock stated

> "it is more than probable we will have an alternative before the Poll Tax goes through."

A rapid response this is not !

# PART SEVEN

# CAMPAIGNS FOR NON PAYMENT

Although the SNP had earlier toyed with non payment, until November '87, few Labour activists publicly advocated it.

Motions for Scottish Conference coalesced the demand. Non payment wasnt the only tactic, but as the vice President of Edinburgh and District Trades Council put it in December '87

> "..ultimately they depend on one thing for success. They depend on us to pay it... we believe that we should say now that we will not pay."

At least 11 motions for Conference called for Labour to open the door to non payment.

The SNP then resurrected the issue and decided to seek a mandate for non payment at the District Elections. Their stance was immediately condemned by John Maxton as

> "a pure gimmick.. it is perfectly clear they have no idea what they are talking about."

John's sentiments are understandable, the SNP was making electoral hay. Alex Salmond's caveats are worthy of oor Donald himself

> "If we emerge.. as the leading party in Scotland,if we win a mandate for a campaign, the SNP will organise and lead the campaign. If the Scottish people want to stop the poll tax, they have got to vote for a campaign of non-payment on May 5th."

Yet the effective way to answer such bluster is to produce the goods.

Instead Labour was denouncing non payment but not producing any alternatives. Thus non payment was (all quotes Jan '88)

> "fruitless..a counsel of despair" N. Kinnock
>
> (ineffectual).. "leave local authorities with the dilemna of maintaining jobs and services or increasing the poll tax" John Rafferty
>
> "unnecessary and energy-sapping..non payment pre-supposed defeat" B. Wilson
>
> "illegality becomes the issue not the poll tax" H. McLeish

The alternatives Labour leaders proposed were still very vague and were to prove ineffectual :

> "the great strength and breadth of opinion can still in scotland ensure that this proposal falters before April 1st '89" N. Kinnock
>
> (COSLA could) "do more within the law to frustrate and delay the implementation" H. McLeish.

H. McLeish did concede that rejecting civil disobedience could only be effective

> "if we put in its place a considered, measured and highly effective campaign."

Where was this campaign ?

## PARLIAMENT — ROUND TWO

Labour's Parliamentary fight relied on an alliance of several groups of oppositionists :

- Labour MPs
- Councillors
- Tory MPs
- Sundry Lords

As could have been predicted, the Government with its 100 plus majority steered the English Act on to the statute book virtually unscathed.

What then was hoped for from this campaign ? What were the tactics employed ?

Labour MPs were to be her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. It was the alliance with other forces which would defeat the government.

Local Authorities had shown their power in November, when Ridley had bowed to pressure and agreed to introduce the Legislation in England in 1990 instead of over 4 years. London authorites had been omitted from this change.

Labour's London Authorities demanded a change over one year as well.

About 120 officials and councillors from Scotland lobbied the Commons over the Poll Tax. Amongst other things they demanded a delay in the Scottish Legislation's implementation date by one year. Not surprisingly they were refused.

Donald Dewar's reaction was that events were turning South of the Border and

> "we can forge a weapon here that could shake this Government to its very foundations."

Councillors were left to press (mainly Tory) MPs about their experiences and difficulties in the hope of

"amendments that would significantly alter the character of it".

In practise, the only amendment of any significance related to Banding or "ability to pay".

## THE TORY REVOLT

Neil Kinnock was to rely on Tory Wets like Heath to defeat the Poll Tax.

When that illusion failed it was replaced by another, a revolt in the House of Lords.

But no subject was as likely to benefit the Hereditary Peers as the removal of their Rates Bill.

Out of self interest they turned out in force and voted against any delay or change with Loud Hussanahs to Maggie.

The Parliamentary Campaign was a Dead Duck. The Poll Tax had to be stopped on the Doorstep.

## LOCAL COMMITTEES

Between November and March, Poll Tax Committees began springing up in every locality. Labour Branches began discussing tactics.

Members recognised that the SNP were opportunistic with their Dont Pay Campaign, but in any case they hardly existed on the Ground.

At that stage, a Dont Pay Campaign was very abstract - it was over a year till people would be asked to pay. However, it should not be ruled out as a last resort if all else failed.

At least in Glasgow, the main people on the Ground appeared to be the Revolutionary Communist Party and the Anarchists. Both Groups adopted Dont Pay as a banner with which to (metaphorically) hit anyone disagreeing that this was the only basis for unity.

Once over the initial hurdle all Groups were willing to Campaign together (SNP excepted).

In Edinburgh, Cant Pay - Wont Pay Campaigns were more widespread and the Poll Tax seemed to have been more widely debated in the Party.

This then was the line up before the March Conference.

## THE MARCH CONFERENCE

The media portrayed the March Conference as a confrontation between Legal and Illegal tactics.

Indeed this was how it was seen by many delegates.

Labour had effectively Done Nothing around the Poll Tax. Yet it was an enormous assault on civil Liberties and the poor.

This made the Poll Tax tactics into THE key debate.

The trouble was Kinnock was committed against Non Payment, but Union Members had been pressing the STUC to raise the Campaign Profile.

A classic Labour Party fudge was delivered :

- a more vigorous campaign would be launched
- non payment would be ruled out of this campaign
- if nothing changed the issue would be redebated in the Autumn.

Kinnock got the votes, but the debate was swinging against him.

Dick Douglas resigned as Chair of the Scottish Group before Conference and clearly summed up the debate at Conference :

"Kinnock said Pay It. I say no !"

## THE REGISTRATION CAMPAIGN

After conference, the Centre of the Anti Poll Tax Campaign concerned the Registration process - the "send it back campaign".

This was a fairly successful attempt to frustrate the registration.

In Lothian Region alone, many tens of thousands either sent back the registration forms with enquiries, or simply ignored the form altogether.

However, the Send it Back initiative did nothing to unify those who had supported it. Everyone remained isolated and vulnerable to threats of fines and wage arrests.

Sufficient Forms have been returned to enable Registrars to proceed to the next stage. Payment Demands are likely to be issued on schedule next March.

## THE CROSSROADS

The Parliamentary Campaign is over, delaying tactics can continue, but effectively the Registration Campaign is over.

Now the issue facing Labour is what to do about non Payment.

The Leadership want to bury the Campaign and look to a Labour government.

But opposition continues to grow to the Poll Tax. This opposition will rise sharply when the Payment Demands are issued. The Campaign will continue even if Labour withdraws from it.

Many Socialists and Non Socialists consider the Poll Tax to be iniquitous and **WILL NOT** Pay It.

Who could have conceived a year ago that a vote on the Scottish executive in opposition to Kinnock and Dewar would only lose by 3 votes or that the TGWU would back non Payment.

How unlikely that in the middle of his election Campaign, Kinnock would have to publicly gag his Election Agent Robin Cook to stop him Joining a Committee of 100.

Many more surprise Refuseniks will emerge.

Labour hopefully will eventually support their stance.

## THE WAY FORWARD

There is certainly the potential in Scotland to mobilise a mass campaign against the Poll Tax and for a Scottish Assembly.

However, the Kinnock-Dewar leadership, following their "new realist" logic to its depressing conclusion, are scared to see any campaign that will threaten Westminster's legitimacy.

For them, parliamentary cretinism clearly comes before jobs, services, living standards and democratic rights.

To date, the SNP have been the main beneficiaries of the pathetic inaction of the Labour leadership. Worse, the Tories have been allowed to step up their attacks on the Scottish people.

Nonetheless, there are also some opportunities emerging for the left. The scale of the public response to the Poll Tax has been uplifting. The Benn-Heffer leadership challenge has also been a spur to greater confidence and organisation on the left.

An organised left-wing alternative is urgently needed. But the organised left in the Labour Party in Scotland has been very weak in the past few

years.

The creation of Scottish Labour Action provides some hope for the future.

The Campaign Group in Scotland, traditionally weak, has been given a boost, with several local groups appearing during the Benn-Heffer leadership challenge.

There is now a real possibility of developing a solid, democratic network of Campaign Groups in Scotland. Hopefully these will progress beyond organising fringe meetings and start to play an important role in campaigning activities.

It is vital for the Labour Party and the Campaign Groups to play an active role in the building of broader united-front bodies that are appearing in the fight against the Poll Tax. These should include not merely Labour Party forces, although we must fight for the labour movement to give a strong lead.

The recent Socialist Conference in Chesterfield, involved thousands of left Labour Party activists along with socialists outside the Labour Party. It decided to hold a special conference on the Poll Tax in November '88 in Durham. This is to be welcomed, and should be supported by the left in Scotland.

The Campaign for a Scottish Assembly is already discussing plans for the creation of a Scottish Constitutional Convention which will include MP's and representatives from local authorities. If a mass campaign Against the Poll Tax can be developed on the ground, such a body could start to assume real significance.

# APPENDIX 1 — THE POLL TAX IN HISTORY

## *by Craig Binns*

> *The question of the best and fairest method of raising the necessary funds is one of great importance. In a primitive community the simple method of a poll tax on every member would no doubt suffice.*

With these words James Muirhead addressed the Royal Philosophical Society of Glasgow in 1909 in a paper entitled "The Principles of Municipal Taxation".

Recognising that he was not living in a primitive community he devoted the rest of his paper to more rational fiscal proposals.

In thus dismissing poll taxes Muirhead was entirely typical of his time. the great Adam Smith had laid down the line in his "Wealth of Nations":

> "The subjects of every state ought to contribute (taxes) in proportion to the revenue which they respectively enjoy."

Adam Smith's principles of taxation - equality, certainty, convenience and economy - are quoted approvingly in the entry on taxation in the Encyclopaedia Brittannica's 1888 edition, which dismisses poll taxes in this laconic fashion:

> *Capitation taxes are chiefly of interest historically, as illustrated by the poll taxes levied at various times.*

A hundred years ago, then, poll taxes were regarded as irrelevant historical curiosities. But since Margaret Thatcher gets her best ideas by raking History's middens, let us do the same. We will dig up not only many forgotten facts about obsolete and unfair taxes, but also some useful ideas on how to get rid of them.

## ENGLAND : 14TH CENTURY

The most famous of all poll taxes was the one which provoked the English Peasants' Revolt of 1381.

It was not intended as a normal revenue-raising device, but as an emergency measure to pay for a war against France.

In 1377 the English parliament agreed to an emergency levy of 4d per person over fourteen years old. The Commons insisted that all the money so raised was to go direct to pay the beleaguered English army in France. They even proposed the appointment of special commissioners to collect it,

separate from the officials who collected other taxes. This was finall agreed to be impracticable.

In 1379, after further military setbacks, the government came back t parliament looking for more money and, as an obviously astonishe chronicler informs us:

> "In this Parliament there was granted a subsidy so wonderful (i amazing) that no one had ever seen or heard of the like."

## A GRADUATED TAX

It was indeed "wonderful" and I commend it to the attention of th Chancellor of the Exchequer.

It was a graduated poll tax, based on social class. Some examples o rates: dukes £6 13/4, earls £4, barons £2, knights £1, and so on. Merchants paid 2/-, 1/- or 6d depending on the scale of their operations. Farmers paid 6/8, 3/4, 2/- or 1/-. Everybody over sixteen years of age not included in the list of ranks paid 4d, except beggars and those living solely by alms.

All this seems much fairer than the Community Charge. In any case it was enacted by parliament during one of the bouts of foaming war-hysteria which afflict that assembly from time to time, and was not intended to be permanent.

What of the sums involved? How much did 4d represent to an unskilled labourer? The wage-fixing legislation in force at that time, which was not in fact very effective, provided that skilled workers were not to recieve more than about 4d or 5d per day, and labourers 1.5d. Thus, a skilled worker was being asked to contribute a single day's pay and a labourer about three days' pay.

Not only was this tax fairer than the Community Charge, it fell more lightly on the poor.

## WAR AND REVOLUTION

In 1380 the situation in France became worse. The government begged parliament for help. The army in France had not been paid for months. There was rebellion in Ireland, trouble on the Scottish border. A revolution in Flanders had disrupted the vital wool trade. French galleys were raiding English ports. This was an emergency.

Apart from rebellion in Ireland the present government can offer none of these excuses. On the contrary, we are told how sound and successful the economy is, and how peacefully we live under the nuclear umbrella.

## TAX INCREASES

The parliament of 1380 finally agreed to grant the subsidy at the very high rate of 1/- per head. (Three days' pay for a skilled worker, eight days' for a labourer.) But the principle of fairness, though diluted, had not been entirely abandoned, it being decided that:

> *For the sum reckoned for each township the sufficient shall (according to their means) aid the lesser, providing that the most wealthy do not pay more than 60 groats (£1) for themselves and their wives; and no one at all should pay less than one groat (4d) for himself and his wife.*

A modern historian notes that this provision "obviously penalised the inhabitants of poor townships", a feature intentionally included in the Community Charge. In 1380 its injustice was recognised and deplored.

## REPRESSION

Voting poll taxes into existence is much easier than collecting them. The king's commissioners ran into trouble right away. Faced with demands for the 1379 levy based on social status, people abandoned their normal habit of pretending to be of higher rank than they really were, or of claiming distinguished ancestry.

In the next year things were even worse. Who was "sufficient"? Who was "lesser"? The collectors' difficulties were increased by the urgent and peremptory orders they received:

> "You are to collect the required information by the means which seem best to you";
>
> "You are to seize all those who act in opposition or rebellion and you are to keep them safely in our prison".

(Malcolm Rifkind, copy these instructions. You are going to need them.)

## REBELLION

The tax collectors obeyed their orders to the letter. The sufficient did not come to the aid of the lesser. Do they ever? Harassed by officials, aroused by a sense of injustice, the lower classes rose in a bloody rebellion.

Poll taxes acquired a bad reputation in government circles as a result of this salutary experience. Only very reluctantly, in times of national emergency, were they resorted to thereafter.

Such an occasion arose in 1641 when it became necessary to pay off a

Scottish army which was occupying the north of England. The 1641 tax wa graduated like that of 1379.

In 1688, a year not merely of national emergency but of revolution, (graduated) poll tax was raised. After 1698 it was dropped and from tha time on the idea of such taxes mouldered quietly in the archives until i was exhumed by the present government.

## FRANCE : 18TH CENTURY

Some other countries, to their great cost, did impose poll taxes o their people in more modern times. Just before the Revolution of 1789 the former French finance minister, Necker, demanded a change in the system o taxation, the unfarness and inefficiency of which had become a national scandal.

He observed that the English paid twice as much tax as the French but that the burden was more fairly distributed and therefore caused less resentment.

French public finance was at that time based on poll taxes, regressive property taxes, compulsory purchases of highly-taxed salt, forced labour by the poor on public works and other ideas which would delight Thatcher's heart.

The king and the nobility benefitted from this system, but in the end they paid for it with their heads: it was a major cause of the Revolution.

It is interesting to note that as late as the 1970's, French commentators on the British fiscal system were still singing in tune with Necker. The 1974 edition of the Larousse Encyclopaedia informs its readers that:

> *English taxation is well accepted by public opinion. This feature, along with the method of collecting tax, explains the low incidence of evasion in Great Britain as well as the importance of the total tax burden, which is almost twice what it is in France.*

No doubt future editions of the Larousse will be suitably amended.

## USA : 19TH & 20TH CENTURY

Another interesting aspect of poll taxes - their use as a political weapon against the poor - can be seen in the recent history of the USA.

From the 1880's onwards some Southern States levied flat-rate taxes on all voters in order to restrict the electorate and so crush the Populist Party which was supported mainly by black and poor white people and was threatening the Democrats' political monopoly.

## POPULISTS CRUSHED

The Community Charge is not in theory a tax on voting rights, but as electoral registers will be used as a means of detecting defaulters it will have the same effect in practice as the Deep South's typical piece of political chicanery. Successful chicanery, too. The Populists were obliterated. Be warned.

## LOSS OF FRANCHISE

In certain respects the Southern tax was less harsh than the Community Charge. As its function was not to raise revenue but to disenfranchise the poor, nobody cared whether it was collected or not.

In many states war veterans and elderly or disabled people were exempt, and some, with traditional Southern gallantry, excluded women from this imposition.

Nonetheless, the tax was the object of resistance by blacks and poor whites.

In 1920 North Carolina abolished it, followed gradually by other states. As a result of civil rights agitation the US Supreme Court voided Louisiana's poll tax in 1966, declaring it unconstitutional. Texas was then forced to repeal its tax and the sorry history of this attempt to perpetuate the political effects of slavery came to an end.

## POLAND : 17TH CENTURY

Poland in the seventeenth century was dominated by a landowning aristocracy. In 1629 the Sejm, a parliament in which only the nobility was represented (today it represents only the state bureaucracy), abolished the tax per acre on land and replaced it by a flat-rate household tax. A modern historian notes that this tax caused hardship because it

> "fell with equal force on every household, irrespective of the size of its property or of its ability to pay".

And, of course,

> "The contributions of the rich landowners diminished; those of the poor rose sharply".

Poland entered a long period of political and economic crises about this time and was finally dismembered by its predatory neighbours, Prussia, Austria and Russia.

Not all taxes in aristocratic Poland, however, were levied at flat rates. The personal poll tax (as opposed to the household tax) was very sharply graduated, with the poorest social strata paying nine pence a head

and the most exalted individual (the Archbishop-Primate) paying 600 zloties - 36000 times as much!

In the light of this the 20% provision for the poorest payers of the Community Charge is a paltry concession indeed.

## RUSSIA : 18TH CENTURY

To see the effects of a flat-rate poll tax at their most gruesome, we have to cross the border into Russia, where one was introduced by Peter the Great in the 1720's.

With typical Russian religiosity it was referred to as a "soul tax" and even Peter's few friends regarded it with dismay.

> "The soul is something intangible and incomprehensible...Prices should be fixed only on tangible goods."

It was this writer who invented the term "soul-destroying" to describe the effects of the tax. Its introduction was accompanied by the usual violence and repression generated by poll taxes. We learn of

> "severe decrees, torture and confiscations, to get the rusty administrative machinery into motion".

Even the Church was compelled to threaten clergymen with

> "merciless corporal punishment to be followed with forced labour, even in cases of old age" to get them to submit to assessment.

## PETER'S TAX

How did Peter's fiscal system work?

Before that time there were various legal categories of peasants, some less free than others, who paid various taxes, and a minority class of slaves who did not.

Peter simply turned the entire working population into slaves and made this new class subject to taxation. Previously employers or masters, the landowners now became slaveowners. They were responsible for collecting the soul tax; to enable them to do this the peasants were bound to the land and lost all social rights.

Peter inflicted this atrocity on his people to pay for a war against Sweden, but as one of his biographers remarks, the damage done by his taxes would not have been paid for even if he had conquered five Swedens.

The landlords, however, acquired a vested interest in maintaining the poll tax and it was continued even after slavery was abolished. They were later annihilated by a vengeful peasantry.

## DISCRIMINATION

Some features of the Russian poll tax are of great interest. It was introduced at a rate of 80 kopecks per year and gradually rose to between 1.15 and 2.61 roubles (depending on region) by 1867. This increase was less than the rate of inflation during that period.

Merchants were not assessed after 1775, paying a tax on capital instead. In 1863 it was abolished for the urban middle classes.

Until 1782 "schismatics", ie members of religious minorities, paid double. This is exactly similar to the English poll tax of 1641, when Catholics paid double.

Poll taxes, being directed at the person of the payer and not at his or her wealth, can easily be used to oppress minorities, and often are.

Was the soul tax abolished in 1917? No, it was already dead.

After the slaves were liberated in 1861 it gradually became uncollectable. Free people do not pay poll taxes. The Great Soviet Encyclopaedia tells us what happened:

> *Large-scale arrears and cases of mass refusal to pay led to the abolition of the Poll Tax in European Russia in 1887 and in Siberia in 1899.*

The Russian peasants found a good way of dealing with poll taxes, which deserves to be imitated.

## TAXATION AND REVOLUTION

When we look at the history of all the great revolutions (even the simplified accounts found in school text books) we see that unjust taxation was a cause of all of them.

The American Revolution was provoked by a trivial tax of 3d per pound on tea, which the Americans refused to pay because they had not voted it on themselves, just as the Scots did not vote the much more iniquitous Community Charge on themselves.

Charles I's various taxes were a cause of the English Revolution, and I have already indicated the importance of taxation in the cases of France and Russia.

Presumably the Tories know all this. They may feel that local poll taxes are not so disastrous in their political effects as national ones, and they may be right; there are few precedents which permit us to make a judgement on the matter.

Municipal poll taxes did exist in Saxony, a backward province of Imperial Germany, before the First World War. In 1914 the Imperial

Reichstag (a much more progressive assembly than today's House of Commons lost patience with this feudal Saxon institution and decreed thei abolition.

## AN IMMORAL TAX

But there is one difficulty which the government has not take sufficiently into account. To get rid of the Community Charge it is no necessary for the Scots to overthrow the state. They may siomply decid to secede from it.

In the meantime many of them will refuse, like the Siberian peasants o 1899, to pay the poll tax.

The SNP is clear in its support of this "gesture politics" which ha been so successful against unfair taxes in the past, but what about th Labour Party?

This is an issue which demands a clear statement of principle.

Issues like the miners' strike, Ireland or nuclear disarmament can b fudged, because most people are not miners or soldiers and are no therefore asked to make personal moral choices about their behaviour i these matters.

But the poll tax affects us all.

What will the Labour Party say to those who refuse to pay?

Unless it clearly states its position without equivocation the Labou Party will have shown itself unfit, owing to unprincipled cowardice, t form a goverment either of Scotland or of Britain as a whole.

# APPENDIX 2

# THE SCOTTISH QUESTION 1888 — 1988

## A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

*— by James D. Young*

The profound crisis of international socialism in the contemporary worl is seen at its sharpest in "Marxist" attitudes to the Scottish nationa question.

Although the Scottish national question has bedevilled socialists durin the hundred years since the foundation of the Scottish Labour Party i 1888, it did not become a major theoretical problem on the Left in recen times until the publication of Tom Nairn's book The Break-Up of Britain i 1977.

Whilst socialists' responses to the questions of cultural freedom an the movements for racial and national freedom forced the national questio back onto the agenda of socialist politics, Scottish socialists were ill equipped to cope with the advent of a serious bourgeois nationalis movement in the 1970s.

Moreover, if Nairn's "nationalist" arguments had not been attacked s sharply by Eric J. Hobsbawm in the pages of the New Left Review in 197 Marxists might have ignored the Scottish national question for a few mor years.

## THE NEW RISE OF NATIONALISM

When I met Tom Nairn in Edinburgh in the spring of 1977, he told me o his astonishing discovery that Hobsbawm was very hostile to the Scottis workers' agitation for self-government.

In accepting an invitation to visit Hobsbawm at his home in Hampstead London, Nairn said he was then verbally assaulted for supporti "bourgeois nationalism". In predicting that Hobsbawm would increasingl turn to the Right, he ascribed Hobsbawm's passionate hostility to th break-up of Britain to his integration within the established soci order.

Far from recognising that the Scottish agitation for self-government wa an elementary democratic demand, the conflicting attitudes of Tom Nai and Eric J. Hobsbawm towards nationalism in Scotland had been condition by their growing disenchantment with the working classes in Europe as potential revolutionary force.

Both men shared a deep pessimism about the fate of socialism in th twentieth century. Becauses they refused to admit that they were livi at the beginning of a gloriously challenging epoch in which socialis

hopes ought to have been at least as great as socialist fears, they cou
only disseminate their pessimism far and wide.

In anticipating the pessimism of the Western socialist intelligentsia
the 1980s, Hobsbawm depicted Nairn's support for nationalism in Scotla
as unrealistic:

> "For anybody can be a realist when the prospects look good. T
> difficulty begins when, as today, analysis suggests to realist
> observers like Nairn conclusions of deep pessimism."

## MARXISTS FOR AND AGAINST THE UNION

In opposing the Scots' agitation for self-government in 1977, Hobsbaw
was expressing the dominant Marxist view of nationalism. Despite the fac
that bourgeois nationalism in Scotland had become for "Marxists" like To
Nairn a substitute for a revolutionary proletariat, it was he rather tha
Hobsbawm who stood on the side of "progress". In his critique of Nairn'
book titled "Some Reflections on the Break-Up of Britain", Hobsbawm wrote

> "Yet whatever the general theoretical or historical arguments, th
> crucial questions must be whether the "break-up of Britain" or othe
> large nation-states will help socialism, and indeed whether it i
> inevitable as Nairn states or implies."

In any event, Hobsbawm's commitment to the Anglo-British state wa
unconcealed. Hobsbawm's critique of The Break-Up of Britain was a
example of unreconstructed British Stalinism, ie the fixed belief that o
the whole nationalism is a bad thing (with occasional exceptions).

Tom Nairn replied to that argument in the now defunct Bulletion o
Scottish Politics by trying to suggest that on the whole nationalism is
good thing (with some admittedly frightful lapses and exceptions). I
contrast to the authentically revolutionary Nairn, Hobsbawm aided thos
like Neil Kinnock who were opposing the Scots struggle for nationa
autonomy.

## ENGLISH MARXISM

Because Marxists like Eric J. Hobsbawm have had so much influence i
shaping socialist-attitudes towards the Scottish antional question durin
the last two decades, the question of where such socialist-attitude
developed needs to be addressed.

A Marxist refugee from Nazi Germany, Hobsbawm's approach to the Scottis
national question was engendered within the milieu of Cambridge Universit
in the 1930s. With "a large and vulgar patriotism for England" h
deepened his particular attitudes towards Scotland within the Communis
Party Historians' Group between 1946 and 1956. As he admitted when h
published an essay on the history of this group in 1978:

> "We were particularly weak on the history of the Empire and colonial exploitation, Scottish, Welsh and Irish history, and the role of women in economic life."

In explaining the opposition of such major figures in the British labour movement as Neil Kinnock and Eric Heffer to the agitation for Scottish self Government, hobsbawm's role in defending english Nationalism has been crucial since at least 1968.

In an essay on the History of the Communist Party Historian's Group, Bill Schwarz documented the Stalinist historian's role in developing "a profound sense of Englishness" and in the calls for "a major reassessment of English culture and political history from the seventeenth century onwards."

## THE CHAUVINIST ROOTS

Furthermore, in examining the emergence of "the radical-democratic strain in English Marxism" in the 1930's, Ralph Samual locates its origins in the 1880s. As he puts it

> One of the most ambiguous legacies of radical-democratic history is that of English nationalism - the notion that English people have been somehow singled out for a special place in history, that the English language is superior to others, and that the liberty of the individual is more secure in England than it is abroad.

Being more English than the authentic English, Hobsbawm was also hostile to "Lallans" - the Scottish national language he un-historically depicted as an "artificially archaic idiom".

Yet despite his English chauvinism, he displayed some awareness of the "peculiarities" of Scottish historical development when he published Industry and Empire in 1968. However, in expressing hostility towards Lallans, he was expressing the dominant attitudes of the British Left towards minority languages. Only in rare moments of crisis did British socialists express their hostility to the Lowland Scots, Gaelic and Welsh languages. For example, in the major two-volume biography of Aneurin Bevan, Michael Foot concealed his hero's contempt for the Welsh language.

## FOUNDING OF THE SLP

When the Scottish Labour Party was founded in Glasgow, the city of radical and socialist culture, in 1888, the Scottish workers' movement (as distinct from the Scottish branches of the Social Democratic Federation) was agitating for Home Rule for Scotland and Ireland.

Although Scottish working people had developed a dual consciousness (that is, of being British and Scottish), the sense of Scottish cultural identity was very strong in the Scottish Labour Party. Despite the fragility and inconstancy of the Scots sense of cultural identity it did

not disappear from the British workers' movement after the advent of the Independent Labour Party or the Labour Party in 1893 or 1900.

In the 1880s the Scottish labour movement was to the left of the English labour movement. Indeed, the point about the greater militancy and socialist consciousness of the Scots was made by the English socialist leader, H. M. Hyndman. Furthermore, Fred Reid argues that in the late 1880s "the discontent of the working class provided the main basis for the divergence between Scottish and English politics". Even so, the fragility of the Scots sense of cultural identity was environmentally conditioned.

But although the Scottish Labour Party was represented at the foundation conference of the Second International in Paris in 1889 before a Labour Party existed in England, this was because of the Scots' greater degree of radicalism. Nevertheless the Scottish socialists' awareness of their collective cultural identity found expression from time to time inside the workers' movement. When the two Scots at the foundation conference of the Second International interjected on being described as "English" delegates, they were drawing attention to a real problem.

## LABOUR AND NATIONALISM

Moreover, the national consciousness of the Scots in the 1880s was sharpened by the increasing and very tangible nationalism of the English. In explaining the emergence of this nationalism, George Lichtheim wrote:

> "At the same time Toryism was reconstituted upon a new social and ideological foundation: no longer merely the bulwark of the landed gentry and the Church, but increasingly the party of the Empire and the fountainhead of English (as distinct from British) nationalism. The nationalism, that is to say, of the dominant majority within a multinational society; for the Scots, Welsh and Irish all had their own forms of national sentiment."

Also this same English nationalism was in with the Social Democratic Federation from its foundation in London in 1883.

Before the Scottish branches of the Social Democratic Federation broke away in 1902 to form the De Leonite Socialist Labour Party, one of the prominent Scottish "impossibilists" objected to the English chauvinism of H. M. Hyndman and Ernest Belford Bax. In so doing, he predicted that "the red flag of socialism" would fly over Scotland before it was hoisted in England.

## TWO STRANDS OF MARXISM

With the breakaway of the "impossibilists" in 1902, two Marxist traditions - and two Marxist attitudes towards the Scottish national question - developed and existed in Scotland until the tradition represented by Eric J. Hobsbawm began to be challenged seriously in the 1970s.

From 1902 onwards the dominant Marxist tradition within the socialist movement in Scotland was represented by John Carstairs Matheson, the leading theorist in the Socialist Labour Party.

By 1903 or 1904, when John Maclean, the famous Clydeside socialist, joined the Social Democratic Federation, the minority tradition represented greater sensitivity towards the Scottish national question without developing any analysis of the cultural identity of those who lived in the Athens of the North.

Unlike Matheson, John Maclean always felt a strong, intense and consistent antipathy towards the Highland landowners. Yet despite the intensity of this antipathy, it was strangely detached from his sense of being Scottish.

Although Maclean was always aware of his Scottishness, he did not grapple with it as a theoretical problem. In teaching industrial history, he confronted a situation in which a single book or pamphlet portraying Scottish working-class history in the nineteenth or early twentieth century simply did not exist. Moreover, despite his sympathetic acknowledgement of the Scottish dimension in politics, he did not really grapple with the theoretical problems of nationalism, nationality or the absence of books on Scottish working-class history.

## JOHN MATHESON

A Gaelic-speaking Highlander and graduate of the University of Edinburgh, John Carstairs Matheson was the only socialist in Scotland before the First World War who developed a Marxist interpretation of Scottish history from mediaeval times onwards.

In systematising his critique of bourgeois nationalism, he insisted that "the political and economic development of Scotland, particularly after the Union of 1707, was practically identical with that of England". Then in denouncing the Young Scots, a group of bourgeois nationalists struggling to get Scottish history taught in the State schools, he reiterated the De Leonist view that <u>class</u> was much more important than <u>nationality</u>. Indeed, he savaged the attempts of the Young Scots to "raise the ghost of Scottish nationality".

In contrast to Maclean's vague and unsystematic, though sensitive, awareness of Scottish nationality, Matheson asserted that "our Scottish nationality had its beginning and its end with the schemes of the ruling class" in 1707. Furthermore, he denounced <u>Forward</u>, the Scottish socialist newspaper, for supporting the Highland Land League's opposition to the eviction of crofters in the Scottish Highlands. In conceiving of <u>Scottish society</u> as a <u>gigantic factory</u>, he was indifferent to the ongoing Clearences.

Despite his faults as an "historian" and socialist practitioner, Matheson always displayed the traits of an unsentimental and systematic thinker. Although he was of Highland origin himself, he did not hesitate to declare that "the Highlanders are no more part of the Scottish nation

than the Sioux are part of the American nation".

By dispossessing the Highland peasants and catapaulting them into the industrial Lowlands, where they might becoe proletarians, capitalism was performing a progressve historical function. To express solidarity with the Highland peasants who were resisting dispossession and capitalist modernisation was to identify "socialism in [Lowland] Scotland with a backward agrarian movement".

Unlike Maclean, Matheson did not recognise the existence of a national question in Scotland. Scottish nationality had come to an end - almost before it had begun - in 1707.

## JOHN MACLEAN

Kenneth O. Morgan, the Establishment historian, asserts that "John Maclean and the later generation of Glasgow socialists after 1917" conceived of their socialism within a restrictive "Celtic context". Maclean's socialism was, in fact, conceived within the context of Bolshevism and world revolution. Despite the mythology, the socialists in and around Glasgow were not inward-looking or parochial. Notwithstanding Morgan's assertins to the contrary, Maclean was not a narrow-minded nationalist. He did not adhere to "Celtic communism"; and he was always an internationalist.

While he was always more sensitive to the question of the relationship between socialism and nationalism than the socialists in the De Leonist Socialist Labour Party, Maclean did not begin to grapple seriously with the thorny problem of the Scottish cultural identity until the end of the First World War. Despite the beginning of an association with the Hon Stuart Erskine of Mar, the second son of the fifth Lord Erskine, and the Scottish Home Rule Association in 1918, he did not develop any illusions about Celtic communism. Though he was more sympathetic to Scottish nationalism, he regarded the agitation for a Scottish Workers' Republic as a tactic. It was, in fact, a wedge to drive within - and to assist in accelerating the break-up of - the British Empire.

Far from taking the lead after 1918 in pushing for national self-determination, Maclean followed Scottish working-class men and men whose nationalism had been engendered by the complex processes unleashed by the First World War.

What was not in doubt was the extensive existence of nationalist feelings and sentiments in the Scottish labour movement. Writing in the Communist in 1921, John Ball articulated the internationalists' hostility to the agitation for national autonomy: "I am afraid I cannot attach great importance to the decision of the Scottish Trade Union Congress to affiliate to the British section of the Red International. It is good in its way, but it was passed by a Congress that 'after an animated debate decided to support Home Rule for Scotland .....' 'Are the Clyde men going to stick to their determination not to accept a wage cut, or are they too busy with Home Rule for Scotland?'"

The internationalists of the early 1920s would soon transform themselves

into the defenders of "socialism in one country".

With the advent of the First World War a series of new material factors confronted Marxists in Scotland. There was a spontaneous working-class agitation for the teaching of Gaelic, though internationalists like John S. Clarke ridiculed it. In the ensuing interplay between the struggle for socialism and the expression of working-class nationalism, cultural questions became central to the socialist struggle. A large number of Highlanders came into the munitions factories on Clydeside where the dominant language now spoken was Gaelic. This was the background against which prosaic workers' leaders like Bob Smillie now began to agitate for the restoration of Gaelic and the teaching of Scottish history and literature in the State schools and universities.

## RED CLYDESIDE

In 1919, by which time it was crystal-clear that the Scots were to the left of the English, John Maclean began to campaign for a Scottish Communist Party with independence for Scotland in its programme.

It did not materialise; and he worked through a number of socialist organisations including the Tramps Trust before he formed the Scottish Workers' Republican Party towards the end of his life.

Appointed by Lenin in 1918 as the Bolshevik Consul in Glasgow, Maclean had already enjoyed enormous prestige in the British labour movement. With his death in 1923 and the rise of fascism in Europe the Scottish national question was no longer given much emphasis in the labour movement.

## A CONTINUING THREAD

Nevertheless there has been an almost unbroken continuity of pent-up anger and resentment against British imperialism in Scotland since the late eighteenth century.

What is now needed is a much greater sensitivity towards the language question, the woman question, cultural oppression, the dependency of the Scottish economy and the much higher levels of ill-health and unemployment in Scotland.

The British labour movement should now begin to understand the existence of the Scottish national question. If it does not, the outlook for the Left in Scotland will be bleak as the bourgeois nationalists exploit legitimate national grievances for their own ends.

## DISMEMBER THE STATE

The break-up of Britain is now occurring before our eyes. British socialists should not regard the emergencé of an independent Scotland as a reactionary development. It would be, in the idiom of Freddie Engels, "a progressive step in England where four nationalities live in two islands and where, in spite of one Parliament, three systems of legislation exist side-by-side".

An independent Scotland could also create the pre-conditions in which we might just become the first democratic socialist country in Western Europe.

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