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# **The Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party: ‘the lesser spotted Tory’?**

**Dr. David Seawright**

School of Politics and International Studies, University of Leeds

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On the Sunday following the 2001 General Election a national newspaper included an amusing piece which compared the election of Peter Duncan, the successful Conservative candidate in Galloway and Upper Nithsdale, with the reintroduction into Scotland of other ‘extinct’ species, such as beaver, red kites and wild boar. ‘The very reappearance of this species [the lesser spotted Tory] has shocked naturalists and political observers alike, who thought the Scottish Tory was gone and forgotten – a victim of political climate change and a failure on its part to adjust to the new habitat (*Scotland on Sunday*, 10 June 2001). Unfortunately, this humour merely emphasises the egregious electoral position of the Scottish Tories. The 2001 election may have witnessed the return of one MP out of a possible seventy-two but such ‘success’ must be set against another decline in their overall share of the vote for a Westminster contest. As table 1 shows it fell around another 2 per cent from an already post-war historical low of 17.5 per cent in 1997, when this ‘species’ of MP was totally wiped out in Scotland. In the intervening period we have seen a successful by-election gain in Ayr for the Scottish Parliament but the other 18 list MSPs were elected in 1999 on 16 per cent of the vote and by virtue of an AMS proportional electoral system that the Party officially objects to.

Table 1 Percentage Share of Conservative Vote, 1950-2001

	1950	1951	1955	1959	1964	1966	1970	1974F
Scotland	44.8	48.6	50.1	47.2	40.6	37.7	38.0	32.9
England	43.8	48.8	50.4	49.9	44.1	42.7	48.3	40.2
	1974O	1979	1983	1987	1992	1997	2001	
Scotland	24.7	31.4	28.4	24.0	25.6	17.5	15.6	
England	38.9	47.2	46.0	46.2	45.5	33.7	35.2	

Source: Seawright, D. (1998) and House of Commons Research Paper 01/54.

Similarly the Party has two Members of the European Parliament, again by virtue of a proportional list system, when it gained around 20 per cent of the overall share of the vote at the 1999 European Election in Scotland. However, when this result is set against the Party in England winning nearly 39 per cent of the vote at this election then one is reminded of the fact that Scottish Tories have usually performed about half as well as their English counterparts, particularly throughout the 1980s and early 1990s when the Scottish Conservatives held office by virtue of this ‘English success’. It is only in the 1950s and early 1960s, in the post war era, that the Scottish Tories performed on a par with the Party south of the border. This begs the crucial question of why it was a victim of political climate change and of why it failed to adjust? Thus, this chapter first sets out to explain *why* the Party finds itself in such a lamentable electoral position and then examines the Party’s future prospects for recovery as it struggles to re-create itself. In so doing it also analyses the problems and issues to be faced by a Scottish ‘cartel party’, within a multi-level polity.

## **A Golden Era and An Issue of Valence.**

There is no doubt that the Party in Scotland achieved considerable success in the 1950s (see table 1). Indeed in this 'golden era' the Scottish Unionist Party – as it was known then – gained 50.1 per cent of the vote and 36 of the 71 seat at Westminster for the 1955 Election. But, a considerable element of doubt is raised by competing theories and explanations which offer contested reasons for this success; even more so by the reasons posited for the subsequent precipitous fall in Party support (for example Kellas, 1989; Mitchell, 1990; Kendrick and McCrone, 1994 and Seawright, 1999). The orthodox explanations, inclusive of class differences north and south of the border and of the decline in the Protestant Orange vote have been shown to be flawed and to fall far short of any comprehensive account of this success and decline (Seawright, 1999). Of far greater import is the dual premise that considers the 'Scottish consciousness' of the Party in conjunction with both the Party's and Scots electorates' contrasting ideological shifts on the left-right spectrum (ibid.). Thus, one component of the received orthodoxy which needed to be seriously challenged was the idea that the Scots were always more left wing than their neighbours south of the border and had continually expressed values consistent with a social democratic culture. In a previous work then, robust statistical techniques were utilised in order to analyse certain relevant socio-economic issues and the results clearly showed that the Scots were in fact relatively more right wing in the 1950s and did not take the 'substantive' move to the left - that is now manifestly found in the ideological values of contemporary Scottish society - until the 1970s (Seawright, 1999). But, unfortunately for the Party in Scotland it simultaneously decided on its own substantive move towards what was hitherto regarded as neo-liberal extremism, culminating in the eponymous title of Thatcherism. The laissez-faire discourse gained ground in the Party at the very time when the Scottish indigenous industrial base was facing an acute crisis of survival and it is not surprising that the Scots should have developed a taste for economic intervention. One piece of Thatcherite legislation epitomised the extent to which the party had moved in the opposite direction to that of the Scots electorate. The Community Charge had little resonance of 'community' for Scots

and its pernicious electoral effects for the party, as the 'Poll Tax' issue, were felt in the Election of 1987, even before its introduction.

Conversely, the Scottish Unionist Party in the 1950s used to great effect rhetoric which purported to reconcile the two themes of individualism and collectivism, enhancing an image of flexibility and pragmatism for itself:

There are two fundamental instincts in human nature - Individuality and Social Service. Regard is paid to both of these in the Unionist Party's view of the object of politics and in its framing of policy. It is therefore wrong to describe the Unionist Party as being upon the Right in the political scale. It is not 'reactionary'. It is not out to 'exploit'. Rather it is on the Middle Road, between two extremes - the extremes of laissez-faire and Socialism. The Unionist Party realises the need for a synthesis of these two fundamental ideas of human individuality and of service to others and to the community. Remember that the Unionist Party initiated or supported most of the social reforms and the social services (Scottish Unionist Association Yearbook, 1955: 13).

This was the Party's public ethos and approach throughout the post war period until at least the mid sixties. A crucial aspect to this ethos and imagery in the 1950s was the Party's ability to concomitantly impose an alien identity upon Labour for a much longer period than that found in England. Thus the Party was successfully using the 'alien' term of Socialist to describe the Labour Party into the early 1960s. After all there was a historical precedent to justify such an approach. Keir Hardie had triumphed over his rivals, such as Hyndman, in having the socialist term expurgated from the infant Labour Representation Committee for the very same reason, that in Hardie's eyes the term socialist was foreign and its use would alienate the British worker. The Scottish Unionist Association's Yearbook of 1955 neatly illustrates the strategy adopted:

Nothing could be a greater misnomer than the name 'Labour' for Socialist policies. It is a name which attracts support; but let those who are misled by it ask themselves: what can the foreign doctrine of Socialism, with its denial of freedom

of choice and of individual opportunity, profit the British people... (SUA, Yearbook 1955: pp. 18-19).

It is significant that Unionism's distinctive symbolism and imagery was jealously guarded by the party in the fifties, to the extent that the term Conservative was expurgated from all official Unionist literature until the Party re-incorporated the term Conservative into its title in 1965, a term it had not used since before 1912. This was to have serious implications for the Party's Scottish identity. Crucially, we find that the Party's opponents were able to invert this alien notion in Scottish consciousness terms. As early as 1964 we see how this order of imagery was reversed to Labour's advantage. When the *Daily Record* was a Tory supporting paper it readily used the idea of 'alien' socialism but by the 1964 Election the *Record* was now equating Labour with 'Scottishness', a vote for 'Labour was a vote for Scotland'. More importantly, the *Record* may well have been the source that first gave public portrayal to the negative image of the Tory Party in Scotland as the 'Hooray Henrys' of the grouse moor. In the same eve of poll edition in 1964, the *Record* ran a double page spread which compared page 12 with the headline of 'Jobless boys, meagre pensions' with that of a facing page, page 13, with the headline 'gunfire on empty grouse moors'. The article then went on to starkly contrast unemployed teenagers and destitute pensioners with Tories shooting grouse.

This chappie is following a well-known Tory sport: shooting grouse over the yawning, gaping, barren (except for grouse) land of some rich landowner somewhere in Scotland.

This is the sport of the few, although the acres of space are great. Acres that a young couple might cry out for room to build a house; acres that might be utilised. Mark you, some other chaps do get employment through this sport; a handful of beaters, gamekeepers.

But a few million other Scots (you and us), who have never seen a butt and shoot grouse, might have one.

A grouse that, in Britain, 1964, while Sir Alecs enjoy a day's shootin' on the empty moors, old folks go hungry and young folk seek vainly for a job.

This is life - or death - under the Tories (*Daily Record*, 14 October 1964).

Whatever the source, the extremely successful application of this negative connotation of the grouse moor image was matched in Scotland, since the mid-1970s, by a similar anti-Conservative style and tone from the four main Scottish national newspapers. A tone and style which confirmed the sea change of opinion that had taken place in Scotland in the mid-1970s (Seawright, 1999). The Unionist ethos was no longer rooted in Scottish consciousness, the Conservative Party in Scotland would now be the party perceived as having an ‘alien’ identity; an ‘anglicised’ one. And we should keep in mind that it is by no means clear that the Conservative Party’s electoral success had varied according to its position on devolution. For example, Mr Heath’s ‘declaration of Perth’, where he advocated devolution for Scotland, was ‘declared’ in 1968 but there was no subsequent electoral benefit at the 1970 Election, as the Scottish mandate remained firmly with Labour. However, it may be far more useful to view such position issues in Scotland, as devolution and others of a more traditionally left-right nature, as undergoing a metamorphosis into one of a valence framework (Stokes, 1992). As this would fit comfortably with the idea of an increasingly vivid portrayal of the Scottish Tories - by a left wing Scottish party consensus and a left wing ‘Scottish establishment’ – as being alien to the Scottish body politic.

Stokes differentiates *position issues* that are on our left right ordered dimension with *valence issues* that are more to do with the degree to which parties are linked in the public’s mind with conditions or goals or symbols of which almost everyone approves or disapproves (1992, p. 143). Adapting Stokes work for Scottish politics has us, in this case, viewing Scotland itself as the valence issue. Thus, such a valence issue acquires its power from the fact that rival parties are linked with the universally approved symbol of Scottishness and the universally disapproved symbol of non-Scottishness. The valence framework also facilitates the venal exploitation of negative campaigning. A valence issue will deliver maximum support for a party if its symbolic content is of high importance to the electorate and there is complete identification of the party with the positive symbol and of the rival party with the negative symbol (Stokes, pp. 144-147). Throughout the last two decades of the twentieth century the left wing parties, Labour,

the Liberal Democrats in all their guises and the SNP, successfully portrayed the Tories in Scotland with the negative universally disapproved symbol of ‘un-Scottish’. One has only to review the Scottish Press, at the time of Hague’s speech on the need for a solution to the West Lothian Question, for a good contemporary example of the use of this negative symbolism. The argument for English MPs having similar rights to Scottish MSPs was viewed by the other three main Scottish parties as inherently divisive, typical of Tory anti-Scottishness and ‘the small minded attempt to seek revenge on the voters who rejected them’ (*The Scotsman*, 14 November 2000).

After the 1997 General Election disaster which saw the Scottish Tory MP added to our Scottish extinct species category, the Party in Scotland, similar to that in England, ran an internal enquiry which resulted in what was termed the, ‘Made in Scotland’, Strathclyde Commission organisational reforms. However, the question is, did these reforms result in a fundamental rethink and was this ‘new party’ now a mass party or was its typology better categorised as a Scottish ‘cartel party’? The section below sets out to explore such questions.

### **Tartan Tory Distinctiveness and the Idea of A Scottish Cartel Party?**

In the wake of such a disaster as 1997, it is no surprise to find that the Party embarked upon the customary period of reflection and two-stage recovery process that a defeated party usually undertakes. The first stage of this exercise of renewal was the rebuilding of the organisational base (Strathclyde reforms) on which the Party could recreate itself and develop a new policy agenda (Rifkind Policy Commission). Unfortunately, neither was perceived as having any great impact or any great success. Examining the second stage first, the Rifkind Commission (known thus as it was chaired by the defeated Edinburgh Pentlands MP and President of the Party in Scotland, Sir Malcolm Rifkind) admirably convened over 400 informative meetings throughout Scotland where an exchange of ideas could take place. The policy document the Commission produced, ‘Scotland’s Future’, clearly delineated the principled acceptance of the essence of devolution, viz., the ability of the Party in Scotland to differentiate from

the approach taken on policy south of the border. With our ‘valence problem’ clearly in mind the Commission believed that policy should be crafted in line with Tory principles but designed to deal with Scottish circumstances, problems and aspirations (SCUP, 1998). Although the proposals from the Commission were portrayed in the Scottish media as anything but different, opportunities would quickly arise in the field of education and social policy which would allow for a manifest ‘tartan’ distinctiveness to policy making. Of course, this also raises problems for governance, as well as opportunities, for a ‘unionist’ party. We shall return to this issue in greater detail in the section below on multi-level governance but for now we shall stay with the symbolism and imagery attached to these different policy agendas.

The goal of ‘tartan distinctiveness’ in policy, as set out by the Rifkind Commission, immediately fed itself into Scottish policy documents. In stark contrast to prospective policy for England and Wales, the Scottish manifesto for the 1999 Holyrood Election gave a commitment to abolishing Labour’s university tuition fees. This distinctiveness continued through the policy document voted on by the membership in Scotland, ‘Believing in Britain, Believing in Scotland’, and on into the Scottish manifesto for the 2001 Westminster Election. In this 2001 manifesto, not only did we see different priorities flagged up under different sub-headings in the Scotland and England editions but more importantly, the Scottish edition was still advocating the abolition of tuition fees. Moreover, it was also stressing the need to implement the Sutherland recommendation on free long-term personal care for the elderly. This divergence from policy proposed for England and Wales has been bitterly criticised as departing from sound Conservative economic orthodoxy. Bill Jamieson was of the opinion that it ‘flies in the face of fundamental Conservative values about thrift, personal responsibility and proper guardianship and care of the public finances’ (*The Scotsman*, 29 January, 2001). But, this concern over the adoption of a policy of universality in social policy is not echoed amongst Scottish MSPs who challenge such an interpretation. David McLetchie, the Tory leader in the Scottish Parliament, thought it was a superficial way of examining such policy and was proud of what the Party in Scotland had accomplished in the way of policy. Phil Gallie disagreed with the view that it was merely about outspending Labour as the policy was carefully costed and it would be, after all, money well spent. Ben

Wallace also agreed with the view that it was certainly not a case of trying to ‘outleft the left’, he stressed that it was right that the party was proactive on tuition fees and the Sutherland proposals. He believed it was surely the Conservative way to protect citizens who had worked hard and saved all their lives, especially in the case of ‘Sutherland’<sup>1</sup>. However, this policy divergence merely may reflect the view expressed by the Rifkind Policy Commission that the ‘notion of the common good is deeply embedded in the Scottish consciousness’ and that ‘Scottish Conservatives must harness it to create a better future’ (SCUP, 1998). Of course, as a unionist party the Tories in Scotland will also be judged on the overall performance of the Party in the UK, in short, on how it has performed at Westminster. The 2001 manifesto acknowledged this fact when the jointly signed introduction from Malcolm Rifkind and David McLetchie referred to the Scottish voters giving a verdict not only on the Labour government at Westminster but also on the record to date of the Labour and Liberal Democrat Scottish Executive (SCUP, 2001). Unfortunately, for the Scottish Tories, that verdict was very positive, which undermines the English nationalist claim that the Tories in Scotland ‘were hated, above all, because they were the Government of England’ (Heffer, 1999, p. 27). Labour does not seem to suffer from any similar adverse reaction. Little wonder then at the election outcome when Tory policy made in Westminster, would chop and change, almost overnight, as in the case of pensions policy. Tax guarantees were very quickly no longer guarantees. And of course the flagship policy on the *Euro* was ridiculed for its ambiguity, it should not be beyond the brightest in an ‘electoral professional’ party to present a policy which was in tune with the majority of UK voters. Because of perceived problems on the backbenches at Westminster the Party could not simply rule out the *Euro* in principle, on constitutional as well as on economic grounds, while simply adding the caveat that parties can never say never in politics. This problem of policy formulation for the Scottish Tories was starkly portrayed in the 1999 Holyrood manifesto when the party in Scotland seemed to be against Bank of England independence; a stance that Michael Portillo would quickly change. This problem rather undermined the claim made in that manifesto of the Party being cognisant of the problem that policies looked as if they ‘had London stamped all over them’ (SCUP, 1999, p.1). Importantly, the 1999 Holyrood manifesto also went on to

declare that ‘this is a new party’ (ibid). We shall now examine the first stage of renewal, that of organisational reform, to examine the extent to which we can accept such a claim. The Strathclyde reforms transformed the Party, from a three-legged structure that had incorporated a voluntary wing, a professional wing and a parliamentary party, into one structural body. In this sense it was a new party. But, it is taking the image to exaggerative lengths to suggest, as the Rifkind Commission document did, that from being the oldest party in Scotland the Party had now become the youngest and newest party as well, reformed and invigorated as a result of the fundamental changes inherent in the Strathclyde reforms (SCUP, 1998). The Strathclyde document stressed the new role of the Convenor, who would be elected by the Scottish membership and play a pivotal role in the Party organisation and reflect the new participatory role of the membership. However, this seemed to amount to the position of a Deputy-Chairman the reality of which, in the first year or two, was a continuation of the bickering and backbiting that the party seems to excel at in Scotland, as the Deputy-Chairman’s clique were faced down by the Chairman’s clique (for example, see *Scotland on Sunday*, 28 November, 1999). Thus, we must ask, had the party really been fundamentally transformed, from a hierarchical elite model of a clique of notables to a participatory mass level party (Duverger, 1954)?

The reality was more prosaic, the Chairman, who was the appointee of the UK leader, had control of the day to day running of the Party in Scotland through the control of a Management Committee. But, intuitively one would expect there to be tension if the Chairman was also an office-seeking politician. Daphne Sleight, the Conservative leader of Edinburgh City Council, made this very point when she suggested that a Chief Executive should be appointed to run the day to day administration of the Party allowing the politicians to concentrate on policy and tactics<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, although there was now one bodily structure there appeared to be three separate figureheads of the Party in Scotland. It cannot be the easiest task for the average voter to differentiate between Malcolm Rifkind as President, Raymond Robertson as Chairman and David McLetchie as Leader in the Scottish Parliament. An analysis of this position is long overdue and the Party should take heed of the Mitchell analysis on this one. ‘The only question that should be asked about David McLetchie’s leadership is why did the Tories not give him the job much earlier’ (Mitchell, 2000, p. 27). The obvious corollary to this observation is

that there should be one unequivocal leadership position and there is a candidate already *in situ*. If the party is not such a model as that of a vibrant mass level party then what typology would best describe it?

Katz and Mair (1995) argue that the models of party – such as the elite, the catch all party and in particular, the mass party model - are attached to a now dated ideal of social structure and a dated ideal of their relationship to civil society. They introduce a new model into this dialectical process of party transmutation, the ‘cartel party’, which challenges the party’s relationship to civil society. This typology of the cartel party is characterised by the ever increasing symbiosis between parties and the state. Parties still compete but rather than the mobilising role in a civil society the major parties now have a mutual interest in collective organisational survival. An interpenetration of party and state which leads to a pattern of inter-party collusion over patronage and the spoils of the state (see also, Mair, 1998). This cartel model can be detected in the formation of the institutional processes for the Scottish Parliament, for example when one considers the draft Order, ‘Assistance for registered political parties’, which extends, for the Scottish Parliament, the role of ‘Short money’ in use at Westminster. In Scotland, like ‘Short’, the money shall enable *opposition* parties in the Parliament to effectively hold the government to account. But, unlike ‘Short’, it shall also enable *all parties* in the Parliament to carry out their parliamentary activities (Scottish Parliament, 1999). None of the major parties in Scotland seemed to be against the principle of state subventions but David McLetchie was appalled at the ‘hand out’ for the Liberal Democrats, as they are a full part of the new Scottish Government (*ibid.*, p. 15). And it is not only with subventions that we see evidence of this ‘collusion’. Fully two years before David Steel, as Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament, has to vacate his chair we have reports of a secret deal between Labour and the Tories to install Annabel Goldie as his replacement. Although it is recognised that she is an ideal candidate for the position we should be aware that, with the idea of collective organisational survival in mind, ‘the driving force behind many Labour backbenchers’ support for Miss Goldie is their determination to stop George Reid, the Nationalist deputy presiding officer, stepping up to the job after 2003’ (*The Scotsman*, 8 May 2001).<sup>3</sup>

However, because of the ‘valence problem’ identified earlier, the Scottish Tories probably have even more of an acute concern, than the other unionist parties, over the perception of which part or parts of the structures of government they are seen to have a greater commitment to. In short, at what levels of a multi-level polity will this symbiotic relationship take place for the Scottish Tories?

### **A Multi-Level Party for a Multi-Level Polity?**

Of course, the acute concern over perception arises due to the Party’s past robust critique of devolution itself. However, it is no exaggeration now to suggest that as ‘a party, the Tories seem more at ease with devolution than does new Labour (Mitchell, 2000, p. 27). Indeed, this reconciled and even contented attitude with devolution is reflected in the comments from Tory MSPs themselves. David McLetchie stressed that the UK leadership is at ease with the flexibility the Party in Scotland has and added for good measure that the Party in Scotland, or the people in Scotland for that matter, would not accept otherwise. Ben Wallace concurred with this view and intimated that the Party in England was not only at ease as well but was very supportive of what the Party in Scotland actually wanted<sup>4</sup>. Many of the MSPs spoke of the excellent liaison within the Party between Westminster, Edinburgh and Cardiff<sup>5</sup>. But for McLetchie and Wallace liaison, balance and, of course, fairness between England and Scotland are the desiderata in the present arrangements of the multi-level polity that is now the modern United Kingdom. In that sense they were perfectly relaxed with Mr Hague’s idea of English votes for English laws and believed the Scots as a fair minded people would accept that<sup>6</sup>. However, the West Lothian question will no doubt remain the same for some time yet while the English response to regional devolution appears to be ‘a polite but firm no thanks’ (John Curtice in *The Guardian*, 4 December 2000). Simply not asking the Question then is no solution, as resentment in England may build to an unmanageable level. Some form of English votes for English laws is one answer but there are other inextricably linked questions which need to be addressed also, by a Unionist party if it is to make the union work.

The Rifkind Commission acknowledged that with devolution there would be obvious constitutional implications for the governance of England as well but thought it outside the remit of the Commission to consider them (SCUP, 1998). The sensitivity to the ‘valence problem’ appears to have led the Party to a bout of amnesia on the dire predictions they gave for post devolution UK politics at the 1997 Westminster Election (SCUP, 1997). But it may have been a salutary exercise for the Commission to consider these in detail. English votes for English laws may address the West Lothian question but the 1997 warning that ‘financial tensions would be created between a Scottish parliament and Westminster’ (SCUP, 1997) has the potential in the near future to severely damage the devolution settlement and by extension the Union itself. And it is not the rabid right wingers of English nationalism, which are now vociferously heard lambasting the Barnett settlement on funding. It is the very Labour politicians who backed devolution and who are now challenging the Scottish block funding. Prescott, Mandelson and many backbench English Labour MPs have joined the chorus against it. We get a flavour of such sentiments from the columnist and new Labour MP for Birmingham Edrington, Sion Simon: ‘English MPs are angry about how much core government money their regions don’t receive compared, in particular with Scotland. “If my constituents knew,” one disgruntled northerner told me, “how many more pounds per head they would be getting if the town were transplanted to Scotland, they’d go crazy”’ (*Daily Telegraph*, 30 April 2001, see also *Scotland on Sunday*, 29 April 2001).

It is no use simply saying smugly ‘we told you so’, it is the duty of a party who wants to protect the union to offer ameliorative solutions to such tensions in our new multi-level polity. But in the policy documents the term Barnett was conspicuous by its absence while ambiguous reports appeared in the press. In November 2000 Malcolm Rifkind appeared to accept a regional needs based formula which would replace Barnett (*Scotland on Sunday*, 5 November 2000). However, by April the following year, in the prelude to the General Election, he appeared to suggest that the Party’s policy of retaining the Secretary of State for Scotland was the only sure way of protecting the Barnett arrangement (*The Times*, 25 April 2001). The political equivalent of ambulance chasing is no way to protect the union, as the anguished cries of discontent from English Labour grow louder the Tory Party in Scotland should avoid jumping on any tartan clad

bandwagons. Thus, principled policy, which offers long term solutions for stability in and between, the different layers of UK government, is the best and right way forward. One way to avoid the Nationalists, on both sides of the border, continually sniping at and exploiting funding arrangements would be to adopt 'Full Fiscal Freedom' for the Scottish Parliament. This led the 'The Tuesday Club', who as a group have no formal affiliation with the Party, to offer such a solution (Fraser, et al, 1998).

The group sketched out 'three good reasons', along with concomitant political benefits, for accepting this policy. Firstly, as the party had lost heavily in the devolution referendum it should unequivocally accept the result but also emphasise that those primary legislative powers for Scotland must carry financial consequences. Secondly, paradoxically it would act as a bulwark against separation. Nationalists could no longer exploit this 'likeliest source of conflict'. Lastly, as there seems to be no indication that the clarion complaints from England will diminish with time, indeed presciently they said the reverse to be probably true, the policy would effect the stable constitutional settlement needed, perceived on all sides to be fair and reasonable; strengthening the union rather than weakening it (ibid.). Moreover, such a strategy should break the social democratic mindset of the Scottish people, and introduce alternative values of thrift, personal responsibility, self-reliance and proper guardianship and care of the public finances that Jamieson (2001) stressed were crucial Conservative tenets. A recent poll for the *Scotland on Sunday* newspaper suggested that the Scottish people would indeed accept this as fair and reasonable. Two thirds believed that Holyrood should be their tax collector while 73 per cent did not want any truck with independence. Interestingly, the newspaper called for the creation of the fiscal equivalent of a Constitutional Convention to debate the need for a new concordat and settlement (*Scotland on Sunday*, 18 February 2001). This could be the very opportunity the Scots Tories need, participating within a new Convention would no doubt have a beneficial impact on their 'valence problem'. That is, their perceived alien identification vis-à-vis the Scottish body politic could be to some considerable length addressed. In short, the degree to which they were linked in the public's mind with the conditions and goals of almost everyone in the unionist parties on this issue could only be of benefit to them in a Scottish consciousness context.

It is extremely important that such governance problems are solved for the long term because it is certainly not beyond the limits of our imagination to see different parties simultaneously controlling the different levers of governance and exacerbating such issues. However, David McLetchie is still cautious about full ‘fiscal powers’, although he readily admits that anyone starting with a blank sheet of paper would not devise the present arrangement. And he further states: ‘I don’t set my face against it but if it was to come about then there must be a much broader consensus for it amongst the political parties and the business community. And there is the argument that you couldn’t significantly expand tax raising powers of the Scottish Parliament without putting that matter to the people first in a referendum, after all it was put to them before’<sup>7</sup>.

Of course, there is the possibility that the SNP could exploit such powers if they were the administration in Holyrood with, let us say, a Tory one in Westminster. But McLetchie was remarkably relaxed about the scenario in our counterfactual crystal ball gazing exercise. He believes that there are lots of issues vis-à-vis the SNP and devolution which are unresolved. For him, even in the highly unlikely and unrealistic scenario that the SNP could form a majority government, under the present system, then that would immediately trigger a referendum. If they won it that would be the end of the show and if they lost it then independence would be off the agenda for some considerable time. On the greater likelihood that the SNP could participate in a coalition then the unresolved issues would come to the fore. Thus, he states: ‘If the SNP want to be in government in Scotland it has to accept devolution, it doesn’t necessarily have to accept the present distribution of powers – between Westminster and Scotland - but it has to acknowledge that there is a role for the British state. It has to come to an accommodation with the British state, at the very least in a single market and monetary union context’<sup>8</sup>. In short, the Scottish Conservatives now believe that there are now potentially more problems over the issue of devolution found within the ranks of the SNP than that found within their own party.

Indeed, returning to the issue of ‘fiscal freedom’, the Party has not set its face against local government raising its own revenue and envisages such councils thus having greater self-reliance. To establish this greater autonomy and independence the Party believes that it is essential that these councils move in a direction which would allow

them to raise more of their own revenue and decide the levels of their spending (SCUP, 2001). This no doubt reflects one of the other dire warnings against the ills of devolution issued at the 1997 Westminster Election, that ‘tensions between a Scottish parliament and local government would be created’ (SCUP, 1997). Two years on, in devolution terms, and Daphne Sleight could still reiterate these concerns: ‘it [devolution] has not done local government any good at all, local government has simply died. The scrutiny of the press is needed yet the press has simply ignored it but that means that many areas have got away with murder because of it, they’ve taken their eyes off the ball’<sup>9</sup>. She goes on to suggest that one reason for this marginalisation of local government is that it is in danger of becoming practically a department of the Scottish Parliament. ‘I would like to see it far more independent, it is in great danger of it being a complete and utter cipher of Labour in power in Holyrood’<sup>10</sup>. The answer for the Conservatives and their leader on Edinburgh City Council, Daphne Sleight, is to devolve greater powers to local authorities reinforcing the councils separate identities and importance.

The Party’s commitment to devolution per se, and commitment to greater devolution to local government, was witnessed by its participation in the ‘Renewing Local Democracy Working Group, (the Kerely Committee of the McIntosh Commission). The Tories participated even though their preferred electoral system for local government (Single Member Plurality) was not even to be considered by the Committee’s terms of reference. Further evidence for the Tories that proportional systems give disproportionate power to smaller parties, in that the Scottish executive terms of reference may have had more to do with a Liberal Democrat tail wagging the dog. Moreover, for the Scottish Tories the discourse of Kerely was suggestive more of ‘Millbank insincerity’, with its ‘modernisation’, ‘renewal’, ‘stakeholding’ and ‘parity of esteem’, than any real empowerment of local democracy. Daphne Sleight states ‘there was a lot of warm words on the Single Transferable Vote system’<sup>11</sup> (STV) but it would seem now that the issue of PR in local electoral reform is rather a sticking point for the Scottish Executive (Scottish Parliament, 2000). Daphne Sleight intimated that the approach taken by the Tories was one of: ‘in the event that the electoral system had to change then at least the party would have a view on it and if the party must choose a PR system, then it would be the Additional Member System (AMS) as the best of a bad bunch’. And asked her opinion of

this 'renewal' of local government that may give it more legitimacy with which to challenge Holyrood, she replied, 'high bloody time'<sup>12</sup>. It is quite obvious that the Tories see local government as a useful measure of counter balance to Holyrood, in our new multi-level body politic.

At the opposite end of the multi-level governance framework the Scottish Tories would like to seek consensus on lasting reform in the House of Lords, incorporating a substantial level of directly elected members. The Rifkind Commission suggested that this should include direct representation from the countries of the United Kingdom in the manner of the US Senate or German Bundesrat (SCUP, 1998). On the question that never seems to go away for the Tories, Europe, the Party in Scotland seems to be at ease with a policy of challenging the elitist one size fits all model of federalist integration, a model which seems to be manifestly out of tune with the masses of Europe, as the Danes and Irish have shown. The party appears to be moving in a 'hyper-globalist' direction, in that it wants the flexibility to gain from a more internationalist open seas policy, with which it believes the present European Union, with its high levels of tax, regulations and directives, militates against (Baker et al, 2000). Whatever the appropriate model should be for the EU, the Party in Scotland advocated that the Secretary of State for Scotland would, on issues of particular concern to Scotland, lead UK delegations to the Council; of Ministers (SCUP, 2001).

With the above short examination of our multi-level governance framework in mind it is clear that the Tories in Scotland have accepted devolution and are working for its success in order to save the union. After all, to paraphrase the Burkean tradition of Conservatism, change is inevitable if not always desirable but the party without the means of some change is without the means of its conservation. Burke also said that it is circumstances which give to every political principle its distinguishing colour and discriminating effect. The principle of devolution has complex circumstances creating a dynamic of demands for greater powers at different levels. In Wales, for example, we already have a consensus forming around the idea of gaining similar primary legislative powers to that of the Scots. One young Welsh Conservative AM expressed the view that such circumstances may dictate the need to accept the idea of a codified constitution<sup>13</sup>. A constitution which would delineate specific powers at the different levels of government

and which would have the added advantage of ring-fencing 'reserved powers' to preclude the EU extending its regulations and directives into areas which were never intended to be transferred to it in the first place. This fits very uneasily with the Conservative idea of the organic evolving state but if the means of change justify the conservation of the union then they duly must be considered.

### **Conclusion.**

The immediate to medium term future for the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party is not one that readily conjures up a rosy image however much we keep in mind Harold Wilson's dictum of a week being a long time in politics. The Party may now be very much at ease with the devolution idea and be a willing, if not an overly enthusiastic, partner in the present Scottish Parliamentary set up. But as this chapter has clearly demonstrated the Party must address the twin issues of a 'cartel party' having a severe 'valence problem' in today's UK multi-level body politic if that image is to have a sanguine tint to it at all. A change of name would not immediately re-root the Party firmly in 'Scottish consciousness'. Indeed, The Strathclyde Commission reforms had ruled out a return to the Scottish Unionist Party, no doubt over sensitivity to the sectarian connotations it carries because of Ulster. But, there may be an opportunity for the Party to revive the local government label of the fifties, the Progressives, to use in local councils, particularly if these councils do have the greater autonomy and independence projected for them post Kerely. Although there would not be an immediate beneficial impact on the 'valence problem' over identity, it is of course sensible to start at ground level to re-root in the Scottish consciousness where, after all, the necessary people are to be found who can rejuvenate the organisation that is needed to gain the necessary votes and seats. But if the Party were to utilise the Progressive Conservatives label advantageously it would still also have to address its position as a cartel party at different levels of government and this, counter intuitively, may offer a greater opportunity to tackle the valence problem.

The SNP do not have a divine right to be considered the ‘Scottish party’ and as David McLetchie has outlined above devolution may hold greater longer term pitfalls for the Nationalists than for the Scottish Tories. If the SNP were to hold power in Holyrood but fail to convince on independence then it may be the SNP who tear themselves apart or even develop a ‘valence’ problem if they refuse the necessary accommodation with Westminster. But more importantly, with the West Lothian and Barnett questions to mind, the Party may help its Scottish identity problem by being proactive in the development of a Scottish Convention on seeking the ‘definitive’ long term solution to these issues. The three major unionist parties in Scotland have, as cartel parties, the mutual interest in Scottish devolutionary collective organisational survival. The three unionist parties working along with the corporate and academic elites in a Scottish Convention could only be of benefit to the Party in a Scottish consciousness context. Moreover, consideration of greater fiscal autonomy for Scotland is not the only question of autonomy that is long overdue for analysis. Further Scottish autonomous reform is needed in the Party’s organisation. Making the leader of the Party in Holyrood the leader of the Party in Scotland would address the equivocal structural problem of the Party. If the Chairman or Chief Executive was not elected by the membership, along with other vital posts in Scotland, then the posts could be in the gift of the leader in Scotland to appoint. We have heard of the excellent liaison between Westminster, Edinburgh and Cardiff, so in theory such appointments should create no difficulty. After all, to paraphrase the leader of the Scottish Tories at Holyrood, the Party in Scotland, or for that matter the Scottish people, would not accept otherwise. But, the convincing win by Iain Duncan Smith, over Kenneth Clarke in the last round of the 2001 leadership election, will re-new the whole internal party debate over the question of the extent of that autonomy. For those who remain within the ranks of the Conservative Party settled policy on Europe is now that of eurosceptic opposition to any further European integration. But, with a new leader who has a reputation of being an ‘arch Unionist’, who once contemplated a future challenge to Labour’s devolution settlement, then policy on Scotland and on the Scottish Party may be far from settled.

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<sup>1</sup> David McLetchie's, Phil Gallie's and Ben Wallace's interviews were part of a series of interviews carried out at the Scottish Parliament between 27-29 March, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Daphne Sleight, Edinburgh 18 March, 2001.

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that regards to the post of Presiding Officer, David McLetchie strongly emphasised that there was no deal between Labour and the Tories on this and thought there was too much reliance placed on a highly speculative newspaper report. Correspondence with David McLetchie, 25 July 2001.

<sup>4</sup> Interviewed at the Scottish Parliament between 27-29 March, 2001.

<sup>5</sup> The Tory Assembly Members in Cardiff, interviewed between 15-17 May 2001, echoed this view.

<sup>6</sup> Interviewed at the Scottish Parliament between 27-29 March, 2001.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with David McLetchie at the Scottish Parliament 27 March, 2001

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Daphne Sleight, Edinburgh 18 March, 2001.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Conservative Member of the National Assembly of Wales, interviewed in Cardiff, between 15-17 May 2001.