

# Europe And Nation Little And Large

The European Community could mean not only centralisation but also decentralisation. There is no reason why it must become a supranational monolith. **Gwyn A Williams** argues that it can provide new opportunities for diversity and national difference

We in Wales live in the aftermath of the Pontypridd by-election, which Labour, with a plausible candidate and a major effort, safely won, though its majority slipped, and in which Plaid Cymru quadrupled its vote and quintupled its percentage, taking a good half of its gains from former Labour voters. We approach the Vale of Glamorgan contest: said to be critical to Labour's recovery. Inevitably, our eyes are fixed on Westminster.

If we go on looking only to Westminster, as we have done for 200 years, generally with the fixed stare a rabbit directs at a stoat, we can feel ourselves to be some small, freak people clinging to the lip of the Island of Britain in total dependence on this British state.

We are nothing of the kind. We are not alone. We are a European people and we belong to an army of small peoples, numbering many millions, who are becoming the fulcrum of the struggle to create a human Europe of the peoples.

It is necessary to look across the Channel. If we look across that Channel, we can't stop looking until we see Vladivostok. The momentous changes underway in the Soviet Union will prove momentous for the human race. Consider one dramatic decision. In the drive for *perestroika*, the Soviet republics of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Byelorussia, together with the Ural city of Sverdlovsk and the Tatar autonomous region, are to switch to full regional self-financing. They will take control of their own peoples and resources and the Soviet Union will have to renegotiate its relationships with them. They are to be the vanguard in the struggle to transform society. It is no doubt a measure of the difficulties *perestroika* faces that, at least in the Baltic republics, the implementation of that decision has been postponed.

Those Baltic republics have the bit between their teeth. Already, with the agreement and in some cases the encouragement of Moscow, they have recovered national flags, national anthems, national days; they are establishing the equality of their own languages and are trying to create their own citizenship. Two of them are talking of the right locally to veto central legislation. There will no doubt be trouble, but there is little doubt either that an effective compromise is in the making.

Despite our very different histories, it is worth taking a closer look at Estonia, smallest of the republics and the pace-maker. They are one and half million people; we are twice that number. Many of them are passionately concerned to maintain and develop their own language and culture in the face of the world language of Russian; many of our people are equally passionate about Welsh. They face a process of immigration and displacement, the threat of historical extinction, as bad as anything which the people of western Wales now face, even as much of urban Wales looks like becoming another Isle of Dogs. Forty percent of the

population of Estonia is non-Estonian; something like 37% of the population of Wales is non-Welsh. But note - at the critical vote in the Estonian Soviet, nearly every one of the representatives of the Russians in Estonia joined with native delegates to call for a genuinely self-governing Estonia, presumably because it was in their interests so to do. This is something we in Wales need to think hard about.

What has driven this Gorbachev generation is not only the renewal of the communist ideal, but brute necessity. They have learned the hard way that they cannot regenerate their society without radical constitutional reform. We are in the same predicament. To talk of 'constitutional tinkering' as a distraction is fundamentally to misread that predicament. There can be no regeneration of our society without a radical restructuring of government on this Island of Britain.

**The necessity becomes more urgent as 1992 approaches.** Some 18 months ago, the European Parliament, unreformed and constrained though it now is, passed a major resolution on the minority languages of Europe, which are spoken by some 80m people. It was a radical demand for serious action in their support. Such a resolution does not today have the force of European law, though after 1992 matters may be different. It has nevertheless gone to the Commission for submission to the states. As far as I know, this resolution passed unreported in the London or even the Welsh press. We learned of it only from our allies in the European Free alliance within the Rainbow Group in the European Parliament.

Only a few weeks ago, that same European Parliament passed an even more radical resolution. This time, it was at least mentioned in one Welsh newspaper. By a majority of 100, it called for real power to pass to the regions of Europe. It called for elected bodies to run those regions with the cash resources to manage their own affairs. The objective is to reduce the growing gap between richer and poorer regions. It argues that the gradual transfer of powers to the Community must be accompanied by decentralisation and suggests the creation of a second chamber or European senate of the regions.

**T**he fiercest resistance came from a centralist Spaniard and an English Tory MEP. Two features particularly appalled the latter. The European Parliament declared that these powerful elected assemblies of the regions should be able in a number of instances to bypass their state governments, deal directly with the Commission and European agencies and help to shape Community policies on the regions. And it insisted on minimal requirements for the definition of a region, so that it should be a real entity not some public relations exercise. That, for example, the embryonic Welsh state which exists in the Welsh Office with its cluster of dependent quangos should be controlled by the people of Wales, not by

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## The Thirteenth State

The abolition of internal frontier controls scheduled for 1992 will have very different meanings for the citizens of the 12 EC countries to those it will have for the 16m non-EC nationals lawfully residing in the Community. Already 2m of the former have exercised their right to live and work in other countries within the EC. Their entitlement to family unity, to equal opportunity in employment and to all the social benefits of their host countries is guaranteed in EC law.

The position of non-EC nationals is the exact opposite. Even though they are fully-integrated into the labour market, albeit usually in the worst and lowest-paid jobs, and are subject to the same pressures to migrate as EC citizens, they have no right to cross frontiers to look for work. Nor do they have the absolute right to family unity enjoyed by

migrants who are EC nationals.

Whereas most of Britain's immigrants were Commonwealth citizens who, when they came, had the right to settle here; migrants to other EC countries, such as Turks and Kurds in West Germany, were primarily 'guestworkers': that is, people who were allowed to reside only as long as their labour was needed. This system had an important advantage for their 'host' country: it had only the most minimal responsibilities to these workers and their families. In effect, these 16m people constitute a 'thirteenth' state in the EC. They have no civic rights. They are unable to vote, and in some countries they cannot form political organisations. They are often prohibited from taking jobs in the public sector. Everywhere guestworkers are a focus for racism.

Unlike Britain, which has always relied mainly on ports of entry and government posts abroad for the enforcement of its immigra-

tion controls, most EC countries exercise controls inside their frontiers. Their internal controls include workplace checks on immigration status by employers, random checks by police in the streets and checks on people applying for benefit and public services. For Britain, one major effect of the harmonisation of immigration policies will be a rapid acceleration of the introduction of similar internal controls to those which have already begun to disfigure life and civil liberties here. Not far behind will be increased pressure for the introduction of ID cards and spot checks in the street on people assumed to be immigrants.

1992 is likely to mean a new 'Fortress Europe' surrounded by even stricter controls at the external borders of the EC, and harsher measures to keep tabs on guestworkers within. There will be pressure to co-ordinate rules on entry, residency, access to employment and entitlement to

civic rights. There will be a common visa requirement. Already EC ministers have drawn up a list of over 50 countries, largely Asian, African and East European, whose nationals will require visas to enter Britain. People from all black Commonwealth countries will find it increasingly difficult to make even short-term visits.

On all fronts the harmonisation of immigration procedures is settling for the most restrictive of current policies. It will continue to do so until there is a much more powerful demand, and not just from the marginalised and dispossessed, that all asylum-seekers and guestworkers living in the Community should enjoy the same rights as EC nationals. •

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*Whose Europe? - Racist Fortress or Equal Rights, a new broadsheet examining what the process of harmonisation is likely to mean. For details contact 'Whose Europe' c/o Refugee Forum, 54 Tavistock Place, London WC1 9RG. Tel: 01.482.3829.*

Whitehall.

We are in for great storms as 1992 approaches, frontiers start to dissolve and state sovereignty begins to become redundant. Obviously 1992 poses the threat of yet greater centralisation of corporate power, yet more deprivation for neglected regions like Wales. It is precisely for this reason that the drive for what is called a social Europe, which Jacques Delors has come to personify, is gathering such power and momentum that the true bearers of the Thatcherite faith are becoming alarmed and hostile.

This campaign, which at the hands of those dedicated to a European unity in diversity is becoming something of a crusade, is in part a reaction against the advance of the Europe of the corporations, but in part a product of it. Globalisation and regionalisation are simultaneous processes within the evolution of that post-Fbrdist society which has been so cogently analysed in the pages of this journal. The newer technology, the newer styles of flexible production directed at consumers of infinite variety and producers of individualised and participatory skills, that whole complex of attitudes and actions which is turning the institutions and practices of both established labour and capital into dinosaurs, certainly can and does cut across states. It concentrates enormous power and decisive control in oligarchies whose decisions can spell death to whole regions and communities.

But the very same process is widely

dispersing production with a freedom and flexibility hitherto unknown. It certainly strives, of necessity, to scoop up un-organised and ill-defended pools of available labour, like the legions of underpaid and exploited women, but it also, of necessity, cultivates a myriad new skills and new workers who are beginning to assume the independence and the dignity often associated with pre-industrial craftsmen and artisans. In an almost classically marxist manner, this capitalism, of necessity, sows the seeds of its own transcendence, much as the social 'libertarian' thrust of Thatcherism opens up all manner of spaces for socialism to move into.

**W**hat is urgently needed is direct political intervention of a socialist character. It will need to be a socialism which has understood the society it lives in, which develops the kind of openness, flexibility, initiative and will which have enabled socialists to assume or share power in a dozen countries on the continent. The central foci of intervention will have to be the local or regional and the European, if possible simultaneously. What will not serve is the state structure of a single country; the old socialist obsession with using the state power of its own 'nation' is patently inadequate.

That is why socialists must commit themselves to the dedicated Europeans' drive for their 'social Europe'. Their objective is to create genuine regional self-government as a necessary complement to increased power at the European

centre, to reduce regional differences, to enshrine workers' rights and workers' participation, to establish women's rights, civil rights, the rights of small peoples.

Europe over the next decades is going to resemble Britain in the 17th century when parliament moved to wrest power from the crown. We face endless struggles over the general and the particular. The European Parliament, handicapped by the fifth column within it staffed by MEPs committed to the state power of their own countries, but assisted by its own fifth column within the Commission and the European agencies, will move to wrest power from the Council of Ministers of the states. Jacques Delors is probably correct to say that, by the end of the century, 80% of the decisions which will deeply affect our lives will be taken in Brussels and Strasbourg. What will those decisions be and who will make them? Running through the endless conflicts ahead will be the struggle to transform the Europe of the corporations and the states into what the European Free Alliance calls the 'Europe of the Peoples', which will be a 'Europe of the people'.

That struggle will not be confined to Western Europe. In it, the small peoples, the little, lost nations, will play a critical role, as radical Europeans well know.

The place of the people of Wales, certainly of Welsh socialists, is in that struggle. For there is one glaring exception to a general trend - the separatist and authoritarian British state we live under, which

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is offering an increasingly determined resistance to a social Europe, a real parliament for Europe, a disarmed Europe.

Nearly every other country in the EC is either an outright federation or grants major autonomy to its regions and minority peoples. The regime which rules us is driving an already over-centralised state into a veritable paroxysm of centralisation. It is relentlessly dismantling local government, eliminating regional democracy, subjecting every quasi-autonomous institution it can get its hands on. The state itself is nakedly invading civil liberties, granting menacing new powers to an already inflated and paranoid world of secret agencies and, in complacent arrogance, erecting a formidably authoritarian system of government - with the precise intention of letting the market loose into every corner of our lives in a process which, in the name of individual freedom, breeds barbarism at the bottom and corruption at the top and destroys all sense of community. Its presiding genius denies that society even exists.

**W**e can see the consequences day by day in Wales, where we face a kind of communal death. There is only one way out. We have to take as much control as is humanly possible over our own society. This means, in the first instance, getting a grip on the Welsh Office and its associated agencies, which account for 80% of our public expenditure and do not answer to us.

This is entirely feasible. Thatcherite 'libertarianism' is riddled with contradictions into which we can burrow like Marx's Old Mole of Revolution. The most important of them for us is called Mr Peter Walker, the prime-minister-in-exile. As Dafydd Elis Thomas, president of Plaid Cymru has said, he is acting, no doubt in the service of his ambition to make his Wales what Birmingham was to Joseph Chamberlain, like a Welsh prime minister. His extraordinary performance, which has earned him massive popularity in Wales, has had several unexpected after-effects. His essentially non-Thatcherite styles have operated as something of a shield for the Welsh against the worst effects of his own government's policies. However real or unreal the consequences of his myriad 'initiatives', he has opened sceptical and resigned eyes to the real possibilities of Welsh self-management which exist; he has awoken a sense of self-help among a people bred over generations to dependence upon Westminster.

The creation of an elected Welsh assembly or parliament with real resources, to take over at least the powers of the Welsh Office, is within our capacity. We will need to mobilise a popular front in Wales, focusing in the first instance on a set of minimal objectives around which a majority can unite. We need to work with our friends and allies among the Scots and the many English now restive in their own regions. It will not be easy, but we can do it.

**But it will not be enough, because any such victory will prove as transient as the achievements of 1945, anchored as it will be in this grotesque British state structure. Consider what we are up against. The present regime can use and build on an existing state structure which dates in its essence from the revolution called Glorious of 1688 which created that Glorious Constitution, universally hailed and endlessly celebrated as a miracle of human ingenuity which had solved the problems of combining order with progress, liberty with hierarchical authority. That constitution was substantially modified but not in essence transformed by the elimination of the confessional basis of the state over the crisis of 1828-35.**

In consequence, we are the only country in Western Europe now where the sovereignty of the people does not exist even in theory. The people in this country are not sovereign. Sovereignty in this country resides in the Crown-in-Parliament, a constitutional fiction (though no fiction in the world of the secret agencies as we have seen!) which both symbolises and entrenches the real power of an an endlessly flexible and evolving oligarchy, the governance of the great and the good, legitimised by two centuries of carefully-cultivated civic and parliamentary practices which are still endlessly celebrated in an odious self-satisfaction fully worthy of that 18th century which initiated it.

The oligarchy has shifted, changed and adapted over two centuries, now opening to admit selected new groups into the elite, now closing up again. We have no written constitution, because that might inhibit the inexhaustible good sense and creative flexibility of the oligarchy and its state government, which needs to be, and increasingly is, more and more removed from control and arbitrary in its action. Contrary to much of our platform rhetoric, we never won the vote in this country. The vote was doled out to us in carefully phased and rationed packages, so that the inner and essentially occult heartland of power survived unscathed. It has been an enormously successful regime, which has skilfully managed consensus through its junior partner of a parliament. A living demonstration of Gramsci's 'hegemony', it has conditioned the people of Britain into the belief that this regime, with its Westminster parliament and its allegedly unparalleled achievement of social peace and cohesion, is the only form of democracy which exists.

**I**t faced two major crises in the 20th century, as social growth accelerated and 'mass society' developed. Both were related to relative decline and war or the threat of it: the upsurge of social Liberalism around 1900 and the breakthrough of Labour after 1945. Both achieved major changes and won major gains, but both were tamed, channelled and contained. As nation-states now lurch into their crisis of obsolescence and a reactionary regime here drives ahead in its ruthless counter-offensive, we can see that those gains

were, in the long run, precarious. This regime is undoing not only what Labour did and what Lloyd George did; it is even undoing what Victorian social reformers achieved. There is no safe hiding place from this state; at the very minimum we need to build a shelter against it more durable than the Puckish spirit of Mr Peter Walker.

Liberal and Labour achievements proved precarious because both, even at the peak of their power, accepted the essential structure of the British state, indeed, seemed unable even to conceive of an alternative. Their British state is now breaking the Labour Party as it did the Liberals. Unless Labour can cut free from its obsession with that state, it will go stumbling on, hypnotised by paltry and ephemeral opinion polls, with the red cross of historical doom, to quote Marx, stamped on its forehead.

**T**his terrible experience has been a striking demonstration that the original marxist critique of social democracy was correct. We cannot use a state structure created to serve one system to build a radically different one. We have to dismantle this state and reconstruct government on this island so that power passes to its peoples. We can do that only if we make ourselves self-governing European peoples. The struggle to transform the EC offers us the opportunity.

In Wales, we need mentally and spiritually to renounce our allegiance to the British state and make ourselves into a self-governing European nation, eventually to stand alongside our sister-nations on this Island of Britain within a new Europe we have to fight to create. It will be a long and hard struggle, not least within our own selves.

We need to fight at every level on the terrain of this island alongside as many allies as we can find among the Scots and the English, but in the coming struggle, we must be prepared to act as a European fifth column within it. We must fight for a real presence in Europe. We have allies there in the European Free Alliance, which represents parties from 18 small peoples, a very mixed bunch, but one which is moving in the direction we need to follow and which works with the German Greens within the Rainbow Group. We will find plenty of allies elsewhere, notably among the German Social Democrats and the Italian Communists. The fact that even this current European Parliament could pass the resolutions on minority languages and regional self-management speaks for itself.

The two struggles are one. They are twin jaws of a nutcracker we must close to crunch on the British state. Those jaws are closing now. This state's powers have begun to drain away to Brussels. In its Northern Ireland province, it has been at war for 20 years. The Scots are going to drive this island into constitutional crises whether we like it or not. We in Wales have little choice. The alternative is a kind of death. •

Revised version of an address to the launch meeting of the Campaign for a Welsh Assembly in November 1988

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