

THE POLITICAL PHYSIOGNOMY OF

The Editors

In The Break-Up of Britain, surely the contemporary Scotland, Tom Nairn refers to 'gnomy of Scottishness'. In post-devolution evidence of the truth of that characterisation how to fulfill their political instincts: behind Dr Jekyll's respectable facade - but within Mr Hyde. On the one hand there are politics, on the other strident dogmatists basis of a majority of one.

The voice of the respectable Dr Jekyll deplores the corruption and promises of election at the same time criticising politicians for being corrupt; he never joins a political party; he believes in the recurrent demand for appointed bodies in the health service, or the BBC, or local councils of Dr Jekyll. We see less of Mr Hyde but he wants to politicize everything. He uses the political parties to write manifestos and then claims that he is being democratic when a majority he rams his policy through council. A councillor who wished to remain in business would know Mr Hyde is a crook. He is being paid to bring trade to fix contracts. He is so horrified by Dr Jekyll's revulsion against him and no one learns from his example.

Three of the papers in this Yearbook deal with the failure even to recognise it. But the developments and the story of one is told in the paper we publish first. Dewar is the Chairman of the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs. The Select

AND HYDE

thoughtful book about Jekyll-and-Hyde physiology and there is ample evidence that they still do not know why they are suppressed. Occasionally they erupt and a-political politics bringing the world on the

more often heard. He is in politics while at the same time. Dr Jekyll would not be beneath him. Experts, be it in the field we hear the voice of Dr Jekyll is louder. Mr Hyde is the shells of the political party or believes in and grace of a slender government. No comment, so, but everyone knows his friends in the building at he almost justifies misunderstanding, that

fitness to this problem are some hopeful developments. Dewar in the paper on the Parliamentary Select Committee is one of a batch

set up by the present government in their first days in power. The hope is that the committees, which are composed of MPs from all parties in proportion to the party balance in Parliament, will examine the functions of government and throw light on dusty corners. If the Scottish Select Committee is successful it will also expose the operations of appointed and ad hoc bodies to public examination and force these bodies to account for themselves to the people. This is an optimistic perspective to be sure. Even to make a start, the MPs on the Scottish Committee will have to get beyond the party dogma and 'ya-boosing' which so often disfigures politics, not least in the House of Commons. It is much too early to say whether the MPs are willing to make the sacrifice, but Dewar is trying to make them and his paper is an optimistic assessment of the possibilities.

Our other papers are about what happens at the moment. Of necessity they are less hopeful. Carol Craig's research about the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) - a body, which does not even produce an annual report - is the first to be published. Dr Craig shows that COSLA has been rendered impotent by its founders' refusal to acknowledge the political issues which divide Scottish local authorities. As Craig reports, COSLA's contribution to the debate in Parliament about this year's Tenants' Rights Bill could, in the words of one MP "have been written on the back of a postcard in 20 minutes." We are happy to publish this antidote to the usual polite descriptions we see elsewhere of COSLA.

In Shetland, as Martin Dowle observes in his paper about the Shetland Movement, Dr Jekyll is in charge although Mr Hyde is fighting back. Here we have a political party in all but name which wants to make radical constitutional changes but which yet lacks the courage to declare itself a party. They would make omelettes but are not yet ready to break eggs. Shetland may be culturally distinct from the rest of Scotland, but it is not immune to its diseases.

Some small comfort may be taken, however, from John Bochel and David Denver's analysis of the May 1980 District Election results. In this instalment of their regular series, Bochel and Denver show the slow continuation of the trend away from independent candidates and independent councils to more openly declared politics. But no sooner

is this comfort offered than it is withdrawn. The citizens stay away from the polls in large numbers, and as Bochel and Denver despairingly report, when they do turn up, vote not on local issues but for, or more often against, the party of the national government of the day. It is just such behaviour by the voters which serves to buttress the anti-political Jekylls in their determination to restrict the role of politics in public life.

In a different sphere, the administration of the health service, David Hunter reports other aspects of the same problem. Members of Area Health Boards, although nominally responsible for running the health services in their areas, have no training or preparation. They are hamstrung by the fact that they are not elected but "appointed for their contribution as individuals", and by the poor definition of their job. The planners who reorganised the health service were so anxious to keep politics out of it that they deprived health board members of any base, and thereby made them powerless against professionals such as doctors. Hunter's research shows that health board members are aware of these problems, but at a loss to remedy them. He argues that ways must be found to offset the grosser imbalances in influence between members and officers. For "the moves to strengthen public scrutiny, control, initiative and participation have been cautious, reluctant and trivial in comparison with the growth of administrative power".

Politicians, especially ex-Ministers are given to writing memoirs in which, amongst other things, they complain that their ideas were thwarted by civil servants. Less involved students of government are frequently heard to explain that the problem is not iniquitous civil servants, but the artificial separation, so characteristic of British government, between central government which makes policy and local government which is meant to implement it. Local officials do not always see things the way governments would like. Paul Crompton's analysis of the preparation of local housing plans offers ample evidence of this: district authorities may politely agree in public with government demands for comprehensive planning to meet housing needs, but in private, where it really matters, their officers cling tenaciously, and effectively, to their departments' traditional ways. The

Tenants' Rights Act, passed this year, is intended to increase the rights of council tenants, not only by giving them the chance to buy their own homes, but also by giving them the right, for example, to improve or sublet them. Will obstructive officials subvert these policies too? If so what, if anything, can the Government do?

Over the past decade, governments have commonly reacted to problems of this kind by reorganising the service involved. Many of these reorganisations, for example of the health service and local government have been as much condemned as the systems they replaced. But one Scottish experiment which has been widely acclaimed, and which has been in operation for ten years is the system of juvenile justice known as the Children's Hearings. Now the Secretary of State has proposed changes. He claims that the public is doubtful whether hearings have:

"sufficient measures of discipline and punishment available to them to deal purposefully with the persistent and generally older offender who apparently thinks he can flout the law."

In consequence he has suggested "specific powers of punishment" to be applied in a "sensitive and understanding way". As Alf Young a former Children's Panel member comments in his paper

"in the approach now perfected by Mr Younger in spelling out the consequences of the Government's industrial and economic policies...panel members are being advised to lean across the table as they dole out the fines and repeat again and again, "This is hurting me much more than it's hurting you".

Young's paper is a forceful plea to increase the powers of the hearings but not in the way the Secretary of State has in mind. He wants them to begin to change the society which produces so many losers. Young notes: panel membership gives one a unique opportunity to look closely at the ugly fissures in society down which some children fall. Occasionally you can haul one of them back up, but you can do nothing to fill in the holes.

Politics is a method for handling, or more optimistically for settling, disputes. Our argument has been that Scots, perhaps rather more than other Britons, have been unwilling to face the complications and responsibilities which taking part in politics involves. There are particular awkwardnesses when the disputes are between Scots. Arguably Scots are much more effective in their political relationships

with the rest of the world, particularly with the rest of Britain. Our fears, expressed here last year, that Scotland's voice would grow faint at Westminster and elsewhere after the devolution debacle, have not - yet? - been realised.

The victory of the Secretary of State for Scotland over the Secretary of State for Industry in protecting Scotland's interest when the Government decided to sell the National Enterprise Board's stake in Ferranti is well known. David Heald demonstrates in his paper on Scotland's public expenditure needs that Younger's predecessors have also successfully protected Scotland's slice of the cake. In this, the first full analysis of the Government's recently published figures for public expenditure in the four United Kingdom countries, Heald comments on the long term shift in Scotland's direction. More radically Heald also proposes that in future we need country-by-country analysis not just of expenditure but also of total public purse costs. At present expenditure on council houses (of which Scotland has more than its share) shows up in public expenditure figures but the costs to the Exchequer of mortgage interest tax relief (of which Scotland has less than its share) do not. This is vital because, as Heald points out, the functional composition of Scottish public expenditure, as currently defined, adds to its vulnerability. Spending is high on programmes such as public sector housing subsidies and industrial support which the Government has chosen to cut sharply for ideological as well as budgetary reasons. Even so, the public expenditure cuts of June 1979, November 1979 and March 1980 did not confirm fears that Scottish expenditure would be disproportionately squeezed. Heald suggests that Conservative anxiety about a Nationalist revival is still strong. With so many Scottish Conservative seats held by small majorities over the Nationalists, this suggestion is credible.

Such Conservative fears in the present parliament and the clout of Scotland's ministers in previous parliaments have won Scotland more than her share of the government jobs dispersed from the South of England. Richard Parry's careful analysis of dispersal policy shows that political considerations have time and again triumphed over the inclinations of the civil service and perhaps over the weight of the argument. Despite some foolish foot dragging by Glasgow District,

Scotland has more than held her own. Parry also comments on a glaring anomaly in dispersal policy: the refusal of the Scottish Office itself to disperse jobs from Edinburgh.

In his annual analysis of the year at Westminster James Naughtie points to one unexpected weakness in Scotland's armoury: Labour. Despite commanding leads in the polls and 44 of Scotland's 71 MPs, Scots' Labour made little impression at Westminster. Partly this is a matter of weak leadership, but more fundamentally it is a matter of confused ideology. Labour, as the Opposition, ought to be attacking the Government; but it is so appalled at the sight of Conservative Ministers dismantling thirty years of welfare legislation, that it tries to defend the administration against the Government. This is one important reason for the anomaly which Naughtie reports: despite rising unemployment and high inflation, despite desperately bad public opinion polls and poor local government election results, despite constant fights with the large Labour ruled local authorities, Scotland's Conservative Ministers and in particular Mr Younger and Mr Rifkind can feel well satisfied with their performance at Westminster. Their legislative programme has emerged almost unscathed.

Ian Dalziel's commentary on Scotland's voice in Europe compliments Naughtie's paper. Dalziel's discussion of the cumbersome EEC machinery will surprise even confirmed anti-Europeans; but his proposal for an energy fund would put Britain, and even more, Scotland, into the forefront of the Common Market.

This year we have the second of our guides to the study of Scotland which we hope will become a regular feature. David McCrone reviews what we know about Scotland's social structure, tracing economic and social changes and the opening up of the Scottish economy to non-Scottish influences. We are also starting another important series - a survey of Scottish legislation. This year Hamish Henderson summarises every single Act of Parliament relating specifically to Scotland passed between 1970 and 1979. It is intended to update this list each year.

The Scottish Government Yearbook 1981 is the fifth in our series. Each successive Yearbook has been longer than its predecessor. While it would be untrue to say that we think each successive volume is the

best, we can unblushingly claim that we have begun to be offered, and to publish, an increasing number of powerful papers based on original research. Our knowledge about Scotland is now, slowly but steadily, growing, and the Yearbook is pleased to encourage this growth and to disseminate the results.

This is not to suggest that all is rosy in our patch. Scotland's social scientists share some of the general diseases: we are good at whining about the English but less good at examining immediate political issues. There is, despite our unsuccessful attempts to inspire it, no serious research on such important matters as the rate support grant settlement for 1980/81 and the continuing struggle between the Secretary of State and recalcitrant local authorities to hold down public expenditure. There is still no publishable work on political corruption in our cities. Of commentary and speculation there is no end; but research takes time, and what is less frequently admitted, courage, and because these qualities are in short supply there are big gaps. Furthermore C H Allen's reference section is shorter this year than last. This diminution reflects Scotland's lower status, after-devolution, in the eyes of journalists and academics outside as well as inside Scotland.

Regular readers will note that despite its increased length, the hardback edition of the 1981 Yearbook will sell for the same price as the 1978 hardback - £10. We are pleased to have been able to hold our price for four years: there can be few rivals to this achievement. We have done it by adopting two expedients: the book has been set from camera-ready typescript, rather than being printed in the traditional way, thus saving considerable printing costs; and we have successfully appealed to some of our friends in industry and commerce to support us by buying institutional advertising. We are extremely grateful to those who agreed. Our move to printing direct from typescript would have been impossible without the extraordinary skill, patience and devotion of our secretary Mrs Helen Ramm.

Paul Harris has been publishing the Yearbook for four years. We are happy to record our thanks to him for applying his considerable entrepreneurial skills to our work. Andrew Bolger has helped us immeasurably again with the proof-reading. Our thanks are also due to

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The Yearbook is edited on behalf of The Unit for The Study of Government in Scotland at The University of Edinburgh. Additional copies of The Yearbook, back copies of the four previous volumes and further information about The Unit's activities can be obtained from Mrs Helen Ramm at 31 Buccleuch Place, Edinburgh EH8 9JT, Scotland.