

## **REVIEW: SCOTLAND AND WALES: NATIONS AGAIN?**

*Michael Keating*

Bridget Taylor and Katarina Thomson (eds), **Scotland and Wales: Nations Again?**, University of Wales Press, 1999. ISBN 0-7083-1506-2, 252 pages, £29.99 hardback.

One of the main problems in studying and writing about Scottish politics in the last three decades has been the dearth of the kind of survey data available for the UK as a whole. After a flurry of activity in the 1970s, there was no Scottish election survey in the dark days of the 1980s while Welsh data have been even scarcer, given the irregularity of opinion polls there. The referendum survey reported here, together with the election surveys of the 1990s, is a major contribution and will provide valuable material to scholars and general readers. The book combines the style of the regular Nuffield election reports with their discursive accounts of events and issues, with that of the quantitative election study. The style is generally clear and accessible. Technical matters are explained well and clearly, with only occasional lapses.

The collection starts with a review of referendums around the world by David Butler and Iain McLean which, interesting in itself, is rather removed from the book's central concerns. There follows an account of the referendum campaigns by David McCrone and Bethan Lewis. Chapter 3 gets us to the meat of the book, the analysis of the results. Paula Surridge and David McCrone show that the Yes vote in Scotland reflected instrumentalist appreciations of the policy benefits the Parliament could bring rather than social background factors or even national identity. They demonstrate what

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### *Scottish Affairs*

has long been argued, that people who dismiss home rule on the grounds that people are more concerned with health services or housing are missing the point. Home rule is seen as closely connected with these substantial concerns. On the other hand, when asked about democratic effectiveness, respondents pointed to issues outwith the Parliament's remit, suggesting that there may be strong pressures to extend its responsibilities. Richard Wyn Jones and Dafydd Tristan, by contrast, show that Welsh identity, being born in Wales and speaking Welsh, are strongly associated with voting in favour of the new National Assembly. Party identification is also crucial, despite Labour's failure to carry all its supporters. Geoffrey Evans and Dafydd Tristan examine the differences in the result in Wales between 1979 and 1997. In contrast to 1979, Welsh identifiers and Welsh speakers were more likely to turn out and to vote Yes, and Labour gave stronger cues. Since abstainers, unlike in Scotland, were much more likely to be opponents of devolution, the differential turnout accounted for the narrow victory of the Yes side. This in turn reflected the failure of the No side to organize effectively and mobilize its supporters. Given the discrepancy of resources of the two sides, this may raise serious questions about the representativeness of the results. John Curtice argues, consistently with Surridge and McCrone, that instrumental expectations of the benefits of devolution accounts for much of the difference between Scotland and Wales. National identity is also more politicized in Scotland.

Anthony Heath and Bridget Taylor's chapter is more an exercise in methodology than a contribution to understanding the referendum outcomes. They aim to test the idea that the referendums were 'second order elections' but since they admit that this concept was not developed to deal with constitutional referendums it is not surprising that it proves of little value. One also gets the impression that they are less familiar with the cases than the other contributors. Their suggestion that future Scottish elections will be first order elections is interesting, suggesting that, as in Quebec, the stateless nation may become the primary focus of political identity and activity. Lindsay Paterson and Richard Wyn Jones provide a thoughtful discussion of civil society, although they are perhaps a mite optimistic about the health of civil society in Scotland and its role in the Scottish Constitutional Convention, already becoming part of Scottish mythology. The road to devolution lay, as it always had done, through the political parties, and perhaps the key contribution of the Convention was to get Labour and the Liberal Democrats to cooperate, with the effect of converting Labour to proportional representation. The second part of the chapters looks at forms of national identity in Scotland and Wales, finding that Yes voters, Scottish and

*Review: Scotland and Wales: Nations Again?*

Welsh identifiers and nationalists have more inclusive and 'civic' view of national identity than their opponents. This, incidentally, is consistent with findings in Catalonia and the Basque Country though the finding has to be treated with a little caution since nationalists are more likely to portray national identity as benign than are their opponents. Kenneth Morgan's chapter is an upbeat view of the prospects of change, based on a 1998 British Academy lecture. Finally James Kellas revisits the 'Scottish political system'. I hesitate to rejoin this worn debate, except to say that those of us who criticized the idea never denied that Scottish political demands were distinct, only that the Scottish Office and other forms of administrative devolution had the capacity to respond to them. It was not only the poll tax that was imposed on Scotland. There was also privatization, council house sales, local government retrenchment, a redirection of urban policy, the internal market in health, transport deregulation, the virtual abolition of regional policy and the radical change in the organization and financing of universities. Nor, as the contributions hint, was centralization a Thatcher innovation. As Morgan notes, old Labour was viscerally centralist in theory and practice since the First World War. The conflict between Scottish demands and Westminster uniformity, indeed, is the basic justification for transferring power to a Scottish Parliament. Kellas also seems to have trouble with Paterson and Wyn Jones' emphasis on civil society, but the debate here is not really joined, which is a pity.

This is an invaluable contribution to understanding contemporary Scotland and Wales and shows that the famine of electoral data is at an end.

***Editor's Note***

*Professor Keating's review was written shortly after the book was published, in winter 1999, but has been delayed because of an editorial error.*