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Civil Society in Scotland

Isobel Lindsay

The outcome of the 2003 Scottish Parliament elections brings to mind the civil society equivalent of the patients taking over the asylum! ‘Taking over’ is an exaggeration but there has certainly been a minor invasion of groups who have been more commonly associated with campaigning than legislating. The Greens won seven seats, the far-left Scottish Socialist Party won six, the recently-formed Scottish Senior Citizens’ Party gained one as did a campaigner against a local hospital closure. Two independents rejected by their parties also won. The interface between the Executive and the institutions of civil society has settled into a conventional pattern of formal consultation exercises and lobbying. But the Parliament has had a more innovative relationship with developments like the Petitions Committee and the growing number of Cross-Party Groups with non-parliamentary participants. The success of minority parties with strong links to campaigning organisations has also created more fluid boundaries.

This chapter will examine the current direction of civil society in Scotland in the context of its historical background. There have been very marked changes in its role. The themes emerging are of a very central position in the 18th and 19th centuries that was crucial in sustaining Scottish distinctiveness. A much-diminished role after the 1st World War until the end of the 1970s was followed by a significant period of coalition-building and social and political leadership in the 1980s and 1990s. The post-devolution period is a paradoxical one for civic institutions with opportunities both gained and lost and a more complex inter-relationship with each other.

The Historical Background

The wider political implications of civil society in Scotland has a long and very significant history. Scotland’s incorporation into the English Parliament in 1707 was not the outcome of conquest but of a deal between political elites. Although unpopular among the wider public, it offered access to the English economy and

colonies in return for neutering a long-standing threat to the security of the English state. The Scottish negotiations put pay to the prospects of a federal solution but did gain protection within the Treaty of Union for certain institutions – the Scottish legal system, the Presbyterian religion, the education system and the local system of burgh administration, for example. If we add to this the fact that most economic, cultural and charitable developments were indigenous, it has been argued that Scotland had a very substantial degree of civil autonomy despite the loss of its position as an independent state.

The importance of this civil autonomy has been stressed by several writers. Harvie (1977:193), for example, explored its relationship with nationalism and national identity: ‘The institutions of Scottish civil society – Kirk, law, local government and education...had traditionally provided the means of bringing national consciousness before the public.’

Paterson (1994: 45) makes this the central theme in explaining the absence of a strong nationalist movement in Scotland in the 19th century when such movements were prevalent throughout Europe:

‘Civil society was autonomous from the state in Scotland as throughout Britain. Its Scottish character derived from its roots well before the Union, and above all from the legal system and the Presbyterian Church. When civil society was regulated at all, that happened from a Scottish centre which, in these functions, retained much of the symbolic significance of sovereignty and majesty that it had always had’.

It can certainly be argued that the absence of a Government/Parliament focus in Scottish society gave high status to institutions of church, education and the professions, especially law. Religious institutions had a particularly powerful role both integrating and dividing society. Scotland, by the late 19th century, had also developed an increasing range of its own ‘modern’ civic organisations such as the Scottish Trade Union Congress established in 1897, the Scottish Football League in 1890, cultural organisations, medical charities, mutual societies etc.:

‘In the voluntary sphere the Scottish urban middle class, in particular, created an intricate web of active institutions, the apex of which were the voluntary hospitals of the four cities.’ (Morgan and Trainer, 1990: 130).

The overall picture at the start of the 20th century was one of a strong civil society that was in most respects distinctly Scottish and acted as a counterbalance to the inevitable English dominance of the British state. Although much of the 20th century story was different there were still important elements of that strong distinctive civil society playing a central role at the end of the century and acting as one of the midwives of constitutional change.

The 1st World War and its aftermath were a particular disaster for Scotland. Scotland lost a higher proportion of men than any other part of the UK, 26% of the men who served died in comparison with 12% for the rest of Britain. This was followed by a huge outflow of population through migration in the following decade – a net loss of 390,000 in ten years (Devine, 1999: 309). This greatly undermined confidence and initiative in many areas of social and economic life. Economic recession, failure to invest in new industries, appalling housing conditions, political disillusion, sectarian tensions – the perception of failure and decline and the scale of socio-economic problems left people looking towards the state for amelioration. The voluntary association route was marginal to the extent of the problems.

Although the traditional civil institutions continued to be significant and the churches and trade unions had a period of growth in the two decades following the 2nd World War, the focus during this period was overwhelmingly on the state. For social and economic change, Scotland looked to the Scottish Office, Westminster and to local authorities. As in other parts of the UK, the 1950s and 60s were periods of substantial change but it is difficult to think of any examples where these changes were initiated or driven by civil society. Innovations in Scotland such as regional economic development policy, the Children's Panel juvenile justice system, the Highlands and Islands Development Board, the New Towns programme, the radical Wheatley regional local government reforms, the Scottish Special Housing Association, educational change were largely driven by Scottish Office civil servants and politicians in that order. There were pressure groups like the Scottish Council

(Development and Industry) but their impact on policy was not profound. The state was powerful and could deliver change. The challenge was to control the state through the direct route of political parties. This was especially so in Scotland since it was assumed that on the whole the Scottish Office would 'bat for Scotland' whichever of the two parties was in power.

On the campaigning front in this period Scotland was more of an imitator than an innovator. Pioneering groups like Shelter, CND, the Child Poverty Action Group, New Left groups, had their origins in the South and were then 'imported'. The civil society role was still quite strong on the traditional front – churches, trade unions and professional associations, employers' associations, 'old' charities – but it was weak on new campaigning and charitable organizations. Scottish civil society could be summarized for much of the two decades following the end of the war as reinforcing rather than changing the structures and values in Scottish society.

What role did the institutions of civil society play historically in the specific context of constitutional reform? There was a crucial period in the 1880s when growing discontent with the inefficiency, corruption and unaccountability of government in Scotland led to the campaign for the establishment of the Scottish Office and the position of Scottish Secretary. This was a genuine example of civil society in action. Sections of the Liberal Party, emerging socialist groups, churches, the burghs, newspapers etc worked together to mobilize public opinion on constitutional reform issues, challenging a largely indifferent or hostile Westminster. The Scottish Home Rule Association was formed in this period. Eventually the demand for a Scottish Secretary was reluctantly conceded and although the substance of the change was very limited at the time, it was a crucial campaign and outcome since it established a basis for public policy decision-making in the following century that was distinctive from the rest of the UK.

The late 1920s/early 30s saw another time of focus on the Scottish constitutional agenda with the formation of the Scottish National Party but it was the cultural turn that was as significant in this period with the emergence of a range of writers asserting and exploring Scottish identity. Hugh MacDiarmid, Eric Linklater, Compton McKenzie, Neil Gunn were prominent examples. Many of them had

specific links with political nationalism. The National Trust for Scotland and the Saltire Society were examples of cultural organizational initiatives at this time

The later 1940s saw another attempt to mobilise the wider institutions of Scottish society for the establishment of a domestic legislature. The Scottish Convention was initiated by people who had given up the nationalist political party route in favour of wider civic and cross-party co-operation to achieve change. It launched the National Covenant in 1949 and was very successful in the mobilization process with a large number of organizations giving support and gathering two million signatures. But delivery was a different matter. The Labour Government rejected it while the Conservatives in opposition offered a Royal Commission. This was established when they returned to power in 1951 and this took the steam out of the movement. When the Commission reported in 1954, it recommended only modest changes in the Scottish Office. By this point the wider home rule movement was considered to be on the fringes.

We can see from this that civic mobilization was used on a significant scale during two periods specifically on the issues of constitutional reform. In the first in the 1880s it was successful. In the second in the 1940s with a more ambitious agenda, it was not. In addition there were party political initiatives in the inter-war period and a loose cultural network seeking to focus on the Scottish dimension.

Coalition-Building: The Response to the New Right

If we define this contemporary period as from the end of the 1970s to the establishment of the Scottish Parliament, we can see significant changes in many aspects of civil society in Scotland. Many of these changes are shared with other developed societies; some are more specific to Scotland. The feature that marked the period was a response to the emergence of what was perceived as an intransigent and unrepresentative political system after Margaret Thatcher took over as Prime Minister. There were unlikely to be many who were familiar with Antonio Gramsci's writings but what happened in practice in Scotland was a good example of his prescription for the development of intellectual and moral leadership in civil

society bringing together alliances for radical change. Certainly civil society played a key role in this period.

Some of the co-operation over these two decades 'emerged' rather than was the outcome of conscious planning. The various organizations and sectors reflected the concerns of their own members and the communities from which they came. The traumatic loss of 40% of Scotland's industrial base in the 1979-94 period affected most civic organization and crossed social class lines (see Brown *et al*, 1998, Ch.4). Similarly the Government's hostility to the welfare state had greater implications for Scotland than most of the UK. Scotland had a much higher proportion of housing in the public sector than any other region, a lower proportion of private health and education provision, and the very low population density of much of rural Scotland has required greater state support. It was predictable that churches and unions and voluntary organizations would express many similar concerns and those in cultural networks would reflect the dominant mood. In the comparatively small Scottish society, many activists were already known to each other.

But it may be questioned why this led to increased co-operation on the issues of constitutional change. There were bitter divisions around this in the 1970s and the divisions between supporters of independence and devolution were still live but largely concentrated in the political parties. The core party politicians were still divided but for many others the common enemy of Thatcherism was a source of unity.

After the third Conservative victory in 1987, the concern about the democratic deficit reached a peak. There were groups who had been consciously promoting civic and cross-party co-operation as the best route to resist the Government's agenda and to promote change. It was at this point that the idea of a Constitutional Convention, which had been around since the failure of the 1979 referendum, became viable. A related development was the campaign by women's groups for radically improved women's representation in Scottish public life. **Author?? 1991(7)** The fourth successive Conservative election victory in 1992 produced a new range of civic initiatives – Scotland United, Common Cause, the Civic Assembly – in an attempt to counter the political depression and build some new momentum. The following

examines some of the developments in the period in the churches, trade unions, voluntary sector and the cultural sphere.

The Churches

Secularization is one of those trends associated with advanced industrial societies and Scotland broadly fits the pattern. Yet ironically there is a case for arguing that decline in membership and in social role has been accompanied by an increase in the political role. As we have seen, the story of church membership is not one of straight decline. The period after the 2nd World War saw a resurgence in membership and a substantial role in the provision of recreation. The Church of Scotland had over a million members and the Catholic Church had almost half a million regular attenders. In 1956 the Church of Scotland had 325,000 enrolled in Sunday School but this had declined to 61,000 by 1994 (Brown 2001). By the end of the 1960s, the decline had set in and the recreational role of the churches as well as their spiritual and social control functions were moving from centrality to the margins. Churches are still among the largest of the voluntary organizations. A survey in 2000 found that 35% claimed an attachment to the Church of Scotland and 12% to the Catholic Church (Curtice *et al*, 2002: 95). They have a presence in most communities and a cultural role in rites of passage. But this cannot disguise substantial contraction. However, where the churches at earlier periods were very limited players on the political scene, their significance in the political arena broadened and deepened during the 1980s and 90s. Before that the Church of Scotland at formal national level would have been seen as reflecting typical middle-class Scottish opinion. This would have been even more so at local level. It made a more radical stance on anti-colonial issues with its overseas missionary background. It was broadly sympathetic to 'Home Rule'. It would actively lobby on such issues as alcohol licensing laws and Sunday observance. It was bitterly divided for years on nuclear weapons policy. Until the Thatcher period the Roman Catholic church was even narrower in its political focus. On issues like separate Catholic schools, divorce and abortion legislation, the Scottish bishops would lobby very strongly but, apart from advising against voting for Communists, it limited its political activities.

The Thatcher period radicalized the churches but in this they reflected the trend of opinion in Scottish society. The rapid de-industrialization in Scotland combined with

the loss of many established companies through closure or take-over, affected the middle-class as well as manual workers. The Scottish churches individually and together through Action by Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS) became regular participants in protest coalitions. Against industrial closures and unemployment, against nuclear weapons and war, against the Poll Tax, for constitutional change – these were some of the issues that brought churches into formal and informal coalitions. ACTS formally participated in the Constitutional Convention and played an active role through its representatives in sustaining the Convention and influencing its outcome on such issues as proportional representation.

There was also greater identification on the part of the Catholic Church with the Scottish dimension rather than Irish ethnic sub-culture within Scotland. Cardinal Gray was a member of the Campaign for a Scottish Assembly. Cardinal Winning, who succeeded him, was involved in a wide range of social and economic causes. The Scottish bishops took a stronger anti-nuclear position than those in England. The Pope's visit in the period was seen by many as a recognition of Scottish identity.

The Church of Scotland had always had a loose left/right division among clergy and lay representatives and this was expressed in often strongly contested General Assembly debates. The Thatcher period moved the Church to the left but this was a reflection of wider opinion in Scottish society. The Prime Minister's controversial speech to the General Assembly in 1988 and her very critical reception, when she was presented with a Church report on poverty, was a clear indicator of the predominant mood of the period.

The Voluntary Sector

It was the Thatcher period that brought expansion, sectoral identity and greater radicalism to the voluntary sector in Scotland. Before that period there was work going on that was worthy but quite limited in scale and not notable for its pace-making. The sector's 19th century buoyancy and sense of purpose had not been replicated in the 20th century. The public looked to the state to initiate and deliver and did so with some confidence in the post-war period.

The combination of Thatcher's hostility to state provision and the 'democratic deficit' in Scotland created a climate more conducive to the third sector. However outcomes were complex. On the one hand, the Conservative Government and its supporters were ideologically quite sympathetic to the idea of the voluntary sector as an alternative to the state where the private sector could not be used (Green, 1993). On the other hand, the kind of people who were drawn to much of the work of voluntary organizations were 'pro-underdog'. They were inclined to social justice values. They were pushing for better services for the vulnerable and more public expenditure to achieve this. They were generally in favour of greater state regulation on, for example, environmental, animal welfare and disability issues. If one thinks of a Social Darwinian spectrum, much of the voluntary sector was at the opposite end from the Thatcherite Conservatives. One study of chairs and chief executives of organizations affiliated to the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations found in 1994 that only 13% identified with the Conservatives (Lindsay, 1995: 328).

A range of new or intensified social problems emerged during this period; high levels of unemployment, community breakdown, more lone-parents, emergence of AIDS, a sharp increase in illegal drug use, more rough-sleeping. In addition there was more assertiveness by groups subject to prejudice on grounds of sexual orientation, gender, race, mental illness and disability. Environmental issues moved towards the mainstream and in the early 1980s proposals for nuclear waste stores in Scotland gave these a particular edge. There was also a period of strong peace movement activity in response to the Reagan-Thatcher cold war strategy. While little of this was unique to Scotland, most of the organizational initiatives were now either entirely Scottish or had a strong Scottish dimension.

The sector became more organized and cohesive during this period with the development of intermediate structures to encourage co-operation and a substantial expansion of networking through training courses and conferences. There was probably some expectation on the part of Government when they promoted the market-testing, contract culture approach that involved not-for-profit organizations competing for public sector contracts that this would create a sector more sympathetic to market values and be more compliant. However there were too many factors pulling in other directions. Most of Scotland's voluntary sector during this period

fitted comfortably into the centre/left anti-Conservative consensus that typified most of Scottish society.

By the end of the 1990s there were an estimated 44,000 voluntary organizations with an annual income of £2.2 billion, around 4% of Scottish GDP and 100,000 employees (see Scottish Executive 2001). There was substantial sectoral infrastructure – a strong Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations, a network of local Councils for Voluntary Service and a range of intermediaries like Children in Scotland, Youthlink, and Environmentlink. The concept of the social economy was just about emerging into the mainstream and had some recognition from the economic development agencies, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Scottish Enterprise. There was also an active range of campaigning groups at the radical end of the spectrum involved in direct action on anti-nuclear and environmental issues. As the larger political parties declined in active membership, it appeared that it was the campaigning/voluntary sector that were more likely to attract those concerned with social change.

Trade Unions

The trade unions in the 1980s and 1990s in Scotland had certain similarities to the churches – declining membership combined with an increasing political significance. The trade unions before the 1980s had much greater workplace influence and their relationship to the Labour Party appeared to provide political influence. In practice the latter was often more illusory than real. There are some examples, but not many, where union intervention in Scotland was significant during a period when Labour was in office. One example of this was between the two General Elections in 1974 when the role of the unions helped to shift Labour policy on devolution but that was in a situation of strong divisions within other sections of the party. During the years of Conservative Government after 1979, the trade union role was more influential in Scotland despite its increasingly weak industrial position. To be more precise, it was not so much the unions in general but that of the Scottish Trade Union Congress. Although Scotland had few remaining independent unions (most had been incorporated into UK structures), the existence of the STUC gave the trade union movement in Scotland a distinctive voice. Its role was especially important since it had organizational resources that could provide some logistical support for campaigns.

This, of course, depended on there being the political will. The STUC had generally been to the left of the Labour Party leadership over a long period and had been accustomed to take its own initiatives. Its role became more focussed when a new General Secretary, Campbell Christie, took over in 1985 and he started his period in office by developing a policy of alliance building. This was not new to the STUC but he pursued it with greater enthusiasm. The STUC had a history of support for devolution and had given some backing to the cross-party Campaign for a Scottish Assembly after its establishment in 1979. The STUC played a central role in the formation of the Constitutional Convention and later in the other initiatives that followed the failure of Labour to win the 1992 election such as the Scotland United group that organised mass demonstrations and the Scottish Civic Assembly. Earlier the STUC had helped co-ordinate the anti-Poll Tax campaign. In 1986 it brought together opposition parties, local authorities, churches and academics in the Commission on the Scottish Economy to prepare strategies for economic regeneration. This was in addition to its role in co-ordinating campaigns against the closure of the steel industry and many other specific industrial closures. It also promoted a range of cultural and anti-racist initiatives.

One of the few successful examples of union activity forcing a change in Government policy in Scotland was in relation to the introduction of primary pupil testing and league tables. In this case one of the few independent Scottish unions, the Educational Institute of Scotland, together with some support from local authorities, succeeded in mobilizing parents to withdraw their children from testing and forced the Scottish Office to abandon its proposals and negotiate a different assessment programme. Although this was a good example of successful individual union action working together with the wider public, it was not typical of the period. The strength of the unions in the post-1979 period was that they had the STUC structure in place and there were some leading figures in the movement who had an ideological perspective committed to the strategy of alliance-building.

The Cultural Dimension

At the start of this 'contemporary' period there were still concerns about a rural romanticism and a Kitsch Scottishness, Kailyard and Tartanry, dominating Scottish

culture. The Edinburgh Festival of 1981 had an exhibition of the worst of tartan artefacts and debates on the Brigadoon-style portrayal of Scotland on film raising concerns that Scottish culture was failing to engage with the real world. How justified these concerns were is a wider debate. There were changes already taking place in the 1970s with such drama as John McGrath's *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil* and John Byrne's *The Slab Boys*. Thirty years later it is difficult to imagine a similar debate taking place. Even if one took a narrowly structural interpretation of civil society, many of the cultural developments in Scotland in the 1980s and 1990s were linked with the social/political developments taking place in the period. Most of the major writers (Alasdair Gray, Iain Banks, A.L. Kennedy, William McIlvanney, Irvine Welsh, Edwin Morgan, James Kelman, Liz Lochhead) were not only part of a broad Scottish consensus on social and economic justice issues and constitutional reform, they were in many cases happy to give their names to or participate in political action. A new element was the Scottish popular music scene, most of which was also explicitly political like Runrig, Deacon Blue and Hue and Cry. The Scottish film output was small but also recognizably radical in its values with people like Peter Mullen and Lynne Ramsay. There were some differences between the devolution and the independence supporters but the similarities were much more important than the differences. Leading cultural figures were very much part of a coherent network. As the poet, Edwin Morgan (2002: 18) has commented:

‘There has always been argument about whether cultural change should precede, accompany, or follow political change. In this case, the outburst of good writing in the 1980s...clearly presaged the 1997 referendum with its overwhelming endorsement of a Scottish Parliament.’

Post-Devolution

Civic institutions in Scotland entered the new Scottish Parliament era with a very positive inheritance. They had played an influential role in sustaining morale and cohesion in Scottish society during the difficult years of de-industrialization and the attack on the social democratic consensus. They had asserted their ‘Scottishness’ in opposition to the Thatcher promotion of Great British patriotism. In particular, they had been significant participants in the process of shaping and delivering the new

constitutional settlement. With the exception of some of the organizations representing business, civil society formally supported the Yes vote in the Referendum. Despite the very wide variety of organizations it represented, the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations took a decision to support the Parliament on the specific grounds that it would be good for the sector in providing more legislative time, greater access and accountability. This did not prove to be a controversial decision.

The civic role was recognized in the make-up of the Consultative Steering Group, established by the new Secretary of State to prepare recommendations for the internal structures of the Parliament.**(14)** That Steering Group recommended strong specialist Parliamentary Committees that, among their other roles, would be expected to offer a direct route to dialogue with MSPs for many organisations. It recommended a Public Petitions Committee to which any organisation or individual could raise any issue and which would ensure that there was an appropriate response by referring the topic to the specialist Committees or the Executive. It also gave its support to the establishment of the Scottish Civic Forum, not in statute as in Northern Ireland, but receiving recognition and financial support from the Executive (Lindsay, 2000:404).

So the constitutional reforms offered the prospect of new influence on public policy. There were early positive developments. Having taken the decision in principle to end university tuition fees, the task of producing a specific scheme was given to an advisory committee whose chair and members had a strong civic sector background and carried out very extensive consultations (Scottish Executive 1999). A similar approach was taken in relation to teachers' pay and professional development. A Social Inclusion Network was established with broad civic representation to work with the Minister (since disbanded in June 2003).

But political life in Scotland was no longer the same. The old democratic deficit was not there. There were 129 elected members together with their staff to offer leadership and anxious to be seen to do so and it has been argued that it is right that civic leadership should play a lesser role (Paterson 1999). So while the institutions and values of the new political landscape should have ensured an increasingly influential civic sector engaging in the process of policy development, what so far has

the outcome been? It is a short period in which to pass judgement but there are several factors that signify some of the plusses and minuses of change. These are the consultation overload, some cynicism about the quality of engagement, exposure of divisions within civil society, and the decreasing presence and quality of the political party in the community.

The number of formal Executive consultations has doubled, comparing the annual average of 132 in 1999-2001 with 76 in 1993-96 (Scottish Civic Forum, 2002: 38). This might be expected to be seen as an advantage but for many organizations with small staff numbers, it means so much reactive work that the time available for the proactive has diminished. Yet if they choose not to respond, it becomes difficult to intervene or criticize at a later stage. An organization like the STUC with a broad range of interests has experienced great work pressures as a result of this. The Civic Forum's Audit of Democratic Participation found in its survey of its own members that there was by 2001 still on balance a positive view of consultation with only 20% saying it was poor and 52% claiming that there had been some changes to Executive policy as an outcome of the consultation process (Scottish Civic Forum, 2002: 72). But a cynicism about the influence of consultation, the very short periods in which it is conducted, the lack of feed-back, is quite commonly heard.

One positive development has been a system of Cross-Party Groups on specific topics of public interest (Scottish Civic Forum, 2003) These are made up of MSPs from different parties along with interested groups and individuals. They have to be approved by the Parliament's Standards Committee. There are now over 40 of these. Examples are Animal Welfare, Epilepsy, Nuclear Disarmament, Scottish Music, Sexual Health, Palestine. They range beyond devolved functions and, of course, have no power but they offer dialogue and networking. This does not involve Executive Ministers and is, therefore, several stages away from the decision-taking structures.

One predictable development in the current scene is that the unifying factor of the 1980s and 1990s – the 'external enemy' – is no longer there and this exposes divisions that were kept muted in those earlier decades. The abolition of Clause 28 (it had a different number in Scottish legislation) that had prohibited the 'promotion' of

homosexuality by public authorities, created a very bitter period in which churches were divided as were political parties and some other organizations although the outcome was in many ways a tribute to civil society. Belatedly, the Minister established an advisory committee with the usual variety of civic representatives to produce an alternative statement of guidance for schools. This was a sensitive and broadly liberal statement that was widely accepted. MSPs voted for the abolition of the Clause and the storm disappeared as quickly as it had arisen. This did, however, illustrate the diversity rather than the familiar coherence of civil society to which Scotland had become used. Other legislation on land reform, fox-hunting, housing, as well as policy initiatives on transport and roads, were examples of civil diversity. While this pluralism is normal and desirable, it has required some adjustment. Civil alliances have to be more complex and variable than they might have been in the past. Also, because the larger organizations felt, at least to begin with, that they had more of a direct route to the new Executive, there may have been some feeling that alliances were less important.

One element of civil society that devolution might have been expected to strengthen was that of the political party. The transfer of greater power to Scotland and the establishment of a democratic legislature should have given some stimulus to political parties at the Scottish and the local community level. Yet the paradox has been that this greater power to deliver social change has been accompanied by a decline in membership in all the larger parties and, although not measurable, a general acceptance that most party political activity at community level has been in decline. While the explanations can only be speculative and this is not a trend unique to Scotland, the lack of internal democracy within parties, disempowering activists and focusing politics on national leaders and national media, has some plausibility as part of the explanation. But while the established parties have not been invigorated at their grass roots by the Parliament, what has happened with potentially important implications is that small parties and campaign groups have succeeded in getting elected and in doing so, they have set an example for others. Given the likelihood that coalition government will be the norm in Scotland and so will the election of MSPs from a variety of small parties and campaigns, the movement in and out of the conventional categories of civil and state institutions may become more fluid.

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