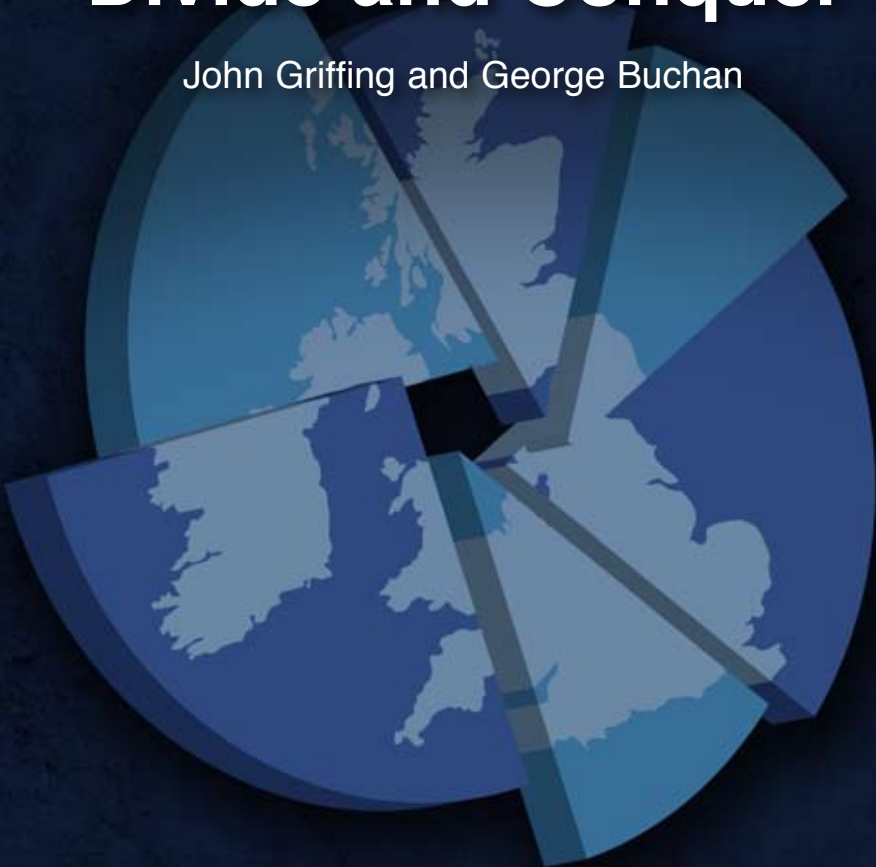




British Regionalization Divide and Conquer

John Griffing and George Buchan





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British Regionalization

— Divide and Conquer

All over the world, regions stand where nations once stood. The world is on the cusp of a revolution in political arrangements, as citizens of the world are losing control with hardly a word spoken. Sovereign nations are realigning increasingly into integrated political and economic unions in varying stages of development, with the European Union being one of the most developed.

Now a seemingly separate but companion trend intended to undermine national sovereignty from within has taken shape: regional devolution. Despite the predictable consequences of this trend, many supporters are not fully aware of its implications. That is why regional devolution must be explored in some depth, to better identify the inherent dangers of this paradigm, and its damaging impact on the proper functioning of national governments, which are the chief protectors of individual liberty and property, and the subsequent protector of national interests.

Regional devolution, unlike continental political and economic integration, consists of reassigning powers traditionally within the competence of national governments to broad regional entities designed to supplant localities of different types, including unitary authorities as well as the more traditional form of local political organization. Most regional governing models generally include quasi-legislatures, but with broader and less-defined areas of power. This development is taking shape all over the European continent, although some nations differ in form.

Germany, for example, has historically had states called Lander, but these have gained new power within the German system since the ratification of the EU-spawned Maastricht Treaty. German regions now have their own ministries in Brussels and compete alongside national German ministers for influence, sometimes quite successfully. With a strong ethnic and regional tradition the increase in regional influence was a natural progression of relatively small reforms in Germany. Not so in other nations with more nationalistic and central models, e.g. France. Regionalism has been forced into the political dynamic, almost inexplicably. Why forcibly change a political culture for no apparent purpose? This form of approach to governance would be fine, even highly beneficial, if it was designed with the intent of increasing democratic accountability and governmental flexibility at the regional (and down to local) level. However, once regional interests become more in competition with, than being a reflection and promotion of national interests, and particularly so when given the international environment to air this conflict in Brussels, it becomes a

key ingredient for the erosion of national sovereignty, and within Europe; and this consequently runs directly along the route to EU supranational federalism.

In the UK, regional devolution has dominated political discourse for the last two decades, although much older regional undercurrents, e.g. SNP-driven nationalism and dormant Irish nationalism for years aggravated by Sinn Féin ideologues, has been exploited by advocates of everything continental to implement European-style regional governance within the UK. Much like the Magna Carta was replaced with a more obtuse and bureaucratic form of the antiquated Code Napoleon (guilty until proven innocent) by the self-same devotees of anything and everything European, regional devolution in the UK has been largely pursued without general public support. Within itself, Scotland has generally been an exception due to the traditional disparity in voting tendencies and election results. But, a perception of a constructive and communicative approach to governance between Edinburgh and Westminster has never really filtered into the public and party-political debate in Scotland, the polarization of which has been central to creating the wider political landscape for bringing an SNP-led Scottish Government to the fore, which is now intent on breaking up the Union and enmeshing Scotland into the wider European structure.

Devolution (or Decentralization) has been portrayed by its proponents as the solution to the centralizing tendencies of Whitehall. Advocates of “Europe” see the ascendancy of regionalism in the United Kingdom as a door to federal reform of the European Union. Those proclaiming a “Europe of regions,” including many in the British government, openly intend just that. One thing is certain: If carried to its logical conclusion, regionalism will spell the beginning of the end for one of the few remaining independent nation-states of Western Europe, specifically through passive acceptance of the post-modernist and self-serving EU ideology that the nation-state is not anymore the highest form of power in the international system.

Previously, the debate over regionalism in the UK has been centered around the creation of regional assemblies with new powers in areas such as employment, transportation, housing, rural development, and spatial planning (zoning). Prior to their abolition by the newly elected coalition government, assemblies existed as unelected bodies, their members drawn from elite circles that included corporate executives, environmental consultants, and local officials serving fixed terms. Regional assemblies at their core were unaccountable to the electorate.

With the abolition of regional assemblies by the Liberal Democrat-Conservative coalition government, and regionalism seemingly derailed, it would be tempting to grow complacent and assume that the war is won because of a victorious skirmish.

But the enemy is the same, and their domestic lapdogs have not stopped pressing the regional concept, even if their approach has been adapted in the face of public opposition. The re-branding of the coalition government via the abolition of regional “assemblies” and their replacement with more free market aligned “Local Enterprise Partnerships” should not be mistaken for victory against the effort to corrode local governance and reduce voter input.

Consider that business control of government functions can be just as damaging as bureaucratic control of government functions. The WTO perfectly illustrates this concept to educated observers. This is also a classic point by which to underline the difference between pro-business and pro-free market policies. It should also be noted that new LEPs are following the same essential geographical boundaries demarcated for Home Secretary John Prescott’s regional vision. The only difference is one of form and not substance. Unelected individuals with no official capacity will still be exercising control over key policy areas.

Therefore, understanding the origins of regionalism, and more importantly, its true purpose, is crucial to preventing its continued ascension in the UK.

It is useful to review the history of regionalism:

Much of the regional agenda, though originally springing from a Europhile and nominally Conservative government, was accomplished during the Blair years. Despite the Blair government's assurances that powers given to regional assemblies would be "drawn down" from central government, and not "up" from local government, powers given to regional assemblies made more sense in the hands of existing and popularly supported local councils, that are far closer to the British people than distant and artificial regional assemblies. Why remake the wheel when adequate structure for management of local issues is already in place, unless the aim is not to streamline but consolidate? As asked earlier, why change the form of government simply to change it? Clearly motives that include more than the good of British citizens are at work in regional designs, utilization of the free market lexicon notwithstanding. If regionalization does not mean bringing power pragmatically closer to the people, then the motives of doing so must be questioned.

Consolidation was likely the real objective of the Blair government. Consider the evidence: Public opinion was ignored, and a series of referendums were advanced to give an air of legitimacy to the wholesale destruction of counties and other localities as vital institutions of British government. According to The Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill of 2002-03, directly elected assemblies were not to even be debated until the British people endorsed them in at least one referendum. Considering the overall opposition to regional assemblies in most areas of the country, many English residents had no incentive to vote for elected regional assemblies which would have still yet more permanency and even lower prospects of removal if "elected."

Despite the climate, referendums did indeed take place, with varying results. Scotland and Wales, both possessing a strong history of separatism, voted for regional parliaments and more direct control over internal matters.

In England (specifically the North East), the nexus of British governance, the result was an utter rejection of regional devolution of any kind with 78 percent voting no. This would have prompted less fervent politicians to cease and desist. Not Blair. He responded by promising to pursue arbitrary regional government in "other ways." And by "other ways," it is evident that Blair meant abolishing any pretense to democratic regionalization, while giving the unelected regional constructions greater power. In other words, regional devolution was never about enhancing democratic government at the local level as pretended. How is coercion considered "decentralization" exactly?

Regional advocates would point out that regional assembly members representing local councils were elected, however indirectly, and that this should have checked regional assembly power. Yet they were not elected for the purpose of regional assembly business, a fact which would tend to blur the actual mandate granted to these individuals by British voters. And even if voted out, these elected members represented such a small fraction of overall assembly composition that their ejection would have had little impact on regional assembly policy. It is also ludicrous to assert that elected members of regional assemblies, representing such a small fraction of overall assembly composition, could by their ejection impact regional assembly policy if the British public attempted to exercise its electoral power.

The problem as it stood before assembly abolition: Too many unelected, unaccountable members in a body with the power to enact enforceable law. In essence, a miniature EU model. Any new level of government with any power beyond that of enforcing or implementing the policies of existing levels of government should be directly accountable to the people they are serving. Anything else is tyranny.

What's different now? Apart from a few symbolic makeovers and changing of the words "regional assemblies" to "Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs)," the answer is, not much.

Conservatives have capitalized on popular opposition to regional assemblies, reallocating regional funding (some of which originates within EU mechanisms) within new LEPs, which are loosely based on county and borough lines. Because LEPs are coded in the libertarian lexicon, many mistakenly assume the new LEPs sufficient replacements for the abolished regional assemblies. But in this statement lies a problem in search of a solution: why do regional assemblies need to be replaced with anything? Did Britain need to undermine the foundations of parliamentary democracy to become the greatest economic and political force apart from the United States in the 19th and 20th Centuries? In point of fact, only when the UK abandoned its traditional orientation as a global trader and global investor to opt for a more narrow and inverted European focus did Britain lose its standing as a dominant world power. Ironically, PM Heath believed that the only way for the UK, one of the world's most influential powers at that time, to exert influence, was to join the European Community, thereby losing British influence to the Franco-German sphere. It was German, not British interest rates that led to the ERM fiasco.

The idea that a new mode of governance is needed, other than what has served Britain well for centuries, is ludicrous. Political canvassing about regionalism does little more than buffer the resumes of politicians who aren't actually doing anything productive in much more vital categories. It is as if workers are laying bricks for a

structure that will house no one, when adequate real estate already exists to satisfy current needs. If too many cooks spoil the broth, then too many layers of unnecessary government obstruct the normal functioning of the overarching system.

And yet, the knee-jerk instinct of conservatives on both sides of the pond is to support any idea with an economic or business connotation, especially when cloaked in *laissez-faire* platitudes. But this approach becomes problematic when power rightfully belonging to accountable, elected representatives is transferred to unelected free market agents, since there are some things only government can do, e.g. protect liberty and property. Business pursues maximum profit with minimal overheads. Placing businesses in charge of democratic institutions can only serve to fuse the economically damaging trend referred to as “the race to the bottom,” with the management of local government. And that could undoubtedly have an impact on personal liberty, something generally cherished in the UK. On the question of liberty, more than anywhere else, the distinction between a pro-business and pro-free market approach to economic policy becomes obvious.

It is important to note that this situation has not arisen from any distaste for democracy by any of the political parties, but is indicative of a massive disrespect for it when pitted against how to push through a desired political change—something that has become the norm both in UK and US politics.

This partly explains why there is little battle of ideas and ideologies anymore, as the fight for votes has become based on specificities, statistics, and individualisation of generic problems, where answers become pitching points with which everyone can agree; in other words, crucial matters of policy become a debate based on what candidates want to do rather than how and why, and further, how this fits into a wider political ideology. (Queue slogan of choice.) The resultant increasing political disconnection between the electorate and the elected in the UK, and particularly so in terms of EU and collective European progression, has created, along with voter turnout averaging around the 50% mark and dwindling party membership, precisely the infertile political ground needed as the perfect prerequisite needed to divide and conquer.

However, there is a blatant parallel with the subsequent impact on personal liberty and what has been happening in Scotland since the inauguration of the Scottish parliament in 1999 and before, and particularly so in the current run-up to the independence referendum in terms of the race to the bottom. The problem is that decentralisation of political power from Westminster stops at Edinburgh, and has not translated into diffusion from Edinburgh to local authorities; in fact quite the reverse has been happening. Changing the locality of power itself does not inherently

increase democratic strength: centralisation in Edinburgh rather than London creates a system exactly the same and equally inflexible as its predecessor, but simply on a smaller scale—the locality changes but the parameters do not.

Therefore, when the form and practice of governmental power does not change, the idea of decentralisation, with all its connotations of becoming more representative, flexible and local through independence becomes a moot point. This is most blatantly reflected by massive disconnect between local authorities' self-funding and provision of services, as councils get about 80% of their funding from block-grants from Edinburgh, which treats them as administrative bodies rather than the elected, political and representative bodies that they are. And so, the cyclical and perennial problem for local authorities in terms of effectiveness and flexibility to manage local issues, and on-the-ground local perception of this, is not being addressed by devolution, but is compounding the existing problem.

There has always been a desire within Scotland for more power over its own affairs, mostly emanating from a traditional and massive disparity in voting and election results north and south of the border, and reflected back on Scotland through the West Lothian Question. This was most obvious in during the Thatcher years and came to a head with the election result in 1997. Therefore, as noted above, PM Blair began the first real attempt at regionalization.

However, the nexus of the problem with devolution and independence as it has always stood is best described as a pursuit of regionalization without a pursuit of localisation, and therefore Edinburgh's attrition of power from Westminster halts there with no intention of filtering down to the 32 Scottish local councils. So whilst ideologically regionalization has the natural ability to strengthen the democratic process through diffusing power down to the local level, the active centralisation of governmental power acts as a democratic road block. Indeed, in recognising the nature of power itself, why would any parliamentary bureaucracy voluntarily want to hand down new-found powers any further?

Misplaced Yank Views of Apparent British Federalism

Many Americans don't see a problem with Britain's move toward regions, accepting uncritically the claim that regional devolution in the UK would more closely mirror the federalism of America's fifty states, and what could be wrong with that? The American system is the only system that functions properly, or so it is believed by many Americans. But the British political landscape cannot be wholly compared to the unique federalism of the United States because of a difference in the foundation and political evolution of both countries over centuries. Although both nations possess many borrowed and shared features, they have not evolved along the same trajectory, despite momentous periods of convergence throughout modern history, notably WWII and the Cold War, both conflicts challenging the very heart of Anglo-American democracy.

The closest thing to America's fifty states in Britain are the one-hundred plus metropolitan, district, county, and unitary authorities. What Blair sought to do would be comparable to President Obama creating new regional governments formed from states in the Midwest, New England, the South, and the West Coast. Americans would point out, correctly, that any powers Washington shouldn't have are reserved for the states, and are reserved for them precisely to prevent centralization in one level of government or the other, and should be given back to the states, not re-allocated to new and less representative regional bodies. In the UK, counties, not states or regions, are the more proper repositories of these remaining powers.

Interestingly, several influential persons of prominence are advocating a form of regional devolution in the United States, based on the rising regional federalism readily observable all over continental Europe and in the UK. Robert Pastor, a staunch proponent of North American amalgamation along European lines is conversely also an advocate of regional devolution at the local level. The more these two trends interact in efforts at "integration" on both sides of the Atlantic, the greater the likelihood of a complementary relationship developing.

However, Scotland is key to this point as it is the only place in Western Europe at the moment which is going through political change profound enough to redefine its system of governance to create a meaningful and effective democratic process. However, unlike in the US, in Europe centralization of government is taken for granted, with no greater example than the European Union itself. Therefore, textbook centralisation of power, rather than its diffusion to the local level as mentioned remains the *status quo* in terms of Scottish governance, unfortunately and partly because the unionist Scottish political parties (i.e. everyone except the SNP) have never been able to find a coherent political narrative or strategy

broad enough to fully deal with the ideology of devolution to counter that of the Nationalists. However this should start to change with the commencement of the anti-independence campaign, but this has only appeared out of all-in or all-out necessity via a confirmed referendum, and is therefore essentially 13 years late. This happens when the nature of democratic power itself is not realigned to fit the new institutional realities, and so it cannot genuinely be implemented or practiced more effectively, because the gap between the ideology and pragmatics of the institutions becomes too great to generate effective democratic politics.

Adding the EU into the mix, and taking this a step further, when power is not seen as a wholly state-based construct, its implementation likewise does not originate wholly from the state, and its practice does not wholly come from state-based institutions. So when this is then put into the context of fledgling independence with a Scottish government which agrees with this kind of internationalist theory of (or desire for) power, immediate profound theoretical contradictions about the nature of not simply the nation-state, but of regionalized power itself surface, and any political or policy strategy which attempts to embrace such contradictions are underlined by uncertainty and ambiguity at best.

However, the promoted enmeshment and absorption of an independent Scottish state into the European Union structure via full membership results in a double fundamental democratic irony for Scottish independence as it stands: bringing power home whilst simultaneously sucking the life out of local authorities in the name of centralisation, and attaining independence as a nation-state, yet proactively binding it into an undemocratic super-state system. If this sounds like one big confusing mess, it is because it is one. Further still, as Robert Hazel from University College London notes¹, if Scotland votes for independence in 2014 and becomes officially independent in 2016 as planned, it causes major problems for the 2015 UK elections as the status quo would still be in place.

All things considered, it would seem that Britain has more in common with the US than not; the power of our citizens undergoes a united assault in the form of regional centralization, wrongly called devolution, and this assault manifests alongside an assault from globalists within both the British and American governments lustily surrendering legislative, executive, and judicial sovereignty to foreign institutions.

Because the nation-state is the primary and original source of power in the international system, and its source of power of those which are democratic being the citizens of the state, who grant the government the ability to govern, national

1 www.scotsman.com/news/peter-jones-a-new-west-lothian-conundrum-1-2168651

interests are then created as a reflection of what is best for the people, because in democracies the people are the state (a foundation which is all too often forgotten). This also creates the primary requirement of democratic governments to protect their citizens and their freedom and liberty. This is absolutely key to understanding international relations, and an independent Scotland's place within it.

The expansion of international organization (IO) power must, and can only, come from the depletion of nation-state power. This is how international law works, and precisely how the European Union works: through international control over national laws and interests. It is this way because the primary source of power has been, and remains to be, the nation-state, from which power is then essentially outsourced to international structures—this is how history has created these very IOs. So when power starts to become outsourced, individual freedom and liberty goes with it. This is also why foreign policy always has been and always will be about protecting national interests, and not about international interests and commonality. Now, at the start of the 21st century, this is how the game remains to be played – negotiating through IOs for support for national interests (and perhaps corroboration that they are indeed yours), not that your interests are to be granted from these IOs – this kind of strategy and foreign policy by definition must have already forfeited the power to decide national interests to places outside the nation-state itself. International organizations serve international interests; that is precisely why they are called international organizations.

What the Scottish pro-independence movement has not come to terms with, in its desire for full EU membership, is that IOs and particularly the EU have the inherent nature of gaining power and so-called international interests at the expense of national power and national interests. They are places in which the point of being there is to try to find common ground. Therefore, it is illogical and contradictory to fight for national interests on the preceding premise that they are to be received and substantiated from outside the nation, rather than as something individual and inherently coming from within the nation-state, with no need of validation by outside institutions. Unless, of course, the premise involves a prerequisite assumption that the nation-state cannot exist without outside validation.

This thinking has been central to the SNP's previous 3 manifestos and in particular, their *Your Scotland Your Voice* publication, which states that, "... Scotland needs adequate representation within the European Union to *negotiate directly for its own interests.*" [Emphasis Added] This is the misinterpretation of the nature of power in the international system and is what produces the receive-rather-than-create approach to the national interest, which is compounded even further by the SNP's central policy to get Trident out of Scotland, and subsequently be released from NATO.

The European Motive Behind British Regionalization

The golden rule of democracy, that power comes from the people, is being blurred from both sides in Scotland with a Scottish Parliament trying to contain as much newly acquired power as possible, and a European Union making and manufacturing decisions which affect the whole continent on which have no line of engagement to pursue. Unfortunately, this is a reflection of the same situation previously existing for the UK as a whole.

However, regional apologists insist that the benefits derived from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) are reason enough to continue along the path of further devolution. They allege that, without Prescott's unnatural regions, European aid money will have no organized means of reaching British citizens, who regional proponents suggest benefit from such expenditures.

This conclusion would be partially valid, if British culture and tradition were a matter of dollars on paper, to be sold for handouts, except that this conclusion assumes the premise that Britain needs these transfers in the first place. Being a massive contributor to the EU, it is illogical to conclude that Britain needs wealth transfers from the continent. Why not just hold back the percentage redistributed from ERDF coffers? Surely the British government, or preferably British citizens, will do a better job of spending or investing these pounds in economically productive ways than bureaucrats inhabiting offices in Brussels or Strasbourg. But then, is the ERDF actually about improving the economic standing of so-called underdeveloped regions? Perhaps more detail will shed clarity upon the demagoguery infusing discussions of devolution.

The ERDF is an EU controlled aid program that promotes local division via artificial British regions by expending public monies on public works projects. The ERDF also gives regions in Britain a foreign policy dimension that greater divorces British citizens from national identity. Similar to the German Lander, British regions as they have been constructed previously, and with recent reforms left out of the equation, were able to negotiate with Brussels on an equal footing with Westminster. At issue is an influx of continental money, in reality, British money. Former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's handbag would be of exceedingly efficient use in the present scenario.

By dividing funding into broad categories that address "structural" issues key to achieving "cohesion," the European Union dissipates national loyalty, as competition for dole-outs becomes more important than loyalty to country. Industries or communities whose additional development depends on the European Union would

more readily place trust in their benefactors, even if the false sense of security the EU provides comes from their own pockets.²

The ERDF has created a form of economic regionalism in which newly developing regional entities, however removed from geographical or historical considerations, build a political culture not around shared values, but around growth patterns and economies of scale.

The most that can be said of economic regionalism, is that it will create new nations in the place of old ones, as there are certain services provided by national governments that cannot be adequately supplanted by regional imitations. Regional revolutionaries such as President of Catalonia Jordi Pujol have said as much. Pujol and his friends envision large banana-shaped regions spanning the entire European continent, forged from regions at similar stages of economic development. Language barriers, diverse traditions, cultures, and belief systems appear to be of little or no consequence to regional proponents. Baden-Wurtemberg, Alsace, and Basel are now one region for employment purposes, for example. The simple question remains, why? Why destroy historic nation states only to replace them with bananas built on the shaky foundation of economic indicators?

The EU avoids questions of sovereignty by talking of Britain's regions as disparaged areas that must be equalized and harmonized with the rest of Europe. Of course, regions that have only been created for the sole purpose of European aid money are bound to have disparities and developmental differences. It's comparing apples to oranges. If this were truly the EU's concern, they would give British localities more of their own money, instead of filtering aid money into local communities based on vague regional boundaries, and the consequential disparity such partitions cause.

As discussed earlier, those who seek a wider European federalism suggest a "Europe of regions" as the best model. As a Europe of this nature would bypass the very entities that are the signatories of the EU's treaties, and violate the traditional definition of federation, it can be deduced that regional federalism is merely a cloaking device for the true Europhile agenda.³

2 Indeed, the EU has insisted that the many EU-financed development projects in the British regions should in some way display the tell-tale ring of stars, as a subliminal message implying that any prosperity resulting from the projects could not have been attained without the benevolence of the European Union.

3 It might also be noted that the EU's principle of subsidiarity, which allegedly divides powers between members-states and the EU, is a joke, because it consists of the member states giving power to Brussels, Brussels stepping beyond its powers, and then member states giving more power to Brussels. Obviously we're not really talking about satisfying a need for federalism.

It is worth noting that after the recent failures at “swallow it whole, swallow it now” integration, EU supporters have retracted bold declarations of supranational union to take up more friendly ideas of regional governance. In his essay “Marxism and The National Question”, Joseph Stalin wrote, “Regional autonomy is essential to the solution of the national problem.”

For over eighty years, countries were conquered and absorbed into the Soviet empire by parceling them into more manageable Soviet Republics that carried out the whims of the Politburo. A similar pattern can be observed in the workings of the EU. Country A joins the EU; Country A enacts the *acquis communautaire*, which contains requirements for skeletal regional structures; the EU then regulates the domestic affairs of Country A via regional machinery.

Looking at the current Scottish situation in this light makes sense in Brussels as it is a situation which is ideal for wielding further influence over the remaining UK by using (particularly a post-independence) Scotland as its device, and even more so with the emergence of new and competing national interests in the British Isles. Whilst the common logic is that Scotland and the remaining UK would create a strong team fighting for collective interests in the EU, this is based on a two-fold false premise – firstly that the parameters for where national interests are to be attained starts and stops in Brussels, and secondly that through breaking up a union, the union itself can become stronger.

As Brussels has made an art-form out of avoiding the democratic process and the very idea of a popular mandate, so runs British regionalization from Brussels’ perspective. Full absorption of one part of the UK model, or at least its breaking up from the inside inevitably changes the power-influence-dynamic between the UK and the EU, and changes it for the weaker when the catalyst for the change itself is unapologetically pro-EU. Yet, whilst there are many question marks over how an independent Scotland would legally become a full EU member and in what time frame, the fact remains that the only key nation left openly against federalization would be broken up and renegotiated with its northern border proactively more allied to Brussels.

The centrality of regionalism to the EU agenda is embodied in “Framework” regulation 2052/88 instituted by regional visionary Jaques Delors during his time as European Commission President: it provides a swift means of delivering regulation upon the subject peoples of Europe without the filtering mechanism of national parliaments. As regulations, apart from directives, instantly become law in EU member states without parliamentary scrutiny, it makes sense to have a Europeanized local tier of

government that is charged with the implementation of EU regulation.⁴ The Delors regulation made it lawful in all EU member states for regional authorities, which were a requirement after the Single European Act, to deal directly with Brussels on a host of issues without consulting with, or working with, national parliaments. Currently, the EU's end-run around national parliaments only extends to "structural funds," which encompasses most economic issues. But as "EU law takes primacy over the law of member states," there would be little, if any, recourse for national parliaments following new regulations that expanded on the current EU practice of benign neglect. The Scottish Government, for example, have already entirely accepted that the best Scotland can do is transpose EU law into Scottish law.

In spite of the obvious, the illusion of regions as a federal measure has been well preserved by the flight of individual EU member states from single member districts, to multi-member electoral regions for the purpose of European Parliamentary elections. British members of the European Parliament are far too few, however, to be equitably dispersed across the vast seas of constituencies present in all such regions. Inevitably, proper democratic process is derailed, and Britons find themselves voting for entire lists of candidates, rather than individual candidates, making elections a mere formality. The 56 additional members elected (out of 129 seats, and 3 less than the amount of Scottish constituencies designated to Westminster) via the party list system in Scotland runs parallel to this. List-voting makes it impossible for Britons to pick and choose from different lists, and gives party chieftains, not the national party as a whole, the power of nominating candidates for elections. The system as it currently stands resembles the one-candidate elections of the Soviet Union; there's no real choice. Furthermore, this is not the decentralization of the UK's government, but the centralization of it. Is it decentralization or centralization when there are fewer people representing larger areas, with less accountability?

Regional devolution is doing its work in the UK. If division and provincial focus at the expense of national unity were merely an unintended byproduct, then the byproduct would account for an incredibly toxic derivative.

Other nations in Europe with distinct local traditions are artificially redesigning government around regions, regions that conveniently hold seats in European-level regional councils/committees granted legislative authority on par with the European Parliament in some cases. But why the UK?

4 The Treaties of Amsterdam and Maastricht gave regional authorities an advisory role in all EU legislation, regulations, and directives.

In France, old and revered departments have been replaced with abstract regional councils. It might irk many British citizens to see anything French imitated in the UK, and yet, this is exactly the case. The new British governing model is largely lifted from French reforms. When the French model for anything is adopted in the UK, aptly described as *malaise en masse*, it may be time to ponder the present direction in which British politics have progressed. Significantly, the French reforms have sparked demands from French regional hubs like Lyons in the Rhone-Alps region for still more power, still more self-government.

In the French illustration is a pertinent lesson for the UK, for Wales and Scotland are now growing discontented with recent reforms, and seek transfers of power that exceed even conventional political balance in overtly federal or confederate political arrangements. Wales and Scotland apparently no longer think primarily of union or the economic or political strength that union implies, nor of the individual freedom chartered in precious documents drafted under the auspices of union. What if a pressing problem demanding a united front arises, as in perhaps, a global war? Where does it end?

There is nothing wrong with being Welsh, Scottish, or English. Our entire family lines are Welsh and Scottish respectively. But there is something powerful about being British or American. Millions died to defend the Union Flag and what it represents: freedom, the freedom to think, to worship, to live, to work. How tragic that minor, albeit deep-seated, cultural animosity⁵ could be permitted to allow Brussels, a city in a province created by the UK, to reduce a great nation that once controlled a quarter of the Earth's surface into a gaggly of bickering regions clamoring for handouts?

There are only two reasons why intelligent adults would pursue a system of governance in Britain which is such a large departure from historical tradition. Either PM Cameron, predecessor Blair, and his colleagues are naïve about the human desire for accountable, democratic representation, or regionalism is an engineered consolidation of power, which by its very nature must sever democratic accountability as a prerequisite for success, again directly in line with the EU model.

5 For example, one of the interesting turns in the perception of Scotland inside Scotland is a general cultural resistance to the terms 'England' and 'Britain' being interchangeable. This generic mixing of these names is popular abroad, and is also manifested in many ways at home. So whilst on the one hand the drive for Scottish independence comes through a rejection of the union itself, there is also a cultural element of distaste for not describing Britain as inclusive of Scotland. Whilst this seems contradictory, it becomes easy fodder for the pro-independence marketing machine when couched in terms of where the power lies, and who holds it, which is the crux of the argument for independence.

It is fairly safe to presume that, if actions are any indicator, Prime Minister Cameron intends more, not less, devolution. His own recent remarks serve as further evidence of this fact. By repackaging regional devolution, thereby concealing the less than savory elements from the English, where no solid history of ethnic separatism exists, it would seem that Cameron believes himself to be invisible to those closely following the regional issue.

Consider Cameron's actions thus far: He reneged on a promise for a referendum or, alternatively, to renegotiate the UK's membership in the EU, the EU being in large part the source of Britain's regional metamorphosis. More importantly, Cameron maintained ERDF funding, which requires a network of regional entities to distribute regional funds. Furthermore, Cameron has capitulated to Scottish-nationalist demands for an independence referendum, despite the long historical ties of the two kingdoms, forged with blood, toil, tears, and sweat, and Cameron blatantly ignores the illegality of such an action under Magna Carta and other notable documents. Besides, when did SNP begin to speak for all Scotland? The fringe gained a seat at the negotiating table with the onset of the Scottish Parliament, and became the driving force when no other Scottish parties, including Labour, knew how to react within a unionist context – a classic example of blowback if ever there was one. Why would Prime Minister Cameron grant any credibility to these anti-union forces unless he also favored dissolution of one of the most powerful and prosperous kingdoms in the world? Cameron's pretense to "localism" does not pass the smell test.

More specifically, even if Cameron did privately oppose regional devolution as harmful to British democracy, riding the fence like he has done on so many other issues is not what is needed in this case. Instead Cameron should be taking bold steps to save the British nation from a Balkans nightmare. A Churchill approach is called for, and "peace in our time" must not be upheld as an excuse for surrender to the voices of anarchy, disunity, and us-against-them thinking.

Surely, what would make the most democratic sense and strength is keeping the original system intact, but allowing local authorities to become the genuinely prominent political entities that they are meant to be, and allowing for a free-market approach to tease out best practices in delivery of services combined with much more control over local budgets. As the elected officials in these localities are the closest to the people in any democratic system, and therefore see the effects of policy on-the-ground most readily, empowerment at this level would take the UK in a much better and more accountable direction.

Conclusion

If the goal of regionalism is not truly decentralization or devolution of power, then its purpose can only be to service a “divide and conquer” strategy directed at what is arguably the last remaining independent nation-state in the European Union. If the European Union’s agenda of regional “cohesion” becomes a reality, Britain will be no more than a cluster of regions controlled from Brussels, and any remaining notion of self-determination will have been erased from the political playbook under the guise of a common European interest, because whilst the ideology of where democratic power comes from may not changed, its contradictory outsourcing will have become fully accepted. How ironic this would be in a recently independent Scotland.

The problem is that Europe is stuck in a political discourse where governments continually expand, continually spend, and therefore work up continual massive debt. Therefore, when a state is in so much debt that it becomes more dependent on outside events than it is inside state (no pun intended), it shows the inherent negative effect on that state that Keynesian economics and expansive government will always have. Without changing the political discourse and size, scope and priorities of government, and therefore what it leaves its own citizens to do to fill the gap, we will always be pottering around the edges of real and democratic change, and unfortunately, regionalization is compounding this problem rather than addressing it.

THE BRUGES GROUP

The Bruges Group is an independent all-party think tank. Set up in February 1989, its aim was to promote the idea of a less centralised European structure than that emerging in Brussels. Its inspiration was Margaret Thatcher's Bruges speech in September 1988, in which she remarked that "We have not successfully rolled back the frontiers of the state in Britain, only to see them re-imposed at a European level...". The Bruges Group has had a major effect on public opinion and forged links with Members of Parliament as well as with similarly minded groups in other countries. The Bruges Group spearheads the intellectual battle against the notion of "ever-closer Union" in Europe. Through its ground-breaking publications and wide-ranging discussions it will continue its fight against further integration and, above all, against British involvement in a single European state.

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