

## **The referendum--where we stand**

A Parliament for Scotland? An Assembly for Wales? Unable to agree among themselves and afraid to go ahead without popular support--last time they put this to a referendum their proposals were thrown out--our rulers have decided to ask us our opinion on the matter.

We should be flattered, but don't be fooled. These proposals are part of a smokescreen to disguise the fact that the Labour Party cannot deliver, and no longer wants to deliver, social reforms aimed at shifting wealth and power from the privileged few to working people.

Labour has always accepted the profit system. They used to believe they could humanise it by social reform legislation. Not any longer. Bitter experience has taught them that where reforms and profits come into conflict, it is reforms that have to give way. The last Labour government under Callaghan ended up applying this and Blair had promised to do the same even before he became Prime Minister.

The Labour Party fully accepts now that priority has to be given to profits and no longer promises more spending on social reforms. But, to distinguish itself from the Tories, Labour still wants to retain a reforming image. But how? By finding reforms which don't come into conflict with profits. Constitutional reforms fill the bill perfectly. They don't interfere with profit-making. They don't cost more money. And they give rise to an illusion of change.

It is in this light that the Labour government's proposals for a Scottish Parliament and a Welsh Assembly should be seen, along with their proposals for turning the House of Lords into a huge non-elected quango and for elected mayors and other such gimmicks. But it's all completely irrelevant as far as ordinary people are concerned.

Constitutional reform is of no benefit or relevance to us. It leaves our lives and the problems the profit system causes completely unchanged. Exploitation through the wages system continues. Unemployment continues. A crumbling health service, a chaotic transport system, a polluted environment, failing schools, rising crime and drug addiction and the general breakdown of society all continue. As far as solving these problems is concerned, constitutional reform is just a useless irrelevancy.

### **Deficient Democrats**

Naturally, Labour wraps its irrelevant, constitutional reforms up in democratic rhetoric. Elected assemblies in Edinburgh and Cardiff, we are told, would be an extension of democracy, bringing power nearer to the people, so how can Socialists not be in favour of this?

Yes, Socialists are in favour of democracy, and socialism will be a fully democratic society, but full democracy is not possible under capitalism. Supporters of capitalism who talk about "democracy" always mean only political democracy since economic democracy--where people would democratically run the places where they work--is

out of the question under capitalism, based as it is on these workplaces being owned and controlled by and for the benefit of a privileged minority.

You can have the most democratic constitution imaginable but this won't make any difference to the fact that profits have to come before meeting needs under capitalism. The people's will to have their needs met properly is frustrated all the time by the operation of the economic laws of the capitalist system which no political structure, however democratic, can control.

It is not imperfections in the political decision-making process that's the problem but the profit system and its economic laws. And the answer is not democratic reform of capitalism's political structure but the replacement of capitalism by socialism.

As a society based on common instead of class ownership of the means of production, socialism will fulfil the first condition for a genuine democracy. Because it will be a classless society without a privileged wealthy class everyone can have a genuinely equal say in the way things are run. Some will not be more equal than others, as they are under capitalism, because they own more wealth. Socialism will be a society where the laws of profit no longer operate since common ownership and democratic control will allow people to produce to meet their needs instead of for the profit of a few as today.

The argument about elected Scottish and Welsh assemblies bringing power nearer to the people might have something in it if, even within the limited context of mere political democracy, the proposed assemblies were going to have some real powers. But they are not.

All their money is to come from the central government, and the only "power" they will have will be to rearrange slightly how the limited amount of funds they will be given is to be spent. In other words, they will have no more power than existing borough and county councils.

They will be part of the administrative arm of central government and their members will be no more than elected civil servants spending central government money. All that would happen would be the introduction of another layer of elected bureaucrats. Another trough for the professional politicians to get their snouts into perhaps, but of no significance to ordinary people.

If our rulers want to reform the machinery of capitalist government in this way, that's up to them. But spare us the pretence that it's some great extension of democracy.

### **Nasty Nationalists**

Also urging a "yes" vote are the Nationalists of the SNP and Plaid Cymru. They see the sham parliament with token powers that is on offer as a step towards their goal of an independent parliament with full powers to impose taxes and make laws.

This argument for voting "yes" cuts no ice with Socialists either. We are not nationalists--in fact we are implacably opposed to nationalism in whatever form it

rears its ugly head--and we see the establishment of an independent Scotland or Wales as yet another irrelevant, constitutional reform. One of the last things the world needs at the moment is more states, with their own armed forces and divisive nationalist ideologies.

Nationalism is based on the illusion that all people who live in a particular geographical area have a common interest, against people in other areas. Hence the supposed need for a separate state and a separate government to defend this separate interest.

This flies in the face of the facts. All over the world, in all geographical areas, the population is divided into two basic classes, those who own the productive resources and those who don't and have to work for those who do, and whose interests are antagonistic.

The non-owning class have a common interest, not with the owning class who live in the same area, but with people like themselves wherever they live. The interests of workers who live in Scotland and Wales are not opposed to the interests of those who live in England--or France or Germany or Russia or Japan or anywhere else in the world.

Nationalists like the SNP and Plaid Cymru who preach the opposite are spreading a divisive poison amongst people who Socialists say should unite to establish a frontierless world community, based on the world's resources becoming the common heritage of all humanity, as the only framework within which the social problems which workers wherever they live face today.

This is why Socialists and Nationalists are implacably opposed to each other. We are working in opposite directions. Us to unite workers. Them to divide them. So, insofar as the proposed assemblies in Scotland and Wales are a sop to nationalism--as to a certain extent they are--that would be more a reason for voting "no" than for voting "yes".

### **Useless Unionists**

So, what about voting "no"? It's tempting. After all, Socialists don't want constitutional reform (we want socialism) and a "no" vote would be a repudiation of the divisive doctrines of the narrow-minded Scots and Welsh Nats. But in the end the point at issue--a mere constitutional reform which will leave profit-making, exploitation, unemployment and all the other social problems quite untouched--is so irrelevant that it is not worth taking sides.

In addition, those leading the campaign for a "no" vote--various businesspeople and the Tory rump--are conservatives in both senses of the term. They want to leave things as they are. They don't want to change anything. We don't see any point in diverting our energies to changing the constitution but we certainly want things to change. We want people to change the economic and social basis of society and establish socialism in place of capitalism. So we've nothing in common with them.

They fear that the proposed change will be the first step on a slippery slope leading to the break-up of the United Kingdom. Maybe, though this is not the opinion of Labour and the Liberals who are also Unionists.

The leading “no” campaigners, too, are nationalists. Not of course Scottish or Welsh Nationalists, but British Nationalists, since that is what the Unionists are, spreading the poison that it is all the people in the British Isles who have a common interest against people everywhere else. But Socialists are just as much opposed to British Nationalism as we are to Scottish or Welsh or any other nationalism.

Just because we are not prepared to back the efforts of Scottish and Welsh Nationalists to break away from the United Kingdom--and vigorously oppose their efforts to split the trade union movement--does not mean that we are Unionists. We don't support the Union. We just put up with it while we get on with our work of convincing people to reject world capitalism in favour of world socialism.

### **Vote for Socialism**

So we shan't be voting “yes” or “no”. We shall, however, be voting. We'll be going to the polling station and, since they are not giving us this option on the voting paper, we'll be writing the word “SOCIALISM” or “SOSIALAETH” across it.

If you want socialism, we urge you to do the same, as a way of registering your support for world socialism and your rejection both of separatist Welsh and Scottish nationalism and of unionist British nationalism.

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