



Gwyn A Williams Land of our Fathers

Capitalism and its British state have radically restructured the economy and the working population of Wales and reshaped those regions which are its human realities. The British state, its local state apparatus and its autonomous cultural agencies are central to the process. Their net input into Wales is about 10% of its domestic product and public expenditure per head is higher than the British average on everything except housing and the police.¹ Whole sectors of industry and great tracts of the country live on the state's agencies. Virtually the entire Welsh middle class is dependent on a British state which subsidises the cultural Welsh nationalism of important groups within it.

Wales has been reshaped into a dependent branch extension of the British economy. There has been a wholesale shift out of the coal and steel which previously characterised the country into the third sector of services and administration and a massive entry of women into the workforce. Some 60% of Welsh workers are now located there; the process accelerated above the average British rate in the late 1970s and, in essentials, is continuing through the current recession, though at diminished speed. Little over a third of the working population are now in manufacturing, where multinationals are increasing in strength, foreign conglomerates controlling from a quarter to a third of the workers in some sectors. Coal and steel now account for only 2.5% and about 6% of workers respectively.

An earlier capitalism had concentrated some three-quarters of the population of Wales in the south-eastern coalfield. This unbalance persists, but social reality is now shaped by an intricate mosaic of new regions formed by different mixes of state and corporate enterprise, female labour, and cultural complexities, which work to different chronologies.² The Welsh share with their neighbours an immersion in the atomising and demobilising ideologies of consumer capitalism and they have been deeply affected further by the dissolution of the intense class and community consciousness generated by coal mining and its conflicts, by the impact of women workers on an essentially macho industrial tradition and by the unavoidable contradictions created by a minority national movement focused on the Welsh language which has achieved a peculiar prominence, largely through external and internal pressure on state agencies, in precisely those sectors of education, communication and the media, which shape and limit popular consciousness, and in which the social relations of the bourgeois hegemony are

reproduced.

Under the pressure of a capitalism and a state adjusting to crisis, south-west Wales, draining its own hinterland, is clustering as a branch dependency of the London-Bristol axis; north and west Wales are being transformed into a recreation area experiencing a major rentier colonisation, which provokes an increasingly violent crisis in national and social reaction. The new technology scatters an archipelago of intensely localised manufacturing development across the wide and emptying spaces of rural Wales and is engendering a slow and smouldering disaffection, as it dismantles a local working class and breeds a ghetto response which tends to acquire a national resonance. Rising around those who cling for their jobs to the state and the service industries is a remorselessly growing underclass of permanently unemployed and wasted human beings and a generation of young people, in town and country, dumped like rubbish. If the process continues, no decent human society is likely to survive; Wales and the Welsh, as historic entities, will disappear from the two western peninsulas of Britain which they have inhabited for a millennium and a half.

In these circumstances, it has become necessary radically to reconsider the strategy and the practice of the socialist movement in Wales.

A MARXIST UTOPIA

This calls for an exercise in Marxist Utopia. By this, I do not mean a blueprint for an unimaginable social order. I mean an analysis which follows the practice of the best political essays in the Marxist tradition: an analysis of a contemporary reality which brings into visibility a social order which is at present inconceivable, but whose contours may be detected in the very motor forces of our history, and which requires conscious and organised human intervention to bring it into reality. An analysis of this kind has to follow its own logic to the limit, in order to elaborate the practice which would govern and inform such an intervention.

This essay is the first in a sequence which attempts such an analysis of Wales and the Welsh. Wales has a national dimension; it is also a region integrated into a British economy which is itself a fulcrum of international capitalism and which is controlled by a unitary British state. The forces which play upon Wales and the Welsh are therefore very complex and, in the current crisis, every aspect of them has to be re-thought. The examination has to start

from specific problems and themes within Wales which need to be considered virtually in isolation in order to detect the logic of socialist mobilisation secreted within them. Only then can it proceed towards a total analysis which will locate this Wales within Britain in its international dimension.

It is necessary first to make some remarks about the predicament of British socialism in general which are germane to the enterprise.

The alternative strategies debated by British socialists tend to lose their purchase on reality when they discuss the assumption of power by working people which will demand, simultaneously, the imposition of a command economy and the creation of a participatory democracy. This question has been posed very sharply by Raymond Williams's recent essay on socialism and parliamentary representation.³ They falter, in particular, before the clear necessity to dismantle and transcend the unitary British state, the United Kingdom.

We will certainly need a clenched fist of power in London, but power cannot remain there. To prise the warfare state and its monstrous apparatus of surveillance and coercion off our backs and to combat and control the multi-national corporations, that power will need to move outwards to acquire a European dimension. To return to working people and to build their socialism, it will need to move inwards to the human realities of the British which are those regions within whose compass most of them live their lives.

We lack the political instrument to effect this change. Antonio Gramsci, the Sardinian who made himself an Italian and a European, was confronted in the Italy of the early 1920s with crises of socialist mobilisation and of the marginalisation and disaggregation of socialist organisations which uncannily resemble the crises which at present afflict the socialist organisations of Britain. He pointed out with some force that socialist parties come to operate in the superstructure of the capitalism they combat; its crisis is theirs. The parallel with contemporary Britain is painfully close. The class struggle in Britain runs its rake right through the heart of the Labour Party. The political organisations of British socialism shuffle into obsolescence and towards bankruptcy. What is in fact happening behind the obvious dispersal of socialist energies is that, in a hostile environment and for the first time in British history, a socialist party of potential power is struggling to be born through the cracking shells of all our parties.

One symptom is the failure of the political organisations of British socialism adequately to respond to the multiple new challenges presented by the re-formation of capitalism and its British state. They seem to lie on the edge of our line of sight. Responses come from *ad hoc* organisations which look upon our parties with repugnance and whose adherents are bored boneless by our strategies. We tend to treat as marginal problems which are in fact marginalising us.

Nowhere is this more true than in Wales which has in any case been conditioned by its massive Labour hegemony, which was the residuary legatee of the struggles of the 1920s and 1930s, to abjure independent initiative, depend upon Westminster and react to threat with ritual and routine protest. This text therefore focuses on two problems which abort the socialist mobilisation of Welsh working people, but which socialist organisations in Wales tend to treat as marginal.

One directly affects large numbers of people and indirectly affects all, is located at the heart of labour and is shared with socialists throughout Britain: women workers and the organised working class. The other is peculiar to Wales, touches only a minority directly but is located at the heart of those processes in education, communication and the media which powerfully affect our awareness and self-awareness and in which the exploitive social relations

and ideologies of the bourgeois hegemony are continuously reproduced: the Welsh language and the Welsh working class.

The socialist solutions which suggest themselves to both problems point in the same direction. They carry the essay's discourse into realms which at present seem Utopian and out of sight. It is nevertheless necessary to follow them through to their limit before we try to close in on that middle distance within which practice will penetrate current reality. For it is precisely those concepts which at present seem Utopian which must govern and direct that practice which our contemporary predicament and its socialist transcendence demand.

WOMEN WORKERS AND THE WELSH WORKING CLASS

The establishment of coal, slate and steel as the dominant industries of Wales consigned women to a supportive role. The depression which destroyed this society in the interwar years exported considerable numbers of Welsh women into servile labour in England and provoked a fierce militancy among many who had to stay at home to cope with the disaster. Neither factor materially affected what had become a traditional dependence. It has been the radical transformation of the Welsh economy since 1945 and in particular its acceleration from the 1960s which have decisively altered the balance.

In 1961 only 28% of Welsh women aged 15 and over were at work or seeking it. Government analysts expected their economic activity rate to rise more sharply than men's; they projected estimates of 43% for 1981 and 47% for 1991. In 1981, in fact, it was 56%; in South Glamorgan (Cardiff and its hinterland) it was nearly 60%; even in traditionally male Gwynedd in the north-west it was over 51%. The increase in the proportion of married women at work has been startling; over the ten years from 1971, it went up 11.5%.

In West Glamorgan (Swansea and its hinterland) between 1971 and 1981, the number of men at work fell from 100,000 to 83,000, while the number of women at work in the Vehicle Licensing Centre, shops and offices, shot up. County planners expect gender equality in number by 1991; in fact, women will almost certainly outnumber men. Similar trends can be detected in Cardiff, the communities along the southern rim of the south-eastern coalfield, throughout the coastal conurbations and, in a different form, in such hard-hit areas as Merthyr Tydfil and the Rhonddas. The transfer is under way, though more slowly, in western and northern Powys, Dyfed and Gwynedd.⁴

The additional and unwaged burden of the reproduction and maintenance of the working class itself subjects many women to part-time work and its familiar degradations: lower pay, bond labour in child care and household management, peculiar difficulties over working time and leave. In April 1981, average hourly earnings of women part-time workers were only 58% of those of full-time male workers. Between 1980 and 1981 there was a steep fall, from a quarter to a third, in the number of women part-time workers in the clothing, paper, print and publishing and electrical engineering, but an increase of 4-5% in the distributive trades, miscellaneous (largely leisure) services, communications, professional and scientific services, and of 11-15% in public administration, insurance and banking. These indications are of peculiar significance in Wales, where

¹ Brian Davies, 'Wales and the British economy', Communist Party Day School, Cardiff, 24 April 1982.

² Meticulous analysis in PN Cooke, *Local Class Structure in Wales*, University of Wales Institute of Science and Technology, Cardiff: Planning Dept Papers no 31 (June 1981).

³ Raymond Williams, 'Democracy and Parliament', *Marxism Today*, June 1982.

⁴ *County Monitors, Census of 1981* (office of Population Censuses and Surveys London 1982)



official estimates of women part-timers in 1981 ranged from 16.5% in Gwynedd to 21% for South Glamorgan.⁵

Of equal significance to Wales is the fact that, while these shifts occurred in women's part-time work, women full-time workers registered the highest percentage increase in earnings of all workers between 1980 and 1981. In 1977, the latest year for which detailed figures are immediately available, there were 998,000 people at work in Wales as workers. Of these, 390,000 were women, nearly 50%. By my provisional calculations, they were up to 42% by 1979 and, by 1981, were probably approaching 44%.⁶ The change-over is unlikely to continue at such breakneck speed, but during the coming decade women will form a majority of the Welsh working class.

A female working class

Women's work, as well as being underpaid, under-organised, subjected to gender discrimination and, for historical reasons, largely lacking in traditional working-class consciousness, has been concentrated in particular and usually despised trades. The pattern persists, but the reconstruction of capital is swiftly transforming it.

In 1977, the largest single category of Welsh workers were those in professional and scientific services, essentially educational and medical services, over 167,000 people; of these 71% were women. The third largest group were the distributive trades, with over 100,000 people of whom nearly 60% were women. Some trades have long been considered women's trades: the low paid heavy service jobs usually regarded as second class, the entertainment services where part-time work is common and declining industries such as clothing and textiles. Women are still concentrated there. Far more striking, however, is the massive entry of women, though often at a low grade, into newer white collar jobs in both industry and administration and into the new technology where multinationals are omnipresent.

In manufacturing, where the proportion of women has been traditionally low, 26-28%, Wales has now reached the British average, but there are deviations. In declining clothing, the workforce in Wales was 86% female as opposed to the British average of 75%,

while in the critical field of electrical engineering, it was 42% against a British 33%. Similar patterns are taking hold in the newer technology: chemicals, instrument engineering, paper, print and publishing; foreign multinationals are particularly prone to employ women in this field as well as in food, drink, tobacco and in specialised jobs like the manufacture of toys, games, sports equipment and leisure electronics. They are counted more dexterous and more docile.

Even more striking has been the employment of women in those critical occupations for Wales, administration and the white-collar third sector. Between 1971 and 1980, the civil service in Wales grew by 50%. Of the 30,000 and more civil servants in Wales in 1980, nearly 17,000 were women, almost 55% of the total. No fewer than 80% of the women had entered during those nine years.

The 1977 picture is a still photograph which catches a female working class in Wales in active passage into a new order. Three sectors: educational, medical-dental services and general retailing, accounted for nearly 150,000 women, 37% of all the women at work. Add four others: national and local government, retail food and drink and entertainment services and you're over 200,000, 54% of the total. Add a further five: clothing, hotels, transport and the GPO, electrical engineering and high technology manufacture for leisure and you reach 266,000, 68% of all women workers. In 1977 therefore nearly three-quarters of the women at work in Wales, whatever their status, were concentrated not only in four trades considered traditional but in ten newer white-collar trades and in the newer technology. Women are concentrating and concentrating with accelerating speed in precisely those sectors of the Welsh economy which are its growth points and those which are of overriding strategic significance.

The jobs lost in older, heavy industry will never re-appear in such numbers as to make a human difference. The new technology will advance remorselessly across this island. Under socialist and communal direction and control, it could be the agency for that ultimate leap from the realm of necessity into the realm of freedom; under capitalism it will have no such effect. The trends are irreversible and we must face the consequences.

During the 1980s the Welsh working class will become, both numerically and in strategic terms, a female working class. If attitudes, ideologies and structures do not change, therefore, it will become a working class subjected to a double servitude. To achieve socialism, therefore, women workers in Wales must win their liberation as workers; in order so to do, they have to win their liberation as women. Socialists in Wales no longer have a choice in this matter. They have to commit themselves totally and without reservation to the full programme of the socialist feminist movement.

The liberation of women workers

The demands of the socialist women's movement of necessity escalate. To enter fully into possession of their own unions, women require a revolutionary change in union practices. To establish equality at work, they require equal access to training, the end of job segregation, special action over low and part-time pay. Central to the working class response to the crisis is the women's demand for a 30-hour week for all. Above all, there has to be an assault on the Bastille of household and family maintenance and reproduction which imprisons women as workers. This attack advances through a sequence of intensifying offensives: special provision over time and the allocation of function, the ending of the married man's tax allowance and its diversion into child benefit, massive public servicing of child care, the removal of child care from gender definition, free access to abortion, to its first climax in the abolition of the family wage and therefore of the family as an economic unit.



They have a good Welsh precedent in the militancy of the near-mythical heroic age of the 1930s

This would constitute the 'abolition of the family', to employ the style of Karl Marx when he accurately described the bourgeois restriction of the franchise in France in 1849 as the abolition of democracy. The abolition of the family has been a commonplace of socialist thinking in this island since the days of Robert Owen and the Spenceans, but it would propel us into a society of which we have little conception. The programme will encounter deep and bitter resistance, by no means exclusively among men. It directly attacks the unholy alliance of capitalism and patriarchy, it runs up against the deepest emotions, it destroys received notions of sexuality. Attitudes and instincts which are considered elemental will have to be exposed as mere ideologies, the gastric juices, to quote Gramsci, of that overpowering hegemony of the exploitive ideologies which we no more perceive as ideologies than we do the force of gravity.

In Wales, as we have already learned, resistance may be peculiarly virulent. We must fight it and break it, not least within ourselves. There will be no socialism until men and women can stand upright as equals. To the immediate point, there can be no socialist mobilisation without it. It can not be done by preaching; it can only be done by pressure, action, if need be by coercion, above all by institutionalised practice to interiorise in people's minds the custom and morality of liberation.

It is important to understand and enforce, therefore, the truth that every single feature of this programme, including the 'abolition of the family', has been accepted by the British TUC, though sometimes in the small print.

Reality of course is different. It is a widespread belief in the

women's movement that trade unions have done nothing for their cause but resist it. They have good reason for the belief but it is mistaken.⁸ In 1981, there were three and a half million women workers in the trade unions, a third of the TUC membership. The level of participation is much lower. In COHSE, 78% of the membership were female in 1981 but there were no women on its executive and only 16% of its TUC delegates were women. CPSA, however, with a 72% women membership, had an executive which was 34% female and a TUC delegation which was 28%. The union with the best record, at least by repute in Wales, seems to be NUPE. With a 67% female membership, it had a 37% female executive and a 28% female TUC delegation. It also enjoyed a good reputation in terms of tone, style, militancy for social objectives and in that whole apparatus of positive discrimination, reserved seats, special units, special officers, women's conferences, which fifteen major unions have now adopted. The British TUC has a veritable armoury of such instruments; women's advisory committees with education programmes exist at the TUC, the Scottish TUC and at two regional TUCs, the North and the South-East. Continents of action remain unexplored and the critical area of the reproduction and maintenance of the working class itself stands an immaculate Everest. Nevertheless, the transformation of our own organisations is visibly under way.

West of Offa's Dyke, life moves on a different time-scale. Over the last few months no fewer than four video and television films have appeared in South Wales devoted entirely to the losing struggle of women in the trade union world.

The agencies of liberation

The Wales TUC is the nearest the Welsh have to their own working class organisation. Scarcely eight years old, its autonomy is limited. In 1980, of a recorded income of over £33,000, £19,500 was a British TUC grant. In that year, its affiliated members totalled over 580,000, a solid 59% of the Welsh workforce. It is dominated by the TGWU with 118,000 registered membership, followed by the AUEW (Engineering) with over 78,000. These two unions account for over a third of the membership. The GMWU, NALGO, and NUPE, in the 40,000 bracket, follow; together with the big two, they form 56% of the membership. After them, come the NUM and the steelworkers in the 30,000 level and USDAW over 20,000; these eight unions account for nearly three-quarters of the membership of the Wales TUC.'

In both its activity and its inertia, its myopia and its sudden bursts of imagination, in its sporadic efforts to mobilise the working class as a class and its more frequent surrender to corporatism, the Wales TUC may well reflect the ideology of most of its officials and militants. Though this year's version of its Social Plan for Wales is infinitely more radical than last's, which acquired notoriety for its acceptance of an incomes policy, it seems slow to adjust to the rapid changes in the working population it aspires to represent. In 1980 there were only 18 women delegates among nearly 350; only one woman on its 45-strong General Council (where she had one of the best attendance records). It seems fixed in a traditional image of 'the worker' as a male who puts in his forty hours a week at least and who

⁵ *Labour Research* June 1982, news brief, pp 134-135.

⁶ *Digest of Welsh Statistics/Crynhoad oo Ystadegau Cymru 1980* (Welsh Office, HMSO, Cardiff 1980) pp 71-77.

⁷ From a large and often terrifying literature, I'd select as a succinct challenge, Anna Cooté and Beatrix Campbell, *Sweet Freedom: the struggle for women's liberation* (London, 1982).

⁸ *Labour Research*, March 1982, 'Working women in the 80s', pp 60-71.

⁹ *Wales TUC/Cyngor Undebau Llafur Cymru*, Seventh Annual Report (Cardiff 1981).

outside the workplace is serviced by women, an image increasingly irrelevant to the Welsh working population which actually exists. The danger is of a drift into a progressively less representative character. It remains the heartland of the organised Welsh working class and the major objective of socialist transformation.

The central need is what it has always been; the mobilisation of working people into a working class which thinks, first, like a working class, second, like a ruling class; the elaboration of forms of organisation for the self-emancipation of the working class which will be the embryo of the forms of self-management in a socialist commonwealth. Priority in this enterprise now must go to the self-emancipation of women.

The first and no doubt most difficult task is the mobilisation of women workers to enter their unions and take possession of them. When this runs into its ceiling, as it no doubt will, they will have no choice but to create autonomous organisations inside, outside and across union borders. They have a good Welsh precedent in the militancy of the near-mythical heroic age of the 1930s when a minority of Communist, ILP, independent socialist and community militants, working in and through the National Unemployed Workers' Movement, the miners' union and community organisations, not only created the celebrated 'unemployed lodges' of *The Fed*, the South Wales Miners' Federation, but on 3 February 1935 brought 300,000 people out on to the streets in the greatest demonstrations south Wales has ever seen, against the Unemployment Assistance Act, the Slave Act of that generation, and stopped a reactionary government in its tracks for eighteen months, creating a united front which was marginalised only after strong counter-action from the Labour Party and the TUC.¹⁰

The key then was the close nexus between union, unemployed and intense community, which is precisely the nexus which no longer exists in Wales. The objective must be to recreate its equivalent for our times. To this process, women are central. The self-organisation of women at work will demand their self-organisation in those areas of experience outside the workplace which are nevertheless central to their role as workers. It will carry them into all those zones of friction between a state and the people subjected to it, where men workers, in this respect, share precisely the same predicament. The act of self-organisation by women workers will be the trigger to a wider self-organisation by working people.

Consider the resistance to a centralised state which is abrogating local self-government, consider the struggle in the DHSS offices which is rehearsing that of the 1930s in the UAB offices, consider the need of trade unions to mobilise community and wider support

Welsh Speakers in Wales 1981

Region	Population	percentage Welsh Speakers (1971 in brackets)
Gwynedd	222,000	61.2(64.7)
Dyfed	323,000	46.3(52.5)
Powys	108,000	20.2(23.7)
Clwyd	386,000	18.7(21.4)
WGlam	364,000	16.4(20.3)
MidGlam	534,000	8.4(10.4)
SGlam	377,000	5.8 (5.0)
Gwent	437,000	2.5 (1.9)
Wales	2,750,000	18.9(20.9)

Office of the Census 1982

against Tebbit, consider the myriad local and fragmented initiatives which now try to organise rescue and resistance, the co-operatives, women's aid nuclei, self-help organisations of many kinds. In a different sphere, consider the growing popular support for CND. Wales has declared itself nuclear-free. The Welsh are given to large, flatulent gestures. How do we make them real? When those missiles come, we'll have to put our bodies where our mouths are.

Community and self-organisation

Two features are common to these sporadic movements outside the political organisations; they operate largely in terms of community at the base and women are central to all of them. At the level of community, city, region, such initiatives in self-emancipation will encounter the trades councils, those celebrated regiments of officers without armies. They were once trades and labour councils, the workers' councils of the General Strike. Their purpose is to connect the unions to a wider world. They have rarely played the role of the *camere del lavoro* and the *chambres du travail* of our comrades in

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Latin Europe. Could they serve as the point of contact and interaction with the forces of traditionally organised labour, as the grit in a Utopian oyster?

Whether they can or not, it is clear that any serious effort at self-organisation by women workers, because of the strategic role of women in our Welsh communities and their struggles, would set in train that process which Karl Marx advocated when he hailed the Paris Commune of 1871 as 'the form at last discovered' of working-class self-emancipation. When the women workers of Wales assume initiative they will, of necessity and in a necessary partnership with men workers, start building little revolutionary socialist Communes.

They will be in practice re-engaging the tradition of Marx's *Civil War in France*, Lenin's *State and Revolution*, the writings of Gramsci in his isolated but creative summer of 1920, of council communism and its multiple, fragmented and generally unconscious inheritors in our day. For it is the form which the Commune-state assumed through the prism of the mind of Karl Marx which seems to me the most adequate precedent for the project which Raymond Williams has called for: the building of a structure of working people's power and socialist practice which is simultaneously a structure of command and of participatory democracy and which will be the bedrock of that socialist party, to be built in parallel, which will force a way for it.

In Wales where women are so central to the working class and to all those zones of friction between the British state and British working people, the job is very difficult but self-evident. Socialist mobilisation requires that priority be given to the self-organisation of women workers which will become, by necessary extension, a workers' self-organisation of that civil society which will be the substance of a Commune-state. It means the imposition, if necessary by coercion, of socialist principle and practice throughout our movement and throughout Wales within a socialist project for the island of Britain. That practice and those principles will arise directly out of and express the experience of a necessarily complex structure of interlocking functional, representative and directive councils which, in turn and again of necessity, will have to be geared to — 'to conform plastically to' as Gramsci would put it — the living human realities of the Welsh, which are their regions.

What is striking is that precisely the same kind of solution suggests itself to that other problem which cripples the socialist mobilisation



of Welsh working people: the Welsh language and the distinct but related problem of Welsh nationality.

THE WELSH LANGUAGE AND THE WELSH WORKING CLASS

By the time of the first language census in 1891, scarcely a half of the population of Wales were officially designated Welsh speakers. There was a very marked regional differentiation between a Welsh-speaking west and an industrialised and heavily populated south and east. At the very climax of Liberalism and the imperial economy, when a triumphant Welsh middle class, (operating largely through the medium of the Welsh language), entrenched itself in local power and created the more characteristic Welsh institutions, particularly in education, massive immigration into south Wales and a workers' revolt against liberalism found expression in the English language. The depression intensified the contradictions; it proved mortal to the Welsh language as the living language of a broad community while it bequeathed to Wales a minority Welsh-Welsh elite, largely academic, as a rival to the newly entrenched Labour hegemony which enrolled most Welsh working people in a commitment to the British perspective of Labour which was deep-rooted. The beginnings of the disintegration of that Labour hegemony in the 1960s coincided with an upsurge of a new Welsh nationalism and with Welsh language campaigns whose frequently extra-legal operations, in conjunction with pressures from the internal elite, created a network of Welsh-language institutions and made Wales officially into a bilingual country. This success, achieved against a background of the remorseless decline of Welsh, generated discontent among many English speakers and it was in some tension that many Welsh people awaited the results of the census of 1981.

At that census, some 550,000 human beings, 18.9% of the 2,750,000 population of Wales, were officially designated Welsh speakers, a loss of 2% over the previous decade. The decline in the Welsh language has slowed dramatically. Overall totals, however, mask trends which are inimical to the socialist mobilisation of Welsh working people.¹¹

The sharpest fall has been in the *Bro* itself, the western heartland of the language. It has been most severe, 6%, in Dyfed, south-west Wales, where over 46% of the 323,000 people are Welsh speaking; in such traditional strongholds as Carmarthen, Dinefwr and Llanelli, it was 8%. In Gwynedd in the north west, where over 61% of a

population of 220,000 are Welsh speaking, where the Welsh language campaigns, rooted in threatened community, have been strong and often fierce, the fall was 3.5%, a slump equalled in Powys, third most Welsh-speaking county, where over 20% of a small population of 108,000 use the language.

Within this pattern, there is intricate regional diversity. Districts in Ceredigion (Cardigan) and Gwynedd in particular have experienced a marked hardening of commitment to the Welsh language. Particular areas, sometimes defined in terms of individual villages, indeed individual streets, quarters, even pubs, have virtually seceded from British community, to create a tribal map as complicated and, in extreme cases, almost as necessary to physical safety, as a Belfast city guide.

On the other hand, while in West Glamorgan (364,000 people: 16.4% Welsh speaking) the drop has reached nearly 4%, there have been increases in the least Welsh-speaking areas. In Gwent (437,000) people where Welsh is negligible, the proportion of Welsh speakers has inched from 1.9% to 2.5%, in South Glamorgan (377,000 people) from 5% to 5.8%. The districts most affected are Cardiff, Taff-Ely and the Vale of Glamorgan. Similar upward shuffles are reported from the Alyn, Deeside and Rhuddlan districts of Clwyd in the north-east (386,000 people: 18.7% Welsh speaking) where the overall decrease was 2.7%. These increases reflect an enervating class differentiation.

In Mid Glamorgan (534,000 people: 8.4% Welsh speaking) the most populous Welsh country, veritable bastion of an English-speaking working class which nevertheless has been a Gibraltar of an English-speaking Welsh identity, the decline precisely mirrors the national average of 2%.

Through this honeycomb of two and three-quarter million people, a good third of whom are not biologically Welsh (but who characteristically provide some of the most fervid Welsh nationalists) burrow the language campaigns and those of a Welsh nation struggling to realise itself, in interaction with but often independently of, each other. They provoke reactions among the majority outside their ranks which range from warm if sceptical sympathy to near-hatred.

¹⁰ Hywel Francis and David Smith, *The Fed: a history of the south Wales miners in the twentieth century* (London 1980).

¹¹ Special report from the County Monitors, Census of 1981, summarised in *Western Mail*, 28 April 1982.

If it were possible to draw a map of Welsh socio-linguistic-political responses, it would resemble those rather desperate attempts to chart the nationalities of the Austro-Hungarian empire. Raymond Williams has said that the first priority for socialism in Britain is the recognition of complexity. In Wales, not even the mountain sheep, an appropriately curmudgeonly breed, would challenge that.

The central and crippling contradiction has been that created by the successful Welsh language campaign. Shedding most of the reactionary accoutrements of its past, spurred on by a desperate urgency and conducted largely by socialist militants in a crusade which was often as human and generous as it was nationalist, it ran into confluence with an established Welsh-Welsh elite hegemony, the minority rival to the overpowering Labour hegemony and like the latter, a Fianna Fail legacy from our imperial past. The interplay with the British state, its regional state apparatus and its autonomous cultural agencies has erected an effective Welsh-language structure in education, communication and the media, which has provoked increasingly negative reactions from the overwhelming, and overwhelmingly working class, majority.

The contradictions of national revival

Some of the contradictions have been lunatic. In Gwynedd, where Welsh is the first language of most of the people, there is a shortage of Welsh speakers among those functionaries who are the myriad points of abrasive contact between a regime and its poor, while in the south-east Wales where, in utilitarian terms, they are least needed, the provision is abundant. Bilingual road-signs ritually traverse English-speaking Gwent and sensitive scholars resign from committees over the question of whether Welsh should rank first or second upon them.

Far more serious has been the impact on those processes in education and communication through which the social relations of the bourgeois hegemony are reproduced. An English-speaking working class see the British state subsidising the Welsh language production of what to them is a middle-class minority. They see bilingual qualification requirements shutting off areas of employment. They perceive Welsh-language schools as nurseries of a new order of privileged beings who employ Welsh, and particularly an intelligently devised *Cymraeg Byw* (Living Welsh) often alien to natural Welsh speakers but intensively taught by methods borrowed from the Zionists and equipped with an apprentice freemasonry of *Dysgwyr* (learners), much as the clergy used an artificial Latin in the middle ages and as an Irish middle class uses official Gaelic. A recurrent image in the popular response focuses, for example, on the deprived areas of Cardiff, that semi-alien capital, where dedicated teachers usually non-Welsh and often socialist, struggle to save the children of the hopelessly oppressed, whose parents in many cases would like to send them to the best schools around which are the Welsh ones, and have to watch the Volvos sweep by to those schools where equally dedicated teachers, often equally as socialist, struggle to save their people and their nation and, in the process, objectively manufacture a new oligarchy to ride on already sufficiently bent Welsh working-class backs.

In this litany of complaint, there is much sheer mythology. Apologists have no difficulty in deploying statistics to prove how limited the restricted job market actually is, how similar the intake of the Welsh schools is to that of most comprehensives in Wales. This is a rather mechanical reading of social processes. In any case, it misses the real point. English-speaking Welsh people who have in the past felt secure in their Welshness complain repeatedly of an allegedly



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overbearing presence of the Welsh-Welsh in the media and in the key sectors of social communication. The legions of TV aerials trained myopically on the Mendips and Merseyside are a sufficient symptom. To the Welsh-Welsh, inured to ghetto living and lack of esteem and all too aware that broadcasting hours in Welsh, for example, are strictly limited, this is perversity; it confirms prejudices inherent from the more reactionary spokespersons of the movement.

These are all evidence of a deeper malaise, for the real issue at stake here is the objective denial of Welshness to the English-speaking Welsh.

A people and a nation

Almost as an automatic response to the success of the Welsh language campaign, the adjective Welsh is increasingly applied, outside and inside Wales, only to the Welsh-speaking component of the nation; the victims retreat into an inert and grumbling acquiescence. Welsh historians, anxious to up-date the most successful textbook in their craft, a collection of broadcast lectures, are reported to have abandoned the project when BBC Wales claimed it could not afford to publish in both English and Welsh. If true, this would represent a denial of effective access to their history to the great majority of the Welsh, already robbed of their collective memory under an old regime. An affirmation of loyalty to the Welsh nation would constitute a betrayal of the Welsh people.

At the twin and opposite pole, militants of the south Wales miners' union, the NUM of the late Dai Francis, a Communist who helped to launch both the Wales TUC and the miners' eisteddfod and was himself a member of the Gorsedd (Order) of Bards of the monoglot Welsh National Eisteddfod, refuse to attend a CND rally because they hear the dread sound of Welsh and suspect a nationalist plot. These contradictions are grotesque.

The grotesquerie is most visible on the television screen. A shadow line divides the Welsh, defined apparently by a minority language, from the rest who are denied any meaningful Welsh identity beyond the sportive and the trivial, dumped in a mid-Atlantic nonentity or treated as English. A random three week survey of the *Radio Times* records fifteen hours devoted to Wales, news programmes apart. Over ten hours were in Welsh, less than five for the residual four-fifths of the people. Now that Channel Four has been created to resolve this contradiction, BBC Wales finds it difficult to provide more programmes about Wales in English. *Sianel 4 Cymru* itself is reported to be dubbing films into Welsh wholesale. Will it display equal solicitude towards the Welsh as they actually exist?

It is difficult enough for the English-speaking Welsh, dog-paddling vigorously as they are in a marginal eddy of the great world ocean of the English language, to find effective forms of representation and the communication of their needs and identity. In this, they are an extreme and wretched symptom of the general crisis of representation, which no parliamentary system or its derivatives can effectively resolve.

The consequence is an intensifying polarisation which is proving fatal to Welsh socialism. Attitudes and ideologies long present among some of the Welsh-Welsh have for many years now bred intellectual clerisies whose dedication and sensitivity towards the Welsh language and its culture have been matched only by their brutal and insensitive arrogance towards their fellow Welshmen and women who do not use it. These have found an extreme current expression in the movement *Adfer* (Reconstruct) and its intellectual fellow-travellers who intend to build a monoglot Welsh Gaeltacht in a western *Bro* and to reconstruct a shrunken but ethnically pure economy and society on this putatively autarkic base. This would

eliminate four-fifths of the Welsh from a Welsh nation, which is the precise intention of some of the spokespersons, and it spawns mutual hatred.

At the other end of the spectrum, Welsh workers are railroaded and self-railroaded through a Welsh Labourism which knows little and cares less about the Welsh-Welsh or indeed about the history of the Welsh, but uses a cosily familiar language of internationalism which lacks all purchase on reality and in particular on the reality of the European Left, into the British chauvinism lurking on the Labour Left and into imprisonment in the myth of the Westminster parliament, in social democracy or, for dissidents, in the bastard British Gaullism of many Bennites.

Adfer and chauvinist British Labourism in Wales are the twin and unpleasant faces of the same petty-bourgeois coin.

Towards the liberation of the Welsh

There is only one way to transcend this crippling contradiction in a socialist manner. The effective regeneration of socialism in Wales requires an effective assertion of the Welshness of the English-speaking Welsh. To achieve this, it is necessary to deny the capitalist

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definition of Wales, which defines it out of existence and to deny that form of British socialism which in practice accepts that capitalist definition and works out from it. It is necessary to assert Wales.

The socialist movement in Wales has therefore to make a commitment, as total as its commitment to the self-liberation of the women workers of Wales, to the Welsh nation, to the Welsh language and to the right of English-speaking Welsh people to be Welsh, to achieve full and institutional realisation of that Welshness, including the right to refuse to learn Welsh and not to suffer in consequence.

It goes without saying that this will be murderously difficult. It runs against the grain of three generations of socialist struggle in Wales which was often a struggle against the more reactionary forms of Welsh nationalism. Over and above any personal response to the terminal crisis of a people and a nation which must in the last resort be beyond reason, there is an objective reality. The campaigns for the Welsh language and a Welsh nation, inadequate and divisive though these are when conducted in terms of an organic Welsh nationalism, are radically changed in genesis, personnel and ideology. They form one important element in that broad democratic alliance which, in achieving socialism in Britain, has to dismantle and transcend the unitary British state of which British Labourism has been such a buttress and to build socialism in an island of Britain which is a European island, around the human realities of that Britain which are its regions.

If capitalism in Britain lives, Wales and the Welsh as historic entities will die and the working class movement of Wales will be

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shuffled out of history. No national movement which is parasitic upon or imbricated in the capitalist mode of production can possibly secure the production and reproduction of a Welsh people and a Welsh nation.

But if socialism is a necessary condition, it is not a sufficient one. It will not solve the problem of a minority Welsh-language culture among an indifferent or hostile majority. To put the problem in its minimal objective terms: Welsh speakers must have their democratic rights. To be real, those rights cannot remain merely formal, they require positive discrimination. At a certain point, as we have learned, discrimination crosses the shadow line and becomes an attack on the rights of the English-speaking Welsh.

TOWARDS THE COMMUNE OF WALES

One answer surely lies in building a socialist structure in Wales within the command and participatory structures of a socialist Britain, from the human realities of Wales which are its regions, never more real than in terms of the language the people use.

In many areas of western Wales, under a socialism which assumed a Commune form, it should be possible to create socialist community around a Welsh language which had been made the official language of the region, with all the social policy corollaries which would stem from such a decision, serviced by the new technology and an all-Wales plan. This would clearly require, if only to protect minority rights, an interlocking structure of functional councils building up into a regional Commune which would need to integrate into a Commune of Wales.

In the many intermediate areas of Wales which are subject to development by agencies of the British state, small-scale industrialisation often based on the new technology has been accompanied by substantial immigration of key personnel. The native working class

has generally been dispersed, either into emigration or into petty self-employment dependent on a local bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie which are themselves often rivals of an immigrant bourgeoisie as clients of the state; the Welsh language has become a resource of protective self-definition. A socialist mode of production under workers' control and self-management has to be established within an all-Wales project, if necessary by coercion, and the Welsh language made ordinary again. Once more, this demands council communism and the Commune form.

At the level of Wales itself, the central necessity is a socialism for Wales whose overriding practice is derived from regional realities and admits working people to power. Equally central is the establishment of a Welsh nationality which is territorial and which makes everyone who lives in Wales and commits herself or himself to Wales, Welsh. Linguistic nationalism will dissolve us all into warring tribes. Within a territorial nationality, it should be possible to evolve creative and equitable policies for all the languages of Wales, not only the two major tongues, but those Asian, African, Caribbean and European languages and cultures which have made a home here. The Welsh language will without doubt play a special role, occupy a special place and enjoy a special nurture; the resources already exist. But socialist policies towards the Welsh language in say Gwynedd will have to be very different from, perhaps the exact opposite of, those for say Gwent, in order to be socialist.

Towards a socialist republic

A socialist solution to the problem of women workers in Wales and to the problem of the Welsh language both point in the same direction. What they indicate is that working class self-management in Wales cannot assume parliamentary form. The inadequacy and illusion of parliamentary form are peculiarly patent in Wales where the establishment of such an assembly for the whole country would simply institutionalise its contradictions. The Westminster parliament is no doubt essential to the initiation of the socialist reconstruction of Britain and could itself serve as an instrument of transition. But as far as Wales is concerned, one institution of the Westminster species is sufficient for one small island. Wales needs a parliament like a hole in the head. What Wales needs is a revolutionary socialist Commune.

It will be a difficult and complicated structure to build and it will have to negotiate its place within the socialist mobilisation of working people in Britain, and within or in relation to, that socialist party which will be the mobilising, directive, and if need be, coercive instrument of change. It will demand sacrifice, perhaps suffering, probably a fall in our standard of living, for we will inherit a devastated land and a demoralised people and will need to establish those priorities which Aneurin Bevan said were the language of socialism. We have no choice. The alternative for Britain is barbarism, for the Welsh, historic extinction.

The conclusion towards which this essay in Marxist Utopia drives is inexorable. This, too, runs against the grain of what we in Wales have inherited as socialism. It lifts the argument to a different and even more difficult terrain which will have to be explored in separate essays. It is even more Utopian and out of sight than other prescriptions suggested by this mode of analysis. It is precisely its concepts, however, which need to inform and direct socialist practice in the Wales of the present. For it has become evident to me in this, the worst crisis which my people, my nation and my socialism have faced, that the only honourable and worthwhile objective, however distant it now seems, for a Welsh socialist or a socialist in Wales who commits herself or himself to Wales, is a socialist republic of Wales, anchored among its sister socialist republics of the island of Britain, themselves anchored in their European reality. •