

The Constitution Unit

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON



The State and the Nations

The First Year of Devolution in the United Kingdom

Edited by Robert Hazell



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*Dedicated to the memory of
Donald Dewar*

*First Minister of the Scottish Parliament
Who died on October 11th. 2000*

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The First Year of Devolution in the
United Kingdom

Edited by
Professor Robert Hazell

The **Constitution** Unit

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Robert Hazell is the Director of the Constitution Unit and Professor of Government and the Constitution in the School of Public Policy, University College London (UCL). Originally a barrister, he spent most of his working life at the Home Office. He left Whitehall to become director of the Nuffield Foundation and founded the Constitution Unit in 1995.

Graham Leicester is a political consultant and Director of the Scottish Council Foundation, an independent think tank based in Edinburgh. He heads a team of academics and others in Scotland monitoring the progress of devolution for the Constitution Unit's 'Nations and Regions' programme.

John Osmond is Director of the Institute of Welsh Affairs, a policy think tank based in Cardiff. He is an author, and a former political journalist and television producer. He has written widely on Welsh politics and devolution. His most recent books are *Welsh Europeans* (Seren, 1997) and *The National Assembly Agenda* (Editor, 1998) published by the Institute with contributions from 46 experts on all aspects of the establishment, operation and policies connected with the new Assembly.

Meg Russell is a Senior Research Fellow at the Constitution Unit, University College London (UCL). She is author of *Reforming the House of Lords: Lessons from Overseas* (Oxford University Press, 2000), and various Constitution Unit Briefings and other articles on parliamentary reform. She is leading a project on the Impact of Devolution on Westminster, as part of the Constitution Unit's 'Nations and Regions' Programme.

John Tomaney works in the Centre for Urban and Regional Development Studies at Newcastle University. His research interests include the political economy of regional development and the politics of devolution in England. Among his recent publications is *A Region in Transition: North East England at the Millennium* (Aldershot, Ashgate), edited with Neil Ward.

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Robin Wilson is director of the Belfast-based think tank Democratic Dialogue, which he founded in 1995. He has been intimately involved for many years in the debates around UK devolution, as well as the specific issues attaching to the Northern Ireland conflict, on which he has written numerous journal articles and book chapters. He was formerly editor of the current-affairs magazine *Fortnight*. He is a member of the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council.

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Foreword

Like all the Constitution Unit's work, production of this book has been a team effort. But in this case the team goes much wider than any we have previously put together: and the reach goes further. It covers the whole of the UK and is intended to be the first of a series of annual reviews, bringing together the fruits of a major five-year research programme into devolution, funded by the Leverhulme Trust. The programme comprises 11 research projects, underpinned by a regular series of monitoring reports. The quarterly reports on devolution can be viewed on the Constitution Unit's website (<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/constitution-unit>), on the *Nations and Regions* pages. (They can also be received every quarter by email: if you want to go onto the list of email recipients, please write to us at constitution@ucl.ac.uk.)

The monitoring reports are written by teams of experts in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. From November 2000, there will be a further monitoring team covering the English regions. The leaders of those teams are the authors of the first part of the book. The four chapters on the Nations are written by Graham Leicester and his team in Scotland, John Osmond in Wales, Robin Wilson and Rick Wilford and their team in Northern Ireland, and John Tomaney from Newcastle University. Their chapters are a pleasure to read, offering real insights alongside the hard facts we asked for to make this a volume of record. And as partners they have been a pleasure to work with, delivering their chapters to very tight deadlines, and producing monitoring reports of consistently high quality.

The second part of the book, on the British state, opens with two long chapters on Whitehall and Westminster by members of the Constitution Unit: Meg Russell and myself, with expert assistance from our researcher Roger Masterman. These constitute our first attempt to record and analyse the impact of devolution on the centre. Next year we hope there will be a similar chapter on devolution and the courts. We also plan to include a regular update on devolution and the centre in the quarterly monitoring reports, in order to cover developments in Whitehall, Westminster, the courts, and intergovernmental relations. The closing chapters include an analysis of public attitudes to devolution by John Curtice, and an account of the new arrangements for the government of London by John Tomaney. They have also been wonderful partners to work with and have delivered their chapters to equally tight deadlines.

The whole book has been edited with exemplary calm and efficiency by our Visiting Research Fellow, Elizabeth Haggitt, who returns to Whitehall next month to pursue her career as a barrister. Others in UCL who have helped at crucial steps along the way include our excellent administrators, Rebecca Blackwell and Gareth Lewes, our Devolution Research Fellow,

Dylan Griffiths, Sally Welham in the School of Public Policy, and Tony Fincham and his team in Research Administration. The Leverhulme Trust have supported our work with their usual helpfulness and efficiency: our thanks there go to Barry Supple, Alison Cooper, and Tony Clinch, and to their adviser Lord (Kenneth) Morgan. Thanks are also due to Keith Sutherland at Imprint Academic, for publishing the book in record time.

Lastly, a plea to our readers, to help make this book better and better in the years to come. We are aiming to produce an annual volume of record. What key facts and information about devolution would you like us to capture in subsequent years which we have not managed to include in the first year? If you want additional chapters, or additional coverage of certain topics, or just additional figures and data, write to let us know, and we will do our best to include them.

Robert Hazell
September 2000

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Introduction: The First Year of Devolution

Robert Hazell

1999–2000 was the first year of devolution in the United Kingdom. It was the year in which the first elections were held in Scotland and Wales, powers were then transferred by Westminster, and half way through the year power was also transferred to the new Executive in Northern Ireland. It was the year in which the devolved assemblies and executives gradually found their feet, and the UK Government began to adjust to the realities of devolution.

The United Kingdom entered the year 2000 with four governments instead of one. It had replaced a unitary system of government with a quasi-federal system. This has led to huge changes not just in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, but also at the centre. Intergovernmental relations are an important feature of the new system of government, with the new Joint Ministerial Committee on Devolution meeting five times in the first six months of 2000 to bring together Ministers from the UK Government and the devolved administrations. Westminster has been slower to adjust, but 1999–2000 saw the beginnings of a debate on how it too needs to adapt to become a quasi-federal parliament.

This book is the story of that first year: of the growing pains of the new assemblies, of their early successes and failures, and of the changes made at the centre as Westminster and Whitehall themselves embarked on an equally painful process of adjustment. The story begins in May 1999 with the first elections to the Scottish Parliament and National Assembly for Wales, and finishes at the end of July 2000, with the end of the first legislative sessions of the devolved assemblies. That is the timeframe for the book: it is the story of the first year of devolution in 1999–2000. But we have gone back a bit earlier in a few chapters, in order to explain the beginning of the story: so that in Northern Ireland the story begins in 1998, with the Belfast Agreement in April and the first elections to the new Northern Ireland Assembly in June. In the chapter on regional government in England, we have reached back briefly to 1996, in order to explain the development of Labour's policy before the 1997 election. And in the chapter on the Greater London Authority, we have started by describing the fragmented system of governance in London.

In order to set out the key events during the first year, most of the chapters open with a chronology. This introductory chapter does the same, but the opening chronological table in Figure 1.1 (page 2) starts with the election of

Figure 1.1. Key events during the legislative phase of devolution 1997–1998

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| 2 May 1997 | New Labour government elected with majority of 179. |
| 11 June 1997 | Discussion paper on Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) published by DETR. |
| July 1997 | White Papers published on <i>Scotland's Parliament and A Voice for Wales</i> . |
| July 1997 | Green Paper <i>New Leadership for London</i> . |
| July 1997 | Referendums (Scotland and Wales) Act 1997 receives Royal Assent. |
| September 1997 | Referendums held in Scotland and Wales approve White Paper proposals. |
| October 1997 | Greater London Authority (Referendum) Bill introduced. |
| 26 Nov. 1997 | Government of Wales Bill introduced into Parliament. |
| 17 Dec. 1997 | Scotland Bill introduced into Parliament. |
| December 1997 | White Paper on RDAs <i>Building Partnerships for Prosperity</i> published. |
| March 1998 | Regional Development Agencies Act 1998 receives Royal Assent. |
| March 1998 | White Paper <i>A Mayor and Assembly for London</i> published. |
| 10 April 1998 | Belfast Agreement signed on Good Friday. |
| April 1998 | Launch of North East Constitutional Convention and of Campaign for Yorkshire. |
| 7 May 1998 | Northern Ireland (Elections) Act receives Royal Assent. |
| 7 May 1998 | Referendum in London approves plans for new Greater London Authority with directly elected Mayor. |
| 22 May 1998 | Belfast Agreement endorsed in referendums in Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland. |
| 25 June 1998 | Northern Ireland Assembly elections. |
| 1 July 1998 | David Trimble elected shadow First Minister and Seamus Mallon shadow deputy First Minister in Northern Ireland. |
| 15 July 1998 | Northern Ireland Bill introduced into Parliament. |
| 31 July 1998 | Government of Wales Act 1998 receives Royal Assent. |
| 19 Sept. 1998 | Ron Davies elected to lead Wales Labour Party in Welsh elections. |
| 30 October 1998 | Ron Davies resigns as Secretary of State and Welsh Labour leader. Alun Michael succeeds him as Secretary of State for Wales. |
| 19 Nov. 1998 | Scotland Act 1998 and Northern Ireland Act 1998 receive Royal Assent. |

the new Labour government in May 1997. Setting out the full sequence of events completes the record, and also helps to underline the speed at which the devolution story has unfolded. It is an extraordinary achievement — to transform a highly centralised unitary state into a devolved and quasi-federal system of government in the space of only three years.

The chronological table is divided into two parts. Figure 1.1 covers 1997–1998, the period of the 18-month first legislative session of the new government when all three devolution bills (to Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland) were passed, together with the Act establishing Regional Development Agencies in England. There is then a brief summary of the devolution legislation before Figure 1.2 is presented, covering the implementation phase. Figure 1.2 sets out the key events covered in this book, during the first year of devolution in 1999–2000.

THE DEVOLUTION SETTLEMENT IN SCOTLAND, WALES AND NORTHERN IRELAND

The legislative scheme for devolution is highly asymmetrical. Each of the assemblies has a different size and composition, a different system of government, and a very different set of powers. There follows a very brief and schematic summary of the devolution settlement in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Scotland (population 5.1 million)

- Parliament of 129 members, 73 from single member constituencies and 56 additional members, elected every four years;
- Primary legislative powers and full executive powers, and
- Westminster model of Cabinet government: Parliament nominates First Minister, who appoints Scottish ministers.

Wales (population 2.9 million)

- Assembly of 60 members, 40 from single member constituencies and 20 additional members, elected every four years;
- Secondary legislative powers only (UK Government to consult Assembly on proposed primary legislation immediately after each Queen's Speech);
- All Executive functions of Secretary of State for Wales transferred to Assembly, and
- Legislation allows Assembly to introduce either Cabinet system, with Committees scrutinising Ministerial activities; or Committee-based system, with 'Committee leaders' of subject Committees constituting an Executive Committee. In the event the Cabinet system was chosen: the Assembly First Secretary chairs the Cabinet.

Northern Ireland (population 1.7 million)

- Assembly of 108 elected by Single Transferable Vote, 6 members from each of 18 constituencies;
- Primary legislative powers in two categories ('reserved matters' requiring Secretary of State's consent);
- System of weighted majorities to ensure cross-community consent between unionists and nationalists on all major issues;
- First Minister, deputy First Minister and Executive elected by d'Hondt system to ensure distribution of ministerial portfolios between all major parties. Executive Committee not bound by collective responsibility, and
- Committees and their chairmen appointed in proportion to party strengths, to scrutinise and advise on the work of each Executive Minister.

In terms of executive power, the main functions devolved are as follows:

- **To all three administrations:** health, education and training, local government (including finance), social services, housing, economic development, agriculture, forestry, fisheries, food, transport, tourism, the environment, sport, heritage, and the arts.
- **Scotland only:** the legal system, penal matters and policing (these matters may be transferred to Northern Ireland at a later date if the Secretary of State sees fit).
- **Wales only:** the Welsh language.
- **Northern Ireland only:** social security (but the legislation contains mechanisms to ensure parity of benefit rates), employment, and the civil service.

In Scotland and in Northern Ireland, legislative power is also devolved in the subject areas listed above: a very significant devolution of power (greater, for example, than the legislative power enjoyed by the states in many federations). In Wales, there is no devolution of primary legislative powers. The following functions are reserved to the UK Parliament and Government:

- The constitution;
- Foreign affairs;
- Defence, national security, immigration;
- Macro-economics, fiscal and monetary policy;
- Trade;
- Transport safety and regulation;
- Policing, penal matters, and the legal system (in Wales and Northern Ireland);
- Employment legislation (in Scotland and Wales), and
- The civil service (in Scotland and Wales).

In terms of finance, all three administrations are funded by block grant from Westminster. This is updated annually by the 'Barnett formula', which adjusts their allocations in line with comparable spending adjustments in England. Within the block grant, they have complete spending discretion. In addition, the Scottish Parliament has power to increase or decrease the basic rate of income tax by up to three pence in the pound.

THE ENGLISH REGIONS AND LONDON

Developments in the English regions and London are not comparable with devolution in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. London has seen the restoration of a strategic metropolitan authority to replace the Greater London Council which was abolished in 1986. But it is a slimmed down version (400 staff in place of the GLC's 20,000), with direct responsibility only for transport, the police, the fire service and economic development. It has no direct revenue raising power, and in other spheres (planning, the environment, culture, and health) the new GLA has a purely strategic or promotional role. As chapter 9 shows, it is a 'weak mayor' model, which relies heavily on the political clout and profile of the directly elected Mayor to bring other agencies to the table.

The Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) established in April 1999 in the eight English regions outside London are weaker still. Being appointed by Ministers in London, they have none of the legitimacy that comes from election. They are also slimline bodies with mainly strategic functions, centred around preparing an economic strategy for their region. They are wholly dependent on central government for their modest budgets, and in terms of powers, functions, and political authority, the RDAs are light years behind the elected assemblies which have been established in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

That concludes the brief summary of the devolution settlement. The next part of the chapter sets out the key events during the implementation phase and the first year of devolution in 1999 and 2000: the period which is the main focus in all the chapters of this book.

A SLOW AND SHAKY START

What are some of the main features of the first year of devolution? From a UK perspective, the first year must be judged a success. It has not led to the break-up of Britain, which had been sternly predicted by Conservative (and some Labour) critics. As chapter 6 on Intergovernmental Relations shows, there have been no major rows with the devolved governments: no ministerial walk-outs, no intergovernmental court battles of the kind which can be a

**Figure 1.2. The implementation phase and first year
of devolution 1999–2000**

| | |
|---------------|--|
| 20 Feb. 1999 | Alun Michael narrowly defeats Rhodri Morgan as Welsh Labour leader. |
| 1 April 1999 | Regional Development Agencies established in 8 English regions. |
| 6 May 1999 | First elections to Scottish Parliament and National Assembly for Wales. |
| 12 May 1999 | Alun Michael elected First Secretary in Wales. Appoints minority Labour Executive of seven Assembly Secretaries. |
| 13 May 1999 | Donald Dewar elected First Minister in Scotland. |
| 17 May 1999 | Labour-Liberal Democrat Executive elected in Scotland of 11 ministers. John Reid succeeds Donald Dewar as Secretary of State for Scotland. |
| May-July 1999 | Designation of 8 Regional Chambers in England. Launch of North West Constitutional Convention. |
| 1 July 1999 | Transfer of powers to Scotland and Wales. Scottish Parliament opened by The Queen. National Assembly for Wales opened. |
| 28 July 1999 | Paul Murphy succeeds Alun Michael as Secretary of State for Wales. |
| 11 Oct. 1999 | Peter Mandelson succeeds Mo Mowlam as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. |
| 11 Nov. 1999 | Greater London Authority Act receives Royal Assent. |
| 29 Nov. 1999 | Election by d'Hondt system of 10 Northern Irish ministers to complete Executive of 12 (with First and deputy First Minister). |
| 2 Dec. 1999 | Power transferred to Northern Ireland. Executive holds first meeting. |
| 9 Feb. 2000 | Alun Michael forced to resign as First Secretary in Wales. |
| 11 Feb. 2000 | Peter Mandelson suspends Northern Ireland Executive after 10 weeks of devolution. |
| 15 Feb. 2000 | Rhodri Morgan elected First Secretary in Wales. |
| 20 Feb. 2000 | Frank Dobson narrowly defeats Ken Livingstone for Labour nomination for Mayor of London. |
| 4 May 2000 | Ken Livingstone wins election as London Mayor, standing as Independent. |
| 8 May 2000 | Donald Dewar undergoes heart surgery. Jim Wallace (Lib Dem) deputises as First Minister in Scotland. |
| 30 May 2000 | Devolution restored to Northern Ireland. Ministers take their places again in power-sharing Executive. |

regular feature of federal–state relations. Seen from Whitehall, the mood is one of quiet assurance. The evolutionary, pragmatic approach has paid off; there have been teething troubles, but the UK Government has not been unduly hampered in the conduct of its business; steady as she goes.

But looking at the individual country chapters in this book, a rather different picture emerges. Here, devolution can at best be described as having got off to a slow and rather shaky start. The new Scottish Parliament should be judged a modest success, on the basis of its achievements in its first year in terms of legislation and the work of its committees; but chapter 2 describes how these have been largely ignored by the Scottish press, which, led by the *Daily Record* and *The Scotsman*, has conducted a campaign of extraordinary ferocity against the new parliament. As a result, most Scots have formed a poor opinion of their new parliament, although they would not want to lose it (see chapter 8 on Public Attitudes).

In Wales and Northern Ireland, the picture is much gloomier. The Welsh Assembly can show few tangible achievements for its first year of operation, apart from ditching its Blairite First Secretary, Alun Michael, after its first six months. In part, this is because it enjoys very limited powers: as chapter 3 records, the Presiding Officer has called for a constitutional convention to expand the Assembly's powers, claiming that there is a majority in the Assembly who would like to see it assume full legislative powers much closer to those of the Scottish Parliament.¹ The Labour administration would not agree to such a radical step,² but at the end of the first year, the new Leader, Rhodri Morgan, has commissioned a full review of the Assembly's operation, which will expose the differences. This may lead to calls for changes in the Assembly's statutory framework, and in particular for sharper separation of powers, due to the difficulties caused by the fusion in the Government of Wales Act of the executive within the Assembly in a single body corporate.

In Northern Ireland, the picture is bleaker still. In the Executive and the Assembly, the war of attrition continues between the unionist and nationalist blocs, with far more energy devoted to symbolic issues like flags or the renaming of the Royal Ulster Constabulary than to matters of substance like the programme for government or the budget. Chapter 4 vividly records the roller-coaster negotiations which eventually led to the first formation of the Executive in December 1999, its suspension 10 weeks later in February, and then its second coming in May 2000. The new institutions continue to be extremely fragile. The new Executive is an involuntary coalition boycotted by the two ministers from the Democratic Unionist Party and there are no

¹ Lord Elis-Thomas, *Wales — A New Constitution*, lecture to Welsh Governance Centre, Cardiff University, 2 March 2000.

² The suggestion was advanced again by Plaid Cymru during the negotiations over Labour's new strategy document *A Better Wales*, published in May 2000.

rules of collective responsibility binding ministers. Its support on the unionist benches in the Assembly hangs by a thread, and could vanish if only a few more UUP members decided to join forces with their anti-Agreement colleagues.

David Trimble's worries do not stop there. The year has seen a growing attrition of support for his position within the party membership as a whole. His internal party support has fallen from 72 per cent of the Ulster Unionist Council after the Belfast Agreement in 1998, to 58 per cent at the Council meeting in November 1999, and to an uncomfortable 53 per cent in May 2000. Equally worrying is the growing polarisation reported in chapter 4, with the erosion of support for the moderate unionists and nationalists (broadly speaking, represented by the UUP and the SDLP respectively), and the rise of their more aggressive challengers in the DUP and the other anti-Agreement unionists, and Sinn Féin. Of particular interest in chapter 4 is the explanation of how this hardening of attitudes can be linked to the legitimisation of the (mutually antagonistic) ethnonationalist definitions inscribed in the Belfast Agreement.

The English regions are at a very different stage of development, but here too there is a serious gap between aspiration and performance. The regions have got off to the slowest start of all. They have yet to see the establishment of regional chambers of the kind promised in Labour's manifesto, which would 'co-ordinate transport, planning, economic development, and bids for European funding, and land use planning'; and they have certainly not seen 'legislation to allow the people, region by region, to decide in a referendum whether they want directly elected regional government.' The main achievement so far has been the creation of eight Regional Development Agencies (RDAs), the other strand of regional policy promised in another part of Labour's 1997 manifesto. But, as chapter 5 explains, the RDAs have not been given the full range of functions and power of John Prescott's vision: they have relatively slender budgets, and have been badly over-sold. Denied responsibility for assistance to industry and skills training, they are little more than re-branded urban and rural regeneration agencies. They have devised regional economic strategies, and launched them in glossy brochures, but have few means of delivering them. As for the regional chambers, they have been conjured into being on a voluntary basis, but they have no statutory powers, functions or budgets, and they operate mainly as a sounding board and secondary line of accountability for the RDAs. Although most have called themselves regional assemblies, they are far from being the precursors to directly elected regional assemblies of the kind envisaged by the constitutional conventions now established in the north-east, north-west and the west midlands, or the Campaign for the English Regions, which was launched in 1999 as their umbrella body. They certainly cannot compare in any way with the devolved assemblies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

THE NEW POLITICS

However, the devolution story is not all gloom and doom. It was bound to get off to the slow and uneven start that was implicit in the Government's strategy of an asymmetrical, rolling programme of devolution. It is still early days; and even in the first year, each of the chapters has interesting developments to report. As predicted by its advocates, devolution has brought in its train some innovations in democratic practice in all three devolved assemblies. The most important difference from Westminster is the powerful subject committees in the new assemblies which combine scrutiny and legislative roles: functions which at Westminster are carried out by separate Select and Standing Committees respectively. The new committees have not been an unqualified success, with the Welsh committees in particular struggling to find the right balance between their different roles. Chapter 3 records how they have been marginalised from the legislative process in the first year, have failed to hold the executive to account in a comprehensive way, and have not really engaged in policy making. In Scotland, the committees have been fully engaged in scrutinising legislation, but as a result, some of them have found little or no time for scrutinising the other policies or actions of the executive.

Another innovation has been the committees' involvement in the budget-making process. At Westminster, scrutiny of the Estimates is a charade.³ In Northern Ireland it was no better, with accelerated passage of the first year Appropriation Bill and acceptance of the Estimates announced by the Finance Minister. But in Scotland and Wales, the assembly committees have made a genuine input into the making of the budget. In Wales, 33 budget recommendations came forward from the subject committees, and the Finance Secretary was able to get the draft budget through by responding to 29 of those points and agreeing to the more generous provision of free eye tests. In Scotland one of the first legislative measures was the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act 2000, which provides for a much more open and consultative budget-making process. The real test of effectiveness will be whether the parliament's input results in reallocation of resources: in particular reallocation between departments and not merely within each department's proposed allocation.

The other big difference from Westminster is that — thanks to the proportional voting systems — no single party has a majority. In Wales, Labour has chosen to govern as a minority administration. In practice, this requires reaching an accommodation with Plaid Cymru on key issues like the strategy document *A Better Wales*; or the free eye tests conceded in the budget. In

³ House of Commons Procedure Committee, Sixth Report 1998-99, *Procedure for Debate on the Government's Expenditure Plans*, HC 295, 20 July 1999; and the previous critical reports referred to in the Introduction to HC 295.

Scotland, Labour governs in coalition with the Liberal Democrats, and has had to agree a programme for government with them which has led to a compromise over student tuition fees. In Northern Ireland, there is a power-sharing executive of four parties brought together in involuntary coalition, who in their first six months (even allowing for discontinuous operation), could not agree on a programme for government; although an interim agenda appeared towards the end of the year.

Proportional representation was also meant to deliver the 'new politics' which would be part of devolution: more inclusive, consensual, and less adversarial than Westminster. In the heady days after the 1997 referendums, there was a lot of aspirational talk about the new politics which was going to characterise the devolved assemblies. Part of the subsequent disillusionment with their performance may stem from the fact that these aspirations were grossly over-sold and were never going to survive the realities of party politics. But although prey to the usual party rivalries, the assemblies practise a different kind of politics from the single party domination which characterises Westminster. Some of the differences are captured in the following chapters, but the essential difference is what is missing: precisely because no single party is dominant, there is none of the triumphalism which characterised the Conservative Government under Mrs Thatcher, or the arrogance and swagger of New Labour under Blair. The siren voices of old Labour in Scotland and Wales, who long to re-assert their party dominance, show how different it could have been; as would the Northern Ireland Assembly if it were governed simply by the unionist majority.

IMPACT ON THE CENTRE: WHITEHALL RULES, WHILE WESTMINSTER FUMBLES

Most of the interest in devolution lies where the action is: in studying the development of the new institutions in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Less visible but of equal importance is the impact on the centre, as the UK Government adjusts to the new demands of governing in a quasi-federal system. Two central chapters of the book look at the adjustments made during the first year of devolution by the two main branches of central government: in Whitehall, and at Westminster.

Chapter 6 describes the machinery and procedures put in place by Whitehall to handle intergovernmental relations with the devolved administrations. In the first year, the machinery seemed to work well: the *Memorandum of Understanding* and Concordats negotiated with the devolved governments seem to be accepted as a useful set of ground rules and, even if advance warning and consultation are still sometimes overlooked, the ethos and expectation are there. Smoothly run initial meetings of all the main intergovernmental

bodies were held: the Joint Ministerial Committee (JMC) on Devolution, the British–Irish Intergovernmental Conference, the British–Irish Council and the North–South Ministerial Council. Details of all these meetings are given in chapter 6. So far the UK Government has been the dominant partner, convening the meetings and chairing all meetings of the JMC. In their first year the devolved governments have shown no signs of solidarity with each other, of ganging up together against the UK Government in the way that states do against federal governments.

At Westminster, it is a different story. Despite the efforts of the Scottish Affairs Committee and the Procedure Committee to alert their colleagues in the Commons to some of the consequences of devolution, there was no advance game plan. The underlying difficulty was that the Government did not want to admit to any consequences and, in the absence of any strong lead from the Leader of the House, it was left to the Procedure Committee and individual backbenchers to make the running. Chapter 7 describes the debates during the first year as Westminster grappled with the realities of becoming a quasi-federal parliament. For the time being, going partially against the advice of the Procedure Committee, it has decided to retain all the previous structures which enabled Westminster to operate as a parliament for Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. The separate networks of Scottish, Welsh, and Northern Irish Grand, Select, and Standing Committees are to continue, although their functions are now reduced. What has proved much harder is the question of whether to create equivalent structures for England. The Procedure Committee recommended an English committee for legislation applying only to England, but because this raised the uncomfortable issue of English votes on English laws (the slogan adopted by the Conservatives), the Government preferred to duck the question. Instead, it has persuaded the House to revive the Standing Committee on Regional Affairs, a committee open to English MPs only, which last sat during the 1970s and which provided a forum for debates on regional issues.

The other respect in which Westminster is toying with the idea of becoming a quasi-federal parliament is in the debates about reform of the House of Lords. In recommending a minority of elected members for the new second chamber, the Wakeham Royal Commission proposed that they should be elected to represent the nations and regions of the UK. A House of Lords remodelled on these lines might then fulfil the classic role played by second chambers in federal systems, where the second chamber represents the states or the provinces, while the first chamber represents the people. But the debate on Lords reform has a long way to go before this vision is more widely shared, even at Westminster. And amongst the nations and regions who might be represented in this way in the new second chamber, the debate has barely begun.

PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARDS DEVOLUTION

Finally, what do the public think about devolution? The first year experience has left the Scots and the Welsh unimpressed by the performance of the new institutions, but unshaken in their commitment to devolution. Chapter 8 summarises the main findings from all the public opinion polls during the first year. By the end of the year, in summer 2000, 60 to 70 per cent of the people in Wales said devolution had not yet made any difference; while almost 80 per cent of Scots said the new parliament had not made any difference to their lives. But these lukewarm responses did not seem to undermine support for devolution itself; if anything the reverse. 43 per cent of people in Wales said in July 2000 that the Assembly should be given law making power, while in Scotland in April no less than 62 per cent of Scots wanted their parliament to have more powers.

In Northern Ireland, it was a different story. Support for the Belfast Agreement waned during the year amongst the unionists, as it became clear that decommissioning of terrorist weapons was not going to be delivered in advance, and the uncomfortable realities of power sharing with Sinn Fein sank in. Unionist support for devolution had never been strong; by summer 2000 it was evenly balanced, with 50:50 for and against the unionists re-entering the power-sharing executive. The year also saw falling support for the Union, with just 56 per cent of people in Northern Ireland in 1999 thinking that the best thing for Northern Ireland's long term future was to remain part of the UK.

In Scotland and Wales, devolution delivered a boost to the nationalist parties, who both saw significant increases in their share of the vote in 1999 compared with their support in elections at Westminster. This devolution differential looks likely to continue, with 15 to 20 per cent more support for Plaid Cymru, and 5 to 10 per cent more support for the SNP, at elections to the devolved assemblies compared with elections to Westminster. But support for the nationalist parties does not necessarily mean support for nationalism, in the sense of separatism or independence. In Wales, in early 2000, one in ten said they wanted independence, and in Scotland one in four: figures little different from pre-devolution levels.

What is different is the demand for more devolution, for the new institutions to be equipped with extra powers, to ensure that devolution makes a difference. In February, no less than 68 per cent of Scots and 62 per cent of people in Wales said they thought further change to the devolution settlements would be needed. This demand for more devolution and for extra powers is the greatest shift in the light of the first year's experience of devolution, and the greatest challenge facing the UK government as it enters devolution's second year.