

The danger of devolution: a fragmented kingdom

By [Jack Harvey](#)

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Image: Andy Hay

If an independence plebiscite were held in Scotland today, it is expected that the United Kingdom would lose one of its members. Scotland would be its own *truly* independent country; the Parliament at Westminster would become a place for Scottish democrats and emissaries to visit rather than for Scottish MPs to attend.

After the end of the British Empire, the government's solution to calls for devolution has historically been to give powers to those who have fervently asked for them. Scotland has a parliament in Edinburgh; Wales and Northern Ireland have national assemblies. After the recent Scottish referendum, further powers have been granted to Scotland with regards to taxation and healthcare.

There is a strong reason for wanting more power: how can everyone in London know what's going on hundreds of miles away? As much as I like to defend ideology, theory and policy, they never fully reflect the reality of things. Countless people have complained that politicians are never in touch with the real world – sometimes a policy fits things like a glove and other times it has no effect (or even a detrimental effect) on a community. So, when the problem is on a national level, it's no surprise that some people would think, "Wouldn't it be better if we decided our own finances, our own policies, our own future? Rather than leave it in the hands of those other people abroad?"

The problem of devolution is that both a collective and its leadership will crumble when power is handed out. The king wouldn't feel so special if every lord and baron got to wear a crown – and there would be no point in having a kingdom if all the peasants got identical crowns too.

Handing so much power to Scotland begs the question, "If they have so much power over their own affairs now, would their independence make any difference?" It baffles me that the government worked so hard to defend the union and all its achievements, but continues to negotiate further devolution with the Scottish.

Responding to the problem of Scottish MPs voting on English matters without the English being allowed to do the same for the Scots, UKIP's Deputy Leader Paul Nuttall MEP suggested having an English Parliament

that worked for the English, a Scottish Parliament that worked for the Scottish and so on. Ironically it seems to me that for a politician keen to promote British culture and keep the union intact, doesn't Mr. Nuttall's suggestion actually fragment the union even more? In a union there has to be unity!

Ideally, legislation should be written and prepared from one place, the capital, and carried out across the whole land. Reflecting the varying demographic, we grant regions particular levels of authority and representation (e.g. you have mayors and councillors) who can implement policies locally, preventing 'blanket policies'. But giving regions their own parliaments and control of more or less everything there is to the administration and government of the area is counterintuitive if you want to unite many peoples under one banner. You are essentially creating countries within countries and giving them enough power and inspiration to ask why it they are not legally and officially their own sovereign nation.

Let me make myself clear: I am not suggesting that we should rid Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland of their parliaments; these seem to me to be irreversible actions equivalent to the creation of the National Health Service. What has to be emphasised is that these parliaments represent the individual peoples who are part of this great collective. It is either the case that all MPs, whether English, Scottish or even Cornish, work for the benefit of Great Britain and the British, or they work for their individual peoples without a union. Personally I prefer the former!



One comment

Connor

26 Feb '15 at 2:15 pm

I think that if Scotland can enjoy devolution of power whilst maintaining the security of being within the United Kingdom - this is a good thing. However, where I agree with you is that we need to ask the question where does this stop. We need to ensure that there is a balance between further devolving powers closer to the communities in which they are enacted whilst ensuring a fully operational and unified UK Parliament. I would support the devolution of powers of the NHS budget and some controls over education, transport etc. But I disagree with the devolution of income tax.

Importantly, I think we need to have the debate whether we should make symmetrical the devolved powers that Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales have. I think if we offer a comprehensive plan to get back some control over certain areas and devolve other important areas - ensuring that each devolved power has symmetrical powers - this too will help create a sense of fairness. Too many English, Northern Irish and Welsh citizens feel that the Barnett Formula is unfair and that if we (the UK) are not careful, Wales and Northern Ireland will be demanding further devolution to mirror that of Scotland.

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