

Wales votes to create its own assembly

By Dan Balz (c) 1997, The Washington Post

CARDIFF, Wales, Sept. 19—Britain's march toward constitutional restructuring continued Friday in Wales, where voters followed Scotland and narrowly endorsed a self-rule plan that calls for creation of elected assembly to oversee the operations of government here.

The result, which was not clear until final returns were counted from the last of 22 voting districts, represented a victory for Prime Minister Tony Blair, who staked his personal prestige on the outcome. But the margin of victory was a disappointment for proponents of the plan, who had hoped for another strong show of support here to go along with last week's overwhelming affirmative vote in Scotland.

The dramatic night of counting affirmed the second step toward completion of the most far-reaching constitutional changes in Britain in modern times. The results from both Scotland and Wales put Britain on a course that, over time, is expected to reduce the power of the central government in London and give greater authority over local and regional affairs to elected bodies throughout the United Kingdom. Such bodies are at the heart of Blair's agenda to modernize the country.

"I am very pleased that the people of Wales have said 'yes,'" Blair said in London Friday morning. "We were elected on a pledge to modernize our constitution and, thanks to the people of Wales and Scotland, we have taken two big steps along that road."

But the combination of the narrow margin of victory in Wales

and the lackluster turnout here robbed Blair's Labor Party of some of the moral authority it had hoped to harvest for its constitutional agenda. It also led Conservative Party opponents of the government's decentralization program to raise questions about whether the country should undertake such significant constitutional shifts without a stronger mandate from the people.

With all 22 local districts reporting, results showed 50.3 percent of the voters in favor of the new assembly and 49.7 percent opposed - a margin of 6,721 votes out of more than 1.1 million cast. A similar plan for limited home rule in Wales in 1979 was defeated by a margin of 4 to 1.

The results were historic, and the tense hours of counting packed enough drama to make up for a referendum campaign that was virtually devoid of it - a campaign that lacked the enthusiasm and

expressions of national pride that were so evident in Scotland.

Officials of Blair's government spent the last days of the campaign stumping through Wales in an effort to stir up support and swell the turnout. They appeared most successful in traditionally strong areas of Labor support, while in areas closest to the English border, the assembly plan was soundly rejected.

Nonetheless, the government counted the result as a further endorsement of its constitutional agenda, and officials plan to press ahead with other changes. The next major proposal calls for a vote on whether to give London its own regional government and, for the first time, an elected mayor, who instantly would become one of the most powerful politicians in the country. That test will come next year.

The close vote reflected the ambivalence of voters in Wales,

which occupies an unusual niche in Britain - it lacks the distinctive national identity of Scotland but still has its own cultural identity and traditions. It is a land better known for poets and writers than conquerors or politicians. It also boasts a thriving language that enjoys equal status here with English. In parts of northern Wales, Welsh is the first language, and in Anglicized southern Wales, there is growing demand for Welsh language training.

The assembly proposal represented a compromise designed neither to encourage a sense of separatism here nor to discourage demands, after 18 years of Tory government in London, for a greater voice in domestic affairs. "In Wales, we share so much with England - more than Scotland does," a Welsh Office spokeswoman said. "This system has been tailored to Wales's needs."

The vote creates an assembly of 60 members, but it will not have taxing power - which voters in Scotland approved for their parliament. Nor will the Welsh assembly be able to legislate for Wales; that power remains with the government in London.

But the new assembly will assume powers now vested in the office of Britain's Secretary of State for Wales to determine spending priorities on such matters as education, health care, transportation and the environment. Assembly proponents argued that the new body also will be able to chart an overall economic growth plan for Wales, whose economy is in transition. Once heavily dependent on coal mining, the region has moved toward service industries and high technology. But it has not kept pace with other parts of Britain and still receives a sizable subsidy from the central government.

Smokers are more likely to be overweight than non-smokers

Reuter

LONDON (Reuter) - Smokers, contrary to popular belief, are more likely to be overweight than people who are not addicted to nicotine, according to a survey released Tuesday.

Researchers who studied the smoking and eating habits of a representative sample of the Austrian population told the European Respiratory Society conference in Berlin that fewer than one in four smokers were interested in healthy eating.

Contrary to the common belief

that smoking reduces appetite, a significant number were also overweight.

"Smokers are more likely to be overweight than non-smokers and probably eat more carbohydrates which tend to be junk food. We need to tackle both risk factors when we try to promote good health," Dr. Rudolph Schoberberger of the University of Vienna said in a statement released in London.

His study showed that 33 percent of Austrians were regular smokers and only 23 percent of them showed any interest in a healthy diet.

"This tendency for a reduced positive eating attitude is much

higher among medium and high nicotine dependent smokers than among low or not nicotine dependent smokers," the researchers said.

In a separate study, Italian doctors revealed that teen-age girls are more likely to take up the habit if their mothers smoke.

Seventy-three percent of girls aged 14-17 in a secondary school in the northern Italian town of Ferrara who were questioned about their habit said their mothers were smokers.

"Mothers' smoking seems to be of crucial importance in teen-age

girls' decision to smoke or not," said Dr. Franco Ravenna, who conducted the study.

Since most of the teen-age smokers said they were aware of the health risks, he suggested that educational programs should be targeted at mothers to make them aware of the link and to help them prevent their daughters from smoking.

Unabomb suspect must take mental exam

By Mark Gladstone (c) 1997, Los Angeles Times

SACRAMENTO, Calif. - A federal judge late Friday ordered Unabomber suspect Theodore Kaczynski to submit to a mental examination by a government expert.

Kaczynski's attorneys had argued that such a face-to-face exam was unwarranted, and that prosecutors instead could rely on medical and other records of their client.

But U.S. District Judge Garland E. Burrell Jr. said that approach would pose "the risk of having the prosecution surprised with expert testimony." In turn, that could trigger a delay in the trial, scheduled to begin Nov. 12.

"Given the nature of the psychiatric skill involved in unmasking the human personality," Burrell said, "... it would be unfair to the government to permit Kaczynski to use expert testimony without allowing the government the opportunity to prepare an effective means to rebut the testimony."

Prosecutors are expected to move quickly to have their own independent expert determine Kaczynski's mental condition.

Kaczynski, 55, a Harvard University-trained mathematician, faces 10 felony counts related to two fatal Sacramento bombings and to blasts that seriously injured two academicians. He has pleaded not guilty.

Lawyers for Kaczynski have indirectly indicated they intend to seek testimony from their own experts about Kaczynski's mental condition.

On Friday, Burrell also ordered Kaczynski's defense team to spell out more clearly "the mental disease, defect or condition" their expert may seek to establish during the trial.

Kaczynski was arrested at his remote Montana cabin in April 1996 after a lengthy investigation sparked by a series of bombings that began in 1978 and targeted those involved in advanced technology.

In another order issued Friday, Burrell rejected Kaczynski's bid to suppress the mountain of evidence found during the search of his cabin near the Continental Divide.

Kaczynski's lawyers had described the government's search warrant as overly broad. Moreover, his attorneys said, federal authorities seized innocuous items such as mittens, scarves and a metal frying pan.

But Burrell said federal agents had acted in good faith in executing the search warrant.

Lawyers change tactics in Albert trial

By Brooke A. Masters (c) 1997, The Washington Post

Prosecutors in Arlington, Va. said Thursday they won't try to convict Marv Albert of consensual sodomy, clearing the way for the NBC sportscaster to argue that the woman he is charged with sexually assaulting agreed to their encounter.

Albert, 57, is scheduled to go to trial Monday on charges of forcible sodomy and assault and battery. The 42-year-old Vienna, Va. woman claims he bit her and forced her to perform oral sex in an Arlington hotel room.

Legal observers have said Albert's strongest defense is likely to be that the Feb. 12 encounter was consensual. DNA tests have linked him to genetic material found on bite marks on the woman's back and semen in her underwear. But that tactic could have carried significant risks because it would require Albert to admit a crime, and the prosecution could have asked a jury to convict him of it.

Virginia, like 13 other states, outlaws heterosexual sodomy of all kinds. Consensual sodomy carries a maximum penalty of five years.

Now Albert doesn't have to face that dilemma. "The Commonwealth has no desire to prosecute this man for consensual sodomy," Commonwealth's Attorney Richard E. Trodden said during a pretrial hearing. "We believe the evidence will show it was a churlish and crude forcible sodomy."

Albert's lawyer Roy Black, who has previously argued that the Virginia consensual sodomy law is an unconstitutional violation of privacy, said after the hearing. "It's unusual that our public servants recognize reality in the latter part of the 20th century, and I am always pleased to hear it."

The prosecution's announcement means Arlington Circuit Judge Benjamin N.A. Kendrick will not have to decide whether the law is unconstitutional. The District repealed its law in 1993, and in 1990, Maryland's highest court narrowed that state's law against oral sex to exclude consenting heterosexual adults.

Legal observers said they aren't surprised Trodden ruled out the consensual sodomy prosecution. This way, he can focus on the allegations of violence and avoid the privacy rights issues.

"They must think they have a strong case on the forcible count," said University of Virginia law professor Anne Coughlin, who has written about sexual assault.

N. American 'Mound' structure pre-dates pyramids, scientists report

By Thomas H. Maugh II (c) 1997, Los Angeles Times

Long before the Egyptians began building pyramids, North Americans were erecting massive earthworks that reflected sophisticated leadership skills and the ability to warehouse the large quantities of food necessary to sustain their construction efforts, new archeological discoveries show.

A team of researchers reports in Friday's edition of the journal *Science* the discovery of the oldest reliably dated human-made structure in North America, a 5,400-year-old earthen mound at Watson Brake, La., that is almost 2,000 years older than nearby sites.

The circular mound, as tall as a two-story house, forms an enclosure nearly 300 yards in diameter, but its purpose is not yet clear.

The discovery of this and other mounds in Louisiana and Florida suggest that the earliest Americans, long thought to be simple hunter-gatherers who roamed the countryside in small, mobile bands, were actually capable of organizing and executing large civil engineering projects, the team reports.

The discovery "totally changes our picture of what happened in the past," says archeologist Vincas Steponaitis of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

"We are reassessing our whole theory of what we thought about the evolution of societies," said National Park Service archeologist Mike Russo of the Southeastern Archeological Center in Tallahassee, Fla. "We once thought society was very slow to develop in North America. In fact,

there were numerous societies here capable of monumental architecture much earlier than we had ever expected."

And what is becoming clear, he added, is that some of these early groups had a relatively comfortable existence, with ample supplies of food and enough time on their hands to undertake massive public works projects.

Such societies had to have a rich biological niche to support relatively large populations without the benefit of agriculture, he said, but they also had to have "social conventions that would allow them to do something innovative, like build mounds. They were a little less conservative than some of the other societies around them."

Although archeologists have often tended to ignore them and the general public is often unaware of their existence, thousands of human-made mounds dot the East and Midwest. Shaped like massive serpents, giant cones and square platforms, these 2,000- to 3,000-year-old mounds in some cases have been shown to serve as ceremonial centers, slaughterhouses and residential sites.

More often, however, their purposes have remained mysterious, lost in the mist of civilizations that had not yet invented writing or other pictorial displays.

Still older mounds are being found in Louisiana and Florida, where the rich mixture of wildlife and marine life from bays and rivers was capable of supporting larger indigenous populations. One of the oldest well-documented such sites was Poverty Point in Northeastern Louisiana, about 100 miles from the new find at Watson Brake.

Poverty Point, named for a nearby plantation, was built some 3,500 years ago by a people who clearly had prospered from trading. Archeologists studying it have unearthed flintstone from what is

now Ohio, soapstone from northern Alabama and Georgia, copper from Michigan, crystal quartz from Arkansas and chert from Missouri.

"That community seemed 'unusually precocious,'" Russo said, apparently springing up in full bloom without any historical predecessors. The much older Watson Brake discovery, he said, "explains Poverty Point."

Although researchers have not yet found any direct links between the two sites, it seems clear that Watson Brake is a more primitive example of the planning that later characterized Poverty Point.

The shape of the mound was hidden by a dense forest of pine at the site until the 1980s, when some of the trees were clear-cut. A recreational archeologist named Reza Jones then recognized the overall outlines of the circular mound.

Eventually, she and others attracted the interest of Joe W. Saunders of Northeast Louisiana University, a state archeologist. Visiting Watson Brake, he observed that an unusual weathering pattern in the soil of the mound, indicating not only that it was man-made but that it was unusually old.

Using both conventional radiocarbon dating and newly developed soil dating techniques, his team concluded that construction of Watson Brake began about 5,400 years ago and concluded 400 years later.

"There have been similar dates for other mounds in the area, but they have always been ambiguous," Saunders said. "One date would be old, one would be much younger. Ours are all old."

The dating is very convincing, said archeologist Jon Gibson of the University of Southwestern Louisiana. "There's just no question about it."

Excavating selected segments of the mound, his team, which includes specialists from around the United States, found an ancient garbage dump, or midden, containing bones of deer, rabbits, squirrels, dogs and other wildlife, as well as skeletons of assorted local fish and shells of snail and mollusks from the prehistoric Arkansas River. No human bones were found, however.

The midden contained seeds from three wild plants that would later be domesticated in the Southeast. Although the Watson Brake seeds showed no signs of domestication, according to botanist Kristin Gremillion of Ohio State University, they could have been gathered and eaten for their starch.

Excavations revealed traces of primitive tool-making facilities and six unusual spearheads called Evans points, with two notches on each side of the blade. These are quite different from the more sophisticated Epps and Motley projectile points found at Poverty Point.

They also found drills that were probably used to make beads, but only one complete bead and a few fragments. In contrast to Poverty Point, all of the material found was local in origin.

"It was pretty dull digging, to tell the truth," Saunders said.

By far the largest amount of artifacts were fire-cracked rocks used for cooking. Because pottery was not yet invented, the Watson Brake residents would heat these rocks in their fires, then immerse them in water to boil the water or splash water on them to produce steam for cooking.

"We have a quarter ton of fire-cracked rocks in the lab," Saunders noted.

The most unusual objects were small cubes, and other shapes, of fire-hardened clay, about 2 inches in size. "We have no idea what these were for," Saunders said.