

DEVOLUTIONA Paper by Mr. Teddy Taylor

Arising out of the discussion on 26th October, I would wish to put the following points to colleagues about the proposals advanced by Mr. Pym.

1. Second Reading of Scottish Bill

My inclination is to have only one vote - namely on the second reading - on the basis that one Party split is preferable to two. On the other hand if, as seems likely, the tabling of an amendment would increase the vote on the second reading, I would have no objection to the proposal.

2. Our proposals

I would strongly recommend that the party should not repeat, restate or resurrect our previous commitment to a directly elected assembly.

The reasons are as follows:-

- (a) It would be a sure recipe for constant constitutional clashes to have a directly elected assembly with no real powers apart from the power to mess up bills in the committee stage. After all the problems we have had, I feel that it would be a mistake to propose a scheme which nobody believes would do any good.
- (b) The resurrection of the commitment would be interpreted as a move towards devolution and not a restatement of the previous position. In Scotland and, I believe in Parliament, we are regarded as having dropped the pledge although it has never been said as such. I doubt if any such pledge would carry any conviction - nobody would believe it.
- (c) The restatement of the pledge would infuriate the anti-devolutionists in the Party while, on the other hand, I think that the pro-devolutionists would not be infuriated if we did not restate it. I believe that they regard this battle as lost and simply do not wish us to rub their noses in it.
- (d) Opinion in Scotland is, in my view, not greatly exercised about devolution one way or the other, but there is a small but growing band of opinion which is resolutely opposed to any kind of Assembly and this includes almost the entire business community. The Scotland is British Organisation, for example, has received massive financial support from industry and commerce.

Opinion polls on devolution have shown a sharp fall in support for an Assembly and the latest figures show about 38 per cent for and 34 against with the rest undecided. A poll conducted by the Scottish Young Conservatives of a sample of 1,050 voters (which in

fairness may not be so scientific as the other poll) showed a 48 per cent vote for "No change". Certainly there is room for one political party arguing against the Assembly plans and I feel that industry and commerce will be bitterly disappointed if we do not fulfil this role.

- (e) In any referendum, I believe that there is every likelihood of the Government's plans being rejected on a "No extra politicians, no extra bureaucrats, no more overgovernment and no extra taxes" slogan. It would be almost impossible to conduct such a campaign if we were committed ourselves to a plan to create more politicians and, inevitably, more bureaucrats to service them.
- (f) Politically we have nothing to gain by being the fourth least enthusiastic party on a directly elected Assembly.

3. Alternative Proposal

I do, however, accept all that has been said about the danger of renouncing and rejecting a directly elected Assembly. I therefore propose the following as a possible stance:-

"The Conservative Party has consistently supported the principle of devolution because we accept the need to bring Government closer to the people. Just as important we favour decentralisation and were the first Government to implement a major dispersal of civil service jobs to Scotland.

While saying this it cannot be denied that our stance on devolution has changed on a number of occasions and in the last General Election we put forward plans for an indirectly elected assembly. The reason for our lack of clarity and perhaps consistency has been that as the Unionist Party we have been more anxious than any other to ensure that any plan implemented should not endanger the Union. We also believe that there is an immense danger in promoting plans based more on electoral expediency than on constitutional sense.

It is because of this that we proposed that there should be an all party conference or constitutional conference where the need to devolve and decentralise should be considered not in an atmosphere of party strife but in a sane and responsible manner. We still believe that this is the right course of action.

But what proposals would we ourselves put to such a Conference?

Our aim would be to seek a devolution scheme which would avoid the obvious faults in the Government's scheme.

For a start we would be reluctant to create more politicians, or a further separate tier of government. The creation of a directly European Parliament and of the two-tier structure of local government shows the immense dangers of Scotland becoming the most overgoverned country in the world. Before contemplating any new directly elected body we would wish to probe thoroughly the possibility of eliminating an

existing tier. There are some who speak glibly about the creation of one-tier local government. This is something which, outside the cities, we have never had in Scotland and, bearing in mind the existing functions of local government which include police, fire, water, sewage, roads and education, we just cannot see how one tier local government could be created unless the areas were so large as to make a nonsense of the word "local" or unless there was to be a mass of joint committees and boards of smaller councils which would in effect be a separate tier. The simplification of local government is an issue which should be considered before and not after we might proceed with plans for a directly elected assembly.

We would also be reluctant to propose an additional bureaucracy. The Government's plans inevitably propose the employment of many more civil servants and the numbers would almost certainly grow. We do not believe that this would be in the interests of Scotland or Britain.

We would also wish to avoid increasing the cost of government. Taxes are high enough at present and I doubt if the people of Scotland would thank us for saddling them with extra costs.

We would also wish the demarcation of power between the various Parliaments and Assemblies to be clear and precise. This is far from being an easy matter, and any problems would be far greater if a Westminster Parliament and a Scottish Assembly had different political parties in the administration

We feel that none of these problems have been resolved by the Government's proposals and will oppose them. We must also admit that we have not yet produced a scheme ourselves which resolves them although the majority proposals in the Douglas Home Report were infinitely more acceptable.

In these circumstances we are more than willing to engage in meaningful discussions with a view to seeking solutions. Of course we will be accused of hedging and of lack of clarity. But better this than proceeding with a plan which is a constitutional nonsense and which will threaten the unity of the United Kingdom which we are pledged to maintain."

MRS THATCHER

The attached correspondence from Chris Patten is self-explanatory. Do you have any objection to his circulating Mr Taylor's paper on Devolution and putting it on the Shadow Agenda say, for Wednesday week.

Agreed. I hope he has ~~known~~ ^{known} of Francis.
CS YES.
CJ

28 October

27th October, 1977

Thank you very much indeed for sending me the paper for the Shadow Cabinet on Devolution. I am sorry that I was detained by Mrs. Thatcher last night; I tried to telephone you this morning but I could not get through to you and was told that your secretary had been "deleted"!

I have had your paper typed with an accompanying note which is enclosed. I have asked Mrs. Thatcher's office to confirm that I can circulate your paper and the accompanying note and as soon as we receive such confirmation we will shoot them off. I hope this is satisfactory.

CHRIS PATEN

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LCC

TO: ALL MEMBERS OF THE SHADOW CABINET

I enclose a paper on Devolution by Mr. Taylor which will be discussed at the Shadow Cabinet meeting on Wednesday, 9th November, 1977. A paper by Mr. Pym has already been circulated.

CHRIS PATTEN

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CFP/RME
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