

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

IRELAND



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Devolution to Scotland and Wales

The Kilbrandon Commission was set up in 1969, against a general background of rising popular discontent, to examine the functions of the central legislature and government in relation to the constituent parts of the UK and to consider whether any changes were desirable. There was considerable disagreement among the members of the Commission but a majority favoured the establishment of regional assemblies with legislative powers over a wide range of functions for Scotland, a similar arrangement covering a narrower range of functions for Wales, and a number of regional coordinating and advisory councils for England.

A British Government consultative document on the devolutionary alternatives, issued in 1973, and a White Paper containing a number of provisional proposals, were followed in November 1975 by a second White Paper entitled "Our Changing Democracy - Devolution to Scotland and Wales". The latter proposed a directly elected Assembly with legislative powers for Scotland ^{and} an Assembly with administrative powers for Wales, both with block grants to finance the services under their control. The proposals were condemned by all the opposition parties at Westminster for being either too radical or too conservative. The two major parties at Westminster are also divided internally on the subject. The differences relate to the causes and implications of increasing nationalist support in Scotland and Wales and to the possible long-term consequences of devolution for the main political parties and for the integrity of the UK itself.

The British Government has announced its intention to introduce a draft devolution bill early this year but will not press for its passage in the current session. A revised bill is to be introduced in the 1976/7 session, to allow the first elections to the Scottish and Welsh Assemblies towards the end of 1977 or the spring of 1978.

Northern Ireland

Although the Kilbrandon Commission initially considered Northern Ireland to be its top priority area, it finally concluded that Northern Ireland problems were "largely separable" from those of Britain. Equally, the

recent White Paper states that Northern Ireland is in a different category to Scotland and Wales and adds "Its history and geography distinguish it from other parts of the United Kingdom, as does the presence of two separate communities." The devolution proposals may nevertheless be construed as having general implications for the questions of restoring devolved power to Northern Ireland and of increasing Northern Ireland representation at Westminster.

At the close of the devolution debate at Westminster on 19 January 1976, seven UUUC MPs voted against the Government motion noting the present proposals and also against the call by Scottish and Welsh Nationalists for meaningful control over their respective economies. They voted instead for the Conservative amendment rejecting the Government's proposals, as did Mr. Craig. Mr. Kilfedder voted the opposite way in each case.

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The latter proposed a directly elected assembly with legislative powers for Scotland, with block grants to finance the assembly when the proposals were endorsed by all the registered parties. The proposals were endorsed by all the registered parties. The proposals were endorsed by all the registered parties. The proposals were endorsed by all the registered parties.

The Government has announced its intention to introduce a bill early this year but will not press for its passage in the House of Commons until it has been introduced in the House of Lords. A revised bill is to be introduced in the House of Commons to allow the House of Lords to be dissolved at the end of 1976 or the spring of 1977.

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