

## THE STRANGE DEATH OF UNIONIST SCOTLAND AND WALES: AN IRISH PERSPECTIVE

*Owen Dudley Edwards*

King:           The King shall drink to Hamlet's better breath,  
                  And in the cup an union shall he throw,  
                  Richer than that which four successive kings  
                  In Denmark's crown have worn. Give me the cups;  
                  And let the kettle to the trumpet speak,  
                  The trumpet to the cannoneer without,  
                  The cannons to the heavens, the heaven to the earth,  
                  'Now the King drinks to Hamlet', Come

, begin -

And you, the judges, bear a wary eye.

Shakespeare, **Hamlet**, V.ii.263/71

### THE REFERENDUM THAT WAS

'Dig away, boys', said Silver, with the coolest insolence; 'you'll find some pig-nuts and I shouldn't wonder.'

Stevenson, **Treasure Island**, chapter 33 'The Fall of a Chieftain' (1883)

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George Dangerfield's sparkling and instructive **The Strange Death of Liberal England**, a septuagenarian but still seminal work, is recalled in our title in homage yet in contrast. By 'England' he meant 'England and Ireland' - Scotland for him seems to have been a constituency whence to elect Asquith, and Wales a birthplace for Lloyd George - and the ambiguity throws useful light on what we may term The English Question. But what he described was the triple-revolutionary crisis whence the United Kingdom was rescued by World War I, and his Tory, Feminist and Labour rebellions took at least four years to kill or at least wound their victim. And the death continues to be disputed: even today eerie phenomena from Dangerfield's Liberal England gleam at us from the rhetoric of Mr John Major, Mr Tony Blair, Mr Tony Benn, Baroness Thatcher, Sir Edward Heath, Mr John Redwood - from practically anyone on the face of the English political landscape, it might seem, save Mr Paddy Ashdown who can permit himself neither the Grantchesterisms of Mr Major nor Mr Blair's Edwardian intoxication with the word 'New'. But if it died, it was an unconscionable time a-dying. Unionist Scotland and Wales, to the contrary, died within the space of a calendar day; they arose full of insolence and (in many instances) wine, and by nightfall were meat for the pathologists. We had seen them in great power, spreading themselves like a green bay tree. Yet they passed away, and, lo, they were not: yea, we sought them, but they could not be found (Psalms xxxvii. 35-36).

There were some posthumous attempts to argue the general election had not been a verdict on the Unions of England and Wales, and of them both with Scotland. Mr Allan Massie (**The Scotsman** 3 May 1997) forbade the obsequies as best he could:

Michael Forsyth may have lost his seat because he is opposed to a Scottish Parliament; but it wasn't that issue which saw the electors of Enfield and Southgate give Michael Portillo the boot. Edinburgh Pentlands may have dismissed Malcolm Rifkind because the voters want a parliament on the Calton Hill, but that wasn't why Harrogate rejected Norman Lamont.

This seems a little feeble, but Mr Massie is presumably constrained by his Tory votaries who do not hire him to over-expose the shortcomings of his own party. What he really seems to be saying is:

The voters massacred the Tories because of their individual records.  
They dismissed Malcolm Rifkind for successively betraying every liberal

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political principle which he had espoused. They dismissed Ian Lang for whitewashing the Tories who enabled arms to be sold to Iraq to the very eve of the Gulf War, and for demanding that Robin Cook apologise to the House of Commons for seeking to expose them. They dismissed Michael Forsyth for stating that the Declaration of Arbroath was betrayed by the SNP's policy of an independent Scotland in the European Union, as well as for much, much more.

They also dismissed Michael Portillo and Norman Lamont for crimes sufficiently heinous to merit dismissal, chiefly aggravated demagogic inflammation of Europhobia.

The Tories were bastards, as Mr Major would say, but essentially privatised bastards, and their deaths were privatised deaths.

But Mr Massie's argument, however phrased, is undermined by the terms in which the Tories conducted the campaign. Mr John Major declared the election a verdict on the Union, insisting that a vote against his followers was a vote against the Union. Mr Allan Massie at that point agreed (**The Scotsman** 30 April 1997), giving as his prime reason why 'I would vote Tory ... because Labour's plans for a Scottish parliament are half-baked, and ... because I value the Union in its present form'.

In my own constituency, Edinburgh South, the Conservative and Unionist candidate's main leaflet opened on a photograph of herself behind a table covered by a Union Jack bearing a portrait of Winston Churchill and a bottle of whisky over the legend 'Only a Conservative Government will preserve the integrity of the United Kingdom and save you from the insult of a Tartan Tax': the symbolism, asserting the Union's bedrock as flag, whisky, Churchill and Scottish parsimony, certainly suggests that Unionist Scotland may have died of a surfeit of its own defence. The constituency's history is also suggestive: Edinburgh South had been safely Tory from 1918 to the 1970s, became a marginal in 1979, fell to Labour's Nigel Griffiths in 1987, and proved a safe Labour seat for the first time in this election. But its Tory priorities were those of the Tory candidate's leaders (apart from her choice of photo opportunity, alongside Michael Howard, Home Secretary and hence irrelevant to Scotland, to symbolise 'effective law and order so that you and your family can enjoy personal security'). Messrs Forsyth, Lang and Rifkind met for the last time in a major rally at Edinburgh on Sunday 27 April 'delivering stirring pro-unionist, anti-federalist speeches to the Tory faithful' (**The Scotsman** 28 April 1997). Mr Forsyth in particular fought all the way

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to the grave: 'Treasury and Scottish Office officials distanced themselves last night from an eve-of-poll claim by the Scottish Secretary, Michael Forsyth, that Scotland would lose up to £2.5 billion for essential services if a Scottish parliament is set up' (**The Scotsman** 1 May 1997). All Mr Massie's post-election volte-face can presumably suggest is that the voters rejected not Mr Forsyth's cause, but his methods. Alas, even this bolt-hole is self-blocked: 'Michael Forsyth has been the best and most imaginative Secretary of State of my lifetime' (Massie **The Scotsman**, 30 April). 'Best' must be a matter of personal or employer preference; we may agree about 'most imaginative'. Unionist Scotland's last words would seem to have been 'Love Me, Love my Mad Dog'.

And, of course, Love my Englishman. Mr John Major's call of the election on the Union issue had its own charms, notably in his appearance at Gretna Green to symbolise the marriage of the two countries in 1707, underlining - one assumes unintentionally - the squalid circumstances attending both the advent of the Union and the average eighteenth-century wedding at Gretna Green: the couple pledging themselves before the anvil at the moment of his arrival proved to be Sinn Fein supporters from Derry (whose political intelligence was hardly vindicated by their apparent conviction that marriage under the liberal laws of Scotland required travelling to Gretna Green even through Scotland if necessary). But however questionable the medium, there is no gainsaying the message. Mr Blair had promised a referendum on Scottish and Welsh Parliaments; Mr Major had provided one.

We are all of us, it seems, referendummies now. But past precedent knew its referenda by general election. The Reform Bill crisis of 1830-2 entailed no less than three. That principle having been conceded, later Reform Bills were taken to differ in quantity but not in quality. Similarly, the conversion of Gladstone to Irish Home Rule in 1885 was followed by a hastily-drafted measure when he returned to power in 1886: its defeat was certain either in the Commons (as it proved) or in the Lords. The ensuing general election, whose predecessor had been less than eight months before, specifically demanded the voters' judgement on the question of Home Rule for Ireland. Of course it entailed other issues, and some verdicts of 1885 were reversed even in Ireland. But it decided the issue for the next six years, in favour of the Union. Even Parnell's Home Rule party could only muster 85 seats in Ireland (and one in Liverpool) with 16 Irish seats voting against. The 1892 election with Gladstone's pledge for a Second Home Rule Bill became another referendum, this time narrowly going in favour of the Liberals and Home Rulers; that Bill's defeat by the Lords in 1893 invited reform of the

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Lords as the only means of its implementation, and neither Gladstone nor his successor Rosebery were prepared to open that front. But when the Liberals, back in power by the landslide of 1906, were faced by the Lords' rejection of Lloyd George's Budget in 1909, they went into the general election in January 1910 on the abolition of the Lords' veto over Commons legislation, whereupon the new King, George V, insisted on yet a further election in December to make the referendum status absolutely clear. The results in both cases were the same giving a majority to Liberals and Home Rulers and hence an implied mandate for an Irish Home Rule Bill which must now pass both Houses once the Lords' veto had been abolished.

The problem was that the referendum had discovered an interested party in Ireland voting against Home Rule and gaining between one-fifth and one-sixth of the Irish seats. And however much the Irish Home Rulers and their Liberal friends sought to dismiss the Ulster Unionists as local bigots manipulable for Tory purposes, the Ulster Protestants proved more dedicated to Unionism than were their British allies. It had been one thing for Queen Victoria to defend the Union against Gladstone in 1885 by telling him 80 or 90 MPs sent by Irish voters to Parliament pledged to Home Rule would only be 'low, disreputable men elected by order of Parnell' and not representative of the true feeling of the country. Property could no longer protect itself by such mystical definitions. But a mobilised mass working-class against Home Rule was another matter, and Irish Home Rule broke down on that point. The percentages were one thing: any such measure would always have a minority, frequently vociferous. The seats were something else. The Irish Home Rulers never won more than the 86 of '86. The House of Commons was visibly confronted by the other Irish party.

What has happened in Scotland and Wales this year is therefore a revolution beyond all Irish Home Rule achievements. It is well-known that the Third Home Rule Bill 1912-14 remained a dead letter, and the island of Ireland was ultimately partitioned because of a Unionist threat of resistance; but without the visible electoral dissent from the claim of an Irish verdict for Home Rule, such resistance could never have been stitched into more than formidable local riots. The Unionist minority questioned Home Rule credibility, and the Ulster question proved more intractable than the Irish question partly because, like the Irish question, it forced minority demands on an insensitive majority, and Ulster Unionists were more serious about themselves than were Irish Home Rulers about Ulster. Scotland and Wales today have simply exploded the confines of normal political life. England, on its side, may not have rejected Michael Portillo and Norman Lamont for reasons primarily

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connected with their Unionism, but they have not loved the Union enough to let it stand in the way of their meals of Michael Portillo and Norman Lamont. Scotland and Wales have killed their Unionism; England has taken advice of Arthur Hugh Clough 'Thou Shalt not Kill, but needs not Strive/Officially to keep Alive'.

### **THE REFERENDUM THAT WAS NOT**

If the tongue only spoke all that the mind knows, there wouldn't be any neighbours.

The Red Book of Hergest (c. 1400)

The destruction of every Scots and Welsh MP pledged to defend Unionism has been shattering for the Tories, and perhaps Labour itself is a little alarmed. Some curious stories survive from the election, including one of an apparatchik assurance that Edinburgh Pentlands was not a marginal seat and that Labour party workers had better take themselves instead to the perpetually marginal battlefield of Aberdeen South (which some thirty years ago had seen the rise and fall of the young Donald Dewar). In fact, young Labour did its bit in Pentlands, and the seat fell, and the Foreign Secretary fell with it, his face resembling a pirate who discovers himself to have boarded the *Flying Dutchman*. But was there a Labour anxiety, in high quarters, to avoid so decisive a holocaust, so complete and 100% rejection of unionism in the referendum Mr Major had declared the election to be? Politicians do not care for electoral decisiveness quite to this extent: it robs even victors of some degree of discretionary powers. And Mr Rifkind, if no longer principled, was still likeable: indeed, his erosion of principle might make him even more likeable, from a Labour standpoint. As it was, Mr Rifkind was as dead as Mr Forsyth and Mr Lang, and Mr Lang had been killed not by Labour but by the SNP. The Labour sweeps, swings and swings were enormous, but the corpses' deaths were divided among several dirks.

Of necessity, this transformed the political debate. Welsh and Scottish Unionism would now seem to consist of (a) a number of political ghosts, whose very utterances discredit their cause by reminding the voters that Unionism has been rejected in their persons; (b) some egregious oafs whose comments on the glories of the Union to Scotland and Wales bring their feet smartly into their English mouths whenever the same are opened; (c) Mr Tam Dalyell of West Lothian, whose famous Question, first uttered some twenty

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years since, has been the staple diet of Unionism from that time. The West Lothian Question itself has been instructive above all in its revelation that the defence of the Union rested chiefly on a thesis adumbrated by a Labour MP a generation earlier, thus proving the utter destitution of the Tories as to any Unionist ideas whatsoever. Mr Dalyell, possibly the most honest MP in the century, was ready enough as always to let any chips fall where they might when impelled by Conscience to take up chip-monkey; but the Tories' dependence on the Question was horribly at variance with the Tories' own use of it, if not as a Lothian, at least as a Lagan solution. For fifty years Northern Ireland elected its Ulster Unionist majorities to the local Parliament at Stormont, and its larger constituencies sent somewhere between 10 and 12 Unionists to Westminster there to keep their Tory allies in power between 1922 and 1972 when at all possible. Critical votes might depend on them, and sometimes did. Scottish politics show every sign of future fluidity, Welsh slightly less, but local Parliaments guarantee no permanently built-in support at Westminster for Labour from Scotland or Wales. The matter was most decisively and permanently summed up by the BBC's Kirsty Wark, on the morrow of the General Election, when Mr Michael Forsyth, giving a final interview from his political tomb, whined something about the West Lothian Question, to be informed grimly that the voters had answered the West Lothian Question. It was a somewhat pathetic swan-song (one would prefer to think of Mr Forsyth's gallantry at the moment of defeat: 'those who live by the sword perish by the sword'); and it reminds one irresistibly of **1066 And All That** on the Williamite settlement in Ireland: 'after the Treaty the Irish who remained were made to go and live in a bog and think of a New Question'.

There still remains the other West Lothian Question: Mr Dalyell is Scotland's only known MP to cherish Unionism, and he was triumphantly re-elected (his constituency now renamed Linlithgow). But he was obviously elected (a) as himself, a beloved institution and (b) as a person pledged to vote into power Mr Tony Blair who was pledged to give Scotland a Parliament if Scotland wanted one. If this is Unionism, it is not Unionism as we know it in Ireland.

The Labour party has buckled down to Devolution for Scotland and Wales rapidly enough since the Election, but it is faced with the quandary that whereas its views remain the same, the electorate has changed not the goalposts but the ground. In the months before the election much of the Devolution debate's agenda in Scotland was forced by Mr Michael Forsyth. Mr Forsyth had probably long ceased to believe in himself, at least as a viable future force in post-election politics, but he ensured that the wretched

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Mr George Robertson would believe in him: Mr Forsyth piped, Mr Robertson danced, and the referendum became two-pronged on the tax issue. The Scots are not, in fact, a particularly grasping or penny-pinching people, but **Punch** having few jokes made its reputation by their variation and - *vide* the Tory Edinburgh South election leaflet - the Tory image of Scotland depended on one's never appealing to Scots materialism in vain. That Thatcherism had elicited an increased community spirit in the Scots, and that if anything the Scottish ethos was much more anti-materialist than the British and Irish norm, may have eluded the clever Mr Forsyth: as C. Northcote Parkinson observed to Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'propaganda begins and ends at home'. Mr Forsyth may therefore have swallowed his own nonsense, or, if not, felt that it should be nevertheless forced down Scotland's throat as a sort of Pride's Purge: one never can tell. (Any man who could bring Margaret Thatcher back in 1997 to campaign in his supremely marginal constituency, after her proven track-record of vote-losing by every visit she made to Scotland, seems far gone in either self-delusion or masochism.) But he sold his tax trap to Mr George Robertson with disastrous results for Labour credibility on the Devolution issue. As matters stand the Labour party on Devolution goes all the way from Dr Gordon Brown, whose **Red Paper on Scotland** 23 years ago firmly fixed Devolution at the heart of Scottish Labour's future, to Mr Tony Blair, whose visits to Edinburgh seem to confirm that the shortest road from Fettes is the longest way round. But if Mr Blair knows little of Scotland, he knows more of ventriloquists' dummies than his critics imagine, and by shifting Mr George Robertson from the Scottish Secretariat he disposed of the dummy when the ventriloquist had died.

And so at last we have switched off the Forsyth saga: even the corps of hard-faced men he had assembled to hold the country to ransom in the sacred name of Business are beginning to mend their manners. After all, now that Mr Forsyth's blandishments have disappeared, Business may begin to realise its vulnerability if not from the Labour party at least from the public. Banks can lose customers; newspapers can lose readers; beer-drinkers can find other brews - a few boycott threats might concentrate the minds of certain vociferous plutocrats wonderfully, especially when the siren voice has been stilled by the Stirling voters. Mr Donald Dewar is loyally New Labour, no doubt, but he goes back long enough as a legislator to know what fair-weather friends Businessmen can be, and what fair-weather friendships they deserve in return.

The ground has shifted, and the lines of new debate are opening. Quite irrespective of which poltroons may be trotted out from the English Tories as

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'shadow Secretary for Scotland or Wales' (the latter presumably to carry with it the right to run for Tory leader after the next putsch), the real debate seems between Labour and Plaid Cymru in Wales, between Labour and the SNP in Scotland. The Liberals may shift from one side to the other depending on Labour respect for earlier agreements now that the jackpot has been won. Labour has begun it badly, by arguing that the General Election of 1997 was a Referendum on Independence as well as on Devolution. Mr Harry McLeish, now in office as Minister for State, asserted it on the last edition of 'Words with Wark' (BBC 8 May 1997), and from the speed with which fellow-party luminaries followed his lead it would seem that a policy has been hatched. If Mr Dewar is behind it, it does him no credit; if he is not, he had better call his minions to heel.

Mr Dewar cannot afford the luxury of honesty in a pure or Tam Dalyell sense of the term, but he is in private unusually honest, and is intelligent enough not to despise the intelligence of others. On Devolution, the Tory party appealed to Caesar, that is, to the survival of the Union, and supported their case by an evident contempt for the intelligence of the electorate: and their corpses are now a danger to the public health. To argue that the people of Scotland and Wales voted in 1997 both on independence and on devolution is to spit boorishly into the very eye of the facts, as Mencken would put it. Ten years ago a London editor of the **Irish Times**, soured by exposure to **Punch** humour and Irish jokes, proclaimed that the British were too stupid to understand proportional representation, never mind tactical voting. The 1997 election proved him triumphantly wrong. For all of the Irish achievement in using PR to the full for the purpose of voting against the politician of your particular aversion, nothing in Irish political history equals the sophistication of what has happened in Scotland and Wales. The electorate voted out every single Tory, and it did so consistently by making the best choice for killer. Some of the parties showed some co-operation, but Labour apparatchiks in particular were ready to pick up what they could regardless of endangering an anti-Tory phalanx. The electorate treated such violations of the anti-Tory, anti-Unionist convention with contempt. Labour were given their prey in Tory seat after Tory seat, but the Liberal Democrats took their Edinburgh West and their Brecon, the SNP their Galloway and their Tayside. Other than that, every single incumbent was re-elected. In vain Labour targeted Plaid Cymru in Ynis Mon, and the Liberal Democrats in Ross, Skye and Inverness West; in vain the SNP yearned for the Western Isles and for Ochil (with an excellent candidate, George Reid, more in keeping with the sophistications of New Labour than is the successful Labour incumbent Martin O'Neill); in vain Plaid Cymru hoped for a breakthrough in Labour's Carmarthen East. The

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Law of Tory Slaughter was ironclad. There was no question of a mandate in any other direction. Even new tenants were respected entering on their party legacies: Labour were turned back from Sir David Steel's old seat. Only Inverness East changed hands, and the retiring Sir Russell Johnson's vulnerability ensured that his successor was certain to be either Labour or SNP. It was there, and there only, that a Labour year made for a Labour gain from anyone save the Tories.

Given the sophistication shown by the Scottish and Welsh electorate, Labour need hardly model itself in the Tory mantle of contempt for voter intelligence. Mr Ron Davies surely sees that point; Mr Donald Dewar has no excuse not to. The argument that the Election was an independence referendum must be dropped, or else risk rapid voter disgust. The electorate wants to work with this government, not to be patronised by it. Labour, the Liberal Democrats, and the nationalists have made their gains largely thanks to voter disgust with the guardians of Unionism in all their corruption, condescension and contempt. An electorate in that condition of awareness will be very quick to resent being treated as the prisoners of what it elected. What makes it worse is that on any independent judgment Mr Alex Salmond in particular, and to a lesser extent Mr Daffydd Wigley and Mr Paddy Ashdown, did tremendous work for the anti-Unionism parties. It was Mr Salmond who beat Mr Michael Forsyth to his knees in open TV 4-party confrontation ('would you live on £2 an hour, Michael, instead of unemployment benefit? Would you, Michael? Would you live on £2 an hour, Michael? Answer, Michael! Would you live on it? You would not!' when Mr Forsyth implied that any decent citizen would work for less than the dole if he had any self-respect, and Mr Robertson groped for such cards as Mr Forsyth might throw him to play). It was Mr Salmond and Mr Wigley who ran rings around David Dimbleby while the more established leaders paid court. And it was Mr Salmond who won the highest admiration from voters across the board, regardless of how they voted. It is about as fatuous to claim that Mr Salmond and Mr Wigley have been defeated in a Referendum where the voters deployed anti-Unionism as skillfully as British politics has even known, as it would be to announce that Labour has failed by being turned back from Ross, or from Ynis Mon, or from Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale.

It is not only silly, but dangerous. Mr McLeish's doctrine that because the SNP has only obtained 22%, therefore it is of no account, makes the Irish Home Rulers' mistake on the Ulster Unionists. The Tory sixth of the Scottish electorate, fifth of the Welsh, is unsupported by seats: it is spread around

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thinly, the inevitable upper-crust minority, learning nothing and forgetting nothing. But six SNP seats and runner-up status in votes, plus the election's gaudiest campaigner, are as perilous to ignore as were the Ulster Protestant masses. Both groups are concentrated and will not go away, even if neither is going to sweep every constituency tomorrow. Labour needs to learn about those regions now swept free of Unionism but almost certainly impervious to Labour electoral charms now and in the future. The SNP and the *Blaid* must be brought in from the cold in regard to devolution, not simply twitted with mythological defeats. For Labour to try to isolate the nationalists will cause people to imagine that Mr Dewar and Mr Davies think Mr Blair is afraid of Mr Salmond and Mr Wigley, and he is hardly likely to thank them for that. Granted that the SNP acted wrongly in leaving the Constitutional Convention, Labour might remember that had it not been for the SNP and Plaid Cymru there would never have been any modern Labour policy on Devolution at all, and, if elected, Messrs Brown, Cook, Dewar, Robertson and other Labour Scots might well have found themselves the merest lobby fodder. Harold Wilson's memoirs are eloquent on the sweet silence of Scots Labour MPs before devolution. If Plaid Cymru had shaken Welsh Labour a little more, there might be a greater future for Welsh Labour members. Meanwhile Labour may be making future trouble for itself in Wales by lordliness: it was a bad day's work not to put a single Welsh speaker in the Welsh Office. Rhodri Morgan of Cardiff West is an unwise enemy for Government to make, all the more now that his wife has become the victor of Cardiff North. George Robertson, similarly ousted from Scottish Affairs, was at least compensated with the Secretariat for Defence. It says much for Scottish status that Defence, once the post-Scotland promotion point for Messrs Younger and Rifkind, is now the solace of frustrated would-be Scottish Secretaries. Labour, New or Old, would be wise to remember that Wales under the Tories proved itself the great hotbed of Young Pretenders. If Mr Blair is belatedly remembering his duties to the ghost of John Smith, he also owes obeisance to that of Neil Kinnock.

## **THE REFERENDUM THAT IS TO COME**

What was Bolshevism but a challenge, perhaps a much-needed challenge, to make certain of the faith that was in a man? He had not patience with the timorous and whining rich. No law could protect them unless they made themselves worth protecting. As a Tory, he believed that the old buildings were still sound, but they must be swept and garnished, that the ancient weapons were the best, but they must be kept

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bright and shining and ready for use. So soon as a cause feared inquiry and the light of day that cause was doomed. The ostrich, hiding its head in the sand, left its rump a fatal temptation to the boot of the passer-by.

John Buchan, **John Macnab** (1925), chap. IX 'Sir Archie Instructs his Countrymen'

I'll bury nae heid like an ostrich's,  
Nor yet believe my een and naething else.  
My senses may advise me, but I'll be  
Mysel' nae maitter what they tell's ...

Hugh MacDiarmid, 'A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle' (1926)

'I am', said the Lady of Shallot, 'half sick of shadows', and in the shadow war now commencing there is ample material for the bellyache. Mr Salmond stakes his claim as leader of 22% of Scottish voters, the Liberal Democrats stake theirs as having ten seats in Scotland to the SNP six, Plaid Cymru's claims oppose the SNP's logic in that they are Welsh runners-up in seats while trailing in votes. The issue, trivial in itself, has potential, if pointless, basis for anti-Unionist divisions. In this the voters seem light-years ahead of most politicians in sophistication. Liberals, SNP and the *Blaid* need one another in the next rounds. All three have to be on the watch for signs of Labour ossification in Establishment, even neo-Toryism. In particular, the tyranny of the big battallions must be watched with constant vigilance. The Scots and Welsh houseclean should be followed by common guard against Tory re-entry and Labour retreat. From this point of view some brisk trading seems essential. The SNP, proud of their great part in the destruction of Scottish Unionism, should therefore back Plaid Cymru for the shadow Secretaryship for Wales and cede their own place for shadow Scottish Secretary to the Liberal Democrats. The Liberal Democrats, on their side, should respond in kind, making common cause instead of establishment entry: Charles Kennedy seems more the man of that hour than Liberal Democrat incipient nobility. With these agreements and manoeuvres concluded, all Opposition Scots and Welsh parties should Obstruct (not simply obstruct) any Labour acceptance of a Tory shadow with corresponding preference in Speaker's allocation of first rebuttal spot on Scots and Welsh questions. Any such acceptance declares that English parties are entitled to superior debating places on Scots and Welsh issues than the actual Scots and Welsh Opposition parties. The example of Parnell, closely studied by Mr Salmond, shows that a comparatively small cadre can do much

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damage: 50-odd Liberals, SNP and *Blaid* could be quite effective. Labour may wish to temper their devolution offers by denying Welsh and Scots national identity: therefore they may favour prime positions for the major Opposition party regardless of its electoral irrelevance to Scotland and Wales. Equally, the other parties owe it to their and Labour's electors to enforce the electoral obliteration of Welsh and Scots Toryism.

If Labour accept their obligations to anti-Unionism, it is an excellent augury for the devolution referenda; if they do not, the real Scots and Welsh Oppositions go on the alert against Labour latter-day Toryism. Curiously enough, the precedent there is a Tory one: Lord Randolph Churchill and his aristocratic cronies made merry hell against a massive Liberal majority in 1880 on the question of the atheist Charles Bradlaugh's being seated in the Commons to which Northampton voters had elected him. Even the remains of Scottish Toryism would be well advised to fight shy of any such carpetbagging. Tory devolutionists were once an impressive throng, with such prominent names as Alec Douglas-Home, Edward Heath, William Whitelaw, Margaret Thatcher, Alick Buchanan-Smith, Malcolm Rifkind, Michael Forsyth: of these Buchanan-Smith alone remained true to his faith. But today's Tory Devolvers are Edinburgh ex-Councillor Christine Richard and Councillor Brian Meek, Struan Stevenson (the vanquished heir to Sir Hector Munro's once safe seat in Dumfries) and other minor lights. Having rid themselves of their Unionist old men of the sea, they can hardly relish a West Lothian Question in reverse where Tory shadow policy is decided by some self-interested English Unionist to whom their own future in the political desert means nothing. In fact Devolution in both Wales and Scotland offers a political rebirth, much as Ireland had and lost the chance of multi-party political co-operation for devolutionary ends, when William O'Brien tried to reconcile the warring traditions in 1910 and was broken on the grounds of party expediency.

There is the danger that Devolution seems so inevitable that it will be assumed ready to pass on the nod. At present it is hard to see who could mount a campaign against it. By this stage a reappearance on the Scottish scene by Baroness Thatcher, for instance, seems capable of producing a verdict of 110% against her Unionism. Britain must by now have learned how to run a referendum other than by general election, if only from its system of trial and egregious error. Twenty-five years ago Ireland and Denmark voted 'yes' to entry into the EC, Norway 'no', and the UK entered and two years later voted on whether it should have. That's one wrong way. Another was the mad 40% amendment which no Speaker of the House of

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Commons should have permitted, contradictory as it was to the nature of a referendum: on that, the voters of Scotland narrowly voted 'yes' for Devolution in 1979 but dead persons on the register counted against them, and in the absence of reaching the 40% Labour felt the decision was suspended, the SNP had no choice but to vote against the government's continued existence for want of any further guarantee, and we got Mrs Thatcher. Even as we stand there are still pitfalls. The Robertson variations on tax-raising powers, in days when he was still, so to speak, on Forsyth 'Change, are an unnecessary nuisance. But the package should pass easily in Scotland provided all interested parties - Labour, Liberal Democrats, Scottish Nationalists, devolutionary Tories - support it unequivocally. The Tories ought to back it, as being their only visible hope of future Scottish or Welsh existence, and any cries against are simply pied piper pleas to join the Great Dead. But the Dev-Tories, thus self-distinguished from the Dead Tories, may decide to return to the party's perpetual obsession anent the Great Scottish Bawbee. They may repudiate Mr Forsyth but, like the translated Mr Robertson, they may have more difficulty in separating themselves from his works and pomps. So, however, the anti-Tory parties must rally behind the foolish as well as the wise question. We cannot afford to run the risk of a self-emasculated Parliament.

The SNP are hardly likely to get the 'independence' referendum question they seek, and while it is good political drill for them to demand it, they must certainly forswear all sign of sulks if it is refused. It was bad enough to have played such pranks over the Constitutional Convention, even if the Labour arrogance was hard to thole: and Mr Alex Salmond felt himself forced to follow his party into an exit which was surely not of his making. That flounce-out cost the SNP friends and support. But it had the excuse of a break over what was still the politics of dream. Today Devolution is on the way, and an SNP decision to sit the dance out, or even to dance against it, would be of far greater potential damage to the party than to the measure. Neither Tories nor SNP would have comfortable campaigns before the electorate of a Devolved Parliament once opposed by them. And if anti-devolution Tories are dead, anti-devolution SNP are death-wished. There is always an uneasy feeling that some members of the SNP really do not want success, and, whatever they tell themselves, regard it almost as blasphemy to do anything which brings victory within the realm of reality. Offered the possibility of stepping-stones to independence, such nationalists immediately jostle to cast the first stepping-stone at their benefactor. In any case, even if Mr Alex Salmond by some miracle got the 'independence' alternative on the Referendum, where would he be? (Granted, it makes sense to put it on the

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ballot.) As far as we can judge, the vote for the choice of 'independence' would run much higher than the SNP present total of 22%, many members of the Labour party and even some Tories voting for it. But, equally, it seems most unlikely that it would get anywhere close to a majority. Mr Salmond would therefore be left repudiated in genuine fact, as opposed to Mr McLeish's 'fact'. That is, tactically, a much poorer position than to have 'independence' as the option withheld from the voters which can become increasingly attractive with every turn of political fortune. Once a Devolved Parliament is sitting, if it is worth anything it should spin itself into organic existence in place of its blueprint birth. After that, it is up to the SNP to show how rather more independence - instead of independence as a lump sum in the abstract - should be to Scotland's benefit. With such a programme as that the SNP could have quite a bright future in a Devolved Scotland, even if Independence remains far off. The precedent here, of course, is the stepping-stone devolution which constituted the Irish Free State as established in 1922. Whitehall assumed it made little practical difference to the power-politics of London and Dublin: in the event, the logic of Dublin devolution brought rolling devolution in which several other British territories followed the Irish example. And Scotland would have the enormous advantage of having avoided the poisoned chalice of violence which gave birth to the Irish Free State.

The Welsh situation is much less clear. What is on offer for Wales has in the past been little more than a talking-shop. Moreover, Scots institutions have been natural nuclei around which a devolved Scotland might spin itself into political self-standing of some sort; the major Welsh institution inspiring self-government hopes is the Welsh language. Scots institutions are in most instances centred in Edinburgh; the Welsh language is at its most powerful diametrically farthest away from Cardiff. Arguably, that was a reason for the failure of the Irish revival: native speaking, far smaller than was true of Wales, was quartered on the western rim. Remote and alien Dublin revived the language by ignorant ukase, to be promptly rejected by what it still treated as Victorian schoolchildren. But if any sort of pro-Devolution movement is to acquire momentum in Wales, it has to have something worth fighting for; and a talking-shop is not enough. If a Parliament handling domestic issues, probably with tax-raising powers, is good enough for Scotland, why on earth is it not good enough for Wales? Past precedent kept Welsh Devolution more toothless than Scots. But the Welsh electorate has declared its equality with the Scottish electorate. It left no Tories only half-dead; it is therefore entitled to a Parliament that is more than half-alive.

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Wales has also got rid of its no-men, for in 1979 the Welsh campaign against Devolution had an incandescence far beyond the Scots. Scotland's no-men were Mr Tam Dalyell, recruiting the Scotophobic Professor Hugh Trevor-Roper whose blood-feuds are evident to all save the kindly Mr Dalyell; and Mr Robin Cook, whose 'No' committee won the support only of what Christopher Harvie (thinking of the pro-hanging, pro-flogging Labour MP for Dundee West) called 'Mad Doigs and Englishmen'. But the Welsh no-men were Mr Neil Kinnock, sweeping the country in the campaign of his life, and Mr Leo Abse, another Labour progressive in excellent Socialist standing. During the Thatcher era Mr Abse retired; and Mr Kinnock found power, or rather the shadow of power. One reason why Mr John Major's previous defence of the Union as leading election ploy should have resulted in stalemate for Devolution was that Labour's Mr Kinnock was so obviously a forced convert. Mr Michael Foot believed in Devolution; he also believed in Mr Kinnock. So for Mr Kinnock to succeed Mr Foot as party leader, he had to accept that against which he won his finest spurs. It was no leadership to rouse the Devolutionary forces in 1992, and when Mr Kinnock's party's party in mid-election treated the battle as already won, Devolution was becalmed. Mr John Smith of course believed in it, and always had, and if Mr Blair in 1997 seemed to have difficulties remembering what devolution was, at least he was making no expedient apostacies over it. Welsh Devolution in 1997 has no latter-day Kinnocks or Abses to fear, although it has one or two no-men among its MPs, but if the yes-people are to get places they need a real cause.

And the word is 'people'. Labour seem to be growing a philosophy of trust in the return of power to the people. The Irish precedent was far too much concerned with the transfer of power to Dublin from London, with the result that an Irish Exchequer was simply a clone of the worst London Treasury inhumanitarianism with qualifications in the Irish language. In Wales and Scotland the whole devolution struggle has been about popular responses. Even the Kinnock campaign against Devolution in 1979 addressed itself to the people, not simply to vested interests. The Scottish Claim of Right existed as an expression of the will of the people. The Constitutional Convention, claims the Tory journalist Mr Michael Fry, was appointed by nobody: therein lay one of its finest recommendations, but to the official English Tory mind what is a Scottish credential is an English insuperable barrier. Canon Kenyon Wright caught it perfectly when he said of Baroness Thatcher that 'if we are told ... "We say 'no!' And we are the State", let us reply "We say 'yes!' And we are the people"'.

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Devolution is being handed down, as part of Her Majesty's most gracious Speech from the Throne and its effects. But Her Majesty would not need to soil her gracious lips with it, had it not been for the action of the people. It is brought about by state measures, but only because the people have spoken. And the people's vote has been a vote for self-rule in Scotland and Wales all the more because a vote against the Tories has been a vote against Quangos. To vote against the Tories was to reject a form of government excluding the people from participation in their own administration. From this standpoint polls - always more questionable on abstract issues rather than personalities or parties - ask the wrong questions. Poll the same Scots on Devolution and on Home Rule: will they be equal? Poll the same Welsh on Devolution and on Quangos: will they be equal? The Referendum of 1 May 1997 made it clear where they wanted Quangos to go, and who they thought should not rule at home. The people have spoken, and must now be given the opportunity to go on speaking. England speaks of a state; Ireland speaks of a nation. But Scotland and Wales may speak of a people because on 1 May 1997 their people spoke for themselves.

*May 1997*