



Mervyn Jones

Scots, Welsh parties press for autonomy, threaten labor rule

During 1977 the dominant topic in British politics—at least in Parliament—will be devolution. This graceless word refers to the granting of partial autonomy to Scotland and Wales. Many English people, not to mention Europeans and Americans, are mystified as to why the issue has suddenly come to the fore.

By any definition of the term, Scotland and Wales are nations. They have been subjected to a long process of anglicization, of which the chief agents have been economic power emanating from London and an educational system based on a mainly English literature and culture. This process, at its peak in the 19th century, has been halted and in some respects reversed by a growing consciousness of nationhood.

In recent decades attachment to Britain has been weakened by a realization—especially on the part of the pragmatic, hard-headed Scots—that Britain is not a very successful or well-managed enterprise. Tied to an economy plagued by inflation and insolvency, the Scots increasingly feel that they could do better on their own. The idea has been greatly stimulated by the development of large reserves of North Sea oil off the Scottish coast. The most effective slogan of the Scottish National party is: "It's Scotland's Oil."

►Between Saudi Arabia and Senegal.

Now for the politics. The overwhelming majority of Britain's population is English, a fact that rules out a simple federal solution. At the last election, 40 million people were entitled to vote of whom 33 million were in England, 3.5 million in Scotland, 2 million in Wales, and the balance in Northern Ireland. But, by a long-standing concession, Scotland and Wales are over-represented in Parliament; Scotland has 71 and Wales 36 of the 635 MPs.

Scotland tends to vote Labor, though it returns a fair number of Tory members. Wales, since the decline of the Liberal party, has voted massively Labor; in 1966, to take a fairly recent instance, the Labor party won 32 of the 36 Welsh seats. Without the Scottish and Welsh votes, there would have been few Labor governments.

The Welsh nationalist party (Plaid Cymru) has improved its fortunes but has yet to achieve a breakthrough. At the last election in October 1974 it drew 11 percent of the Welsh vote and won three seats. The Scottish National party, however, is at breakthrough point. At that election it drew 30 percent of the Scottish vote and won 11 seats. Most of these seats were won from the Tories, while Labor just managed to retain control of its strongholds in Glasgow and the central industrial belt. Still, one industrial seat did fall to the SNP, and in a score of others the Labor pluralities were dangerously small. Given the chancy workings of the simple-plurality system, the SNP could sweep the board by upping its share of the poll to 40 percent.

The SNP and Plaid Cymru stand for complete independence—in a famous utterance, one Scots nationalist envisaged the day when "Scotland will take her place at the UN between Saudi Arabia and Senegal." The older parties take comfort from the fact that most Scots and Welsh people don't share this aspiration, or so the opinion polls indicate. But Scots in particular are inclined to vote SNP because they see the nationalists as the best champions of Scottish interests.

The SNP is a vigorous party with a youngish and active membership; it has at present more individual members than the ramshackle Labor party. And Scottish and Welsh people—more emphatically the former—do want a na-

tional authority with real powers to reform the social and economic structure.

►A block grant but no taxing powers.

The government's devolution scheme, now before Parliament, offers a Scottish Assembly with law-making powers within defined limits. (This is not a complete innovation, since Scottish law has always differed from English law in various respects.) There would be a Scottish executive, constituting a sort of government responsible to the assembly. Wales would also get its assembly, though without law-making powers, and its executive.

The main bone of contention is that the assemblies would have no powers of taxation. They would be given a "block grant" by the British treasury, which they would be free to apportion to housing, welfare or other purposes. At first glance it is hard to see why Scotland and Wales shouldn't be allowed to institute a sales tax or a gasoline duty, while every American state has that right and the Union survives. English politicians of both parties, however, consider that fiscal powers would be the entering-wedge for independence. The SNP loudly declares that the assembly and executive would have no real capacity to reshape the economy, so the scheme is a mere palliative.

If the devolution bill goes through Parliament according to plan, the assemblies will be elected in 1978. It is being suggested (notably by Tories fearful of seeing their party vanish altogether from the scene) that the election should be by proportional representation. Certainly, if the simple-plurality system is used, the SNP is likely to emerge in firm control of the assembly and executive in Edinburgh. The consequence would be a series of furious battles over the size of the block grant and probably a determined demand

for fiscal powers. Should that demand not be conceded, one would have to expect far more Scots to favor complete independence.

►Devolution as first installment.

As the parliamentary debate opens, it is pleasant to record that the Tories are in worse trouble than the Labor party. They are supposed to be in favor of the principle of devolution, but Margaret Thatcher decided to vote against the first reading of the bill, a blunder comparable to Sen. Goldwater's vote against the Civil Rights Bill. Led by former Tory leader Edward Heath, who is always glad to make life difficult for Thatcher, 30 Tory MPs voted for the first reading.

Labor also has problems; a dozen or so Labor MPs, mostly left-wingers, regard the scheme as a diversion from social issues and a threat to the solidarity of the English, Scottish and Welsh working class. But the government's first-reading majority was a comfortable 45, pretty good considering that its paper majority is only one. The SNP and Plaid Cymru are voting for devolution as an installment; the Liberals are also for it.

All is not clear sailing, however. The bill is a complicated one and the government is almost sure to meet defeat on some clauses. The issue of fiscal powers will come increasingly to the fore. Given success in the House of Commons, there is the possibility of a rougher passage in the Tory-dominated House of Lords. And another economic crisis could bring about the collapse of the government at any time during 1977. The ensuing election could well result in a Tory victory, based on the preponderant English votes, and at the same time an SNP triumph in Scotland. Both would be very bad news for Labor.

New study sparks Mexican abortion controversy

By Harvey Levenstein

The abortion controversy has exploded in Catholic Mexico, the indirect result of last year's International Woman's Year. Motivated by IWY, six female Mexican researchers undertook the first comprehensive study of abortion in Mexico. The results, published in a book called *El Aborto en Mexico (Abortion in Mexico)*, were shocking, propelling the academic book into instant "best-seller" status.

Most Mexicans know that illegal abortions are common in their country, but few dreamed that the practice was as widespread as the researchers claim. According to them, despite Mexico's laws, which forbid abortions except in cases where the mother's life is directly endangered, one out of every three Mexican women of child-bearing age has had at least one illegal abortion. One out of every five Mexican pregnancies are terminated by abortions, they say.

Abortion in Mexico says that one third of the women who have abortions require hospitalization because of severe hemorrhaging and/or infections. The medical subdirector of the government Social Security Institute says that 80,000 aborted women come to its hospitals each year, and then "only when they are on the point of death."

►Catholicism doesn't discourage abortion.

The women researchers have destroyed the myth that abortion in Mexico is the preserve of prostitutes and other single "fallen women." Sixty-five percent of the women who have abortions are either

married or live in "free unions."

Catholicism seems to be relatively ineffective in discouraging abortion in Mexico. Eighty-six percent of the women who

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had abortions call themselves Catholics.

Unfamiliarity with or unwillingness to use birth control seems to play a major role in causing the flood of abortions. Seventy percent of the women had more than four children and 52 percent gave too many children as the main reason for having abortions. Another 27 percent said that they could not afford more children.

As in many countries, there is a decided class difference in methods of abortion and their safety. Illegal abortions performed by a doctor under safe clinical conditions cost from \$320 to \$480 (U.S.). Only the middle and upper classes can afford them. The poor are forced to rely on the more dangerous methods, often inserting unsanitary devices into the uterus.

One of the most ancient methods is still common: almost 15 percent of the women aborted themselves by taking native herbs and potions. Many of the poor of this country still swear by traditional folk medicine, as do some of their better-off relatives. "When my wife seemed to be pregnant with a child that we could not afford,

we hopped on the bus down to the little village in the mountains of Vera Cruz where I'm from," said a graduate student at Mexico City's National University re-

cently. "There, my grandmother, who is the local 'curer,' gave my wife a potion." "I threw up like crazy," said the wife, "and felt sick as a dog for a few days, but the stuff really worked!"

Although exact figures on deaths due to abortion do not exist, the authors estimate that a high percentage of the deaths due to abortion are the result of bacteriological shock due to unsanitary conditions.

►A thunderous response.

There is only a small organized movement to repeal the anti-abortion laws. Those few who advocate change concentrate just as much on the necessity for better family planning programs to disseminate birth control information and devices as upon the necessity to change the anti-abortion laws.

Nevertheless, the increase in suggestions that the anti-abortion laws be changed has produced a thunderous response from the Catholic church. "Abortion is murder," said the Bishop of Mexico City in a headline-making statement. "If what is

intended is to combat the demographic explosion, the best way of doing that is through truly responsible parenthood," he said, indicating that he supported the idea of the government's program of the same name.

Although some government deputies in Mexico's feeble congress have tentatively come out for changes in the abortion laws, the President and his cabinet who control the real political power, have been notably silent on the issue.

Other public figures are trying to hedge their bets as well. The head of gynaecology and obstetrics at Mexico City's Woman's Hospital managed to grab some headlines by condemning abortion as damaging to women, without making it clear whether he meant all abortions or just illegal abortions. It could lead to permanent sterility or early menopause, he warned.

It is unlikely that President-elect Lopez Portillo will risk an open confrontation with the Church over an issue which would bring him few political benefits. Unlike Italy, there is no noisy organized woman's movement in Mexico to pressure the government. There is also no strong leftist movement goading the government into defying the church. The Mexican government party, the *Partido de la Revolucion Institucional* has only recently lived down a reputation for being anti-clerical. It is unlikely that Lopez Portillo feels strongly enough on the abortion issue to provoke another Church/State conflict over it.

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Willy Brandt, president of Socialist International, and Bernt Carlsson of the Swedish Social Democratic labor party.

Left trend stalled in Socialist International

By Bruce Vandervort

From its founding in 1889 to World War I, the Second International unified the world socialist movement. But the socialist parties split over the issue of participation in World War I and then later over support for the Russian Revolution. In 1919 the Third International was formed under Soviet leadership.

The two internationals and their successor organizations tended to be mirror-images of each other. The Third International was committed to the overthrow of capitalism, but tightly controlled by the Soviet Union and reflecting its undemocratic vision of socialism. The Second International and the post-World War II Socialist International were anti-Communist and reformist in their outlook.

But the ferment of the 1960s made it impossible to speak simply of Soviet Communism on the one side and reformist anti-Communist Social-Democracy on the other. Several European communist parties have thrown off their dependence on the Soviet Union and have re-introduced democracy as an essential component of socialism. Several social-democratic parties have opened dialogues with the communist parties and contain genuinely socialist tendencies within them.

The following report of the Socialist International's recent Geneva congress indicates some of the different tendencies within the international, but views pessimistically the prospect of completely transforming the international from the left.

Geneva. The Socialist International since its reconstitution in 1946 has been dominated by the pre-World War II generation of European social democrats who have kept it more or less firmly in the orbit of the Atlantic Alliance. As the illusions of the Kennedy years began to fade before the realities of American aggression in Indochina and counter-insurgency in Africa and Latin America, however, their position began to be threatened.

By the end of the '60s a revived European left, manifested in the anti-Vietnam

war protest movements in Scandinavia, the German Federal Republic and in the French upheaval in May-June 1968 had imposed a more independent outlook on some of the social democratic parties. This led to the formation of a moderate left within the international, united around its opposition to the old guard's Cold War policies.

In the early '70s, prospects seemed good for a renewal of European socialism and of the international. In 1971, the French Socialist party reconstituted itself with a leftwing majority. In 1972, social-democratic election victories followed in Australia, New Zealand and the German Federal Republic (where the leftist "Young Socialists" or "Jusos" played a considerable role in Willy Brandt's SPD). At its Vienna Congress in 1972, the international also seemed on the verge of coming to grips with Third World problems and the implications of detente.

But the advent of world recession in 1974-75 brought defeat to important social democratic parties and generally reversed the leftward trend in the international. As the international convened this last November for its 13th congress, it was in the wake of the defeat of the Swedish Social Democratic Labor party, its first defeat in 40 years, and an unexpectedly narrow victory by the German SPD.

Thus, despite considerable press ballyhoo to the contrary, most parties did not come to Geneva in an innovative mood. Faced with the complex issues of Eurocommunism, Third World liberation, detente, and the nature of socialism itself, the parties either did little or nothing to modify traditional international positions.

Those that wanted to continue the left direction of the early 1970s departed disappointed. "Everybody agrees that there has to be a change," a French delegate said, "but I don't think the old guard realizes that the change must be far-reaching and immediate. Sometimes I think this organization has a suicide complex."

► Dialogue with the CPs.

While European social democrats have accepted detente with communism beyond

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their borders, some have strongly opposed the attempt by European communist parties to form "common fronts" with the social democratic parties. Differences of opinion on this point produced a row last year between the SPD and the French, Spanish and Italian Socialist parties—parties that have made or are negotiating electoral alliances with the Communists.

The social democrats have since reluctantly accepted the notion that the different political situation prevailing in southern Europe makes such alliances necessary, but feelings continue to run high on this subject. Thus, Giuseppe Saragat of the Italian Social Democrats (a small party to the right of the Italian Socialists) said, "The Italian Communist party is like a snail; it can come out of its shell, but it can never deny its Leninist principles."

Saragat, whose party has been an important recipient of CIA funds over the years, went on to insinuate that PCI participation in the Italian government would lead to Soviet intervention as in Hungary and Czechoslovakia.

The final resolution, while finding the Eastern bloc countries reluctant to implement the 1975 Helsinki Accords, did commit the international to seek ways to broaden detente. And an ancient obstacle to Eastern bloc contacts was scaled down by adoption of a British Labor party motion obliging the various Socialist International-associated Eastern European socialist parties-in-exile to merge into a single body.

► Still worlds apart.

Debate on the "New International Economic Order" gave a good indication of the limits on international receptiveness to Third World initiatives. West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, who seems to enjoy his role as the international's Jimmy Cagney, dropped in briefly to let the delegates know that he thought that talking about new world economic relationships was a waste of time. If countries were facing empty coffers, it was due to bad economic management; instead of indulging in ideological speculation, they ought to be fighting inflation.

Senegal President Leopold Senghor put the case for the developing nations. Since the massive external debt of the Third World was due to the inequitable terms of trade, he argued, 50 percent of it ought to be absorbed by the industrialized countries. Also, Third World nations that spent over 20 percent of their budgets on arms should be denied foreign aid. Senghor's modest proposals (other advocates urged a total moratorium on external debts) were not seriously debated.

The upshot was a resolution calling for "further study" of the matter. French Socialist party economist Michel Rocard, however, shocked delegates by denouncing the resolution as a "botched compromise."

► Third world on parade.

Since all of the substantive issues had been covered during the economic order debate earlier, the discussion on "The Situation in the Third World" was simply intended to formalize the international's much-heralded "opening to the Third World." But, as the earlier debate had clearly demonstrated, that "opening" was more symbolic than real.

Seeking membership beyond its European base poses ideological problems for all of the tendencies within the international. To begin with, socialism of the European variety (with the possible exception of that preached by French socialists) has little appeal in the developing world; its gradualist approach to economic and social questions offers little to peoples seeking immediate national liberation and economic justice.

Therefore, most of the Third World parties admitted to the international are "socialist" in only the vaguest sense

(Michael Manley's Jamaica People's National Party would be a notable exception). Most are either left liberal formations like the Argentine Radical party or political reflections of "strongman" regimes that have given themselves a "progressive" allure, like Senghor's Senegal Progressive Union.

The international's left opposition, while it might prefer bypassing these parties in favor of closer links with the various national liberation movements, is aware that the other social democrats would never accept it. So, although the international continues to give financial and moral support to movements like SWAPO in Namibia and FRELIMO in Mozambique, their more explicitly revolutionary postures and ties with the USSR (or China) exclude them from membership.

Social democratic opposition has also been crucial as far as relations with the Arab "socialist" parties are concerned. Malta Premier Dom Mintoff's motion to admit them to the international was rejected on the grounds that the parties in question had not made formal application for affiliation. While a case for refusal could have been made on the basis of the dubious nature of "Arab socialism," the real reason for the rejection was a potential veto by the Israeli Labour party, supported by the social democrats. Largely on the insistence of Bruno Kreisky (Austria), well-known for his good relations with the Arab peoples, an amendment was adopted providing for "association" of the Arab parties with the work of the international.

► Future of the left.

Some observers saw the 13th Congress a victory for the left. The new president, Willy Brandt, after all, is more open to the left than was his predecessor, Bruno Pitterman of Austria. As well, three leading figures of the moderate left were made "super vice-presidents": Bruno Kreisky, in charge of relations with the Arab states; Olof Palme, in charge of relations with the Third World; and Francois Mitterand (France), in charge of contacts with the communist parties.

This does not add up, however, to a victory for a left bloc or position. The moderate left has always been more of an alliance of personalities than a coalition of parties. Besides, its members are agreed on only one point: a desire to rid the international of its cold war rigidities. Beyond that, there is little common ground.

For instance, the Austrian, Benelux and Scandinavian parties, like the German SPD, have abandoned class struggle in favor of welfare statism, while the French and other Southern European parties have not. This doctrinal difference is reflected in attitudes toward industrial democracy. The Northern Europeans favor a system of "co-determination," while the French and Southern Europeans are committed to "autogestion" or workers' self-management.

If a left bloc is to emerge within the international, it is not likely to come from the contemporary moderate left opposition or from an "opening" to the Third World. Instead, everything depends on the future evolution of the balance of forces within key European member parties. Some important developments to watch will be: (1) the direction taken by the Swedish Social Democratic Labour party now that it is out of power, (2) the success of the "Juso" faction within the SPD and the British Labour party left in surviving "witch-hunts" by their respective right-wing leaderships and (3) the success of the left within the French Socialist party in forcing the party's technocratic leadership to remain faithful to its Marxist program.

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