

SCOTTISH DEMOCRACY AND SCOTTISH UTOPIAS: THE FIRST YEAR OF THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

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INTRODUCTION

In his poem 'A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle', Hugh MacDiarmid likens the aftermath of the General Strike in 1926 to the dullness of a spent firework:

The thistle like a rocket soared
And cam doon like the stick.¹

Scotland has often been characterised as a land of lost dreams - of revolutionary utopianism ground down into disappointment. Many commentators in the last few months have interpreted the first year of the Scottish Parliament as another such experience. They point to the enormously high expectations that people had at the time of the referendum just three years ago in September 1997, voting overwhelmingly to set the Parliament up.² They remember that, as the first elections approached in May 1999, the Parliament seemed to be acquiring epochal significance - a revolution that would give Scotland its first government for three centuries, and its first taste of real democracy ever.

And then the current lamentations note the readiness of people to tell more recent social surveys that the Parliament has not made much of an impact:

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¹ Lines 1181-2 in 'A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle', Buthlay, K. (ed.) (1987) Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press.

² Brown, A., McCrone, D., Paterson, L. and Surridge, P. (1999), **The Scottish Electorate**, London: Macmillan.

one for BBC Scotland on the first anniversary of the elections found a third of people rating the Parliament's performance as 'poor' and only a quarter rating it as 'good'.¹ These surveys have provoked a jamboree of jeremiads in the press. The normally level-headed Iain MacWhirter has even suggested that the Parliament is a second Darien Disaster in the making,² referring to that other utopian dream in the 1690s where Scotland's attempts to establish a trading colony in Central America collapsed, leading more or less directly to the Parliamentary Union with England in 1707. And Cardinal Thomas Winning famously derided the Parliament as 'an utter failure'.³

Intermingled with this story of fallen dreams is a similarly intense sense of disappointment with the Labour Party: the Scottish Election Surveys of 1997 and 1999 found that, between the UK and Scottish general elections of these years, the proportion of people in Scotland believing that New Labour acts in the interests of the working class had fallen from 90% to 51%, and that the proportion believing that the party acts in Scotland's interests had fallen from 68% to 40%.⁴ It's only because of the optimism engendered by the Parliament project that we have partly forgotten the sense of a bright new dawn in the early hours of 2 May 1997. In Scotland, these two things are inextricable: the future of social democracy and the future of the constitution have become inseparable in the last thirty years. So when people tell pollsters that they are disappointed with the Parliament they are not mainly making a comment on its style of debate or its consultation procedures: they are expressing their feeling that the optimism on reforming policy has not been fulfilled.

My purpose in this article is to analyse this disappointment. Was it inevitable? Could a merely home rule Parliament ever have lived up to the expectations that were heaped onto it? What are the consequences of disappointment? And how do the answers to these constitutional questions relate to the parallel question of the future of social democracy, Scotland's dominant ideology?

¹ *System 3 poll for BBC Scotland, 27 April - 2 May, sample size 999.*

² *The Sunday Herald*, 2 July 2000.

³ *Guardian*, 2 June 2000.

⁴ *Scottish Election Survey 1997 and Scottish Soci!! Attitudes Survey 1999.*

THE OLD UNION

I'm going to start by examining some features of the old Union - not the caricature it eventually became under the governments of Margaret Thatcher and John Major, but what it was still achieving when it last commanded popular legitimacy - the period between 1945 and the 1970s, with a residue lasting into the 1980s. What is it that the Parliament is supposed to be replacing? I want to ask this historical question because to understand the recent expectations and apparent disappointment we have to understand what went before.

First some general points about the way in which the Union operated from 1707 until fairly recently.¹ The Union was partial: it did not take away from Scotland any of the major institutions of civic life, notably the church, the legal system and the system of local government. It was an amalgamation of Parliaments and little else. That then established the precedent that what we would now call social policy would be debated and made in Scotland by Scottish agencies.

Because of that, the Union allowed a distinctive Scottish social ethic to flourish. This started as the sense of social responsibility that was a product of moralising presbyterianism. It moved through the socially responsible Victorian liberalism which Scotland espoused enthusiastically, even while also embracing free trade and imperialism. And it culminated in the consensual ground of 'middle opinion' in the 1930s, laying the basis for the Scottish acceptance of the welfare state. Scotland has always had its own manner of debating social policy and its own way of accepting international political currents.

Paradoxically, the Union also depended, however, on nationalist pressure. All these protected civic institutions and social spaces managed to maintain their semi-autonomy through nationalism - not because of the enlightened good will of the UK State, but because Scots have recurrently asserted their separateness and have reminded the English that the Union is supposed to be

¹ See, for example, Fry, M. (1987) *Patronage and Principle*, Aberdeen University Press; Harvie, C. (1981) *No Gods and Precious Few Heroes*, London: Edward Arnold; Keating, M. (1996), *Nations Against the State*, London: Macmillan; Kellas, J. (1984) *The Scottish Political System*, Cambridge University Press; McCrone, D. (1992), *Understanding Scotland*, London: Routledge; Nairn, T. (1981), *The Break-Up of Britain*, London: Verso; Paterson, L. (1994), *The Autonomy of Modern Scotland*, Edinburgh University Press.

a union and not an absorption of Scotland into England. Each wave of nationalist assertion managed to maintain a sufficient autonomy and a sufficiently distinctive ideology not only to satisfy that particular nationalist phase temporarily but also to provide the grounds on which the next wave of nationalism would thrive.

One example of this process can illustrate it. The setting up of the British welfare state from the 1920s to the 1940s did provoke suspicion in Scotland that powers would be centralised in London. The suspicion surfaced in the 1930s in such cultural bodies as the Saltire Society, the Scottish Youth Hostels Association and the National Trust for Scotland. It appeared in wartime in the Scottish Office under Labour's Tom Johnston, who abandoned his commitment to home rule in return for gaining the freedom to pursue distinctively Scottish domestic policies. And the nationalism reached a public climax in the national covenant of 1949, attracting about 2 million signatures to a petition for home rule. It all then subsided, but it left a more autonomous Scottish welfare state than might otherwise have been. It therefore also left a distinctive Scottish debate about welfare, which in the 1980s became the basis for a new Scottish nationalism - the now familiar claim that Scotland did not share the New Right preferences of Margaret Thatcher.

What kind of Union did this semi-independence create? Three features help us to understand the hopes for what the Parliament might now achieve. The first was a complex process of consultation on policy by which the Scottish Office remained embedded in Scottish civil society¹. This was the Scottish instance of political pluralism - the governing of welfare states by means of negotiation between the state and organised interests groups. Policies were regarded as legitimate only if the due process of consultation had been followed. The network of people who engage in these negotiations has been called the policy community.

A couple of examples can illustrate that. One is the process which led to the 1968 Social Work (Scotland) Act, a quite visionary piece of legislation that established, among other things, the Children's Hearings system by which all but the most serious offences by young people in Scotland are treated as a

¹ pp. 71-97 in Midwinter, A., Keating, M. and Mitchell, J. (1991), *Politics and Public Policy in Scotland*, London: Macmillan; pp. 97-123 in Brown, A., McCrone, D. and Paterson, L. (1998), *Politics and Society in Scotland*, London: Macmillan.

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matter of child welfare rather than of criminal justice.¹ The legislation followed closely the report of a committee chaired by Lord Kilbrandon. The committee consulted widely with relevant professional bodies, and with local government, and presented a well-argued case for child-centred welfare, drawing on progressive international ideas, especially from Scandinavia. There was very little direct political involvement. Willie Ross, Labour Secretary of State, and his deputy Judith Hart were keen proponents of the measure, and wanted as little partisan interference as possible. By and large the lawyers had been placated, unlike in England where the magistrates resisted similar proposals to remove their jurisdiction over children. So the legislation that laid the basis of Scottish social work for a third of a century was achieved by consensus arising out of thorough consultation and by avoiding the partisan strife that is, nowadays, supposed to mar the policy process at Westminster.

Another example is in vocational training, and shows that the old pluralism was still working tolerably well even after Margaret Thatcher had come to power. It concerns the introduction of new certificates of vocational education in the mid-1980s.² Thatcher, and her adviser David Young, were enthusiastic about this, and they intended to use the Manpower Services Commission to achieve it, by-passing the government education departments which they regarded as unacceptably cautious. This provoked suspicion in Scotland, not only because the Scottish Education Department was held in much higher regard than the Department of Education and Science was in England, but also because any direct intervention in Scottish education by a body based in Sheffield threatened the autonomy of the whole system. The lead in the Scottish resistance was taken by the schools inspectorate, who managed to postpone by a year until 1984 the introduction into Scotland of the MSC's flagship programme, the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative. Working closely with representatives of the local authorities, the teachers, the lecturers in further education colleges and employers, the inspectorate developed in that short period of time an entire new Scottish qualifications framework which the MSC's programme then had no option but to fit into. The framework remained with us until this year, in the current reform of all post-16 qualifications. Thus was the pluralism of the policy

¹ Murphy, J. (1992), *British Social Services: the Scottish Dimension*, Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press.

² Fairley, J. and Paterson, L. (1991), 'The reform of vocational education and training in Scotland', *Scottish Educational Review*, 23, 68-77.

community used by civil servants to achieve swift, effective and consensual change.

So that was Scottish unionist pluralism when it was working. One of the things it achieved at its best was joined-up government, a daft phrase for a concept which is more intelligently referred to as coherent government - the second feature of the old Union which I want to mention. Listening to think-tanks and government ministers these days, you'd readily conclude that seeing connections among disparate policy areas was an invention of Blairism. In fact, it has been around at least since the advent of the welfare state. We had it in Scotland in the 1930s, when the Special Areas Commissioner sought to counteract the effects of industrial decline by promoting industry and social renewal in the old manufacturing districts. We had it in the vogue for planning in the post-war period, when the whole point of things like the Clyde Valley Regional Plan was to see the problems of the region as a whole. We had it in the development of public health in Scotland from the late nineteenth century. For example, here is the 1936 view of a coherent public health education policy that was expressed by a committee chaired by Professor Edward Cathcart:

No great improvement can be expected in the general health of the nation unless an organised attempt is made to convince each person of the necessity of observing fundamental rules and of developing such habits, attitudes, and ideals as will promote physical, mental and emotional well-being.¹

Links among 'physical, mental and emotional well-being' also underpinned the child-centred ideas that grew to dominate educational policy by the 1960s, reaching their apogee in the relatively successful and popular Scottish system of comprehensive secondary schools - a policy entirely based on the premise that educational success and failure cannot be understood only in educational terms, but must be related to the social and economic circumstances faced by children. From that same time, too, we have the internationally respected Scottish system of community education, linking education, youth work and community development in an attempt to regenerate whole communities, enabling them to take responsibility for their

¹ p. 106 in *Department of Health for Scotland (1936), Committee on Scottish Health Services Report*, Cmd. 5204, Edinburgh, quoted on p. 311 of Wilson, S. (1987), 'The public health services', in McLachlan, G. (ed.) *Improving the Common Weal: Aspects of Scottish Health Services 1900-1984*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp. 279-321.

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own lives. (It should be mentioned in passing that the unsung heroes of the entire movement for self government in Scotland are in the network of community educators, imbued with linked ideas on culture, politics and radical political action.¹) And - an example that appears to have been completely forgotten by fashionable policy advisers - we had coherent government par excellence in the Highlands and Islands, in the social remit of the old North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board, and then in the Highlands and Islands Development Board after 1965. So many are the examples of coherent government from when the Union was working well that it is plausible to link this with the pluralism of the policy networks and the overlapping membership of the consultative committees. Far from coherent government's being absent, it was actually the thing which this old social democratic pluralism at its best did most effectively.

Then - the third feature of the old Union - this pluralistic policy process and unified approach to social policy also yielded some striking divergences in outcome between Scotland and the rest of the UK. I've mentioned some already - for example, the flexible system of vocational qualifications which emerged after 1984, the system of Children's Hearings, the generally successful Scottish comprehensive secondary schools. Others could be mentioned, both successful and less so. The inherited framework of academic school qualifications survived attempts in the 1940s and 1960s to merge it with the English A-level system, and then came to be more highly regarded than it. Its eventual reform now owes more to wider European models - notably in Denmark - than to anything that is being seriously attempted in England, although there is a distinct possibility that Wales may go even further in the direction of a baccalaureate-style examination; the fiasco surrounding the reform does raise other issues, to which I'll return, but the main point here is about the Scottishness of the qualifications system in the old Union. Scottish housing policy has been distinctive for a very long time, and had a great deal to its credit in its programme of slum clearance from the 1940s onwards; only in the last three decades has it come to be seen as a failure.

So the old Union, when working at its most effective, consulted widely, tried to link different areas of social policy together, and brought into being some of the most distinctive features of current Scottish life. That is what Scottish

¹ Crowther, J., Martin, I. and Shaw, M. (1999). *Popular Education and Social Movements in Scotland Today*. Leicester: National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education.

social democratic unionism amounted to, and it is a signal achievement. And I think, therefore, that we mustn't underestimate the extent to which the project for Scottish home rule has been conditioned by a memory of this experience. Probably recollection of how it all used to work well was the main background reason why so many people voted against a Scottish Assembly in the 1979 referendum. When the Conservative governments then began to move away from consultation, from permitting Scottish distinctiveness and from the coherent approach to social policy that Scottish social democracy had adopted as its own, a memory of its successes became a leitmotiv of the campaign for home rule. Hence the theme of limited sovereignty, of consultation, of coherent government that runs through the Claim of Right of 1988, the report of the Constitutional Convention in 1995, the UK government's white paper that was endorsed in the referendum of 1997, and the 1998 report of the Consultative Steering Group which established the standing orders and working practices of the Parliament we now have.

THE NEW UNION

Returning Scotland to the best instances of the old Union may well be worth while, but it hardly amounts to a revolution, and certainly not to the sort of historically momentous change which is implied by all those descriptions of the Parliament as the best opportunity which Scotland has had for three centuries. No wonder there is a sense of disappointment: 'back to the 1950s', which is what we are realistically talking about with a merely domestic legislature, is not a slogan inspired by millennial dreams.

Let's look again at the three aspects of policy making which I've just described from the old Union, and ask whether the Parliament is making a difference. Consultation is enshrined in its founding principles, and certainly the committees have been going about this with relish, and frequently with considerable effect. The report of the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee on local economic development is admired as a model of how to consult. The petitions committee gave a highly visible platform to the campaigners for a restoration of the rail line to the Borders. And the Justice committee provided the basis in consultation for the most spectacular moment so far in the parliamentary chamber: the defeat of the Executive over the Scottish Socialist Party's Bill to reform the procedures by which debts are recovered from the poor.

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It's not just the Parliamentary committees. There are also the specialist committees set up to advise on particular aspects of policy, notably the committee chaired by Andrew Cubie on student finance. Its consultative process is also admired as a model, yielding a consensus for a radical new scheme to widen access. And there are the generally fairly thorough consultations that have been inaugurated by the Scottish government itself, for example on what is now the Education Act.

This is all a great change from the days when Tory Secretaries of State such as Ian Lang and Michael Forsyth would announce that national testing in primary schools would be legislated for before any public consultation had happened at all, or would announce a specious consultation on their proposed fundamental reform of local government and then ignore or distort majority opinion on almost all significant aspects of it.¹ But it's not much of a change from the days of the old and functioning Union.

Similar comments can be made about coherent government. The Scottish government's New Community Schools bring together a range of welfare service to help children to learn. But they're new only insofar as the social problems of poverty are very different from those in the 1960s or earlier. Seeing the barriers to children's learning as a social problem, and not merely an educational one, is, as I mentioned, at least as old as the old social democracy of the welfare state. The Scottish government's strategy for ending poverty - the creature of Wendy Alexander, minister for communities - is also a significant change from the ignoring of poverty that characterised most of the previous two decades, but it merely re-establishes the type of concerns that dominated welfare policy for six or seven decades before that. The re-emergence of interest in public health challenges eighteen years of refusing to accept that there are social factors involved in the patterns of ill-health, and challenges also the dominance of health policy by medical practitioners; but - as I have mentioned - it is not at all a new idea, and was lost only with the removal of the public health function from local authorities in the early 1970s.² The 1936 Cathcart committee's goal of promoting physical, mental and emotional well-being sounds very like the holistic

¹ McCrone, D., Paterson, L. and Brown, A. (1993), 'Reforming local government in Scotland', *Local Government Studies*, 19, 9-15.

² Public Health Function Review Steering Group (1999), *Review of the Public Health Function*, Edinburgh: Scottish Executive; Scottish Office (1999), *Towards a Healthier Scotland*, Edinburgh: Scottish Office.

approach to health education advocated in 1999 by the report of a committee chaired by the current Chief Medical Officer for Scotland, Sir David Carter.

And if none of this attempted coherence would surprise an old social democrat such as John P. Mackintosh, Willie Ross or Tom Johnston, it might actually rather disappoint them, insofar as it says nothing about altering the balance of social power, reconstructing the entire social edifice as social reformers such as T. H. Marshall used to put it.¹ New Labour has abandoned old social democracy's doubts about capitalism, and it rejects the notion that some people have to give up some of their wealth and power if the majority are to gain any. For example, the recent report on poverty from the Labour-dominated Scottish Affairs committee at Westminster rejected the large quantity of evidence they received that you can't make much impact on poverty unless you create new - and better quality - jobs. The committee did not even mention a role for wealth redistribution, and broadly agreed with Wendy Alexander's evidence when they concluded that 'providing people with appropriate skills for available jobs was the way forward'.² So the new coherence is relative - relative to the fragmented years between the 1970s and the 1990s, but distinctly patchy compared to the determined social democratic ideology of the founding thinkers of the welfare state.

Nevertheless, this return to consultation, and partial return to coherent government, is also then returning us to the third aspect of the old Union which I mentioned - distinctive Scottish social policies. Student finance is the most visible. From this autumn, students from Scotland are not paying fees to take Scottish higher education courses, whereas students from the rest of the UK are. From next autumn, there will be rather more generous grants available to Scottish students from poor families than to similar social groups in the rest of the UK, and this will be paid for by what will, in effect, be a redistributive graduate tax. That is all highly distinctive.

Another distinction is actually over the matter which provoked the Cardinal's ire. Wendy Alexander may not have been at her most adept in her initial handling of the proposed repeal of the law which banned local authorities from 'promoting' homosexual relationships as an acceptable type of family, and appears to have been entirely oblivious in advance to the storm of protest

¹ Marshall, T.H. (1950), *Citizenship and Social Class, and Other Essays*, Cambridge University Press.

² Paragraph 168 in *Scottish Affairs Committee of the UK Parliament (2000), Poverty in Scotland*, London: UK Parliament, 19 July.

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it would raise, particularly in its implications for teaching about sexuality in local authority schools. But the furor during last winter can be cited, rather perversely perhaps, as another instance of public consultation that would not have happened without the Parliament: it was certainly more thorough than anything which took place when the law was introduced by the Thatcher government in the first place. The outcome leaves Scotland in a highly distinctive position, and is something for which Ms Alexander can take considerable credit. We have repealed this legislation, which has not happened in England and Wales, and we have a new set of guidelines on sex education that are significantly more liberal than those which govern the subject in England. For example, in Scotland marriage is to be treated as no more than an important example of a stable family relationship.¹ In England, it is 'a building block of community and society'.² In Scotland, there are four long paragraphs on how teachers can deal sensitively with teenagers' incipient homosexuality, the emphasis being on teachers' encouraging them to understand their feelings and the social implications of them.³ In England, the brief paragraph on homosexuality is set alongside a requirement by schools to pay attention to the views of parents.⁴ Although there are some other respects in which the English guidelines are more detailed - for example, on the provision of contraceptive advice - the Scottish version is distinctly more liberal. And the point to emphasise is that all this is now consensually accepted in Scotland, despite the fuss last winter. Or maybe it's because of the fuss: maybe that catharsis has allowed us to move on.

Other examples of an emerging new Scottish distinctiveness can be given: the proposals for a stronger Freedom of Information Act in Scotland than in the rest of the UK, the proposed new and more open system of appointing Scottish judges, the greater attention to children's rights in the recently passed Education Act, and the preference for public over private solutions across most (though not all) areas of social policy. Nevertheless, important though

¹ Paragraph 4.2 in *Scottish Executive (2000), Report of Working Group on Sex Education in Schools*, Edinburgh: Scottish Executive, 16 June.

² Paragraph 1.21 in *Department for Education and Employment (2000), Sex and Relationship Education Guidance: Draft for Consultation*, London: DfEE, 16 March.

³ Paragraphs 5.26 and 5.29 in *Scottish Executive (2000), Report of Working Group on Sex Education in Schools*, Edinburgh: Scottish Executive, 16 June.

⁴ Paragraphs 1.30 and 1.31 in *Department for Education and Employment (2000), Sex and Relationship Education Guidance: Draft for Consultation*, London: DfEE, 16 March.

these features of the new Scottish social policy are, they are not more distinctive than the kinds of policy from the old Union which I outlined earlier. The old child-centred principle inherent in the system of Children's Hearings is not less distinctive than the new sex-education guidelines or the rather minimal requirement that schools consult students on school policy. The Scottish system of comprehensive schools is not less distinctive than the approach to equal opportunities embodied in the report of the Cubie committee. And the preference for public solutions is a Scottish practice dating back right through the Union to the Reformation.

Perhaps all this says is that the scope for a small nation to be distinctive is always restricted to variations on common themes, whatever the governing system. That, after all, is the normal conclusion from any analysis of how federal systems of government have actually operated over the last half century or so. As one writer says of the USA since the New Deal: 'since the 1930s, the federal government has been the planner, provisioner and primary entrepreneur in domestic policy.'¹ The scope for deviation from that common pattern has been in the details of implementation.

And I must emphasise again that, if a return to the old pluralism of the old Union is the best that the Parliament can achieve, then that is certainly not insignificant. Renewing Scottish pluralism would be no mean achievement, after the centralism and atrophy of consultation which happened in the Tory years. If the consultation processes provoke Scottish civic institutions to develop their own policy-making capacity, that too will be an important development: that will help to ensure that innovative ideas about policy are not the preserve of civil servants and ministers. Again, though, this would be a return, not a wholly new departure. Civic Scotland's policy making was independent and innovative until the 1960s. You find this if you look, for example, at the Kilbrandon commission's report on social work, or the late-1940s thinking on how to organise secondary education for mass democracy (still felt then to be new), or the influence of Glasgow University's economics department on thinking about regional development from the 1930s onwards. Little of that indigenous creativity about social policy could be found in the 1980s and 1990s, partly because there seemed little point in the face of an unpopular and centralised government, and partly because so much energy went into thinking about the constitution.

¹ Page xviii in Collins, B. (1983), 'Introductory: federal power as a contemporary American dilemma', in Jeffreys-Jones, R. and Collins, B. (eds), **The Growth of Federal Power in American History**, Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, ix-xviii.

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In any case, formally returning to the ways in which policy was made in the old Union of the welfare state may have quite different implications now. The institutions with which government now consults are generally more democratic than their predecessors were in the 1950s. That internal democratisation of civic Scotland is gradually being forced further forward by the Parliament itself, especially its committees. Never before have bodies such as Scottish Opera, Glasgow Health Board or the Scottish Tourist Board been subjected to the kinds of scrutiny that they have received in the last year. And we could hardly have a better instance of this new climate than the crisis which erupted this autumn over the issuing of examination certificates to school students. The underlying reason for the mess was that the leadership class in Scottish education nationally - the schools inspectors and quangos and senior personnel in the Scottish Executive - listen mainly to each other, and simply don't have a habit of trusting the people, in this case most pertinently not trusting teachers, who had been warning them of impending disaster for months. The indignant public reaction to the fiasco may not have been due to the Parliament directly, but it did owe something to the climate of higher expectations about public involvement that the Parliament has provoked.

Moreover, the Parliament wants that public involvement because its procedures are more open, a consequence of the proportional electoral system and the resulting coalition, the high proportion of women, and the working practices. That, and its effects on civic Scotland, are all very worth while. But, whatever the merits of all this democratisation and mostly unspectacular social reform, it is not exciting. My main point from the history of the Union in the twentieth century is to induce a sense of perspective, something woefully lacking from all but a few journalistic commentaries on the Parliament's first year (commentaries found most consistently on BBC Scotland and in the **Herald** and **Sunday Herald** newspapers). The history I've sketched tells us how difficult and complicated good social policy is, and how slow it is to have lasting effects. If we want to find out whether coherent government is feasible and whether it works, we have to look at the experiences of the 1940s and after. If we want to see what a pluralistic democracy looks like, we have to examine the old policy communities. But saying that the Scottish Parliament is recovering the best of Scottish unionist policy making is hardly likely to excite a people that has entertained such utopian hopes for such a long time.

WHAT NOW?

It's for precisely that reason that we get a sense of disappointment. We didn't get here in Scotland because of a well-defined popular desire to renew Scottish pluralism, or to improve the policy-making capacity of Scottish civic institutions, or even - directly - to improve consultation. We got here because of a mixture of nationalism and a sense of outraged social justice, focusing particularly on the poll tax. That's what fuelled the referendum outcome and all the decades of campaigning before it. Anger, nationalism and indignation at social injustice don't belong in the same discussion as the politely technocratic renewal of pluralistic management.

That's one reason why we now find in surveys a clear majority of people wanting more powers for the Parliament. The BBC Scotland poll in May, for example, found 62% of people wanting more powers, and fewer than one in ten wanting fewer. When asked about Scottish governance in two decades time, 37% thought the Scottish Parliament would be the most important institution, 33% the European Parliament, and only 17% the UK Parliament. This is not straightforwardly a reaction to the experience of the first year, because the level of support for more powers was much the same in surveys at the time of the 1999 election, for example in the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey, as was the view that the Scottish Parliament ought to be far more important than Westminster. It seems to be yet another 'settled will' (John Smith's description of support for a parliament), unchanged by all the buffeting which the Parliament has received in the media.

From the 1999 Social Attitudes Survey, we also find that the preference for more power is particularly strong among people whose political views most closely resemble old-style social democracy, themselves a clear majority in Scotland. The main components of this majority ideology are a belief that wealth and power are unequally shared in society, a firm commitment to redistribution to correct that, a view that taxation and public spending are the best way to achieve social justice, and a preference generally for public over private action. These views are shared by all social classes, all age groups, and both sexes: they are truly a national consensus. Thus there seems a general willingness to accept the verdict of the Scottish Low Pay Unit on the Parliament's present powers that it 'cannot legislate on any of the key

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economic dimensions of anti-poverty work' because it lacks any significant powers over wealth redistribution.¹

Tying together the social democracy and the preference for a stronger Parliament is national identity. Favouring a quite radical social democracy is more common among people who feel Scottish, who are the vast majority of the population (between three quarters and nine out of ten, depending on how it is measured). That nationally framed political ideology then inclines people to a national route to realising their radical preferences.

We must be careful not to make the mistake of extrapolating from this to other dimensions of belief. These radical views about social policy co-exist with some fairly conservative moral attitudes. There is in fact quite a lot of agreement with New Labour that the welfare state is not very efficient - that people claim benefits to which they are not entitled, and that others don't claim those which they ought to receive. There is not much sympathy for public spending on categories of recipient who are judged to be partly responsibly for their plight - for example, the unemployed and lone parents. What's more, there is general agreement with New Labour that private wealth-creation does have a leading role to play in national regeneration, in the sense that only a quarter of people reject any role for private enterprise. One of the mistakes which media commentators made in the 1980s and early 1990s was to infer from Scottish support for redistribution etc that Scots would also support every progressive cause that could be imagined. Realising the inaccuracy of that impression, and lurching sharply in exactly the opposite direction, has fuelled another journalistic practice of late: the **Guardian**-style view that Scotland is a land of dark iniquity.²

Nevertheless, the point remains that the Scottish majority don't see their social democratic ideology shared by New Labour, and that they see the only route to further progress in a stronger Scottish Parliament than we have. The issue is not to judge whether these radical and nationalist doubts about the present Parliament are warranted. And I'm not passing comment on whether a programme of radical social democracy in a small country is feasible.³ The point is simply that the underlying logic of current political attitudes in

¹ Paragraph 63 in *Scottish Low Pay Unit (2000), Memorandum, evidence presented to Scottish Affairs Committee of the UK Parliament, London: UK Parliament, 8 June.*

² For example, Royle, T. (2000), 'Wreckers of democracy', *Guardian*, 8 June.

³ See, for example, Gamble, A. and Wright, T. (1999), *The New Social Democracy*, Oxford: Blackwell (special issue of *Political Quarterly*).

Scotland - the logic of the disappointment with both Parliament and New Labour - is this potent mix of national identity, redistributive social democracy, and preference for further constitutional reform. The view seems to be that further constitutional change would involve not only a stronger Scottish Parliament, but also a European government that supported social democracy and - unlike the Scottish or UK Parliaments - would be economically powerful enough to do something about it. Ultimately these aspirations persist because the utopianism which gave rise to the Parliament is also a popular theory of how society works - a purported explanation of society's ills and therefore a model of how to reform them. Scottish utopianism continues to be, in the words of the sociologist Krishan Kumar, 'subversive', providing 'a critical commentary on the arrangements of society'.¹

CONCLUSION

We are seeing in Scotland just now an example of one of the things that can happen when utopianism is disappointed. I started with a quotation from Hugh MacDiarmid expressing characteristic Scottish pessimism. Here he is on the obverse, the inveterate utopianism:

If Scotland fills us wi despair we may
Be proposin a goal that disna lie
Onywhaur in history's plan the noo; we sigh
In vain - because we canna think in vain
And oor desire'll hae its due effect
In the lang run²

Utopianism is strong in Scotland, despite the strong heritage also of boring presbyterian pragmatism. The campaigning for a Parliament went on for so long that it was bound to attract to itself all the hopes of all sorts of social movements that were dissatisfied with any aspect of modern society. There was utopian democracy: the vision of a state made one with civil society, where power was distributed equally and was debated rationally. There was utopian radicalism: the millenarian belief that a good society could be

¹ Page 87 in Kumar, K. (1991), *Utopianism*, Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

² Lines 22-27 in 'Unconscious goal of history', in Law, T. S. and Berwick, T. (eds) (1978), *The Socialist Poems of Hugh MacDiarmid*, London: RKP.

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constructed here despite all the sobering experience of a century of trying. And there was utopian nationalism, in both a political and cultural form: social fragmentation could be healed by refounding the bonds of community in this unique place. We cannot understand the evolving attitudes to the Parliament without remembering this context of utopian aspirations.

It has generally been assumed by people who have written or talked about the Parliament's first year that disappointment leads to apathy and disillusion. But that is not what the history of utopian thinking would lead us to conclude. Bernard Levin expresses this well. 'Utopians are inured to disappointment', he wrote, especially whole societies with strong utopian traditions: 'there are always fellow-utopians to throw a life-belt to those struggling in the water of broken promise'.¹ Krishan Kumar puts it more theoretically:

a boundary [on what is possible] can either confine and inhibit or it can invite us to go beyond it. The commonly accepted boundary of the possible is always contingent, always dependent on the particular circumstances of time and place. Utopia breaks through that boundary'.²

We have that utopian inclination in Scotland - not only in the thirty years of recent campaigning for home rule, but also over a much longer duration, right back to the Reformation through all the secular and religious utopias that have been sketched in the meantime. Maybe all small nations have in their culture that element of dreams born of disappointment; certainly the same kind of thing can be found in Poland and Ireland. Maybe it is inevitable that, if you're weak and divided, you dream about being strong and whole.

Whatever the truth of that, we now have the beginnings of an answer to the question: what happens when expectations are disappointed? There were indeed immensely high expectations, and these do indeed seem to have been disappointed to some extent. I have suggested that that was inevitable, that a home rule parliament could never achieve much more than renewing Scottish pluralism, returning us to something like the position we were in half a century ago, though with the addition of a rather more open form of civic democracy. Insofar as the proponents of home rule - as opposed to independence - suggested that more was possible within the Union, their project will fail. Most of them, however - the supremely cautious Donald

¹ Page 123 in Levin, B. (1994), *A World Elsewhere*, London: Cape.

² Page 3 in Kumar, K. (1991), *Utopianism*, Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

Dewar to the fore - did not make exaggerated claims of this sort, and their more modest project is indeed beginning to succeed. Pluralism *is* being renewed, coherent government *is* struggling back to life, although hampered by the ideological vacuum of current left-of-centre politics, and distinctive Scottish details of policy *are* once again finding an acceptable place in the Union. As I said, that is no small achievement, and if you're of a cautious and patient disposition is probably much the best of all possible outcomes.

But, in the context of a utopianism that is inured to disappointment, the popular reaction seems to be already a turn towards something more. People want more radical social reform, pushing forward a social democratic programme that has seemed incomplete since the 1960s petered out in the drab 1970s. They want a more radical democracy, challenging no longer a Tory-controlled Scottish Office but now the elites of the civic institutions. And they want the Parliament to acquire the powers that can achieve these things.

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