

BRITAIN, THE SCOTTISH COVENANT MOVEMENT AND DEVOLUTION, 1946-50

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During the writing of this paper the last Conservative Government agreed to return the Stone of Destiny from Westminster Abbey to Scotland, where it had been removed by Edward I during the War of Scottish Independence. The Government, in announcing the decision, declared that it wanted to ensure the Scottish public 'felt' Government closer 'to home', a measure designed to re-assure the electorate of Scotland's incorporation into the British State (**The Times**, 4 July 1996). The Stone, which was once thought 'the dead symbol of an extinct Scottish monarchy', would re-enforce public perceptions of a United Kingdom under the Windsor dynasty (SRO, HH 41/2101). This is not the first time that British Governments have engaged in dramatic measures to bolster the Union. In 1885, after an intense pro-devolution campaign, it established a Secretary for Scotland with a wide brief that included law and order, education and welfare provision. In 1926, after an extensive campaign for Home Rule, the Secretaryship was elevated to a Secretary of State, a principal member of the Government (Levitt 1992). The 1930s saw the establishment of St Andrew's House in Edinburgh where the Scottish departments were brought together under the umbrella of 'the Office of the Secretary of State', headed by a Permanent Under Secretary of State (Milne 1958). On the one hand the steady enlargement of the Scottish Secretary's functions highlighted a belief in the integrity of the Scottish nation, but, on another, the Permanent Under Secretary of State's increased control over the Edinburgh departments indicated the importance to Scotland - and Britain - of maintaining an integrated State. Scottish opinion may have been ambivalent over the Government's gesture, but, as **The Times** reported, the return of the Stone underlined the special nature of Scotland's sovereignty and the Scottish Secretary's power in Cabinet.

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At a time when the Bill for a Scottish Assembly is actively under discussion, a re-assessment of the post-war Home Rule campaign would appear appropriate. The Scottish Covenant Movement, which promoted the campaign and collected nearly two million signatures in favour of an Assembly, appeared to be on the edge of a significant political break-through. Yet soon after the Labour Government in May 1950 agreed an inquiry into the possibility of producing information on Anglo-Scottish trade public interest appeared to wane. By the autumn, interest in an Assembly had all but evaporated and was hardly mentioned during the 1951 General Election (**The Scotsman**, 19 October 1951). In 1954 the Royal Commission on Scottish Affairs could confidently claim that the great majority of Scots supported the Union (Royal Commission, Cmd 9219). This article, based on public and other records of the period, sets out to provide a review of the Movement's impact on Government discussion, the attitude of Scottish civil servants towards devolution and the reasons for its particular downfall. By adopting an historiographical approach it can, perhaps, provide a better appreciation of the contemporary hostility towards Home Rule and the origin of the opposition the Movement faced.

One explanation that has been suggested for the Movement's collapse was that it failed because it was too 'young', or rather that those involved were not politically sophisticated enough to agree a common front with other political parties and exploit the advantage gained (Mitchell 1996). A post-war society tired of shortages and the endless 'red-tape' of a London appointed civil service seemed ripe for a campaign based on liberating Scottish enterprise. What was required, it was recognised, was a distinct Party capable of mobilising political opinion over a sustained period, particularly within the community. The Covenant's acknowledged leader, J.M. MacCormick, had certainly fought elections, but the Movement was a movement of outsiders, and many local authorities, trade unions and professional organisations felt uncomfortable at any hint of demagoguery.

Another explanation suggests that the Labour Party in Scotland, which had previously supported devolution, crumbled under pressure from its internal post-war contradiction; in favour of restoring power to the worker, but also in favour of nationalisation and central control (Donnachie et al 1988). A Movement with an incipient bias towards nationalism was the antithesis of socialism; and socialism was the reason why Labour had won the 1945 election so handsomely. Arthur Woodburn, the Scottish Secretary at the height of the Movement's campaign and a one-time contributor to the Independent Labour Party's **Forward**, could not take the Movement seriously, and vigorously opposed concessions. For him it represented an attack on collective security.

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Yet another argues that Scottish political opinion was largely unformulated, there was a widespread and strong attachment to nationalism, but at a cultural, rather than political level (McCrone 1992; Paterson 1994). 1947 had seen the establishment of the Edinburgh International Festival which seemed to go from strength to strength. Elsewhere there was no diminution of interest in Scottish popular culture, from sport to the theatre. The Movement's failure was its inability to translate a deeply held cultural distinctiveness to the level of political awareness and significance. The nationalisation of the municipal gas and electricity industry, together with the privately owned coal, rail, and steel industry, may have removed economic power from Scottish institutions, but Labour promised better wages and increased employment. Indeed as the press pointed out after the 1950 General Election, the working class seemed content with Labour's record (**Glasgow Herald**, 24 February 1950). Full employment, a reduced working week and a higher standard of living, aided by positive State intervention, formed the cornerstone of a new political consensus.

These explanations all have an un\$oubted degree of legitimacy, but the concentration of attention on the Movement's 'innocence', the lack of 'courage' within the Scottish Labour Party or individual awareness, perhaps, fails to take into account British perspectives on the issue or the strength of opposition within Scotland. Many of the issues raised about devolution in subsequent debates were widely discussed during that period, but equally important in assessing the Movement's failure was the attitude of the Anglo-Scottish administrative establishment as it attempted to counter what Lord Home once considered a misguided campaign based on emotion, rather than rational appreciation of the Scottish interest (**Lords Debates** 20 November 1951).

**NATIONALISATION AND THE INTER-LOCKING OF
SCOTLAND'S ECONOMIC INTEREST, 1945-47**

The Second World War brought sweeping changes to the organisation and administration of Government and by 1941 large areas of social and economic life were directly managed by Government departments and their statutory authorities (Cantwell 1993; Alford et al. 1992; Lee 1995). In Scotland, the Scottish departments continued to maintain their responsibility for law and order, the health services, agriculture and education, but in economic affairs the Ministry of Labour, the Board of Trade and other London-based departments assumed much of the responsibility for war production and industrial investment. The growth of central economic planning did not go unnoticed and throughout the period a number of MPs

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and Scottish organisations raised concern over Scotland's position in the post-war world. Some new factories had been introduced, for instance Rolls Royce had established aircraft manufacture in Glasgow, but Scottish opinion remained uncertain that Scotland's traditional industries could maintain full employment without considerable redirection of industry (**Hansard** 12 May 1942 and 8 December 1943). It was also noted that Scottish firms seemed reluctant to invest in new areas of production, particularly light engineering, despite pledges of Government assistance (PRO, CAB 124/676).

In the 1920s the Scottish Labour Party had, at various times, introduced Scottish Home Rule Bills, and, although they were unsuccessful, the Party continued to retain a commitment to devolution. In 1944, William Leonard, one of Glasgow's MPs, in collaboration with the 'Scottish Convention', a coalition of Labour, Liberal and Communist interests, published a memorandum proposing a Scottish Parliament with responsibilities that included the existing Scottish departments, as well as the Ministry of Labour and Ministry of Transport (SRO, HH 1/801a). The Parliament would also assume control over industrial development, with an inter-parliamentary committee established to ensure that Scotland received its 'fair share' of industry redirected from the south of England. Generally the proposal followed previous devolution schemes, but Tom Johnston, the Coalition Government's Scottish Secretary, and a one-time supporter of a Scottish Assembly, rejected the idea. Johnston, who personally disliked attending Westminster, had reluctantly come to believe that the Scottish economic 'interest' lay in maintaining a close working relationship with what he termed 'Whitehall securities' (SRO, HH 41/691). In 1943 he had proposed the transfer to the Scottish departments much of what the Convention had argued, but had found considerable opposition within the Treasury and Cabinet. The Treasury commented:

That [the Scottish Secretary] should stimulate his colleagues in Scotland's interests, advise them on Scottish aspects of national plans and on appointments of Scottish representatives on national bodies, and in general, act as Scotland's mouthpiece in the Government - all this is entirely desirable; and Ministers will no doubt wish to propose that the Secretary of State should be associated with standing Cabinet Committees whose work affects Scotland, even at points where the Secretary of State's statutory responsibilities are not engaged. But if he is directly responsible in all matters which affect Scotland's welfare, Scotland is likely on balance to lose rather than gain. Moreover, the burden on the Secretary of State personally, already prodigious, would be well-nigh intolerable; his staff would be loaded with a bewildering

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variety of work on much of which they could not acquire and bring to bear the necessary concentrated knowledge and efficiency; either it would be done less well than in the larger and less wide-ranging English departments or else it would merely reproduce work which might without difficulty have covered Scotland as well as England in the first place.
(PRO, CAB 87/72)

Later in 1944 Johnston met the Convention and agreed that the transference of responsibility to an Edinburgh-based Assembly might improve the level of co-operation between the different Government departments. However, in practice, he thought that without a Scottish Secretary in the Cabinet it was likely that the British Government's interest in Scottish conditions would decline (SRO, HH 1/801b). Johnston outlined the Government's proposed scheme for post-war economic planning and indicated that under the Distribution of Industry Act the Board of Trade held primary responsibility to attract new industry to Scotland. An inter-departmental committee, with Scottish representation, existed to ensure that Scotland received its 'fair share' of factories and new investment. Nevertheless, the Scottish Labour Party agreed to include a commitment to 'home rule' in its election manifesto. The pledge was confirmed soon after the 1945 election at the Scottish Labour Party's annual conference.

A key element in the new Labour Government's economic strategy was the nationalisation of industry, and by Spring 1946 Bills had been introduced for the nationalisation of the coal mines and civil aviation. Further measures were announced covering the railways, the electricity industry and road transport. The extent and pace of the legislation meant that in debates many MPs found it difficult to raise matters of purely Scottish interest and their concern was heightened by the Government's decision not to create an autonomous Scottish civil aviation corporation. The lack of parliamentary time also applied to other legislation and in July the Scottish Parliamentary Labour Group wrote to Herbert Morrison, the Lord President of the Council, to complain about the Government's attitude towards Scottish business. (The Lord President was responsible for managing the Government's legislative programme.) The Group reminded Morrison of the Party's devolution pledge and urged the appointment of a 'fact-finding inquiry' into Scottish Administration, which it said would do much to appease Scottish 'sentiment' (PRO, CAB 124/911a). Morrison was unsure of a response, but in the Autumn, after consulting Westwood, the Scottish Secretary, he agreed to meet the Group and discuss their suggestion. At the meeting the MPs stressed their commitment to Labour's programme, but added that there was a widespread concern that the Government had not fully appreciated the impact

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of transferring the control of Scottish industry to London-based boards (PRO, CAB 124/911b). Although the SNP 'was not a serious force', they noted that many other 'responsible' organisations feared a return to the inter-war slump unless radical measures were introduced to attract industry.

A few weeks later Westwood held another meeting with the MPs who re-affirmed their concern over the treatment of Scottish business in Parliament and the comparatively high level of unemployment (PRO, CAB 124/911c). (Scottish unemployment stood at five per cent, about twice the level in England.) They suggested that Scottish officials of the British ministries should be given greater responsibility to co-ordinate activities without 'reference' to London. An element of administrative devolution, the MPs stated, would ensure that Scottish needs were likely to be met more quickly and efficiently than through centripetal management, particularly in regard to the nationalised industries. Westwood agreed that the Government had introduced relatively few 'Scottish' bills, as distinct from UK bills with Scottish application clauses, but stated that much of this was due to the pressure of legislation which the Party had pledged in its British manifesto. The Scottish departments, he added, kept in regular contact with other ministries to ensure that Scottish issues and problems were fully understood and addressed.

Westwood, like Morrison, thought their concerns were premature, but in February 1947 a group of Labour MPs forced an adjournment debate on the Government's attitude towards unemployment (**Hansard** 10 February 1947). Generally the debate rested on the need to increase the number of advance factories and for the Board of Trade to work more 'positively' with the Scottish departments in securing development. However, at the end of the debate, a Conservative MP, A. Gomme-Duncan (Perth and Kinross), switched the attack from the Board to the Scottish departments. Scottish economic development, he said, was primarily a matter for the Scottish Secretary who had not provided 'the drive' for his officials to support the Board and other British departments. Outside Parliament, others began to raise concerns. Edinburgh's Lord Provost commented that 'pledges' were not enough; the 'practically-minded' Scots wanted action on jobs and housing (**The Scotsman** 1 February 1947). A month later the Scottish Convention organised a 'Scottish National Assembly' and debated the issue of political devolution. The meeting, composed of a variety of radical interests, but without any official Labour, Conservative or SNP representation, discussed the problem of 'long-distance' control in economic affairs, particularly airports, and agreed the necessity for a separate Parliament, based on the Northern Ireland mode. A small committee, with MacCormick as Secretary, was established to organise opinion and press the claim on the Government

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(**The Scotsman** 24 March 1947). A further development occurred in April when Sir Patrick Dollan, a prominent figure in the Scottish Labour Party (he had been Glasgow's Lord Provost) and Chairman of the Scottish Advisory Committee on Civil Aviation, urged the necessity for a separate Scottish Department of Economic Affairs (**Glasgow Herald** 7 April 1947). Dollan argued that the sheer scale of Labour's plan for economic co-ordination had caused considerable difficulty in Scotland, where British ministries found local authority and other conditions different from England and where Scottish Administration often acted as an intermediary between the ministries and public opinion. A new Parliamentary Under-Secretary who would co-ordinate the role of these ministries, but answerable to the Scottish Secretary, he said, would 'cut through' much of the 'red-tape'.

Westwood, himself, had considerably revised his thought on the issue of Ministerial responsibility and Scottish Departmental co-ordination. The following month, the Cabinet Office received a draft memorandum from David Milne, his Permanent Under Secretary of State, which outlined a case for the appointment of a Minister of State for Scottish Affairs. The Minister would hold Cabinet rank and assume some of the Scottish Secretary's statutory responsibilities, though Westwood envisaged that the enabling legislation would give the Scottish Secretary the right to vary these according to circumstance. The memorandum commented:

During the war Parliament sat on only three days a week; there was no standing committees and little legislation; the Secretary of State was not a member of the War Cabinet; and the volume of business under his charge was reduced by the virtual cessation of many peace-time services. Now Parliament sits on five days a week and has a full programme of legislation, in much of which the Secretary of State has to take an active interest. The standing committees, including the Scottish Grand Committee, are fully employed. The Secretary of State is a member of the Cabinet, and, of course, of a number of its committees. All services for which he is responsible are in full operation, and in addition there are many new and important policies now in hand, such as the organisation of the national health service and the development of education and town and country planning.

(PRO, T 222/1048a)

Westwood argued that it had proved difficult for one senior minister to manage the Scottish brief from London and Edinburgh effectively and he envisaged the new minister acting in the area of housing and economic affairs (**Hansard** 28 April 1948).

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The memorandum astounded the Cabinet Office, whose Deputy Secretary was W.S.Murrie, a past Scottish Office assistant secretary with responsibility for the 'Home Rule' brief. Murrie was very much a cultural nationalist of the old school (he provided considerable support for the Edinburgh International Festival) and minuted that the appointment would do much to 'raise the demand for greater devolution', which, he argued, lay only on the surface of Scottish thought (PRO, T 222/1048b; **The Times** 20 June 1994) Murrie accepted that the previous two years had been 'very exacting' for Westwood, but noted that the amount of new legislation directly affecting the Scottish departments would decline. There were, Murrie argued, severe constitutional difficulties with the proposal; what would happen if the Scottish Secretary delegated part of his responsibilities and then found the Minister of State developing a different policy? Murrie's view was accepted by E.E.Bridges, the head of the Home Civil Service who bluntly told Milne that the proposal would weaken the Scottish Secretary's position in Cabinet (PRO, T 222/1048c). Westwood refused to accept the advice and pressed in a later draft for the appointment of a Cabinet Committee to consider his request. Bridges was even more alarmed and told Milne he was no more 'enamoured' with the revisions; he did not believe other Ministers would be convinced that the Scottish Secretary's work had significantly increased, or that there was a threat from the Nationalists (PRO, T 222/1048d).

Meanwhile Westwood had received a further letter from the Labour MPs renewing their suggestion for an inquiry into Scottish Administration, which they argued was even more pressing than in 1946. He immediately suspended his draft memorandum on a Minister of State and wrote to Morrison indicating his support and suggested that the Government should appoint 'an independent committee to enquire into the administrative set up in Scotland and to make recommendation as to whether and to what extent further legislative devolution ... is necessary, practical and advisable, whilst retaining the integrity of the United Kingdom' (PRO CAB 124/911d; T 222/1048e).

At first, Morrison did not reply, but the Conservative opposition had sensed a change in the public's mood. Anthony Eden, in a tour of Scotland, paraphrased much of the Covenant's manifesto and suggested that his Party would want 'to reduce Whitehall control' through 'administrative centralisation in Scotland' (**Glasgow Herald** 5 and 23 June 1947). He repeated an earlier Conservative pledge to establish Scottish executive boards for nationalised industries. Shortly afterwards, Lord Elibank, a Conservative Peer, put down a motion in the Lords seeking the Government's intentions. Westwood, alarmed, wrote a further letter and Morrison asked Alec Johnston, his Under-Secretary, for advice. Johnston, another Scot, was even drier in his opposition than Murrie and urged caution (Johnston 1988; **The Times** 20

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September 1944). There was, he said, no 'real demand' for devolution and restated an earlier minute which laid the blame for poor co-ordination on the Scottish departments (PRO, CAB 124/678). Johnston believed that the Scottish Secretary's attempt to involve himself with economic affairs had lessened the Board of Trade's 'sense of responsibility', much to the advantage of the English and Welsh regions. The Scottish departments, he added, lacked the administrative and technical experience to assume responsibility for economic development. Morrison replied to Westwood accepting a statement for the Lords, which left the Government's position open, but refused to support an inquiry. He commented:

I think we should be very cautious about embarking on enquires until we are quite clear in our minds where we want to get to at the end of the day. The whole subject is difficult and arouses great feelings and if we start up enquires without a clear idea of our policy we may be forced into courses of which we strongly disapprove. I feel grave doubt whether any useful purpose will be served by an enquiry into the administration of the socialised industries in relation to Scotland at the present juncture. For better or for worse a framework has been set up and it will not be possible to do anything about that framework until there has been practical experience of its working over a number of years.
(PRO, CAB 124/911e)

Morrison urged Westwood to conduct a 'public relations' exercise to convince the Scots that nationalisation would bring economic development. Somewhat stunned by the letter's tone, Westwood wrote back that he had never 'contemplated an inquiry into Parliamentary devolution, or even the present division of functions between Great Britain Ministers and the Secretary of State', but thought the principal issue surrounded the management of the nationalised boards (PRO, CAB 124/911f).

At the beginning of August the MPs met Westwood and Morrison to discuss their claim, which, they said, had the unanimous support of the Labour backbench. Though neither Minister gave any indication of the Government's response, they did agree to raise the issue at Cabinet (**Glasgow Herald**, 6 August 1947). Nevertheless Morrison felt uneasy with Westwood's position and was further alarmed by letters from the Scottish Convention demanding a meeting with the Prime Minister, and from the STUC stating the case for a Scottish economic planning committee with powers to direct industry (**Glasgow Herald** 9 August 1947; SRO, SOE 1/110a) In a reply to the STUC, Morrison accepted that the decline in Scottish unemployment had been 'disappointing', but rejected the suggestion that the machinery of

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Government was inadequate. In Scotland, he added, the British ministries were headed by a 'senior and responsible officer' with considerable 'authority' to ensure co-ordination (SRO, SOE 1/110b). Meantime, Westwood confounded Morrison by changing his view yet again, arguing that 'nothing less than an independent enquiry' would be satisfactory and asked him to attend another meeting with the MPs (PRO, CAB 124/911g). Morrison, who thought that the Scottish Secretary had lost control of events, reluctantly agreed to attend the meeting, but then told Westwood that his leave would prevent a meeting until mid-October (SRO, SOE 1/110c).

On 7 October Westwood was sacked in Attlee's first major reshuffle of the Cabinet, apparently being told he was 'not up to the job'. Arthur Woodburn, who had earned a reputation as a hard-working Parliamentary Under Secretary at the Ministry of Supply, became Scottish Secretary. Although his appointment had been widely expected, not all commentators were totally convinced that he understood the role of the Scottish Secretary in Cabinet or believed in Tom Johnston's 'non-party' approach to Scottish consultation (**Glasgow Herald** and **The Scotsman** 8 October 1947). In his 1945 election address Woodburn had given only 'qualified' support to Home Rule and in the pre-war years had acquired a profound dislike of the ILP and other pacifist-inclined parties, exactly those who had taken a leading role in establishing the Covenant Movement (**The Scotsman** 2 and 11 October 1939; SRO HH 1/1231a). In fact, he had published and spoken widely on the benefits of nationalisation and central economic planning (Woodburn 1931 and 1948; **The Scotsman** 10 and 15 October 1931). Nevertheless, Woodburn recognised that Labour's post-war programme had disturbed Scottish 'sentiment' and agreed with Attlee that his first priority would be to review the devolution issue for the Cabinet.

Woodburn wasted little time and within a week of taking office dropped the idea of a Minister of State, much to Bridges' pleasure (SRO, HH 1/1231b). Instead he minuted to his officials that the principal issues affecting Scottish opinion were the co-ordination of economic development and the treatment of Scottish business at Westminster. However, he added:

The Labour Party [in Scotland] now puts socialist unity before its feelings, but it can be said without exaggeration that Scots of all Parties are apprehensive of tendencies to absorb independent Scottish institutions in UK bodies and view with suspicion and resentment any reluctance to allow Scottish affairs to be dealt with in Scotland. This feeling is growing and it will thrive in any policy of apparent negation and in my view the urgent and desirable thing to do is to give it a positive lead into legitimate

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developments.
(SRO, HH 1/1231c)

Woodburn suggested the establishment of a Scottish Production Council, under his authority, which would draw in opinion from both public and private industry and act with executive authority to 'stimulate' Scottish enterprise. The Council would assume certain functions exercised by other British departments. Bridges thought this idea and a proposal to allow the Scottish Standing Committee to take the Second Reading of Scottish Bills was worth pursuing, but felt concerned that Woodburn still wanted a fact-finding inquiry (PRO, T 222/1048f; SRO, HH 1/1231d). Alec Johnston's advice to Morrison was more negative; an inquiry, he said, was a 'cover for further concessions' which would 'fan the flames of Scottish Nationalism' (PRO, CAB 124/911h). The Scottish Secretary, Johnston added, had no responsibility for economic affairs and reported that 'a Production Council which is dealt with by a Minister without responsibility would be a focal point for irritation and annoyance'. The proposals were 'dangerously vague'. Milne agreed and tried desperately to persuade Woodburn to abandon the whole idea of an inquiry (SRO, HH 36/92). Woodburn reluctantly accepted that the Council should be constituted as an 'Economic Conference' without any executive authority, but decided to discuss a fact-finding inquiry directly with Morrison.

Morrison agreed to support Woodburn's proposal on the Scottish Standing Committee (the Conservatives had indicated their support), but reminded him that the Government was recovering from the dollar-crisis and was determined to retain Party unity at all costs (PRO, CAB 124/912; **Lords Debates** 23 November 1947). A fact-finding inquiry, Morrison said, would divert scarce civil service resources and would provide a forum for the opposition to attack Labour's programme of nationalisation. There was no evidence of widespread dissatisfaction with the programme, and, in Scotland, Labour MPs and trade unions were amongst those most vociferous in seeking further State investment in Scotland's economic infrastructure. Other ministers took a similar view and Woodburn, with even more reluctance, agreed to redraft his Cabinet memorandum in the light of Morrison's advice (PRO, CAB 129/22).

In January 1948 Woodburn announced the Government's decision in a White Paper: a change in Parliamentary procedures, a Scottish Economic Conference, which would discuss matters of common interest, but not pass resolutions, an internal inquiry into improving administrative procedures and the publication of an annual Report on the Scottish economy (Scottish Affairs, Cmd. 7308; SRO, HH 1/1231e). Political separation, he reported,

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was 'romantic' talk which had little support; the majority of Scots appreciated that living standards depended on free trade between Scotland and England. Woodburn's announcement received a mixed welcome. **The Times** noted that the proposal to extend the work of the Scottish Standing Committee had 'won modest praise' from MPs (**The Times** 30 January 1948). The **Glasgow Herald** expressed satisfaction, particularly over Woodburn's proposed role in 'co-ordinating' the Scottish Economic Conference (**Glasgow Herald** 30 January 1948). **The Scotsman**, by contrast, thought the announcement an 'anti-climax'; there was nothing to suggest he would vigorously promote Scottish interests at Westminster (**The Scotsman** 30 and 31 January 1948). A month later, at a by-election in Paisley, Labour retained the seat with an increased share of the vote. The Conservatives withdrew in favour of MacCormick, who had been nominated by the local Liberals, but fought the election as the 'national' candidate, pledged to restore a 'free economy'. He secured little endorsement from the trade unions, industry or the press, the **Glasgow Herald** commenting that a Scottish Parliament 'would only serve to increase Scotland's difficulties' (**Glasgow Herald** 4 February 1948). **The Scotsman** was similarly reticent, reporting that many 'Unionists' viewed his candidature with 'reserve' (**The Scotsman** 11 February 1948).

What had the events of 1947 demonstrated about British reaction to Scottish devolution? In the area of education, social services and home affairs there was a long tradition of adapting English legislation to Scottish custom and practice (PRO, CAB 87/72). So long as the Union was guaranteed, whether domestic Bills were English Bills with Scottish application clauses, or were introduced separately and considered by the Scottish Grand Committee, was a matter of how best to use Parliamentary time. It was not an issue of great constitutional concern. However, in economic matters, the issue went beyond inter-locking trade and Treasury capital investment. Labour Ministers believed that the failure of the Scots to develop new industry was the result of weak entrepreneurship; too much of Scottish enterprise was oriented towards traditional industry (**Hansard** 29 March 1945). Scotland would have to attract new managerial talent from the Midlands and South-East, aided by the Board of Trade and the nationalised industries. A second element was the belief that British administration was best organised on a centripetal basis where expertise (and efficiency) was gained through specialisation of task; the Treasury thought that further devolution would lead to duplication of effort and greater conflict over policy development (SRO, HH 1/1231f). Parallel administration would undermine the authority of a Cabinet Government based on ministerial responsibility for distinct areas of policy (PRO, CAB 87/5). A third element lay with the untested nature of post-war Government. The British ministries, particularly those that oversaw the

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nationalised industries, appeared to offer much, new investment, more jobs and higher wages. There may well have been a shortage of materials, but there was nothing to suggest any inherent unfairness in regional allocation. At the end of 1947 Woodburn, whatever his original reservation, accepted the logic of Labour's centralised view of planning; the Scots could have further 'autonomy' in the introduction of Bills, but in economic affairs much would depend on the Scottish Secretary's administrative ability to influence and co-ordinate the work of British ministries.

**THE MACHINERY OF GOVERNMENT AND SCOTTISH
'SENTIMENT', 1948-50**

Milne had not been surprised by Whitehall's attitude towards a fact-finding inquiry. A career civil servant, he had acquired a reputation as a cautious and careful administrator who understood the potential for conflict between the Scottish Secretary's role representing the Scottish 'interest' in London and the position of other Ministers. He also understood the fragility of domestic 'sentiment' towards 'incorporation' within the British State. An essential aim of 'the Office of the Secretary of State', he believed, was to maintain a close working relationship with Scottish institutions on the basis of mutual co-operation and trust (Milne 1954; SRO, HH 36/1; **The Times** 5 February 1972). In July 1947, after Westwood suspended his memorandum on a second senior Scottish minister, Milne commissioned a booklet on Scottish Administration, which, he hoped, would enable other departments to appreciate Scottish conditions and the difficulties of administrative co-ordination (SRO, SOE 1/95a). Following an earlier Treasury suggestion he also hoped they would use the opportunity to review the status and authority of their senior officers. Initially the departments resisted Milne's idea, thinking that the range of services provided made it difficult to agree common practice, but, in September, the Treasury accepted that a booklet would provide a reasonable basis for further discussion (SRO, SOE 1/95b). Shortly after the ministerial agreement on Woodburn's proposals, Milne authorised an internal review into departmental co-ordination in Scotland (SRO, SOE 1/95c). The review, which was based on the booklet, noted that there was a considerable diversity of status and responsibility amongst the Scottish heads of British departments (SRO, HH 1/1231g). There was no single officer in charge of the Ministry of Transport. The same applied to the Board of Trade and Ministry of Supply. According to the review, only the Ministry of Works, which was headed by an Under-Secretary, combined the 'widest measure of delegated power' with the ability to speak 'authoritatively' in the formulation of policy. However, the civil servants also reviewed the division of

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responsibility between the Secretary of State and other Ministers and suggested that the historical development of the division was 'neither wholly logical or necessarily right'. It recommended that the appointment of an additional parliamentary under-secretary might assist in ensuring a greater degree of administrative co-ordination without loss of efficiency.

The Scottish review contrasted with Morrison's assurances to the STUC and in March 1948 Milne wrote to Bridges arguing that there were grounds for discussing the matter with other British ministries, particularly those that dealt with trade and industry (SRO, SOE 1/110d). Bridges accepted that Milne had prepared a strong case and authorised him to approach the ministries, though he was not prepared to concede an independent inquiry (PRO, T 222/1048g). Milne subsequently wrote and outlined his view that some measure of reorganisation was necessary. He believed that an element of parallel administration in economic affairs would do much to re-assure the public of the Government's commitment to the Scottish economy and added:

So long as there is due regard for Scottish history and the traditional right to be treated as a separate country, it can be assumed that the great majority of the people will realise that Scottish interests are inseparable from the interests of Great Britain as a whole, and the [separatist] factions would not gain ground.

(SRO, SOE 1/110e)

The response of the ministries was not particularly favourable. The Ministry of Labour remained adamant that there was no 'failure' in administrative co-ordination and suggested that, if the Scottish Secretary pressed for the upgrading of responsibility, the same would have to occur in Wales, which the Government had previously rejected. The Ministry of Transport adopted a similar position. The Board of Trade's response was, perhaps, the most hostile, arguing that Scottish development depended on 'close central control' to ensure that English industrialists remained aware of Scottish opportunities (SRO, SOE 1/110f). Public opinion, the Board argued, strongly supported its involvement in attracting English industry. In December Milne met senior officials from the Board, the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Works, but the resistance, if anything, had strengthened. They thought that it would be difficult for an additional Scottish Parliamentary Under-Secretary to 'supervise' the work of the 'major' departments without conflict over policy.

In January 1949 Woodburn accepted that there was little point in pursuing the issue and withdrew support for an additional Under-Secretary. His lack of interest probably reflected the success of his administration in other fields. Government expenditure on Scottish housing, the health service, hydro-

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electricity and the coalfields reached record levels and surpassed the 'Goschen' line adopted unofficially by Scottish civil servants to judge investment between Scotland and England. Much of this was attributed to the work of Scottish officials attending inter-departmental committees in London and pressing Scotland's difficulty in improving the economy and the quality of life (PRO, T 222/324). Nevertheless a substantial body of Scottish opinion remained unhappy with Scottish economic development. In July 1948 the Conservatives initiated the first debate on Scotland's trade and industry since 1942 and drew attention to the lack of investment in the traditional industries, particularly steel (**Hansard** 21 July 1948). The Conservatives returned to the attack the following year and complained bitterly that Scottish unemployment remained twice the level of England's, despite central economic planning (**Hansard** 7 July 1949). In civil aviation, the apparent lack of a decision on extending Prestwick airport led to an angry exchange between the Scottish Chamber of Commerce and the Ministry of Civil Aviation which the press said had failed to appreciate Prestwick's unique benefit to the Scottish economy (**The Scotsman** 2 July 1949; SRO, DD 17/18/1).

By early 1949 the Covenant Movement had recovered from the Paisley defeat and accepted that in future its success would depend less on the support of Scottish institutions than on its mass appeal in undermining the Government's position. In March its leadership wrote to Woodburn announcing that a plebiscite in the small Angus town of Kirriemuir had demonstrated overwhelming support for legislative devolution and asked the Government to conduct a referendum on the issue at the next election (PRO, CAB 124/61a). Woodburn, after consulting Morrison, rejected the idea and pointed out that there was no constitutional authority for Parliament to accept a plebiscite decision (SRO, HH 1/810a). Undaunted the Movement announced other plebiscites and then in the Autumn a campaign to gather public signatures for a pro-devolution covenant. In July Scottish Labour MPs became alarmed at the Movement's apparent growing appeal and urged Woodburn to reconsider a fact-finding inquiry on Scottish Administration (SRO HH 1/1231h). Woodburn rejected an inquiry for much the same reason as in 1947 and was supported by Morrison who advised Labour MPs against attending the Covenant's National Assembly, planned for October (PRO CAB 124/61b). In November the Conservatives forced an adjournment debate on devolution and announced their long awaited Scottish plan, an increase in Ministerial strength (including a Minister of State), the establishment of Scottish Boards of Nationalised Industries (where 'practicable') and the appointment of a Royal Commission into Scottish Affairs (**The Scotsman** 29 November 1949).

Milne was aghast at the turn of events and like Morrison saw that the Covenant Movement appeared much stronger than in 1947 (PRO, T

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222/1048h). Although he was less concerned than Morrison with the degree of support given by the press, Milne appreciated the psychological impact a mass petition might have on de-stabilising Scottish institutional opinion (PRO, CAB 134/60a; SRO, HH 1/810b). Milne was also concerned over the centrifugal nature of the Movement's leadership, with members drawn from the Liberals, the Communists and Nationalist groups. The political philosophy of National Liberalism, based on 'self-determination' and market economics had been decisively defeated at Paisley. The Nationalists, Milne knew, had skirted between pacifism and more volatile forms of opposition (SRO, HH 41/1390; 55/557-8). The Communist Party, for their part, openly advocated a Scottish Republic allied to Moscow, and 'allied' meant controlled (SRO, HH 41/454a).

Woodburn agreed with Milne and decided to adopt a robust attitude towards the Movement. At the Scottish Labour Party's Annual Conference a motion in favour of an inquiry was overwhelmingly defeated (**Glasgow Herald** 24 October 1949). His second attack occurred the following week after the Convention's 'National Assembly' had met and unanimously agreed to present the pro-devolution petition to the Government. Woodburn, in a press statement, noted that the Assembly had contained few representatives of Scottish 'economic life' and warned that political separation would ultimately increase distrust between England and Scotland (**Glasgow Herald** 31 October 1949). Then, after consulting Morrison on the need to prevent devolution becoming an election issue, he turned his attention to the Conservatives (PRO CAB 124/61c). Both Ministers knew that the Party had been unhappy at their past association with MacCormick (Mitchell 1990). During the adjournment debate he criticised the Conservatives for tacitly supporting an 'emotional' movement at a time of 'a grave international crisis' (**Hansard** 16 November 1949). (The Soviet Union had just exploded its first atomic bomb.) Woodburn claimed that the Movement had been infiltrated by 'extremists' who had advocated terrorism and 'the blocking of free trade between Scotland and England'. He did not name MacCormick directly but hinted that a speech he made on the frustrations of the Movement occurred at the same time as an attempted bombing campaign by a group called the 'Young Scots' (**The Scotsman** 6 October 1947 and 8 June 1948). The speech startled MPs and although Woodburn was widely condemned for 'intemperate' language against a Movement headed, amongst others, by the Dean of the Faculty of Advocates and the Professor of Law at Glasgow University, the Conservatives remained wary (**The Scotsman** 17 November 1949; SRO, HH 1/811a). In reply Walter Elliot, the former Conservative Secretary of State, criticised Labour's 'blind' acceptance of centralisation and its failure to integrate Scottish 'sentiment' into the machinery of government,

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but then agreed that the principal 'danger' lay with economic 'fragmentation', an aim that 'only the most extreme would desire'. A few weeks later Elliot reiterated his position and stated that although he agreed that the Movement was right-wing, 'its views were not those the Conservatives could share' (**The Times** 31 December 1949).

Elsewhere 'informed' opinion began to clarify its attitude and distance itself from the Movement. **The Times** welcomed the Conservatives' Scottish plan, but noted that a substantial body of opinion, especially in the central industrial belt, remained opposed to devolution (**The Times** 29 November 1949). The **Glasgow Herald**, which had similarly welcomed the proposals, restated Woodburn's concern over Britain's economic position and then argued that a single issue referendum could not accurately gauge public opinion in isolation from other issues (**Glasgow Herald** 29 November 1949 and 6 January 1950). It felt the political inspiration of the Covenant came from the Irish Republic, not Ulster, with its strong history of anti-English sentiment, a view echoed by some Scottish civil servants (**Glasgow Herald** 30 December 1949; SRO, HH 41/454a). Shortly afterwards the paper published a series of articles outlining the 'facts' of Scotland's economic life (a lower national income) and the extent of Treasury subvention (**Glasgow Herald** 2-6 February 1950). The BBC broadcast an evening talk detailing the Covenant's proposals and its scheme of finance (SRO, HH 1/811b). At the same time the Scottish Miners' Union voiced its concern over the Conservatives' proposals for an autonomous Scottish Coal Board, which it felt might lose access to English markets (PRO, CAB 134/691). In January Lord Clydesmuir, a Conservative ex-Scottish Secretary, accepted an invitation from Woodburn to chair an inquiry into Prestwick airport and the Scottish Council (Development and Industry) endorsed the development of industrial estates, commenting that inward investment had created over 100,000 jobs since the War (**The Scotsman** 24 January 1950).

In mid-January the Government called a General Election and the Covenant leadership decided not to field candidates of its own. (Officially the Movement was 'non-political'.) The Election, which had reduced Labour's majority to five, led many in the press to believe that the Government would need to become more 'flexible' and respond more positively to public opinion (**Glasgow Herald** 25 February 1950; **The Times** 25 February 1950). Four days later, Woodburn was sacked and replaced as Scottish Secretary by Hector McNeil, the Minister of State at the Foreign Office. As an ex-journalist he was thought good at 'handling' the press. (Privately Woodburn was incensed and believed that he had been made the 'scapegoat' for a position agreed with Morrison.)

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In Scotland the general acceptance of the Government's view of the Movement by 'informed' opinion brought Milne relief, but he sensed the need to change tactics. The press, in particular, thought that Woodburn's approach was too 'negative'. Milne advised McNeil that an inquiry into Anglo-Scottish finances would restore confidence that the existing 'administrative and political set-up' could respond to Scottish issues (SRO, HH 41/454b; **The Scotsman** 25 January 1950; **Glasgow Herald** 27 February 1950). The inquiry which would almost certainly take at least a year to prepare, would deflect attention from the Movement's campaign to a more 'rational' discussion of Scotland's economic development (SRO, HH 1/811c). McNeil agreed that some gesture was necessary and approached Sir Stafford Cripps, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, for his support in Cabinet. (The Chancellor's support was essential as the return involved information held by the Treasury.) Cripps, however, continued to oppose an inquiry, partly because he believed there were methodological problems in disaggregating Scotland's trade and finances from England's, but also because he thought its results would not satisfy Scottish opinion. McNeil refused to accept either objection and wrote:

The vast majority of Scottish people have always had a traditional respect for facts and if the enquiry displayed as I think no doubt it will display that the Scottish people were not being unfairly and perhaps even generously treated that would meet a great deal of the criticism. It is not the extremists in Scotland who worry and embarrass us, it is the impression among the population which the extremists have to some degree created precisely because there was a lack of information.
(SRO, HH 41/454c)

Cripps re-affirmed his opposition, but McNeil wrote again and insisted that it was important to support and use 'moderate opinion' to deflate the Movement's popular appeal (SRO, HH 41/454d). The broad anti-Covenant 'coalition' that had developed, McNeil noted, formed many of the major Scottish institutions and included those in the media, the STUC, the SC(DI), the Chambers of Commerce and Edinburgh and Glasgow City Councils (**The Scotsman** 5 April 1950, 24 April 1950 and 10 May 1950). (The STUC accepted that nationalisation had improved wage levels and increased the level of British investment in Scotland's infrastructure. Edinburgh's Lord Provost was particularly concerned to maintain the high level of investment in education and social services.) Cripps reluctantly agreed that McNeil's argument had validity, but suggested an inquiry into the practicability of producing a return on Anglo-Scottish finance and trade (SRO, HH 41/1389; PRO, CAB 124/60b). (It would involve less civil service time.) McNeil, who

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sensed that the Conservatives would not press a further Parliamentary debate (they had barely discussed devolution during the Election), accepted the compromise (**Hansard** 25 May 1950; **The Scotsman** 20 May 1950).

How can the issues raised between Woodburn's White Paper and the announcement of the inquiry be assessed? Milne's problem in pressing administrative devolution was principally two-fold. First, the other Whitehall departments felt comfortable with their administrative structure and saw little necessity to introduce an element of parallel administration. The function of the 'Office of the Secretary of State' (the Scottish Office) was to ensure that major issues concerning the Scottish 'interest' were heard in London and that those interests understood the British view. The involvement of the Scottish departments in the implementation of economic policy heightened a sense that British ministries failed to appreciate Scottish conditions and confused the public as to authority. Second, they identified a body of Scottish opinion that wanted British rather than Scottish Administration; the latter implied detachment from Whitehall, the City of London and the centre of international trade. A senior minister resident in Scotland with responsibility for economic affairs might find himself removed from the formulation of commercial policy and become the focal point of nationalist opinion (PRO, T 222/1048i; SRO, HH 41/454e).

Milne's other difficulty lay in crossing the boundary between enhancing Government efficiency (however defined) and sustaining a set of values which underpinned separatism. Historically the London-based Scottish Office represented 'rationality', the counter-weight to centrifugal sentiment. Milne, like others, saw the demand for political devolution only on the surface of opinion, unless or until the electorate's 'faith' in the existing machinery of government evaporated. Woodburn's assault on the Covenant Movement, the disengagement of the press and the Conservatives' tacit support of its demolition, served only to underline deep counter-veiling emotions within Scotland. Any concession towards the Movement was regarded as encouraging parochial thought and the Jacobite tradition, a desire for self-expression whatever the cost to public order. Woodburn, the SC(DI) and the miners may have feared the loss of Treasury investment, but to Milne and many other civil servants, the issue centred on a rational appreciation that the Union had freed the Scottish mind from the issue of nationhood and liberated a different kind of enterprise. In 1949, when the Movement appeared on the threshold of significant advance, the British political and administrative establishment moved, almost in tandem, to deflate its legitimacy and destroy its popular support. As one witness to the events reported, power and influence lay in Whitehall and 'the Corporate State'. The alternative was to be left 'chappin at the door'.

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- SRO, HH 1/811b. A. Hetherington, 'Does Scotland Need a Parliament?', 8 December 1949. The talk was subsequently published in booklet form. Hetherington was on the editorial staff of the **Glasgow Herald**.
- SRO, HH 1/811c. Milne had received a report from the Scottish Home Department which confirmed the view that Government expenditure in Scotland exceeded tax revenue, minute, 24 January 1950.
- SRO, HH 1/1231a. Minute, Scottish Home Department, 25 October 1949.
- SRO, HH 1/1231b. Minute, Milne, 17 October 1947.
- SRO, HH 1/1231c. Minute, October 1947.
- SRO, HH 1/1231d. Scottish officials were less keen in the change of procedures, arguing that it might 'lessen English interest in Scottish affairs'; minute, R.N. Duke, Secretary of the Scottish Home Department, 29 October 1947. He took early retirement in December and became chairman of the South-East Scotland Electricity Board.
- SRO, HH 1/1231e. Minute, A. Johnston, 20 Dec, 1947. The Cabinet had agreed the proposals on 11th December, but decided to delay the announcement until Woodburn had secured the support of Labour MPs, the STUC and business organisations. A meeting with MacCormick was arranged out of courtesy, but Woodburn was instructed not to appear as if he was 'negotiating'.
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- SRO, HH 41/454e. Scottish Office briefing, 8 March 1950.
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