

Lost Souls in the Lobbies?
Backbenchers from Scotland and Wales in
Post-Devolution Westminster

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Long before devolution, students of territorial politics were familiar with the notion that the UK should be considered a ‘union’ rather than a ‘unitary’ state.² This reflected the fact that ‘the nation-building process in the UK was not a simple story of centrally-imposed homogeneity’ but rather that each part was integrated into the UK state in a different and asymmetrical way.³ In institutional terms the essence of a union state is the absence of administrative standardisation across the entire territory of the nation, and the ‘survival in some areas of variations based upon pre-union rights and infrastructures’.⁴ This includes, in the UK case, the separate legal systems for Scotland and Northern Ireland and the existence of the three territorial offices of state in Whitehall.

At Westminster, the asymmetrical union state was embodied in a raft of specialised structures and procedures established to fulfil the representative, legislative and scrutiny functions of Parliament along territorial lines. All three ‘Celtic’ territories had separate grand committees, select committees and question times, enabling members of the different territories to scrutinise legislation and executive activity applying to their part of the UK. In addition, two Scottish Standing Committees undertook the committee stage of many bills emanating from the Scottish Office and the Scottish backbenches.

From the perspective of MPs from constituencies in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland, one could speak of two separate ‘levels’ or ‘spheres’ of politics within which to operate.⁵ One is of matters relating solely to their

¹ I would like to thank Robert Hazell and Alan Trench for their comments and suggestions, and René Holbach and Maria Stemmler for research assistance.

² See S. Rokkan and D.W. Urwin, *Economy, Territory, Identity: Politics of West European peripheries* (London: Sage, 1983); and J. Mitchell, ‘Scotland in the Union, 1945–95: The Changing Nature of the Union State’, in T.M. Devine and R.J. Finlay (eds.), *Scotland in the Twentieth Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996).

³ M. Laffin and A. Thomas, ‘The United Kingdom: Federalism in Denial?’, *Publius: The Journal of Federalism*, 29 (3) (1999): 89–107, p. 91.

⁴ Rokkan and Urwin 1983, p. 181.

⁵ In the main, this chapter does not consider the roles or behaviour of MPs from Northern Ireland. The specific political circumstances (including the long suspension of devolution between 2002 and

own territory, and the other is that covering UK-wide policy domains, which could have a more or less direct impact on the separate territorial spheres.⁶ Scots in particular were sometimes said to inhabit a ‘parliament within a parliament’, with the Grand Committee described, and sometimes even addressed, as ‘Scotland’s Parliament’.⁷ The significance of the Scottish committees as a parallel sphere of legislative activity is underlined by the high proportion of bills that followed the territorial path through the House of Commons.⁸

Pre-devolution analyses confirmed that the behaviour of Scots in the House of Commons was different in significant ways from that of their colleagues from elsewhere in the UK:

Scottish MPs are a distinct group in the House of Commons. They have their own Bills to discuss; their own committees to sit on; and their own ministers to question. These activities set them apart from other members, who do not share their duties and interests.⁹

Scottish members typically focussed more on domestic and local issues, and less on international affairs or macroeconomic policy than their English counterparts. The majority of Scottish members were described as operating principally at the Scottish level where they ‘concentrate on securing benefits for Scotland and are not fully integrated into the UK political system’.¹⁰ An analysis of Scottish members’ participation in question time similarly concluded that ‘Scottish MPs devote the overwhelming proportion of their activity to Questions specifically concerned with Scotland.’¹¹

There is also evidence that Welsh MPs could be considered a distinct group, though this is less well documented. As early as 1978 it was noted that the demands of committee work forced most Welsh MPs ‘either to specialise in...Welsh Affairs or to increase their work-rate in order to participate in other areas of government activity’.¹² However, the smaller sphere of responsibility of the Welsh Office compared with its Scottish sister, coupled

2007) and the separate party system of Northern Ireland raise an entirely different set of issues which are beyond the scope of this chapter.

⁶ M.J. Keating, ‘Parliamentary Behaviour as a Test of Scottish Integration into the United Kingdom’, *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 3 (3) (1978): 409–30 at p. 409.

⁷ G.E. Edwards, ‘The Scottish Grand Committee, 1958 to 1970’, *Parliamentary Affairs*, 25 (4) (1971): 303–25, p. 322.

⁸ One study found that of 23 bills certified by the Speaker as relating exclusively to Scotland in the 1966–67 and 1967–68 sessions, 12 received their second reading in the Scottish Grand Committee and 17 were considered in Scottish Standing Committee at the committee stage. See J.G. Kellas, *The Scottish Political System* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 88–9.

⁹ Kellas 1984, p. 81.

¹⁰ Keating 1978, p. 409.

¹¹ D. Judge and D.A. Finlayson, ‘Scottish Members of Parliament: Problems of Devolution’, *Parliamentary Affairs*, 28 (1) (1975): 278–92 at p. 283.

¹² W. Mishler and A. Mughan, ‘Representing the Celtic Fringe: Devolution and Legislative Behaviour in Scotland and Wales’, *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, (3) 3, (1978): 377–408 at p. 380.

with the greater scepticism among Labour MPs about specific Welsh solutions, meant that Welsh members were more integrated into the UK mainstream. The Welsh Grand Committee provided less focus for Welsh politics than that of Scotland due to the absence of Wales-only bills. Consequently, it was not widely considered an important institution either in its first incarnation in the 1960s and 1970s or as part of John Major's anti-devolutionist 'Grand Committee strategy' in the 1990s.¹³ The Committee on Welsh Affairs established in 1979 had a greater impact, although accounts of its early years reveal an ambivalence among members about its *raison d'être*.¹⁴ It was also criticised as 'largely ineffective' at holding accountable the institutions of Welsh government.¹⁵ At the same time, the ongoing process of 'administrative devolution' saw those institutions — the Welsh Office and its associated 'quangocracy' — steadily growing in importance, thereby creating the space for a more extensive Welsh sphere of political action at Westminster.¹⁶ In addition, the new, if fragile, ascendancy of Labour's pro-devolutionist wing, combined with the decline of the Conservatives in the principality, supports the idea of a growing focus on Welsh issues among Welsh members over the twenty years preceding devolution (albeit it that this was insufficient to keep pace with the widening 'democratic deficit').

However we understand the pre-devolution Scottish and Welsh political spheres at Westminster, what is clear is that with devolution, many of the key policy areas where MPs from Scotland or Wales might have different interests and preferences from England have been transferred to Holyrood and Cardiff Bay. This could have been expected to herald the demise of the separate territorial political spheres at Westminster. However, as discussed in previous volumes in the *State of the Nations* series, the institutional architecture of territorial representation at Westminster has remained largely untouched, with standing orders still providing for separate territorial committees, legislative procedures and question times.¹⁷ This may reflect the 'counterintuitive and messy' nature of British institutional reform, and the survival of the territorial offices of state in Whitehall, whose contours are reflected in the committee system.¹⁸ Alternatively, it may indicate that the

¹³ J.B. Jones and R.A. Wilford, *Parliament and Territoriality: The Committee on Welsh Affairs, 1979–1983*. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1986), p. 9; J.B. Jones, 'Changes to the Government of Wales' in J.B. Jones and D. Balsom (eds.), *The Road to National Assembly for Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), p. 24.

¹⁴ Jones and Wilford 1986, p. 17.

¹⁵ R. Rawlings, *Delineating Wales: Constitutional, legal and administrative aspects of national devolution* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), p. 30.

¹⁶ See K. Morgan and K. Mungham, *Redesigning Democracy: The making of the Welsh Assembly* (Bridgend: Seren, 2000), p. 45.

¹⁷ G. Lodge, M. Russell and O. Gay, 'The Impact of Devolution on Westminster' in A. Trench, (ed.) *Has Devolution Made a Difference? The State of the Nations 2004* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2004), p. 194.

¹⁸ Lodge, Russell and Gay 2004, pp. 212–3.

territorial structures and processes of the House of Commons have adapted to the new circumstances in which they find themselves.

This chapter seeks to shed further light on this issue. But rather than posing the question of what functions are played by the territorial machinery at Westminster, it focuses instead on the *behaviour* of MPs from different parts of the UK. As noted, pre-devolution research found that representatives from Scotland and Wales acted differently from the English in significant ways. Following in the footsteps of these studies, it addresses three questions:

1. whether there are significant quantitative differences in the workload of the three national groups of MPs;
2. whether the three national groups differ in terms of the activities and policy areas on which they focus;
3. after examining empirical evidence about the current situation, which factors are likely to have an impact on Scottish and Welsh members' behaviour in future.

One possible finding would be that Scottish, Welsh and English MPs now behave in an indistinguishable manner from one another. Given the extensive evidence that this was not the case prior to devolution, this would imply that since the establishment of the devolved bodies, there has been an *integration* of the previously differentiated activities of the various groups of MPs. Arguably, this might represent a 'reintegration' process, with territory and nationality resuming its former status as 'embellishment and detail', marginal to the principal cleavages within the British political system.¹⁹

However, it is in fact highly unlikely that we would uncover integration in the pure sense of essentially identical behaviour by MPs from across the country. At the least, we would expect to find variation in the workload of Scottish, Welsh and English MPs. In particular, this is likely to be reflected in terms of constituency casework and legislative scrutiny given that much of this relates to matters that are now devolved in Scotland or Wales. These categories of work are largely reactive tasks from an MP's perspective, and for Scots at least, both are likely to have fallen as a result of the transfer of major policy areas to the new devolved bodies. What we might call the *underemployment* hypothesis was posited prior to the failed 1970s devolution project, when it was predicted that devolution might lead to a 'Scottish [and Welsh] group of 'lost souls' at Westminster'.²⁰ Evidence that Scottish and Welsh members have less work to do would support this prediction. Arguably, it would also represent a reversal of the pre-devolution situation

¹⁹ Pulzer cited in W. Mishler, 'Scotching Nationalism in the British Parliament: Crosscutting Cleavages among MPs', *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 9 (1) (1983): 5–28, p. 5.

²⁰ Judge and Finlayson 1975, p. 292.

when non-English members were said to suffer from ‘relative overwork’, at least if they wanted to play any role in UK-wide matters as well as meeting the demands of territorial scrutiny.²¹

A more positive interpretation of the likely effects of devolution was made by the Kilbrandon Commission on the Constitution in 1973. It suggested that Scottish and Welsh members would ‘be freed of a great deal of constituency business’, and would therefore ‘have more time to devote to the reserved matters like constitutional and external affairs, defence, finance and trade and industry, and to European Affairs’.²² The idea that devolution would create a new cohort of ‘national [UK] Members of Parliament’ was deemed naïve by some, given the pre-devolution focus on constituency and domestic policy matters among many MPs.²³ Evidence of a disproportionate emphasis on UK matters among Scottish and Welsh members, however, could support this thesis. It is worth noting that the 1990s blueprints for devolution — the report of the Scottish Constitutional Convention and the White Paper on *Scotland’s Parliament* — did not address this issue.²⁴

Alternatively, it may be that Scottish and Welsh MPs have diverted their efforts to UK (or England-Wales) policy issues but with a view to advancing the interests of their territory rather than as members of a UK-wide polity. This would suggest the emergence of ‘territorial advocates’ rather than UK-focussed ‘national MPs’. This was in fact, one of the roles that pre-devolution Scottish members often played. Keating found that although Scottish MPs in the 1970s acted predominantly at the ‘Scottish level’, when they did participate in UK-wide policy and legislative debates, it was usually in policy areas ‘in which there was scope for promoting Scottish material interests’ such as agriculture and industrial policy.²⁵

A final possibility is that MPs have responded to devolution by seeking out new roles in keeping with the ‘multi-level’ character of contemporary Scottish and Welsh governance. Specifically, MPs may play a role in facilitating *linkage* between the central and peripheral tiers of governance. This might entail developing relations with members of the Scottish Parliament or National Assembly, scrutinising the intergovernmental aspects of post-devolution governance, or engaging in policy debates that are no longer the responsibility of Westminster. This last option is the most difficult to find

²¹ Mishler and Mughan 1978, pp. 379–80. Mishler and Mughan also point out that the greater per capita representation of Scotland and Wales did not compensate for this as ‘Notwithstanding their substantial overrepresentation...the absolute number of Scottish and Welsh MPs is quite small’...

²² Royal Commission on the Constitution [The Kilbrandon Commission] *Report on the Constitution* Cmnd 5460 (London: The Stationery Office, 1973), p. 246.

²³ Judge and Finlayson 1975, p. 292.

²⁴ Scottish Constitutional Convention, *Scotland’s Parliament, Scotland’s Right* (Edinburgh: Scottish Constitutional Convention, 1995); Scottish Office, *Scotland’s Parliament* Cm 3658 (London: The Stationery Office, 1997).

²⁵ Keating 1978, p. 419.

evidence for, as this chapter is concerned with observable behaviour and many 'linkage' type activities would be likely to take place behind the scenes, for instance through intra-party channels. Nonetheless this possibility needs to be kept in mind and we will return to it in the final section of the chapter.

Prior to that, the chapter discusses three types of empirical evidence. First, it examines data about the quantity of work that MPs from the different nations undertake. This is relevant not only as a test of the 'underemployment' and 'integration' hypotheses, but also for placing in context discussion about the search for new post-devolution roles. Secondly, it explores the territorial elements of the House of Commons' legislative process; in this area, as with constituency relations, devolution was expected to strip Scottish and (to a lesser extent) Welsh MPs of much of their workload. However, it is also possible that devolution has thrown up new legislative scrutiny tasks for MPs. The third section looks at the use of parliamentary questions for insight into the policy and executive scrutiny activities of MPs. Here we discuss whether a new-found UK focus is apparent among Scots and Welsh members and whether this points toward the emergence of either 'national (UK) members' or 'territorial advocates'.

Three caveats should be made at this point. First, the various scenarios mapped above are not mutually exclusive; rather, elements of each are likely to be discernible. Secondly, although short-hand descriptions used may sometimes lump Scotland and Wales together, it is likely that the behaviour of Scottish and Welsh MPs differs in significant respects, as indeed it did prior to devolution. Thirdly, given the wide range of activities undertaken by MPs that are beyond the scope of this discussion, much of the texture and detail of parliamentary life's rich tapestry is omitted. For instance, there is no consideration in any detail of the role of select committees as our interest lies in the behaviour of MPs as individuals. Nonetheless it is possible to reach some preliminary conclusions about behavioural differences between the various national groups in the Commons. This in turn will enable us to sketch the contours of the Scottish and Welsh political spheres as they operate at Westminster today.

THE WORKLOAD OF MPS: TESTING THE UNDEREMPLOYMENT HYPOTHESIS

Measuring the overall amount of work done by MPs is a difficult task. However, two different sources of data are available to give us some indication of whether there is variation in the average workload of English, Scottish and Welsh members.

First, an objective record of certain aspects of MPs' work comes from the publication (by the House of Commons) of expenses claimed by MPs. Of the different categories of expenses listed, the one that might be considered the

most useful proxy for MPs' workloads is the postage expenses claimed. Here the data clearly show that English MPs claim significantly more than either the Scots or Welsh. This difference is even more striking when a straight comparison is made between Labour backbenchers from the three countries, which corrects for any bias that might result from behavioural differences between MPs of different parties or between ministers and backbench MPs (as both are to be found on Labour, but not opposition, benches). The most likely explanation for this is that the volume of constituency casework has fallen as a result of devolution, with much of this workload now being handled by members of the devolved legislatures.

The second source of relevant data is from surveys of MPs conducted by Russell and Bradbury.²⁶ According to these figures (which are self-reported and partial), Scottish MPs do work fewer hours than their English counterparts. Breaking these data into different categories of activity reveals that the discrepancy is predominantly located in the field of work related to the constituency. As for Welsh members, although they claim to work more than their English counterparts overall, they too spend significantly less time on constituency business.

Comparing survey data from before and after devolution, Russell and Bradbury suggest that there is a significant, and probably widening, disparity between English and Scottish/Welsh MPs in the time devoted to casework though 'the gap is not as large as might have been expected if casework were distributed between the [devolved and UK] institutions on the basis of policy relevance alone.' They conclude that 'MPs in Scotland and Wales are reluctant to give up their constituency activities' and may undertake proactive measures to boost their constituency profile in the face of competition from MSPs and AMs, or may simply spend longer on the cases they receive.²⁷ And indeed, the final row in Figure 8.1 shows that Scottish and Welsh members claim to hold constituency surgeries more frequently than the English, which could be interpreted as part of an attempt to generate additional constituency work. Alternatively, it could reflect a differential propensity to focus on constituency work either between the different national groups of MPs or between the political parties (with Labour over-represented in Wales and Scotland).²⁸

²⁶ M. Russell and J. Bradbury, 'Devolution, Elected Representatives and Constituency Representation in Scotland and Wales, 2000–2005', database SN 5443 at Economic and Social Data Service, (2006).

²⁷ M. Russell and J. Bradbury, 'The Constituency Work of Scottish and Welsh MPs: Adjusting to devolution', *Regional and Federal Studies*, 17 (1) (2007): 97–116., pp. 104–5.

²⁸ This would tally with pre-devolution findings that Scottish MPs — and those from the Labour Party in particular — concentrated on local and constituency matters more than other members (Kellas 1984, p.84; Judge and Finlayson 1975, pp. 282–3).

Table 8.1: MPs Workload by Nation²⁹

		England	Scotland	Wales
	Postage Expenses claimed (all MPs) (2005–6)	£3,633.47	£2,885.41	£2,554.90
	Postage Expenses claimed (Labour backbenchers only) (2005–6)	£4,137.26	£2,866.48	£2,773.57
S u r v e y D a t a 2 0 0 4	Hours Spent on Different Activities (weekly)			
	Constituency casework	15.3	11.8	12.2
	Other local constituency work	16.5	12.6	15.4
	Total local/constituency workload	31.8	24.4	27.6
	Parliamentary workload	25.4	26.2	28.3
	Dealing with UK wide organisations	3.8	3.6	5.8
	Dealing with regional/Scottish/Welsh organisations	1.4	2.1	3.8
	Total hours worked*	68.2	61.1	71.3
	Communications received	216.1	94.6	115.3
	Number of constituency surgeries per month	3.8	5.1	4.3
	For survey data, N =	103–49	22–28	12–16
* Total hours worked does not equate to a sum of the previous categories of activity because respondents were asked separately how many hours they worked overall as well as how many they spent on specific activities.				

More striking is the difference in the average number of communications received per MP: English MPs receive more than double the number reported by Scottish MPs and nearly 90 per cent more than members from Wales. One minor caveat to be added is that in 2004 Scottish and Welsh constituencies were on average around 20 per cent smaller in per capita terms than those in England so a lower volume of constituency work is to be expected (redistribution means this is no longer the case in Scotland, but it is

²⁹ Source: House of Commons 2006, *Members' Allowance Expenditure April 2005 – March 2006*, column 7a 'Stationery: Associated Postage Costs', at: www.parliament.uk/documents/upload/HoCallowances0506current.pdf; Russell and Bradbury, 2006.

still the case in Wales).³⁰ The discrepancy in constituency casework is far wider than the different sizes of electoral quota however, which strongly suggests that the existence of the devolved legislatures has reduced the volume of work in this area for Scottish and Welsh members.

Of course, dealing with constituents' casework is not in itself a 'political' activity and, as such, tells us little about the existence or absence of separate territorial political spheres at Westminster. What it does provide however, is suggestive evidence that in the post-devolution environment, Scottish and Welsh MPs must look elsewhere for functions to fulfil if they are to escape the fate of post-devolution 'underemployment'.

W(H)ITHER THE TERRITORIAL LEGISLATIVE SPHERES AT WESTMINSTER?

As noted above, a major responsibility of Scottish MPs prior to devolution was scrutinising legislation relating to Scotland, whether exclusively or not and whether or not that legislation passed through the special Scottish legislative machinery. In the decade before devolution, an average of over five Scottish bills was passed in each session. Since 1999 there have been only two in total. To put this in context: the UK Parliament passed an average of over 50 Acts per year in the decade prior to devolution and approximately 40 per year since devolution.³¹

With virtually no primary legislation to consider, the Scottish committee system — which lay at the heart of 'the Scottish political system in its parliamentary aspect' — has largely fallen into abeyance.³² (The exception is the Scottish Affairs Committee which plays no role in the legislative process.) Neither of the two Scottish Acts passed since 1999 — the Sunday Working (Scotland) Act 2003 and Scottish Parliamentary Constituencies Act 2004 — were referred to the Scottish Grand Committee for second reading stage or to a Scottish Standing Committee for committee stage proceedings.

As shown in Table 8.2, in the aftermath of devolution the Scottish Grand Committee did continue to meet for debates on non-legislative matters, although less frequently than before devolution. Since 13 November 2003, however, there has been not a single meeting of this body. To a limited extent — and as anticipated by the Commons Procedure Committee — the parallel parliamentary chamber in Westminster Hall has provided an alternative outlet for specific Scottish and other sub-national debates, such as the debate on the Arbuthnott Report on electoral systems and boundaries in Scotland

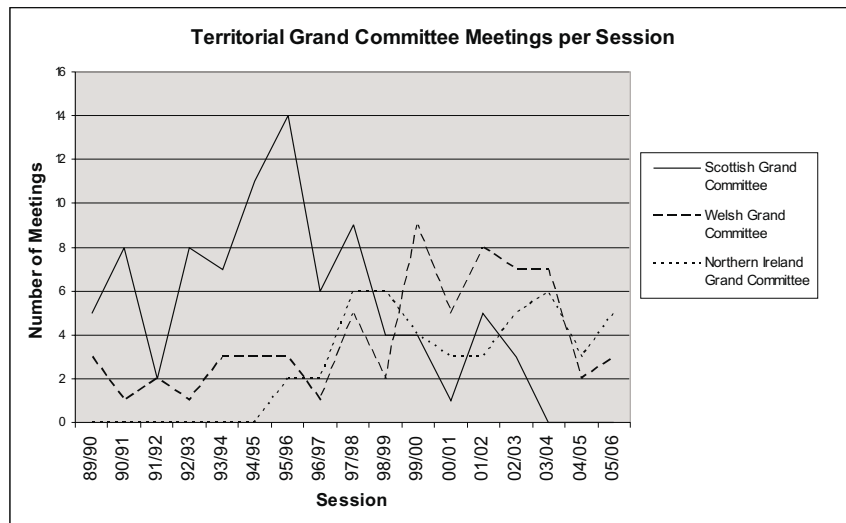
³⁰ National Statistics, *Parliamentary electors on the 2000 and 2001 electoral registers — Revised Figures*, at: www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/xsdataset.asp?More=Y&vlnk=3258&All=Y&B2.x=61&B2.y=11

³¹ Data from Office of Public Sector Information at: www.opsi.gov.uk/acts.htm.

³² Kellas 1984, p. 85.

held on 20 July 2006.³³ Westminster Hall, however, is not generally seen as a high-profile arena, hence occasional calls for such debates to be referred to the Scottish Grand Committee instead.³⁴

Table 8.2: Territorial Grand Committee Meetings per Session



The situation faced by Welsh MPs is somewhat different in that Wales-only Acts at Westminster were a rarity before devolution — with just 10 such pieces of legislation passed between 1988 and 1998. Since 1999 a further seven Wales bills have been enacted meaning that devolution has not had a significant effect on the legislative scrutiny workload of Welsh MPs. No provision has ever been made for second reading debates on Wales bills to be taken in Grand Committee but non-Welsh members will generally leave the floor to Welsh members during Commons debates on such legislation, even on the constitutionally-significant Government of Wales Act 2006.³⁵ Likewise, specific Welsh standing committees have never been constituted but Welsh members can expect to comprise a large proportion of the membership of standing committees on Wales-only bills. In the 2005 Parliament, for instance, two Wales bills have been sent to a standing

³³ House of Commons Procedure Committee, *The Procedural Consequences of Devolution* (Session 1998–9, 4th Report, HC 185) (London: The Stationery Office, 1999), para. 17.

³⁴ House of Commons Scottish Affairs Committee, *Putting Citizens First: The Report from the Commission on Boundary Differences and Voting Systems* (Session 2005–6, 3rd Report, HC 924) (London: The Stationery Office, 2006), para. 13.

³⁵ 41 speakers in all participated in the Commons second reading debate on this bill, of which 28 (68 per cent) represented Welsh constituencies.

committee: the Transport (Wales) Bill and the Commissioner for Older People (Wales) Bill, with Welsh MPs making up 87.5 per cent and 58.82 per cent of the respective committees.³⁶ Welsh members represent just 6 per cent of the House as a whole. In addition to standing committee scrutiny, Wales bills are sometimes scrutinised (for instance in draft form) by the Welsh Affairs Select Committee which provides an additional element of an active, if limited, Welsh legislative sphere at Westminster. The Welsh Grand Committee has also continued to meet quite frequently, often to discuss broad issues such as the implications for Wales of the Budget or the UK Government's legislative programme rather than to consider specific legislative measures. Like its Scottish counterpart it has seen the frequency of meetings decline since the first term of devolution. During the long suspension of devolution up till 2007, the Northern Ireland Grand Committee became, for the first time, the most active of the three territorial Grand Committees.

By another measure, however, the amount of Welsh legislation has fallen significantly: with the National Assembly for Wales able to enact delegated legislation, the number of Statutory Instruments passed at Westminster that 'apply exclusively or primarily to Wales' has fallen from over 150 in two years before devolution to just 22 in the two years up to May 2007.³⁷ Even more dramatically, the number of statutory instruments (SIs) applying to Scotland has fallen from over 400 in two years before devolution to just 27 between 2005 and 2007. The total number of SIs passed annually at Westminster is over 3000, meaning that Scottish and Welsh SIs collectively represent under 1 per cent of the total. Thus secondary legislation offers very limited sustenance for separate Scottish and Welsh political spheres at Westminster, although when instruments applying solely to a single territory are committed to delegated legislation committees, it is the norm for there to be greater than proportional representation of that territory on the committee.³⁸

Although exclusively Scottish legislation has become very rare and exclusively Welsh legislation has remained so, there are also various categories of legislation that apply to Scotland and/or Wales in specific ways as well as to other parts of the UK. Scrutiny of such legislation could potentially provide scope for political activity within discrete territorial spheres at Westminster.

³⁶ The bills for the Government of Wales Act 2006 and the Public Services Ombudsman (Wales) Act 2006 (both introduced in 2005) had their committee stages in Committee of the Whole House.

³⁷ Data from Office of Public Sector Information at: www.opsi.gov.uk/stat.htm.

³⁸ For instance, in the first six months of the 2006–7 session three committees were appointed to consider Wales-only SIs with an average of 47 per cent Welsh membership (compared with 6 per cent of the House as a whole). The level of Scottish representation on committees considering Scottish SIs varies quite widely, but orders modifying the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament appear to have a particularly high percentage of Scots among their members: orders amending the list of non-devolved matters in 2005 and 2006 comprised respectively 55 per cent and 44 per cent Scottish members, compared with 9 per cent in the House as a whole.

For instance, from the 2005 UK general election till the end of the 2006–7 session (May 2005 to November 2007) a total of 16 bills passed at Westminster came under the ambit of the legislative consent (or ‘Sewel’) convention, meaning that they legislated for Scotland in devolved areas or amended the powers of the devolved institutions.³⁹ Many predominantly English bills also have provisions applying to Wales in non-trivial ways. Since the 2005 commitment to drafting legislation ‘permissively’ there have been four Acts of Parliament — in addition to Wales-only Acts — that have contained ‘framework powers’ granting significant policy discretion to the National Assembly.⁴⁰

While Scottish and Welsh members may take an interest in such legislation, potentially acting as territorial advocates, they face a major structural problem in that the ‘Sewel elements’ or ‘framework powers’ in bills such as the Further Education and Training bill introduced in 2006 (which was subject to the Sewel convention as well as containing framework powers for Wales) are of minimal concern to the majority of members of the House. As a result, legislative proceedings are inevitably dominated by English concerns and English voices. In his analysis of parliamentary treatment of Sewel bills, Winetrobe found that they are ‘treated just like any other bill’ with little awareness of the Scottish implications of the legislation and limited Scottish representation on standing committees set up to scrutinise them.⁴¹

Indeed, of 16 standing committees set up to scrutinise bills subject to the legislative consent convention between May 2005 and November 2007, seven had no Scottish representation at all, and most of the others had just one Scot. Overall, Scots made up just 4.5 per cent of these committees — half the level of Scottish representation in the House. Page and Batey argue that ‘the danger must be that against the background of devolution the Scottish element of such legislation will attract even less attention’ than did Scottish elements of pre-devolution UK bills.⁴²

Similar problems apply to scrutiny of the Welsh elements of predominantly English bills. Of the four bills containing ‘framework powers’ in the 2005–6 and 2006–7 sessions, there was, on average, just one Welsh member on each standing committee. In all cases this was a Labour backbencher. Nearly 80 per cent of Scots on Sewel bill committees were also from the

³⁹ Scottish Parliament Information Office, *Sewel Motions / Legislative Consent Motions: Session 2*, Scottish Parliament Fact Sheet, (Edinburgh: Scottish Parliament, April 2007).

⁴⁰ The commitment to permissive drafting was made in: Wales Office, *Better Governance for Wales* Cm 6582 (London: The Stationery Office, 2005). The four Acts in question are: the Education and Inspections Act 2006, the Further Education and Training Act 2007, the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, and the the NHS Redress Act 2006.

⁴¹ B. Winetrobe, ‘A Partnership of the Parliaments? Scottish law making under the Sewel Convention at Westminster and Holyrood’ in R. Hazell and R. Rawlings, (eds.), *Devolution, Law Making and the Constitution* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2005), pp. 55–6.

⁴² A. Page and A. Batey, ‘Scotland’s other parliament: Westminster legislation about devolved matters in Scotland since devolution’, [2002] *Public Law* (autumn): 501–23, at pp. 522–3.

Labour Party, suggesting that there is limited critical scrutiny of UK Government legislation in terms of its implications for the devolved tier of government.

Table 8.3: Overall Voting Records of MPs by Nation

	English MPs	Scottish MPs	Welsh MPs	Northern Irish MPs	Total
Participation in divisions (all MPs) (%)	71.2	68.3	71.4	28.2	69.7
Participation in divisions (Labour backbencher) (%)	76.0	76.9	75.6	n/a	76.0
Rebelliousness (all Labour MPs) (%)	2.5	1.5	1.6	n/a	2.3
Rebelliousness (Labour backbenchers) (%)	3.4	1.8	1.9	n/a	3.1
N (all Labour MPs): England = 284, Scotland = 39, Wales = 29. N (Labour backbenchers): England = 176, Scotland = 24, Wales = 22.					

A final method of assessing whether Scots or Welsh MPs play a distinctive role in the legislative process is by reference to voting records in divisions in the Commons. Table 8.3 shows that MPs from the three part of Great Britain have similar voting records in terms of the proportion of divisions they participate in. This is the case even when we correct for potential party bias by looking only at Labour backbenchers from the three nations. The implication of this is that whether an item of business affects an MP's constituency has little effect on whether the MP turns out to vote on it. An interesting contrast can be found in the third row of the table, which demonstrates that English Labour MPs are much more likely to vote against the leadership line than their comrades from north and west of the border. While this may partly result from genuine differences of opinion, it probably also reflects the fact that many controversial votes have been on essentially English-only matters. On such divisions Scots and Welsh members have limited electoral incentives to cast their votes against their whips on grounds of principle. This is, in fact, further circumstantial evidence of the existence of Scottish and Welsh 'lost souls' on the backbenches of the House of Commons, with limited territorially-specific business on which to focus, restricted opportunities to act as advocates for Scotland and Wales during consideration of bills that apply in part to their territories, and many divisions to vote on that have no relevance to their constituents.

PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS AND MPS' POLICY INTERESTS

Save for the limited opportunities available for Private Member's Bills, backbenchers themselves have little influence over what legislation comes before the House of Commons. Neither do individual MPs have a great deal of say over whether they are placed on committees considering specific pieces of legislation. As such, the amount of territorially-focussed activity for members to engage in during the legislative process is largely determined by factors out of their control. The evidence presented in the preceding session therefore gives a good indication of the differential opportunity structures faced by members from England, Scotland and Wales but says little about their interests or motivations.

The parliamentary question, on the other hand, represents a tool that MPs can wield at will. PQs (in their oral variety) were once described as 'almost the only vestige of the rights backbenchers enjoyed in the nineteenth century'.⁴³ As members of the UK Parliament, Scottish and Welsh members have the right to table questions to any government department, including on policy areas that have been largely or entirely transferred to Edinburgh or Cardiff. There is also no limit to the number of questions that MPs may table so data about written questions can provide direct insight into members' personal political interests and role perceptions, thereby helping us answer the question of what Scottish and Welsh MPs do post-devolution. The pre-devolution finding that Scottish MPs' parliamentary questions were largely focussed on Scottish Affairs is powerful evidence of Scottish members' non-integration into the UK-wide political sphere.⁴⁴ Post-devolution evidence of significant differences between national groups of MPs in terms of PQ usage would undermine the 'integration' hypothesis, that post-devolution Scottish, Welsh and English MPs behave in an indistinguishable manner.

Comparing the raw figures reveals that Scottish and Welsh MPs table significantly fewer written questions than their English counterparts. Restricting the data to Labour backbenchers only reveals that Welsh and especially Scottish members ask fewer questions than their English counterparts.⁴⁵ Specifically, between May 2006 and May 2007 English Labour backbenchers tabled an average of 66 questions, while Welsh members

⁴³ D.N. Chester in *Report of the Select Committee on Parliamentary Questions* (Session 1971–72, HC 393) (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1972), p. 87.

⁴⁴ See Judge and Finlayson 1975, p. 282; and D. Judge, 'Backbench Specialization — A study in parliamentary questions', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 27 (4) (1973): 171–86. As noted earlier, Welsh MPs were less detached from UK politics, though comparable figures on PQ usage are not readily available.

⁴⁵ Restricting the sample to Labour backbenchers discounts any potential party bias, for instance deriving from a greater propensity of Opposition members (disproportionately from England) to table questions. It also reflects the fact that government ministers do not table questions. Data is derived from www.theyworkforyou.com.

tabled 51 and Scots just 22. This corresponds to Russell and Lodge's finding for the 2002–3 parliamentary session that Scottish MPs tabled significantly fewer questions on average than both English and Welsh members.⁴⁶ One interpretation of this discrepancy, and in particular the low usage of parliamentary questions among Scottish members, is that this further supports the 'underemployment' hypothesis. On the other hand, however, parliamentary questions are a rather blunt proxy for members' workload. They take minimal time to write and table and are often seen as a cost-free way for members to demonstrate (for instance to local media) their interest in or commitment to a particular issue. It is possible that Scottish members table fewer questions overall but spend more time on other related parliamentary activities. Indeed the evidence is that MPs from the three territories of Great Britain spent a similar number of hours on 'parliamentary work' (see Table 8.1). They also appear to participate equally frequently in oral question time in the House.⁴⁷

Thus the main value of written parliamentary questions from a research point of view is as an indicator of MPs' priorities and interests. Past studies of the use of parliamentary questions have emphasised this point: Chester and Bowring's classic text pointed out that PQs are 'the most personal of all the activities of the House, reflecting much more closely than any other form of procedure the everyday activities of members, the problems that concern them, their predilections and idiosyncrasies'.⁴⁸

Table 8.4 shows the 'most popular' departments among the current crop of Labour MPs in terms of those to which members addressed the most questions between 2001 and October 2007.⁴⁹ This reveals significant qualitative differences in the scrutiny activities of the different territorial groups of MPs. English members focus to a large extent on 'domestic' policy areas with health, home affairs and education taking the top three spots, and UK-wide policy areas of less interest.

For Scottish Labour MPs, in contrast, major UK-wide departments such as the Treasury, the Foreign Office and the Department of Work and Pensions

⁴⁶ M. Russell and G. Lodge, 'The Government of England by Westminster', in R. Hazell, (ed.), *The English Question* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), pp. 66–9.

⁴⁷ We looked at oral questions on the order paper from January to December 2006 relating to a selection of 13 departments including the three territorial offices. For these departmental question times we found that 83 per cent of questions were tabled by English MPs (representing 82 per cent of the House) 9 per cent by Scots (9 per cent of the House) and 8 per cent by Welsh (6 per cent of the House). Hence English and Scottish MPs participated proportionately to their numbers in the House while the Welsh were overrepresented at the expense of MPs from Northern Ireland. These figures do not take into account differential representation in government.

⁴⁸ D.N. Chester and N. Bowring, *Questions in Parliament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).

⁴⁹ These data come from www.theyworkforyou.com, specifically the 'topics of interest' section on the individual page for each MP which lists the five departments to which the MP in question has asked the most written questions. Figures cited in the text and in table 4 refer to the number of MPs for whom the department in question ranked in the top five. These figures therefore relate to the balance of interests between the different national groups of MPs, rather than to the overall volume of questions received by departments.

score highly, as does the Scotland Office. Also of interest to Scottish members are home affairs, trade and industry, and defence — all areas where there are distinctive Scottish, and in some cases constituency-specific, interests that MPs might seek to promote. Many questions on the (largely Scottish-based) oil and gas industry, for instance, have been addressed to UK-wide departments such as the Department for Trade and Industry (now the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform) and the Treasury by Scottish MPs. Similarly, the Ministry of Defence has had to respond to questions on the status of Scottish regiments in the British army, and the Department of Work and Pensions has been questioned on the effects on benefits entitlement of the introduction of free long term care for the elderly by the Scottish Parliament. On the other hand, many other questions to these same departments from the same members contain no specific Scottish focus. It is also notable that trade and industry and environmental matters seem to be of less interest to Scottish than to English members, despite the fact that these were the areas where pre-devolution studies found strong evidence of Scottish interest.⁵⁰ It is hard to say what the balance is between UK-focussed ‘national members’ in the Kilbrandon sense on the one hand, and advocates for specific territorial interests on the other. Only further detailed research into the content of parliamentary questions could help to resolve this question.

Welsh MPs too appear to focus on reserved policy areas to a greater extent than English members. Interestingly, in the Welsh case there is a greater emphasis on those policy departments where there is greater scope for territorial advocacy. By far the most popular target of Welsh Labour MPs’ questions is the Home Office, which is responsible for policing in Wales and receives a high number of specifically Welsh questions, for instance on its controversial attempt to merge the four Welsh police forces in 2006.⁵¹ Trade and industry — another area where clear opportunities exist to defend particular territorial interests — is also a focus for far more Welsh Labour MPs than either English or Scots. Another interesting figure is the far higher number of Welsh than Scottish members asking questions to predominantly English departments such as those responsible for health and education. This reflects the fact that these policy areas are more extensively devolved in the case of Scotland. For instance the National Institute of Clinical Excellence provides guidance on health technologies and clinical practice for the English and Welsh NHS only. As such these data indicate that Welsh

⁵⁰ Keating 1978, p. 419.

⁵¹ Evidence of the strength of feeling among Welsh members can be found in: Welsh Affairs Select Committee, *Proposed Restructuring of the Police Forces in Wales*, (Session 2005–6, 2nd Report, HC 751) (London: The Stationery Office, 2006); and Welsh Affairs Select Committee, *Current Restructuring of the Police Forces in Wales*, (Session 2005–6, 5th Report, HC 1418) (London: The Stationery Office, 2006).

members remain more closely integrated with English members. However once again, only detailed content analysis could ascertain what proportion of questions on any of these subjects pertain exclusively to Wales, and what level of territorial advocacy can be found among Welsh members.

Table 8.4: Proportion of Labour MPs with Scrutiny Focus on Various Departments (2001–7, as per centage)⁵²

	England	Scotland	Wales	All
Health	76	24	56	69
Home Office	69	39	80	67
Education and Skills	54	6	24	46
Trade and Industry	43	39	72	45
Work and Pensions	37	52	28	38
Communities and Local Government ⁵³	36	9	8	31
HM Treasury	33	58	36	36
Environment, Food & Rural Affairs	32	24	36	31
Foreign and Commonwealth Office	31	58	28	34
Transport	21	21	20	21
Defence	15	36	28	18
Culture, Media and Sport	12	9	4	11
International Development	10	24	20	12
Constitutional Affairs / Justice	7	0	0	6
Other	5	6	0	5
Northern Ireland Office	5	9	0	5
Wales Office	0	0	44	4
Scotland Office	0	48	0	5

⁵² Figures refer to the percentage of members for whom the department in question was one of their top five in terms of the number of written questions posed. Departments are ordered by popularity among English members. Source: www.theyworkforyou.com.

⁵³ Includes previous incarnations of this department such as DETR and ODPM.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

The picture painted so far is a messy one, as is to be expected when presenting averages representing the behaviour of dozens or hundreds of individuals. Nonetheless, a few conclusions can be drawn about the extent to which each possible scenario for Scottish and Welsh MPs' roles in the post-devolution House of Commons is supported. This final section also considers factors that may bear upon the situation in the future.

First, in terms of the 'reactive' workload faced by MPs we found unambiguous evidence that in some senses Scottish and Welsh members suffer from *underemployment*. Constituency casework is lower for Scottish or Welsh members than for English ones, a disparity which may widen, given the probability that further responsibilities will be devolved from Westminster. This latter factor will also impact upon the Welsh legislative sphere, which we found to be livelier than the moribund Scottish equivalent. Particularly if the National Assembly for Wales acquires 'primary legislative powers' by 2011 (as the new Welsh Assembly Government intends) the quantity of Wales-only primary legislation at Westminster is likely to slow to a trickle.⁵⁴ Prior to that point, legislative competence is to be transferred to the National Assembly on a case-by-case basis, which will generate some scrutiny work for Welsh members, but only on the principle of whether the powers in question should be transferred, rather than the use to which they will be put by the Assembly in Cardiff.⁵⁵

The workload faced by each Scottish and Welsh MP depends not only on the overall quantity of territorial tasks but also on the number of MPs from each territory. This is liable to change. Pre-devolution overrepresentation of Scotland was partly justified by reference to the demands of Scottish legislative and committee work. Now that this has all but evaporated, it may even make sense for the Scottish quota to be reduced to less than that of England. In addition, Wales might lose its present overrepresentation (at least on a population basis) at some future date if Cardiff Bay acquires primary legislative powers. Reducing the number of Scottish and Welsh MPs to less than pure proportionality has also been advocated as a plausible *faute de mieux* solution to the West Lothian question.⁵⁶ Should it be implemented, a

⁵⁴ Labour and Plaid Cymru Groups in the National Assembly, *One Wales: A progressive agenda for the government of Wales* (Cardiff, 2007), p. 6.

⁵⁵ As some MPs were reminded to their frustration in the first scrutiny of a draft LCO. House of Commons Welsh Affairs Committee, 'Proposed Legislative Competence Orders in Council: Additional Learning Needs', Uncorrected Transcript of Oral Evidence, 7 November 2007, to be published as HC 44-I.

⁵⁶ I. McLean, 'Barnett and the West Lothian Question: no nearer to solutions than when the Devolution Programme started'. Paper presented at ESRC Devolution and Constitutional Change Programme Conference, London, December 2005, p. 11.

side-effect would be that it would partially compensate for the declining workload of Scots and Welsh MPs.

Another relevant factor, as noted in the introduction, derives from the institutional symmetry of Westminster and Whitehall. Specifically, so long as Whitehall retains a territorial dimension in the shape of the Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland Offices, Westminster will presumably reflect this in its organisation of question time and select committees. However, as differences between the three devolution settlements decline, the government may one day merge the three territorial departments into a single department for devolution, as some commentators have advocated.⁵⁷ Even if separate territorial select committees were to outlive the departments they shadow, they would probably struggle to find a coherent role, as some would say the Scottish Affairs committee already does. Like the Scottish Grand Committee, these bodies may slide gradually into irrelevance.

An alternative path these committees may seek to follow is that of forging closer relations with the respective devolved institutions. For instance, the Scottish Affairs Committee recently suggested the establishment of a “super” Scottish Grand Committee’ involving MPs, MSPs and MEPs, to consider ‘Sewel bills’ and other matters of joint interest.⁵⁸ The Welsh Affairs Committee, for its part, has already experimented with joint meetings with National Assembly committees when scrutinising draft legislation. However for a number of reasons the potential of this *linkage* role for Scottish and Welsh MPs’ seems limited. First, the government is sceptical about formal inter-parliamentary structures like the proposed ‘super Scottish Grand Committee’.⁵⁹ Second, there is some evidence of a lack of enthusiasm among MSPs and AMs themselves about the development of such links.⁶⁰ Third, the need for cooperative action is likely to decrease in future as legislative and policy ‘delineation’ between the two tiers of governance accelerates.

It is possible that despite these hurdles, the territorial committees may develop new and innovative inter-parliamentary modes of working. For instance, there may be scope for joint scrutiny of intergovernmental

⁵⁷ R. Hazell, *Three into One Won't Go: The future of the territorial Secretaries of State* (London: The Constitution Unit, 2001); House of Lords Select Committee on the Constitution, *Devolution: Inter-Institutional Relations in the United Kingdom* (Session 2002–3, 2nd Report, HL 28) (London: The Stationery Office, 2003), para. 68.

⁵⁸ House of Commons Scottish Affairs Committee, *The Sewel Convention: The Westminster Perspective* (Session 2005–6, 4th Report, HC 983) (London: The Stationery Office, 2006) para. 43.

⁵⁹ House of Commons Scottish Affairs Committee, *The Sewel Convention: The Westminster Perspective: Government Response* (Session 2005–6, 2nd Special Report, HC 1634) (London: The Stationery Office, 2006) paras. 10–12.

⁶⁰ In 2005 the Scottish Parliament Conveners’ [committee chairs’] Group turned down an invitation to hold a meeting with the Scottish Affairs Committee, advising the Westminster body instead to arrange separate meetings with Scottish Parliament subject committees as appropriate. See: House of Commons Scottish Affairs Committee, *Work of the Committee in 2005* (Session 2005–6, 1st Report, HC 836) (London: The Stationery Office, 2006), paras. 35–8.

relations, which to date has operated predominantly beneath the radar of parliamentary scrutiny.⁶¹ But these committees comprise only a fraction of the Scottish and Welsh parliamentary groups. What new roles they develop will therefore be of limited import as far as describing the behaviour and roles of Scottish and Welsh backbenchers as a whole is concerned. Of course, in a more informal sense MPs do fulfil the linkage function to some extent as individual members, through intra-party and constituency-level relations with members of the devolved legislatures. But this is unlikely to extend to playing an active role in debates around devolved policy matters, partly because of simple geographical and institutional isolation from those debates, and partly because the Scotland and Wales branches of the Labour and Conservative parties, for instance, may defend their autonomy against serious encroachment by MPs.⁶²

The implication of this is that as political actors Scottish and Welsh MPs will predominantly be confined to the Westminster stage. As territorial legislative and scrutiny tasks decline, is there any possibility that they might be able to (*re*)integrate themselves into the ‘mainstream’ of political activity in the Commons? In one important sense, most Scottish and Welsh MPs do remain integrated by virtue of their membership of UK-wide political parties. It is undoubtedly the case that Scottish and Welsh Labour, Liberal Democrat and Conservative MPs perceive themselves as largely, if not primarily, participants in the partisan conflict that characterises Westminster life. Yet as confirmed by the behavioural analysis above, this does not mean that full integration — in the sense of identical patterns of activity among the different national groups of MPs — is plausible. For instance, the lower levels of rebelliousness found among non-English (and particularly Scottish) Labour MPs implies a semi-detached relationship with many of key political conflicts at Westminster. Analysis of parliamentary questions indicates that some Scots and Welsh members do continue, to a limited extent, to participate in debates in devolved policy areas (note for instance, the 6–24 per cent of Scottish members with an interest in health, education and local government). But although Scottish and Welsh MPs can table PQs in any area they wish, their influence on the ‘English’ policy-making process will be limited. Both select and bill committees on ‘English’ policy areas tend to be English-only zones.⁶³ And the prospects of integration in this sense could be set back further by attempts to tackle the West Lothian question, in

⁶¹ R. Hazell and A. Paun, ‘Parliamentary Scrutiny of Multi-Level Governance’. Paper presented at conference of the International Association of Centers for Federal Studies, University of Tübingen (Germany), 30 June 2006.

⁶² Although it remains a point of debate how extensive autonomy has in fact been gained by the sub-national branches of the main parties (see M. Laffin, E. Shaw and G. Taylor, ‘The Parties and Intergovernmental Relations’, in A. Trench (ed.), *Devolution and Power in the United Kingdom* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

⁶³ Russell and Lodge 2006, Figure 4.3, p. 69.

particular by progress towards the Conservative goal of leaving English matters to English MPs.⁶⁴ Even if 'English votes on English laws' is not implemented, political constraints on the participation of Scots and Welsh members in English policy-making will persist.

This suggests that the most plausible options for Scottish and Welsh MPs may be to play the roles of UK-focussed *national members* or *territorial advocates*. Evidence presented here suggests that both these proclivities are present to some extent, though the balance between them is hard to discern. However, this chapter has focussed principally on Labour MPs, as no other party is represented in significant numbers in all three Great British territories. This may change. For instance, the SNP contingent in the Commons certainly consider themselves to be defenders of the Scottish rather than the UK national interest, so any growth in their number at future elections (likely on current polling evidence) would boost the *territorial advocacy* inclination of Scottish members. The same goes for Plaid Cymru, and perhaps the Scottish and Welsh Liberal Democrats too. But the most significant potential development would be the election of a Tory government, whose majority would almost inevitably rest principally on English seats. The upshot might well be to transform Scottish and Welsh Labour MPs into territorial advocates just as a decade and a half of Thatcherism convinced many of the need for devolution in the first place.

If Labour remains in power and dominant in Scotland and Wales, territorial advocacy is likely to be more muted as party considerations prevail, but some scope for this role will remain. This is particularly likely to be the case on the issue of finance. It is apparent that public spending growth over the coming decade will be lower than in the Blair years, and, partly as a result, pressure on the Treasury to revisit the financial structure of devolution is growing. Should a genuine rethink of the Barnett formula commence, it will be at Westminster where competing territorial interests will make their cases. In such circumstances, even otherwise loyal Labour MPs might find it hard to maintain support for the UK Government if their part of the country looked like losing out, particularly in the face of a strong electoral challenge from nationalists, Lib Dems or (in England) Conservatives.

As for the UK-focussed *national member* role, the pre-devolution prediction was that Scottish and Welsh MPs would find it hard to reinvent themselves en masse into specialists in foreign policy and the economy, and this has no doubt been a genuine difficulty for some members. To some extent, however, it could be a transitional problem, in that aspiring politicians of the post-devolution era might be more likely to come to Westminster if they were interested or had expertise in UK-wide matters,

⁶⁴ Conservative Party, *Are you thinking what we're thinking? It's time for action*. Conservative Election Manifesto 2005 (London: The Conservative Party, 2005), p. 22.

while those with an interest in healthcare in Wales or policing in Scotland would be more likely to head for Edinburgh or Cardiff. Thus the number of ‘national members’ among the non-English contingent at Westminster may increase over time. But such a development would not compensate for the fact that Westminster will remain dominated by English political concerns, and increasingly so, should further powers be transferred to the three devolved capitals. Only a radical shift towards federalism — with either an English parliament or strong regional assemblies dealing with domestic policy matters — could change this, by transforming all MPs into UK specialists. But so long as the UK remains an asymmetrically-devolved union state, Scottish and Welsh MPs will continue to struggle to define their role, and as a result will continue to face calls to reduce both their numbers and their powers.

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