

its tendencies towards a People's Front, though greeted with hostility by the dominant leadership of the Labour Party and the Liberal Party on the one hand, and by certain 'left' sections on the other, is a sign to be welcomed by the working class. Every encouragement should be given. . . ."

After the Second World War, when the perspective began to open up for the rapid advance of world Communism, the *British Road to Socialism*, published in 1951, continued to stress the same basic idea:

"The great majority of clerical and professional workers, teachers, technicians and scientists, working farmers, shopkeepers, self-employed and small business men, are victims of the reactionary policies of Tory big business at home and abroad. . . . Like the industrial workers, they too suffer from high prices and rents, and heavy taxation, etc. On all these issues the middle sections of the people can be drawn into the fight alongside the Labour movement. *An alliance must be built up between the working class and these sections of the population, in the fight for peace and social progress, and against all attempts to maintain capitalism at the expense of the national interests. Such an alliance, headed by the working class, is an essential condition for the establishment of a real Socialist Government to build a Socialist Britain.*"

Non-manual workers in Britain can be won for the building of socialism as they have already in one third of the world.

We need to use the examples of where socialism is the way of life to show that it gives not only economic security, but that socialist ideas are more moral and practical than those of capitalism. But theory and

the experience of others is not sufficient to clear away the deliberate confusion about socialism created by the ruling class.

The acceptance of the need for socialism comes as a result of thousands of experiences in trying to maintain and improve conditions under capitalism along with constant explanation of the theory of and need for socialism. But experiences can lead to greater frustration unless they have a direction and aim. What is required is a common policy of demands which meets the needs of the majority of the people, and around which unity in action can be built. This is the basis of the General Election policy of the Communist Party. It calls for an independent Britain in tune with the developing world, truly democratic, with correct social priorities and social opportunities for all.

The Communist Party's policy is a clear-cut alternative to that of the Tories. It contains none of the vague terms of official Labour policy. Its acceptance by both manual and non-manual workers is the prerequisite for the next stage of advance for Britain.

Marxist ideas cannot be ignored. Millions of words are written against them, but they continue to be a growing source of attraction to non-manual workers.

Today within the Communist Party a substantial percentage of its membership is drawn precisely from among those sections of the people which this article has been discussing, including all sections from office workers to some of Britain's most distinguished scientists and intellectuals.

We can be confident that these numbers will grow.

Britain's Minority Languages

Tim Enright

Of what they (i.e. the Highlanders) had before the late conquest of their country, there remain only their language and their poverty. Their language is attacked on every side. Schools are erected in which English only is taught, and there were lately some who thought it reasonable to refuse them a version of the holy scriptures, that they might have no monument of their mother tongue.

THIS was the situation which Dr. Johnson discovered in the course of his famous tour of the Western Islands of Scotland in 1773. The Gaelic language has been under constant assault, of one kind or another, from that day to this. "There is no tracing ancient nations but by language," said Johnson, "and therefore I'm always

sorry when language is lost, because languages are the pedigree of nations." Scotland's Gaelic "pedigree" is in grave danger today.

Welsh would seem to be in a stronger position than Scottish Gaelic. Nevertheless, Mr. Saunders Lewis, giving the B.B.C. annual Welsh lecture, *Tynged yr Iaith*, in 1962, said:

"I believe that if the decline continues at the present rate, Welsh will cease as a living language around the beginning of the twenty-first century."

Cornish, the first of Britain's minority languages to disappear in the modern period, was forced out towards the end of the eighteenth century, and Manx ceased as a living tongue in the course of the present century.

Anglo-American capitalism is not concerned with the survival of Gaelic or Welsh. On the contrary, they form a barrier in the path of a uniform advertisement-conditioned English-speaking market. By contrast, in the Soviet Union and China minority languages which were decaying, and in some cases virtually extinct, before socialism, are today flourishing and developing.

I. THE ATTACK ON WELSH

The Act of Union of England and Wales was passed in 1536. It laid down that

“all Justices . . . shall proclayme and kepe . . . all . . . courtes in the Englysshe tonge and also from hensforth no persone or personnes that use the Welsshe speche or langage shall have or enjoy any maner office or fees within the Realme of Englonde Wales or other Kinges dominions . . . onles he or they use and exercise the speche or langage of Englysshe.”

The absolute monarchy of the Tudors required a homogeneous Britain, and cultural differences stood in the way. The Welsh ruling class, toadying to Henry VIII and his successors, turned their backs on the Welsh language and adopted “the naturall mother tonge used within this Realme”. The clergy and the professional class as well as the rising bourgeoisie followed suit. The hillside peasants and labourers, however, remained Welsh-speaking and preserved the ancient cultural heritage.

There were the few who raised voices of protest. “Those who wish to destroy the language of the Cymry,” wrote a scholar towards the end of the sixteenth century, were “the dross and scum of the people”. In the seventeenth century Welsh was still spoken by the majority of the people who remained poor and largely illiterate. The schools were the preserve of the anglicised upper and middle class. The gentry, as elsewhere, profited from the Reformation which failed, however, to win over the mass of the people. The new services in English were as incomprehensible as the Latin of the old days.

An Act was passed in 1563 authorising the translation of the Bible and Prayer Book into Welsh. The New Testament appeared in 1567 and the complete Bible in 1588. William Morgan’s famous translation, which was to play a profound part in the subsequent development of the language, had no immediate effect. The churches remained empty. So far as the common people were concerned the Church belonged to the anglicised ruling class. The episcopate was in fact largely composed of Englishmen.

The religious and educational movements which swept through Wales in the course of the eighteenth century established Methodism and spread literacy arising out of the study of the Bible. The Welsh Trust, which founded schools and distributed Welsh Bibles, split on the question of whether English or

Welsh should be taught in the schools. Welsh won the day in North Wales though it was not so successful in the South. The Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge took over the work of the Trust and built charity schools in which the language used was Welsh. To cope with the demand for educating a clergyman, Griffith Jones, started the Circulating Schools. Jones was an ardent champion of the language, and his schools, moving from village to village, had an astonishing success. Within thirty years between three and four thousand of them had been set up. Adults attended by night in even greater numbers than the children. It was “the single business of these schools . . . to teach the scholars to read the word of God”.

An important part in the great revival of Welsh culture was played by such societies as the Cymmrodorion founded in 1751. Soon almost every village had its literary club from which sprang the revival of the Eisteddfod. Eisteddfodau in the form of gatherings of bards had occasionally been held in the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. They now began to appear in the form familiar to us today—great festivals of national culture.

The Industrial Revolution

South Wales with its wealth of coal and iron was one of the springboards of the Industrial Revolution in the second half of the eighteenth century. English-speaking business men, technicians and workers settled there in large numbers. At the first official census in 1801 the population of Wales was 587,245. Half a century later it had doubled, the main increase being in the South, which was by now heavily anglicised.

The workers in factory and mine spoke Welsh while English was the badge of social success. Following the “Rebecca Riots” in the countryside and the spread of Chartism in the industrial belt, the Government set up its famous commission of inquiry into the state of education in Wales in 1846. As one M.P. put it: It should be borne in mind that

“an ill-educated and undisciplined population, like that existing amongst the mines in South Wales, is one that may be found most dangerous to the neighbourhood in which it dwells, and that a band of efficient schoolmasters is kept up at a much less expense than a body of police or soldiery.”

He moved for an inquiry “especially into the means afforded to the labouring classes of acquiring a knowledge of the English language”. Three Commissioners, English lawyers without a word of Welsh, surveyed the country for six months. Their conclusion was that the Welsh language must go. It was

“. . . a vast drawback to Wales and a manifold barrier to the moral progress and commercial prosperity of the people . . . disastrous . . . to all moral improvement and popular progress.”

They went on to make the profound blunder of commenting on the character of the people (whose language they did not even understand!):

“. . . side by side with warmth of religious feeling there was widespread disregard of temperance, of chastity, of veracity and of fair-dealing.” Sexual immorality was “the besetting sin . . . the peculiar vice of the Principality.” Again “there are, perhaps, few countries where the standard of minor morals is lower.”

The memory of “the *brad* of the Blue Books” (i.e. treachery) is still very much alive. The reaction among Welshmen was immediate. Their patriotism and enthusiasm for their ancient language were fanned into a blaze. So completely had opinion changed by 1880 that the Aberdare Committee on Intermediate and Higher Education in Wales said:

“The existence, therefore, of a distinct Welsh nationality is in our opinion a reason for securing within the limits of Wales itself a system of intermediate and higher education in harmony with the distinctive peculiarities of the country. . . . Such is the attachment of the Welsh to their own language and literature, so deeply interwoven are they with their daily life, their religious worship and even their amusements, that . . . the Welsh language will long be cherished by the large majority of the Welsh people.”

There were, however, influential forces opposed to preserving Welsh. Thundering against Matthew Arnold who had been invited to lecture at the Chester Eisteddfod *The Times* said:

“The Welsh language is the curse of Wales. . . . An Eisteddfod in one of the most mischievous and selfish pieces of sentimentalism which could possibly be perpetrated. It is simply a foolish interference with the natural progress of civilisation and prosperity. . . . The sooner all Welsh specialities disappear from the face of the earth the better.”

Already in the forties as much English as Welsh was spoken in the South and by the seventies a third of the whole population of Wales spoke English habitually. The number of Welsh speakers has continued to fall as the following census figures show:

1891	50%	of total population	Welsh-speaking		
1911	43%	“	“	“	“
1931	37%	“	“	“	“
1951	29%	“	“	“	“
1961	26%	“	“	“	“

Welsh in the Schools

It took a long fight to have Welsh taught in the schools. Welsh-speaking parents, while cherishing the language themselves, felt that if it were taught in the schools it would hinder their children’s advancement in the world. One of the authors of the notorious Blue Books had written:

“My district exhibits the phenomenon of a peculiar language isolating the mass from the upper portion

of society; and as a further phenomenon, it exhibits this mass engaged upon the most opposite occupations at points not very distant from each other; being, on the one side, rude and primitive agriculturists living poorly and thinly scattered; on the other, smelters and miners, *wantonning in plenty*, and congregated in the densest accumulations. . . . They are never masters. . . . It is still the same people. Whether in the country or among the furnaces, the Welsh element is never found at the top of the social scale. . . . Equally in his new as in his old home, *his language keeps him under the hatches.*” (Italics ours.)

The first victory came when a new Code was issued in 1888 allowing the schools “at the discretion of the managers to teach the reading and writing of the vernacular”. Being only permissive, the regulation was widely ignored, though the parents in a number of areas, including those heavily anglicised, had by the end of the century swung in favour of introducing the language. For example the parents of only two of Cardiff’s thirty schools opposed it.

The Education Act of 1902 transferred the schools to Local Education Authorities and the teaching of Welsh spread rapidly. By 1907, when the separate Welsh Department of the Board of Education was set up, the language was taught as a subject and medium of instruction in “almost every county in Wales”. The first special Code for Wales (1907) said:

“The Board of Education wish that every Welsh teacher should realise the educational value of the Welsh language, and of its literature, which from its wealth of romance and lyric is peculiarly adapted to the education of the young.”

The number of pupils taking Welsh in the grammar schools has increased over the years. In 1910 there were 42 successful candidates for Higher School Certificate and 460 for School Certificate. In 1951 the numbers were 189 and 2,179 respectively.

Decline of Welsh

As the census figures quoted above show, the number speaking Welsh has been halved since the end of the last century. If the present trend continues among the quarter of the population who still speak the language, it will have disappeared as a living tongue in the space of a generation. The decline in industrial South Wales has been rapid. In Merthyr Tydfil, which was Welsh-speaking at the end of the last century, the percentage of children speaking Welsh as their first language in 1961 was 0.6.

One of the main reasons for the decline in the total number of Welsh-speakers was the heavy depopulation of the agricultural areas in the North during the economic slump between the wars. There had of course been a similar draining away from the countryside during the nineteenth century, but it was largely into the industrial South which needed

workers in the period of industrial expansion. In the twenties and thirties the unemployed had to cross the border for the industrial cities of England. This trend continues today.

The many forces militating against the language have also been growing more powerful. The Council for Education reported gloomily in 1953:

“. . . the tide of anglicising influences seeps slowly and steadily onwards. The rapid growth of tourism, the cinema, the radio, the wide dissemination of English periodicals, greatly increased facilities for easy communication not only with more anglicised Welsh areas but with large cities in England—all these, we are convinced, have made the position of the Welsh language increasingly difficult to maintain, and *in present circumstances, equally difficult to foresee.*” (Italics ours.)

Today we can add television and mass-advertising to this list.

The Present Position

The latest survey, *Report on the Welsh Language Today*, prepared by the Council for Wales and Monmouthshire, was presented by the Minister for Welsh Affairs to the House of Commons in November 1963. “The first half of the twentieth century has been a difficult period,” it says, “*and the issue is not yet clear.*” (Italics ours.) It seeks a crumb of comfort from the fact that the rate of decline was slower from 1951 to 1961 than in the previous two decades. It takes encouragement from the success of the “Welsh School” movement. In anglicised areas several schools, primary and secondary, have now been established in which instruction is given through the medium of Welsh.

It is disturbing however that the amount of Welsh actually spoken is less than the census figures would seem to imply. For example, only 9 per cent of local authorities conduct their meetings wholly in Welsh and another 9 per cent partly in Welsh. The proportion of local authority officers who are required to be Welsh-speaking is only 10 per cent. The language is little used in correspondence. The same applies to government and administration generally. One authority does not even reply to letters received in Welsh!

The language is more widely used among farmers and agricultural workers than in industry generally. It is still strong however in the slate quarrying, coal mining and woollen industries. Little Welsh is used in trade union affairs.

While commenting favourably on some aspects of the B.B.C.’s Welsh Service, and the promised extension of a new television service throughout Wales in 1964, the Report says, “we regard the attention paid to Welsh-speaking children on television as pitifully inadequate”. Its comments on Wales West and North Television are out of date

since that company has now abandoned its Welsh programmes “because of their prohibitive cost”.

On the school position it says:

“In general, even in the Welsh-speaking areas, the Welsh language does not play as significant a role in the life of the schools as might be expected. It is little used in the conduct of school business and in the daily activities of the school community.”

One of the Report’s main recommendations is that the language should be granted “official status” which would mean a much wider use of Welsh in government and administration, including the courts. It suggests various means by which the use of the language might be fairly rapidly extended in several spheres of Welsh life since “the majority of the people in Wales are anxious to see the Welsh language survive and flourish”. And it calls for the setting up of “a permanent body . . . whose task would be to care for the interests of the Welsh language”. One would hope that if such a body is established the Labour and trade union movement will be strongly represented. It concludes:

“Given the strongest efforts of those who speak Welsh and the ready help and understanding of those who do not, there is good reason to hope at this time that the future health of the language will be assured.”

II. GAELIC UNDER ASSAULT

Gaelic was once the language of the majority of the Scottish people. The number of Gaelic-speakers had dropped to a quarter of a million, or 6.84 per cent of the total population of Scotland when the first official census was taken in 1891. By 1951 the number was 95,447 or 1.98 per cent of the total. It had further dropped to 76,587 or 1.48 per cent of the whole population in 1961.

The attack on the language began with the Reformation. To the Scottish Reformers Gaelic was a bulwark of Catholicism. Its suppression and replacement by English was the method adopted for proselytising the Highlands. In 1609 the Statute of Iona ordered the suppression of the bards, the custodians and creators of a vast body of literature in prose and verse. In 1616 the Privy Council passed an Act laying down that

“all His Majesty’s subjects, especially the youth, be exercised and trayned up in civiltie, godliness, knowledge, and learning; that the vulgar Ingleshe tongue be universallie planted, and the Irish (i.e. Gaelic) language which is one of the chief and principall causes of barbaritie and inciviltie among the inhabitants of the Isles and Hylandis, may be abolisht and removit.”

After the Revolution of 1688 King William granted money for the purpose of erecting schools “for rooting out the Irish language”. The Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge said in 1716:

“Nothing can be more effectual for reducing these countiees to order and making them usefull to the

Commonwealth than teaching them their duty to God, their King and Country, and rooting out their Irish language.”

The Established Church had, however, to accept the inevitable—to tolerate the language until the Highlanders had learned English and become Presbyterians. The S.P.C.K. itself published its Gaelic New Testament in 1767. Numerous translations of the works of Calvinist divines followed and were almost the only printed works in Gaelic for a long time to come. A similar fate met Welsh prose.

Puritanism was inimical to most aspects of Gaelic culture. Carmichael in his *Carmina Gadelica* quotes a visitor to the Hebrides in 1899 asking a woman whether there were music, singing and dancing at weddings any more. She replied:

“It is long since we abandoned these foolish ways. In my young days there was hardly a house in Ness where there was not two or three who could play the pipes or the fiddle. . . . A blessed change has come over the place. . . . The good men and the ministers who arose did away with the songs and the stories, the music and the dancing. . . . They made the people break and burn their pipes and fiddles.”

The Highland Clearances

The greatest blow to the language came with the Highland Clearances towards the end of the eighteenth century. Wool was in heavy demand by expanding capitalism. To meet this demand and rake in fat profits the much-romanticised chieftains expropriated the clansmen in their thousands and replaced them with sheep. The Gaels were shipped wholesale to Canada where in 1951 there were still 12,679 native speakers of Gaelic. Most of those who avoided emigration settled in Glasgow and other manufacturing towns. According to Fraser Darling some of the evictions “were of the order of brutality of a Norse raid a thousand years earlier.” Marx gives an account of the clearing made by the Duchess of Sutherland:

“This person, well instructed in economy, resolved, on entering upon her government, to effect a radical cure, and to turn the whole country, whose population had already been, by earlier processes of the like kind, reduced to 15,000, into a sheep-walk. From 1814 to 1820 these 15,000 inhabitants, about 3,000 families, were systematically hunted and rooted out. All their villages were destroyed and burnt, all their fields turned into pasturage. British soldiers enforced this eviction, and came to blows with the inhabitants. One old woman was burnt to death in the flames of the hut which she refused to leave. Thus this fine lady appropriated 794,000 acres of land that had from time immemorial belonged to the clan.”

Marx goes on to comment that finally part of the sheep-walks were turned into deer preserves. Hugh

MacDiarmid says in a poem:

No country in the world has ever been cursed
With such a gang of hyaenas as have somehow
annexed
All your dukedoms and earldoms and historic
estates,
No man of them heeds save in as much as he gets
Wealth to waste in London who would else starve
on his wits.

(“*Scotland's Pride*”)

Today much of the land in the Highlands is owned or controlled by members of the peerage and directors of sporting syndicates, and they only need gillies, game-keepers and shooting-lodge servants. The clearances have continued, if less directly; virtually eliminating the railways is the latest mode of attack.

Gaelic and the Schools

The Secretary of the S.P.C.K. reported in 1803 that

“. . . out of 335,000 persons in the Highlands, it was computed that 300,000 understood no other language than Gaelic. . . .”

This was about 20 per cent of the total population. By the middle of the century the number had dropped to 10 per cent. Teaching then in Highland schools comprised English reading, writing and arithmetic. Gaelic was not used except for Bible reading.

In the sixties a special Commission sat to consider a national system of education. A prominent witness before it declared: “I consider it an advantage decidedly, that Gaelic should cease.” And this view prevailed since education was largely seen as a means of equipping the pupil for almost certain emigration. Gaelic was blamed for the poverty and backwardness of the Highlands. The Commission laid it down that

“. . . the teachers of infant schools and all other teachers in the Highlands should encourage the scholars to use the English language in their conversation as far as possible.”

The teachers did their job well. Another story quoted by Carmichael concerns a girl who on leaving school one evening joined with other girls in singing a Gaelic song:

“The schoolmaster heard us, however, and called us back. He punished us till the blood trickled from our fingers, although we were big girls, with the dawn of womanhood upon us.”

This unfortunately is not the only story told of brutal zeal employed by teachers in stamping out Gaelic. The use of the “tessera” was widespread. This was a piece of wood handed to a pupil in the morning with instructions to give it to the first person heard speaking Gaelic. The offender got rid of it by passing it on to the next person and so on to the end

of the day, when punishment was meted out to those who offended school discipline by speaking their native language. The "tessera" was also used in Wales for a similar purpose.

The Scottish Education Act of 1872 made no mention of Gaelic. However, the tide began at last to turn, dating perhaps from the founding of the Gaelic Society of Inverness in 1871. One of its earliest undertakings was to petition the House of Commons to provide for Gaelic teaching in the Highlands. The Education Department relented and a new code was issued in 1878 *permitting* the employment of teachers of "Gaelic, drill, cooking, or any other special subject." Progress indeed!

In practice, however, little happened, for ten years later the Gaelic Society of Inverness was moved to protest:

"... we are sorry to see from the latest blue-book that the Highland Inspectors are still opposed—bitterly and unreasonably—to the teaching of the language in schools."

The Twentieth Century

The position had altered little by 1914. Professor W. J. Watson in his inaugural address as Professor of Celtic at Edinburgh University said:

"It is true that it is not actually illegal to teach Gaelic in an elementary school to Gaelic-speaking children. The thing may be done, and, here and there, it is done. But when it is done, it is done precariously and on sufferance; as a work of supererogation but conveying no merit in the performance."

As a new Education Bill was in the offing, pressure began to mount from Scotsmen interested in the survival of the language and a clause was inserted in the Education Act of 1918 laying it down that there should be "adequate provision for teaching Gaelic in Gaelic-speaking areas".

The high hopes held out by the "Gaelic Clause" have not been fulfilled, however, and the number of Gaelic speakers has fallen sharply since then. Gaelic has now virtually disappeared as the first language of infants entering school on the Scottish mainland. As a first language among pupils it is to be found only in the Hebrides and already the Inner Hebrides are heavily anglicised. There were in fact in 1957 only 905 children in the first two classes in primary school whose first language was Gaelic. The report, *Gaelic-speaking children in Highland Schools*, comments: "This group . . . may be historically a very significant group, if the next ten years are to be critical for the survival of the Gaelic language." (Italics ours.)

The number of primary school children in 1957 with Gaelic as their first language was 3,829, or 0.6 per cent of the total, as compared with 18.5 per cent in Wales. The figures for secondary schools were much the same. The atmosphere of the schools

is mainly English, even in the strongest Gaelic-speaking areas. The child who speaks Gaelic to his playmates almost invariably speaks English to the teacher.

The same report notes that the majority of children whose first language is Gaelic come fromcrofting families, while children of middle-class origin in the main speak English as their first language. "It is not possible to say what socio-economic factors are at work," it declares.

It is of course only all too clear; the same factors have militated against the language in Scotland, Wales and Ireland for centuries. The story is told of an old woman walking the road in West Kerry who saw a well-dressed man coming towards her. She mustered the few English words she had to greet him. He replied in Irish, "May the devil sweep you." Says she, "I thought you were a gentleman!"

Gaelic in Jeopardy

It is a clear danger-signal for Scottish Gaelic that the number of Gaelic-speaking children entering the schools is decreasing annually. Its position in every way is much weaker than that of Welsh. The amount of Gaelic used by the B.B.C. is very small and there are no courses on radio or television for children. Gaelic publications are mainly undertaken by societies publishing their own work as compared with fourteen weekly newspapers in Welsh and fifty-one journals of various kinds. The only Gaelic newspaper ever issued was a weekly published in Canada and that ceased in 1904. The government does not subsidise the publishing of Gaelic books, though it provides a limited subsidy for the production of new works in Welsh.

An Comunn Gaidhealach, the Highland Association, is the main organisation working to foster and promote an interest in the language. Up to a few years ago it published most of the textbooks used in teaching Gaelic. Its main methods are adult evening classes and *mods*. These, like the Welsh *eisteddfodau* and the Irish *feiseanna*, are festivals of culture held at local and national level.

Many of the forces working against the language are similar to those working against Welsh. The main factor, as with Irish Gaelic, is emigration. Moreover, the same puritanism which wrought such havoc with Gaelic culture in the last century is still strong. Dr. Macdonald, Professor of Practical Theology in Trinity College, Glasgow, was quoted by the *Oban Times* as saying last December:

"... religion in the West Highlands is life-denying. It turns a stern face on what it calls secular activities by which it means sport, music, especially instrumental music, and everything that can be lumped under the vague term secularism."

The youth react against this in the way that elsewhere they have reacted against restriction. A correspondent in the *Manchester Guardian* a few years ago found it

“a strange and rather depressing experience to steam into a Hebridean harbour and encounter on the pier clusters of Teddy-boys speaking Gaelic.”

The crisis facing the Gaelic language is now widely recognised in Scotland. The *Oban Times* (24.10.63) said:

“Post-Mod reflections in various newspapers and periodicals . . . appear to have stirred a general feeling that more has to be done to foster the Gaelic language *if it is not to disappear within existing life-times.*” (Italics ours.)

The hub of the problem is the economic plight of the Highlands and Western Islands. The only use the Tories have for a Gaelic-speaking island like South Uist is to turn it into a rocket station!

III. A GLANCE AT IRISH GAELIC

Irish Gaelic, the parent of Scottish Gaelic (they had the same literature until the modern period), is in a stronger position numerically and is supported by the state as an official language. The population of the Gaeltacht, the Gaelic-speaking area along the western seaboard, is short of 80,000, while some 20 per cent of the total population speak Irish with varying degrees of fluency. The Gaeltacht is, however, being drained by what can only be described as mass emigration. It has been estimated that about five out of every six people leave it, mainly for England and America. A part of Huddersfield can be described as semi-Gaeltacht because of the flow of emigrants from Connemara to it. Irish-speaking priests have had to be sent there to serve the community.

Whole villages can be found completely deserted, with the walls of the houses crumbling, in what were not long ago Irish-speaking areas. An old man I met in the West-Kerry Gaeltacht a few years ago said to me as he swept his arm round indicating a wide area, “In all this place you will notice one strange thing—you will hear no sound coming from a cradle.” The deserted village has been part of the pattern of Irish life since the time of Goldsmith’s poem of that name, published in 1770:

“But now the sounds of population fail,
No cheerful murmurs fluctuate in the gale,
No busy steps the grass-grown foot-way tread,
For all the bloomy flush of life is fled.”

The latest report on the position appeared early this year. It says:

“A similar decrease (to that since 1926) over the next thirty years would *wipe out the Gaeltacht in a single generation.* The solution of the Gaeltacht’s problems, especially the economic ones, is therefore a matter of extreme urgency. But, as the population

is now a tragically small one, there can be no excuse if the nation fails in present circumstances to make it a viable and growing community.” (Italics ours.)

The report makes various proposals for providing small-scale industries for the Gaeltacht.

All children in the Twenty-Six Counties are taught the language in school and it is also a necessary qualification for many public positions. The majority of the people favour the restoration of the language. There has however been always a certain amount of vocal discontent over what is called “compulsory Irish” in the schools. The main opposition party, Fine Gael, thought to exploit this at the last general election as a means of stemming its waning fortunes, but it was decisively rebuffed by the electorate.

In the Six Counties, where the teaching of the language is voluntary, only 7.7 per cent of pupils in primary schools were being taught a small amount of Irish in 1960-61.

The final paragraph reads:

“That a report should be issued annually by the Government detailing the work done by the State, either directly or indirectly, for the preservation of the Gaeltacht and for the revival of the language outside the Gaeltacht during the previous year; this report should also indicate the objectives to be aimed at during the following twelve months.”

As the Commission which issued it was set up by the Irish Government and spent five years working on it, no doubt an attempt will be made to put some at least of its many recommendations into practice. It is hard to see, however, how the language can be saved if the Gaeltacht dies. And the question here, as in Scotland, is mainly an economic one. If enough industries could be established to provide for the Gaelic-speaking peoples of Ireland and Scotland a standard of life comparable to that obtaining elsewhere, there would be hope for the future of the language.

IV. MINORITY LANGUAGES UNDER SOCIALISM

It is instructive to glance, if perforce briefly, at the treatment of minority languages in the socialist world. In the Soviet Union at the time of the October Revolution there were some twenty-six scattered nationalities in the Far North still in the tribal stage and speaking various languages. Their simplicity had been cruelly exploited in Tsarist Russia.

The Soviet Government appointed a special body to study the ethnographic and economic problems of the nomadic peoples. Socialist reconstruction of life in the Far North rapidly followed. Schools were set up for adults as well as children, and cultural bases in the most remote areas. The cultural base had its scientific research station, its boarding school, kindergarten, creche, hospital, health centre, veterinary station, co-operative and public baths among other things.

Since not one of these peoples had its own alphabet, leading linguists were drafted to tackle the problem and by 1932 alphabets had been created for sixteen of them. Today they all have their own alphabets and education proceeds in the native languages. They have produced writers and poets who are acclaimed throughout the Soviet Union.

A similar leap forward has taken place among the formerly backward Central Asian and Transcaucasian republics. The Kirghiz people, for example, had no written language before the October Revolution. The first newspaper was published in the Kirghiz language in 1924. Today scores of newspapers and hundreds of books are published in the native tongue. Now they have 1,711 schools while formerly they had about 100.

Again, the people of Tajikistan, who under the Tsar lived in oppression and ignorance, reached the stage of having their own Academy of Sciences in 1951 which has numerous research institutes under it. They also have about 2,000 libraries of various kinds, eight theatres and many other cultural and educational institutions. The picture is the same among all the minority peoples of the Soviet Union.

In China less than half of the fifty or so national minorities had written languages before the liberation. These written languages were not always adequate and were in any case used only by a small number of people, such as witch-doctors. Many of the minority languages too have widely differing dialects. Soon after liberation the People's Government directed that help must be given "to those nationalities which have no scripts so that they can create them; and to those whose scripts are inadequate so that they can gradually perfect them". The first Five-Year Plan said that "publication of newspapers, periodicals and books in the languages of the various nationalities must be promoted".

Since then a mass assault on illiteracy has taken place. Teams of investigators have set out to survey the languages and record the dialects. New scripts have been devised and old ones reformed. Twelve minority languages publishing houses were set up in various parts of the country which by 1959 had published primary and middle school texts and literacy readers in nineteen languages. By 1962 books of all kinds had been published in several of the languages, and newspapers and periodicals in ten.

There is a special Minority Languages Institute where the languages and customs of the various peoples are studied and field workers trained. A vast body of folk literature has been recorded and the traditional drama has been revived, with hundreds of professional troupes touring even the most remote villages and putting on regular performances. Broadcasts, films and plays in the minority languages are a normal feature of life in China today.

V. THE FUTURE OF GAELIC AND WELSH?

It is clear that minority languages thrive under socialism. The energies of the people are galvanised to save and develop their cultural heritage. And they receive every encouragement, material and otherwise, from the state to do so.

It is clear too, that if we had socialism in Britain, the present precarious situation of Welsh and Gaelic would be radically altered. The question is whether these languages can be kept alive meanwhile.

Fortunately the position of neither Welsh nor Gaelic is hopeless. They have been under direct assault for three centuries and are today under constant pressure from one of the most powerful languages in the world. Despite all they are still very much alive. There is a widespread fund of goodwill, if not always active effort, in favour of their preservation and restoration.

Today too, as the most recent reports show, there is a greater awareness of the position. In Wales the B.B.C. have now extended their Welsh television service and the Government have set up a committee "to clarify the legal status of the Welsh language and to consider whether any changes in the law should be made". In Scotland the reorganisation of the work of *An Comunn Gaidhealach* and the appointment of a full-time director-general have been under discussion. In Ireland, the discussions which arose following the issuing of the Report on the Restoration of the Irish Language caused a further survey to be made of the people's attitude towards the language. It has now been established that 82.2 per cent favour the teaching of Irish in the primary schools and 85.2 per cent favour this policy for secondary schools.

The culture which gives Wales and Western Scotland their distinctive identity has been forged by the common people through generations of struggle. The fight for its preservation can be won. Victory will be brought nearer however when the whole might of the British Labour movement is put behind the other forces working for the survival of Welsh and Gaelic. The lead here, as in so many other struggles, may have to come from the Communist Party. It is not only a question for the Welsh and Scottish people. The cultural riches deriving from three different languages, each with a long literary tradition behind it, are the heritage of *all* the people of this island.

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Oscar Lange's "Political Economy"

John Eaton

THIS remarkable book¹—published in Poland in 1959, where its first edition of 30,000 sold out in a few months, and now available in English—is not receiving in Britain the attention it deserves. At the time of writing I have seen no review or mention of it in the press and only very few economists seem to be aware that it is now available in English.

Perhaps its neglect should in part be laid at the door of the publishers who though widely experienced in the handling of scientific and technical translations are less at home with sociological and economic works. However, its neglect also reflects a certain apathy amongst progressives about economic theory in general and Marxist economic theory in particular—an apathy that plays only too well into the hands of reactionaries and “establishmentarians” whose line is to dismiss Marxist economic theory as “of no scientific significance”. This situation is not helped by the fact that, with a few notable exceptions such as Maurice Dobb’s work and recently Piero Sraffa’s *Production of Commodities by Means of Commodities*, very little has been appearing in English that adds anything new to the theoretical work in the great classics of Marxism.

But science studies a world which, as Engels

wrote of nature, “does not move in the eternal oneness of a perpetually recurring circle, but goes through a real historical evolution”; and to keep alive science must constantly renew itself as history evolves.

Issues of Today

The outstanding value of this book by comrade Oskar Lange is that it is informed from start to finish by a lively awareness of the technological and ideological situation of the world as it is today. One feels that the whole structure of the book—which builds up from the foundations of dialectical materialism with a methodological style typical of the best scientific works—has been designed with a consciousness of the issues posed by the advances of modern science, by automation, by cybernetics, by operational research etc. etc. and also with a thorough understanding of contemporary bourgeois economic theory comparable to Marx’s understanding of the foremost economic theories of his day.

Socialism implies a marriage of the most advanced theoretical work with the political movements and organisations of the working-class and the masses. The political expansion of socialism has made great strides in the last half century with which the development in theoretical work by Marxists has in many respects not kept pace. The distinguishing characteristic of Marxist socialism is that it is scientific and applies generally—and in particular also to the social sciences and to politics—a philosophical outlook and methods

¹ *Political Economy*, Vol. I, *General Problems*, by Oskar Lange, published by Pergamon Press and PWN-Polish Scientific Publishers, 1963, pp. xiv + 355, translated from the Polish by A. H. Walker. 45s.