

The Nations: Socialism in a Disunited Kingdom?

Wed, 9/16 3:59AM • 2:39:33

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

welsh, wales, unionist, scotland, english, england, devolution, scottish, harriet, labour, brexit, nationalism, british, rory, independence, ireland, state, people, uk, northern ireland

SPEAKERS

Allison Morris, Rory Scothorne, Harriet Protheroe-Soltani, Alex Nevin, Adam Ramsay

Adam Ramsay 01:06

Hello and welcome to today's panel at the World Transformed where we're going to be talking about all four nations of the UK and the breakup of Britain. And do we have a fantastic panel ready for you today and I, you know, you can probably guess where they're all from if you have a basic sense of the kind of history and geography of these islands, but we had a bit of wrangling of the order because Allison from Northern Ireland, isn't here yet she is covering a court case. And so we are going to start with with an excellent comerade Rory Scothorne who has been a kind of leading thinker about the role of the left in the Scottish independence debate and Rory is gonna charge us for a bit about the situation in Scotland so Rory, can I just hand over to you?

Rory Scothorne 02:01

Hello, I hope everybody can hear me, thanks very much for having me on, TWT is such a great addition to the labour movement and the left, I'm very excited to be talking about Scotland, which is all I ever seem to talk about. I am just going to start with an overview of where Scottish nationalism emerged from, so its of long view here and then I'll try and be more specific, but I'll try and keep itr as brief as possible. One of the worst things you can possibly do when you want to talk about Scottish nationalism is to bring up the winner of the 1995 Academy Awards for best picture, Braveheart, so that is what I am going to do. Sorry if I am muffled, hopefully you can hear me a bit better there. So Braveheart is obviously totally nonsense, filled with outrageous historical inaccuracy and some appalling gender politics, and in that sense, is a pretty good insight into a certain element of the modern Scottish nationalist movement, but it's not particularly representative of the movement as a whole. To give some background to the film, its supposed to be a battle at Sterling bridge- there is not even a bridge. William Wallace has managed to get a handful of boring Scottish nobles that bring their army along and they're all lined up waiting for him to arrive and there are these two guys at the front of the ranks, facing down at the English army, and they are kind of these avatars for ordinary working folk, who are getting frustrated at waiting around, and they're getting worried about the size of the English army. One of them gets fed up, and says 'come on lads, I'm not dying for these bastards, lets go home' and everyone

starts drifting off to go home and the nobles are panicking. And then Wallace and his troops show up on horses, riding up the road and they're all painted blue, and they stir the troops up into a violent frenzy and they slaughter the English and it's all very exciting. And this came out in 1995, so 2 years before Scotland voted for devolution. And what you get, from people responding to Scottish nationalism is that, it's oh, it's all Braveheart nationalism. Watching the film is kind of interesting for Scottish nationalism, it is kind of abstractly speaking, a fantastic bit of nationalist propaganda. There is a clear populist angle in that scene. Where these two guys felt no solidarity whatsoever with the local elites who are constantly compromising with the English. So the masses have no motivation to fight for their identity against a foreign invader. That is, until William Wallace showed up and encouraged the revolt by talking about freedom- something that their own ruler had never offered them, classic populist stuff. And this is a big turning point in the film where the leadership of the nation transfers from this pragmatic, self interested local elite towards this charismatic populist. And so the sensation is to say that something similar has happened in Scotland where Labour was the old pragmatic calculating elite, which was to be wiped out by the SNP, new national heroes, that gave us something worth fighting and dying for. I don't think that was really the case. And that's the kind of characterisation you're going to get from folk watching from afar, or unionists with that agenda. What has actually happened in Scotland is a lot less romantic than that, a lot less exciting than that. If anything, the rise of modern nationalism in form of the SNP, really restored the decline of something worth fighting for and the replacement of that desire to go home and relax in peace. For a lot of the UK's history the Scots were dying for those bastards, they made up a disproportionate chunk of the British armed forces that conquered much of the world, won a couple of World Wars and the fact is they died for the English and the Scottish ruling class. And, again, I'm not sure how the audio is here, but it seems like, I'm still a bit mumbled, maybe I can go and grab some headphones very quick.

Adam Ramsay 06:51

I realised I did not really introduce myself at the beginning, I'm Adam Ramsey for open democracy, and I am the most boring person on this panel. Why I didn't think to tell you I am but um, but, you know, while we wait for Rory, you're going to get some kind of, you know, random filler chat for me. And you know, I have to say that as a, what you might call surprising Scottish person. There you go! Rory has headphones now, can we hear you better?

Rory Scothorne 07:18

Is that better?

Adam Ramsay 07:20

Now. All right, there we go. Go for it Rory.

Rory Scothorne 07:26

Okay, I was talking about Braveheart and how what we're looking at here is the decline of something worth dying for, in kind of British identity, but also in Scottish identity to an extent. So when Scotland was kind of a compassionate and paid up part of the Union, and for much of the 19th and 20th centuries the philosophy underpinning this was what historians have called unionist nationalism and this was not a kind of integrationists, a British unionism, assimilationist, British unionism. This was a unionism which was based on the idea of a distinct Scottish and patriotic interest in the Union union was a way of

preserving Scotland's distinctiveness and its interests as part of something bigger. And unionist nationalist would lean heavily on the symbol of the Scottish soldier with his own regiments and his own iconography. And there's a giant monument to William Wallace Sterling, which is built with the support of Victorian unionists. They believe that well, it's a struggle for independence that ensured that Scotland good negotiators for an entry to the union, rather than being conquered, and in doing so, the Treaty of union preserved a whole range of Scottish institutions in tact, the church law and the education system of government. These things have never been devolved. They've always been autonomous. And so that they functioned as kind of carriers of a kind of background, but now Scottish National Identity all the way through the history of being. But once you get into the first few decades of the 20th century, Scotland has a distinctive unionist industrial bourgeoisie which rapidly begins to decline. heavy industry faces more competition from across the globe. The economy is crippled after the First World War and its heavy industry which is really hit hardest. The Union was still kept alive however, and briefly strengthened by the expansion of the franchise, growing success of a genuinely British wide labour movement. And alongside that labour movement is a new and modernising administrative class which is starting to oversee the welfare state is declining. A privately owned industry is supposed to be taken over by the public sector. And again, you've got a kind of investment in an idea of Britishness This is a multinational vision of Britishness, which is still worth fighting for. It's rooted quite deeply in industrial communities, but Also in a kind of technocratic and middle class vision of state driven progress. But by the time you get to the late 60s and 70s, you start to see the capacity and manoeuvrability of the state into decline. domestic industries started to be offshored. American and Japanese industries start coming in and running Scottish industries as branch plants. And finance capital, lets me get into the 80s starts to really take over. And of course, as we all know, this process also starts to crush the life out of the labour movement. And if you look at the beginnings of modern nationalism, particularly more social democratic left wing visions of nationalism, in the 60s and 70s, a lot of the discussion shifts away from earlier quite romantic visions of Scottishness and into a deeper and more painful kind of disillusion with the British state. We're still dealing with the consequences of that moment that shift away from a sense that Britain Really offered something, it was a way of keeping your communities alive. And the labour states of social states was something that communities had a real direct lived investment and and once that just starts to take over and and you get a British ruling class that really kind of embraces that particular kind of decline, the collapse of forms of industrial and social citizenship, in which everyone has a stake, and its replacement with a citizenship based on property ownership, consumerism. These are things where people start to think well, was Scotland was Scotland's connection to this vision, recessions. Particularly the decline of a general British popular sovereignty. That's not to say that the British people are sovereign, we have parliamentary sovereignty, but a sense that people have the power to shape the world around them, really does decline during this period. And Britain no longer provides what we might call the conditions of self that termination. Industrial Britain with a kind of strong labour movement that could, in circumstances tell capital what to do. Scotland has arguably a greater capacity for a real and meaningful form of self determination than it does now. Even though we had no Parliament at all. Scotland had a ready made fallback for a kind of alternative vision of citizenship. Through the 80s and 90s. We had that those kind of raw materials of identity preserved through the union. And these were embraced not just by the SNP but by labour through the 80s and 90s. Labour's ability to offer a Scottish Parliament was a big part of their appeal in the 80s and 90s. And their continued defence of that vision of Britishness as social citizenship and stood in pretty good stead well into the 2000s. But as the kind of long effects of that transition began to hit home, you started to see the

s&p, more capably taking Over the mantle and offering what is actually quite different vision of Scottishness. And so Labour's idea of a unionist, Scottish and nationhood was to a huge chunk of the population were fighting and dying for a thing. Is nationalist Scotland the same thing? Is this a kind of new form of deep existential loyalty that will drive people into some kind of revolts that might be potentially useful for the left. And Tom Nan used to talk about rolling mutinies across Britain's forgotten regions and nations and people today and in the Scottish nationals, we would talk about mass civil disobedience, I'm going to Scottish revolution, if Westminster refuses Scottish independence referendum. But when you look at the SNP zone platform, it does seem to be based much more on a kind of resignation. Kind of deeper nationalistic sense of popular agency is really about pragmatic adaptation by more competent leads to a new world order, much more than the kind of world making agency that underpins both imperialist and laboris divisions of state. And so that brings us to the kind of final point. And this is about Braveheart. Two, this isn't a Scottish movie. And this was a global film targeted an international audience, playing some key elements of a globalised culture that turned the plucky little guy wherever he was, into a kind of saleable commodity. And the key thing about Scotland here is that it provides these kind of glamorous, slightly exotic ethnic roots, rather than, you know, a genuinely internationalist vision of popular sovereignty. This was about some kind of deep authentic spirits that could struggle for liberation. And this is fashionable is it's a kind of global site Geist and, and one of the things that underpinning modern Scottish nationalism I think there's a sense that Scotland is a better container for new forms of global identity globalised identity than Britishness is. Britishness feels old fashioned. It feels quite insular. Scottishness has been refashioned as something quite open and inclusive, and frankly as an effective commodity to sell as your own identity on the world market. So while the s&p are mobilising today is not this deep activism or kind of radical break with Britishness and more Scottish nationalism. mobilises now is more a kind of demand for globalisation to fulfil its participatory and democratic promise. We know I think on the left today how shallow that promise really is. So I suppose one of the things I want to open up the discussion for people is what usefulness there might be in that kind of nationalism that kind of fairly globalised, and not internationalist, but cosmopolitan nationalism. That doesn't really have too many deep roots in Any kind of radical identity or social democratic agency that is more about adapting to the world as it is. And so I'll wrap up with that as a kind of starting provocation and leave it to the others to fill in the gaps that the rest of the UK, so thanks very much.

Adam Ramsay 16:18

Thank you, Rory. I think it's fair to say that not only do you give a sort of good recent economic history of the kind of causes of the rise of Scottish independence, but also, in a sense, a good context for us to see all of this conversation, the industrial decline, that innovativity of Britishness and how states reproduce themselves, and kind of develop, issues which I am sure Harriet would like to comment on too. Harriet Protheroe- Soltani. Harriet is a trade union officer, she is very involved in Momentum, I think she's actually Vice Chair at Momentum at the moment if I'm not mistaken, and, and was also, once upon a time very involved in the Scottish independence debate in 2014, when she was a student up here at Edinburgh, which is where I know her from, so Harriet, it's great to see you again. Take it away.

Harriet Protheroe-Soltani 17:21

Thanks, Adam. I'm glad we had a historical analysis and an academic analysis because you're not going to get that from me. So if you're expecting that, forget it. You're not a political analysis. Okay. I

want to start this by, I want to aim this essentially at the English left. And I think the English left tend to have a bad understanding of devolution and independence, and I'm sorry, it's a bit harsh, but it's something that I find incredibly frustrating. I think it's frustrating to be part of a movement and you know, when I see movement, I mean a broad stroke of the UK left to seem to be having different conversations in different parts of the UK. So I want to use this to kind of unite us around a common cause and I want that cause to be the fact that the British state is antithetical to socialism. And I think we need to look for alternatives. So that's what I'm going to begin with. So, um, I guess many of you will be wondering whether- so I'm going to talk about Wales obviously, as you can tell, and where the Welsh Labour members support independence and what the picture is for us in Wales. And, and support for independence in the Welsh Labour Party is growing at a phenomenal rate. Just two years ago, support within the Labour Party was 20% in favour of independence, and now it's 51%. So that's the majority of the Welsh population wanting Welsh independence and as we can talk with with Rory later, I think that would be a radically different situation. And if Scottish Labour had had these figures, some time ago, I think we would have seen a different approach to the SNP if it had been this way. So I think it's quite interesting for us to, to kind of frame it within that context. So how well supported it is actually becoming in Wales. So I'm part of a group called Labour for an Indy Wales. And we know that structural change won't come from the centre. Federalism has been called for for about 200 years in the UK and it hasn't worked yet. And many of us here will have the analysis that devolution was used to quell nationalist sentiment, but actually, I think it's done the opposite. Devolution started the conversation, where did they expect it was going to end? And when you start, you know, creating your own laws, you're going to have an effect on culture. So inevitably, there will be legal and cultural differences between Wales and England. Some of this might be hot takes, right? So get in the comments, and I'll read your comments in a minute. So I kind of want to mention the cultural differences very, very briefly. So I did a previous talk with Adam before for open democracy and I gave this example there, but I think it's an important one to raise here. And to me, this was a big signifier that made me realise how different the nation's have become and I think that was Burnard Castle when Dominic Cummings drove to Burnard castle. As bad as some, you know, Welsh ministers can be, I very much doubt that a Welsh minister would have pulled that stunt. And I think this to me speaks to a wider culture of elites dominating UK society with etonian arrogance and entitlement. I think, for example, the cultural differences here in Wales, we don't have a etonians running the government, we have farmers. So there's a cultural difference, which I could also argue is class based. And I could come on to that later though. So I think that is definitely more of hot take. Something that's happening at the moment I think is very, very interesting in terms of how we're looking at devolution is the internal market bill. I think this will probably come up in the conversation as well as huge power grab that we are seeing from Westminster to overwrite devolved areas and the laws of devolved areas in their favour. If you haven't needs any evidence of the Tories in the UK government wanted to keep control that is one of them. But I think another point that we've got coming up on the horizon is going to be the agriculture bill and the trade bill. And these are going to have huge impacts on parts of the UK such as Wales. So for example, a huge section of the Welsh economy is down to farming and the agriculture and trade bills really hit Welsh farmers, especially small farmers, because when there's no export market, we're going to have a huge problem aka you know, like tariff free trade to Europe, and the NFU the National Farmers Union said that if Welsh lamb do not have turned free exports to the European Economic Area, and there'll be a 90% price drop. Yeah, in the price of lamb sorry, you probably thinking, 'Why is she going on about lamb?' but this is a huge part of the UK market and the Tories are riding roughshod over it, then we've

got a huge problem here, especially because, for example, the price of lamb is going to absolutely plummet and farmers are expected to be decimated in Wales. And what this will do will have an effect on language as well. So, most small farmers in West Wales and North Wales are Welsh speaking farms, so, if it's the case that these small Welsh farms end up closing up shop having to sell land in a hurry, because they can't afford to keep their farms open anymore, it's gonna have a huge effect on the Welsh language. And people will end up moving to northern cities of England or southern places in Wales, Southern Wales, where language is not used. So there's going to be whole areas of Wales and the Tories at the moment, haven't really considered in these trade bills and these power grabs and these trade deals with America, we're gonna, you know, push them- the price of meat internally to the market will also fill the market with really, really cheap, horrible meat the Welsh farmers can't compete with. I know this sounds daft. I'm spending such a long time talking about farms, but If you live in Wales, you'll understand. So these are just like small examples of where I think we're gonna see huge cultural differences coming up and people really looking towards the assemblies to try and get help. And I think there's a really interesting move at the moment if any of you were on Twitter like I'm, I'm not very good on Twitter, but Welsh Twitter I seem to like have made inroads into and Welsh Twitter is essentially young pro independence activists, younger generations are very, very much in favour of independence at the moment and I know Plaid Cymru has just gained about 7000 members, they gained 3000 members after the Barnard castle incident alone, like their membership is skyrocketing, and also the support withiCn Welsh Labour is skyrocketing. And the younger generations are really really putting energy behind talking about independence and the future of Wales. There's new Welsh media. For example, there's organisations such as..... Welsh language media and.... Welsh language media as well. And then you've got Nation Cymru and Voice Wales, all trying to like, swerve the cultural analysis from Westminster, from the British press, which the Welsh press mainly is, the most press to have in Walesis British press, we have very, very little Welsh press, we only have Wales online, essentially. So the cultural backdrop to this is growing and growing. And also, I think it's important when we're talking about younger people and their draw towards independence to look well, the Welsh Assembly has done. So we passed a groundbreaking act, called the future generations act. And I think it was the first in the world the first parliament in the world to consider legislation where future generations had to be considered in every decision. So it means that laws through the Welsh Assembly always have to have an analysis and the impact is going to have future generations to come in behind them. I think that's made us much more conscious as a nation towards what we're saying publicly, what we're doing publicly and how it effects people. Anyway, I'm going to bring it back to why I think TWT audience will be interested in this. And I think that if you want change in the UK, and if we want to see socialism in the UK, we really have to understand the British state is going to fight this off tooth and nail as we've just seen with the last election. And as we've seen with the decimation of the Corbyn project, one of the only ways I can see people really like holding their feet to the fire of the establishment is through growing independence movements. I know for the left is a really tricky conversation to talk about independence, because it quickly comes on to a conversation about nationalism. Back in this instance, I think we can really see the difference of nationalisms between the nationalism of the British state and for example, the nationalism of Plaid Cymru, or the Welsh nationalists on Twitter, which tends to be a much more egalitarian and socially aware nationalism. So I think for those watching in England, I think ifwe're going to really have this conversation about how we can fundamentally change the UK, we need to look at alternative options such as independence. And I want us to be able to inspire these conversations across the country. And I want you to look to the Westphalian farmers instead of the

Etonians for the change that we want to have. And I'm going to wrap up there and I feel like I've waffled too much about farming but whatever.

Adam Ramsay 26:24

Thanks Harriet, I actually grew up on a sheep farm. My first five years were spent in helping my dad round up sheep. So I, you know, very happy to chat about farming all day long on please don't apologise for doing so. Thank you so much, Harriet. That was great. And I think that, you know, many of us will be familiar with the quote that you can no more get democratic socialism through his British state, than you can get milk from a vulture. I think that you know, as you said, the lack of understanding on the English left and the lack of conversation on the English left About that fundamental conundrum that we live under a state that was built to plunder the rest of the world and enrich the British ruling class, on a state that is designed for egalitarianism, never mind socialism is is often frustrating. No Harriet you talked a lot about indigenous and how people in England comrades in England need to think more about some of these questions that is obviously not true of everyone. One example of someone who has done a lot of thinking about this, to writing about this is our next panellist. Alex Nevin is a music star. He's an academic. He's a great writer. And I'm going to hand over to him right now.

Alex Nevin 27:45

Thanks Adam. Yeah, well, I mean, coming after the Harriet' section, I think I guess it would make sense now to have someone who you know kind of at this point sort of lifts of their shirt and to reveal a kind of, you know, tattoo of a St George's flag and kind of really advocates the English cause in case in the case of Englishness, I'm not going to do that. As Adam said, you know, I've sort of thought and written quite a bit about Englishness, but really from a kind of critical, kind of deconstructive point of view. I think, you know, Englishness is something that we need to talk about. And I'm really interested in hearing what the other panellists have to say, as we sort of open this up and what other contributors have to say. So please, please jump in. And I'm interested to hear what people say. But I think we have to be clear that we start from a point of which Englishness is something that has to be interrogated from a left wing point of view as Harriet says, and I sort of wholeheartedly agree with their point about, you know, the British state being antithetical to socialism. Certainly the British state in its current form. But I would also go further and say that, you know Englishness as it currently exists, in England, as it currently exists, are also antithetical to socialism. I mean, just to kind of situate this sort of discussion about Englishness historically, first of all, I mean, there were kind of two two versions of England's version of England and Englishness, broadly speaking, I think one is a sort of deep historical version of England and Englishness, it goes back, you know, throughout the centuries, England's was a country, certainly in the mediaeval periods, you know, not for a huge portion of human history for a few hundred years really, and obviously, with the kind of complicating factor of it having lands in France and the kind of border with Wales being very for us and the board in Scotland also been very for us. But I think it's fair to say that England was a nation state for Several hundred years, a legitimate nation state, it hasn't been so since the act of union and really since then, even extending into the present day is a kind of terminal confusion in terms of, you know, where England stops and Britain begins and what the relationship between Englishness and Britishness is you know, England and Britain are still really confused and you still get people kind of talking about, you know, in extreme cases, you know, Andy Murray being English and, you know, people from different parts of the British Isles being English, English men or women. So that's the kind of deep historical context which, as I say, extends into the

present day and is most characterised by this kind of confusion between England and Britain, which isn't quite resolvable and we certainly haven't resolved, I don't think. There's also this kind of more recent, much more recently, really kind of beginning in the 90s nothing coinciding debates about Welsh and Scottish devolution and subsequently independence, there has been a kind of, I guess, a kind of pushback from England, you know, this kind of response to these discussions about devolution and independence in Scotland and Wales, and Ireland's obviously a kind of separate discussion entirely. And, you know, you've started to see this debates about, you know, should we have an English Parliament? Should there be kind of devolution in England? What does it mean to be English specifically, as opposed to British? I'm mostly sort of quite critical of that as well. I think, obviously, that's, you know, in an extreme sense, that's has a kind of far right manifestation that kind of, you know, you see the fact that, you know, far right parties in the late 20th century tended to be the British, you know, the British National Party. You know, UKIP founded it in the 90s but then post Millennium you've seen a kind of an embrace by the far right of Englishness, specifically, English Defence League, for example. And that's been mirrored in a kind of sort of conservatives sort of centrist liberal embrace of Englishness as well, you see kind of conservative commentators, you know, writing kind of middle ground books about what it means to be English. There is a book, Ben Fogle published a few years ago called English you know, Marmite, queueing and the weather. So the whole kind of soft conservative, kind of centrist middlebrow revival of Englishness, which I also think is kind of mostly BS and certainly not really very socialist. Clearly there is, you know, away from the far right and the near right centre, there has also been revived with debates about progressive patriotism, so called, some of those are very meaningful and have a lot to be said for them, I think, you know, we we are going to, perhaps in the course of this panel, beginning with this, this panel and the discussion, you know, have to start talking about Englishness from a left wing point of view and what that might means for socialists. Nevertheless, I think those examples that, you know, they tend to be overwhelmed by the kind of far right and the centre in a way that I just think, you know, you know, advocating a kind of Unified Progressive Englishness is going to be so difficult in the face of far right racism and kind of centrist and conservative, kind of soft nationalism. I'm not personally persuaded that progressive Englishness is possible. And again, I'd be interested to hear what other people have to say about this to sort of counterpose with that. Just Finally, I think what we have to compose with that is, you know, thinking about England as a place of different regions or different kind of civic areas, different kind of civic territories. You know, this is underlined by the fact that, you know, if we're talking, you know, in the context of this, this discussion about the four nations England is a very, very different nation to Scotland, Wales and Ireland, Northern Ireland. You know, the population of England is over 55 million in comparison with the other nations which you know, tend to be between, you know, three in Wales is just over three Scotland, between five and six and Ireland depending on you know, even if Ireland we united it would be, I think, eight or 9 million England as a as a kind of vastly bigger country as the kind of impact areal centre of, of the British Isles, and I think, you know if we if we're going to have a discussion about devolution to, to the nation's if we're going to have this discussion which has been really forced upon us by the imminent likelihood of Scottish independence, I think you know, we're gonna have to respond to that with a discussion about some form of devolution of power to English regions with English civic areas, the various different ways of doing it. As Harriet says federalism has not yet materialised, you know, the kind of federal devolution of the English regions would be one way to do this. That hasn't happened, and we have to be realistic that it doesn't seem like an imminent possibility under Tory rule. Nevertheless, I think, you know, the key thing is if we're talking about

England, kind of starting again, you know, reimagining a sort of positive way for England. I think, you know, this has to involve kind of deep addition to the region's, and, you know, in a way that is sometimes analogous with evolution to the nations. So think that's, that's what I've got to say for now.

Adam Ramsay 36:12

Great. Well, thank you, Alex. And I think, you know, we can all appreciate that people in England and the English left, feeling your way into this conversation has been quite hard for a lot of you people on the English left. I think a lot of people are really appreciating your contributions to that conversation. So thanks so much for bringing that today. Next, we are going to be chatting about Ireland. Now, I should say that in my original lineup, I wanted to go from the population-wise smallest, kind of all the territories of the UK, which Ireland still is at the moment, whether it or not, to the largest, but we've we've jumbled things around and we're going to talk about Ireland next. I think it's important do acknowledge when we do that the kind of history and situation in Ireland is in many ways quite different from that in Scotland, Wales and England and while it is, I think, right, that is part of this conversation, we all seem to think about some of the differences of relationship and of power in that context. But I'm sure that Allison has much more to say about that than I do. And Alison is a cracking journalist based in Belfast for the Irish news, which is the leading publication of the Irish community in the North of Ireland. And, Alison, take it away.

Allison Morris 37:36

Okay, I suppose as you said, it's very different because the historical context at which we come with, you know, when you talk about nationalist politics, and in the island of Ireland, next year will be the centenary of the formation of Northern Ireland. So it'll be 100 years since this island was partitioned. And that's key, I suppose, when we come to talk about what's happening now in a modern context. So we had a very lengthy conflict, and thousands of lives were lost. And that was, you know, in a bid to force our issue unification, which was never gonna happen by that method. And what we have now in a part sharing government was something that I think that many people would have been quite willing to accept, at least in the sort of short to medium term. So as long as we had peace, and we had evolution and we had politicians who were locally elected who were fighting our corner, I think that most people could have probably lived with that settlement had it not been for a series of more recent events. So what we have had is we have always at the current state of affairs in Northern Ireland is we had a mandatory power sharing government that was originally intended or designed to have two parties of the modern nationalist and unionist communities in positions of First and Deputy First Minister. So this was a government that was designed at the time 20 years ago, to have Ulster unionists and the SDLP as the first and Deputy First Minister, but patterns changed quite dramatically over that time. And therefore we have the DUP and Sinn Fiene. So you know, as far to one side and as far as the other side as you can possibly get, they're not attempting to share power. And that created a very different dynamic because for republicans and for Sinn Fiene, the peace process and the Good Friday Agreement was not a settlement, it was a process, the unionist, I think believes that at that stage, it would be a settlement to what was happening here, that would be a permanent solution. But that was never going to be the case because demographics have changed. And that constraint is something just quick, some follow up, go back to the, you know, the 50s, the 60s, the 70s, and even 80s. Catholics just have more children. It's as simple as that. You know, I'm from a family of nine, and that would have been the norm where I came from at that time. And so we have a much larger population of young

people here from the Catholic nationalist background and we do commentary on people from the unionist loyalists background. So what was designed as a union of state for unionist government, a unionist government with the union majority, in those hundred years changed much quicker than I think that the people who designed this region expected to, we now have almost 50/50. And so that in itself, pushed talk about a border poll and reunification, and it gave nationalism a new voice, but then something else came along which we hadn't really expected, which was Brexit. And we know now that Northern Ireland did not come into the thinking of those people who championed Brexit during that referendum. And it was only after they received, you know, the leave result that they decided, the realisation that there was, you know, a huge land border between part of the UK and the EU that needed sorted out, and then it come into their line of sight. And the mess that we are seeing from that of chaos came from that I think has been very frustrating to watch you know from from the side of the channel and this week as the internal markets bill was being discussed in the Commons. You know, I find myself, you know, screaming at the television screen of the lack of knowledge that exists in relation to what actually are the realities of living on this island and how that partition of that border and how Brexit is going to affect that and affect our peace. But what that did it was it pushed the campaign to discuss reunification, to discuss what is now being called a new Ireland rather than united Ireland. So, you know, in the Belfast of my childhood, the campaign for reunification was one that was being led by more hardline republicans that was one that had a violent armed wing. And it was one that you know, some patriotic songs of the nation once again, we no longer speak in that context anymore. What we have is a new Ireland which will accommodate all kinds of religious beliefs and people from all different types of backgrounds who have not made the sale and their home. It's a very different conversation and it's one that really comes down, not to identity and not to what kind of passport you're going to have. So as part of the Good Friday Agreement and as someone from Northern Ireland, I have dual identity and I feel like I can have a British passport or an Irish passport, or both and in many occasions in my life, I have had both, I find one was very useful of travelling to Russia and the other very useful of travelling to Israel. So I have the best of both worlds in that respect. But that would have been down to identity and the flags you associate with Northern Ireland, that sort of very patriotic, you know, people who use their identity above all else that matters. Now were talking about economics, so the talk of reunification with the the campaign which those on the left have seen, is their best opportunity to try and create this new Ireland is one that is based on the academic mayhem that we believe for has been predicted that will follow after Brexit and until lesson two matters of the Conservative Party gaslighting people who live here they speak by claiming that this internal markets bubble which is going to you know, breach international treaty is all for our own good just for the protection of the Good Friday Agreement, but nothing could be further from the truth. The Northern Ireland protocol, which was introduced into the withdrawal agreement, was the sort of poor sister of Theresa May's backstop. There is no Brexit that's good for a tiny island like this, which has to exist and function in terms of half of us being in the EU and the other portion having left. None of those are good options, so you had then a second option, which was the backstop, which was obviously redrafted because at that. We could see that English nationalism that the Brexiters, who for them, Brexit became like a cult, like something that had to be achieved at all costs regardless of whether it damaged the union they claimed they wanted to protect. It forced Theresa May out of this government which I I think that is probably if you are unionist and you want the union to be preserved, they're probably doing a better job of breaking it off than any one on the left could ever do because the actions that they're taking in relation to Brexit are going to force the hand of people in Scotland and also of people in Northern Ireland, I would have thought if you

have had asked me five or 10 years ago that we will have a border poll on this island for for unification. But possibly not my lifetime, I was pretty sure that there would be reunification of assailant, maybe in my children's later life, or possibly my grandchildren's now, I'm fairly sure that there will be a border poll on this island within the next five or seven years. And that has been forced because of the attitudes of Brexit. And what people can say and even moderate to the people in the middle can say is as a lack of understanding of where we live here, lack of understanding of the complexities and the politics of this island. From our sort of overlords in Westminster, who are making decisions that are really to the detriment of the people who live here. And that is something that I think has given nationalist politics new life because they're able to point to how the quality of life for people who live here is being greatly reduced by being attached to to a union, which clearly does not care for them and which uses them as collateral damage when it comes to negotiations, in relation to Brexit, something else that I find interesting and that, again, was something that none of us could have predicted was the reaction to the pandemic. So, we have had COVID, and we've had a reaction to that we have watched and what happened was we had a health minister who was a unionist, and then we had other ministers who were Sinn Fein, from a nationalist point of view. They argued for lockdown earlier unionism was looking towards Westminster for direction, nationalism was looking towards Dublin for further action. And all of a sudden, I think that both came together and realised that as a tiny island, that the best health care response that we could possibly have was to try and align ourselves with this, in terms of lockdown and opening up again, and so what we're seeing is cooperation on a scale that probably hasn't been seen before on this island between two different governments in terms of the healthcare approach to the pandemic. And things like that will be seized on when this is long gone and settled by those from the left and from nationalists who will say we can see that we were better off as one and as I've written it as one. So come next year, there's going to be a number of events that are being planned. That will either celebrate or commemorate the division of this island, depending on the the line you stand on. And that will be interesting because will we be discussing the separation the partition of Ireland in terms of its future and how we will live as a divided state or is this the sort of reflection almost you know, is it given us sort of eulogy to a state that is definitely on its last legs and and on its way out? What we have also seen, similar to after you know what what was spoken about before about the rise of the far right and the pandemic, again, they have exploited, as you can imagine, in relation to sort of anti mask protests and anti lockdown protests. And we've seen a small group of that, that has started to access the sort of Irish yellow vest movement. And these are people who, well, if you look at the English far right, they hark back to, you know, to time of the Empire, and the time of you know, an all white Britain, you know, with, with union flags flying and bolting on every lamppost, what we have with the Irish far right is people who look back at a time when the church and state was one of the same when Ireland was controlled by the Catholic Church, and when all of the social restrictions that existed because of that in terms of women's reproductive rights in terms of, of same sex marriages, in terms of a whole other aspects of social modernization that have taken place quite rapidly in the south of Ireland, slower in the North, but we are we are getting there at a slower pace. And for them that becomes quite an alien environment. And we've seen people who for some reason, would rather live back in that old Ireland, you know the island of thath cottages and women in their Magdalen laundries, and those people have seen on the pandemic and the sort of far right anti mask, anti lockdown New World Order. At the start, it's easy to dismiss those people. And I think we do that at our peril because the protests have been getting larger and larger and at the weekend, there was protests in London with several thousand people in attendance. And I think that that's quite dangerous. And that is possibly what ourselves as a

journalist and as a journalist who would consider myself a socialist and consider myself to be on the left. It's a very, very dangerous game for us to dismiss those people as you know, as crackpot. So, you know, enhancer as far right or whatever, that we have to know that the more that we feed into conspiracy theory by not not challenging that narrative or not even recognising that exist, it grows and the shadows of growth and the darkness. And that wouldn't be the type of Ireland that anyone would want to live in in the future. So what I would say in terms of our politics here and the nationalist you know, version of our politics, that we came out of conflict and to talk about the unification was almost to be seen as is that you hadn't accepted that the peace process of being a success. And that you want to go back to times when when things here were very different and very violent. And we had a hard border. And there's a fear that this current Brexit deal and as we head towards the end of the trade agreement, negotiations and come January, nobody knows what's going to happen, there has to be checks on the silence, you cant not have checks, Boris Johnson knows that they have to take place somewhere. That the compromise that the system typically supports and therefore you wouldn't see them, you wouldn't see any infrastructure. This internal markets fell bill is threatening to take that away because union doesn't just like what they call a sea border, and us being in any sort of regulatory alliance with the state of Ireland. And therefore, there's a very real danger that we're going to have border posts and costumes posted at the border. And that would just be, I think, a massive backward step in terms of our peace process. And in terms of the stability of this island. And I think that that's something when I'm listening to debates in Westminster that they just don't get, you know, I think that a lot of people think that when they talk about the, the border in Ireland, they think it's like a border when you go on holiday. And you can stop now and have your passport. And it's nothing like that. It's green fields, and it's farms and its people who's living room is in the South and their kitchen is in the North. People cross back and forth across it every day for work and education, all sorts of other things. It is completely open and seamless. And apart from the fact that the real times change from miles to kilometres, you wouldn't actually know it was there, or existed at all. And were now heading back to a time, where in the persuit of a very damaging ERG style Brexit, we will have a possibility that these structures start appearing again for different reasons. And in one way that would be damaging for peace, and in another way i think that you know those to the left and those who favour unification can see that as an opportunity to say to young people, you know, look, this is the place who we are sort of handcuffed to, if you like, in Westminster. This is the damage that the their causing to our economy. They have put that there's a very easy way to take that away. And you wonder whether people will be voting to be part of a United Ireland or just to go back into Europe again. I think the same thing has happened with Scottish independence, though what's happened to that debate is that its turned not just an independent Scotland, but it's also Scotland to return to some kind of, of EU membership. And so that's give it another push because that's taken people who may not necessarily be deadly patriotic in one way or another, but that's pushing them in the economic field and all of those things are issues that the left or those who you know, are in favour of unification can't say that was some master plan that they come up with, because they're all incidents that have been thrust upon us, either unexpectedly or against our will. And those are all issues that I think going forward that we're going to be discussing more and more. And so I would never have thought if we talked about the hundredth anniversary of the formation of Northern Ireland, that we would be in the position that we are in. But the fact is now we're changing demographics, changing economic situations. And the fact that the South now looks socially more progressive. For a younger, I think it seems to be economically and socially faster growing. It gives them something to aspire to. So when you think about who are pushing this agenda, those on the

far right, those who insist on slowing down social change those who have insist on a hard Brexit, they're doing more, I think, for the campaign for for nationalist reunification than anyone else. The problem is that the Ireland that had been expected to exist, if we ever get reunification, you know, a sort of big Socialist Republic. That doesn't exist anymore. You know that the island of my modern times is one that as party capitalists were coming information over like, like Yahoo, pay less tax, probably, you know than your average shop worker. And all of those things, I think are something that we do come when we do come seriously to talk about a border poll, and to talk about what will happen in the, in the times of a referendum. There are issues that are probably gonna come more and more to the front. They're not being discussed now at ant great length, but I think that they will be discussed as we go forward, especially among young people who are angry, that sort of capitalization of property and things of that mean they are going to be strapped for the rest of their life and all sorts of other issues that we failed with was grossly capitalist societies. And all of that, as I said, if you'd asked me, you know, when in my childhood when I left a very violent place, a place where I had to pass a soldier at the bottom of my garden path every morning on the way to school? I didn't expect that we would have changed so dramatically in such a time and why we do have case we also have political and political instability now. But I don't think that when we all went into that euphoria of the peace process 20 years ago than any of us expected a lot of that has to do with English nationalism and then betrayed. And when we talk about the English far right, I think it's easy to think of, you know, skin heads and football shirts, but you know, the real English far right or you know, are the people walking in the House of Commons, you know, sitting on the green benches, you know, the, the people of wealth and property, are the actual elite, you know, the, the elite of the establishment. They are pushing this agenda, which is to the detriment I think of the working class people, regardless of whether you live in England, Scotland, Wales, or Northern Ireland.

Adam Ramsay 54:35

Great, thank you. So much Alison. Covered so much ground there. That was excellent. And I think, you know, every year or two since 2014, I've gone to the north of Ireland to go and chat up on the street about kind of constitutional questions and so on, and I think, exactly as you're kind of conjured up there, what's always been striking is how much it's a pragmatic choice of people. So I remember in 2014 People, you know, I go to the kind of majority Catholic areas of Belfast and before to say, well, actually secretly, you know, I'd call myself a nationalist, but the NHS is pretty great, I would probably stay in the UK, you go now, to majority unionists places, and you talk to young people there and a number of them will say, 'Well, I can't tell my parents this, but actually, you know, now were leaving the EU...', its extraordinary, and you conjured that very well. And that's very important. So navigate up to questions, and we've had a few in. I am going to start with, and they are kind of streaming very fast. And I should say that in the kind of comments section, there's a whole lot of discussion going on, and some of its questions. And it's possible that you've written that kind of really interesting question that I have missed. So if you have, feel free to to repaste that into the chat. No. So I would like to see it. But I'm gonna, I'm going to start with Lorcan Mullen's question. So Lorcan said, I think very well the key question is, 'how can the left in each place actually build a common politics and respects self determination, but can actually gather enough power to do transformative, necessary things?' So that's been that's been put down, written there in front of you. So would any of the four of you like kept jumping on that, first with the response, and if you can kind of give, quick one minute responses, and we're gonna then come

back around and we're gonna hope in the meantime, people are going to pace more questions into the chat. Thank you. Who wants to go first? If not, I'll pick on someone. Harriet, why don't you jump in.

Rory Scothorne 56:48

I just posted in the chat, shotgun not me first! I think this is what I was trying to allude to earlier when I was talking about how we break the British state and how we break the internal mechanisms that are there to fight against socialism. So I think, by different nationalist movements, they need to be framed around common values that the left could agree on. So for example, there's a lot of say, the Scottish nationalist movement or the progressive end of the Scottish nationalist movement, that could easily be repeated to in Wales, for example, like the radical independence campaign in Scotland, we now have an organisation in Wales, that were set up in kind of direct response to that. I think it's those kind of values that we can see being inspired from Scotland that we're now having the same conversation here in Wales, which could break the British state and can also end up making a more socialist independent state. If that makes sense. You made me go first, so it's probably a terrible answer.

Adam Ramsay 57:59

Please, it popped up saying, you didn't want to go first as I was saying your name, Rory, Rory has volunteered. We've got a private chat with you behind the scenes so I can actually see them. Rory!

Rory Scothorne 58:13

Yeah, its a fantastic question Lorchan. The idea of doing things UK wide is almost circular because one of the main reasons that people are starting to embrace nationalist politics in places like Scotland and Wales is because they are no longer seeing certain opinions. People that really need to do the work in the run on this stuff are in England, there's only so much Scotland can do. And, and one of the main ways to shift is the centre of English identity. Alex's comments have passed on a lot of this. And I think so long as English political identity is this kind of like passive, looking south to London and Westminster its going to be incredibly hard to build up a kind of integrated left that takes into account again, the management of self-determination for Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland. And I think one of the key ways of shifting that is to start building up more politicised territorial identities in England. So, again, I completely agree with Alex that English progressive nationalism seems like a dead end on this because it'll probably only reinforce that massive territorial Gulf in England between North and South. And it could just as easily be used to consolidate power in the south and then redistribute it North. And I think that's where comrades in both Scotland and Wales can contribute is by kind of evangelising about using territorial politics to get noticed and get yourself your foot in the door. If the north of England developed a territorial politics, that was a threat, not just to London Frankly, a progressive threat to labour it could get noticed a lot more a lot easier. The fact that you know, territorial politics in the North of England has become and Brexit basically, or appears to be something that is very easily portrayed as right wing, well, it probably is right wing, is a real problem because what we actually need is a left wing territorial politics in north and then in places like the southwest of England, in places like Cornwall, that can threaten labour and kind of blackmail labour. It's taking territorial demand seriously, and starting to seriously decentralise things labour still still wedded to this idea of parliamentary sovereignty. Kier, Starmer, doesn't waffle about progressive federalism already, I see no evidence he believes it, until the English labour left starts very seriously considering the British Constitution and the centralization of sovereignty in the, in the UK Parliament, I just see very little for kind of seriously unified

and effort to kind of breaking up some of that power, because we really need, we're waiting for England to kind of do something about where power lies now. And I think breaking up English territorial power is really central for that.

Adam Ramsay 1:01:24

Thank you, Rory. It always strikes me as astounding that so much of the Labour Party thinks it's possible to believe in the Westminster system under which sovereignty lies with the crown in Parliament's and also claim to be socialist. Either you are a socialist and believe in popular sovereignty, or you believe in the Westminster system and the crown in parliament. I don't see how those two things are compatible in any way. Either Alex or Alison need to come in on the last question or Shall we continue?

Allison Morris 1:02:00

I think that what the left are failing to do is is take in the very simple, normal ordinary day to day politics which which unites us all. And if you look at what's happened in the pandemic, if you look at the people who suffered most, if you looked at the fact that the clusters existed within meatpacking factories, people who were sent to pick fruit and level unsuitable homes and the people have no direct provision, people in Leicester making, you know, dresses for pennies for online retailers, and all of those people were sacrificed to shop workers on minimum wage for sacrifice, but the rest of us were told to stay at home from the left and from the liberal left, I haven't heard anyone stand up in the Commons and defend the fact that capitalism has failed those people has not only failed and has basically deemed them as expendables. . And if this pandemic ever showed the failure of capitalism and who's dying you only need to look at the figures and the numbers of people of colour who have lost their lives. A lot of that is to do with unsuitable working conditions and unsuitable living conditions. They don't understand if you're trying to form a unified left. And if you're trying to find common ground that exists in all four regions, where there hasn't been more shouting about, you know, this is the reality of what capitalism really is. I think that you need to show the disparity of wealth that exists in this country to really, really mobilise people, because a lot of that takes place behind closed doors. And I don't think that people realise and understood the actual material cost of capitalism in terms of human life, that they would be so supportive of the current Westminster regime.

Adam Ramsay 1:03:49

Yeah. And Alex would you like to jump in on this question, or should we?

Alex Nevin 1:03:53

Yeah, I mean, basically what what Rory said, perhaps we should move on, you know, I dont have to much to add, I think he summarised things very well.

Adam Ramsay 1:04:03

Okay, so for the audience, it might be that you have asked a lot of great questions kind of previously in the conversation, but they've got lost me in all the other chat that went on. So if you want to ask any more questions, please do type them into the chat box, which is on the right of my screen. So it's probably on yours, as well. But in the meantime, I'm going to ask all four of you a question of my own, which is, to what extent does this relate to or interact with Black Lives Matter movement and perhaps

the greater prominence of interrogation of British history and colonialism? I suppose what I mean by that is that I've always been astounded by the extent to which sort of progressive ish people from England like to identify as British because they see that as a more progressive identity when I've always sort of responded well, if you have any sense what British means to most of the world. So be interested in your thoughts on how the kind of Black Lives Matter debates. And not just the debate, but the fact that you know, for example, Reni Eddo-Lodge 'Why I'm no longer talking to white people about about race' has been top of the book charts for the last few months, and there has been a genuine process of kind of popular pedagogy in the last few months, and how that's shifted this conversation, do you think?

Rory Scothorne 1:05:42

I mean, it's a hard question, because everyone on this panel is white. One of the interesting things that's happened here, and this has always happened in in British social movement is that there's a very slow process of territorial adjustment that happens. So there is there is centre of British social movements, and that is almost always London. And, and, and that centre adopts certain causes and gets gets kind of fired up for certain causes. And then the periphery is adjust themselves to it. And we'll pick up on those things as well and then and then gradually adapt them to their own circumstances. And that's what's been happening in Scotland a bit is that Scotland has taken up the kind of mantle of the protests in Bristol and black lives matter whether the left in Scotland have started- and it's been fantastic in some ways in that it's prompted people in Scotland to really start grappling with Scotland's colonial history for the first time, and that's got an interesting disruptive effect on some narratives of Scottish nationalism, about Scotland being a colony, where actually, you know, as soon as this issue pops up, it starts to prompt people to go, well, you instantly start finding out how complicit Scotland was and huge swathes of Glasgow and Edinburgh were funded by slave trades. And you find that there's there's statues and buildings named after people who were entirely involved with this and had deeply racist views and so on. The other thing it's done is prompted people actually organising these protests insofar as protest in Scotland have been led by black people. They have been able to form identities that has I mean, that the form movements and organisations to mobilise around these issues, and in a way that really isn't prioritised in Scottish political discourse, just because Scotland is so dominated by basically the politics of Scottish nationalism, which is overwhelmingly white. And, and so, those it's actually an interesting kind of unionist case for these things where priorities in London, where we have a much bigger population of BME people, these things can can force those issues on the agenda of countries like Scotland where people have much less representation. And that process of adaptation is very important. But it does still mean that the centre of gravity is elsewhere and and shifting our centre of gravity so that Scotland can start to engage with these questions on its own terms. And rather than having to adapt issues that are kind of enforced far away, that's one important part of your struggles.

Adam Ramsay 1:08:31

Thank you, Rory and anyone else? Harriet?

Harriet Protheroe-Soltani 1:08:38

Yeah. I just wanted to nod to what Rory said there, which always comes up in these discussions around nationalism is the idea of the nations of the UK being colonised by the English. That's a big discussion that we can have but it's also a very sensitive discussion and Adam Price for example, interjected last

year by saying that he thinks England should pay Wales for reparations for its colonisation of Wales, which many people in the BME community in Wales, were like 'what on earth'. Like what on earth are you doing? it prompted a really helpful discussion actually, around the nature of racism, domination and institutional racism within Wales. And but I also think more broadly, politically, I think this is a bit of a problem for us in Wales in the sense that we were the only nation in the UK in the last Senate election to elect eight UKIP seats, and then Brexit party seats. And most of them have defected now because they were nutters, if I can pull that. Pull that into the conversation and they've defected to random crunk parties, but it's a big problem for us that some of them are really reactionary and hostile opinion really came to the fore in the last Senate election. So what at the same time as you've got like the Plyd Camry type of nationalism that says, you know, we want to live in an inclusive and anti racist society. You've also got the Welsh reactionary nationalism that can be very hostile and racist, even though Adam Price said that could be a good thing. And so these these two kinds of you know, we've got to work our way through this I will type of world, we want to live in this is going to be some of the key questions.

Allison Morris 1:10:28

Hey, I think the difference for me is when you are Scottish, you know, Welsh and English, you still identify also as British, whereas I have never felt British. I've always felt Irish regardless of whether I live in part of the United Kingdom or not. So you know, British colonialism, I have no attachment to feel whatsoever. And I've always thought it was a destructive force. Certainly in the history of my Ireland and that I live and we were a very weight to Sadie. We had a peace process that was able to work and address the inequality between nationalists and unionists because I believe we are all the same colour, had we been of different colour that would have been a much harder thing to achieve and that equality would have been a much harder thing to achieve. But what I did notice is during the Black Lives Matter protests that took place in Northern Ireland, despite the fact that we had huge, you know, Republican funerals, whose demonstrations over the 12th of July, the police stood well back and didn't find anyone but showed up you're very peaceful Black Lives Matter protest and which people were socially distanced and how did I find so the organisers and in terms of the PSNI, which is, I think, at this point in time, are only like 3% of the people who work for the police force of Northern Ireland for people of colour. I was a very bad look and the optics of that were incredibly for in terms of time to, you know, integrate people here with me at this place to home and contributed so much to our island. And I think that there is an opportunity there to be rich bait and friends of those people who are on the left if you do agree with socialist politics, the people who nobody came, let's face it, this was a great way placed on an island whether they even want to immigrate here probably, you know, we're all fighting with each other but that has changed and we are now a more functional multicultural society. And I think that there's a real opportunity because these are quite unlike, I suppose the history of migration and other parts of the UK, this is quite new here. So these people are coming here willingly to make this, this their home. And I think that there's an opportunity to reshape and transform the lives of those who wish to join us from here, in terms of the betterment of all our lives.

Adam Ramsay 1:12:26

Thank you, Allison, and Alex do you want to jump in on this?

Alex Nevin 1:12:30

yeah, sure. I mean, I think it raises the sort of separate but related question of, you know, I think one of the most important things in this discussion is really, that we really have to, certainly, from a socialist perspective, detach the relationship between territory and ethnicity. You know, it's, it's, it's something you can't get away from when you're talking about nations and nationhood, to me sort of going back historically, you know, to the to the early 20th century, and beforehand. The fact that this force of discourse of of small Nations has at its centre this question of ethnicity. And I think that is something we really have to kind trying to counterpose are kind of left movement for devolution, and perhaps both kind of national and regional devolution, you have to kind of try to detach, kind of essentialist definitions of ethnicity from debates about you know, how to how to kind of form progressive modern nations or regions. And I think certainly in an English context, that's one thing thata discourse about regionalism or kind of some kind of civic territorialism has going for it is that it you know, it doesn't, you know, regionalism can be sort of hijacked by kind of rightist notions of ethnicity, but usually they're more kind of dependent on your attachment to a city or a town and its kind of institutional culture, its infrastructure, its much, much more fluid than these kind of more monolithic, kind of, you know, ethno nationalist notion. So I think, you know, slightly slight tangent from from BLM, but you know, I think sort of relatedly if we look, if we're talking about the kind of progressive left's movement towards nationalism and kind of civic regionalism, then we really have to be sure that we're sort of detaching, you know, these kind of simplified notions about, you know, what, what constitutes, you know, the English and perhaps, you know, the Scottish, the Welsh and the Irish. You know, the English don't really exist as a kind of as a kind of, you know, essentialist thing.

Adam Ramsay 1:14:47

Thanks, Alex. Maybe we'll get into that conversation later. Perhaps. We'll come to that in a bit because we got great from Sarah, and Sarah Sea, I think it is who asks the question 'Independence is popular with Scottish left, but Scottish Labour is still permanently wedded to unionism. How can we build support for a non-SNP socialist independent Scotland within the party? I'm going to expand that slightly so it applies to all three of you. So, that is for Rory, but then ask the same question about Wales. How can the Labour Party in Wales avoid the fate of Scottish Labour which has been seemed to be you know, so bound to one side is constitutional right that besides that, frankly is seen by most people as the right wing. And then similarly Alex, How can English labour begin to come to terms with this kind of shift in understanding and come to terms with the idea that maybe it's in English labour, but Rory I'm going to come to you first on that.

Harriet Protheroe-Soltani 1:15:58

This is hard. Welsh Labour in a better position for their senses, and actually, but really missed a bit. And a lot of the people who could have helped to make that shift of the Scottish Labour Party towards a position that is not true independence is at least open to the idea, certainly open to some idea of greater Scottish self determination has a more nuanced engagement, scotch identity, a lot of people have already left. And have left for good, I think and they've joined the SNP they've joined the greens have joined. They've just left electoral politics altogether. And the result is a kind of reinforcing the downward cycle where the people who are left are more hardline unionists, and they put off the other people. And so I've been arguing for ages the Scottish Labour needs to shift this position on on these questions, and I tend to get yelled at by people with a lot more power in the party than I do, and, and the trouble is that the other trouble is that the voters we have left our pre split. It's been at least for a

split I mean, it's we're looking at like 30 to 40% of best, who are pro independence of Scottish Labour voters. And there's a decent chunk of Scottish Labour as they're pretty opposed to independence. And so a shift requires that it needs to be kind of committed to and needs to be argued for. And I think there's an element of it which is kind of going to be done through sheer unpleasant experience as we continue losing the will have just have to dive reality will become increasingly unrealistic for Scottish Labour to oppose independence as furious as it currently does, is absolutely vital that they stay on point come around to it because after independence in Scotland on the apart the left. And so I think the best place it's going to come from is actually outside the party and in the labour movement in the in the trade unions, there's a lot more support and it's trade union leadership's are much more open to it. I think that's where the work has to be done. I think people need to start shifting towards a stronger stance on this stuff, at the very least on supporting a second referendum. organisations like the Scottish trade union Congress, and the leadership's of the big unions are aware I think that the shift is going to have to happen first.

Adam Ramsay 1:18:29

Thanks, Rory and Harriet ,you okay talking about the Welsh context.

Rory Scothorne 1:18:35

So I think we are in a much better position as Rory says, I think this is probably where my lack of historical analysis could come in handy. From from my own political perspective, I guess the the difference between the leadership of what was the Welsh Parliament and the concept of the clear red water between labour in Westminster and labour in Wales, had already differentiated on the basis of the nation within the Labour Party, if you already had those two ideologies that battle within the party at that time, and so I think this has kind of opened the door to many of the politicians in the Welsh parliament to have their own Welsh Labour, cultural identity. And, yeah, I have to be careful when I say this, I don't want to like give the game away for anyone. But we do have a lot of Welsh Assembly, politicians that come to us to leave the front end Wales, and I totally support you. I just can't publicly say it. So they're already like halfway there. And they already understand that, especially with this new internal bill, that they're going to be power grabs back from the Tories, like we always knew this was going to happen. And that has happened and it's going to really radicalise the MS;s first of all, because they want to keep their jobs. Second of all, they spent the last 20 years building a project around Welsh national identity and Weksh Labour. I do worry though the younger generations and they said to you earlier, the Welsh Twitter generations are much more Plydd inclined because they've been much more progressive on this topic. We've kind of stepped back as well to the birth of the managers of, of Welsh capitalism and Welsh devolution. Whereas Young Welsh people are way more inclined the more radical elements of Welsh politics and seem to be more drawn towards Plaid, now the Corbyn project is gone now. I do worry that now 16 year olds before the vote in Wales that they will be voting more for Plaid than labour, which is why we need a radical left Welsh Labour Party.

Adam Ramsay 1:20:42

And Alex, what do you make all that?

Alex Nevin 1:20:45

Yeah, well, sorry, Adam, could you just remind me how you were gonna kind of redirect that towards the English

Adam Ramsay 1:20:52

Well I suppose the question is, you know, if English labour at the moment is very wedded to unionism when The left of Scotland and Wales are not particularly then, you know, in a sense is English labour, which is getting in the way of, of this almost more than potentially, certainly more than the Welsh Labour party is. Scottish Labour has a different question. So how can the English labour party be supported?

Alex Nevin 1:21:23

sure. Yeah. Well, I mean, sort of thinking cynically, I mean, I think the English left is probably not going to think about this until it comes knocking on the door, you know, in the advent of, you know, Scottish independence or some form of kind of major Scottish schism, perhaps in Wales as well. I mean, I think, you know, England, England as the kind of Imperial centre, I think the criticisms that Harriet sort of started off talking, talking about are very fair. So, It's kind of unfortunately, I'm not that optimistic that being, you know, we're gonna kind of think about these things in the ways that we need to until we kind of are forced to do so. So well, hopefully on the left what we can do is try to sort of decisively break with that kind of lingering you know, kind of 20th century unionism that certainly in a Scottish context, we're always talked about, which isn't to say that you know, there aren't kind of ways in which we can think about you know, the connections between kind of certain kind of network connections between English and Scottish Labour English whilst labour was the islands, is again a kind of separate discussion, but I think we just need to kind of get get rid of that kind of, kind of lingering 20th century unionism, the even you know, that the socialist campaign group, you know, even kind of, you know, Corbyn and MacDonal, if I remember correctly in 2014, we're very much, you know, kind of rehashing this kind of lazy unionists, these kind of lazy kind of union as commonplace. And so I think, where unfortunately a quite of kind of difficult and pessimism inducing fruits of our history on the left and in general, but I think in order to kind of start looking forward to that kind of longer process of, you know, what do we do after the break of the breakup of Britain, which is probably inevitable, I think just getting rid instantly have that kind of lingering lazy, kind of 20th century unionism that we kind of have even on the left is the way to go.

Adam Ramsay 1:23:47

All right, thank you, Alex. You know, as you say, one of the courageous thing to want to talk like this or not, you don't have to, so might as well get your lines in the next question, which I think might. Our final question unless you know I'm told otherwise is from Theodora and she says that the left generally should be in favour of taking down borders, not erecting them. Will a federal public in Britain with strong devolutionary powers make more fertile ground for socialist politics? And I'm going to start with Harriet this time if that's okay, Harriet.

Rory Scothorne 1:24:25

I mean, yeah, of course, but what is the route to that, we tried it, we lost. If you can show me the route to it, I'm happy to give it a bash. I've given it a bash. I've given my life to the bloody Labour Party. And I'm continuing to do so I'm questioning that right now. But if there are ways for us to do that, then

fantastic. I'm more than willing to have this conversation but they're not. The British state once again, clamps down along with all of media in it to stop us from running a socialist government. So the only way we can look at alternatives through in my opinion and Welsh nationalism or what Even like, it's really difficult to say this, but I would say the word nationalism, right? Because like that brings up all these things for people but like in Wales and in Scotland, we can have these conversations and I think people in England should like champion them so they can have the same conversations too. Rory? The great irony of all this always is that the things the only thing that really effectively forces Britain to decentralise any power whatsoever is nationalism. Again, again, again, this is what we've seen. Every wave of British centralization, as well, tends to be accompanied by a performance of decentralisation, virtual liberation. Where England and the UK is caused to come up with new schemes of creating new tiers of local government or creating devolution and so on. And at the exact same times it's coming up with them is massively centralising power I mean, Blair hugely centralised power, while creating devolution at the same time this is the great paradox of Britishness is that every performance of centralization you talk about further devolution. You know, Powell said, the power revolts, the power retains, and that that really is the mantra despite everyone's disagreement to the last poll, that's the mantra of British decentralisation is that it's always about giving people power with permission. Like they're never actually given sovereignty, they're always given and the permission to use some powers on behalf of the British state. And that's the trouble with framing federalism as devolution. These are mutually exclusive things. federalism means genuinely shared sovereignty. devolution means sovereignty is retained at Westminster, and the devolve power is allowed to use the power that sovereignty grants. And we're seeing right now what that really means as the UK Government is suddenly able to immediately centralise everything back with the internal markets bill. And they can just do it. They don't have to ask the Scottish Parliament for permission. They can just override it completely. And that's the trouble with devolution. There is no evolutionary solution to these problems because power devolved, is power retained. Federalism would need some kind of fundamental change at the centre of Britain. And I've seen no evidence whatsoever that labour really believes in that. Because as soon as labour gets into power with the majority, why on earth would it want to give up power that it has, and Britain, and that's a problem for Labour too, because it makes British power fundamentally reversible you can when you can pass a bunch of laws next time and gets in and just overwhelms it again, you'd need a written constitution you'd need you'd need evenly balanced federal regions which have been breaking up England, it needs you probably in proportional representation for it to work, frankly. I mean, the number of things would have to change is just extraordinary. And the only thing that's really going to do it is it Britain is going to break up anyway. And I think the best solution constitutionally speaking, I mean, I want there to be some kind of bonds with the rest of the UK, and we can pool and share resources and so on. You know, there's a nice idea but if that's on really equal terms and modern democratic terms. I think we actually need to break up first. What we need is a kind of disunion and reunion on confederal and egalitarian grounds when sovereignty grows from the bottom up rather than being kind of occasionally handed out from the top down so I would say that the most progressive future for Britain's probably federalist rather than in some kind of pretend devolved federalism

Adam Ramsay 1:28:38
Alex?

Alex Nevin 1:28:39

Yeah. Yeah. I agree with it. I mean, I think yeah, I mean, just to reiterate, yeah, I think you know, this is this is gonna, it isn't, we're not gonna have this, you know, a federalist or a kind of con federalist break up of England certainly isn't is not going to happen anytime soon and it's much more likely that it's going to happen with a kind of with the kind of external shock of Scottish and Welsh particularly pathway imminently Scottish independence. I mean, realistically, what that's going to lead to is it is a kind of is it is a sort of chaos in in England and a kind of a period of sort of bewilderment and confusion about what on earth we are because, you know, as I sort of said in my introduction, that you know, still this still really Englishness hinges on in most contexts hinges on a very confused and lingering Britishness. So just think we're gonna have a break up for Britain is kind of happening. If it doesn't come from Scotland or Wales, it's gonna come from Ireland, and then we're just going to be kind of thrust into this incredibly chaotic kind of scorched earth context where you know, no one really knows what's going on and we don't really know what England in English, this our if we, if we have a date. So now, you know I'm not quite sure, it's difficult to predict what's going to happen in that in that scenario, but obviously, the process, you know, the thing that should happen is, you know, a genuinely kind of sovereign depth democratic reorganisation of the constituent parts of England so that they're not moved over in a kind of quasi- imperialist, non-federalised way.

Adam Ramsay 1:30:33

Thanks, Alex. Yeah, I mean, the thing that always strikes me is that in order to get a federal UK, you have to persuade Westminster and people of England to give up the sovereign power of the monarchy. And that's, you know, good luck with that. So, anyway, I'm gonna wrap up. Thank you so much. I should have said before that Allison, I'm afraid told us in our private chat that she had to go. So she sends her love and solidarity, but had to leave early. But you heard from Alison Morris, who has said before is a fantastic journalist in honour do for her work there you heard from Harriet Soltani, who, as well as being a professional video organiser, and momentum Vice Chair is a great writer known again. And so do you look up her writing. Alex, I think is one of those people who you know, combines a whole range of skills in the world. I was looking at his Wikipedia page earlier about how you been like the indie band. Wikipedia page, which is, you know, pretty serious. These things get cold, as well as a great writer and academic and thinker and these thoughts and much appreciated. And Rory is a wonderful activist, and thinker and academic here in Scotland, and a Long Term comrade on the Scottish left and it's always a joy to have had with him. I've been Adam Ramsay from open democracy. Thank you so much for joining us. Thank you for your wonderful questions and hopes to see you all again soon.