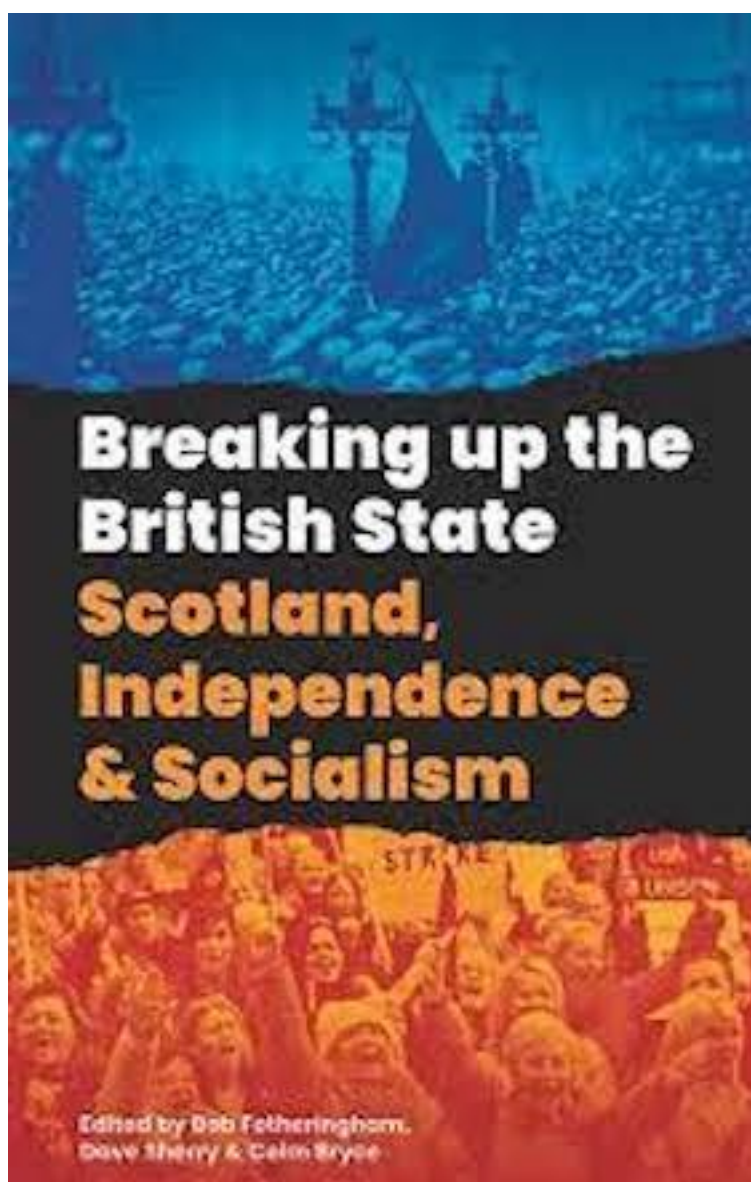


# THE SWP AND SCOTTISH INDEPENDENCE

Allan Armstrong reviews  
*Breaking up the British state –  
Scotland, Independence & Socialism,*  
editors, Bob Fotheringham, Dave Sherry and Colm Bryce



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## Introduction

The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) has recently published a book entitled *Breaking up the British State – Scotland, Independence & Socialism (ButBS)*<sup>1</sup>, edited by Bob Fotheringham, Dave Sherry and Colm Bryce. This book has an extended introduction and nine chapters on a variety of Scottish-related topics. It includes a lot of interesting material, particularly on Scottish trade union struggles, racism and anti-racism in Scotland, and on the SNP government's neo-liberal (with a social bent) record.

This review of *BuBS* is in two parts. The first part, *Breakin' up is so hard to do*,<sup>2</sup> examines the thinking and theories which have led to the SWP adopting Scottish independence. It points to some of the *ButBS* shortcomings, when applied to the political situation we confront today. The UK is facing a long-term crisis. The majority of the British ruling class now give their backing to Boris Johnson's authoritarian populism. They are imposing a reactionary unionist clampdown on the existing 'Devolution-all-round' and Irish 'Peace Process' settlement. This was put into place, after 1997, when neoliberal New Labour (and later David Cameron's Conservatives) adopted a liberal unionist strategy to maintain the UK in the face of recent challenges, particularly in Ireland and Scotland. This led to the devolution referenda in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and the referendum in the Republic of Ireland, which dropped its constitutional claim over Northern Ireland.

British Labour, which has always been divided between liberal and conservative unionist approaches to the UK, is now further divided on national lines too. Only in Wales does Labour still cling to a liberal unionist, 'extend devolution' agenda. For the UK as a whole, and in Scotland in particular, Labour has become conservative unionist, unable to challenge Johnson's undoing of New Labour's liberal unionist settlement.

But constitutional nationalists, particularly the SNP, have also been stymied. Previously they were able to push liberal unionists further along the devolutionary road, and even obtain IndyRef1. Today, constitutional nationalists, like Nicola Sturgeon, whilst putting on a better display of opposition than the liberal unionists, are also thwarted by reactionary and conservative unionists who make no real concessions.

*ButBS* ignores the underlying nature of the UK's unionist and imperialist state. This state is based on the sovereignty of the Crown-in-Westminster, with its armoury of anti-democratic Crown powers. *ButBS* also doesn't recognise the political nature of the changing strategies, liberal, conservative and reactionary unionist,<sup>3</sup> the British ruling class has adopted to maintain its direct control over

the UK and its indirect control over the Republic of Ireland. The first part of this review goes into the political reasons why the SWP is unable to devise an immediate republican, ‘internationalism from below’ strategy’ to resist Johnston’s reactionary unionists and to offer an alternative to the constitutional nationalists’ floundering attempts to bring about constitutional change.

There is also a deep-seated economism to the thinking behind *ButBs*, which leads its contributors to prioritise trade union struggles. They don’t appreciate the issue of oppression, and the nature of the democratic political struggles arising from this. They ignore the issue of alienation, and the cultural resistance this has given rise to in Scotland. This review highlights the significance of these issues in the ongoing struggle for Scotland’s self-determination.

*ButBS* upholds what it sees as Lenin’s theory of national self-determination. This claim is found to be wanting as it misses the most obvious parallel. Lenin looked to the case of another unionist state – Swedish Norway. By any international comparison Norway was low on oppressed nation criteria, but nevertheless, was denied the democratic right of national self-determination by the Swedish imperial and unionist state. The SWP’s failure to ground support for Scottish self-determination upon the democratic principle of opposition to oppression (even if this has not yet become overt oppression) leaves *ButBS* dependent on less firm grounds in its support for Scottish independence. This part of the review concludes by looking at contested arenas where such debates are already taking place.

The second part of this review, *To party or not to party?* will look into the SWP’s long-standing claim that it provides the Socialist party alternative to the constitutional parties - particularly the social democrats, be they Labour or the SNP. Social democracy has changed its meaning over time<sup>4</sup>, and can now mean little more than a commitment to state intervention in the running of the economy. The SNP adopted such social democratic thinking under Alex Salmond. This has been taken further under Nicola Sturgeon. Far from being incompatible with neo-liberalism, this amounts to a social neo-liberalism, first developed in the wider UK under New Labour.

The second part will also take up the issue of political organisation raised in *ButBS*. It looks at why *ButBS* is muted in making any party claims for the SWP. It makes a criticism of the wider social democratic legacy, which has had such an impact on the British Left. Whilst wanting to reject British Labourism, *ButBS* is still mired in an acceptance of much Left social democratic thinking.

The SWP is one of the larger British political organisations claiming to be revolutionary socialist and Marxist. It also adheres to what it considers to be

Leninist methods of organisation. Therefore, in upholding the need for a revolutionary party, *ButBS* contributors want to embrace Vladimir Lenin (and Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Rosa Luxemburg and Leon Trotsky too). In an attempt to appear orthodox, *ButBS* uncritically invokes the Bolsheviks' 1917 Declaration of Rights. This declaration addressed the oppressed nations in the new state inherited from the Tsarist Russian empire. However, for various reasons, this declaration has not left Socialists a legacy which we can champion today. The Bolshevik's failure to embrace an 'internationalism from below' strategy contributed to this.

Therefore, the second part of this review concludes by advancing the case for a different sort of party - a socialist republican party, developing the strategy of 'internationalism from below' first promoted in these islands by James Connolly and John Maclean. And they were part of a wider tradition, with representatives in Poland and Ukraine too. Their thinking and strategies were to be tested in the 1904-7 and 1916-21/3<sup>5</sup> International Revolutionary Waves. Their thinking retains considerable relevance today, especially when some Socialists, understandably anxious to oppose the imperialist designs of the US and British ruling cases, end up giving support to the spurious anti-imperialist claims of Vladimir Putin's Russia, a declining imperialist power, and Xi Jinping's China, a rising imperialist power.

I have written an earlier and fuller analysis of the IS/SWP (and other significant Left political organisations in Scotland) and their relationship to the issue of Scottish self-determination, in my tribute to Neil Davidson.<sup>6</sup> Neil was an SWP member from 1978-2014. I have used the same method in this article of adding substantial footnotes, which further develop points made in the main text, and also provide examples from my own direct political experience and writings.

## **Part One - "Breakin' up is so hard to do"**

### **1. Murray Armstrong, one-time IS and SWP member, reviews *ButBS* for *bella caledonia***

Murray Armstrong has drawn the attention of the wider fragmented Scottish Left to *ButBS*<sup>7</sup> in his review in *bella caledonia*.<sup>8</sup> In the 1970s, Murray was a member of the International Socialists (IS), the precursor to the SWP. He moved from Glasgow to become an SWP organiser in Coventry. He later resigned from the SWP. He went on to become an associate editor on *The*

*Guardian*. Upon retirement, Murray turned his attention back to Scotland and has written two well received books on Scottish history.<sup>9</sup>

Murray's review of *ButBS* outlines many of the book's arguments, including a reasonable claim that it provides "a near comprehensive history of modern industrial relations in Scotland".<sup>10</sup> He is right to suggest that any reader, new to Scottish Left politics, would learn quite a lot from this book. Murray's interest in "modern industrial relations" partly reflects his own involvement in the events of the 1970s period.<sup>11</sup> However, Murray is perhaps also hinting at the underlying theme of *ButBS* - the primacy of economic struggle (sometimes to be supplemented by movement struggles).

But Murray also states that *ButBS* contains "ten lengthy critiques {which seem to amount to a} 400-page manifesto from Scottish members of the Socialist Workers Party. In political terms a manifesto is usually drawn up by a party or other organisation for standing in parliamentary or local elections. But any reading of *ButBS* will show that this is not the aim. Indeed, the book displays a pronounced tendency to stand back from electoral activity and leave that to the SNP or Alba, whilst criticising those who on the Left who follow these two parties.<sup>1</sup> There is no indication of the need for a specific Socialist party to stand independently in the electoral arena. Instead, there is division of labour. The nationalist parties stand in elections, and Socialists work in the trade unions and the movements.

Although this review is primarily a critique of the SWP, there are also former SWP members who have been drawn into Scottish national politics. Indeed, some have flipped from the SWP's one-time Left British unionism to the Scottish nationalism of the SNP and its breakaway, the Alba Party, hoping to push them Leftwards. Graham Campbell, currently the Afro-Caribbean-Scottish SNP councillor for Springburn/Robroyston, was until quite recently a member of the SWP, albeit always a dissident. Chris Bambery (ex IMG, ex SWP and Counterfire) became the parliamentary secretary, first to the SNP MP George Kerevan (ex-IMG, ex-Labour and now Alba) and then for the dissident SNP MP, Joanna Cherry. And the person who organised behind-the-scenes to set up Alba, is another ex-SWP member, the documentary film maker, Laurie Flynn.

However, there are also a number of SWP breakaway organisations in Scotland. The International Socialist Group (ISG) was set-up in 2011, but later dissolved. Some former members favour maintaining a leadership hidden behind a 'think tank' mask - *conter*. Others, who left the SWP between 2012-13, formed the International Socialists Scotland (ISS). When Neil Davidson left the SWP in 2014, forming the all-Britain rs21, ISS politics became more influenced by his

thinking. And some SWP members, including Neil Faulkner (and now ex-Counterfire too), who also broke away are now in Anticapitalist Resistance, along with Socialist Resistance (ex-IMG).<sup>12</sup> But if you go to these organisations' websites, there is no explanation of the debates which led to their breaks from the SWP, nor indeed any acknowledgement of each other. Despite their apparent mutual non-recognition, these organisations retain some of the old SWP politics and its methods, if still unacknowledged.

For those new to politics, such small organisations may appear to be marginal, and not justify any attention. But they have had some influence on the Left in the Scottish national movement, in the Radical Independence Campaign (RIC), All Under One Banner (AUOB) and Now Scotland (NS). Some rs21 members have also been also given a voice in *conter*. The arguments made by these organisations and individuals are also sometimes taken up by others.

Murray Armstrong and others have also written for *bella caledonia* (independence, self-determination. autonomy). This is the best of the pro-independence blogs, addressing political, social, economic and cultural matters. Therefore, in the hope that Socialists can regain the more central position, which we once held in Scottish self-determination struggles, this review examine some of the theories and arguments put forward, not just by the SWP, but also accepted by its dissidents and breakaways, to try and see what is required to move beyond their limitations.

*ButBS* points to the political significance of the emergence of the non-partyist, All Under One Banner (AUOB)<sup>13</sup> and makes an appeal for Socialists to join Now Scotland (NS). NS has emerged from AUOB. It is not an SWP controlled front organisation. In the recent NS internal elections, SWP candidates openly stood under their own banner. And some SWP candidates were elected, but others were not. And, as most Socialists with any experience on the Left well know, this latter outcome is not something that ever happens in the SWP's own front organisations! In these, any important decisions have already been taken behind-the-scenes by the SWP central committee. Therefore, the SWP's openness in the NS internal elections is to be welcomed.

NS originated in AUOB. AUOB's capacity to mobilise tens of thousands, the majority workers, means that Socialists should indeed participate.<sup>14</sup> But AUOB and NS act primarily as pressure groups confining themselves to providing the muscle for the SNP (and/or Alba's) immediate constitutional aims. SWP and *ButBS* want AUOB and NS to appeal to trade unions to mobilise workers in support of IndyRef2. It also wants them to raise social issues. But there is silence on any immediate political demands, e.g. abolishing the Crown Powers



(by encouraging democratic defiance) and a call for a Constituent Assembly<sup>15</sup> (taking an immediate democratic republican approach).

Therefore, my review, whilst acknowledging the positive features of *ButBS*, will adopt a more critical approach than Murray's. There is a lot of material in *ButBS* which could contribute to necessary debates.<sup>16</sup> These could lead to a higher political synthesis and to a more positive approach than the 'Maginot Marxist' defence of entrenched positions, which so often passes for debate on the Left. I would like to bring members of the SWP and its breakaways into a wider debate. But should this not prove possible, I would hope to broaden the discussions and debates to others on the Left, not only in Scotland, but throughout these islands and beyond.

## **2. Setting the scene – the SWP from anti-devolution to pro-devolution, from anti-independence to pro-independence**

The introduction to *ButBS* is written by Angela McCormick and Glasgow SWP organiser, Keir McKechnie. McKechnie also wrote the SWP's last significant contribution on Scotland, the pamphlet entitled *Scotland – Yes to Independence, No to Nationalism (S-TtINtN)*, published in 2013, in the context of IndyRef1.<sup>17</sup> This was a less substantial affair, very much a hasty product of the SWP's desire to sign up to the latest movement the leadership wanted to throw the organisation into.<sup>18</sup> A series of arguments were presented to justify SWP support for Scottish independence, but the fact that up until 2010 the SWP had opposed this was not mentioned!

There is nothing wrong with having to change your mind in the light of new circumstances, but to gain any sort of credibility, especially in the wider movement for Scottish self-determination, such changes need to be clearly explained and adequately theorised. *S-YtINtN* certainly did not do this. I wrote a critique, *Riding two horses at once – the SWP and Scottish independence*.<sup>19</sup> I also met McKechnie at one of the IndyRef1 events. He said he might write a reply. No such reply was ever forthcoming.

But *ButBS* now offers a more developed reasoning for the SWP's relatively newfound commitment to Scottish independence, and its current role in the Scottish independence movement. However, despite some advances, contributors still display thinking which leads to the poorer arguments, and which undermine the better arguments found in this book.

Back in 1975, when the SWP was still the IS, its founder member, Tony Cliff, had tried to persuade a Scottish aggregate meeting in Glasgow that support for

greater Scottish devolution was the anti-Tory course to adopt.<sup>20</sup> Edward Heath had been replaced from the Right by a new leader, Margaret Thatcher. She opposed Scottish devolution. The SNP had won 11 seats at Westminster in the October 1974 election. Socialists and the Labour movement needed to face up to this new challenge. A part of the Labour movement, and especially a key section of the Left led by the CPGB, with its strong influence in the STUC, had adopted Scottish devolution. So, Cliff argued that the IS should side with this Left and support Scottish devolution against the Tories and equivocal Labour politicians.

However, leading IS Glasgow shop-stewards, Peter Bain and Jimmy McCallum, looked beyond any transient party politics (after all Heath, when in opposition, had committed himself to some form of Scottish devolution in his Perth Declaration of 1968). Instead, Bain and McCallum looked to the British state<sup>21</sup>, arguing that it represented a historical gain which united the British working class. Scottish devolution would break up that unity. This was also linked to their opposition to the CPGB's support for a Scottish Assembly, which was seen as contributing to the popular front attempt to organise an all-class, Scottish opposition to the closures at Upper Clyde Shipbuilders (UCS) during the 1971 Work-In, instead of focussing on the all-Britain working class overthrow of the Tories.<sup>22</sup> Anti-Toryism was deeply held by both sides in this IS debate, but Bain's and McCallum's arguments carried the day.

Soon the IS became the SWP and, in the run up to the 1979 Devolution referendum, began to promote the slogan 'Revolution not Devolution'. Thus, the SWP contributed in its own small way to defeating Scottish (and Welsh) devolution, but instead of revolution we got Thatcher! Shades of their more recent support for 'Lexit, Yes, EU No', which contributed in its own small way to the rejection of the EU (in England and English-speaking Wales anyhow) in the 2016 EU referendum. But instead of a 'Left' Leave, with a Trade Union & Socialist Coalition<sup>23</sup> - never much of a likelihood - or later a Jeremy Corbyn led government, we got Theresa May and then Boris Johnson!

With regard to Scottish independence, it wasn't until 2010, that the SWP could finally return to the late Cliff's way of thinking back in 1975. By this time, support for Scottish independence was now definitely anti-Tory. The SWP had already made a U-turn from its 1979 opposition to Scottish devolution and supported New Labour's constitutional proposals against the Tories in the 1997 referendum. But by the 2012-14 IndyRef campaign, following 14 years of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown-led government from 1996-2010, the SWP was less willing to tail-end Labour on political issues. And, as it soon turned out, the new Miliband-led Labour shared the same oppositional view over Scottish independence as the Tories anyhow. So, for the SWP, support for anti-Tory Scottish independence could now be adopted.

The CPGB and Militant had given their support to Scottish devolution long before the SWP. The CPGB breakaway, the Communist Party of Scotland (CPS) and Scottish Militant Labour (SML) had also given their support to Scottish independence long before the SWP. For both sides – pro- or anti-Devolution, pro or anti-Independence - anti-Toryism figured large in their thinking. But this was supplemented by a testing of the ‘mood music’ of Scottish workers. Were workers becoming more nationally conscious and was this a reflection of a shift to the Left? And was the SNP, its leadership with very different class aims, able to siphon of this potential, because Socialists had not addressed this Scottish Question satisfactorily?

The SWP has not really advanced much beyond this way of thinking. *ButBS* and the earlier *S-YtINt* silence, over the SWP’s late adoption of support for Scottish devolution and Scottish independence, seems to reveal some embarrassment on their part. Despite using the many of the same underlying methods as the old CPGB and Militant/Socialist Party, the SWP had misread Scottish workers’ ‘mood music’. Newer younger recruits may be unaware of the SWP’s past history, but other Left political organisations, whether pro- or anti-independence, and indeed quite a few SNP members, all working in a politicised Scottish independence movement, well know the SWP recently opposed Scottish independence.

Thus, the CPGB, SML and SWP, using anti-Toryism and testing the ‘mood music’ of Scottish workers, have found themselves at different points along a timeline, in providing support for greater measures of Scottish self-determination. Today, as the deepening crisis of the UK state exposes its national cracks in Wales too, we are witnessing the same social democratic-style, political tail-ending on constitutional or democratic issues from these organisations. None have yet made the leap to supporting Welsh independence.

The CPB,<sup>24</sup> the Socialist Party (still of England and Wales) and the SWP still support British liberal unionist, Welsh devolution. But, as in Scotland, it is likely that these organisations will be pushed further by events arising from the wider anti-democratic, imperialist and unionist nature of the UK state. This state is currently in the hands of Johnson’s Tories’ authoritarian unionists trying to impose a reactionary unionist clampdown. Wales (along with the English regions) gets a passing mention in *ButBS*.<sup>25</sup> A little more attention is given to Northern Ireland/Ireland. But there is no deeper analysis, which could contribute to taking on the British ruling class’s strategy for maintaining the Union. They have an all-UK, and indeed an all-islands strategy, to maintain their power.

In going on to address the current situation in Scotland, *ButBS* shows no recognition of the need for Socialists to make our own politically independent, immediate democratic challenge to the existing UK state set-up, nor to the SNP leadership's planned 'Indy-Lite' under the Crown, City of London, British High Command and NATO. Any new constitutional proposals are left to the Scottish nationalists - SNP or Alba. *ButBS* proposals see Socialists largely confining our activities to offering advice about the sort of economic and social policies the nationalists should adopt to win over the working class to their independent Scotland. This is backed by calls for action to exert pressure on the nationalist parties. AUOB and NS are the chosen vehicles to achieve this. Then, after independence, it seems that, as Socialists we can then better advance working class aims and claims.

But there is no historical precedent for this. Possession is 9/10 of the law. Nationalist parties, which win independence, complete their leaders' own national project by creating a consolidated ruling class. They do this by bringing on board some of their former anti-nationalist adversaries. No matter how much the winning of independence depends on the actions of the exploited and oppressed, they are always ditched by the nationalist leader. We have seen this, for example, in Ireland, India and South Africa.

Thus, the SNP leadership already shows a preference for working with business leaders and senior public service managers, even when they are unionist. This has been shown when these bosses come into conflict with workers far more likely to have voted for Scotland's independence.<sup>26</sup> This is driven by the SNP leaders' desire to develop a new Scottish ruling class. The appointment of anti-working class business leaders and neo-liberal supporting academics to the SNP government's Sustainable Growth Commission and post-Recovery Covid-19 Plan team is another indication of this.

*ButBS* can provide no real answers as to how the SNP leadership can be challenged politically now. This weakness is based on a deeper problem. *ButBS* provides no fundamental theoretical and historical analysis of the nature of the UK state, and its changing relationship with its constituent units - England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland (Ireland in the past). Nor does it examine the politics we confront, and the significance of the changes from social market, then neo-liberal and now on to authoritarian national populist politics. Nor are these politics' changing connections to liberal, conservative and reactionary unionism recognised. And *ButBS* offers no immediate programme, a long-standing feature of SWP politics, where having a programme is seen as an impediment to the political U-turns often made by the SWP leadership<sup>27</sup>.

Although, in the past, the SWP has never been shy about promoting itself as THE revolutionary party, today it is more chastened, after all its splits. *ButBS* mentions SWP members' role in trade union struggles and the movements, sometimes in its own front organisations, but tends to fall back on the need for Socialists (undefined) to participate in these struggles. Thus, the contributors provide no clear indication of the SWP's role in today's democratic, political and constitutional struggles in Scotland.

*ButBS* does deal with other parties claiming to be revolutionary socialist, particularly the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) and its successor, the Communist Party of {the no longer so Great} Britain (CPB), and Militant and its successor, the Socialist Party (SP).<sup>28</sup> They make some political criticisms of these organisations. These cover their roles in industrial<sup>29</sup> and the anti-poll tax struggles,<sup>30</sup> and in the campaigns for greater Scottish self-determination. But *ButBS* is silent about some of the SWP's own shortcomings in these struggles.

### **3. The SWP, some of its breakaways, IndyRef1, the Radical Independence Campaign and the problem with 'national exceptionalism'**

Between 2012-14, the SWP didn't have a very good IndyRef1. Back in 2006, it had followed Tommy Sheridan in the creation of his vanity party, Solidarity. This proved to be a Socialist dead-end. Solidarity's populist Scottish nationalist politics acted as a precursor for Hope Over Fear and the 'max-the yes vote', Action for Independence. These have now found their home in another vanity party, Alba. This is led by Alex Salmond. However, somewhere along the road, the SWP left Solidarity, recognising that its own then Left British unionism was making little impact in an increasingly populist Scottish nationalist organisation.

But in 2010, the SWP was also hit by another political bombshell. As a result of its equally dubious role in George Galloway's vanity party, Respect, in England and Wales, the SWP experienced a major split. This breakaway led to the formation of Counterfire, led by two of its most seasoned operators, Lindsay German and John Rees. These two also enjoyed close relations to the CPB, which was still influential in trade union bureaucracy circles. With such influences, Counterfire has continued with many of the SWP's and CPB's anti-democratic, frontist methods.

However, a Scottish dimension soon opened up, as recent leading SWP operator but now Counterfire member, Chris Bambery, gave his support to another SWP breakaway. This was the youthful International Socialist Group (ISG), confined to Scotland. Its members were inspired by the international events of 2011. The ISG initially opposed the SWP's more overtly popular front and routinist methods.

But the ISG backed the Coalition of Resistance, initiated by Counterfire, another popular frontist and Broad Left attempt in the trade union arena, but with a more Left populist and media savvy approach. However, in an already crowded field (the CPB, SP and SWP), this proved to be abortive. But then the ISG struck gold. In 2012, the SNP government was about to launch IndyRef1. The SNP leadership had just forced support for NATO through its October conference. The ISG overcame the previous deeply damaging SSP/Solidarity split in Scotland and attracted many outraged SNP members and some now ex-members. The ISG launched the well-timed Radical Independence Campaign (RIC) at an 800 strong Glasgow conference on November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2012.<sup>31</sup>

RIC became a widely supported organisation. RIC had local groups the length of Scotland and international members and supporters too. There were also three openly declared political affiliates. These included the Scottish Greens, Commonweal (increasingly an SNP orientated pressure group, promoting Nordic-style, social democratic politics) and the Republican Communist Network (RCN)<sup>32</sup> (originally formed as a platform in the SSP). RIC also had several undeclared supporting organisations, including the SSP (but whose participation was subordinate to their work in the SNP front, Yes Scotland), Socialist Resistance's members in Scotland, some of the Democratic Left,<sup>33</sup> the SWP, and some anarchists too.

The ISG did not go for open political affiliation. Its members preferred to use their control of office bearer posts to influence things. This was one aspect of SWP politics they have retained. The ISG was also given support by leading and well respected SWP theoretician, Neil Davidson - but he was now an SWP dissident. But just to make things worse for the SWP, it was soon overwhelmed by the Comrade Delta affair<sup>34</sup>. Eventually, this proved too much even for the very loyal, but now dissident Neil. After others had already left the SWP, he helped to form rs21 in 2014.

Bob Fotheringham lumps together “Hope Over Fear, Radical Independence Campaign, Women for Independence, Labour for Independence, the Socialist Workers Party and a myriad yes groups” as key players in IndyRef1.<sup>35</sup> This could not be said of Hope Over Fear<sup>36</sup> and certainly not of the SWP. However, there was one possible arena in which the SWP could have made more impact in InfyRef1. The SWP is an all-Britain organisation, which has its own International, the International Socialist Tendency (IST). The SWP could have organised meetings and solidarity rallies in England, Wales and Ireland (especially with its SWP links to the Irish Socialist Workers Party<sup>37</sup> and its front organisation, People before Profit (PbP;),<sup>38</sup> and in Greece (where it is part of the revolutionary Left alliance, Antarsya)<sup>39</sup>. However, it was left to others in RIC, particularly individuals from the ISG and the RCN<sup>40</sup>, to address meetings and rallies in

England, Wales, Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, Catalunya, Euskadi, Quebec and Greece.

The ‘national exceptionalism’,<sup>41</sup> which characterises the British SWP (and much of the rest of the Left<sup>42</sup>), meant they largely left it to their comrades in Scotland to campaign over Scottish independence. This followed the longstanding British Left tradition towards Ireland. And later, when the SWP’s ‘Lexit Yes, EU No’ provided a cover for the Right, this campaign was also marked by a ‘national exceptionalist’ (British) approach to the Brexit campaign. There was no major public activity organised by the IST on ‘mainland’ EU. (e.g. rallies). This ‘national exceptionalism’ is a feature of *ButBS* too, despite the occasional nod to Northern Ireland/Ireland and Wales. There is with little conception of what is needed to organise meaningful all-islands solidarity on both sides of the Celtic Sea and beyond.

#### **4. The SWP promotes anti-imperialist arguments to support the SNP’s constitutional proposals just as the leadership moves to a closer embrace of US and British imperialism**

So, what justification did the SWP come up with for supporting Scottish independence from 2010? In 2013, McKechnie’s pamphlet, *S-YtINtN* tried to find some contemporary arguments to justify this change of line. He argued that support for Scottish independence was anti-imperialist. McCormack and McKechnie continue with this argument in *ButBS*.<sup>43</sup> Certainly, a better anti-imperialist case can be made for Scottish independence than can be made for Scottish devolution (even in its latest Left guise - ‘progressive federalism’), since this so clearly leaves the UK or British imperial state firmly in place.

However, at the same time as the SWP began to support Scottish independence, the SNP leadership and government, who led IndyRef1, was moving in the opposite direction. In October 2012, under then leader Alex Salmond, supported by ‘Left’ Kenny MacAskill, Alex Neil and Jim Sillars (today members and supporters of Alba), an SNP conference was organised to overthrow the party’s long-standing anti-NATO policy, the better to create a ‘New SNP’. Support for the British High Command, the monarchy and sterling were further indications of the SNP’s US imperialist, UK and City of London accommodating ‘Indy-Lite’ version of Scottish independence.

Now Fotheringham argues quite rightly that there is wider support for Scottish independence than the SNP and particularly its leadership.<sup>44</sup> Indeed much of the book is aimed at precisely these wider supporters. But the ‘johnny-come lately’ SWP has a problem when it has long ignored or downplayed the democratic issue

underlying Scottish self-determination and failed to develop its own politically independent strategy and immediate programme to address the issue of Scottish independence.

Because this means the SNP, which had campaigned for many decades for its versions of Scottish independence (and these have changed over time), and for possible transitional arrangements (e.g. devolution), has been placed in a powerful position within the wider Scottish independence movement. This is because of its long-term commitment. The SNP was rewarded for this at Holyrood in 2007 and 2011 and again in 2021, and most spectacularly at Westminster in 2015, immediately after IndyRef1. This had turned out to be somewhat of a pyrrhic victory for the British ruling class and the unionists. In contrast, the Scottish Left's Holyrood bridgehead only lasted from 1999 to 2007,<sup>45</sup> with 1, then 6 SSP MSPs, none of whom were members of the SWP.

It is necessary to take a much longer view of the emergence, global hegemony, then decline of the British imperialism. This has led to changing pressures on the form of state adopted by the British ruling class – the UK. The UK is a specifically unionist state, designed to promote British imperialism. Historically, there was nothing particularly special about the unions of the Scottish and Irish Crowns with the English Crown – either in the case of Ireland in 1534 or Scotland in 1603 - nor the Crown's scattered territories in Calais (up 1558) and the Channel Islands. In those times, Europe had several such mixed and often non-contiguous territorial political entities, e.g. Hapsburg Spain, Hapsburg Austria, Sweden-Finland, Poland-Lithuania and the Kingdom of Prussia.

However, the 1707 Scottish and 1801 Irish unions of parliaments contributed to the formation of a new type of state. This was designed to promote capitalism and British imperialism. What had originally been a largely English empire was opened up to become a British empire, with a British ruling class, which also contained hybrid Scottish-British and later Irish-British sections. They retained particular class privileges within their proto-nations then later nations, as these became constituent parts of the UK state.

Indeed, the unionist form of state was so successful for the British ruling class, that they reformed their UK state set-up to allow for the emergence of a completely new nation - Wales. The Welsh had never constituted a united nation, nor had Wales ever been a recognised part of the Union of the Crowns. Gwynedd, the last small kingdom<sup>46</sup> surviving in Wales, was finally conquered in 1284. Wales was made a principality of the English Crown, some parts under direct rule, other parts feudally devolved to marcher lords. Later this divided Wales, with uncertain boundaries, was fully absorbed into a unitary English state in 1534 and 1542 (also ending the political power of the Anglo-Welsh marcher lordships).



However, in the nineteenth century, measures of Welsh administrative devolution were granted, under pressure from a rising Welsh middle class (including some now significant business figures, e.g. coal owner, David Thomas). The major party pushing for liberal constitutional reform, in this case the Welsh section of the British Liberal Party, wanted no break with the British Crown or empire. The first officially recognised investiture of the Prince of Wales, held in Wales since 1284, was undertaken in 1911 for Edward VII. This was acclaimed by the Welsh Liberals. There was no fiercer supporter of the British empire in the First World War than former Welsh Liberal Home Rule firebrand, David Lloyd George, but now conservative unionist, who became UK prime minister in 1916.

There is very little understanding in *ButB* of how the UK, with its British and hybrid British identities, has been created and how it is now being undermined. Instead, the *ButBS Preface* states that the “‘United Kingdom’ has become a joke”.<sup>47</sup> This is dangerous because the British ruling class, including its hybrid British members, and now its authoritarian national populist and reactionary unionist supporting majority, is fully aware of the different national democratic challenges it faces across these islands. It has developed a carefully calibrated strategy to address these problems. Even the more reactionary Hard Right and ultra-unionists<sup>48</sup> (e.g. those once associated with UKIP, the Brexit Party and some of their successors) pursue an all-UK strategy in association with ‘Ulster’-British Loyalists and the US populist Right. It is the British Left and many Left nationalists in Scotland, Wales and Ireland who have no all-Great Britain, all-UK nor all-islands (far less a wider European) strategy to take on the British ruling class.

## **5. Scottish independence - a product of working class defeats or the decline of the UK’s imperialist and unionist state?**

John Maclean is a significant figure who *ButBS* feels the need to address. There are 31 references with two distinct longer sections in the book.<sup>49</sup> This highlights the continued political relevance today of what Maclean was arguing towards the end of his life. Indeed, this is why much of this reply also addresses Maclean’s political legacy.

Fotheringham’s conclusion wants to place the SWP within John Maclean’s (and James Connolly’s) international socialist tradition.<sup>50</sup> But it also wants to criticise key aspects of their politics. Again, there should be no problem with this. We don’t want to make secular saints out of Maclean or Connolly. But it is not only some of their outdated historical thinking (which can now be updated in the light

of more recent research), or certain tactics (which have shown themselves to be flawed) that *ButBS* contributors want us to jettison. It is the socialist republican politics, which are Maclean's and Connolly's major political contribution, and which still have so much relevance today.

Connolly and Maclean came to appreciate the fundamentally anti-democratic, imperialist and unionist nature of the UK state. They could see the underlying contradictions this would give rise to, long before the majority of the working class (and small farmers/crofters). They used their workers republican/socialist/communist politics to analyse these contradictions. They understood that the underlying tensions would lead to future crises in the relationship of two of the constituent nations – Ireland and Scotland – to the UK state. Therefore, Connolly and Maclean thought that Socialists should draw attention to this possibility, long before support for the exercise of more vigorous measures of national self-determination had become more widely accepted by the exploited and oppressed of these nations. They were strategic thinkers. Connolly set up the Irish Socialist Republican Party in 1898. Maclean set up the Scottish Workers republican Party in 1923.

Therefore, in rejecting Maclean's and Connolly's socialist republican strategic thinking, *ButBS* contributors have to look elsewhere to explain the political emergence of Scottish and Irish self-determination. They put this down to working class 'defeats.' How much better things would be if there were just trade union struggles and whatever the movements of the day were doing!

Thus, McKechnie and McCormack argue that James Connolly's decision to give support to the immediate creation of an Irish Republic in the 1916 Rising was the product of the defeat of the 1913-14 Dublin Lock Out<sup>51</sup> - rather than arising from British ruling class's (including its reactionary, conservative and liberal wings) murderous pursuit of the First World War and the reactionary and conservative Unionists' determination to prevent an Irish Home Rule reform of the UK state, or the liberal unionists' and their Irish constitutional nationalist allies' inability to deliver this.

Yet, despite *ButBS* seeing Connolly's support for the 1916 Rising as a product of defeat, elsewhere it does recognise that there was a positive, if historically thwarted, attempt to set up the First Irish Republic from 1918.<sup>52</sup> Sinn Fein called on Irish voters to use the 1918 Westminster general election to endorse the Easter 1916 Republic declaration, which they did overwhelmingly. The gung-ho, post-war, British unionist, coalition government immediately organised to suppress this democratic vote for Irish self-determination.

However, it took until the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty and the 1922-3 Civil War before the UK government could partially thwart this, forcing the abandonment of the First Irish Republic and the creation of the 26 county, Irish Free State as a British dominion, alongside a devolved 6 County, Orange garrison statelet in Northern Ireland. The SWP does view Irish unification as being unfinished business. Indeed, the fact that the SWP (now the Socialist Workers Network (SWN) is an independent organisation in Ireland, only linked to the British SWP through the IST (which is not the case for the SWP in Scotland), is a sure indication of this!<sup>53</sup>

But Fotheringham then also goes on to put down the political emergence of the issue of Scottish self-determination to ‘defeats.’ Thus, the reason for the Left’s current involvement in the Scottish independence campaign “grew out of years of defeat – socially, politically and economically”.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, this argument is taken back historically to Maclean. He became an advocate for a Scottish Workers’ Republic and a Scottish Communist Party back in 1920. Dave Sherry argues that this “{said} more about his own isolation than it did about the balance of class forces. By then the movement was weak on Clydeside, the CWC {Clyde Workers Committee} had been broken by mass unemployment and the victimisation of its leadership”.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, Sherry argues that Maclean was wrong because he “thought the workers in Glasgow were ready to seize power”<sup>56</sup>.

This is very much a misrepresentation of Maclean’s own views at the time. He explained to Lenin, in his 1920 *Open Letter*, that it was his opponents, trying to set up a new CPGB, who were talking up an immediate revolutionary scenario amongst workers in Scotland and England, the better to curry favour with Lenin. “You are asked to believe that large numbers of workers are organised on a workshop basis ready for the signal of revolution... I am of the belief that the workshop movement in England is as dead as it is in Scotland.”<sup>57</sup>

Back in 1917, Maclean had indeed been one of the first Socialists in the UK to appreciate that workers were now living in an International Revolutionary Wave, following the October Revolution in large parts of the Russian empire. The Bolsheviks recognised this by appointing Maclean the Russian consul in Glasgow. This did not mean he was pushing for an insurrection in Glasgow (even in January 1919), but that he fully understood that genuine Socialists, soon to be called Communists, should organise their activity the better to advance this International Revolutionary Wave. Therefore, they should link whatever class struggles they were involved in - initially the anti-war campaign and the strikes for greatly improved pay and conditions - with building the consciousness and organisation needed to raise the revolutionary tempo.

For Maclean such activity always went along with alerting workers to struggles elsewhere, which were contributing to the ongoing International Revolutionary Wave. Maclean fully recognised the political significance of this wave's knock-on effects. Its epicentre lay in the 'Russia' of the soviets. But he also understood the importance of struggles against the British Empire in India and in Ireland. It was these that led Maclean to champion an 'internationalism from below', 'break-up of the UK and British empire road to communism'. Despite Sherry's comments on the falling away of the CWC and the wider workshop movement, Maclean recognised that there were other struggles which could contribute to the International Revolutionary Wave - initially the unemployed, the Lewis land raids. but most of all the Irish Republican struggle.

It wasn't until Maclean's visit to Dublin in June 1919, at the prompting of social republican, Constance Markiewicz, after she spoke at the Glasgow May Day rally that year, that he began to appreciate the greater revolutionary potential of political over economic struggle. The UK government had derailed the potentially revolutionary impetus of the 40 Hours Strike in Glasgow in January and early February,<sup>58</sup> but the experience of the more serious challenge of the Limerick 'Soviet' in April, had not set back the wider Irish Republican struggle.

By 1920, Maclean's pamphlet, *Ireland's Tragedy, Scotland's Disgrace*,<sup>59</sup>) was pointing to the centrality of the Irish Republican struggle in challenging the UK state and British empire.<sup>60</sup> And this political struggle was far from being in retreat at this time, unlike the largely economic struggles of early 1919 in Glasgow, Belfast and London.<sup>61</sup> Maclean could see that the Irish struggle represented a qualitatively higher level of political struggle.

Maclean's more strategic thinking was also displayed in *The Vanguard*,<sup>62</sup> the journal he set up, with others, to pursue the new socialist republican politics. He began to adopt a programmatic approach - *A Fighting Programme Needed* (no. 6, May 1920); *The Fighting Programme Welcomed* (no. 7, June 1920), *Still the Fighting Programme* (no. 9, August 1920).

The ebbing of the International Revolutionary Wave after 1921 certainly undermined Maclean's (and many others') immediate revolutionary hopes. But there is another way of looking at the political impact of events in Ireland and Scotland. This would be similar to the approach needed to assess the thinking adopted by Marx and Engels after the defeats of the 1848 Revolution and of the 1870 Paris Commune. In 1850, they wrote their *Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League*. This highlighted key lessons that had been learned and developed an early theory of permanent revolution. Immediately after the defeat of the Paris Commune, Marx wrote *The Civil War*

*in France*. This highlighted the need to dismantle the capitalist state and replace it by communal organisation.

James Connolly's adoption of a 'break-up of the UK and British empire road to socialism' and John Maclean's later adoption of a 'break-up of the UK and British empire road to communism' also represent considerable political gains. These can contribute to a growing awareness of the anti-democratic nature of the unionist and imperialist UK state, based on the sovereignty of the Crown-in-Westminster with its armoury of anti-democratic Crown Powers. Such thinking is not an adaptation to defeat but leads to a greater degree of understanding learned in the testing school of democratic struggle. This still provides a good basis for politics in these islands today.

## **6. Maclean and the similarities and differences between Scotland and Ireland and some overlooked contradictions**

Sherry also claims that Maclean "underestimated the differences between Scotland and Ireland."<sup>63</sup> But despite Maclean's initial flirting with the idea of the solidarity of the Celtic race, his politics weren't motivated by pan-Celtic racist nationalism<sup>64</sup>. He wanted to give support to a wide range of struggles against the British Empire and colonial employers – in Ireland, but also in Canada, India and Egypt. He would be aware of the differences between the situations in all these nations, despite their shared subordination to the UK state. He knew that the responses of the British in India to the resistance there were far more brutal than in Ireland, despite his continued chronicling of British atrocities in Ireland (c.f. the Croke Park Massacre in Dublin on November 20<sup>th</sup> 1920, and the Amritsar Massacre in India on 13<sup>th</sup> March 1919).

What was different about Ireland, though, was that it lay within the British unionist state. Scotland's Central Belt also had a large community from an Irish background. This led to many links between Scottish Socialists and Irish Republicans – including social and socialist republicans.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, Scottish crofters already had a record of linking up with Irish land struggles.<sup>66</sup> Maclean knew many Clydeside comrades from an Irish background and he personally came from a Mull crofting background. A significant strand of what was to emerge as Communist politics in Ireland was formed on Clydeside, where Roddy Connolly and James Fearon both worked for a time. Walter Carpenter, a leading promoter of Communist politics in Ireland, came across to address Glasgow meetings, no doubt gaining from the experience. Indeed, it has been suggested that the early Communist Party of Ireland had a branch in Glasgow.<sup>67</sup>

And in seeing that there was a higher degree of political consciousness at the time in Scotland, particularly on Clydeside (and also in Dundee), Maclean was not looking to create an isolated Scottish (or pan-Celtic) separatist breakaway. He argued that “English labour is bound to respond to our call if we in Scotland strike out boldly for political conquest”.<sup>68</sup> ‘Internationalism from below’ was central to his thinking throughout. Maclean linked his call for a “Scottish workers’ republic” with the call for “Scottish workers to be joined in one big industrial union with their British comrades against industrial capitalism.”<sup>69</sup> But clearly in supporting working class internationalism in “one big union”, he meant something very different from the bureaucratic ‘internationalism from above’ practised by most existing British trades unions then and today.

There were indeed some contradictory features in Maclean’s new analysis, but these are not directly addressed in *ButBS*. In confronting the new political circumstances in Scotland, brought about by the impact of the 1916-21/3 International Revolutionary Wave, Maclean had no real independent grounding in Scottish history. *Forward*, dominated by the Independent Labour Party (ILP) thinking (albeit an open and interesting publication), would have been an important source of historical knowledge for most on the Scottish Left, including Maclean.<sup>70</sup>

However, immediately after the First World War, the ILP and the Scottish trade union movement, including the STUC, proved unable to go beyond calls for Scottish Home Rule, or possible dominion status for Scotland. This call was meant to be made to US President Woodrow Wilson’s 1919-20 Paris Peace Conference. This was an attempt to restructure the imperialist world from above, in the face of new challenges from below. However, all calls for national self-determination within the empires and states of the First World War victor states were ignored. Maclean foresaw this, and inspired by the Bolsheviks and anti-imperialist struggles, outlined a very different approach (as did Jim Larkin, then in the USA).

With the ILP and STUC turning to Wilson and the Paris Peace Talks and looking for an essentially liberal reform of the existing world order, Maclean had to look elsewhere to find some historical arguments to support his alternative orientation on the Irish Republicans (and the Bolsheviks) to achieve national self-determination. Neither the BSP nor the SLP had ever shown much interest in Scottish history. Therefore, Maclean turned instead to two Scottish cultural figures who were giving their support at the time to Sinn Fein - Ruaraidh Erskine of Marr and William Gillies. Maclean borrowed arguments from Marr which he related almost entirely to prefeudal Scottish history. Maclean wrote of the “Celtic or communistic system”<sup>71</sup> (or what Engels had termed “primitive communism”).

In Maclean's first specific writing on Scottish history, he drew no distinction between the role of Robert the Bruce and William Wallace, not appreciating the class divide between their two approaches,<sup>72</sup> He wrote of "the 'rebellion' of 1715 and 1745 {as being} natural reactions against the treacherous deed of 1707,"<sup>73</sup> without examining the political aims of the Jacobite leaders – the restoration of the Stuart monarchy to all three kingdoms of the UK.<sup>74</sup>

This is in marked contrast to James Connolly's classic *Labour in Irish History (LiIH)*, based on extensive research, backed by profound insights learned from his own class experiences. This book provided a foundation for his own Irish workers' republican approach, which contributed to his participation in the 1916 Easter Rising. Connolly lambasted the Irish nationalist icons, particularly the Jacobites and Daniel O'Connell. To challenge both the Irish Unionists and the Irish Parliamentary Party of his day, Connolly developed an Irish history rooted in the peasant revolts against the imposition of feudalism, the role of the United Irishmen as democrats and internationalists, the republican Young Irelanders and Fenians, and then the Irish Land League. He viewed "The working class {as} "The inheritors of the Irish ideals of the past {and} the repository of the hopes of the future."<sup>75</sup> But he always remained an Irish internationalist.

Connolly's *LiIH* analysis won out on the Left in Ireland, albeit often later more in words than in deeds. However, in Scotland, it was the *History of the Working Classes in Scotland*, written by the ILP's Tom Johnston, which came to inform most of the Scottish Left.<sup>76</sup> In the three short years still left to Maclean, some his earlier tentative historical analysis was dropped, as he further developed his 'break-up of the UK and British empire' strategy. He made little more reference to past historical events, concentrating overwhelmingly on the events of the ongoing International Revolutionary Wave. In particular, Maclean examined the changing political situation, leading to the competing strategies being promoted by the leaders of British imperialism, in relation to the latest imperial competitor on the block, the USA.<sup>77</sup>

There was also confusion in Maclean's mind about the terms English and British. In first comparing Scotland with Ireland, Maclean wrote about both nations "cha{fing} under the same English yoke", whilst almost immediately going on to write of the "British government" and 'its "prosecution of the {First World} war."<sup>78</sup> At the time of the first phase of the Scottish Wars of Independence (1296 -1328) England formed part of a wider Plantagenet empire (following the earlier Angevin empire). These two empires were a product of earlier Norman-French conquests. French, not English, was the official language of the Plantagenet state. It was their wider dynastic interests that the

Plantagenets promoted, not specific English national concerns. And rich Gascony was of more concern to Edward I than relatively poor Scotland.

Following the 1707 Union of Parliaments (and especially after the defeat of the Jacobites, who were linked to Bourbon France), the Scottish ruling class became a constituent part of a wider British ruling class. In 1785, the Scottish-British, Countess of Sutherland married the English-British, Marquess of Stafford. Between them they were responsible for the Sutherland Clearances and the exploitation of English coal miners near Manchester.

And in supporting the First Irish Republic, Maclean did not become starry-eyed about Ireland, or the course of the struggle there<sup>79</sup> When, the First Irish Republic too began to succumb to the ebbing of the International Revolutionary Wave, after 1921, Maclean acknowledged this, albeit only in private correspondence. He criticised his friend and comrade, Jim Larkin for his adaptation to ‘Pink Labour’ at the prompting of the CPGB.<sup>80</sup>

To the very end of his life, Maclean was trying to grapple with the political consequences of an ebbing International Revolutionary Wave, leading to changes in his strategy and tactics. Yet, like so many other Socialists at the time, Maclean still believed that he was living through a temporary lull in the International Revolutionary Wave. In Maclean’s last 1923 election leaflet, the linked international nature of the struggle remained crystal clear – “Russia could not produce the World Revolution. Neither can we in the Gorbals, in Scotland, in Great Britain”.<sup>81</sup>

## **7. The problems associated with dropping old Brit Left arguments on Maclean without understanding his republican socialist perspective**

The attempts to marginalise, misrepresent or reinvent a John Maclean (and a James Connolly) go back a long way. Whenever there has been rising support for the exercise of Scottish self-determination, sections of the British Left<sup>82</sup> have had to make new political adjustments in their assessments of Maclean. This has often meant a rejection of earlier slurs and the adoption of new fall-back positions.

One of the earliest British Left attempts to marginalise John Maclean came from the CPGB’s Willie Gallacher. It was later taken up by others on the British Left.<sup>83</sup> They have argued that Maclean’s refusal to join the CPGB and his support for a Scottish Workers Republic came about through a loss of his mental capabilities, following his harsh term of imprisonment at Peterhead, and further jail sentences. However, Maclean’s post-jail writings, the frequent calls



for him to address meetings throughout these islands, and the huge crowds at his funeral in December 1923, undermine this particular attack.

Harry McShane was originally a close comrade of John Maclean, but later became a CPGB full-timer, until he resigned after the 1956 events in Eastern Europe. In 1978, Joan Smith, then in the SWP, interviewed McShane and wrote his biography.<sup>84</sup> In this book, McShane distanced himself from Gallacher's personalised and sectarian attacks on Maclean.<sup>85</sup> But McShane developed his own fallback position. He claimed that Maclean's "Scottish Workers Republican Party... had some queer people that I didn't quite like {which was no doubt true}- they had never been to John's economic classes and they knew nothing about socialism or revolutionary work."<sup>86</sup>

But many of the people Maclean was now working with were unemployed or women responsible for maintaining homes in very adverse circumstances, not the skilled and semi-skilled workers who had been the main attendees at his economic classes and the main backers of the BSP and Socialist Labour Party on Clydeside. But Peter Marshall, who had been part of the Tramp Trust Unlimited, with McShane and Maclean, and was a teacher at the Scottish Labour College, certainly joined the SWRP.<sup>87</sup> And Neil Johnston, Maclean's black comrade from Barbados<sup>88</sup> and his co-lodger in Auldhouse Road, Pollokshaws, poured praise on Maclean's politics and comradeship in his final SWRP days.<sup>89</sup> And both Sylvia Pankhurst and Constance Markiewicz, no strangers to "revolutionary work", were campaigning with Maclean right to the end, and he maintained contact with his old comrade Jim Larkin and his brother, Peter in Australia. McShane's distancing himself in 1978, from Maclean's old SWRP, had to do with his own renewed support for Scottish devolution as opposed to Scottish independence.

Today the SWP, whilst wanting to locate itself in the John Maclean tradition, has to fall back on other political criticisms - particularly claims about the impact of 'defeats', questioning the significance of comparisons between Scotland and Ireland, and Maclean's opposition to the infant CPGB. The first two criticisms have already been dealt with, but what about the significance of the claim, which argues that Maclean was completely wrong in refusing to join the CPGB in 1920? This charge tends to reinforce a Scottish Left versus British Left political confrontation. This was a secondary feature of Maclean's *Open Letter to Lenin*.<sup>90</sup> It made no plea for any new communist party to adopt support for a Scottish Workers Republic. The principal disagreement was about the political nature of some of those promoted to leading roles in the new CPGB. e.g. Lieutenant-Colonel Malone MP and Mr. Menell, director of the *Daily Herald*, and the political shortcomings of some people after their record

during World War One. They still went on to become leaders in the infant CPGB.

Maclean's arguments on the political weaknesses of some of those who were to join the leadership of the infant CPGB, were to be taken up again in a new form in his last years. Maclean had already been in a political alliance with Sylvia Pankhurst from East London. She also had an inspiring anti-First World War record. They both went on to mount campaigns against Rightist and racist accommodating members of the planned new CPGB.<sup>91</sup> Later, Maclean's and Pankhurst's renewed political alliance was based on a significant difference with the CPGB over how to win over 'Red Labour' (then mainly ILP members<sup>92</sup>) from 'Pink Labour' (the First World War, national Labour backing leadership and some now former ILP pacifist supporters).<sup>93</sup>

In some ways this anticipated the recent debate over Jeremy Corbyn. Do you try to win over the best 'Red Labour' supporters to Socialist politics, or go along with Corbyn's own social democratic accommodation to the 'Pink Labour' Right? Corbyn's strategy led to a call to vote for a far greater number of Right than Left Labour candidates in 2017 and 2019. Should this strategy have proved electorally successful, Corbyn would soon have been summarily ejected from office, with the collaboration of the Labour Right he had asked people to vote for. There would have been even less to show for Corbyn's efforts than for those 'Red Clydeside' MPs who left for Westminster in 1922 and again in 1923. They went on to support Ramsay MacDonald's short-lived 1924 Labour/Liberal coalition pro-imperialist government.

We can see in retrospect that Maclean and other Socialists (including the CPGB) were undoubtedly working in a period of retreat. They partially acknowledged this and adjusted their tactics accordingly but thought that the situation was temporary. But Sherry's argument that Maclean was isolated on the Left is not borne out by the facts. Compared to others on the Left, Maclean's support remained high. The votes he won in Glasgow council and general elections were good. In November 1921 Maclean, whilst still in jail, stood in Kinning Park in the local election and came second. Standing as an SWRP candidate in Townhead in a 1923 Glasgow local by-election, Maclean came second again, beating the CPGB-backed official 'Pink Labour' candidate.<sup>94</sup>

In the 1922 Westminster general election, Maclean came third with 13% of the vote. This time Maclean stood in Govan against a 'Red Labour' and Scottish Home Rule supporting candidate, George Buchanan.<sup>95</sup> On the previous occasion in 1918, when he stood in Govan, he was officially backed by Labour. Maclean had stood on a revolutionary platform against a national Labour

candidate George Barnes, a vehement upholder of the First World War. Having worked so hard in the area, Maclean was not willing to move to another constituency<sup>96</sup>. By 1922, in recognition that he was now confronting a ‘Red Labour’, rather than a ‘Pink Labour’ candidate, Maclean’s address stated that if electors could not vote for him, they should vote for Buchanan.<sup>97</sup> His unanticipated death meant that his candidacy had to be withdrawn in the following 1923 Westminster general election. So, this prevented his likely increased electoral support from being tested.

Nowadays, ‘British road to socialism’ politics are more and more rejected in Scotland (including by the SWP). These politics are usually, but not exclusively, associated with the old CPGB. But they have prior and deeper roots going back to Henry Hyndman’s Social Democratic Federation (1885-1911), followed by the British Socialist Party (1911-1920). And UNITE general secretary, Len McCluskey’s ‘British jobs for British workers’ tradition is also long-standing. It goes back to Robert Blatchford, Fabian Society member and publisher of *The Clarion*, which published his article, *Britain for the British* (1903). The TUC supported the first UK anti-migrant legislation, the racist Aliens Act (1905). Before Brexit, Right and ‘Left’, there had been other ‘British jobs for British workers’ detours through the British National Party and New Labour’s Gordon Brown.

Social democratic ‘British road to socialism’ politics can best be countered by an updating of James Connolly’s and John Maclean’s socialist republican, ‘internationalism from below’, ‘break-up of the UK and British empire’ politics to achieve socialism/communism. This leads us to a fuller understanding of the UK’s imperialist and unionist state, and the changing strategies that the British ruling class has resorted to maintain its power. And it also provides a better basis for challenging them.

## **8. Missing out the significance of cultural resistance and its relationship to the legacy of John Maclean**

In criticising Maclean (and Connolly), Sherry makes use of another argument, which is perhaps even more crucial for an SWP, which despite all its breakaways and setbacks, continues to take sustenance from its own continued existence as an organisation. John “Maclean, like his great contemporary, James Connolly, left nothing behind in the way of political organisation.”<sup>98</sup> Now, it would be tempting to say that as Socialists we would be better off without many of the political organisations which have been “left behind”, both physically and politically. However, despite losing their revolutionary *raison d’être* and potential, some of these organisations have made valuable

contributions in the past, which we do need to defend. These organisations also include comrades who are capable of critical thought and are looking for better answers.

I would argue that significant legacies are left not only by political organisations. One of the key features of any resistance after political defeats and setbacks, is how this can take on a culturally challenging form. Thus, after the defeat of the Second Irish Home Rule Bill in 1893, the Irish Renaissance emerged (which later James Connolly very much related to); after the defeat of the American black struggles in the 1916-21 International Revolutionary Wave, the Harlem Renaissance emerged (which Claude Mackay<sup>99</sup> very much related to); and after the defeat of the post First and Second World War claims for greater Scottish self-determination, there were two distinct phases of a Scottish Renaissance. The legacy of John Maclean was very much celebrated within these, and through them his thought was passed on.<sup>100</sup>

Despite making some political criticisms of the later CPGB line on Scotland, *ButBS* ignores the very significant contributions made by the CPGB and fellow-traveller artists to the Scottish Renaissance, e.g. James Barke, Mary Brooksbank, Lewis Grassie Gibbon, Hamish Henderson, Hugh MacDiarmid and Sorley Maclean. They were followed (with some overlap in personnel) by a third wave of the Scottish Renaissance, linked to the re-emergence of the Scottish national question in the 1960s and 1970s. Other artists associated with the CPGB made their mark, e.g. Alan Bold, David Craig, Ken Currie, Dick Gaughan, Matt McGinn and Sandy Moffat. And the fourth wave of the Scottish Renaissance, following the defeat of the 1979 Devolution referendum and preceding the 1997 Devolution referendum, included Jackie Kaye, a CPGB full-timer's adopted daughter, and one-time CPGB supporter, John Manson.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the CPGB published the influential magazine, *Scottish Marxist*. Cultural issues were addressed seriously. The CPGB also had a key influence in the post-war Unity Theatre in Glasgow (1941-51) the Edinburgh Peoples Festival (1951-54) and along with its successor, the CPB, has helped to run the Star Folk Club in Glasgow since 1978.<sup>101</sup>

It was following the CPGB's continued engagement and commitment to greater Scottish self-determination, that they published *Scottish Capitalism – Class, State and Nation from before the Union to the Present (SC-CSaN)* in 1981.<sup>102</sup> The contributors to this book examined the historical links between a perceived Scottish nation and the rise of capitalism. After the first *Red Paper on Scotland*,<sup>103</sup> edited by then radical Gordon Brown, and *The Break-up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-nationalism*,<sup>104</sup> written by Tom Nairn, *SC-CSaN* was probably

the most influential book on the Left in relation to the Scottish Question at the time. It included some pioneering but flawed historical analysis.

Over two decades later, a great deal of this historical analysis was to be successfully challenged by Neil Davidson,<sup>105</sup> whilst he was still an SWP member.<sup>106</sup> Yet, when it came to the cultural dimension of resistance to British imperialism and unionism, both Neil earlier and *ButBS* today, have had very little to say, despite the Left's continuing dominance in this arena of struggle.<sup>107</sup>

But it wasn't only the CPGB, or even its dissidents, fellow travellers and breakaways, who have contributed to this wider cultural resistance in Scotland. From the heady days of 1968, the hegemony of the CPGB was challenged in the cultural sphere. Bob Tait (influenced by the IMG) produced *Scottish International* (1968-73). Ray Burnett<sup>108</sup> (a one time IS member) produced *Calgacus*.<sup>109</sup>

And following the defeat of the 1979 Devolution referendum there was *Radical Scotland* (1982-91), edited by Alan Lawson. This provided much of the thinking behind the Scottish Constitutional Convention. There was also *Cencrastus*, (1987-2006), published by Raymond Ross. This had a wide range of Left and Scottish nationalist contributors. The years leading up to InyRef1, and the partial setback in 2014, have both contributed to a continued cultural renaissance. This also included the online *bella caledonia* (independence, self-determination, and autonomy) founded by Mike Small (ex-RCG) and Kevin Williamson (ex- Militant and ex-SSP). And an important feature of this latest phase has been the greater prominence of women and BAME artists.

But perhaps the *ButBS* contributors' apparent unwillingness to address the significance of cultural resistance is related to the SWP's analysis of capitalism. This is mainly focussed on what they see as the central dynamic of capitalism - the capital labour relationship - and a resistance largely based on trade union struggles. And this is indeed an important feature of capitalism but not one that can be sustained without other key supports.

Whilst acknowledging the limitations of analogies, capitalism could be compared to a motor car. Certainly, a car needs a central drive shaft, powered by petrol. This is analogous to the extraction of surplus value in the labour process under capitalism. And by further analogy, the combustion which takes place in the car's fuel chamber can be seen as the equivalent of the impact of industrial struggles, which determine the level of profit for capitalists and class confidence for the working class. And sometimes these struggles can be strengthened by additives, e.g. from the movements, rather like additives to petrol.

However, just as vital, if the car is actually to move, is the need for a chassis with axles and wheels. This can be compared to the state. The state is vital if the conditions allowing for the continued extraction of surplus value are to be maintained. And as any driver knows, deficiencies in the chassis, axles and wheels can be as problematic as those found in the transmission.

And a car will also have a body. The body's ability to provide some comfort to the car's driver and passengers, and to impress others, could be compared to capitalism's cultural superstructure. And indeed, it is often the inadequacies, or the apparent obsolescence, of the car's body which can lead the driver or passengers to question the need for a particular car. By analogy, this is like cultural resistance and the seeking for alternatives.

Thus, capitalism needs to be treated as a linked system of exploitation (the extraction of surplus value and other forms of surplus labour), oppression (the denial of democratic rights) and of alienation (a profound discontent, expressed in the cultural sphere, because people cannot meet their needs.) The counter to this exploitation, oppression and alienation are struggles for emancipation, liberation and self-determination (in its widest sense).<sup>110</sup>

Therefore, a serious attempt is required to come to terms with the cultural resistance aspect of the struggles for greater Scottish self-determination. In the form of the folk singers, Jimmy Ross, and the late Alistair Hewlett, the SWP has had its own artistic performers. Several of the contributors to *ButBS* (as well as Jimmy Ross) were involved in either or both Scottish Rank & File Teachers and the Scottish Federation of Socialist Teachers. These have produced quite a number of artists.<sup>111</sup> However, whereas the CPGB drew upon its own and fellow-travelling artists to incorporate cultural resistance into their analyses of Scottish political history, the more economistic SWP has not done much on this front. The lack of any serious attention in *ButBS* to cultural resistance is a weakness of the book.

My emphasis on the significance of cultural resistance under capitalism is not an attempt to dodge the significance of the organisational issue, which *ButBS* raises. John Maclean, along with all the rest of the non-Russian Left, tried to apply what they thought to be new and relevant from the Bolshevik party model under the different political conditions where they lived. This acknowledgement is not an attempt to put the Bolshevik model on some sort of pedestal. Some shortcomings of the Bolshevik party model were already becoming apparent during the 1916-21/3 International Revolutionary Wave and became accentuated as it ebbed. This is true, even if you accept that the

continued strength of the imperialist forces mobilised against the infant Soviet Russia was the over-riding problem Bolsheviks and other Socialists then faced.

The SWP's internal regime is modelled on some of the worse features of a CPSU in retreat. Furthermore, as the following section of this review will show, this weakness goes along with attempts in *ButBS* to uncritically apply elements of Lenin's thinking, in the hope of appearing orthodox. Orthodoxy can harden into dogma, which can produce its own schismatics. Some dissidents though can become real critical thinkers contributing to the politics needed for later advances.

### **9. An attempt at an orthodox Leninist defence of the right of national self-determination and a failure to appreciate the Norwegian precedent**

It has been shown that *ButBS* contributors are somewhat shaky in their understanding of the socialist republican politics of John Maclean and James Connolly. However, to deliver a killer blow, they turn to Lenin over the issue of national self-determination.<sup>112</sup> They want to prove that Scotland is not an oppressed nation, and that Ireland, unlike Scotland, had no national ruling class participating in the running of the British empire. This is used to explain why Connolly was right, but Maclean was wrong in supporting independence for their nations during the 1916-21/3 International Revolutionary Wave. But it also leaves SWP support for Scottish independence as a tactical issue, dependent on the 'mood music' coming from the working class.

Both Scotland and Ireland did have a ruling class who participated in the running of the British empire, even if the overwhelming majority in Ireland came from one-time colonial stock. But this was also the case in the thirteen British North American colonies. The SWP appears to treat the descendants of the American colonists as members of the American nation (despite the imperial republican, Native and Black American and sexist exclusionary politics that most of their members went on to pursue). Thus, one would hope the SWP can see the descendants of the longer established colonial settlers in Ireland as being part of the Irish nation.<sup>113</sup>

The new Irish ruling class came from England, forming the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy and from Scotland, forming the Scotch-Irish, who were mainly Presbyterians, but still retained many direct links with Scotland. These ruling groups also included a few former native Irish prepared to convert to the established Anglican Church of Ireland or to become Presbyterians. And even as far back as the post-1789 International Revolutionary Wave, the revolutionary democratic and republican United Irishmen saw them both as part

of a wider Irish citizenry or nation consisting of Protestants (i.e. Anglicans), Catholics and Dissenters (mainly Presbyterians).

Now, of course, the leaders of the thirteen British North American colonists, gave up their hybrid-British identities and went on to constitute themselves as an American national ruling class. Partly inspired by the American colonial struggles, a section of the longer established Irish colonial leaders began to mount their own challenges to the existing UK state. It was only following the defeat of the United Irish challenge in 1798, that the Anglo-Irish and the Scotch-Irish leaders began to merge in a new Irish-British ruling class. After giving their support to the 1801 Act of Union. Thus, the old Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, mainly landlords, along with the rising Scotch-Irish Presbyterian capitalists, became the Irish-British component of a wider British ruling class within the Union and Empire. In this way they participated as much in the promotion of British imperialism as their Scottish 'cousins'.<sup>114</sup>

But that is not the whole story. Over time, the Act of Union changed the nature of the earlier colonial/imperial relationship between Great Britain and Ireland. The reformed Union was subjected to wider economic changes and to pressure from below. After major struggles, e.g. for Catholic emancipation (1828), the disestablishment of the Anglican Church of Ireland (1869), and various land reforms culminating in the UK state buy-out of the landlord class and the transfer of their land to Irish farmers (1903), more Catholic Irish were won over to the maintenance of the British union and empire. Some bought the land which had been abandoned by thousands of their co-religionists, the small tenant farmers, who either died or emigrated during the Great Hunger of 1845-52. During this wider process of socio-economic change, some big business figures emerged from a Catholic nationalist background, e.g. William Murphy, with interests in the wider British union and empire.

The mainly Catholic based, Irish Parliamentary Party confined its demands to Irish Home Rule parliament under the Crown, so its Irish capitalist backers could maintain the economic benefits they derived from the British union and empire. They gave their wholehearted backing to the UK in the First World War. Indeed, a greater number of British Liberal MPs voted against the First World War at Westminster in 1914 than Irish nationalist MPs (only one - the Independent Nationalist MP, Laurence Ginnell).<sup>115</sup>

And in the 1921 negotiations between the UK government and some Sinn Fein leaders to overthrow the First Irish Republic, key figures of the new Irish ruling class-in-the-making were persuaded by Jan Smuts (one-time Afrikaaner guerrilla leader in the 1899-1902 Boer War) of the benefits of, British dominion status – or what became the Irish Free State. Once the anti-Treaty Republicans had been



defeated, the newly widened Irish ruling class, backed by former Unionist employers, used the Irish Free State to launch a major employers' offensive against the working class and smaller farmers. Guinness, previously a major unionist Dublin employer, reinvented itself as an iconic Irish company.

Today's SNP has a lot in common with the old Irish Parliamentary Party and some comparison can also be made with the earlier Sinn Fein led by Arthur Griffith,<sup>116</sup> He supported monarchy and empire, and later gave his support to the Irish Free State. The SNP leadership doesn't want to have to mount a counter-revolution to crush any new Scottish Republic. Instead, it hopes to pre-empt this danger with its own 'Indy-Lite' 'Scottish Free State' accommodation to the Crown, the City of London, the British High Command and of course NATO.

*ButBS* attempts to use Lenin's theory of oppressed and oppressor nations, but it misses his key argument. Oppression is the denial of democratic rights – in this case the right to national self-determination. There is no doubt that when making any international comparisons, the degree of oppression in Scotland in this regard has been much less than in Ireland, where supplementary repression has frequently been resorted to. But, just as in Maclean's time, when India and Egypt were much more heavily oppressed and repressed than Ireland, so today, Ireland is much less heavily oppressed and repressed than Palestine, Kurdistan, the Chechens in the Russian Federation or the Uighurs in Chinese Xinjiang. Thus, *ButBS* does not apply the logic of one of Lenin's quotes which a contributor uses - "Socialists have to act as the tribune of the people, able to react to every manifestation of tyranny and oppression, no matter where it appears, no matter what stratum or the class of the people it affects."<sup>117</sup>

But what is more surprising about *ButBS* is that it in its use of Lenin's writings on national self-determination, there is no mention of the most obvious comparison with Scotland. This is the case Lenin makes for Norway's independence. Between 1814 and 1905, Norway was part of another unionist state - the United Kingdoms of Sweden and Norway. In terms of political oppression, Norway was treated lightly by the Swedish Crown. Norway had its own 'home rule' parliament. and a much more extensive franchise than either the UK or even Sweden.<sup>118</sup> Yet Lenin, following his understanding that oppression means the denial of democratic rights, gave his wholehearted (albeit retrospective) support to Norway's successful bid for independence.

Lenin had to find a theory to back his newfound support for the right and even the exercise of national self-determination in Norway. Norway is in a part of the world where he had already dismissed the relevance of the National Question since the 1870s. The theory Lenin came up with to justify this support for national self-determination in Norway was that it was "mixed national

state”.<sup>119</sup> In the English language this is confusing, since ‘national’ can cover both nation (a multi-nationality or multi-ethnic category, e.g. the people living in Scotland) and nationality (a category associated with a particular ethnic or cultural group, e.g. Scots, Gaels, English etc). However, it is fairly clear that Lenin’s “mixed national states” are multi-nation states, particularly ones that have a unionist constitution. And, following the example provided by Engels, Lenin extended his thinking to the four nations of “England “(!)<sup>120</sup> Significantly, James Connolly, much clearer about the distinction between the UK and ‘England’, also made the connection between Irish and Norwegian self-determination in his debate with William Walker of the Belfast ILP in a contribution to *Forward* 1910.<sup>121</sup>

There is something intriguing though, ignored by Lenin. He was a vehement supporter of one-state parties. But for Norway to win its independence in 1905 (during the 1904-7 International Revolutionary Wave), two social democratic parties, the Norwegian Labour Party (founded in 1888) and the Swedish Social Democratic Party (founded in 1889) acted together. They helped to win overwhelming support for Norwegian independence and then by resisting a Swedish military call-up and threatening a general strike, they thwarted the use of the Swedish Crown forces to suppress this challenge.

Imagine the unionist British Labour Party following the Swedish Social Democrats in doing that for Scottish independence! But could the all-Britain SWP contemplate similar action to the Swedish Social Democrats? Probably, but only as another ‘Johnny-come-lately’ response to the actions of the UK state in moving from its recently more lightly imposed oppression in Scotland (the denial of democratic rights, e.g. IndyRef2) to overt repression. The example of Catalunya is used by several *ButBS* contributors, and Fotheringham has written a useful section *Catalonia – the lessons for Scotland*.<sup>122</sup> It is clear that the leaders of the 2017 Catalan independence referendum were somewhat taken aback by the response of the Spanish state and the lack of response of the EU.<sup>123</sup>

This represents another case of the importance for Socialists to understand the specific nature of the state they are up against. Socialists should have been aware that the post-Franco Spanish state still retains many Francoist features. Following the collapse of most of the wider Spanish empire in 1898, in its war with an imperial rival, the USA, Spanish reaction turned far more to Castilian-Spanish supremacist thinking. Under Franco, promoting national independence became illegal under the Spanish constitution. Thus, the Spanish ruling class response to the challenge of the Catalan referendum, was to use its Castilian/Spanish state to move quickly from its asymmetrical devolutionary settlement of 1978 to overt repression – including the jailing of the leaders of the Catalan independence referendum. In many ways that devolutionary

settlement in Spain was more generous than that of the UK state in 1996. This reflected the greater resistance the Castilian/Spanish state had faced, particularly in Euskadi and Catalunya, in the last days of Franco and the partial collapse of his state in 1976. But when faced with a determined movement for a new Catalan Republic, this democratic devolutionary facade was quickly dropped.

Can we be so sure, now the UK state is run by authoritarian populist and reactionary unionist British nationalists, that they would not resort to repression in an attempt to thwart Scottish independence? George Osborne, one-time Tory chancellor, used the jailing of Catalan independence leaders as an example of the sort of tactics that the UK state might have to fall back on in Scotland.<sup>124</sup> And, if today's Spanish state has retained some of its Francoist features, then it is not so long ago that the UK state was also resorting to brutal repression in Northern Ireland/Ireland.

So, what Socialists really need, is the ability to anticipate the nature of the flare-ups around national self-determination in a crisis-ridden UK. And it is important to recognise that we live in one of Lenin's "mixed nationality" or specifically unionist states. The UK consists of 'three nations' England, Scotland, Wales and a bit of the Irish nation - Northern Ireland – which is constitutionally a semi-detached province of the UK. The British ruling class is far more aware of this than the SWP. They have now developed a reactionary unionist strategy operated across these islands to maintain its power.

Furthermore, when you look at the constitutional proposals in the 2017 and 2019 Labour manifestoes, you soon see that over Scotland and Northern Ireland/Ireland, Corbyn-led Labour held the same policies as Johnston's Tories – no IndyRef 2 and the re-establishment of the Stormont executive.<sup>125</sup> It was only in Wales that the 2019 Westminster manifesto offered a further extension if the old liberal unionist devolutionary settlement – an approach abandoned by both British and Scottish Labour for Scotland.

Therefore, in the absence of any clear SWP theoretical underpinning for the actual nature of the UK state, or for the exercise of national self-determination, *ButBS* cannot match, never mind better the British ruling class, when it comes to organising an internationalist approach. Nor can it really challenge the shrinking Left Labour and the CPB 'progressive federalist' alternative. Over this issue, Fotheringham points out that, "the problem for the Labour Left is that its influence on the Scottish Labour party is diminishing"<sup>126</sup> (and that goes even more so for its influence on the only Labour party that matters, when it comes to any proposed constitutional changes - the British Labour Party)

But the more fundamental problem with federalism, recognised by republican socialists, is that it is impossible under the UK constitution with its sovereignty lying with the Crown-in-Westminster. The most that can ever be conceded under this constitutional set up is ‘Devo-Max’.<sup>127</sup> And this can always be rolled back later, just as is now being done to the post-1997 ‘Devolution-all-round’ settlement. Therefore, if the balance of forces changes enough for the British ruling class to consider ‘federalism’ in the future, the better to maintain the Union, as happened during the struggle for the First Irish Republic,<sup>128</sup> Socialists need to have the arguments to deal with this.

Although *ButBS* is unable to get to grips with the constitutional nature of the UK state, there are some passing references to events beyond Scotland. Fotheringham notes there is “developing tension between the Tories and the English regions”; “a rising level of support for independence in Wales” and “growing support for Irish unity in Northern Ireland.”<sup>129</sup> In each case these challenges are being mounted by either English regionalists or constitutional nationalists. What are the SWP proposals for English regional reform and what is its attitude to the emergence of specific regional parties? What is the attitude of the SWP to Welsh independence?

We do know that the SWP is pro-Irish unity, but what is the current optimism of *ButBS* based on? The *Preface* waxes lyrical about “polls favouring a united Ireland”. However, this particular view of Irish reunification amounts to illusion mongering in two ways. The first illusion is that majority for Irish unity, shown in the polls in Northern Ireland, is based on a false claim. Certainly, the parties in the official Ulster Unionist and Loyalist bloc (DUP, UUP and TUV), supported by the various Orange Orders, have lost their overall majority at Westminster and could do so at Stormont too. But the only really pro-Irish unity party in the Nationalist and Republican bloc, Sinn Fein, has been falling back in electoral support too. And it is only through winning majorities for pro-Irish unity MLAs at Stormont that any possible official support for a referendum can be achieved in Northern Ireland.

The biggest recent growth in support for constitutional change has been for another form of unionism, the liberal unionism of the Alliance Party. Alliance refuses to join the overtly sectarian ‘Ulster’<sup>130</sup> Unionist and Loyalist bloc, or of course, the Republican/Nationalist Irish bloc, and prefers to call itself a Northern Irish party (a term also preferred by the UK state). The prospect of liberal unionist reform of Stormont is likely to be the preferred option of the other component of the official Nationalist/Republican bloc – the SDLP, especially if the Loyalists threaten further violence. It was Sinn Fein which provided a non-reciprocated stand-down of candidates for Alliance in the 2019 Westminster

election. It is Alliance and the SDLP which are looking forward to the next Stormont election, not the DUP nor Sinn Fein!

The second illusion lies in the failure of *ButBS* to recognise the constitutional obstacles, North and South, to any Irish unity referendum. This requires simultaneous polls in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, following majority votes in Stormont and the Dail, which have been backed beforehand by the UK government.

If Sinn Fein, currently doing well in the Republic of Ireland, was to substantially increase its number of number of TDs, there is still very little possibility of an overall Dail majority for an Irish unity referendum. The Irish ruling class is utterly opposed to this until some undetermined time in the distant future (perhaps corresponding to the 50 years that Jacob Rees-Mogg has claimed it will take the majority of 'Brits' to benefit from Brexit!) And if Sinn Fein was to gain more TDs, this would likely be at the expense of Socialists (including the SWP's IST affiliated People before Profit<sup>131</sup>). But, if instead, Sinn Fein made the necessary political accommodation to bring on board a significant section of Fianna Fail, the prospects for any future Irish unity referendum would make Nicola Sturgeon's IndyRef2 timetable look like reckless adventurism!

But even more dangerous for Socialists in Northern Ireland is tail-ending a Sinn Fein-led Irish unification campaign based largely on a change in the sectarian head count. This can only polarise politics around the Unionist/Loyalist and Nationalist/Republican blocs. Even if the Unionist/Loyalist bloc loses its majority, it still has the capability to fight back, by giving hardcore Loyalists the freedom to launch murderous sectarian attacks, and to create 'no go' areas. This is a key reason why the Irish ruling class does not want either the trouble, or the expense that this form of Irish reunification would bring.

For Socialists the political basis for Irish reunification lies not in new demographic majorities for Irish (Catholic) Nationalists or in attempted new constitutional deals with the Northern Irish-British unionists, the Ulster-British (Protestant) Unionists, or a new protected Irish-British minority status in a future united Ireland. Socialists need to look to the New Irish<sup>132</sup>, including those young people who have already broken from traditional<sup>133</sup> Irish Catholic Nationalist and Ulster Protestant (especially Presbyterian) Unionist, social conservatism and reaction. This possibility has already been shown in campaigns over abortion, gay and transgender rights. And a major component of the New Irish are the migrants and asylum seekers who have most to lose in any hardening of the Border, as border patrols hunt them down for internment or repatriation.

And Socialist appeals to the existing trade union leaders to support Irish reunification are very unlikely to be effective. Both in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, trade union officials are deeply embedded in partnership agreements with their states and employers. The main role of such deals, including the 2019 Croke Park Agreement in the Republic of Ireland, has been an attempt not to oppose, but to lessen the impact of the drastic austerity imposed by both the EU and British banks. Whilst one of the purposes of the 2015 Fresh Start Agreement in Northern Ireland has been to try and divvy out the cuts imposed by the UK government between the two constitutionally recognised communities – Unionist/Loyalist and Nationalist/Republican.

Thus, partnership agreements have tended to reduce trade union officials to acting as a free personnel management service for governments and employers. The existence of two states operating in Ireland, and usually different employers in each, certainly makes joint solidarity action more difficult. But there are some shared employers and there are also all-Ireland unions, e.g the Irish National Teachers Organisation, and indeed all-islands unions, e.g UNITE.

Socialists need to develop an industrial republican strategy, based on the recognition of the sovereignty of trade union members in their workplaces, over the currently existing sovereignty of the general secretaries in their union HQs. And this should go along with an alternative republican ‘internationalism from below’ political strategy across these islands to counter the trade union full-timers’ bureaucratic ‘internationalism from above’, made in alliance with governments and employers. Their alliance was first officially cemented under ‘Devolution-all-round’ and the ‘Peace (pacification) Process’. As far as the working class in Ireland is concerned, any wider ‘peace dividend’ has been remarkably thin.

None of this is to be found in *ButBS*. It makes no reference to the links between the British and Irish ruling classes. *ButBS* uses the terms UK, Britain, Great Britain and British somewhat indiscriminately. Socialists, though, should be fully aware of the nature of the state we live in – the United Kingdom of Great Britain **and** Northern Ireland and the political consequences which flow from this. Despite the *ButBS* dismissal of “Great Britain {as} a joke”, the British ruling class has an all-UK and an all-islands strategy. The concluding section suggests how Socialists can achieve this.

## 10. Conclusion

Socialists need to develop a republican, ‘internationalism from below’ challenge across these islands and further afield too. One place, where this debate is currently taking place is the Republican Socialist Platform (RSP).<sup>134</sup> The RSP

has taken off, after the attempt by some associated with one of the SWP breakaways, now behind *conter*, and also supported by a majority of another breakaway, rs21, to close down the Radical Independence Campaign.<sup>135</sup> Many, particularly younger, activists in the campaign for Scottish independence, have resisted this and fought back. RIC has reformed and includes people from a Socialist, Left SNP, Left Green background, as well as those involved in various campaigns, e.g, Living Rent and the Cop-26 coalition.

The RSP is one of RIC's affiliated organisations. RSP is open to others who want to widen out the debate, and who appreciate that the next phase of any Indy campaign, needs to be based on the democratic and republican principle of recognising the sovereignty of the people. But RSP is also a place where wider discussions and debates take place. These look beyond any immediate programme, strategy and tactics needed for our struggles in Scotland. The RSP seeks "a global commune which places humankind in a planned sustainable relationship with nature, to end capitalist exploitation, oppression and alienation and environmental degradation."<sup>136</sup> And RSP is seeking ways of avoiding falling between the dangers of tail-ending immediate struggles or movements and of offering abstract propaganda for a better future. RSP sees the key to this in "promoting the fullest democratisation of all organisations involved in struggle... Only when we are in full control of our own organisations of struggle can we begin a transition to a new society."<sup>137</sup>

**30.7.21 - updated 4.8.21**

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### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> *Breaking up the British State – Scotland, Independence & Socialism (ButBS)* edited by Bob Fotheringham, Dave Sherry & Colm Bryce (Bookmarks, 2021)

<sup>2</sup> With apologies to Neil Sedaka

<sup>3</sup> *From Pre-Brit to Ex-Brit- Understanding the Unionist nature of the UK state and the reasons for its ongoing demise*, Allan Armstrong <https://allanarmstrong831930095.files.wordpress.com/2021/07/from-pre-brit-to-ex-brit-4.pdf>, p.31-33

<sup>4</sup> <http://republicancommunist.org/blog/2017/08/17/the-difference-between-social-democracy-official-and-dissident-communism-and-a-politics-based-on-emancipation-liberation-and-self-determination/>

<sup>5</sup> In retrospect it can be seen that this International Revolutionary Wave ended in 1921, marked by events in the fateful month of March. However, there were still hopes that this revolutionary wave could be revived in Germany. The failure of the Hamburg Rising in October 1923 ended this possibility.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://allanarmstrong831930095.files.wordpress.com/2021/07/from-grey-to-red-granite-2.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Murray and I (no relation) were both in the International Socialists, then the SWP and Scottish Rank and File Teachers and Lecturers in the early and mid 1970s.

<sup>8</sup> <https://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2021/06/03/breaking-up-the-british-state-scotland-independence-and-socialism/>

<sup>9</sup> *The Fight for Scottish Democracy & Reform in 1820*, Murray Armstrong (Pluto Press, 2020). *The Liberty Tree: The Stirring Story of Thomas Muir and Scotland's First Fight for Democracy*, Murray Armstrong (Word Power Books, 2014). Indeed, it was in Edinburgh's Word Power bookshop that I had the pleasure of meeting up with Murray again after more than 30 years, when he was discussing his new book's publication with Word Power's Tarlochan Gata Aura. These two books get favourable mentions in *ButBS*, Charlie McKinnon, p. 411, refs. 25 and 50.

<sup>10</sup> There is one key industrial battle from the 1980s *ButBS* does not deal with and that is the North Sea Oil dispute (Brian Higgins, <https://libcom.org/book/export/html/4658> - Offshore Industrial Liaison Committee (OILC)). However, in turn, I first read about the successful New Turkey Red Strike of 1911 involving the National Federation of Women Workers and the Amalgamated Society of Dyers in Sherry's article in *ButBS*, p. 131.

<sup>11</sup> I was a participant in rank and file struggles in this period. In the process, I became the convenors of the SWP's Scottish Teachers Fraction (a body mainly responsible for trade union work) and of Scottish Rank & File Teachers (a united front coalition within the Educational Institute of Scotland).

<sup>12</sup> Anticapitalist Resistance includes people in Socialist Resistance (SR), which is affiliated to the Fourth International (FI). FI and its sections are now based more on diplomatic internationalism. For example, leading SR members in England and Wales did not champion SR policy in support of Scottish independence in the former Left Unity Party against the Left British unionists in the party. SWP's own sect-international - the International Socialist Tendency (IST) – although never as significant on the Left as the FI once was - also now displays more of a diplomatic internationalist approach. IST's Irish section opted to become the Irish Socialist Network, operating within a wider front - People before Profit, something that would have once got it expelled.

<sup>13</sup> This is also something I as an RCN member attempted to do in 2018 in RIC. I wrote an article for the *conter* blog, originally launched by the now defunct Respect, Independence, Socialism and Environmentalism – Scotland's Left Alliance (RISE)) (<https://www.conter.co.uk/blog/2018/9/7/the-yes-movement-the-left>), before it became a front for a politically anonymous inner group. The Left contingent on the large Edinburgh AUOB march, held on 6.10.18 can be seen at - <https://edinburghric.files.wordpress.com/2021/08/auob-6.10.18-photos.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> <http://republicancommunist.org/blog/2018/09/11/edinburgh-october-6th-a-rallying-call-for-the-left/> and <https://www.conter.co.uk/blog/2018/9/7/the-yes-movement-the-left>



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<sup>15</sup> The social forces for such a Constituent Assembly appeared in all the autonomous Yes groups the length and breadth of Scotland, as well as campaigns like the Radical Independence Campaign (RIC), Women for Independence, Trade Unionists for Independence, Labour for Independence., etc. Should there have been a ‘Yes’ vote on September 18<sup>th</sup>, 2014, the SNP government was going to close down ‘Yes Scotland’ and bring Scottish Labour, Conservative and Lib-Dem politicians into its negotiating team with the UK government. Many independence supporters already appreciated that the outcome of such negotiations would be decidedly ‘Indy-Lite’. RIC was committed to making its next conference open to all these autonomous groups, to campaign for a Constituent Assembly.

<sup>16</sup> It is unfortunate that some of the articles do not appear to have been checked beforehand for errors, e.g. the claim the Romans left Britannia in 165 AD (p.54); or that the Calton Weavers’ Strike (1787) took inspiration from the French Revolution (p. 395), which only began two years later! There is one important reference which does not check out (p.72, ref. 42). In initial drafts of some of my own historical writings I have sometimes made howlers. When writing on Ireland I have been saved from publishing some of these by the late Rayner Connor O’Lysaght, and when writing on Ukraine I have been helped by Chris Ford.

<sup>17</sup> This pamphlet was accompanied by the republication of Dave Sherry’s book, *John Maclean, Red Clydesider* (Bookmarks 2014). This had been published first in 1998 to provide an official SWP, Left British unionist take on John Maclean, at the time of the foundation of the Scottish Socialist Party. However, the republication of *JMcLR* in 2014 needed a new political reframing of Maclean. Yet, *ButBS* reworks earlier *JMcLRC* arguments, without producing any new historical material. It does not engage with the research inspired by, the IndyRef1 campaign and the 1916 Dublin Rising centenary (e.g. *John Maclean – Hero of Red Clydeside*, Henry Bell, (Pluto Press, 2018), *The Red and the Green, A Portrait of John Maclean*, Gerard Cairns (self-published, 2017), *Scotland and the Easter Rising - Fresh Perspectives*, edited by Kirsty Lusk and Willy Maley (Luath Press, 2018), or *We Will Rise Again – Ireland, Scotland and the Easter Rising*, edited by Stephen Coyle and Mairtin O’Cathain (1915 Rising Centenary Committee, 2018). I address some of the problems stemming from this later in this article.

Yet Sherry is quite capable of producing valuable independent research as shown in his article, *Helen Crawford: From daughter of the manse to dangerous Marxist in Scottish Labour History*, Volume 55, 2021, pp.65-82. I look forward to reading the full book.

<sup>18</sup> I have highlighted the weaknesses of the SWP’s Movementist approach (which are even more marked in its breakaways) and the need for a very different approach in IndyRef1 campaign (<https://allanarmstrong831930095.files.wordpress.com/2021/07/from-grey-to-red-granite-2.pdf> pp. 69-76) (<http://republicancommunist.org/blog/2017/08/11/a-critique-of-jeremy-corbyn-and-british-left-social-democracy-part-2/>)

<sup>19</sup> <http://republicancommunist.org/blog/2013/03/30/riding-two-horses-at-once-the-swp-and-scottish-independence/>

<sup>20</sup> <https://allanarmstrong831930095.files.wordpress.com/2021/07/from-grey-to-red-granite-2.pdf> – pp.9-10

<sup>21</sup> And it is the more colloquial and ruling class defined ‘British’ state, rather than the ‘United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland,’ which IS .and most others on the

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Left used. This led Ireland/Northern Ireland to either be marginalised or compartmentalised, especially when national democratic challenges emerged.

<sup>22</sup> This point is made by Dave Sherry and Julie Sherry (*ButBS*), p. 187. However, to give the CPGB leaders of the 1971 UCS Work-in their due, they did try to extend their campaign on an ‘internationalism from below’ basis, with appeals to workers in England and further afield. This is partly acknowledged by Sherry and Sherry on p. 190. A more adequate criticism of the CPGB’s pro-Scottish devolution stance then would have been to highlight the very limited possibilities for meeting workers’ aspirations in a Scottish Assembly subordinate to a UK state based on the sovereignty of the Crown-in-Westminster, buttressed by the state’s anti-democratic Crown Powers.

This situation was already being highlighted in Northern Ireland where a Civil Rights Movement, initially seeking reform of the UK state and Stormont, was gunned off the streets of Derry on Bloody Sunday in January 1972. The need for socialist republicans to mount an immediate social republican response was already becoming clearer. Unfortunately, despite the impact of the struggles in Ireland, particularly in Scotland’s Central Belt, the then IS’s (later the SWP’s) ‘national exceptionalist’ approach to Ireland, formed part of a deep-seated Labour, official CPGB and trade unionist tradition on the Left.

I also attended this IS aggregate. My own then Rosa Luxemburgist politics over the National Question were just as inadequate in addressing the political situation. As far back as 1919-23, John Maclean was already highlighting British Left weakness with regard to Ireland in the infant CPGB, the ILP and the British trade union movement.

<sup>23</sup> The SWP was part of the Trade Union & Socialist Coalition (TUSC), a Socialist Party-(ex-Militant) led, pro-Leave, electoral front. TUSC stood in the 2010 and 2015 general elections but vacated the electoral scene for a Corbyn-led Labour challenge in 2017 and 2019.

<sup>24</sup> The Valleys, now the Welsh, Underground Network, whose leading figures appear to come from, or have been influenced by CPGB/CPB politics, have come out in favour of a Socialist Welsh Republic. This is probably the first indication of a CPB/CPS-style break in Wales (<https://welshundergroundnetwork.com>).

<sup>25</sup> *ButBS*, Bob Fotheringham, p.326

<sup>26</sup> This was shown by the SNP government’s initial backing for Tayside Health Board management against their Ninewells Hospital porters in Dundee in 2015, and by their behind-the-scenes backing for the FE college principals over college lecturers to sabotage an already agreed pay and conditions deal from 2016-17.

<sup>27</sup> In this respect, the lack of a programme plays an analogous role for the SWP leadership that the lack of a written UK constitution does of the British ruling class. They can make it up as they go along!

<sup>28</sup> The full name is the Socialist Party of England and Wales, of which the Socialist Party of Scotland (not to be confused with the Scottish Socialist Party) is an autonomous section, in reality a ‘branch office’.

<sup>29</sup> *ButBS*, Dave Sherry and Julie Sherry, p. 187

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<sup>30</sup> Tommy Sheridan's and Scottish Militant Labour 's role in the Anti-Poll Tax Federation (1998- 91) is criticised because they were "now gravitating towards a form of left-wing nationalism." (*ButBS*, Dave and Julie Sherry, p. 214). But at this time, Militant was still heavily involved in the British Labour Party and held to a Left unionist defence of the UK. Indeed, even after leaving the Labour Party in 1991, Tommy Sheridan and Alan McCombes (for Scottish Militant Labour) made the case for the defence of the Union to unite the British working class. This was done at a John Maclean Society meeting in a debate with Gerry Cairns and myself. We argued for a republican, 'break-up of the UK' approach.

Nevertheless, to give Militant its due, during the anti-poll tax campaign, it did practice 'internationalism from below' in the Scottish and All-Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federations. The Scottish APTF used the Tories' early implementation of the poll tax in Scotland to send campaigners down to England and Wales, to prepare for the Thatcher and Kinnocks' 'internationalism from above' state offensive to implement the poll tax. This involved Labour controlled local councils sending out sheriff officers and bailiffs.

<sup>31</sup> The ISG wrote a considerably more developed book on Scottish independence than the SWP did at the time. This was entitled *Britain Must Break – the international case for independence*, James Foley (ISG, 2012). This was heavily influenced by SWP thinking, particularly by the then dissident Neil Davidson. It put forward a Left social democratic critique of the SNP and New Labour. I wrote a republican socialist review, '*Britain must break' to defend 'Real Labour' or the 'Break-up of the UK' to advance Republican Socialism*. (<http://republicancommunist.org/blog/2012/09/16/britain-must-break-to-defend-real-labour-or-the-break-up-of-the-uk-to-advance-republican-socialism/>). At this stage the ISG were willing to engage with others and entered into the debate. Several of their leading members have now abandoned this open approach, and have retreated to the SWP tactic of the time (e.g, Keir McKechnie) of ignoring awkward political challenges.

<sup>32</sup> The Republican Communist Network (RCN) was the organisation I was involved in. It has become the Republican Communist Forum (RCF) which publishes *Emancipation, Liberation & Self-determination* (<http://republicancommunist.org/blog/about-2/>). Most RCF members work in the new wider Republican Socialist Platform (<https://republicansocialists.scot>).

<sup>33</sup> The Democratic Left, unlike the CPB, came out of the Eurocommunist wing of the old CPGB.

<sup>34</sup> <http://republicancommunist.org/blog/2013/04/16/feminism-and-the-crisis-in-the-british-socialist-workers-party/>

<sup>35</sup> *ButBS*, Bob Fotheringham, p. 317.

<sup>36</sup> Sheridan's Hope Over Fear gained more influence after IndyRef1. The Movementism of RIC's ISG leaders led them to downgrade and then abandon any organisation around Scottish independence. However, the Independistas of 'We are the 45' (an appeal both to the size of the Yes vote and to Scottish Jacobite historical sentiment) continued. After, the Scottish rejection of Brexit in 2016, they were able to attract wider forces, now that there was a democratic basis for calling for a new referendum. All Under One Banner organised increasingly large demonstrations. However, prior to this, Sheridan had been courting another section of Independistas who, in contrast to the civic national and rainbow coalition nature of the politics which dominated IndyRef1, was more attracted to

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ethnic and anti-‘woke’ nationalism, e.g. Scottish Resistance. Ethnic and anti-‘woke’ nationalism had been marginal during IndyRef1. Soil nan Gaidheal, openly ethnic ultra-nationalists, is even more entrenched in this tradition.

<sup>37</sup> In 2018 the Socialist Workers Party in Ireland has become the Socialist Workers Network (SWN), in its own Movementist adaptation to changing Irish politics. Despite growing differences with its British SWP parent organisation, SWN remains an affiliate of its International Socialist Tendency.

<sup>38</sup> People before Profit has TDs in the Dail, an MLA in Stormont and councillors in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

<sup>39</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antarsya>

<sup>40</sup> My own contributions for RIC were in Dublin and West Belfast, at the ‘London Says Yes’ rally with Bernadette McAliskey (<https://edinburghric.files.wordpress.com/2020/04/london-says-yes-rally-6.9.14-1.pdf>) and writing a RIC contribution to be read at the ‘Go For It’ rally in Cardiff (<https://edinburghric.files.wordpress.com/2020/04/go-for-it-welsh-rally-cardiff-6.9.14-1.pdf>), Cat Boyd, then in ISG, spoke in London, Bilbao and Quebec (and probably in other places too).

<sup>41</sup> *The British Left and the UK state - From the British Left’s ‘national exceptionalism’ during the ‘IndyRef1’ campaign to acting as Left outriders for the UK state during the Brexit campaign (TBLatUKs)*, Allan Armstrong, pp. 3-15

<sup>42</sup> This was also true of the Socialist Party with its own sect-international, the Committee for a Workers International (CWI).

<sup>43</sup> *ButBS*, Keir McKechnie & Angela McCormick, pp. 5 and 16-19

<sup>44</sup> *ButBS*, Bob Fotheringham, p. 318

<sup>45</sup> In the 1999 Holyrood election, the SWP stood independently but as part of an electoral deal with SSP. The SWP had become a platform in the SSP in 2003 and of Solidarity in 2007. Throughout this period, they opposed Scottish independence.

<sup>46</sup> Gwynedd was not recognised as a kingdom by the Angevins or Plantagenets, but as a subordinate principality within their dynastic empires. It was from this precedent that the royal title of Prince of Wales was created after the conquest of Wales.

<sup>47</sup> *ButBS, The Preface*, p.1

<sup>48</sup> <http://republicancommunist.org/blog/2014/06/26/making-plans-for-nigel/>

<sup>49</sup> *ButBS, John Maclean and Scottish nationalism*, Dave Sherry, pp.172-4 and *Maclean and Connolly*, Bob Fotheringham, pp. 396-8

<sup>49</sup> *ButBS*, Bob Fotheringham, pp. 396-398

<sup>50</sup> *ButBS*, Bob Fotheringham, pp. 396-398

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51 *ButBS*, Bob Fotheringham, p. 397

52 *ButBS*, Keir McKechnie and Angela McCormick, pp. 31-2

53 Connolly's decision to adopt a breakaway Irish workers' republican road can now be accepted by many on the British Left. However, the recognition of the need for an independent (and eventually reunited) Ireland, has produced another political problem for the British Left. The creation of both the Irish Free State (later the Republic of Ireland) and a semi-detached Northern Ireland statelet has led to affairs in these two political entities becoming politically marginalised. Much of the British Left has adopted a 'national exceptionalism' (*TBLatUKs*, pp. 3-15), so events in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland can be compartmentalised. This remains true even when events there have major knock-on effects for the rest of the UK – something all sections of the British ruling class are fully aware of.

There is a flip side to this 'national exceptionalism' on the Irish Left, which also doesn't understand the wider unionist nature of the UK state, equating Unionism with reactionary and conservative Irish/Ulster politics. The political basis for this is explained in <https://allanarmstrong831930095.files.wordpress.com/2021/07/from-grey-to-red-granite-2.pdf> – pp. 32-4.

54 *ButBS*, Bob Fotheringham, p. 318

55 *ButBS*, Dave Sherry, p. 172

56 *ButBS*, Dave Sherry, p. 172

57 <https://www.marxists.org/archive/maclean/works/1921-oll.htm>

58 Maclean's view of the future revolutionary potential of the 40 hours Strike in 1919 can be seen in the quote from Harry McShane in *ButBS*.p.168. At that time Maclean and McShane were very close, and continued to be until the demise of the Tramp Trust Unlimited.

59 <https://www.marxists.org/archive/maclean/works/1920-tit.htm>

60 I have addressed this in <http://republicancommunist.org/blog/2018/06/22/allan-armstrong-reviews-the-red-and-the-green-by-gerard-cairns/> - i) *The missing Labour in Scottish History and the need for a socialist republican 'internationalism from below' politics today*. Since then Gerry has provided more details of Erskine's politics in his very informative *No Language!, No Nation! The Life and times of the Honourable Ruaraidh Erskine of Marr* (Rymour Books, 2021)

61 *ButBS*, Dave Sherry, p. 165

62 The republication of *The Vanguard* was a repeat of Maclean's earlier method of taking on the BSP leadership during the First World War.

63 *ButBS*, Dave Sherry, p. 172

64 In *Irish Stew* (*The Vanguard*, August 1920) (<https://www.marxists.org/archive/maclean/works/1920-irish.htm>) Maclean writes of "our sister race the Irish". Yet at this time,

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most social scientists had not made clear the distinction between race, nationality and nation, which became much clearer for most Socialists after the rise of and fascism. (<http://republicancommunist.org/blog/2016/07/15/peoples-nationalities-nations-nation-states-nationalism-and-nationalists/>). Lenin wrote favourably of the stance of the Irish Race Convention, held in New York in 1916, but chose to translate it as the Irish National Convention, in *The Discussion on Self-Determination, Summed Up – 10. The Irish Rebellion of 1916* (<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/jul/x01.htm>).

<sup>65</sup> Recently the extent and significance of these have been shown in *The Red and the Green – A Portrait of John Maclean*, Gerry Cairns (self-published, 2017) (<http://republicancommunist.org/blog/2018/06/22/allan-armstrong-reviews-the-red-and-the-green-by-gerard-cairns/>)- section 6. *The growing impact of the struggle for an Irish Republic on Maclean's politics*.

<sup>66</sup> *From Davitt to Connolly – 'Internationalism from Below' and the challenge to the UK state and British empire from 1879-1895*, Allan Armstrong (Eleconmac Paperback, 2010)

<sup>67</sup> *Roddy Connolly and the Struggle for Socialism in Ireland*, Charlie Maguire, p.46 (Cork University Press, 2008)

<sup>68</sup> *The Irish Tragedy: Up Scottish Revolutionists!* John Maclean (*TIT-SD*), (*The Vanguard*, November 1922) (<https://www.marxists.org/archive/maclean/works/1922-irish-scot.htm>)

<sup>69</sup> *EA*, John Maclean, (<https://www.marxists.org/archive/maclean/works/1922-election.htm>)

<sup>70</sup> Both Connolly and Maclean had contributed to *Forward*.

<sup>71</sup> *Literary Note*, John Maclean (*The Vanguard*, November 1920) <https://www.marxists.org/archive/maclean/works/1920-lit.htm>, John Maclean

<sup>72</sup> *TIT-SD* John Maclean (pamphlet, Tramp Trust Unlimited, 1920) (<https://www.marxists.org/archive/maclean/works/1922-swr.htm>)

<sup>73</sup> *All Hail, the Scottish Workers Republic!* John Maclean (leaflet, August 1920) (<https://www.marxists.org/archive/maclean/works/1922-swrhtm>)

<sup>74</sup> I have examined the historical roles of William Wallace and Robert the Bruce in *Oor Wullie – William Wallace and Socialists Today*, (<http://republicancommunist.org/blog/2005/09/13/oor-wullie-william-wallace-and-socialists-today/>) and of the Jacobites in *Beyond Broadwords and Bayonets*, Chapter 3, *Jacobites and Covenanters* (<http://republicancommunist.org/blog/2003/08/03/beyond-broadwords-and-bayonets-2/>)

<sup>75</sup> *Labour in Irish History*, James Connolly (<https://www.marxists.org/archive/connolly/1910/lih/chap16.htm>)

<sup>76</sup> *The History of the Working Classes in Scotland*, Tom Johnston, was originally published by *Forward* in 1920, and republished by Unity Publishers, (1946) and ER Publishers (1974). It provided a historical grounding for a liberal unionist, British Scotland.

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Johnston himself later abandoned liberal unionism for an acceptance of the UK constitutional status quo, and a government post!

<sup>77</sup> Maclean first outlined his thoughts on the rise of the US imperialism in *The Coming War with America*, written in 1919 (<https://www.marxists.org/archive/maclean/works/1919-america.htm>). Because such a war never occurred, Maclean's views have often been summarily dismissed. The key point was that Maclean already recognised that another inter-imperialist war was inevitable in the absence of a Socialist revolution. Furthermore, many leading British figures at the time did show growing hostility to the rise of US imperialism. It took many years before the majority settled for junior imperial status, perhaps as late as 1956. . And Maclean's own post-1919 writings on the manoeuvrings of the various imperial powers (including Japan), following the waning influence of British imperialism, are well informed.

<sup>78</sup> *TIT*<sup>78</sup> Interestingly, Maclean had already given his support to CPGB candidate from Dundee, when he stood in the Caerphilly byelection in 1921.

<sup>79</sup> Maclean's initial views on Ireland had been formed when, as a member of the British, Social Democratic Federation, he had been invited by James Larkin to Belfast during the epic 1907 Carters and Dockers Strike. The conclusions he drew were very much at one with the largely economic thinking of the British Left. He argued that such struggles would overcome sectarianism amongst the Irish working class. *Reflections on Belfast*, John Maclean (<https://www.marxists.org/archive/maclean/works/1907-belfast.htm>)

<sup>80</sup> *James Clunie, The Voice of Labour - The Autobiography of a House Painter*, James Clunie, (self-published, 1958), p. 96

<sup>81</sup> *Election Manifesto*, 1923, John Maclean, (<https://www.marxists.org/archive/maclean/works/1923-man.htm>)

<sup>82</sup> Scottish and Irish nationalists have tried to absorb Maclean and Connolly into a specifically nationalist tradition, downplaying their socialist republican and internationalist politics. Rather than resorting to the slurs of the British Left, their thinking has sometimes been associated with the romanticising of Maclean and Connolly, something, which in a context of cultural resistance (see part 8), can be positive.

<sup>83</sup> *John Maclean and the CPGB*, Bob Pitt (a Trotskyist) (<https://bobbitt.org.uk/john-maclean-and-the-cpgb>). I attended a meeting in Glasgow organised by the remnant CPGB (*Workers Weekly*) in 1997 at the time of the Scottish Devolution campaign. Pitt had been invited to speak. Despite Pitt's culling of useful historical documents for his pamphlet's appendices, his dependence on the Gallacher "mental instability" slur, and his misrepresentation of the political debates underlying their differences, were very apparent at this meeting. The CPGB's own speaker was clearly at some loss. *WW* did not report this meeting!

<sup>84</sup> *Harry McShane - No Mean Fighter*, (HM-NMF) Harry McShane and Joan Smith (Pluto Press, 1978)

<sup>85</sup> *HM-NMF*, Harry McShane and Joan Smith, pp. 151-2

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<sup>86</sup> *HM-NMF*, Harry McShane and Joan Smith, pp.150-1

<sup>87</sup> *HM-NMF*, Harry McShane and Joan Smith, p. 136

<sup>88</sup> Neil Johnstone had probably been brought into contact with John Maclean by black Socialist, Claude Mackay. Maclean's close ally, Sylvia Pankhurst, had supported Mackay in challenging the racist attacks of E.D. Morel (ILP) in the *Daily Herald* in April 1920. And it is significant that both Mackay and Johnstone had Scottish surnames, dating from the days of Scottish slaveowners in the West Indies!

<sup>89</sup> *JM-HoRC*, Henry Bell, p. 194

<sup>90</sup> *Open Letter to Lenin*, John Maclean (<https://www.marxists.org/archive/maclean/works/1921-oll.htm>)

<sup>91</sup> <https://allanarmstrong831930095.files.wordpress.com/2021/07/from-pre-brit-to-ex-brit-2.pdf> – pp. 585-592

<sup>92</sup> Indeed, the role of *The Vanguard* role in helping to promote specifically communist politics in the ILP can be seen in the advert it took from *The International (organ of the Communist section of the ILP)* (issue, no 13, December 1920).

<sup>93</sup> <https://allanarmstrong831930095.files.wordpress.com/2021/07/from-pre-brit-to-ex-brit-2.pdf> – pp.

<sup>94</sup> *John Maclean*, Nan Milton, p. 287 (Pluto Press, 1973)

<sup>95</sup> Buchanan's support for Home Rule wasn't just a side feature of his politics. He moved a bill for Scottish Home Rule at Westminster in 1924. It was talked out.

<sup>96</sup> Having worked so hard in the Govan area, Maclean was not willing to move to another constituency. And the SWRP continued to work very hard in preparation for the next general election, when it was widely expected that Maclean would perform much better, following Labour MPs' ineffectiveness at Westminster.

<sup>97</sup> Interestingly, Maclean had already supported a CPGB candidate, Bob Stewart from Dundee, when he stood in a Westminster by-election in Caerphilly in August 1921. Stewart also stood against someone who Maclean might also have considered a 'Red Labour' candidate. Morgan Jones and ILP member was a conscientious objector during World War One.

<sup>98</sup> *ButBS*, Dave Sherry, p. 173

<sup>99</sup> Claude Mackay originally from Jamaica, worked in the USA, before moving to London and writing for Sylvia Pankhurst's *Workers Dreadnought*. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Claude\\_McKay#Sojourn\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_Kingdom](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Claude_McKay#Sojourn_in_the_United_Kingdom)).

<sup>100</sup> Henry Bell states that John Maclean's "organisational legacy may have been slight but his political legacy has been vast." He outlines how this legacy has been transmitted to future generations in *John Maclean – Hero of Red Clydeside (JM-HoRC)*, Henry Bell, pp. 196-20, (Pluto Press, 2018). Corey Gibson in *The Voice of the People – Hamish Henderson*



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and *Scottish Cultural Politics – John Maclean and the Radical National Tradition* (Edinburgh University Press, pp.131-138) also develops this line of thinking.

In 1973 the John Maclean Society published *Homage to John Maclean*, edited by T.S Law and Thurso Berwick, which contains many songs and poems that had been written over the years about John Maclean,

<sup>101</sup> <http://www.starfolkclub.com>

<sup>102</sup> *Scottish Capitalism- Class, State and Nation from before the Union to the Present*, edited by Tony Dickson (contributors - Jim Brown, Keith Burgess, Tony Clarke, John Foster, Peter Smith and Willie Thompson) (Lawrence and Wishart, 1980)

<sup>103</sup> *The Red Paper on Scotland*, edited by Gordon Brown (which also included contributions by Tom Nairn and John Foster, amongst many others) (Edinburgh University Student Publication Books, 1975)

<sup>104</sup> *The Break-up of Britain: Crisis of and Neonationalism*, Tom Nairn (New Left Books 1977). Once again, a pioneering book that has still left one baleful legacy of the Left. This is the equation of Britain and the UK state. Nairn was later to use the term ‘Ukania’, but this did not really get to grips with the relationship of Ireland/Northern Ireland’ to the rest of UK.

<sup>105</sup> *Discovering the Scottish Revolution, 1692-1746*, Neil Davidson (Pluto Press, 2003) also see *Beyond Broadwords and Bayonets*, Allan Armstrong (<http://republicancommunist.org/blog/2003/08/03/beyond-broadwords-and-bayonets-2/>)

<sup>106</sup> The beginnings of such a criticism were also made by George Kerevan, whilst he was still an International Marxist Group (IMG) member, in *The Origins of Scottish Nationhood, Arguments within Scottish Marxism*, (*The Bulletin of Scottish Politics*, Volume 1, No, 2, pp. 111-133 (Scottish International Institute, 1981). However, the IMG turn to the Labour Party took Kerevan rightwards in politics, something which continued with his later membership of the SNP. IndyRef1, though, seemed to bring about a ‘Damascus road’ reconversion to the Scottish Left. He joined up with Chris Bambery (ex IMG and ex-SWP). More recently Kerevan has shifted his politics again and joined Alba, whilst Bambery remains parliamentary assistant to SNP dissident, Joanna Cherry.

<sup>107</sup> *Arts of Resistance* (2009) and later *Arts of Independence* (2014) written by one-time CPGB fellow-traveller, Sandy Moffat (and also by Alan Riach), both published by Luath Press, recognise this, especially in the title of the first book.

<sup>108</sup> Ray’s significance was recognised by Neil Davidson. in Antonio Gramsci’s Reception in Scotland (<https://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2017/04/10/antonio-gramscis-reception-in-scotland/in Antonio Gramsci>)

<sup>109</sup> Ray Burnett and Bob Tait also featured in the 1975 *The Red Paper on Scotland*. This was altogether a more widely ranging book than its more recent imitator, *The Red Paper on Scotland, Class, Nation and Socialism*, edit. Pauline Bryan and Tommy Kay (Red Paper Collective, 2014). This attempted to provide a Left cover for British unionism during IndyRef1. One of the editors, nominated by Jeremy Corbyn, became Baroness Bryan of Partick. However, Corbyn wasn’t successful in getting one of his other close Scottish supporters, past trade union official, Karie Murphy into the House of Lords. But another

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‘Left’ Labour and onetime MP and MSP, Katy Clark became Baroness Clark of Kilwinning on a sojourn in the House of Lords. You can see why a challenge to the UK state does not figure large in Scottish ‘Left’ Labour!

<sup>110</sup> Allan Armstrong, <http://republicancommunist.org/blog/2014/05/07/exploitation-oppression-and-alienation-emancipation-liberation-and-self-determination>

<sup>111</sup> SRFT and the SFST included members who went on to make their mark in the cultural sphere –e.g. actor Elaine C. Smith, authors John Aberdein (CPGB upbringing and ex-SSP) and Norman Bissell (ex-WRP); film makers, Eddie Dick (ex-Young Spartacists) and Callum Macrae (ex-Workers Action); traditional musician Ronnie Alexander (anarchist and republican and player with Clutha). SRFT was also involved in early support for Gaelic, publishing *The Struggle for a Language* by Gwen Mulholland (daughter of one-time CPGB member and promoter of Scottish self-determination, Bob Mulholland).

And there two others, who worked with the SWP but were from a dissident or fellow-travelling CPGB background and took a strong interest in Scottish cultural affairs. Kenny MacLachlan (onetime EIS president), helped to preserve the Maryhill Burgh Hall murals. Jim Aitken (EIS conference delegate) has continued this with his involvement in Culture Matters (<https://www.culturematters.org.uk>)

<sup>112</sup> *ButBS, Preface*, p.1, Keir McKechnie and Angela McCormick, p.18, Donny Gluckstein, pp, 28-32.

<sup>113</sup> Failing this, the door is opened up for expelling these people for still being non-Irish colonial settlers (Algerian style). Or a reversed ethnic supremacist politics could be promoted, where those from such backgrounds become the underdogs (there is a precedent for this in the disparagingly termed ‘Redlegs (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Redleg>) in some former British Caribbean colonies. I don’t believe for a second that this is what the authors of *ButBS* want, but their thinking over this opens the door to others who have no such scruples.

<sup>114</sup> *From Pre-Brit to Ex-Brit, part 2. 1. Union and Empire – Hybrid Britishness or Republican Breakaway*, Allan Armstrong (pp. 125-165 (<https://allanarmstrong831930095.files.wordpress.com/2021/07/from-pre-brit-to-ex-brit-4.pdf>))

<sup>115</sup> Laurence Ginnell went on to become a significant figure in the First Irish Republic, joining Sinn Fein and becoming an anti-Treaty campaigner.

<sup>116</sup> Arthur Griffith, the founder of Sinn Fein, was no anti-imperialist. He had originally envisaged Ireland as part of ‘Dual Monarchy’ with Great Britain. following the example of Hapsburg Austro Hungary. This way Ireland could benefit from the British empire too. The Republicans only gained control of Sinn Fein in 1918.

<sup>117</sup> *ButBS*, Charlotte Ahmed and Henry Maitles, p.296. This confusion also appears in their opposition to “anti-racist campaigning which imposes pre-conditions – for example to Israel”, pp. 294. This concedes the political ground to those they criticise a few pages earlier who “equate criticism of the Israeli state and its Zionist origins as racist and opposition to its oppression of Palestinian people as tantamount to anti-semitism (p. 283). Jews, who wish to give genuine support to anti-racist demos, where today Muslims (including some Palestinians) are likely to be major participants, do not come along with Israeli flags, even if

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some may still support the maintenance of a specifically Jewish form of state. White Afrikaaners opposing the South African Apartheid regime did not bring South African state flags to protests. White Americans opposing the segregated Jim Crow South did not bring along Confederate flags. Those from a Protestant Irish background opposing officially backed sectarianism in Northern Ireland, do not carry union jacks or ‘Ulster’ flags. Furthermore, today, it is the Hard and Far Right in the UK, who look to Israel as providing the constitutional precedent for an ethnically supremacist state - only instead of a Jewish supremacist Israel they want a white British supremacist UK (e.g. Steven Yaxley-Lennon, aka Tommy Robinson).

These weaknesses in this article are a shame, because in many other respects it is helpful and informative.

118 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norway#Politics\\_and\\_government](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norway#Politics_and_government)

119 *The Right of Nations to Self-Determination - 6. Norway's Secession from Sweden* V. Lenin (1914) (<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1914/self-det/ch06.htm>)

120 If much of the British Left is confused today about the difference between Great Britain and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and even more confused about the nature of Northern Ireland (a province not a nation), back in Lenin's lifetime, he was just as confused about the difference between “England” and the United Kingdom (although this ‘confusion’ is still widespread on the British and Greater England Right!)

121 *Socialist Symposium on Internationalism, and Some Other Things*, James Connolly, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/connolly/1911/connwalk/5-syminter.htm>

122 *ButBS*, Bob Fotheringham, pp.380-83.

123 The EU (and its predecessors, the EEC and EC) is a treaty organisation of existing states and has played no part in the internal affairs of these member states, without their approval. The lack of response to the violent UK and Spanish state repression in Ireland/Northern Ireland or in Euskadi, including the use of death squads, had already highlighted this.

124 <https://www.thenational.scot/news/19023650.scottish-independence-george-osborne-simple-plan-stop-referendum/>

125 *The end of short lived Maybynism and the victory of full-blown Right Populism – The December 12<sup>th</sup> general election will decide.* (TeosIM) Allan Armstrong, pp.16-17 (<https://allanarmstrong831930095.files.wordpress.com/2020/02/the-end-of-shortlived-maybynism-3.pdf>)

126 *ButBS*, Bob Fotheringham, p.328

127 Federalism or independence – what is best? J. Willie Gallacher - <https://republicansocialists.scot/2021/01/federalism-or-independence-whats-best/>

128 *Ireland and the Union, 1905-1929', Devolution in a federal form*, Walter Kendle (Glendale, 1992)

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<sup>129</sup> *ButBS*, Bob Fotheringham, p. 326

<sup>130</sup> Ulster was a nine county province of Ireland. But Ulster, as well as the wider Ireland, were both partitioned in 1921, leaving the former Irish Unionists with six Ulster counties, hence my use of ‘Ulster’ rather than Ulster. The British ruling class has always preferred to name the territory Northern Ireland, as in the full title of their state - the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. This was partly done in the hope of exerting some leverage over ‘Southern Ireland,’ or what became the Irish Free State, a dominion under the Crown within the British empire.

<sup>131</sup> People before Profit can still make electoral gains at Sinn Fein’s expense in Northern Ireland, because Sinn Fein is in the ‘governing’ coalition’, along with the DUP. But in the Republic of Ireland, Sinn Fein, unlike Labour or the Greens, has never been in government, so it can still appear to be a more principled outsider, and gain more TDs.

<sup>132</sup> Here I use ‘New Irish’ in a wider sense than recent migrants. Historically, Unionists in Ireland were prepared to consider themselves to be some form of Irish –the Irish-British – as long as they dominated. But, after Partition most Unionists broke with this Irish label, going instead for ‘Ulster’-British. Therefore, today, those mainly younger people who are rejecting their ‘Ulster’-British’ upbringing could be described as potential ‘New Irish.” And indeed, such is the significance of the break many young people in the Republic of Ireland have also had to make with traditional Irish nationalism, it could also be argued that they are becoming ‘New Irish’ too. A prime cause for a new Irish unity is the shared rejection of social conservatism and reaction.

<sup>133</sup> This does not mean any rejection of all that is best in traditional Irish culture. To take a key example, traditional music, which has had a major global impact, we can look at three significant strands. Perhaps it is the Chieftains who are the best-known representatives of Irish traditional music, but they have drawn massively on music from Brittany, Galicia, Cape Breton Island, China, and Hispanic and Appalachian USA. A second major traditional stream is associated with Christy Moore, Sweeny’s Men, Planxty and Moving Hearts and their successors. This has been influenced by early British folk rock and Balkan traditional music (from a time when there were links between musicians politically influenced by the Irish Communist Party, e.g. Andy Irvine, who used these links to travel to the old East European CP-led Peoples Democracies). Whilst the music of The Pogues came out of the British punk experience of the London-Irish and has been transmitted back to Ireland and Irish-America (e.g. Black Forty Seven) and more recently to Peat and Diesel based in Lewis.

<sup>134</sup> <https://republicansocialists.scot>

<sup>135</sup> *Freedom Come All Ye*, Allan Armstrong (<https://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2021/02/03/freedom-come-all-ye/>)

<sup>136</sup> <https://republicansocialists.scot/constitution/>

<sup>137</sup> <https://republicansocialists.scot/constitution/>