

“SCOTLAND AND INDEPENDENCE FORTHCOMING IN FEDERAL IDEA/ IDÉE FÉDÉRALE”

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In May 2011 the Scottish National Party (SNP) scored an overwhelming victory in elections to the Scottish Parliament. In spite of a rather proportional electoral system designed precisely to prevent it, they gained an overall majority, taking 69 of the 129 seats with 45 per cent of the vote. Since the SNP is pledged to a referendum on independence within the course of the new parliament, the result would seem to pose a serious challenge to the union. Yet Scottish independence remains a distant prospect as the rising fortunes of the SNP have so far been largely unconnected with it.

This is the latest twist in the complex story of Scotland's place in the United Kingdom, an issue since the Union of 1707. This did not extinguish the Scottish nation but created an 'incorporating union', in which the Parliaments of Scotland and England were rolled into a single British Parliament, but the governing institutions of Scotland otherwise left mostly intact. The rise of the interventionist state in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries resulted in increasing centralization and London control, but by the same measure in regular demands for more Scottish self-government within the union. The compromise was an extensive system of administrative decentralization, centred on the Secretary of State for Scotland, a member of the central Cabinet (and by convention a Scottish MP) who ran most domestic administration from Edinburgh.

For the dominant parties in Scotland (Labour and Conservative after the First World War), this provided a privileged place within the United Kingdom and an opportunity to lobby for Scottish interests. To these instrumental considerations was added a doctrine of unionism, which freely conceded – indeed celebrated – Scottish nationhood while detaching it from the idea of self-government.

Unionism was regularly challenged in the name of Home Rule, later known as devolution, a demand for self-government within the United Kingdom in a kind of federal arrangement. There were always home rulers within the Labour and Conservative parties, while it was the official policy of the Liberals, but it was always subordinated to unionism and to the priority of gaining power at Westminster. From the 1930s, with the emergence of the SNP, a third option was presented in the form of Scottish independence, although the dividing line between home rule and independence was never a clear one, and some prominent politicians have crossed back and forth. SNP leaders were characterized as 'fundamentalists' (favouring independence or nothing) and gradualists (who supported devolution at least as a first step). These party attitudes were confronted by a public opinion in which every single test of opinion over a hundred years, whether by polls, referendums (in 1979) or general elections in which it was a manifesto commitment, showed a majority of the population in favour of home rule within the United Kingdom.

Traditional unionism became increasingly unsustainable from the 1960s in the face of a rising nationalist movement and a feeling that it was not delivering. It was fatally undermined during the 1990s, when a government with minimal support in Scotland imposed radical neo-liberal policies on it. The Conservatives, who in 1955 gained an absolute majority of the Scottish vote and seats, were reduced to a small minority and in the election of 1997 lost the last of their Scottish seats – presently they hold only one. After a false start in the 1970s, Labour rediscovered its historic home rule traditions and in 1997, after a hundred years of legislative proposals, a bill providing for a Scottish Parliament was supported in a referendum by a margin of three to one, and passed in Parliament. The first elections, in 1999, were won by the Labour Party, which, lacking an overall majority, formed a coalition with the Liberal Democrats. The SNP emerged as the second party and official opposition. With the Conservatives now acquiescing in devolution, it looked as though the old three options had been narrowed down to two: devolution within the United Kingdom and independence. Nationalists proclaimed that they were all fundamentalists now, united in moving to the next stage. Labour leaders, for their part, proclaimed that devolution would kill nationalism stone dead.

Neither was right. The constitutional issue has remained on the agenda but in a changed form. In the early years of devolution, polls recorded a seemingly contradictory set of attitudes. When asked whether they favoured independence, up to 50 per cent of respondents would say yes; but when asked to compare independence with devolution, support for the former fell to under a third. In pre-devolution days, this might be explained as devolution supporters citing independence as their second option, and indeed during the 1990s the majority of devolution supporters did indeed shift their second preference to independence rather than the status quo. After 1999, however, devolution was the status quo. There was even one survey, conducted by ICM regularly between 1998 and 2002, in which respondents were given a straight choice for or against independence; then given a range of options including the no devolution, stronger or weaker devolution options, and independence. About half the respondents supported independence in response to the first question but only about a third in response to the second. This sort of finding is, of course, familiar in Quebec, and can also be found in Catalonia and the Basque Country. One explanation is the wording of the question, with harder questions, especially using the word 'separate', reducing independence support. It is also because the meaning of independence itself is so ambivalent, depending crucially on the details. Voters do not by and large recognize a sharp line between remaining in the UK and becoming independent, but rather a spectrum of greater or lesser powers.

European integration further blurs the meaning of independence. The SNP, previously hostile, embraced Europe in the late 1980s as an external support system for an independent Scotland. With Labour also moving in a pro-European direction, this ensured that debate in Scotland centred on a shared commitment to Europe, in contrast to the way England was moving. It also allowed the nationalists to dismiss many of the concerns about independence, including market access and stability, as well as to present themselves as more cosmopolitan and outward-looking than many of their unionist opponents.

Because of these ambiguities and the difficulties of wording, it is not easy to plot support for independence across time. Looking at broadly similar questions, it does seem that it fluctuated around 20 per cent from the 1960s to the 1980s,

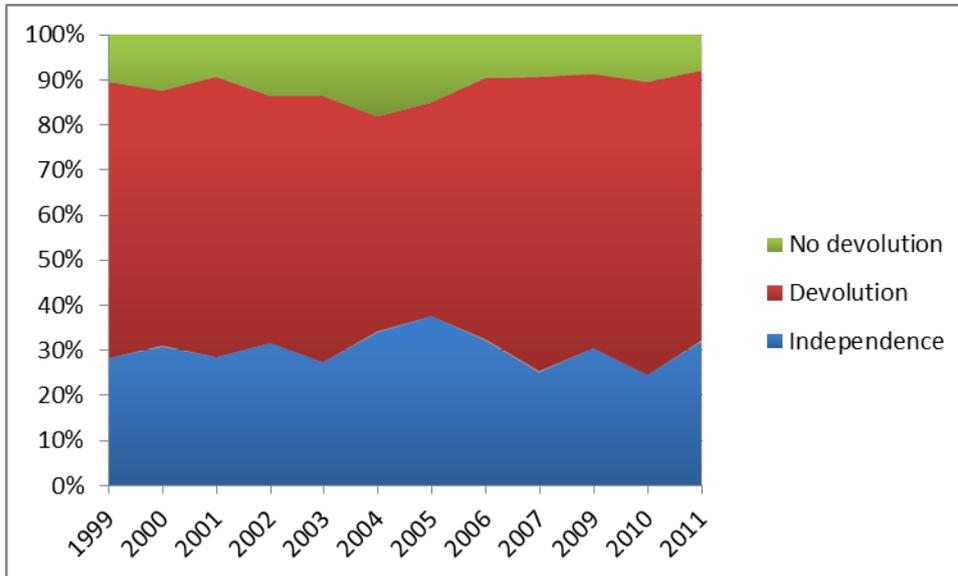
then increased to the low to mid 30s during the early and mid-1990s (Keating, 2009). This was the time of maximum alienation, as Scots repeatedly faced the re-election of Conservative governments (under Margaret Thatcher and John Major) with dwindling support in Scotland. Devolution in 1999 stabilized independence support at a slightly lower level, and since then it has been around 25 to 30 per cent. Since 1999, we have data from the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey (SSAS), an academic rather than a commercial survey, which asks a consistent question. This still does not provide us with clear trend data, as it is only an annual snapshot and is subject to the influences and events of the moment. The question asked between 1999 and 2009 was:

Which of these statements comes closer to your view?

- Scotland should become independent, separate from the UK and the European Union.
- Scotland should become independent, separate from the UK but part of the European Union.
- Scotland should remain part the UK, with its own Parliament which has some taxation powers.
- Scotland should remain part of the UK, with its own Parliament, which has no taxation powers.
- Scotland should remain part of the UK without an elected Parliament.

In 2010 there was a change in wording (see below), but Curtice (2011) has collapsed the responses from both into a three fold division, as has been done regularly in past. Figure 1 gives this version of results, merging the two independence and the two devolution options. Support for independence outside the European Union is minimal, and there is very little appetite for a return to the position before 1999, leaving devolution and independence as the main competitors.

Figure I



Reinventing the Nation

In 2007, benefitting from Labour's unpopularity as the incumbent government in Westminster, the SNP overtook them for the first time by one seat and formed a minority administration in Scotland. There was much comment at the time that this coincided with a fall in support for independence as measured by SSAS, from 30 to 24 per cent. The fall was not in fact indicative of a trend but rather of normal fluctuation (it was back at 28 per cent the following year) but it does at least show that the nationalist victory was not fuelled by a rising demand for independence. Opinion polls similarly suggested that the SNP victory was neither preceded nor followed by a surge in independence support. It is clear that, by promising a referendum on independence, the SNP had separated that question from the issue of who would form the government of Scotland.

A curious feature of the Scottish National Party is that it has devoted little time and attention to nation-building in Scotland. Since the idea of a Scottish nation is so unchallenged, it seems to think that this is unnecessary. Yet the meaning and salience of nationhood are, as elsewhere, continually changing. It is not that feeling Scottish makes one a political nationalist. Traditional unionists had a

clear and strong vision of the Scottish nation as a component part of the United Kingdom; indeed they saw the union itself as the framework for the Scottish nation and even incorporated the mediaeval heroes of the independence wars in their narrative, arguing that they had ensured the survival of the nation so that it would join the union on its own terms. The SNP, on the other hand, has not managed to reinvent the idea of the nation so as to underpin an independence project.

Nor is it the case that devolution, by providing a distinct Scottish arena, has increased the sense of national identity in Scotland. There has been an increase in the proportion of people privileging their Scottish identity in the standard surveys that ask whether they feel: only Scottish; more Scottish than British; equally British and Scottish; more British than Scottish; only British. This shift, however, occurred in the 1980s and 1990s and there has been no measurable change since 1999. Indeed, as the vast majority of the population now describe themselves as only or more Scottish, it is a poor discriminator between supporters and opponents of independence.

Yet if nationalism has not succeeded in establishing a convincing counter-narrative of the nation, unionism as an ideology and political practice is in even worse shape. Conservative traditionalist unionism has declined with the Scottish Conservative Party, leaving Labour as the only party effectively operating across Great Britain.¹ Labour, however, has struggled to find a convincing unionist narrative. This became something of a fixation for New Labour during the 2000s, especially after the Scottish politician Gordon Brown became Prime Minister in 2007. In a manner reminiscent of Pierre Trudeau, New Labour saw multiculturalism (the product of immigration) and multinationalism as a single challenge, to be addressed in the same way. They sought to construct a unitary Britishness as a civic identity over and above these particularist identities. This was an impossible project for a number of reasons. Multiculturalism and multinationalism are not the same thing. Britishness is not a single overarching identities, as traditional unionists knew well, but differs from one part of the state to another. This allows unionism to take different forms across the United

¹ Not the United Kingdom, which includes Northern Ireland.

Kingdom, with the very intellectual contradictions contributing to its acceptance in different places. Any effort to construct a single narrative spanning everything from southern English Conservatives, through Scottish nationalists, to Irish nationalists and unionists, could only be a recipe for conflict. Nor does the British state possess the instruments for socialization into a single national identity, as the naïve proposals of the Goldsmith (2008) report, commissioned by the Labour Government, show. For example, Goldsmith proposed fostering Britishness through the 'national curriculum', apparently unaware that this applies only in England, with the other three nations having their own arrangements.

The unionist assumption that civic identity and social solidarity can only be British collides with the fact that a national identity on civic lines and underpinning social citizenship is emerging within the constituent nations, however little the SNP has done consciously to promote it. One of the reasons why the home rule movement, after a hundred years of failure, triumphed in the 1990s was a rejection in Scotland of the neo-liberal policies of the Thatcher/Major era. It is not that Scots are further to the left than the English. Surveys show them only very slightly to the left and close to voters in the North of England (Rosie and Bond, 2007). In Scotland, however, resistance to Thatcherism had a vehicle in national identity, with the nation being reinvented on social democratic lines. Since devolution, policy in Scotland under both Labour/Liberal Democrat and SNP administrations, has been more traditionally social democratic than in England, with no quasi-privatization in the health service, support for comprehensive education and a generally more universalist attitude to social services (Keating, 2010). This has undermined Labour and leftist unionism, which had previously been able to present Scottish nationalism as somehow undermining class or wider solidarities.

There have been various efforts to rebuild a sense of British national identity around the idea of social citizenship. The New Labour think tank Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), has worried about different social entitlements in different parts of the United Kingdom, a concern reflected in the Commission on Scottish Devolution (2009). Yet they have not been able to demonstrate that devolution is undermining welfare and, in practice, all the divergences in public

policy have represented an enhancement of social citizenship in the devolved territories (Keating, 2010). Rather than a race to the bottom there is, if anything, a race to the top. The most recent IPPR publication worries about common social citizenship but then seems to conclude that confederation may be the answer to the constitutional issue (Jeffery, Lodge and Schmuecker, 2010).²

So at the level of ideology, we can conclude that neither nationalists nor unionists have won the argument. Scottish nationality is strong and has been reconstructed around social and economic questions, but its constitutional implications are ambivalent.

Drivers of Independence

The polls, as mentioned above, suggest that independence has the support of between a quarter and a third of Scots, a figure that has been rather stable. It is linked to identity at the extremes, in that there is a correlation between unitary Scottish identity and independence, but even this is imperfect. In 2005, half of those identifying as only Scottish supported independence but, perhaps surprisingly, so did a fifth of those identifying as only British (although numbers are low) (SSAS, 2005). The great bulk of the population clustered around the middle on both dimensions, embracing dual identities and favouring various degrees of home rule.

Economic considerations have featured greatly in the debate about independence. Not surprisingly, nationalists have argued that Scotland is subsidizing the rest of the United Kingdom and would be better off outside it; unionists argue the contrary. The arguments about fiscal cross-subsidization are not clear and much depends how oil revenues are calculated. It is also a difficult argument for unionists to use, since it suggests that Scots are subsidized and unable to manage on their own. Public spending is generally higher in Scotland, as a result of the lagged effects of a formula (the Barnett

² I should perhaps add that my own paper, arguing that social citizenship did not have to be UK wide and was not a problem in Scotland, was dropped from the collection as it did not support the unionist narrative.

Formula), which are tolerated in the interests of political peace.³ The arguments about revenues are more contested.

On the broader economic front, it has been the case for the last hundred years that Scottish nationalism has thrived in good times, when it seemed that the nation was less dependent on the UK connection, and has done less well in relative poor times like the 1950s and the 1980s.⁴ At such times they have tended to cleave to Labour as the party that looks after their interests within the British state. This is consistent with the rise of nationalism in the late 1990s and early 2000s but would suggest that it would be less popular in the present crisis.

Examination of the matter at an individual level suggests another complex relationship. Not surprisingly, Scots have tended to think that they do worse out of the Union while English voters think that they do. So the key question is not whether Scots feel that they are doing well but whether they would favour independence when they think they would be better off economically as an independent state, whether or not they are doing well in absolute terms or in relation to England. This might depend on international conditions, economic optimism or being part of Europe.

There is some evidence that those who think that the Union is not working in Scotland's interests and that Scotland is poorly treated are more likely to favour independence. According to the 2005 SSAS, just over a third of the population favoured independence; the same number thought that England does better than Scotland from the Union (eliminating 'don't knows'). The symmetry is misleading, however, since these are not the same people. Just over half those

³ The Barnett formula allocates increases or decreases in spending among the constituent parts of the United Kingdom as a population-weighted proportion of the increases or decreases for England on services corresponding to those devolved to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. This determines spending at the margin. The base remains historical and this has favoured Scotland, although Barnett implies that the Scottish advantage will diminish over time. Once the spending totals are determined, the devolved governments have complete freedom in deciding how they are allocated among their own functional headings. Barnett was adopted as a temporary expedient in the 1970s (at that time it applied to the Scottish and Welsh Offices) but carried over into the devolution era in the absence of agreement on anything else.

⁴ In the 1960s and 1970s, often recalled as difficult times, Scotland was doing well in relation to the United Kingdom and avoided mass unemployment.

favouring independence thought that England does better and just over half thinking that England does better were in favour of independence. This shows that those who have an economic grievance are more likely to favour independence and vice versa, but does not account for that quarter of those thinking that Scotland benefits equally who still favoured independence.⁵ Asking whether people think that Scotland gets less than its share of government spending also suggests a rather loose connection between the two. Just over half the population thought that Scotland gets less than its fair share, a figure rising to a little over 60 per cent among independence supporters. Of those who thought that Scotland gets less than its fair share, some 45 per cent preferred independence, marginally more than those who favoured devolution. Once again, there is an overlap but it is far from perfect. Nor do we know in which direction the influence is working. There was a core of just over a fifth of electors who both believe that Scotland does badly economically and financially from the Union and support independence, but otherwise the issues were only loosely connected.

There is some evidence that the economic crisis has, as would be predicted, dampened enthusiasm for independence. The SNP made a great deal of the advantage of small nations in global markets, pointing to the 'arc of prosperity' running from Finland through Ireland to Iceland. The unionist parties duly gloated in the travails of Ireland and Iceland, lampooned as the 'arc of insolvency'. The fact that the largest of the failed banks, RBS, is Scottish-based and another, HBOS, has strong Scottish links, was also used to demonstrate that Scotland could not manage on its own. It may also be that the politicization of the spending levels in England and Scotland and the public campaign by some English politicians has convinced Scots that they do get a relatively good deal. Curtice (2011) and Curtice and Ormston (2011), using SSAS data, show that economic discontent with the Union has been falling during the period of devolution, including that of SNP government. The proportion of Scots thinking that England does better out of the Union fell from 36 per cent to 23 per cent between 2000 and 2010, being overtaken slightly by those thinking Scotland does better (up from 22 per cent to 26 per cent). The proportion thinking that

⁵ The survey even showed that a fifth of those who think that Scotland does better out of the Union favour independence, although the numbers here are too small to be reliable.

Scotland got less than its fair share of public spending was down during the same period from 59 per cent to 38 per cent, with 41 per cent thinking that it was about right. On the other hand, the broader economic arguments seem to be as evenly balanced as ever, with 31 per cent believing that the economy would be better off under independence and 32 per cent believing that it would be worse off. There is now a connection between the two, as half of those believing that the Scottish economy would be strengthened by independence support it, against just 10 per cent of those who think it would be weakened (Curtice, 2011).

What is consistently striking about the data, however, is how many people feel that independence would make little difference in domestic policies or even in economic matters. This may reflect assurance in Scotland's membership of the European Union; unionist scaremongering about independence cutting Scots off from their relatives in England seems quite ineffectual. A YouGov survey in 2007 showed that only 14 per cent of people thought that an independent Scotland would establish border controls, while 70 per cent thought that it would not. Since then, the UK has massively strengthened its own border controls, including those with other European countries, which rather undermines the unionist critique. Independence has, so far, been treated in a rather relaxed way, compared with other countries and large proportions of the population have been reported as thinking that it will come in due course anyway. A YouGov poll of June 2010 showed 49 per cent of respondents thinking that Scotland would become independent within twenty years, although only four per cent thought that this would be within five years. Only 34 per cent thought that Scotland would never become independent. This echoes polls taken regularly over the years.

Interpreting Independence

Here is the key to understanding what is going on. Self-government is seen as a journey rather than a sudden change. Detailed examination of survey results shows that most Scottish voters want more self-government within the United Kingdom, including control over almost all domestic policy, but are not interested in the trappings of independence or a separate foreign and defence policy. They would like to see Scotland have a distinct voice in European affairs,

but this is to do with domestic than traditional foreign affairs. In the SSAS of 2010, the fourfold set of options was changed to the following, with the percentages as shown:

Constitutional Options, Scotland, SSAS 2010	
Which of these statements comes closest to your view?	per cent
The Scottish Parliament should make all the decisions for Scotland.	28
The UK government should make decisions about foreign affairs and defence; the Scottish Parliament should decide everything else.	32
The UK government should make decisions about taxes, benefits and foreign affairs; the Scottish Parliament should decide everything else	27
The UK government should make all decisions for Scotland	10

Detailed findings on individual issues confirm those of previous surveys. Some two thirds of Scots want domestic control of education and health (which are already fully devolved) and social security (which is not); the same proportion favour the UK looking after defence and foreign affairs (Curtice, 2011). While respondents believed that taxes should be shared, 57 per cent thought that the Scottish Parliament should have the predominant say in this area (Curtice and Ormston, 2011). At the same time, echoing other surveys, a majority of respondents in each area did not want differences in entitlement between Scotland and England. This may simply be a case of wanting the best of both worlds, as when citizens want low taxes and generous services, but it also seems to reflect a continuing, if attenuated sense of British social citizenship. Other surveys show that a sense of Britishness, while in decline, is pervasive.

Tilley and Heath (2007) show a marked drop in pride in Britain among Scots over succeeding generations, particularly so in relation to political matters such as democracy and history, as opposed to science, sports, arts and literature. The shift is also marked in social security and in economic achievement, suggesting that newer generations do not construct their visions of economic development or social solidarity around the British nation. On the other hand, Scottishness has not displaced Britishness completely and often seems complementary rather than competitive to it, as nearly half of even SNP supporters retain some element of British identity and often take pride in the British past (Bechhofer and McCrone, 2007).

The independence prospectus is highly dependent on Scotland remaining within the European Union but surveys show that attitudes to European integration are complex. The Scottish Social Attitudes Survey (SSAS) measures attitudes to Europe on a five-point scale, with two points denoting Euroscepticism and two points Europhilia, the middle one being neutral. As in the rest of Britain, there is a pervasive Euro-scepticism; this is slightly, but consistently, less pronounced in Scotland than in England. Supporters of all parties in Scotland are less Eurosceptic than in England, so this effect is not due to nationalist enthusiasm for Europe. While a previous tendency for nationalists to oppose Europe had disappeared by 1997 (Dardanelli, 2005), they are now divided on the issue (McCrone, 2006). Those identifying as Scottish are less Eurosceptic than British identifiers; English respondents identifying as English are more Eurosceptic again.

There is some connection between attitudes to Europe and on Scottish constitutional issues, but it is rather loose. The small number of people who favour independence outwith the EU are, not surprisingly, very Eurosceptic, as are the small number who want to have no Scottish Parliament (SSAS, 1999, 2000, 2003, 2005). Those favouring independence in the EU are more likely to be Europhiles than those favouring other constitutional options; but only one

survey, that of 2003, found that Europhiles actually outnumbered Eurosceptics among the independence-in-Europe camp (35 to 33 per cent: McCrone, 2006). Two years later, amid more general Euroscepticism, the best that could be said is that they were less anti-Europe than other groups (47 against 52 per cent: SSAS, 2005). Supporters of independence in Europe are less inclined than others to want to withdraw from the EU (although some five per cent consistently choose this option) but tend to be moderate Eurosceptics, who want to stay in the EU but reduce its powers. Supporters of independence outwith the EU are more likely to favour withdrawal but, curiously, most of them favour staying in.

A more general question asking whether people favour giving the Scottish Parliament more powers (on a five-point scale) also shows a loose connection with Euroscepticism. Nearly three quarters of those strongly opposed to giving the Scottish Parliament more powers are Eurosceptic, against half of those strongly in favour (SSAS, 2005). Most of the electorate, however, take rather centrist positions on both issues. Young people are distinctly less Eurosceptic than their elders, a finding that holds equally for England and Scotland. This all suggests that there is a market for a pro-European policy for more Scottish autonomy or independence, and that the SNP has made some progress in convincing its supporters, but that the link is by no means obvious to all. Working class voters, a key part of the nationalist constituency, are inclined less to both Euroscepticism and Europhilia, while small businesspeople, another (albeit not numerous) pool of SNP support, are highly sceptical (McCrone, 2006).

The nationalist project to shift the electorate away from supporting Scottish autonomy within a British union to a coherent project of independence within the European Union has therefore had a limited impact, albeit important in some sectors of the population. The SNP must be cautious about associating their project with a European project that gains little more enthusiasm in Scotland

than elsewhere in the UK, and especially cautious about stressing the supranational aspects of Europe. On the other hand Europe may work as a permissive factor to loosen the dependence on the British union and serve to undermine some of the classic unionist arguments, while the electorate, when considering independence options, may take the EU context for granted. So at a time when Labour politicians were proclaiming that in an independent Scotland people would face borders controls and be cut off from their relatives in England, surveys showed that the electorate did not believe them.⁶ Many of them are now used to travelling easily in Europe; some would be aware that it was the UK government that had refused to join the Schengen area of passport-free travel and was even then introducing drastic new border controls for entry and exit.

This would suggest that there is a market for a party presenting a third way between devolution and independence. In the early years of devolution, the parties polarized in order to emphasize their difference, the SNP insisting on independence as the next step while Labour engaged in a strongly unionist rhetoric. Since 2007, however, the parties have sought the middle ground. The response of the Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties to the first SNP electoral victory was to set up their own commission, ostensibly in the Scottish Parliament but soon taken over by London, to produce proposals for reform. The resulting report (Commission on Scottish Devolution 2009) recommended expanded but still limited taxation powers and some minor additional competences. Tactically, the London takeover of the Commission was a mistake, preventing the parties in Scotland from making their own case, while the taxation proposals attracted widespread criticism for being too little and on various technical grounds. The scheme was nonetheless incorporated into a bill, which was accepted in both Scottish and UK parliaments.

⁶ YouGov survey April 2007. Fourteen per cent of people believed that an independent Scotland would establish border controls with England, and 70 per cent thought that it would not.

The minority SNP government, for its part, launched a national conversation intended to lead to a bill and independence referendum. The national conversation was very low-key, failed to incorporate any serious academic research input and paid little attention to foreign examples. Towards the end of the process, the SNP government produced a number of papers, the tone of which was consistently to water down the idea of independence to approach something like the Quebec sovereignty-association or sovereignty-with-partnership ideas. There might be joint regulatory institutions for the United Kingdom and shared embassies. British military bases might stay in Scotland and the Pound Sterling be retained, at least pending a decision on joining the Euro. These ideas, sometimes labelled as ‘independence-lite’ began to merge into the idea of ‘devolution-max’ favoured by those on the other side who wanted to go beyond Calman’s limited proposals. Indeed the SNP offered to put a second question on the ballot-paper explicitly providing for devolution-max, although the unionist parties refused to be tempted. The argument was strung along for almost four years but, realizing that they did not have a majority in the Scottish Parliament for an independence referendum, the SNP announced that no bill would in fact be produced.

Possibly the weakest part of the SNP’s independence prospectus is the failure to decide on their preferred social and economic model. Their arc of prosperity included both low-tax countries like Ireland and the high-spending Scandinavian social democracies. They have promised that an independent Scotland would cut business taxation to Irish levels in order to compete for investment, but also sustain better and more universal services. They have sometimes tried to square the circle by claiming that tax cuts would pay for themselves by stimulating growth but this is the wishful thinking of politicians. There have long been rival neo-liberal or small government and social democratic tendencies within the SNP. A book co-authored by future SNP minister Michael Russell during a period out of the Parliament advocated drastic neo-liberal surgery

(MacLeod and Russell, 2006). but in government the SNP expanded universal services, abandoning the vestigial university fees and introducing free medical prescriptions

2011 and Beyond

Loss of the independence issue appeared for a while to take the momentum out of the SNP administration in Scotland, especially as attention shifted to the UK level for the general election of 2010. Labour resumed its traditional role of protector of Scotland in hard times and did extremely well, winning the election convincingly in Scotland even while being severely beaten in England. In fact not a single parliamentary seat in Scotland changed hands between the elections of 2005 and 2010, even the two by-election victories (one for the Liberal Democrats and one for the SNP) being overturned. The victory carried Labour over into the following year and it approached the Scottish elections well ahead in the polls. Yet they had seriously failed to take account of the changed nature of Scottish politics. Scottish voters may not be hankering for independence but they do treat Scottish elections as a completely different occasion from Westminster contests. Labour, however, acted as though the Scottish elections were 'second order', inviting people to express send a message to the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition in London.

The SNP sensed the change in the political game much better. The attenuation of the independence prospectus and the promise of a referendum next time effectively neutralized the issue during the Scottish election of 2011. Instead, the SNP was able to play on its record in government and to pose as the party best able to defend Scotland against the Conservative-dominated administration in London by playing the national card and demanding more fiscal powers. Their convincing victory was thus achieved without a surge in support for independence. Instead, they have embarked on a two-prong strategy. In the short term, they have demanded more fiscal autonomy and powers over resources, in pursuit of 'devolution-max'. Towards the end of the

parliament, they then propose an independence referendum. This satisfies both the fundamentalist and gradualist wings of the party, while seeking to ensure that something is achieved even if the referendum fails.

The unionist parties, unable now to stop a referendum bill in the Scottish Parliament, have also indicated that they will not seek to block it by legal means, as beyond the competence of the devolved institutions. There are some unionist die-hards in London unwilling to let Scotland go but English opinion in general seems remarkably relaxed about the prospect of Scottish independence. A survey of Conservative Party candidates before the General Election of 2010 showed that 49 per cent would not feel sorry were Scotland to leave the union (ConservativeHome.blogs.com). Nor do English elites deny the principle of Scottish self-determination. John Major (1993) declared that no nation could be kept in a union against its will, while even Margaret Thatcher (1993: 624) conceded that 'As a nation, they (the Scots) have an undoubted right to national self-determination; thus far they have exercised that right by joining and remaining in the Union. Should they determine on independence no English party or politician would stand in their way, however much we might regret their departure.' Labour politicians have been less explicit; but in recent years no senior representative of the party has denied Scotland's right to independence in principle. Former First Minister Donald Dewar effectively conceded it in 1994 (Murkens, 2002), and Scottish leader Wendy Alexander even called for an independence referendum in 2008; she was called to order by the UK leadership, but on the timing of the demand rather than the principle of self-determination.

Polls have regularly shown that the division of opinion in England about Scotland's future mirrors that in Scotland, sometimes showing even higher levels of support for Scottish independence. A YouGov poll taken immediately after the SNP victory of 2011 showed 41 per cent of respondents in the rest of the United Kingdom in favour of Scottish independence. This is perhaps not so

much a measure of goodwill towards Scotland as a desire to be rid of troublesome neighbours who are portrayed in the English media as enjoying higher levels of public services at the expense of English taxpayers. It also shows how many English citizens construct their nation, confusing England and Britain, just as many foreigners do. As a result they do not see Scotland as an essential part of their nation, since England would still survive. The years of SNP government may therefore have made little impact on Scots' desire for independence, but have rather increased English support for it – in the same YouGov poll just 29 per of Scottish respondents backed Scottish independence.

There is evidence that SNP members now tend to the gradualist rather than the fundamentalist tendency (Mitchell, 2008). Experience of nationalists in government has extended their support base, as they do not seem inclined to risky adventures. It seems likely then that Scottish independence will happen in steps, with a gradual increase in powers. Hitherto this has been possible within the unwritten British constitution, by granting asymmetrical powers to Scotland, with Wales following on behind. Northern Ireland is treated as a distinct problem and neither affects nor is affected by what happens in Scotland and Wales. Some English commentators have sought to make a lot out of the resulting anomalies, notably the West Lothian Question, about why Scottish MPs at Westminster should be able to vote on English domestic matters while neither they nor English MPs can vote on the same issues in Scotland. On two occasions under the last Labour Government, major policies affecting only England (on health and higher education) were pushed through against internal opposition, only because of the support of loyalist Scottish MPs. It has proved difficult to get English opinion much exercised about these matters. Efforts to convince the public on both sides of the border that Scotland gets a good financial deal have, as noted above, been more successful.

One way out of this dilemma could be a federal system, with devolution all round to the four constituent nations, but there is almost no interest in this in

England. It would also be an unbalanced federation, with on part, England, representing 85 per cent of the population and the English Parliament rivalling that of the United Kingdom. Dividing England into regions would not help, either, since there could be no question of giving them the same powers as the Scottish Parliament. English regionalism, rather, has been canvassed as a way of dealing with the internal constitution of England, not that of the United Kingdom. In any case, a proposal for devolution in the North-East of England, considered the most favourable territory and thus a good place to start, was defeated by a margin of three to one in a referendum in 2004.

A formal confederal arrangement, with Scotland running its domestic policies but joint institutions for defence, foreign affairs, Europe and other common interests, would also have little appeal in England. English political culture and practice is strongly unitary and there is little reason to think that they would abandon a system under which, at present, an English-dominated Parliament and Government have a free hand in these matters for a system in which they would have to negotiate with Scotland. Scottish independence, however, would not raise these difficulties.

So it is easier to convince the English than the Scots of the merits of Scottish independence. The hope of the SNP, however, may be that four years will allow a further building of a distinct Scottish polity, with more domestic competences devolved, so that the next step, towards independence but with some common institutions, will appear altogether less radical. Further divergences in social citizenship, with the UK Government embarked on a radical reduction of the role of the state and privatization of public services, while Scotland (and Wales) retain a more traditional form of social democracy, could then convince Scots that only a much looser arrangement could allow them to retain their own social model.

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