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Fortify the Cheviots! The Nazis and the Nats

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In January 1939, Douglas Young, future leader of the SNP, wrote to his fellow poet, George Campbell Hay: 'If Hitler could neatly remove our imperial breeks somehow and thus dissipate the mirage of Imperial partnership with England etc he would do a great service to Scottish Nationalism'. Young thus showed the ambiguous, to say the least, attitude of Scottish nationalists towards Fascism. Hatred of the English led to the downplaying of the Fascist threat to freedom and peace, while more radical nationalists could be attracted to the authoritarian and xenophobic solutions offered by the *Fuhrer* and the *Duce*.

For a Scottish Fascism

From the beginning, Fascism cast its charm on some Scottish nationalists. In June 1923, after Mussolini's blackshirts marched on Rome, Hugh MacDiarmid called for a Scottish Fascism. In *The Scottish Nation*, he wrote:

There is need for a Scottish Fascism just as there was need for an Italian Fascism – and the first plank in the programme of the former would be precisely the same as the first plank in the latter – 'Scotland First' for us as it was 'Italy First' for them.

The Fascist example therefore inspired the reinvigoration of both Labour and Scottish nationalist movements. The new nationalism would incline to the Left and meet Labour half-way in the interest of 'Scotland First'. It would also create a socialism which respected or revived traditional, rural-based culture. The entire Fascist programme could be 'readapted to Scottish national purposes and is (whether it be called Fascist or pass under any name) *the only thing that will preserve our distinctive*

national culture.’. Also in 1923, MacDiarmid declared that Mussolini represented ‘an experiment in patriotic socialism’ and that ‘we want a Scottish Fascism which shall be... a lawless believer in law – a rebel believer in authority’. Another link to Italian Fascism was his admiration for Ezra Pound and for Major Douglas’s Social Credit theory.

MacDiarmid eschewed the British Fascisti, whose British patriotism, imperialism and anti-communism were absolute anathema. It can also be argued that, in 1923, the Fascist regime, as it is now historically understood, had not been established. Nevertheless, in 1930, he said of a secret Scottish nationalist society, Clann Albann, to which he belonged, that ‘the whole organisation is on a militaristic basis, and in this resembles the Fascist movement’. This ‘organisation’ would only count six members. However, MacDiarmid had great plans for it. In *The Scots Independent* of June 1929, he imagined the Scotland of 1979, whose path to independence had been opened by Clann Albann:

No longer confining themselves to English precedents, [young Scots] availed themselves readily of the examples of Italy and Ireland, and, powerfully re-enforcing the transitional organisation of the Scottish Nationalist Party (up till then still deplorably liberal and Anglophile) with their militaristic neo-Fascist auxiliary Clann Albann, carried the Movement to the successful conclusion we know of by 1965, and re-established the ancient Gaelic Commonwealth in Scotland on a modern basis.

In 1931, in *The Modern Scot*, he favourably reviewed a book by Wyndham Lewis on the Nazi movement. Scotland, too, needed some *Blutsgefühl* (‘blood feeling’).

Scottish Ambiguities

MacDiarmid was not alone. *The Scots Independent*, main organ of Scottish nationalism, also showed an ambivalent attitude towards issues of race and continental fascism. In December 1926, the ‘organ of Scottish nationality’ had criticised obsession with ‘the Irish menace’, but only because ‘the Menace to Scotland is unrestricted and excessive immigration, *whatever be the country of origin of these immigrants*’. In November 1927, the paper responded to remarks by John Buchan on

‘the decay of Scotland’, arguing that ‘Mr Buchan, in common with most of the Anglicised gangs of self-seekers sent to represent Scotland in the English parliament, are stout defenders of the present position, which means the political eclipse and national extinction of our country’. Only freedom and independence could prevent the ‘dying of a race’. The Italian example could inspire rejuvenation: ‘Mussolini points the way’, headlined the *Scots Independent* of November 1928, referring favourably to Il Duce’s land reclamation scheme. In August 1933, the paper reacted thus to the Scottish Fascist Democratic Party’s ‘curiously mixed programme’:

The first article in its creed is excellent: ‘absolute independence and self-government for Scotland’. If that were Fascism we could all be Fascists. (...) But the main part of the programme seems to consist in the stirring up of religious rancour against Roman Catholics. (...) The chief significance of the new Party is that it illustrates further the rapid disruption of the English Labour Party.

In December 1936, while the Spanish Civil War raged unreported in the Scottish nationalist press, J. A. Russell gave a positive assessment of the Third Reich:

Germany under dictatorship gets things done – constructs roads, bridges, swimming-baths, strives to make its people fit and healthy, calls for sacrifices in the national interest, maintains the morale of its unemployed by local schemes of work, and uses its native resources to the fullest extent. (...) Admittedly, in achieving these things, many individual considerations have been set aside – in the case of the Jews, Trade Unions, Socialists and Communists – quite ruthlessly so. Nevertheless, in ridding itself of all supposedly ‘subversive’ elements, Germany can be said to have achieved a national spirit and unity of purpose that in many directions might well be the envy of ‘free’ Scotland.

Admiration for Fascism and Nazism was in a minority, albeit a significant one. Thus, in May 1937, the SNP conference resolved that ‘the party is alive to the significance of the growth in Fascism in England as manifested in the last County Council elections in London, and declare that unless self-government is achieved

Scotland might find herself against her will forced by English votes into a British totalitarian state'. But in April 1938, Archie Lamont wrote:

Scotland cannot afford to go into a war along with England. It would mean the final destruction of our national personality. It would mean the annihilation of the Scottish National Movement, and the submersion of everything democratic and distinctively Scottish (...) We must refuse to fight, refuse to pay taxes or advance loans, refuse to handle munitions, and if we are forced into the army, refuse to carry arms.

However, the sacrifice of Czechoslovakia at Munich would be denounced in the name of small nations. In November 1938, John MacCormick reaffirmed 'an unwavering belief in the League of Nations and in collective security'. But the nationalist mindset allowed for all sorts of potent amalgams. The London, Government, claimed the SNP leader, was 'casting envious eyes on Fascist methods of government, and yearning for the opportunity to introduce them at home'.

In January 1939, Arthur Donaldson argued for Scottish neutrality in any future conflict:

Everything that Hitler has done and is said to have done against humanity and democracy will be done here by our dictators within a month or two after the first gun, and worse before it is over. The only good way 'to kick Hitler in the pants' is to establish in Scotland a real political, social and economic democracy.

In April 1939, a month after Nazi troops invaded what remained of the Czech lands, destroying all illusions of 'appeasement', John Macdonald was warning the readership about 'The English in Scotland': their country was threatened by 'ever-increasing English immigration', with 'southerners taking top jobs'. Also in that issue, Andrew Dewar Gibb offered 'The True View' on Nationalists and war:

Scotland has good reason to hate all this war talk, in a far deeper sense than England. And the normal Scotsman does not find easy consolation in naval twaddle about 'England's' might and the moral need in the world of a strong

(not to say belligerent) Britain. He will be quicker to recognise in all this the revival of the spirit of Imperialist aggressiveness and empty jingoism.

A Visitor from the Third Reich

Given such violently pacifist and anti-English views, it was not surprising that, in February 1939, Andrew Dewar Gibb received a very warm letter from one Dr Gerhard von Tevenar in Berlin. Von Tevenar was both a Celtic scholar and agent of the Abwehr, Nazi military intelligence. In the case of von Tevenar we see the extent of Nazi penetration of Celtic nationalist movements, as well as attempts by the SNP to exculpate itself.

Scotland was one of the nations of the Celtic race that von Tevenar would visit, study and aim to convert to an alliance with the Third Reich. In 1936 and 1937, he visited Scotland as part of a tour of the Celtic fringe. Von Tevenar's letter to '*Lieber Herr Professor*' displays common commitment to the nationalist cause, but without any explicit reference to subversive activity. But the political and the cultural were never far away:

Glasgow must have seen recently very stormy receptions of the Air Minister; on the occasion our big papers mentioned for the first time. I would be delighted to write some book about your country and Scottish Nationalism if I can find time and rest enough this year.

Von Tevenar dreamed of a return to Caledonia:

It is a great pity, indeed that the difficulties to go abroad for my countrymen are still growing. (...) As you know, I had the chance to drive all over Alba from John o'Groats to the Mull of Galloway and from Skye to Dunedin, and to catch some very beautiful views of land and men.. I do not know if I told you that we were lucky enough to listen on some gaelic songs which a shepherd sung while driving home his cattle, one evening near Stein (this sounds as German) on the isle of Skye. We were sitting down between some hills,

covered with heather, and looking West to the thin lines of the Hebrides, with the great red sun disk behind; as the boy did not perceive us, he sang quite undisturbed – and this evening will be always one of our most beautiful impressions of the gaelic Scotland.

He then turned to the prospects for the nationalist movement:

You will certainly pardon my frankness, but I must tell you that I found amongst the young Irish more idealism and preparedness for sacrifice than amongst the young Scotsmen.

But he concluded on a hopeful note:

I would be delighted to discuss all this with you personally and I do regret very much that I had no chance to meet you again in August '36, after that Wallace commemoration at Elderslie.

Such an encounter would, however, never come to pass. Indeed, the declaration of war against Nazi Germany seems to finally shake Andrew Dewar Gibb out of indulgence toward the new enemy threatening not only England but Scotland herself. In *The Scots Independent* of October 1939, Dewar Gibb tried to reconcile anti-Englishness with opposition to Nazi aggression.

The difficulty of England's is not Scotland's opportunity – not yet. If the German planes come over, Scotland, equally with England, is threatened with death and destruction. A Scottish life was the first British casualty of the war. In the interests of Scotland we have to save what can be saved for her.

In April 1940, Dewar Gibb wrote in praise of 'True Nationalism':

The natural exemplar to which Scotsmen should turn with humility and admiration today is Finland. (...) It would be post-war policy of the new Scotland to 'work in friendly collaboration with Europe – but in *free* and friendly collaboration.

The following month, as the Nazi threat turned towards the last remaining western democracies, Wilson MacCulluch unmasked 'Hitler's conspiracy in Scotland. The activities of Dr von T-'. His mission had been thwarted:

He was loud in his surprise that the Scottish Nationalist movement had not developed a 'youth movement' which was his agreeable Teutonic way of hinting at a storm troop organisation. Strange to say no Nationalist ever displayed the slightest desire to fill this lamentable gap in the movement. Scottish Nationalism remained staunchly democratic. Dr Von T must have listened to many a word of abuse of the Nazi system (of which he professed to take a detached view).

After this preliminary exploration, 'Von T' had returned to Scotland in the summer of 1937. They were not the dupes of 'Goebbels viceroy to the Celtic and Teutonic West': 'When the Day came, it was to another party that the Fuhrer was forced to turn for his accomplices in our midst!'

The SNP thus publicly cleansed itself of any possible compromise by the activities of this Nazi agent and stood up to the new threat. In June 1940, E. Marischal outlined a 'Nazi Plan to Invade Scotland', involving bombs on aerodromes, small landing parties on Fife and East Lothian coasts, and small patrols in British uniforms or civilian clothes. London had to be warned: 'Until the British military authorities understand the ingenuity of the German methods, they will not be able to meet them successfully'. In July, the headline was 'Fortify the Cheviots!': Scotland had to be made strong against invasion by the raising of a Scottish Home Defence Army, and the rapid transfer to Scotland of sufficient arms-making, planes and personnel. With Norway in the hands of the Nazis and their puppet Quisling, a 'diplomatic correspondent' of the *Scots Independent* asked: 'Who will rule the North?'. The war brought possible changes to Scotland's 'living space'. Norway would take Orkney and the Shetland Islands, 'and they will be the bridle with which she holds us in her power'. Conversely, if Scotland emerged victorious from the war, she would find her place in 'a free federation of the Western Scandinavian democracies', including the Faroes and Iceland. It was the 'Commonwealth idea' that would save the West for civilisation and freedom. In October 1940, *The Scots Independent* described the

present conflict as ‘a war of nations against the would be destroyer of nations, It is a war “for” the Commonwealth idea, the idea of a co-operation of peoples, and “against” the idea of a super-race ruling its enslaved sub-races’. In November 1940, it was with relief that, ‘from a secret source in occupied Norway’, it was announced that ‘the invasion of Scotland is off!’

Against the ‘Fifth Column’

But there was still antipathy to any war against Fascism. On 25 January 1939, Douglas Young wrote to George Campbell Hay: ‘To me the cold-blooded financial stranglehold of London on the coolie and semi-coolie peoples under the aegis of democratic Westminster is quite as repulsive as the hooliganism of the Nazi storm-troopers’. Young expanded on these views in a letter to Hugh Seton-Watson: ‘I believe a Nazi boss, and certainly an ordinary SA man, to be a more honest creature than a typical British bourgeois; at any rate the difference is so slight as not to be worth fifty or even five million lives’. The poetry of Hugh MacDiarmid showed how anti-Englishness and anti-imperialism – the two inextricably linked – could lead to a downplaying, if not downright denial, of the threat emanating from Berlin. In ‘On the Imminent Destruction of London, June 1940’, the bard of Langholm wrote:

Now when London is threatened
With devastation from the air
I realise, horror atrophying me,
That I hardly care.

MacDiarmid’s sentiments were echoed by Harry Miller, leader of the Scottish Socialist Party, whose socialism seemed markedly shorn of internationalism. In January 1941, he wrote to the poet: ‘The latest racket is in sending Scots girls to Coventry, refusal means their dole is stopped while English wenches are arriving in droves and walking into jobs. Glasgow is crawling with prostitutes from London, Birmingham and Coventry. The same thing applies to men, there seems to be a deliberate transference of population’.

That same year, in his pamphlet, *Hitlerism in the Highlands*, Oliver Brown was happy to tar the English oppressor with the Fascist brush:

You will find listed in these pages some of the evil consequences of the *Anschluss* of 1707, whereby the former nation of Scotland was incorporated in the English Reich. It is hoped that you will thus be enabled to strike the proper balance and reach the ultimate truth of which the following facts form an indisputable and indispensable part.

Brown passed on to a litany of 'Hitlerist' crimes in the Highlands: Culloden and Butcher Cumberland, the Disarming Act, the Clearances, Skye's contribution to the tears, toil and sweat of empire building, and the heartless dictatorship blighting fishing and shipfaring. Brown concluded:

Now the Highlands have been declared a 'protected area' by the Government against which they require protection. Similarly, in Germany, the Gestapo takes its victims into protective custody (even the vocabulary does not vary!)

The author of this legally published polemic granted that there was a considerable freedom of speech in Scotland, but this freedom was 'every day diminishing. The imprisonment by the English Government of Arthur Donaldson and Matthew Hamilton without charge or trial shows the danger of rousing the resentment of our London rulers. (...) Scotland, under the domination of a permanent English majority in the House of Commons, has no more freedom of action than Norway under Nazi occupation'.

Indeed, the authorities had begun to move against a suspected nationalist 'fifth column', beginning with Matthew Hamilton, a garage owner in Lamancha. Hamilton's nationalism led him to support a position of neutrality in a future war with Germany. Indeed, this stance had a racist rather than purely pacifist underpinning, for on 24 May 1939, he wrote to Rolf Hoffmann, Nazi propaganda chief in Munich:

The Celtic peoples of Scotland, Ireland and Wales (who are becoming united) desire no further participation in continental wars on behalf of Jewish-controlled England. (...) We fly a string of Welsh, Irish and Scottish flags, and would like a small swastika flag to fly alongside to show our good feeling.

Hamilton was also involved in what Special Branch described as the ‘highly seditious and dangerous Scots Order’. On 14 January 1940, at the Mound, Hamilton described the application of the Military Service Act to Scotland as high treason, publicly burned two calling-up papers and advised his listeners to treat all calling-up papers in this fashion. In these febrile times, he had nevertheless done enough to merit internment under Directive 18B on 3 June 1940. He was interned on the Isle of Man. It was there, on 24 July 1941, that Hamilton appealed to history to protest this internment:

I claim my Rights to the Protection of Scots Limitations and Security Acts, 1701-4-7, and the Treaty of Union, Provisions 1707. Also all Provisions and .. for the rest of my life, and from any further Acts on my Scottish Liberty and Privileges, which have been won by the Sacrificial Blood of my Scottish Forefathers on many a Sacrificial Field, and in the full strength of these aforesaid Acts, Sue for and Hereby Claim my Liberty.

This Quixotic tilt was unsuccessful. In July 1942, Matthew Hamilton was released on the proviso that he kept police informed of his place of residence and notified his movement monthly to the police in person.

Hamilton was not the only target. On 3 May 1941 police carried out raids on the houses and premises of nationalists opposed to the war effort. Various items of interest were found. One target was Harry Miller. His police interrogator was particularly interested in possible links with Nazi intelligence:

[He] stresses the point that he is not in sympathy with Nazi Germany or dictatorship of any kind and intimated that he would be in direct opposition to any individual using the Nationalist Party for spreading Fascist propaganda.

The police reported that they had seized a pamphlet, ‘Halt Conscription’, a poster ‘No national service until Scotland gets Home Rule’, advice against national registration, as well as Fascist propaganda leaflets and correspondence. The raid on R. E. Muirhead seemed particularly fruitful:

In the course of the search we took possession of a number of papers and documents bearing on extreme Scottish Nationalism. We also took possession of a quantity of gunpowder and a small pistol and some fireworks. No importance was attached to the gunpowder, pistol or fireworks as they did not seem to be of recent issue and appeared to have been kept in a place for some considerable time. (...) Also taken possession of was a copy of a letter which Mr Muirhead had sent prior to the war to Dr von Teffenaar [*sic*], Berlin, a known Nazi agent who visited this country on two occasions before the outbreak of hostilities in an endeavour to enlist the support of Scottish Nationalists.

In Aberdeen, Douglas Young told the police: 'I certainly am a Scottish nationalist and do not recognise the Westminster government, but there is nothing subversive to be found here not nothing that would injure the war effort'. George Campbell Hay, on the run from the military, was hiding in Argyllshire. At his home was found a letter from Iain Haig in which he said: 'I wish more than ever now that Germany would win the war and create a hell of a change in this bloody country'. That said, the investigators could find 'nothing of a seditious or pro-German nature was contained in the correspondence'.

Indeed, these raids, and the detention of Arthur Donaldson, were met with indignation. On 13 May 1941, James Maxton raised questions in the Commons, denouncing the 'melodramatic nonsense and rubbish' used by the authorities to justify their actions. On 25 May 1941, it was the turn of MacDiarmid to write to 'Dear Comrade' Tom Johnston, the Scottish Secretary:

Neither I nor any of the Scots Republicans who have been raided have had any subsidisation from our dealings with the German Nazis – nor any subsidisation from any other foreign source. The whole thing is a base English Imperialist manoeuvre to throttle and libel the now rapidly growing Scottish Socialist Republican Movement – and to divert public attention from the pro-Nazi Fifth Column traitors who are not to be found in our ranks but in the ranks of our aristocracy, plutocracy, and the 'internment' movement itself, where there are plenty who will sell us out to Hitler if they get a chance – thought they are posing meanwhile as the most active and vocal of 'patriots'.

He protested the raids on nationalist publication, the internment of Arthur Donaldson, and the treatment of Douglas Young, who had been 'raided, questioned and grossly victimised by the English Gestapo'.

According to the security services, Donaldson was 'an extremist Scottish nationalist who has been engaged in the formation of an organisation called United Scotland which is more extremist than the SNP from which Donaldson has been expelled'. He had 'made statements indicating that in his view England would be completely crushed by the early spring of this year, that the Government would leave the country and that the movement in Scotland must then be able to show the German Government that it is organised and has a clear cut policy, that it is not with England in the war and that when fire and confusion is at its height in England the movement can start in earnest'. What's more, he was the organiser of 'a body called the National Aid Society assists conscientious objectors on Scottish Nationalist grounds to go into hiding'. Special Branch concluded that 'it seems apparent from his activities and the above references that he is building up an organisation with a view to his assuming the function of Scottish Quisling when invasion takes place'. Donaldson was reported to have 'pro-Nazi and subversive views'. Donaldson's propaganda work involved intensive slogan painting during 'moonless period' along all bus and tram routes, including the declaration: 'Scottish workers – beware of English 'Pétains''. It was concluded that 'Donaldson has a mind which works along National Socialist lines'. However, despite Donaldson's subversive views, there was no substantive proof of potential Quisling activity. The audience and influence of Donaldson and his associates were negligible. Therefore Tom Johnston came to the conclusion that 'his indefinite detention in Barlinnie Prison is not necessary'.

The clemency of the authorities notwithstanding, these raids and arrests encouraged in Scottish nationalist ranks a drift away from fortifying the Cheviots against Nazi invasion to fortifying them against the Auld Enemy. Already in January 1941, the *Scots Independent* had led on Westminster's mis-treatment of Scottish hill farmers and the threat from English workers coming north. The headline in May was 'Go south or starve!', as nationalists protested the 'forced drafting of Scots girls to England'. In June 1941, the arrival of Rudolf Hess gave rise to accusations of another 'Fifth Column' in their midst :

The fact is that, when Deputy Fuhrer Hess came to Scotland he asked to see, no wicked Nationalist, but the eminently respectable premier duke of Scotland, his Grace of Hamilton. And all Hamilton ever had to do with Scottish nationalism was to oppose its candidates in elections.

In July 1942, Douglas Young contributed 'Quislings in Scotland. Review of the Fifth Column'. His evidence was a 'Statement to give expression to public opinion in Scotland in opposition to agitation for a Scottish National Parliament, published in Glasgow in 1933. The list of signatories showed 'solid vested interests', a 'roll of infamy' that included dukes, earls and Unionist chief whips. Young concluded:

Now, it it is a sin and a crime to be a quisling in Norway, if it is a sin and a crime for Laval and Co in France to collaborate with the foreign intruders, then it must be a sin and a crime for anyone in Scotland to be opposed to the freedom of the Scottish nation through democratic self-government.

In August 1942, when Colin Walkinshaw wrote of 'Freedom or Fascism', he meant 'this planning racket' that would be 'death to Scotland' and open the road 'towards fascism'. At the end of his assault on the 'slave state', he declared: 'This is just fascism, though Fascism in a peculiarly English dress with the Old School ties taking the place of the brown or black shirt'. The fascistic nature of the British state was confirmed by the jailing of Douglas Young for refusing conscription. In August 1942, *The Scots Independent* wrote of the treatment of this patriot: 'It is significant that the English have always avoided a discussion of the Act of Union – and any resolute attempt to get to the root of the subject is invariably met with the mailed fist'. Young was 'not a pacifist nor is he Anti-War (...) He wants a genuine Scottish war effort for genuine war aims and for that he insists that the Scottish people must be free'. Young was replacing another martyr detained at His Majesty's Pleasure, Matthew Hamilton. In September 1942, it was announced that England was 'bleeding Scotland white'. It was 'The Clearances all over again'.

The question of the war effort led, in 1942, to a split in the SNP, with Jon MacCormick leaving to form the pro-war and pluralist Scottish Convention. Under the leadership of Douglas Young, the SNP was half-hearted at most about the struggle against Fascism (it is during this period that Young translated Aristophanes's anti-war

play, *Lysistrata*). On 25 August 1943, the Home Office reported on a leaflet. Beginning '1314 Bannockburn 1943...' it stated it was 'high time for another Bannockburn' and for the clearing out of Scotland of her worst enemy 'the London imperialist Boss Class and the English would-be *Herrenvolk*'. In September 1944, *The Scots Independent* claimed that the freedom of Scotland's youth was put in peril by being corralled into 'the British *Jugend*'. A month later, as the allies advanced on all fronts, Douglas Young complained of 'peace, *imperfect* peace', protesting at the 'conscript police'. As the Third Reich teetered on the verge of total collapse, readers were exhorted to 'go into battle' for the 'reconquest of Scotland'. In June 1945, Robert McIntyre, ephemeral SNP MP for Motherwell and Wishaw, declared that 'the future of Scotland is not in the hands of bogus peace conferences and foreign ambassadors and agitated prime ministers. The future of Scotland is in the hands of her own people'. But the dismal results of the July general elections showed the SNP to be badly out of touch with a geopolitical dynamic which saw the Labour landslide, an overwhelming identification with 'Britishness', - at least for the time being - and, in Europe, the high watermark of anti-Fascism.