

Defending the Constitution: the Conservative Party & the idea of devolution, 1945-1974¹

In retrospect, the interwar years represented a golden age for British Conservatism. As the *Times* remarked in 1948, during the ‘long day of Conservative power which stretched with only cloudy intervals between the two world wars’ the only point at issue was how the party might ‘choose to use the power that was almost their freehold’.² Nowhere was this sense of all-pervading calm more evident than in the sphere of constitutional affairs. The settlement of the Irish question in 1921-22 ensured a generation of relative peace for the British constitution.³ It removed from the political arena an issue that had long troubled the Conservatives’ sense of ‘civic nationalism’ - their feeling that the defining quality of the ‘nation’ to which they owed fealty was the authority of its central institutions, notably parliament and the Crown – and simultaneously took the wind from the sails of the nationalist movements in Wales and Scotland.⁴ Other threats to the status quo, such as Socialism, were also kept under control. The Labour Party’s failure to capture an outright majority of seats at any inter-war election curbed its ability to embark on the radical reshaping of society that was its avowed aim, a prospect which, in any case, astute Tory propagandising ensured was an unattractive proposition to most people before the second world war.⁵

¹ I would like to record my thanks to Dr James McConnel, Ewen Cameron and Stuart Ball for their input to this chapter.

² *Times*, 6 October 1948, p. 5, Leader, ‘Conservatives in Conference’.

³ John Turner, ‘Letting go: The Conservative Party and the end of the Union with Ireland’, in Alexander Grant and Keith J. Stringer (eds.), *Uniting the Kingdom? The Making of British History* (Routledge, London, 1995), pp. 255-74.

⁴ Jim Bulpitt, *Territory and Power in the United Kingdom: An interpretation* (Manchester, 1983), pp. 129-30. IGC Hutchinson, ‘Scottish Unionism Between the Two World Wars’, in Catriona M. MacDonald, *Unionist Scotland, 1800-1997* (Edinburgh, 1998), p.89; M. Cragoe, ‘Conservatives, ‘Englishness’ and ‘Civic Nationalism’ between the wars’, in D. Tanner et al., *Debating nationhood and governance in Britain, 1885-1939: perspectives from four nations*, (Manchester, 2006), pp. 192-210; R. J. Finlay, *Independent and Free*.

⁵ Ross McKibbin, ‘Class and conventional wisdom: The Conservative Party and the “Public” in Inter-war Britain’, in idem., *The Ideologies of Class: Social relations in Britain, 1880-1950* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 259-93; P. Williamson, ‘The Doctrinal Politics of Stanley Baldwin’, in M. Bentley, *Public and Private Doctrine* (Cambridge, 1993); David Jarvis, ‘British Conservatism and Class Politics in the 1920s’, *EHR*, cxi, 1996, pp.59-84; John Singleton, ‘Labour, the Conservatives and nationalisation’, in Robert Millward and John Singleton, *The political economy of nationalisation in Britain, 1920-1950* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 14-15.

The general election of 1945, however, reshaped the battleground of British politics and confronted the Conservative Party with different challenges. The Labour Party's large majority allowed Attlee's government to pursue its radical agenda unhindered, and raised for Conservatives the spectre of an all-powerful, socialist State in which control would be sucked into the centre, parliament made redundant and the 'British way of life', based on hardy individualism and personal initiative, undermined. As the Cold War took hold Conservative anxieties increased and the concern that the Labour Party might unwittingly 'hold open the door' for communism was often voiced. Nationalism, too, re-emerged in the Celtic heartlands of Scotland and Wales. Its challenge was different to that posed by Labour: Socialism threatened over-centralisation, but the nationalists, with their demands for separate legislative assemblies in Cardiff and Edinburgh, promised to fragment the State. As the Conservative Party made its hard way back from the great defeat of 1945, its central vision of how the State should be run was menaced from opposite sides by the competing ideologies of socialism and nationalism.

In this chapter, the extent to which Conservative policy towards Wales and Scotland was shaped by these forces in the decades after the war will be examined. Their relationship with the two countries was different. The Conservatives had a deep-rooted connection with Scotland that they lacked with the principality.⁶ Several party leaders and cabinet ministers hailed from Scotland and Lord Salisbury had appointed the first Secretary for Scotland in 1885; by 1939 the post had been upgraded, and now a Secretary of State sat in Cabinet, with an Under Secretary and a Scottish Office in Edinburgh.⁷ Between the wars, the country was a Conservative stronghold, with the party capturing almost half of Scottish seats between 1924 and 1939. In Wales, by contrast, the Conservatives had shallow roots. A bare 15% of the seats fell to their share between 1924 and 1939, and despite some ad hoc devolution of government functions to Cardiff, there was desire to treat Wales in the same way as Scotland. In 1938 Chamberlain became the last in a series of inter-war Ministers to turn down

⁶ Gabrielle Ward-Smith, 'Baldwin and Scotland: More than Englishness', *Contemporary British History*, 15 1 (Spring 2001),

⁷ M. Cragoe, 'Conservatives, "Englishness" and "Civic Nationalism" between the wars', in D. Tanner and C. Williams (eds.) *Debating Nationhood* (Manchester, forthcoming, 2006); H. J. Hanham, 'The creation of the Scottish Office, 1881-87', *Juridical Review*, 10 (1965), pp. 205-44; J. Mitchell, 'The Gilmour Report on Scottish Central Administration', *Juridical Review*, 34 (1989), pp. 173-88.

requests for a Welsh Secretary of State.⁸ As a consequence the Conservatives were regarded in Wales as the party of England in a way that was not so true in Scotland, and their inability to recruit sufficient Welsh-speaking Welshmen constantly undermined attempts to establish an enduring influence outside the anglicised fringe of the principality.⁹ The Conservatives had less to gain and less to lose in Wales, and their approach to policy-making reflected this.

The chapter falls into three sections corresponding to clear phases of Conservative thinking about the problem of devolution, and related, in turn, to the perceived threats posed by socialism and nationalism. Section one deals with the years immediately after the war, when the threat of socialism was paramount; section two focuses on the years of government between 1951 and 1964 when the socialist threat receded beneath the blanket of mid-century prosperity and nationalism's peripheral barks grew fainter; the final section examines the decade between 1964 and 1974, when nationalism rather than Socialism became the principal threat.

Section 1: A Minister proposed, 1945-51.

Throughout the period between 1945 and 1951 Conservatives feared that Labour's Socialist policies were creating an over-mighty State. Although their anxiety on this head was not new,¹⁰ it gained intensity after 1945 as fear of the Soviet Union's ambitions grew. It was typified by the comment of Winston Churchill, whose own contempt for communism was deep-seated,¹¹ that a victory for Labour at the general election of 1945 would lead to the introduction of a 'Gestapo' in Britain.¹² If

⁸ J. McConnell, "Sympathy without relief is rather like mustard without beef": devolution, Plaid Cymru, and the campaign for a secretary of state for Wales, 1937-8', *Welsh History Review*, 22, 3 (2005), pp. 535-57.

⁹ K. O. Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation: Wales, 1880-1980* (Cardiff, 1981), p. 379.

¹⁰ Ross McKibbin, 'Class and conventional wisdom: The Conservative Party and the "Public" in Inter-war Britain', in *The Ideologies of Class: Social relations in Britain, 1880-1950* (Oxford, 1990), pp.259-93; P. Williamson, 'The Doctrinal Politics of Stanley Baldwin', in M. Bentley, *Public and Private Doctrine* (Cambridge, 1993), pp.181-208.

¹¹ David Carlton, *Churchill and the Soviet Union* (Manchester UP, 2000), p. 140.

¹² Churchill, like many of the inter-war academics at the LSE, never forgot that Nazism was National Socialism, which makes sense of the German 'Gestapo' jibe. R. Cockett, *Thinking the Unthinkable*. His Gestapo point was not untypical of Tory opinion: Harriet Jones, 'A bloodless counter-revolution: The Conservative Party and the defence of Inequality, 1945-51' in Harriet Jones and Michael Kandiah (eds.) *The Myth of Consensus: New Views on British History, 1945-64* (Macmillan/ICBH, London, 1996), pp. 5-6.

Labour's programme became law, he suggested, and a 'complete socialist system' was introduced, 'effective and healthy opposition and the natural change in parties in office from time to time would necessarily come to an end and a political police would be required to enforce an absolute and permanent system upon the nation.'¹³ A week later he suggested that under a 'Socialist regime', people would become 'mere cogs for the service of the State without privileges or freedom of any kind'¹⁴

If fear of the Labour Party's centralising policies formed one axis of concern for Conservatives, the rise of nationalist sentiment in Scotland and Wales formed another. The Scottish Nationalist Party [SNP] had performed well at a series of by-elections during the war, and captured Motherwell at a by-election in 1945. Although both they and Plaid Cymru performed less well at the general election of 1945, both recovered ground at subsequent by-elections.¹⁵ In 1946, the Welsh nationalists took 30% of the vote at Ogmore and over 20% at Aberdare, while the SNP, with local Conservative backing, secured 43.2% of the poll at the Paisley by-election in February 1948.¹⁶ By the end of the decade extensive petitioning campaigns calling for the creation of legislative assemblies in both countries provided another testament to the vitality of nationalist sentiment. The Scottish Convention began circulating its Covenant in 1949, while the New Wales Union inaugurated a similar campaign in 1950. The unsettling influence of nationalist activity prompted the Conservative grass roots in both countries to demand explicit expressions of devolutionary intent from central policy-makers. However, as this section will underline, Conservative policy makers only accommodated such pressure when it visibly benefited the larger campaign against socialism.

The general election of 1945 left the Conservative party in disarray; the leadership did little to point a direction for the party in the country.¹⁷ Only in 1946, when the party Conference demanded a statement of policy was a committee established under R. A.

¹³ *WM*, 14 June 1945.

¹⁴ *WM*, 22 June 1945.

¹⁵ Alan But Philip, *The Welsh Question*, p. 74; Richard J. Finlay, 'Pressure Group or Political Party? The Nationalist Impact on Scottish Politics, 1928-1945', *20th Century British History*, 3, 3 (1992), pp. 274-97.

¹⁶ M. Dyer, ' "A Nationalist in the Churchillian Sense": John MacCormick, the Paisley by-election of 18 February 1948, Home Rule and the crisis in Scottish Liberalism', *Parliamentary History*, 22 (2003), pp. 285-307; *WM*, 7 December 1946.

¹⁷ Ramsden, *Age of Churchill*, p. 143; Ramsden, *Making of Conservative Party Policy*, p. 109.

Butler, which produced the *Industrial Charter* in May 1947.¹⁸ The *Charter* marked the party's acceptance of those measures of nationalisation which had already taken place; greater openness towards Trades Unions; and more economic intervention than Tories normally allowed.¹⁹ However, it also emphasised the party's opposition to further nationalisation, state monopoly and the curbing of individual enterprise, and demanded that the State 'devolve both the making of plans and their execution' to more local bodies, and ensure 'adequate decentralisation with special regard to Scotland and Wales'.²⁰ Their concern for Scotland was particularly marked, and they highlighted their sympathy with 'Scottish anxiety at the way in which control over its economy is being centralised in London, four hundred miles from its industries.'²¹

The principle of 'decentralisation' enshrined in this analysis would form a key element in Conservative strategy in the post war years; at grass roots level in Scotland and Wales, however, it was augmented by a heightened sensibility to the threat of nationalism. The Scottish Unionist Members Committee [SUMC], alarmed by the pervasiveness of 'the belief that insufficient attention is paid to the needs of the country' had started to consider the scope for further administrative devolution as early as October 1946.²² Their deliberations were given added urgency by the SNP's unexpectedly strong display at Paisley in February 1948, and the subsequent decision by the Scottish Convention to circulate a petition (or 'covenant') calling for a Scottish parliament. The Scottish Unionists responded with a specially convened conference at which they recommended a far-reaching package of measures including the appointment of a new Minister of State for Scotland with an additional under-secretary; a Royal Commission to examine financial relations between Scotland and England; and the creation of separate executives for the nationalised industries in Scotland.²³ All were incorporated in the Party's Scottish Manifesto, *Scottish Control of Scottish Affairs*.²⁴ Though a response to nationalism, the policies complemented the larger battle against Socialism. As the conference itself concluded, the battle against

¹⁸ Ramsden, *Making of Conservative Party Policy*, pp. 109-12.

¹⁹ Ramsden, *Age of Churchill*, pp. 150-2.

²⁰ *The Industrial Charter: A Statement of Conservative Industrial Policy* (London, 1947), pp. 10-11, 26.

²¹ *Industrial Charter*, p.12

²² SUMC, 1/11, [J. R. Hutchison?] to Winston Churchill, 24 March 1947.

²³ *Scotsman*, 2 June 1949.

²⁴ Anthony Seldon, *Churchill's Indian Summer: The Conservative Government, 1951-55* (London, 1981), p. 130.

Socialism had to take priority for the simple reason that ‘Because centralisation is an essential part of Socialist belief, there will be increasingly less recognition of Scotland while Socialism lasts’.²⁵

In Wales, Conservatives responded in similar fashion. In October 1946, the MP for Caernarvon, Col Price-White, told the House of Commons of the ‘unity of desire and demand for special Ministerial control of Welsh affairs on the part of Welsh men and women’,²⁶ and a year later, introduced a successful motion at the Conservative Party’s annual conference urging the formulation of a policy for Wales.²⁷ Central Office tasked a somewhat reluctant Enoch Powell with visiting Wales and devising a policy document.²⁸ After two fact-finding missions, he recommended that the party appoint someone either in, or with access to, the Cabinet to ensure ‘attention to Welsh interests in all spheres of government.’²⁹ This became the party’s policy. In January 1948, Butler promised that a member of the Cabinet would be appointed to safeguard Welsh interests and to liaise with civil servants. ‘They needed not a Minister with over-riding powers’, he told the Commons, ‘which would lead to muddle, but a watchdog of Welsh affairs – an Ambassador for Wales in the Government.’³⁰ While a few voices were raised in protest against the proposed Minister for Wales - ‘Ruritanian nonsense’ blustered ‘Kelticus’ in the *Western Mail*,³¹ the party made the post the central plank of *The Conservative Policy for Wales and Monmouthshire*, published in 1949.³² Yet, in Wales as in Scotland, the adoption of the policy reflected its perceived utility in the fight against Socialism as the claims of regional identity. Even the *Western Mail*, which had sought greater concessions, greeted the document by hoping the ‘Welsh Charter’ would appeal to ‘all who fervently desire a relaxation of State control’ and ‘a restoration of individual freedom’.³³

²⁵ *Glasgow Herald*, 29 November 1949, 5f ‘Unionist Policy on Scots Devolution’.

²⁶ *Hansard*, 5th series, vol. 428, c. 341 (28 October 1946);

²⁷ *WM*, 22 July and 22 September 1947.

²⁸ J. Ramsden, *The Making of Conservative Party Policy: The Conservative Research Department since 1929* (London, 1981), pp. 122-3.

²⁹ CCO, 4/2/183, S. Pierssene to H. Hopkinson, 22 Jan. 1949; E. Powell to W. V. Weale, 17 Aug. 1948; CCO, 4/2/183, ‘Report on Rural Wales’, typescript dated 20 Jan. 1948, pp. 9-10, para 19.

³⁰ *Hansard*, 5th Series, vol. 446, cc. 692-6 (26 Jan. 1948).

³¹ *WM*, 3 November 1948, letter of ‘Kelticus’.

³² Alan Butt Philip, *The Welsh Question*, p. 295; *WM*, 1 March 1949, letter of H. Raymond Gower,.

³³ *WM*, 1 March 1949.

In 1949, the Conservatives produced a major statement of policy, *The Right Road for Britain*. Here, the full reach of the decentralisation policy was visible for the first time. Alongside the distinctive solutions developed for Wales and Scotland were policies designed to empower local government across Britain.³⁴ As Churchill told a conference on this theme in October 1949, Labour was threatening ‘to replace our well-trying system of local government’ with an ‘alien’ system of non-elected bodies ‘manipulated from Whitehall’.³⁵ The Conservatives, he maintained, would ‘take care that local government remains a true reflection of the communities it exists to serve, rather than a mere appendage or even utensil of any Government which rules in Westminster.’³⁶ Local government reform would remain a key element in Conservative thinking about devolution for the remainder of the period covered by this chapter.

The Tories’ anti-centralisation platform played an important role in the general election of 1950.³⁷ Churchill elaborated the theme for audiences in Edinburgh and Cardiff in the week before the election, arguing that nationalism was the result of Labour’s centralising policy, and sympathising with Scots who might wish to leave a Union dominated from London.³⁸ At Cardiff, he was more circumspect,³⁹ and explained that the Conservative policy of a Minister for Welsh Affairs offered the best counter to the ‘handcuffs of centralisation’ proposed by Labour. The message seemed to get through. In Scotland, the Conservatives and their National Liberal allies gained 4 seats, and though no additional seats were secured in Wales the party’s share of the vote rose to 27%.⁴⁰

The narrow majority retained by Labour ensured that another election could not long be delayed. In the twenty months between the elections of 1950 and 1951, however, fresh evidence emerged that the principal driver for Conservative policy-making was socialism rather than nationalism. In Wales, a body inspired by the Scottish

³⁴ Ramsden, *Making of Conservative Party Policy*, pp. 135-41.

³⁵ *WM*, 12 October 1949.

³⁶ *WM*, 12 October 1949.

³⁷ Mitchell, *Conservatives and the Union*, p.50.

³⁸ *Glasgow Herald*, 15 February 1950, p. 7.

³⁹ *WM*, 9 February 1950.

⁴⁰ Craig, *Parliamentary Election Statistics*, p. 14; H. G. Nicholas, *The British General Election of 1950* (Macmillan, London, 1951), p. 321.

Convention, and calling itself the 'New Wales Union', began circulating a petition calling for a Welsh parliament.⁴¹ The initial reaction of local Conservatives to the idea ranged from mockery - it would be no more than 'a glorified county council', said one⁴² - to more apocalyptic predictions that, given the likely predominance of Labour members from the industrial belt, it would be a 'Socialist Prison'.⁴³ That local feathers were ruffled, however, was revealed when a hastily convened gathering of Welsh Conservatives met at Ludlow in May.⁴⁴ The meeting denounced the current Conservative policy on Wales as 'weak and unattractive' and resolved to seek an audience with Butler to insist on securing for Wales 'the same sort of political set up as Scotland'.

The party leadership, however, remained unmoved. The chairman of the Wales and Monmouth Area felt the party had gone far enough on the issue of Welsh devolution. As he wrote in a private memo to constituency chairmen in Wales: 'We should avoid taking a step which would in the end help the Welsh nationalists. We should not open the door to them in the way the Socialists open the door for the Communists. We do not want to take the first step which would help a separatist movement.'⁴⁵ Socialism remained the principal enemy and the existing policy was deemed sufficient to meet this challenge. When the Conservative Party's *Aims for Wales* was published in October, the original proposal for a Minister remained.⁴⁶

The 1951 election vindicated the strategy. In both Wales and Scotland, the Nationalist vote was squeezed; all the Plaid Cymru candidates lost their deposits.⁴⁷ The Conservative big guns rechristened decentralisation and called it 'local patriotism'. Lord Wootton assured an audience at Anglesey that the party did not want to 'treat Wales as a region of England ... Conservatism was the enemy of centralisation, and the champion of local patriotism';⁴⁸ Butler, speaking in Blaenau Ffestiniog, explained

⁴¹ Finlay, *Partnership for Good?*, p. 141; J. Mitchell, *Strategies for Self-Government: The Campaign for a Scottish Parliament* (Edinburgh, 1996), pp. 144-7; *WM*, 14 July 1950, letter of Lewis J. Parry.

⁴² *WM*, 18 May 1951; *WM*, 11 April 1951.

⁴³ *WM*, 21 May 1951; *WM*, 21 May 1951.

⁴⁴ CCO, 4/4/324, J. V. Garmonsway to J. P. L. Thomas, 17 May 1951.

⁴⁵ CCO, 4/4/324, Confidential 'Memorandum from the Chairman to Constituency Chairmen'.

⁴⁶ *WM*, 9 October 1951.

⁴⁷ GH, 17 Oct 1951; *Times*, 25 October 1951; D. Butler, *The British General Election of 1951* (Macmillan, 1952), p.191; *WM*, 27 October 1951.

⁴⁸ *WM*, 3 August 1951.

that Conservatives liked ‘local patriotism’ and this was why, ‘in local government, we so deplore the Socialist tendency to transfer powers to Whitehall. Conservatives distrust centralisation.’⁴⁹ Anthony Eden drove home the central message at large meetings in Cardiff and Edinburgh, where he said that socialism inevitably meant government by monopoly, bureaucracy and control from Whitehall, and an ever more powerful State.⁵⁰ In Glasgow Churchill condemned the ‘concentration of power in one place and in one set of party-biased hands’ and promised that a Conservative government would take steps to ‘see that Scotland is no longer treated as though she were some province or appendage of England’.⁵¹

The election returned the Conservatives to power. They won 321 seats, a majority of 17 over Labour, Liberals and ‘Others’. In Scotland, the party claimed almost 50% of the votes cast and won three more seats, bringing its total to 29. In Wales, the share of the vote reaped by the Conservatives and their National Liberal allies rose above 30% of the total, and victories in Conway and Barry brought the party’s total representation in the principality to six.⁵² Although the suspicion lingers that the party’s promise of a Minister for Wales had little direct influence on this improved performance, the wider policy of which it formed a part, decentralisation, had clearly been very successful in Britain as a whole. From a devolutionary perspective, it now remained to be seen whether the promises forged during the dark night of opposition would be redeemed in the cool morning of victory.

Section II: The Minister for Welsh Affairs Era: 1951-64

On their return to government in 1951, the Conservatives moved quickly to fulfil their election pledges to Wales and Scotland. In the former, a ‘Minister of Welsh Affairs’ was appointed, together with an Under Secretary with his own PPS. Scotland received a Minister of State to act as a deputy to the Secretary of State, and to work mainly in Scotland itself, together with a third Under-Secretary of State and a Royal Commission on Scottish Affairs. Despite the activity of the first months, little further

⁴⁹ *WM*, 15 October 1951.

⁵⁰ *WM*, 12 October 1951; *Glasgow Herald*, 16 Oct 1951.

⁵¹ *Glasgow Herald*, 18 October 1951, p.5.

⁵² Craig, *Parliamentary Election Statistics*, pp. 14-15.

progress was made on devolution in the years of Conservative government beyond the transfer of some minor administrative functions were devolved to the Scottish Office.⁵³ The fear of Socialist centralisation that led the party to offer concessions to both countries in the *The Right Road for Britain* (1949) was effectively neutralised by their own victory in 1951. With the reins of government in their own hands there was little pressure on the central party to consider further constitutional innovations. At the same time, the electorate seemed content with the status quo. The 1950s saw the Unionists advance in both Wales and Scotland Unionists, especially the latter, where they captured on average some 46% of the vote.⁵⁴ However, the failure of the party leadership to embrace the notion of a Secretary of State for Wales allowed the initiative in Welsh affairs to pass inexorably to the Labour Party.

The post of Minister for Welsh Affairs was designed to be held in tandem with a senior Cabinet position.⁵⁵ In the 13 years it existed, four different individuals held the post. The first, and arguably most successful, was Sir David Maxwell Fyfe, who combined the role with that of Home Secretary.⁵⁶ The fact of Maxwell Fyfe's being a Scot caused some expressions of outrage in the principality:⁵⁷ one correspondent of the *Western Mail*, for example, wondered whether cynicism should have been carried to its logical conclusion and Oliver Lyttleton appointed 'Colonial Secretary and Minister for Welsh Affairs'.⁵⁸ Some of the sting of Maxwell Fyfe's appointment was drawn by the nomination of David Llywellyn, MP for Cardiff North, and Howell Garner Evans, National Liberal MP for Denbigh, as Under Secretary and PPS respectively.⁵⁹

Maxwell Fyfe's tenure of the office was, in fact, highly successful on both personal and political grounds. He quickly garnered a crop of good reviews from different parts of Wales. No less a figure than Huw T. Edwards, chair of the Council for Wales,

⁵³ I. Levitt (ed.), *The Scottish Office. Depression and Reconstruction, 1919-1959* (Edinburgh, 1992); I. Levitt, 'The Origins of the Scottish Development Department, 1943-62', *Scottish Affairs*, 14 (1996); Mitchell, *Conservatives and the Union*, pp. 30-37.

⁵⁴ Finlay, *Partnership for Good?*, pp. 138-40.

⁵⁵ Seldon, *Churchill's Indian Summer*, p. 127.

⁵⁶ WM, 18 October 1954. Churchill's first choice, Gwilym Lloyd George, lost his seat at the 1951 election.

⁵⁷ Earl of Kilmuir, *Political Adventure: The Memoirs of the Earl of Kilmuir* (London, 1964), p. 203; CCO, 4/4/324, unknown to Lord Woolton, 29 October 1951.

⁵⁸ WM, 1 November 1951, letter of Elliott Humphreys.

⁵⁹ WM, 6 November 1951; WM, 15 November 1951.

remarked: ‘The more we deal with him, and the more we meet him, the more we are impressed by his genuine desire to do something of practical value for Wales. The minister is really concerned about the affairs of Wales.’⁶⁰ It was with some justice that the *Western Mail* remarked, in April 1952: ‘Within a few months of his taking office Sir David has succeeded in making Conservatives and Conservatism better liked in Wales than they have been for generations.’⁶¹

Hard work and skilful diplomacy lay at the root of Maxwell Fyfe’s success.⁶² In the first year alone, he visited Wales on no fewer than twenty occasions, speaking to a wide variety of representative bodies and even asking for a Welsh Dragon pennant for his Home Office car when in the principality on Ministerial duties.⁶³ He succeeded in blocking both the proposed afforestation of a section of the Towy valley and the siting of a planned weapons range on the Lleyn Peninsula, while also ensuring that the day-to-day control of primary and secondary education was transferred to Wales.⁶⁴ The party was not slow to capitalise on Maxwell Fyfe’s good track record. At the end of its first year in office, the Conservatives issued a short leaflet detailing their successes, the *Review of Welsh Affairs*, in English and Welsh editions.⁶⁵

Maxwell Fyfe was ably supported by his Under Secretaries. David Llywellyn soon resigned on health grounds,⁶⁶ but his successor, Lord Lloyd was well chosen. Lloyd was a resident of Hitchin in Hertfordshire, but had served in the Welsh Guards during the war and had long fielded Welsh questions in the House of Lords. Although there was some disappointment that a Welsh MP had not been selected for the post,⁶⁷ Churchill defended the appointment on the grounds that, not being bound by the same rules of attendance as a member of the lower chamber, Lloyd could spend more time in the principality and ‘attend personally at conferences and on delegations affecting Welsh affairs both within the Principality and at Whitehall.’⁶⁸ It was the model which had been adopted in Scotland, where Lord Home’s spell as Minister of State was

⁶⁰ WM, 16 October 1952.

⁶¹ WM, 17 April 1952.

⁶² CRO, CCO, 1/10/507, Annual Report 12 March 1954.

⁶³ WM, 29 September 1952; WM, 22 October 1952.

⁶⁴ WM, 19 May 1952.

⁶⁵ WM, 6 October 1952.

⁶⁶ WM, 13 October 1952; WM, 18 January 1966.

⁶⁷ WM 16 October 1952, letter of N. Penry Thomas.

⁶⁸ WM, 25 November 1952.

proceeding successfully, and was to become a permanent feature of the arrangements in Wales. Lloyd's chief contribution was to head a committee of business leaders which considered ways of bringing new industries to Wales, improving roads and boosting tourism.⁶⁹

The new arrangements for the administration of Wales were probably at their most effective and popular during the tenure of Maxwell-Fyfe and Lloyd. Both men moved on during the reshuffle occasioned by the retirement of Churchill in 1955, and thereafter the vitality of the post was lost. For the next two years, Gwilym Lloyd George, (supported by Lord Mancroft,) continued to combine the posts of Minister for Welsh Affairs and Home Secretary, a period which saw Cardiff formally designated the capital of Wales. In 1957, however, the post was reassigned to the Minister for Housing and Local Government, Henry Brooke, a sensible rationalisation of the role given the extensive organisational contacts this Department had with the principality. At the same time, the post of Under Secretary was upgraded and its occupant became Minister of State for Wales. Macmillan's choice for the new position fell upon an obscure Breconshire councillor, Vivian Lewis, who took the title Baron Brecon of Llanfeigan.⁷⁰ Macmillan's thinking was similar to that of Churchill's in appointing Lord Lloyd. 'I felt it right', he explained to an audience in Swansea during the 1959 election campaign, 'that there should not only be a Minister for Wales but a Minister in Wales, centred upon Cardiff and travelling continuously throughout the principality ... to ensure the co-ordination of economic development and [gauge] the changing needs of employment and industry.'⁷¹

Brooke's tenure of the office was troubled.⁷² He failed to capture the public imagination and his reform of administrative arrangements antagonised the Council for Wales, with which both Maxwell Fyfe and Gwilym Lloyd George had worked

⁶⁹ Seldon, *Churchill's Indian Summer*, pp. 128-9; WM 21 February 1953; WM, 4 April 1953; WM, 7 May 1953.

⁷⁰ CCO, 1/12/513, Brecon and Radnor Constituency Association files, Annual Report, 11 May 1958; P. Stead, 'The Labour Party and the Claims of Wales' in J. Osmond (ed.), *The National Question Again: Welsh Political Identity in the 1980s* (Llandyssul, 1985). P.108.

⁷¹ WM, 25 September 1959.

⁷² CCO, 1/12/517/1, Harold Soref to G Pierssene, 25 February 1957; CCO, 1/11/517, anonymous letter addressed to Macmillan, 10 February 1957 accusing the prime minister of an 'obvious anti-Welsh bias'; Morgan, *Rebirth*, p. 379; WM, 5 October 1959; WM, 11 Sept 1959;; Deacon, *Governance of Wales*, p. 16; WM, 9 September 1959.

well. The Council produced a highly critical report in January 1957 complaining that there was insufficient coordination between government departments; that Welsh civil servants were graded too low to carry weight at Whitehall; and that the Minister for Wales lacked executive authority.⁷³ They recommended the appointment of a Secretary of State with two Under Secretaries. Macmillan refused to grant this, offering instead a Minister of State, an economic committee of the Conference of Heads of Departments in Wales, and a strengthening of the 'senior cadre' of civil servants available to support the Minister of State for Wales and the Minister for Welsh Affairs. It was not enough, however, and Huw T. Edwards and four others resigned from the Council.⁷⁴ It was Brooke, too, who had to deal with the fallout from probably the most controversial issue to arise during the Tories' period in office, the planned flooding of the Tryweryn valley to supply Liverpool with water, a cause which Plaid Cymru took up with alacrity.⁷⁵

In fact, Brooke and Lord Brecon had a good story to tell about economic development in Wales – at the election of 1959, for example, they claimed to have brought 10,000 new jobs to Wales⁷⁶ - but Brooke cannot have been sorry to move on. His replacement in 1961 was Sir Keith Joseph who held the post until Labour were returned at the election of 1964. Labour's decision to replace the Minister for Welsh Affairs with a fully-fledged Secretary of State for Wales brought to an end the post's thirteen-year existence.⁷⁷ With so many changes at the Cabinet level, it was unsurprising that the key player after 1957 was not the Minister but his deputy, Lord Brecon, who held the post until Labour returned to office. Brecon provided an enduring focus of stability in Welsh affairs and his appointment remained, in the eyes of one observer, 'the most successful move the Conservatives made to try and meet Welsh demands.'⁷⁸

⁷³ Butt Philip, *The Welsh Question*, p. 281.

⁷⁴ WM, 12 September 1959; Butt Philip, *The Welsh Question*, pp. 77-8, 297-8; Andrew Walling, 'The Structure of Power in Labour Wales, 1951-1964', in D. Tanner, et .al., *Labour Party in Wales*, p.196.

⁷⁵ Owen G Roberts, 'Developing the untapped wealth of Britain's 'Celtic Fringe': Water engineering and the Welsh landscape, 1870 - 1960', *Landscape Research*, 31 (2006), pp. 121-33.

⁷⁶ WM, 3 October 1959,

⁷⁷ WM, 2 October 1964. Russell Martin Deacon, *The Governance of Wales: The Welsh Office and the Policy Process 1964-99* (Cardiff, UWP, 2002), pp. 18-19.

⁷⁸ Griffith, *Memory*, p.163.

The creation of the Minister of State for Welsh Affairs was complemented by a steady devolution of administrative functions to the principality.⁷⁹ Reforms in 1952, 1954, and 1958 gave the Cardiff Office of the Ministry of Education responsibility for running the every-day business of education in Wales; similarly, the Welsh Office of the Ministry of Health and Local Government had acquired responsibility for all local government matters in Wales and Monmouthshire by 1960. A new Commissioner for Wales was appointed at the Ministry of Transport and the status of the Welsh Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture was up-graded in 1956 so that he became responsible for 900 civil servants. The decision to up-grade the Under Secretary's post to that of Minister of State in 1957 was part of a wider reorganisation of arrangements within Welsh government noted above, and in 1963 the Conservatives created a Welsh economic intelligence unit, rather misleadingly called the 'Welsh Office'.⁸⁰ By 1964, a variety of Departments, including Education, Housing and Local Government, Agriculture and Fisheries, and Transport had offices in Wales.⁸¹

The nature of this process, however, should not be misunderstood. Vernon Bogdanor has highlighted the fact that these administrative changes did not reflect any 'overall plan of devolution': 'the process of decentralisation', he contends, 'was entirely pragmatic, and the extent of decentralisation differed from department to department.'⁸² And contemporary reviews were mixed. While the *Western Mail* could report by the end of the decade that 'literally no Government plan affecting Wales now reaches the Cabinet without careful scrutiny from the Welsh point of view',⁸³ a more common view seems to have been that voiced by Labour MP, W. T. Jones, who told the House of Commons in 1957: 'I cannot think of a single benefit that has accrued to Wales as a result of the appointment of a Minister for Welsh Affairs ... No special legislation has been brought forward peculiar to Wales and exclusive of England and Scotland.'⁸⁴ The Minister for Welsh Affairs had not secured for Wales the tangible advantages that the Secretary of State had gained for Scotland.

⁷⁹ Butt Philip, *Welsh Question*, p. 297-9.

⁸⁰ CCO, 1/14/538/1, Pontypridd Constituency files, Annual Report, 1962-3.

⁸¹ *The Campaign Guide, 1964* (London, 1964), p. 388.

⁸² V. Bogdanor, *Devolution*, p. 158.

⁸³ WM, 5 October 1959.

⁸⁴ *Hansard*, vol 564, col. 1010 (11 February 1957)

The question that must be addressed in the remainder of this section is why, having taken the initiative in creating the Minister for Welsh Affairs post, and subsequently allowed pragmatic devolution of administrative functions to the principality, the Conservative hierarchy remained unwilling to countenance the next step, the upgrading of the Minister to a full Secretary of State for Wales?

That there was a significant body of support in Welsh Conservative circles for the creation of a Secretary of State for Wales is indisputable. It arose in part from the local party's enduring anxiety concerning Plaid Cymru. Although average electoral support for Plaid peaked at about 10% in 1959, support in their strongholds of Caernarvon and Merioneth ran at about 20%, and their impressive performances at Aberdare (1954) and Newport (1956) demonstrated they could be a potent force at by-elections.⁸⁵ As the *Western Mail* reflected after the first of these, the Nationalists would represent a genuine threat in the principality as long as they could argue that the problems of Wales were receiving scant attention from Whitehall – a contention the appointment of a Secretary of State might help refute.⁸⁶ The Parliament for Wales petitioning campaign, moreover, attracted considerable support.⁸⁷ Welsh Tories were undoubtedly flustered by the assertion of Plaid's leader, Gwynfor Evans, that the 250,000 signatures on the petition finally submitted to parliament in March 1956 proved nearly 80% of people wanted Home Rule for Wales.⁸⁸

Another motivation for those who supported the appointment of a Secretary of State for Wales was the (perhaps sentimental) desire for constitutional parity with Scotland. This was a cornerstone of the *Western Mail's* position, and in July 1954, Sir Godfrey Llywellyn toured Wales and told the party chairman, Lord Woolton, that in towns such as Cardiff, Swansea and Llangollen there had been unanimous agreement that the Minister for Wales should become 'a whole time office with cabinet rank'.⁸⁹ Nine

⁸⁵ Butt Philip, *The Welsh Question*, pp. 78-9; WM, 25 October 1954; CCO, 1/11/540/3, S. B. H. Oliver to T. F. Watson, 12 July 1956

⁸⁶ WM, 30 October 1954.

⁸⁷ CCO, 4/4/324, Miss James to T. F. Watson, 5 July 1950; CCO, 4/4/324, J. V. Garmonsway to J. P. L. Thomas, 17 April 1951; WM, 12 April 1954; WM, 28 September 1959.

⁸⁸ *Western Mail*, 7 January 1956; CCO, 1/11/539, Brigadier E. O. Skaife to John Hare, 16 February 1954; CCO, 1/12/532, Aberavon constituency files: AGM 1958.

⁸⁹ CCO, 2/3/17, Sir Godfrey Llywellyn to Lord Woolton, 5 July 1954.

months later, on the eve of the 1955 election, Geoffrey Block of the Conservative Research Department reported very similar sentiments at the West Wales and Monmouth Council meeting in Carmarthen.⁹⁰ Several candidates at the 1955 election, including Raymond Gower in Barry and Michael Roberts in Cardiff South East, came out in favour of a Secretary of State.⁹¹

The Conservative manifesto of 1955, however, promised only that the ‘steady policy of administrative devolution should go on and go further’.⁹² The party hierarchy remained immovable for several reasons. First, they were not convinced that opinion within the Welsh Conservative party was genuinely united in favour of more devolution. Hostility to what Block called ‘this highfallutin’ nonsense of a Secretary of State and two Under-Secretaries and a glass coach’ could certainly be found, and a report by the Bow Group, *Work for Wales* (1959), openly disputed the need for a Secretary of State for Wales.⁹³ Second, the party hierarchy believed that the present arrangements were adequate to the administrative needs of Wales,⁹⁴ and that the appointment of a Secretary of State might make life more complicated. As Central Office pointed out in 1957, if there were a Secretary of State, MPs and Deputations would have to conduct all their business through that office which would then be responsible for delegating it to one of the nineteen new assistant secretaries.⁹⁵ It was a view that contained more than an echo of the analysis advanced by Neville Chamberlain in 1938.⁹⁶ A third reason for the party’s lukewarm attitude to the idea of a Secretary of State was a conviction that it would win them few votes. At election after election, the issue of Welsh devolution proved ephemeral in all but a few northern constituencies where Conservative chances of success were in any case slight.⁹⁷ This was true even in 1964, when Labour promised the electorate a Secretary of State.⁹⁸ In Wales, as in Scotland, Conservative candidates fought primarily on

⁹⁰ CCO, 2/45/4, G. Block to S. B. H. Oliver, 25 April 1955.

⁹¹ WM, 23 May 1955; CCO, 1/12/519, Basic Report, Denbigh, 19 December 1958, for Geraint Morgan; WM, 25 September 1959.

⁹² WM, 30 April 1955.

⁹³ CRD, 2/45/4, G. Block to D. Llywellyn, 12 February 1957; Judy Hillman and Peter Clarke, *Geoffrey Howe: A Quiet Revolutionary* (London, 1988), pp. 40-54; WM 23 Sept 1959; WM, 3 October 1959.

⁹⁴ WM, 23 April 1954.

⁹⁵ CRD, 2/45/4, G. Block to C. Chegwiddden, 22 February 1957.

⁹⁶ WM, 11 May 1955; WM 25 September 1959; McConnell, ‘Roast Beef’.

⁹⁷ WM, 25 Sept 1959; WM, 5 October 1964.

⁹⁸ Butler and Rose, *General Election of 1959*, p. 90; WM, 24 September 1959.

national issues and with like results: the proportion of the vote they and their National Liberal allies secured in Wales remained buoyant at around or just over 30% of the total. By 1959 the party held seven Welsh seats.⁹⁹

If considerations of practicality and expediency formed important elements in the party hierarchy's unwillingness to countenance the creation of a Secretary of State, there was also a strong ideological dimension. The creation of a Minister for Welsh Affairs had formed one element of the decentralisation policy enshrined in *The Right Road for Britain* (1949). As John Ramsden has argued, the review had an enduring impact: 'at least until 1965', he contends, '... a solid body of Party policy was in existence which could be modified, refined and kept up to date with changing circumstances'.¹⁰⁰ The original justification for the Minister of State for Wales remained at the forefront of the party leaders' minds throughout the 1950s. Thus when Anthony Eden visited Cardiff in 1955,¹⁰¹ he tied the benefits that Minister for Welsh Affairs had brought to Wales to the Conservatives' wider commitment to localised government: 'Our aim is always to secure a sufficient measure of devolution for Welsh local authorities ...[in] ... matters of day-to-day business with Departments in Wales', he concluded, adding, 'I hope you will agree that all this is proof that we are opposed to the idea of running the United Kingdom from Whitehall.' This echo of the 1951 campaign was heard in many speeches in both Wales and Scotland during the 1950s.¹⁰²

The fear that the creation of a Secretary of State might empower either Socialists or nationalists in Wales, and thus make the administrative task of any future Conservative government more difficult, remained paramount. As C. Chegwiddden, the party's political education officer, noted in 1957, the argument often used by supporters of the Secretary of State plan, that it would 'put a sprag in the wheel of the Nationalist chariot',¹⁰³ overlooked the possibility that it might equally create a

⁹⁹ D. Butler, *The British General Election of 1951* (Macmillan, 1952), p. 261; Butler and Rose, *General Election of 1959*, p.181; D. Butler and Richard Rose, *The British General Election of 1959* (Macmillan, 1960), p. 215; Craig, *Parliamentary Election Statistics*, pp. 15-17.

¹⁰⁰ Ramsden, *Making of Conservative Party Policy*, pp. 135-41.

¹⁰¹ D. Butler and Richard Rose, *The British General Election of 1959* (Macmillan, 1960); WM, 11 May 1955; WM 25 September 1959; WM, 18 September 1964.

¹⁰² *Glasgow Herald*, 29 Sept 1959; WM, 13 January 1956.

¹⁰³ CRD, 2/45/4, C. Chegwiddden to G. Block, 14 February 1957.

platform on which Plaid could realise its ambitions. ‘The skeleton framework for a Parliament for Wales would be much nearer looking like a permanent structure than it does now,’ he argued. The principal objection to that, as noted earlier, was that any such Assembly would almost inevitably become a Labour fiefdom, dominated as it must be by representatives of the industrial south-east. Thus Conservatives feared that if they replaced their current Minister of State for Welsh Affairs, appointed to keep socialism at bay, with a Secretary of State, they might unwittingly open the door to the creation of a Welsh parliament and the very denouement they had worked assiduously to avoid: an unbreachable socialist power-base in the principality.

The Conservatives made no commitment to create a Secretary of State at the general election of 1964. Some consideration was given to the suggestion that the Welsh Office at Cardiff might be made independent and ‘wholly responsible for redevelopment in Wales and all Welsh affairs’, while retaining a Minister for Welsh Affairs with cabinet rank.¹⁰⁴ In the event, the manifesto made no such declaration.¹⁰⁵ During the campaign, the party grandees rehearsed their familiar lines, talked up the successes recorded during the years of Conservative government, and warned that Labour’s proposals would be less effective and more expensive.¹⁰⁶

While a significant section of grass roots opinion was thus attracted by the idea of a Secretary of State during the 1950s, partly to achieve parity with Scotland and partly to outflank Plaid Cymru, the party hierarchy remained convinced by their original decentralising rationale. Any move to create a Secretary of State in Wales, they reasoned, enhanced the possibility of a Welsh parliament, which in turn would institutionalise a Labour administration in Wales that would simply fall in with any centralising plans a future Labour government might introduce. The party also estimated, correctly, that there were very few votes at stake in this area. The consequence of Labour’s victory at the 1964 election, however, was that a Secretary of State was created for Wales. The catechisms formulated for the *Right Road for Britain* in 1949 were rendered redundant; the party would have to devise a fresh approach to the problem of Welsh and Scottish government.

¹⁰⁴ CRD, 3/9/24, ‘Suggested items for inclusion in the Party’s Manifesto’, [undated, 1964].

¹⁰⁵ *Western Mail*, 18 September 1959.

¹⁰⁶ WM, 18 September 1964; WM, 18 September 1964.

Section III: Facing the Nationalist challenge

The general election of 1964 brought to an end thirteen years of Conservative government. The party fared badly in both Wales and Scotland: in the principality, the Conservatives lost one seat and received a smaller share of the votes than at any election since 1950. In Scotland, they sustained heavy punishment. Their share of the vote fell from 47% to 41% and they lost 7 of their 31 seats.¹⁰⁷ Fittingly, given that they always fought on national policies, Conservatives in both countries identified poor national leadership as the primary cause of their difficulties.¹⁰⁸ Alec Douglas Home made the party look 'positively medieval' according to one defeated Conservative candidate in Wales.¹⁰⁹ No-one in the principality suggested that Labour's championship of a Secretary of State had cost the Tories votes outside a few already unwinnable seats such as Merioneth.¹¹⁰ For the most part, devolution had again proved a 'damp squib' at the election.¹¹¹ Plaid Cymru, fielding more candidates than ever before, saw its share of the vote fall: only in Caernarvon and Merioneth did they save their deposits.¹¹² In Scotland, the SNP entered the fray on a major scale for the first time, fighting 15 seats. Only in West Lothian, however, where the nationalist candidate garnered 30% of the poll, did they enjoy any success.¹¹³

In the final ten years of the period covered by this chapter, however, nationalism was to take over from Socialism as the major factor driving Conservative thinking about the government of Wales and Scotland. The section begins by examining Conservative reaction to the nationalist victories at by-elections in Carmarthen in 1966 and Hamilton twelve months later, and then explores the policies developed respectively for Wales and Scotland in the light of this analysis. Their response, as will be seen, confirmed the party's traditional willingness to countenance greater self-determination in Scotland than in Wales; yet Heath's proposal for an Assembly in Edinburgh took the rank and file to the limit of what they were prepared to concede, if not beyond.

¹⁰⁷ Craig, *Parliamentary Election Statistics*, pp. 17-18.

¹⁰⁸ Butler and King, *General Election of 1964*, p. 299.

¹⁰⁹ *Western Mail*, 28 October 1964 (Peter Temple Morris).

¹¹⁰ *Western Mail*, 5 October 1964.

¹¹¹ *Western Mail*, 15 October 1964.

¹¹² Butler and Rose, *General Election of 1964*, p. 355, Morgan, *Rebirth*, p. 386.

¹¹³ Butler and Rose, *General Election of 1964*, pp. 329-30, 355-6.

The rise of nationalism as an electoral force in Wales and Scotland so soon after the general election of 1966 was remarkable. During the campaign itself, there was little sign of what was to come. As the authors of the Nuffield study remarked in their analysis of the campaign: ‘Even in Scotland a majority of candidates denied that local issues mattered significantly’, and quoted one county member as saying, ‘This was a national election fought nationally’.¹¹⁴ Although Plaid Cymru’s vote held up well and the SNP saw its vote rise considerably, neither party returned a member to Westminster.¹¹⁵ Yet within eighteen months both nationalist parties had tasted victory.¹¹⁶ In July 1966, a by-election occasioned by the death of Megan Lloyd George saw Gwynfor Evans overturn a Labour majority of almost 9,000 in Carmarthen to win Plaid Cymru its first seat in parliament; on 9 March 1967, the SNP produced a very good performance in a by-election at Pollock and finally, on 2 November 1967, the SNP achieved the electoral breakthrough they had been threatening at Hamilton in Lanarkshire. Winnie Ewing captured 41.6% of the vote in defeating Labour’s Alex Wilson.

The Conservative party responded to the upsurge of nationalist sentiment by commissioning a study of attitudes to self-government in Scotland and Wales from its Opinion Research Centre. Their report, completed in November 1966, suggested that people in both countries suffered from a sense of ‘alienation and neglect’:¹¹⁷ Westminster-based governments were perceived to be taking more out of the local economies than they put back in, and people in both countries believed they would be better off if they governed themselves. The Conservative party, meanwhile, was perceived as particularly distant, ‘a uniquely English party of the Squirearchy, the Establishment, the Church of England and Westminster’. Yet the ORC also concluded that there were important differences between nationalism in the two countries. Nationalist sentiment was consistently stronger and more virulent in

¹¹⁴ D. E. Butler and A. King, *The British General Election of 1966* (London, 1966), p. 199.

¹¹⁵ Butler and King, *General Election of 1966*, p. 261.

¹¹⁶ For the wider European context to this upsurge of nationalism, see: James G Kellas, *The Politics of Nationalism and Ethnicity* Macmillan, 2nd ed. 1998, pp. 105-15.

¹¹⁷ Bod. Lib., CPA, CCO, 18/29/1/1, ‘Special attitudes in Scotland, Wales and the West Country’: a survey conducted by the Opinion Research Centre for Conservative Central Office, Nov. 1966 [Unpaginated].

Scotland than in Wales and, significantly, a far higher number of existing Conservative voters in the former declared that they would consider voting with the nationalists than was the case in the principality. Strikingly, a majority of respondents in Scotland, but only one-third in Wales, claimed they would vote for Home Rule even if it left them poorer as a consequence.

The report provided an enduring context for Conservative understanding of nationalism in Wales and Scotland. In Wales, it was seen to matter less. Plaid Cymru's triumph at Carmarthen was ascribed to the candidate's 'considerable personal reputation', nationalist exploitation of local issues, and the defection of Liberal voters to Plaid.¹¹⁸ In the longer term, Tory analysts reckoned Plaid was more likely to inconvenience Labour in the valley seats than affect the peripheral areas of Wales where Conservatism maintained a foothold; the hope was even expressed that intervention by the Nationalists in seats like Montgomeryshire and Cardiganshire could work to the party's advantage by splitting the Labour vote.¹¹⁹ There was little to be gained by pandering to those who sought greater self-determination for Wales.

Analysis of the situation in Scotland was very different. The ORC's rolling assessment of nationalist progress made clear that the SNP offered the party a direct challenge, and competed for many of the same voters.¹²⁰ Keenly aware that the party had lost 11 seats and one-eighth of its voting strength in Scotland since 1955,¹²¹ Edward Heath moved swiftly after the SNP's victory in Hamilton to demand fresh thinking on Scottish governance.¹²² A committee of the Scottish Unionist party was instructed to explore possibilities for a more advanced policy on devolution, and Peter Goldman, director of the Conservative Political Centre, was commissioned to write an independent report on the same subject in case the Scottish committee interpreted its brief too narrowly. In fact, the committee did not disappoint.¹²³ They called for the

¹¹⁸ D/Pol./13/1 Minute Book of Carmarthen and District Liberal Association Minute Book, 1965-1978, p. 33-5, meeting of 2 August 1966; Cf. Morgan, *Rebirth*, p. 386.

¹¹⁹ Bod. Lib., CPA, CCO, 1/14/517/2, 'Nationalism in Wales' by Howard Davies, July 1966; CCO, 20/11/20, Memorandum on the political situation in South Wales, November 1967.

¹²⁰ Bod. Lib., CPA, CCO, 500/50/1 'The Motivation behind Nationalism', ORC, March 1967 and November 1967

¹²¹ Bogdanor, *Devolution the United Kingdom*, p. 132.

¹²² Bod. Lib., CPA, CCO, 500/50/1, Scottish Conservative Central Office, Hamilton By-election report.

¹²³ Bod. Lib., CPA, CRD 500/50/1, T. F. Thompson to Sir G. M. Anderson, 27 March 1968.

establishment of an assembly of approximately 100 directly and indirectly elected members, a conclusion broadly in line with Goldman's recommendations.¹²⁴ Heath endorsed the idea of a Scottish Assembly in a famous speech to the Scottish Party's Conference in Perth on 18 May 1968.

In March 1970, a constitutional committee chaired by Alec Douglas-Home produced a report, *Scotland's Government*, which detailed how the system would work in practice.¹²⁵ The 'Convention' would comprise 125 members, and sit for about 40 days a year; legislation would be referred to it in the same way as it was to the Scottish Grand Committee at Westminster: a Bill designated 'Scottish' by the Speaker of the House of Commons, would receive its Second Reading, Committee and Report stages in the Convention before coming back to Westminster for its Third Reading and progress to the House of Lords. The new Convention, which was accepted by a large majority at the Scottish Conservative party conference in May 1970,¹²⁶ was thus not a body that would challenge the authority of the Westminster Parliament. 'Without an executive, with deliberative responsibilities shorn of any powers to challenge or confront Westminster over matters of disagreement', writes Mitchell, 'the Scottish Convention was a mere talking shop.'¹²⁷

Yet in Wales, even such a watered-down form of devolution remained far beyond the limits of what the Conservative party would countenance. After Labour's victory at the polls in 1964, the Conservative leadership reconciled themselves to the new status quo in Welsh government,¹²⁸ accepting, as Alan Butt Philip has remarked, 'that the party could not dismantle the new Welsh Office and its Secretary of State'. Despite losing two previously safe seats, Conway and Monmouth, at the general election of 1966,¹²⁹ they took the subsequent rise of nationalism in their stride, and fell back on the familiar rhetoric of centralisation to explain the phenomenon. In September 1967,

¹²⁴ Bod. Lib., CPA, CRD, 3/28/6, B. Sewill to E. Heath, 27 February 1968; CRD 3/28/7, J. Douglas to B. Henderson, 3 May 1968; CRD 3/28/7, Memorandum on the Government of Scotland, by Peter Goldman, 1 May 1968.

¹²⁵ *Scotland's Government: the Report of the Scottish Constitutional Committee* (The Scottish Constitutional Committee, Edinburgh, 1970).

¹²⁶ James G. Kellas, 'Scottish Nationalism' in D. Butler and M. Pinto-Duschinsky, *The British General Election of 1970* (London, 1971), p. 453.

¹²⁷ Mitchell, *Conservatives and the Union*, pp. 59-60; Finlay, *A Partnership for Good?*, p. 149.

¹²⁸ *Western Mail*, 19 October 1964.

¹²⁹ *Western Mail*, 11 March 1966; *WM*, 19 March 1966.

the Welsh party chairman, Anthony Barber, declared that support for Plaid ‘was really revulsion by the people of Wales against over-centralisation and political control by Westminster’.¹³⁰ Following the SNP’s victory at Hamilton in November 1967, the *Western Mail* produced a remarkably similar analysis. ‘Wales and Scotland’, it declared, ‘share an anger at the irrelevance and ignorance of much Whitehall decision-making that has been little soothed by either the presence of Secretaries of State in the cabinet or the setting up of innumerable toothless committees.’¹³¹

The *Western Mail* had, by this stage, become converted to fully elected assemblies for both Wales and Scotland; this, however, was not a policy that found favour within the Conservative party at large. The conviction that Plaid posed a greater threat to Labour than their own party meant the Conservatives could safely follow their gut instincts and confidently oppose schemes of elaborate self-government such as that proposed by the Welsh Office in 1966, which envisaged a two-tier local authority topped by an elected ‘Council of Wales’ with executive powers.¹³² In the wake of the 1966 election, Heath dispensed with a Shadow Secretary of State for Wales,¹³³ and established a policy committee under the party’s new ‘front-bench spokesman’ on Wales, the MP for Hereford, David Gibson-Watt. That group quickly came to see the administration of Wales in terms of local government reform, with bigger, more powerful Welsh local authorities the key to ameliorating the dissatisfaction felt in Wales at being governed and administered from London.¹³⁴ A future Conservative Secretary of State (however that role evolved) could, they believed, ‘live perfectly well with eight major authorities and thirty-six minor authorities, whatever their political colour’;¹³⁵ a directly elected, and probably Labour-dominated, Welsh parliament would be far more problematic. The declaration of Perth was in no way a precedent for action in the principality.¹³⁶

¹³⁰ WM, 30 September 1967; WM, 20 March 1967.

¹³¹ WM, 4 November 1967; Ken Young, ‘The Party and English Local Government’ in Anthony Seldon and Stuart Ball (eds.) *Conservative Century: the Conservative Party since 1900* (Oxford, OUP, 1994), p. 426; *Glasgow Herald*, 10 March 1966.

¹³² Bryan Keith-Lucas and Peter G. Richards, *A History of Local Government in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1978), pp. 209, 215-17.

¹³³ WM, 20 April 1966.

¹³⁴ Bod. Lib., CPA, LCC, 1/2/12, Minutes of the Leader’s Consultative Committee, 13 May 1968; Bod. Lib., CPA, CRD 2/32/1, Memorandum, 21 May 1968.

¹³⁵ Bod. Lib., CPA, CRD 3/37/2, ‘Machinery of Government’ by Professor Ivor Gowan.

¹³⁶ Bod. Lib., CPA, CRD, 3/28/7, ‘Comments on the interim report of the Scottish policy group’ by Geoffrey Block, 2 May 1968. Bod. Lib., CPA, CRD, 3/37/2, Minutes of the second meeting of the

Perth was the high-water mark of late 60s Tory concern with nationalism. In April 1969, Harold Wilson appointed a Royal Commission on the Constitution. Their lengthy deliberations effectively put the issue on to the political back-burner for five years, and both Labour and the Conservatives took the opportunity to avoid making any fresh constitutional commitments.¹³⁷ Devolution was consequently given a relatively low priority at the general election of 1970,¹³⁸ and it became clear that there were many even within the Scottish Conservative Party who were far from comfortable with Heath's proposed Convention. The party's Scottish chairman, Sir Menzies Anderson, failed to mention the policy at all during a major speech in Glasgow eight days before the election, prompting the political correspondent of the *Scotsman* to question how committed the Conservatives really were to its establishment.¹³⁹ In Wales, the Tories' manifesto, *A Better Tomorrow for Wales*,¹⁴⁰ offered little beyond a promise to retain the Welsh Secretary of State, transfer full responsibility for primary and secondary education to the Welsh Office, and allow local authorities to 'elect' representatives to an advisory council. The campaign, however, was dominated as always by the 'bread and butter' issues of jobs and taxation, though Heath was quizzed in Cardiff about the very different policies his party had put forward for Scotland and Wales by a reporter from the *Western Mail*.¹⁴¹ He replied with the well worn line that 'Scotland had a different legal system and there was, as a result, an awful lot of legislation that was concerned exclusively with Scotland'. He then added, 'There are few measures dealing exclusively with Wales', a comment which, as the *Mail* remarked, rather begged the question.¹⁴²

The election saw the Conservatives gain 77 seats and return to office with an overall majority of 14. In Wales, they took seven seats, though they secured just 27.6% of the

Policy Study Group for Wales and Monmouth, 1 May 1968; CCO, 20/11/39, A.S.D. Graesser to A. Barber, 3 May 1968. Bod. Lib., CPA, CCO, 20/11/39, A. Barber to E. Heath, 8 May 1968. Bod. Lib., CPA, CRD 3/28/7, Extract taken from notes taken at a meeting of Leader's Committee, held 8 May 1968. Bod. Lib., CPA, CCO, 20/11/39, 'Welsh Reflections on the Repercussions of the Announcement of a Scottish Assembly', by David Gibson-Watt, 7 May 1968

¹³⁷ Mitchell, *Strategies for Self-government*, p.46, p. 58; WM, 31 October 1968; Bogdanor, *Devolution*, pp. 171-7

¹³⁸ Mitchell, *Conservatives and the Union*, pp. 61-2.

¹³⁹ Quoted in Mitchell, *Conservatives and the Union*, p. 61.

¹⁴⁰ WM, 2 June 1970.

¹⁴¹ WM, 4 June 1970; WM, 11 June 1970.

¹⁴² WM, 4 June 1970.

vote, their lowest share since 1950.¹⁴³ In Scotland, the Conservatives won three extra seats, but the overall swing to the party was smaller than it was in England, 2.3% as against 5.6%.¹⁴⁴ The Nationalist parties were eclipsed. Plaid Cymru ran candidates in all Welsh seats for the first time, but won none; the SNP ran 65 candidates but returned only Donald Stewart for the Western Isles.¹⁴⁵

Once in office, Heath moved quickly to axe 17 ministerial positions, among them the more junior post at the Welsh Office, the Under-Secretaryship.¹⁴⁶ The post of Minister of State was retained, and went to Douglas-Watt, while Peter Thomas, for many years MP for Conway, but now sitting for Hendon South, became Secretary of State. The party's chief spokesmen on Welsh issues thus both sat for English constituencies, and the lack of importance attached to Wales was emphasised by the decision to ask Thomas to combine the post of Secretary of State with the Chairmanship of the Party.¹⁴⁷ In Scotland, the establishment was retained: a Secretary of State with a seat in the Cabinet (Gordon Campbell), a Minister of State (Lady Tweedsmuir), and three Under-Secretaries.¹⁴⁸ While Heath was still publicly supportive of the Convention idea, many of his followers were becoming actively hostile. The rising popularity of Labour during the parliament invoked in Scottish Tories the same fear that had long haunted their Welsh counterparts, that any Scottish 'parliament' would simply become a stronghold of socialism. At the Scottish Party conference in May 1973, Ian Sproat warned that such a body would become 'a splendid platform' for 'irresponsible elements', 'publicity-seekers' and 'extremists'.¹⁴⁹ Devolution was becoming a distant prospect.

In the event, it was in the arena of local government reform that Heath's administration had its biggest constitutional impact on Scotland and Wales. Peter Walker's 1972 Local Government Act instituted a two-tier structure with 39 counties

¹⁴³ *WM*, 20 June 1970.

¹⁴⁴ Mitchell, *Conservatives and the Union*, p. 61.

¹⁴⁵ *WM*, 20 June 1970; Morgan, *Rebirth*, p. 393; Michael Steed, 'An Analysis of the Results' in D. Butler and M. Pinto-Duschinsky, *The British General Elections, 1945-92* (London, 1971), pp. 388-9.

¹⁴⁶ Butt Philip, *Welsh Question*, p.123; Deacon, *Governance of Wales*, p. 26; *WM*, 25 June 1970; *Times*, 25 June 1970.

¹⁴⁷ Deacon, *Governance of Wales*, pp. 26-7.

¹⁴⁸ *Times*, 1 July 1970.

¹⁴⁹ Mitchell, *Conservative and the Union*, p. 65.

and 296 Districts.¹⁵⁰ In Wales, they adopted the formula proposed in the 1960s by David Gibson-Watts' policy group and forsook an elected assembly in favour of eight county authorities. Nationalists criticised the government for pre-empting the Kilbrandon report,¹⁵¹ but the Conservatives insisted that the reform of 'local democracy in Wales brought 'administration ... closer to the ordinary citizen' and addressed the key concerns of moderate Welsh opinion.¹⁵² The Local Government (Scotland) Act of 1973 also adopted a two-tier model, though one of the upper-level regions, Strathclyde, contained more than half the Scottish population.¹⁵³ Clearly, no Scottish assembly could coexist comfortably with such a powerful yet supposedly 'inferior' body.¹⁵⁴ In Scotland, as in Wales, local government reform made devolution more difficult, and the insight of the Welsh Council of Labour into the post-reform situation in the principality is applicable to both countries: an elected assembly, it remarked, would sit atop the two tiers of government 'like a jellyfish on a bed of nails'.¹⁵⁵

The Kilbrandon Commission eventually published its 'diffuse and long-winded' report in October 1973 and recommended that directly elected devolved assemblies with responsibility for local government, roads, housing, education and agriculture be created for both Wales and Scotland.¹⁵⁶ The Tories had refused to give evidence to the Commission¹⁵⁷ and were determined not to be bounced into a general scheme of regional devolution. They found support from three Commissioners (including an English Tory MP) who were 'entirely against devolution to Wales, favouring only a Welsh Council with deliberative and advisory powers.'¹⁵⁸ The general reaction of MPs to the report was, according to the *Western Mail*, one 'of complete cynicism', and the Conservative party quietly put its findings to one side, as, indeed, did Labour.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁰ Kevin Theakston, 'The Heath government, Whitehall, and the civil service' in Stuart Ball and Anthony Seldon (eds.), *The Heath Government 1970-74* (Longman, London, 1996), p. 82; Young, 'Party and English Local Government', pp.430-31.

¹⁵¹ Bogdanor, *Devolution*, p. 164.

¹⁵² Bod. Lib., CPA, OG/73/128, 'Draft manifesto for Wales by Ian Grist', 9 July 1973.

¹⁵³ George Monies, *Local Government in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1985), pp. 5-23.

¹⁵⁴ Bogdanor, *Devolution*, p. 136.

¹⁵⁵ Quoted in Bogdanor, *Devolution*, p. 164.

¹⁵⁶ Bogdanor, *Devolution*, p. 173.

¹⁵⁷ WM, 10 September 1969.

¹⁵⁸ Bogdanor, *Devolution*, p. 175.

¹⁵⁹ WM, 1 November 1973; Morgan, *Rebirth*, p. 395.

Given the muted reaction, it is hardly surprising that neither Labour nor the Conservatives made any commitments on devolution at the election of February 1974, both regarding the subject as ‘a non-issue outside Wales and Scotland’.¹⁶⁰ Instead, Conservatives in both countries stuck closely to the main theme of an election precipitated by Edward Heath’s on-going struggle with the mineworkers: ‘Who Governs?’¹⁶¹ The strategy was more successful in Wales than Scotland. Plaid won in Caernarvon and Merioneth, and came within three votes of taking back Carmarthen but the Conservatives increased their haul of seats in Wales to eight, albeit on only 25.9% of the poll.¹⁶² In Scotland, however, the manichean polarities of the national campaign were blurred by the discovery of North Sea oil. This handed nationalists an answer to a question which had long undermined their quest for an independent parliament: how would Scotland survive economically without English tax-payers’ money? Buoyed by Kilbrandon and oil, the SNP took 7 seats; the Conservatives and Labour each lost four. The Tories performed particularly badly and saw their share of the vote slip disastrously from 38.5% to 32.9%.¹⁶³ Whatever the resources of the North Sea promised for the British economy in the longer term, its first effect was to boost the political economy of Scottish nationalism.

The extraordinarily tight result of the election - Labour had 301 seats; the Conservatives 297 - ensured that another contest would occur almost immediately. The success of the SNP caused both parties to revisit their Scottish policies over the summer.¹⁶⁴ The Conservatives could not afford to appear anti-devolutionary, and accepted a new proposal for a devolved assembly in Scotland, with a membership recruited from local authorities rather than elected directly. This was backed up by a summer poster campaign which sought to brand the SNP as the party not of devolution but of separatism.¹⁶⁵ The party also promised a Scottish Development Fund to handle oil revenues. Heath, like Wilson, visited Scotland twice during the

¹⁶⁰ D. Butler and D. Kavanagh, *The British General Election of October 1974* (London, 1975), pp.1, 57.

¹⁶¹ Butler and Kavanagh, *General Election of February 1974*, p. 245.

¹⁶² WM, 2 March 1974.

¹⁶³ Butler and Kavanagh, *General Election of February 1974*, p. 278.

¹⁶⁴ D. Butler and D. Kavanagh, *General Election of October 1974* (London, 1975), p.76; Bogdanor, *Devolution*, p. 177-9.

¹⁶⁵ Butler and D. Kavanagh, *General Election of October 1974*, p.93.

campaign, an indication of its importance as an election battleground. However, he made little reference to his party's plans for devolution, choosing instead to emphasize national unity, the central theme in the Tory campaign, and to attack the SNP for their alleged ambition to break up the United Kingdom.¹⁶⁶

In Wales, the Conservatives naturally offered less, but their message was essentially the same. The manifesto, *For Wales and Her People*, called for unity and added, 'At a time when society faces increasing pressures, irreversible constitutional experiments have no place. Any changes in the system of Government must be evolutionary'.¹⁶⁷ Nevertheless, they promised to increase the functions of the Secretary of State for Wales and to ensure that money voted by Parliament for expenditure by the Welsh Office would be in the form of a block grant, so that the Secretary of State would decide how the money was spent 'with Welsh interests and advice in mind'. The manifesto also promised to create a Select Committee made up of Welsh MPs which would have the power to examine all matters relating to Wales and to call Ministers, civil servants and other experts before it. In addition, a strengthened Welsh Council would have the majority of its members elected from the county and district councils to increase its influence.

Labour were returned to office with an overall majority of 3. The most significant aspect of the result, however, was the continued rise of nationalism in Scotland. The SNP won 11 seats, and positioned themselves as the second party in Scottish politics by capturing 30% of the votes. Their success seems to have come in large part at the expense of the Tory party, whose vote slumped by 8.2%.¹⁶⁸ The dire warnings of the surveys conducted by the ORC after 1966 seemed finally to be coming true. In Wales, the election was much less dramatic. Plaid recaptured Carmarthen, but it lost support in many of the valley constituencies, and became more dependent on the isolated, Welsh-speaking rural areas of Wales.¹⁶⁹ The Conservatives, though their share of the vote fell to just 23.9%, retained all 8 of their seats in the principality.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁶ Butler and D. Kavanagh, *General Election of October 1974*, pp. 132, 261-2.

¹⁶⁷ WM, 27 September 1974.

¹⁶⁸ Michael Steed, 'The Results Analysed' in Butler and Kavanagh, *General Election of October 1974*, p. 346-4; Mitchell, *Strategies for Self-government*, p. 209.

¹⁶⁹ Steed, 'Results', p. 351.

¹⁷⁰ WM, 12 October 1974.

The outlook was not, however, a bright one: whereas they had lost only six deposits in the February election, in October they forfeited no fewer than 11: they, too, were becoming an ever narrower force in Welsh politics.

Conclusion

Conservative responses to devolution in the period after 1945 were crucially shaped by two external forces, socialism and nationalism. In the years immediately after the Second World War, concern about the Labour government's centralising policies, and a fear that socialism might 'hold the door open for Communism', prompted the party's attempt to harness 'local patriotism' in Scotland and Wales by promising further measures of devolution. Twenty years later, it was the rise of nationalism that drove Conservative policy formation. The success of Plaid Cymru and the Scottish National Party, at Carmarthen and Hamilton respectively, prompted Edward Heath to commit his party to the cause of a Scottish Assembly.

However, the Conservatives' approach to devolution was always tempered by a third, internal, force – its own civic nationalism. As Philip Lynch has explained, 'Instead of being defined in ethnic or racial terms, conservative accounts of the nation focus on allegiance to common institutions, a shared history and a political culture which fosters common values.'¹⁷¹ This had two principal consequences. First, the solutions proposed by the Conservative party never threatened to limit the fundamental authority of the Westminster parliament. Even their most advanced proposal, a Convention for Scotland, was denied legislative powers. Second, because the party lacked ideological commitment to the principle of devolved government, the Tories tended to revert to a policy of inaction as soon as the immediate external pressure prompting the adoption of a devolutionary perspective died away. Thus, though the manifesto pledges of 1951 were largely honoured, the Conservatives' own electoral victory to some extent vanquished the party's nightmares of socialist rule: as a consequence, the period 1951-64 witnessed no further upgrading of devolved institutions of government in either Scotland or Wales. Similarly, when the popular support for nationalism in Scotland and Wales ebbed in the late 60s and early 70s, the

¹⁷¹ Philip Lynch, *The Politics of Nationhood: Sovereignty, Britishness and Conservative Politics* (Macmillan, 1999), p.5.

Conservative leadership took advantage of the Kilbrandon report's lengthy gestation and allowed devolution to languish.

One final factor influencing the nature of the solutions proposed by the Conservative party should be noted. Their commitment to devolution was always at root, a calculation made with an eye to electoral success. Since the party had much more to lose in Scotland than in Wales, it was natural that the solutions advanced for Scotland should have been more far-reaching than anything proposed for the principality. The Conservative Party had a much greater natural sympathy with the claims of Scottish nationhood, and consequently recognised the potential strength of nationalism's appeal for those who might otherwise consider themselves 'natural' Tory voters. In Wales, by contrast, the Conservatives constantly questioned whether there existed a real desire for devolution. Whilst the party's own polling data suggested that some greater recognition of Wales by central government would be welcomed, it fancied that the devolution debate was got up by the media and the chattering classes. The shallow basis of the party's support in the principality, in any case, meant that any large-scale measure of devolution, such as an elected assembly, would simply institutionalise a Labour majority and make life extraordinarily difficult for a future Conservative government. As a consequence, they became increasingly open in their opposition to Welsh devolution, calculating that they had little to lose politically from such a position. The trend of election results between 1945 and 1974 vindicated this decision. However powerful the attractions of self-government proved to Scottish voters, devolution turned out to be 'the dog that did not bark' in Wales. The vagaries of the first past the post system consistently failed to reflect in terms of seats won the scale of Conservative support in Wales, yet by the end of the period covered by this chapter, there were eight Conservative MPs in the principality.¹⁷²

There is no doubt that, as Alan Butt Philip has pointed out, the actions of the Conservatives in the period covered here had a significant impact in propelling Wales along the road to devolution. *The Conservative Policy for Wales and Monmouthshire* produced in 1949 was the first attempt by any of the major parties to develop a distinct approach to Welsh policy, and by accepting this, as much as by recognising

¹⁷² In 1959, they won approximately 30% of the votes but received only 17% of Welsh seats. Even in October 1974, their 23.9% of the votes cast in Wales won them only 22.2% of the seats.

the principality's claim to Cabinet-level recognition, it set a precedent which, over the course of a generation, increased the likelihood of self-government for Wales. It was, however, an outcome to which the Tories remained adamantly opposed.