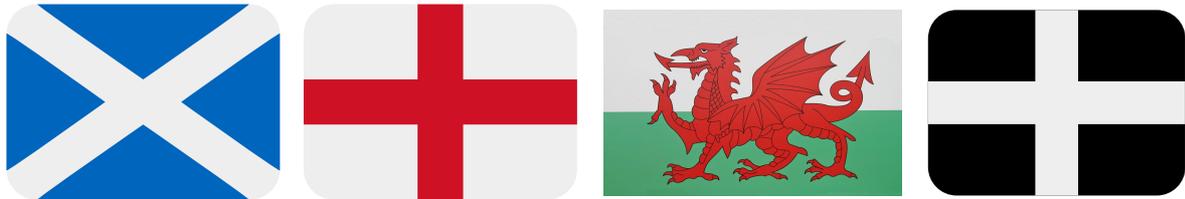


**Communist Party
Progressive Federalism
Commission Briefing**

PROGRESSIVE FEDERALISM



November 2021



**TAKE THE ROAD TO
SOCIALISM**

BRIEFING 1 FOR THE CPB PROGRESSIVE FEDERALISM COMMISSION

November 2021

“The executive of the modern state is nothing but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie”[1]

1. The State and Democracy [2]

The State is an apparatus for enforcing the interests of capital.

Its representative institutions were originally solely to represent capital. Through struggle the working class won the right to vote – nationally, locally. The ruling class sought to nullify these gains either by limiting the powers of these representative institutions or, more lethally, by co-opting the organisations of the working class to work on its own terms.

However, capitalism is a system in constant crisis that is driven by its own contradictions – of the tendency to concentration and monopoly and the tendency for the rate of profit to decline. Controlling these contradictions requires new attacks on working people, on non-monopoly sections of capital and, not least, externally, on weaker nations and peoples.

This makes the defence of democracy, the belief that people collectively have the right to determine their future, the central issue of our time. It provides the potential basis for an alliance that can isolate and defeat monopoly capital and, through struggle, expose the exploitative and oppressive nature of its power, of the capitalist state itself.

2. What is the current position?

Over a number of years, Britain’s inadequate model of democracy has been weakened. We have witnessed the interests of monopoly capital limit the scope of institutions. For example:

- The EU fettering our national parliaments;
- Denying the Scottish and Welsh Parliaments the powers necessary to intervene decisively in their economies;
- National parliaments hollowing out local government, slashing funding, and privatising services
- Elected Mayors and cabinet systems reducing community representative models of accountability;
- An unelected House of Lords.

The Tories continue to promote sham forms of democracy which, in reality, are about a further centralisation of powers in the hands of directly elected mayors, their cabinets and unaccountable big business interests.

Following the right-wing Brexit, the Tory Government’s imposition of the Internal Market Act is designed to stop the existing national devolved institutions making unilateral strategic state aid interventions (for example to promote particular industries or to save jobs).

In Scotland, the SNP and Greens call for an 'Independent' Scotland but also want to re-join the EU, risking shackling Scotland to all the neo-liberal pressure of big business and robbing it of powers to intervene democratically in its own economy.

It is against this backdrop that Britain's Road to Socialism[3] (BRS) indicates that "the struggle to promote the economic and social interest of working people is directly linked with the battle to expand democracy against the power of big business."

3 A Marxist understanding of the role of nations and nationality[4]

The debate around independence in Scotland requires Party members to go back to basics and consider a Marxist understanding of nations and nationality. Marx understood that such entities are not fixed, they are not products of nature but come into being as a result of socio-historical processes.

Forged in the course of class struggle, each new ruling class seeks to re-mould national culture and ideology in its own image and interests. At any particular point in history, loyalties will be defined by the dominant class.

There is a need to avoid emotive appeals and to base our strategic analysis and tactical moves on an understanding of the balance of class forces and trends at any given moment.

4. Progressive Federalism [5]

There is an (understandable) tendency to consider proposals for governmental reform (e.g. constitutional matters, the organisation of regional and local government) on technocratic grounds. Instead, BRS calls for political judgements on whether new institutions will help "to shift the balance of power in favour of the majority and enable working people and their allies to exercise increasing control over the allocation of resources at federal, national and regional level."

Specifically, and linked to the current debate over further devolution to the Scottish and Welsh Parliaments, BRS calls for:

1. A British federal parliament, elected by STV in multi-member constituencies to have jurisdiction over foreign affairs, defence, macro-economic policy and national insurance, the power to raise taxes on wealth and income and the responsibility to redistribute income among the nations and regions on the basis of social need.
2. National parliaments in Scotland, Wales and England together with English regional assemblies should be elected on the same basis, with powers to raise revenue and specifically to advance democratic control through public ownership, state investment and public procurement.
3. A directly elected Cornish Assembly.
4. A federal upper chamber elected by the national parliaments and regional and Cornish assemblies.
5. What is to be done?

Here are some current initiatives for the Commission to consider.

Trade unions - we need to consider how best to raise issues of economic democracy through the trade unions. For example, in Scotland, the STUC has published a series of proposals for economic recovery, the People's Recovery.[6] While less developed, the Wales TUC has a call to 'reshape the Welsh economy that provides real results for working people.'

Community Wealth Building – even within constrained circumstances it is possible for left-labour Councils to take a different approach to economic development. For example, in Preston Council in NW England and North Ayrshire Council in Scotland, there are attempts to redefine how, and for whom, local economic development works, using their procurement approach and to work with other anchor institutions to boost the local economy.[7]

Creating broader alliances – we can work with others to pursue our agenda for Progressive Federalism. For example, in Scotland there is the Red Paper Collective[8] and ROSE[9] and we have also worked on events with left-Labour politicians under the Claim the Future[10] banner and on events at the Marx Memorial Library[11].

But there is much more to be done. For example, (this isn't an exhaustive list):

- We should develop a clearer understanding within the Party of the existing national devolved institutions, including local structures such as Mayors, and be clear when developing proposals whether these are to apply to all or specific institutions.
- When involved in discussions on independence or the devolution of powers, we should look deeper into the immediate technocratic fixes offered
- We should analyse each proposal against the political framework outlined in BRS.
- For England, we should continue to argue for regional mayors to be replaced with democratic regional assemblies.[12] Ongoing changes are proposed in England beyond the major metropolitan areas, such as county mayors, county deals or restructuring of counties and districts, which party members need to be aware of and respond to.
- We should re-affirm our recognition for the distinctive national, cultural and social characteristics of Cornwall to be expressed through a directly elected Cornish Assembly.[13]
- We should use every opportunity to highlight the centralising and privatising effect of various UK government funding initiatives, including the Levelling-up capital fund.
- We should highlight the blatant profiteering our institutions facilitate to win ideological understanding of the nature of this stage of capitalism and for support for our Alternative Economic Strategy.

[1] Manifesto of the Communist Party, 1848, (see p16 of the CPB reproduction of 2005, still available).

[2] For a further overview see The Case for Communism, 2006, CPB; Building an economy for the people: an alternative and political strategy for 21st century Britain, 2012, pp57-58, Manifesto Press.

[3] See BRS 2020 p54

[4] For a further overview, see The Case for Communism, 2006, pp26-27, CPB.

[5] See BRS 2020 pp55-56

[6] <http://www.stuc.org.uk/files/Policy/Research-papers/peoples-draft-6.pdf> ;

[7] For more see The Preston model: An overview (democracycollaborative.org); What is Preston Model? - Preston City Council; Community Wealth Building (north-ayrshire.gov.uk).

[8] Red Paper Collective – A Labour Movement for Radical Change

[9] <https://www.radicaloptions.scot/>

[10] <https://claimthefuture.today/>

[11] Welcome to Marx Memorial Library | Marx Memorial Library

[12] BRS 2020, p55

[13] Ibid.