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Chapter 3

Political and Administrative Asymmetries in a Devolving United Kingdom

John Loughlin

Historical Introduction

The 'Union' State

The United Kingdom is neither a unitary state according to the French model of 'unity and indivisibility', nor a federal state like the US or Germany. It is, rather, a 'Union' state (Rokkan and Urwin 1983; Mitchell 1996) since it has been constructed through a series of Acts of Union between England and the other constituent nations: with Wales between 1536 and 1543,¹ with Scotland through the union of the Scottish and English crowns in 1603 and of the parliaments in 1707, and with Ireland in 1801 following the abolition of the Irish Parliament after the failure of the 1798 Rebellion.

Each of these Acts of Union was made in different circumstances and led to different kinds of relationship between the component parts. The Act of Union with Wales meant the complete political and administrative assimilation of Wales into England, although the Welsh retained their distinctive language and culture and their own tradition of Protestantism.² The 1707 Act of Union between Scotland and England meant, in theory, the abolition of both the Scottish and English parliaments and the creation of a new parliament for Great Britain (Ireland still had its own parliament until 1801). Scotland, unlike Wales, had been, for several centuries,

¹ Strictly speaking there is no 'Act of Union' between England and Wales as Wales was not a distinct political entity as was Scotland or Ireland, which had their own parliaments but, rather, a collection of chiefdoms which were assimilated into England during the sixteenth century. It was only later, by analogy with what occurred between England and Scotland, that one began to speak of an 'Act of Union' with Wales.

² Although the Anglican Church of England was the established church in Wales as well as England, most Welsh people adopted other forms of Protestantism, such as Methodism, Baptism and independent evangelicalism which are known as 'Nonconformist'. Nonconformist Christianity was closely associated with the Welsh language and the campaign to disestablish the Church of England in Wales. This began in the nineteenth century and finally succeeded in 1920, and was an important element of a growing Welsh nationalism.

an independent nation and monarchy³ and, after the Act of Union, retained what some scholars have described as some of its 'institutions of civil society' (Paterson 1994): its distinct Established Church (Calvinist rather than Anglican), its system of Roman law rather than English common law, its institutions of education and local government, and its separate financial institutions (Scottish banks have to this day the power to issue Scottish banknotes). After 1801, Ireland resembled much more a colony of England, ruled by the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland (appointed by the English monarch) and the Chief Secretary of Ireland (appointed by the British Prime Minister).

This brief description of the formation of the Union state illustrates the different asymmetries. England has occupied the dominant position *vis-à-vis* the other three nations but each set of relationships is different: Scotland, while subordinate to England, retained the greatest degree of autonomy; Ireland, while effectively colonised from the beginning of the nineteenth century, nevertheless conserved a certain distance and distinctiveness, while Wales, never having possessed its own political or administrative institutions, was in the weakest position through its complete assimilation into England. The United Kingdom, before 1921, was composed of four nations: England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales, each with its own flag and emblems.⁴ But Wales was allowed the least recognition as its symbols were not included in the Union Jack, the flag of the United Kingdom.⁵

The Asymmetry of the Administrative System

The historical development of the UK administration reflects the diversity of the Union system. After the 1707 Act of Union, Scotland was represented in the UK Cabinet by the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Lord Advocate was the chief law officer. In 1746, the post of Secretary of State was abolished and the Lord Advocate assumed responsibility for representing Scotland until the Home Secretary took over this in 1828. Nevertheless, despite this formal responsibility of the Home Secretary, the Lord Advocate continued to represent Scotland in the Cabinet and in Parliament. Two developments during the nineteenth century led to the strengthening of distinctively Scottish institutions both within Scotland and in its representation in the British Cabinet. First, the functions of government expanded in areas such as local government, public health, poor law

³ The first unified kingdom of Scotland dates from about the tenth century AD. The Scottish monarchy was often in conflict with England and allied with the latter's enemies, especially France.

⁴ The rose for England, the thistle for Scotland, the shamrock for Ireland and the daffodil for Wales.

⁵ The 'Union Jack', or 'Union Flag', has since 1801 consisted of the combination of three crosses of the patron saints of England, Ireland and Scotland: the cross of St George representing England; of St Patrick representing Ireland; of St Andrew representing Scotland. There is a Welsh flag carrying the cross of St David but the most common symbol for Wales is the red dragon!

relief, roads and water supplies. Administrative agencies were set up in Scotland itself to manage these activities. Secondly, Ireland throughout the century was in continual turmoil from increasingly violent nationalist agitation for Home Rule (autonomy). Similar demands for Scottish Home Rule began to be heard. As the Scottish agencies were often incompetent and corrupt, Scottish MPs asked in the 1860s for the establishment of the post of Secretary for Scotland. This did not occur until 1885 and was partially to stave off demands for Scottish Home Rule and even independence. A new department, the Scottish Office, was created under the control of the Secretary for Scotland. Nevertheless, the Scottish Office remained in London and went to Edinburgh only in 1926 when the Secretary for Scotland was renamed Secretary of State for Scotland. As the demands of government increased throughout the twentieth century, the functions of the Secretary of State and the Scottish Office became more complex. This led to the appointment of junior ministers to assist the Secretary of State. Between 1974 and 1979, there were two Ministers of State and three Parliamentary Under-Secretaries. In 1979, when Mrs Thatcher became Prime Minister, this was reduced to one Minister of State.

Wales was never an independent nation like Scotland, but was politically and administratively assimilated into England. From the sixteenth century Acts of Union until the end of the nineteenth century, parliamentary Acts for England automatically included Wales. Wales was simply part of the English public administration and government departments straddled both countries. The first distinctively Welsh administrative bodies were in the field of education: the Central Welsh Board created in 1896 and the Welsh Department of the Board of Education in 1907. Over the next 50 years, other all-Wales bodies were created: the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales and Monmouthshire in 1908, the Welsh National Health Insurance Commission in 1911, the Welsh Department of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries in 1922, the Conference of Heads of Government Offices in Wales in 1946, and so on. But it was only in 1955 that Wales was recognised as separate from England in the nomenclature of the political system. In that year, this changed to England *and* Wales, and Cardiff became its capital. In 1964, Harold Wilson's Labour Government created the post of Secretary of State for Wales who took over responsibility for running the Welsh Office which was created a year later. The Welsh Office, based in Cardiff, took over the responsibilities of some of the Whitehall⁶ departments operating in Wales. It can be seen that, compared with Scotland, the history of Welsh administration started from a very different base and was cobbled together in a piecemeal way until the creation of the Welsh Office. But the Welsh Office, much younger than the Scottish Office, also only slowly developed a sense of autonomy and, compared to the latter, was much more subservient to Whitehall and much less able to play an autonomous policy-making role (Loughlin and Sykes 2004).

⁶ The term 'Whitehall' is a short-hand way of referring the UK central departments of the civil service which are mostly located in that part of London.

Ireland's historical trajectory and its relations with England were quite different from those of Scotland and Wales. Until 1921, the whole island was part of the United Kingdom and had its own Irish Civil Service, based in Dublin, separate from the Home (or Imperial) Civil Service which operated in Great Britain. The Irish Civil Service was organised along the same lines as the Home Civil Service and operated according to the same principles. Nevertheless, there was little direct connection between the two civil services and civil servants did not transfer from one to the other. Nationalist agitation, both violent and 'constitutional' (that is, using parliamentary methods) racked Ireland throughout the nineteenth century and was opposed by equally vociferous and at times violent unionism. Nationalism and unionism also had a religious dimension, with most nationalists (though not all) being Catholic and most unionists (though not all) being Protestant. Although the Protestant minority in Ireland were found across the whole island, their heartland was in the northern province of Ulster.⁷ The failure of the British to grant Home Rule to Ireland at the beginning of the twentieth century led to the explosion of violent political struggle which began with the Dublin Rising in 1916 and continued with the Irish War of Independence (1918–21) fought by the Irish Republican Army (IRA). During the War of Independence, Sinn Féin, the majority nationalist party set up a (or an illegal) parallel parliament – Dáil Eireann – and government, as well as separate police and courts, thus effectively undermining British government in Ireland.

The outcome was that the island was partitioned and two separate parliaments established: Dáil Eireann in the 26 counties of southern Ireland in what was then called the Irish Free State (which became the Republic of Ireland in 1949) and the Northern Ireland Parliament (with a House of Commons and a Senate modelled on Westminster) at Stormont near Belfast. The old Irish Civil Service also divided into one in the southern state, and the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS). But the result of partition was to create an artificial state in the North in which half a million Catholics were left at the mercy of a million Protestants who dominated the Northern Ireland Parliament and government. There was widespread discrimination against Catholics in employment and in the distribution of public services such as housing. Between 1922 and the 1960s, there was a 'convention' in the Westminster Parliament not to discuss Northern Ireland and the British government in practice ignored the problem. The IRA never completely disappeared and launched a number of violent but unsuccessful campaigns throughout the existence of the Northern state. At the same time, the

7 The historic province of Ulster comprised nine counties but when Ireland was partitioned only six counties were included in the new state of Northern Ireland, which is sometimes mistakenly referred to as 'Ulster'. The reason for this was that the Protestant/Unionist majority in a nine-county Ulster was very slim while in the six counties of Northern Ireland it was a comfortable two-thirds. In other words, the very design of the state of Northern Ireland was a massive gerrymander designed to ensure a permanent Protestant majority despite the fact that Protestants were a minority on the whole island.

police were almost totally identified with the Protestant population; there also existed Loyalist (extreme Unionist/Protestant) paramilitary groups such as the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF). The situation boiled over in the mid-1960s when Catholics, assisted by some liberal Protestants, launched the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Movement with the simple demand that Catholics in Northern Ireland should enjoy the same rights as other UK citizens. The traditional nationalist demands of British withdrawal and the unification of Ireland were (temporarily) shelved. This led to a cycle of repression by the Stormont government, the radicalisation of the demands of the Catholic minority, the revival of the IRA, the entry of the British Army as a protagonist and the long period of the 'Troubles', which saw thousands of deaths and the widespread destruction of property.⁸

It can be seen that Northern Ireland is profoundly different from the rest of the United Kingdom in its history, and in its political and social cleavages. There is not sufficient space to recount the entire history of the Troubles and their resolution in the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 (see below). Suffice to say at this point that, in 1972, the Northern Ireland Parliament at Stormont was first suspended (and later abolished), after which Northern Ireland was directly governed by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. Nevertheless, the NICS continued in existence and, in effect, became the real governors of Northern Ireland.

Causes of the Legal and Constitutional Asymmetries and Principal Cleavages

Constitutional Cleavages

One underlying cause of the asymmetry between London and the three territories administered from Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast is the doctrine of parliamentary sovereignty that is at the heart of the British Constitution.⁹ This doctrine asserts the absolute sovereignty of the Westminster Parliament over all issues affecting the realm. In theory, and sometimes in practice, Parliament can do anything it likes with regard to the UK's territorial governance system. It could, for example, effectively abolish the Northern Ireland Stormont Parliament in 1972, the Greater London Council in 1986, or radically reform local government as it has done on several occasions. This means a high level of *political* asymmetry in the relations between London and the three territories. However, the level of asymmetry is different in each case because of the distinctive historical trajectories outlined above. There is

8 There is a vast literature on the 'Troubles'. The reader may consult the excellent website at the University of Ulster: CAIN Web Service (Conflict Archive on the Internet) <<http://cain.ulst.ac.uk>>.

9 It is sometimes said the UK has an unwritten Constitution. It is more accurate to describe it as an uncodified Constitution which is both written (in the form of legislation and judicial case-law) and unwritten (in the form of 'conventions' which regulate political and administrative relationships and behaviour).

also a difference between the situation in Great Britain (relations between London and Edinburgh and between London and Cardiff) on the one hand, and that in Northern Ireland (relations between London and Belfast). Northern Ireland has a constitutionally recognised *conditional* relationship with the United Kingdom in the sense that it has a right to secede to join the Republic of Ireland if a majority of its population wishes this¹⁰ (Connolly and Loughlin 1990). This is not the case, at least in constitutional terms, with Scotland and Wales, although this would be tested if there were a referendum on independence in Scotland as the Scottish Nationalist Party, now leading the Scottish government, have promised.

But, even within Great Britain, we can see that, although they had similar institutions, the Scottish and Welsh Offices related to London quite differently in practice.¹¹ When policy directives came from Whitehall to the Scottish Office, Scottish civil servants asked the question: how can we *adapt* this policy to give it a 'Scottish' shape?¹² When the same directives arrived at the Welsh Office, Welsh civil servants asked the question: how can we *adopt* this in the way the people in Whitehall wish? In other words, Scotland displayed a *de facto* higher level of policy autonomy than was the case in Wales. There were a number of reasons for this: the Scottish Office was much older than the Welsh; it was bigger; its civil servants were of a higher calibre and had a longer tradition of policy making than those in Wales.

National Cleavages

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is best described not as a classical unitary or federal state, but as a *multi-national 'Union' state* (Rose 1970; Rokkan and Urwin 1983). Before 1921, the British constitution recognised the existence of four nations: England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. Each nation had its own symbols such as a flag, a national anthem and each had its own sporting teams which are recognised as distinct in international sporting tournaments (in contrast, say, to Catalonia, the Basque Country, Corsica and Brittany). Scotland and Ireland also possessed their own central banks and, still today, can issue their own bank notes (in Northern Ireland, of course, these are sterling pound notes). The partition of Ireland in 1921 complicated this picture since the Irish nation was

10 This was based on two Acts of the Westminster Parliament. The Government of Ireland Act 1920 which established the state of Northern Ireland stipulated that a majority of the Northern Ireland *Parliament* was necessary for secession. Since there was a permanent in-built Unionist majority, this was unlikely to happen. The Northern Ireland Constitution Act 1973 changed this to a majority of the people of Northern Ireland. Since Catholics had a higher birth-rate than Protestants, a majority in favour of secession became more likely.

11 Interviews with Scottish and Welsh civil servants carried out in 2003.

12 It should be kept in mind that Scottish and Welsh civil servants are part of the unified civil service of Great Britain, unlike Northern Irish civil servants who are part of the separate NICS.

divided, leaving Northern Ireland within the UK. Although Northern Ireland has some of the trappings of nationhood, such as a flag and some sports teams,¹³ its 'national' status is not recognised by the majority of people there: most Northern Irish Catholics/Nationalists consider themselves as part of the nation of (all-) Ireland; the majority of Protestants/Unionists consider themselves as part of a 'British' nation, that is, covering the whole of the UK.

This last comment points to one of several ambiguities in relation to the 'national' question in the United Kingdom: is there an overarching 'British' nation (as Northern Irish Unionists believe) or are there simply three-and-a-bit nations? Putting to one side for the moment the Northern Irish case, we can see that, in Great Britain, this is related to the question of national identity: how British, Scottish, Welsh, and so on, do the inhabitants feel? The answer to this, explored by the famous Moreno question,¹⁴ is that the majority have a dual identity: British *and* their own national identity (English, Scottish and Welsh), but that the intensity of identification varies across the three nations of Great Britain. A majority of Scots feel themselves to be more Scottish than British, while a smaller majority of Welsh feel themselves to be more Welsh than British. But almost all still identify themselves as British. Interestingly, when the same question is asked in England, the majority of English people feel themselves to be more British than English. In other words, Scots and Welsh are more conscious of their national identities but this is situated within an overarching Britishness, while most English tend to identify Englishness with being British. These questions of national identity reveal a basic asymmetry in terms of national consciousness: England occupies the dominant position and tends to confuse 'England' with 'Britain', while Scotland and Wales are highly conscious of their national identities.

Linguistic Cleavages

English is the common language of the entire British Isles, including the Republic of Ireland, but there also exist other 'native' languages. The most widely spoken of these minority languages is Welsh with about 20 per cent of the Welsh population of about two and a half million claiming some knowledge of it. This 'knowledge', however, varies from complete fluency and use as first language to knowledge of a few phrases. Nevertheless, Welsh is used as a first language in wide (if sparsely populated) areas of the country as well as in urbanised areas such as Cardiff.

13 Some sports teams such as rugby and cycling were founded before partition and are still on an all-Ireland basis, while there are two soccer teams, one for the Republic and one for Northern Ireland.

14 The 'Moreno question', developed by the Spanish political scientist Luis Moreno, inspired by Juan Linz's study of the Basque Country and Catalonia, attempted to gauge the degree of 'Scottishness' or 'Welshness' compared to the degree of 'Britishness' of those living in Scotland and Wales. See Moreno (2006), for the author's reflections 20 years after the original research. The basic approach has since been used in several social science surveys, particularly after devolution in 1998.

In contrast to, say, Brittany, there is also a Welsh-speaking middle-class elite with a strong presence in the media, in education and in public administration. The position of the language was strengthened from the 1970s with a series of parliamentary Acts which provided a Welsh-language media including television, compulsory Welsh language training in all public schools, use in the courts and, finally, the setting-up of the Welsh National Assembly as a bilingual institution (Williams 2000). Gaelic speakers in Scotland are mostly confined to the Highlands and Islands of the north-west of the country and seem to have been a minority since the early middle Ages, as Gaelic was displaced by an Anglo language known as Scots (or Lallans).¹⁵ Nevertheless, there are today bilingual councils on the Scottish islands, a Gaelic media, and the Scottish Parliament has made some token gestures towards the language. In Northern Ireland, the Irish language (in a dialect close to Scots Gaelic) was spoken mainly in the Nationalist community as a badge of national identity. There are small Irish-speaking communities in Belfast and a flourishing Irish-language primary and secondary school sector but the language is not widely spoken. Nevertheless, after years of hostility towards the language by the British and Northern Irish governments, the Good Friday Agreement has given the language official recognition (and funding). At the same time, in the interests of 'balance', the Agreement also recognised a language called 'Ullans' (analogous to the Scots Lallans) allegedly spoken by the Unionist community (and therefore entitling them too to funding!).¹⁶ Finally, in England one may note the existence of Cornish (close to Welsh and Breton) revived and spoken by a few Cornish enthusiasts as well as various English dialects such as those found in Yorkshire, Northumbria and Lancashire.

There is a high level of asymmetry between the dominant language of standard English and the various languages and dialects of the rest of the United Kingdom. Even Welsh, the strongest of these, has difficulty in maintaining its hold in the face of the strength of English. What remains of the various dialects in the rest of the country is little more than distinct accents or ways of pronouncing standard English. The main instruments of this standardisation are the media and the educational system despite some attempts at using 'regional' accents on television programmes.

Social, Cultural and Geographical Cleavages

The United Kingdom is divided between a prosperous South, on the one hand, and, in particular, the South-East of England and the greater London region and, on the other hand, the North of England, West of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern

¹⁵ This name derives from the fact that Scots was the language of the Lowlands of Scotland.

¹⁶ Although some linguists seriously claim that 'Ullans' is a distinct language on a par with Irish, this claim should be taken with a pinch of salt and 'Ullans' seen simply as a dialect of English.

Ireland. On a wide range of indicators the latter areas are poorer with higher levels of deprivation than the South-East. The majority of the UK population lives in the South-East and it is there that are concentrated the centres of political, economic, social and cultural power. But within each of the English regions and in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, there are similar social and economic divisions. In Scotland, the 'Central Belt' between Glasgow and Edinburgh, in Wales, the area around Cardiff, in Northern Ireland, the greater Belfast region are more developed than the rest of these countries.

The social and geographical cleavages also translate into cleavages of political culture, with the South-East of England being much more favourable to neo-liberalism while the rest of the country leans much more towards traditional social democracy. This is understandable given the high levels of economic and social deprivation in these areas. But it is also a reflection of different conceptions of nationhood and citizenship. While the South-East of England largely accepted the Thatcherite idea of the citizen as a consumer in a market-place, the rest of the country had a more corporatist understanding of citizenship and a more positive view of the state. In Northern Ireland, the Nationalist community tended to support social democracy while traditional Unionists shared many of the ideological positions of the UK Conservative Party (of which it was once a part). Today, the lines are somewhat more blurred. The Nationalists, whether they support Sinn Féin or the Social Democratic and Labour Party, support social democracy. The Unionists, split between the Democratic Unionist Party and the Ulster Unionist Party, also accept the necessity of state intervention, but the DUP is more populist and closer to the Nationalists in this regard than the Ulster Unionists, who are probably closer ideologically to the British Conservatives.

Main Institutions, Actors and Factors that Influence the Political Dynamics of the Territorial Debate

*The Traditional Positions of the Main Institutions and Actors*¹⁷

The main institutions that influence the territorial debate are the political and administrative institutions and the civil service which have been described above as well as civil institutions such as the employers' organisation, the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), and the trades unions, represented collectively by the Trades Union Congress (TUC). The main public actors are the political parties and, behind the scenes, the upper ranks of the civil service. Other important actors are the media and think tanks on both the right and left of the political spectrum: for example, the Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR) which is close to the Labour Party and DEMOS also on the left and, on the right, the Institute for

¹⁷ Tables 3.1 and 3.2 at the end of this chapter summarise the position of the actors in favour or opposed to devolution as well as to symmetry or asymmetry.

Economic Affairs. On the wider scene, the European Union was an important influence on thinking on territorial governance, particularly within the Labour Party during the 1990s.¹⁸

The circumstances in Great Britain and in Northern Ireland are, once again, quite different and need to be analysed separately. In Great Britain, the main political parties and the civil service were, in the past, firmly unionist and tended to oppose any attempts to devolve power to the English regions, or to Scotland and Wales. The Conservative Party was traditionally unionist and, since Disraeli, promoted the notion of 'One [British] Nation'. The Labour Party was overall also unionist with regard to Scotland and Wales (although it supported Irish nationalism), but for different reasons. Like other European socialist parties, it adopted a centralist Jacobin-like approach on the grounds that this made it easier to redistribute wealth from the richer regions to the poorer. Wales and Scotland had their own branches of the Labour Party and throughout most of the twentieth century, both were strongly unionist as their support bases were the working classes of both countries, whose well-being was tied to the link with London and, after the Second World War, to the Welfare State. Scottish and Welsh Labour supporters feared that nationalism in both countries would endanger this link. The old nineteenth century Liberal Party supported Home Rule for Ireland and was sympathetic to devolution, although it also had a unionist wing. It represented the interests of the growing British working classes during the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century. It was gradually replaced by the Labour Party as the second party of the United Kingdom and by the 1950s had been reduced to the position of the third party, perpetually condemned to being in opposition thanks to the 'first-past-the-post' electoral system.¹⁹ This position of permanent exclusion from the necessity to make political decisions allowed the party to become a kind of catch-all libertarian party which espoused ideas such as decentralisation and even federalism. In the 1980s, they joined with some members of the right wing of the Labour Party who had formed a new party called the Liberal Democrats. The final group of important political party actors in Scotland and Wales are the two nationalist parties – the Scottish National Party (SNP) in Scotland and Plaid Cymru/the Party of Wales).²⁰ The ideological orientation of these two nationalist parties has changed over

18 When the Labour Party was in opposition it conducted a far-reaching review of its policies in order to become once again electable. Bruce Millan, who had been the European Commissioner for DG XVI (Regional Policy), led a working party on regional governance. This was a key element in New Labour's 'conversion' from its traditional centralism to regionalism.

19 The British electoral system is the so-called 'plurality' or 'first-past-the-post' system which means that the candidate in a constituency which receives the most votes, not necessarily a majority of those cast, takes the seat. There is no element of proportional representation. This has favoured the two largest parties, the Conservatives and Labour, and penalised smaller parties such as the Liberals (later the Liberal Democrats).

20 Plaid Cymru translated literally is 'The Party of Wales'. In the 1990s, the party added the English version to the name in order to attract non-Welsh speakers.

the years. In the 1960s, when they first began to make a serious political impact by winning some seats in Westminster, they sought independence for their two countries and both tended to oppose European integration on the grounds that it was harmful to nation-state nationalism. By the 1990s, this position had changed and they now advocated 'Independence within Europe', that is, as members of the European Union. They were also sympathetic to the notion of a 'Europe of the Regions', not because they regard themselves as 'regions' (on the contrary, they see themselves as 'nations'), but because it would undermine the position of the big nation-states such as the United Kingdom.²¹ But the two parties also differed among themselves, with the SNP continuing to advocate independence for Scotland while Plaid Cymru adopted a more nuanced position with regard to Wales. However, Plaid Cymru was internally divided over whether they should follow the SNP's example or the more cautious 'moderate' position of accepting devolution.

Northern Ireland is, once again, different from Great Britain.²² The party system there is based on the cleavage over whether Northern Ireland should remain part of the United Kingdom – the unionist position – or whether it should become unified with the Republic of Ireland. We have seen that the latter is a constitutional possibility. The political parties of Great Britain usually did not organise or contest elections in Northern Ireland.²³ Without recounting the full history of Northern Irish politics, we can say that by the 1970s, four main political parties dominated the scene, two on either side of the political divide. On the unionist side, the more moderate Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) contested leadership of the Protestant community with the more radical Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), founded and led by the Reverend Ian Paisley. On the nationalist side, the two protagonists were the moderate Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) and Sinn Féin, the political wing of the Irish Republican Army (IRA). Each of these parties had a different position with regard to devolution/independence. The UUP and the DUP both rejected completely any unification with the Republic of Ireland. The UUP for a time favoured the complete integration of Northern Ireland into the United Kingdom, that is, there would be no devolved institutions. The DUP, on the other hand, sought a return of the old Stormont Parliament, that is, devolution with majority rule and without power-sharing with the nationalist minority. Both the SDLP and Sinn Féin favoured Irish unification but differed in their methods of

21 One can note similar shifts among other European minority nationalist parties such as in Corsica, Brittany, Catalonia and the Basque Country.

22 See Table 3.3 at the end of this chapter for the attitudes of the political parties in Northern Ireland to devolution before the Good Friday Agreement.

23 The Labour Party did not do so because it supported Irish nationalism and, later, the Northern Irish Labour Party was founded. The Unionists were originally associated with the Conservative Party but, in practice, were a separate party. The Conservatives in recent years have allowed some candidates to stand but these received just a handful of votes, illustrating that the cleavages of Northern Irish politics are different from those of Great Britain.

obtaining it. The SDLP rejected violence and was in favour of devolution, but with an assembly where power was shared between the two communities. Sinn Féin at first was simply a support group of the IRA who sought to win independence through the 'armed struggle'. By the 1990s, however, they decided to call a cease-fire and to pursue their aims by political means. As we shall see below, all four parties as well as smaller groups such as the Loyalist paramilitaries were able to overcome their differences to the point that they could accept the Good Friday Agreement signed in 1998.

Among the interest groups, the trades unions were firmly unionist for the same reason as the Labour Party: because it meant easier redistribution of resources. The CBI opposed devolution since they preferred to deal directly with a London government than with devolved governments. Furthermore, since the populations and Labour Parties of Scotland and Wales tended to be more radically left than in the South-East of England, business organisations felt there was a danger that the 'business interest' might be jeopardised. Nevertheless, with the advent of devolution in 1998, these positions began to change and became more nuanced. In both Scotland and Wales, as the locus of decision-making power in those areas that were devolved shifted from London to Edinburgh and Cardiff with the setting-up of the Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales, interest groups began to cluster around the new institutions (Keating and Loughlin 2002). Generally speaking, those groups in Scotland and Wales that were close to Labour – the trades unions, the local government associations and groups from the voluntary sector – were strongly in favour of devolution and began to restructure their own organisations to relate directly to the new institutions (for example, by setting up a 'desk' which dealt directly with the Parliament and assembly). This was also the case with the business associations, although their approach was more cautious since they sometimes felt excluded from the decision-making system (although this was denied by the politicians in power at the regional level). At the same time, business, the trades unions and the voluntary-sector organisations all maintained their links with the UK-wide national organisations which were still present at the London/Whitehall level and lobbied on issues that were not devolved but which still affected the devolved territories (see Tables 3.1 and 3.2).

The Factors that led to the Devolution Programme and the Shift to Political Asymmetry in the 1990s

For most of the post-war period, there was a cross-party consensus on the acceptance of the Welfare State and its ideals of uniformity and symmetry of welfare provision across the entire territory. The Labour Party in Scotland and Wales were strongly in favour of this and, as noted above, many of their members originally opposed devolution on the grounds that it might endanger this consensus and the benefits their societies (the poorest in the United Kingdom apart from Northern Ireland) received from it. In 1979, the then Labour Government, faced with a growing threat from Scottish and Welsh nationalists, held two referendums

on devolution in Scotland and Wales. At the same time, they laid down stringent conditions for a positive outcome to be accepted: 40 per cent of the electorate rather than of voters was necessary for the referendum to pass. In Wales, only 12 per cent of the electorate voted and the measure was defeated by four to one (956,330 NO, 243,048 YES). In Scotland, there was a small majority of voters but these represented only 35 per cent of the electorate (1,230,937 YES, 1,153,502 NO). The plans were shelved until the election of New Labour in 1997.

This consensus around the Welfare State broke down mainly as a result of the Thatcherite reforms of the 1980s, which initiated policies that went against the political value systems and cultures of these two nations. During its long period in the political wilderness (1979–97), the Labour Party had to reinvent itself in order to become re-electable. Without going into all the details of its transmogrification into New Labour under the leadership of Neil Kinnock, John Smith and Tony Blair, we may note two new approaches, closely related to each other, which stand out: a commitment to political devolution and a more positive attitude to European integration, compared to either the Conservatives or to Old Labour. Some within New Labour saw devolution as necessary in the light of the general trend towards decentralisation and regionalism across Europe, which had characterised the late 1980s and early 1990s.²⁴

Factors behind Devolution in Great Britain: Scottish Alienation and European Regionalism

The driving force behind devolution came from Scotland, the area most deeply alienated from London by the policies of Mrs Thatcher. The issue which clinched this alienation was the attempt by Thatcher to introduce what became known as the 'poll tax' in Scotland before introducing it in the rest of the UK. The 'poll tax' was a residential tax which sought to replace the tax on property but which penalised the poorer sections of the population. After vigorous protests by the Scots tax, the proposal was withdrawn. Mrs Thatcher's brand of neo-liberalism, based on market competition and consumerism, also offended the social democratic and egalitarian traditions of Scotland.²⁵ Scottish alienation expressed itself through a vast mobilisation of the *forces vives* of Scottish society: the Labour Party, the Liberal Democrats, the trades unions and voluntary organisations, the Churches (both Catholic and Protestant). At first, the SNP did not participate but later joined

²⁴ One of the architects of New Labour's policy on regions was Mr Bruce Millan, a Scot and former Labour minister, who had been the EU Commissioner for Regional Policy. Millan had been instrumental in ensuring the founding of the Committee of the Regions during the IGC which led to the Treaty on European Union signed at Maastricht.

²⁵ An important turning-point in the Scottish reaction was a speech that Mrs Thatcher gave to the Church of Scotland General Assembly in Edinburgh where she claimed that neo-liberalism was the contemporary expression of the values of the Gospel! This horrified her Scottish audience.

in; obviously, the Scottish Conservatives were not interested. The mobilised forces met in what was known as the 'Scottish Constitutional Convention', chaired by a Protestant pastor of the Church of Scotland. The Convention's primary demand was the 'return' of the Scottish Parliament to Edinburgh and the strong Scottish presence in Tony Blair's New Labour Party ensured that this became a central plank of the party's programme if and when it would be elected to power. The situation in Wales was rather different. There was a movement dedicated to demand the setting-up of a Welsh parliament, led by Plaid Cymru but now involving also some members of the Welsh Labour Party. Nevertheless, the Welsh were still more attached to 'Old Labour' and there was a great deal of resistance to devolution. Still, important figures within the Welsh Labour Party, including the party leader, Ron Davies, were committed to devolution and fought for it to be accepted. There was little interest in regional government in England, although there were some regionalist movements in certain regions particularly in the North of England, which had also suffered from the neo-liberal policies of the Thatcher governments.

The Devolutionary Process

The devolutionary *process* was, to some extent, inspired by the model the Spanish employed to establish their Autonomous Communities, that is, it was based on popular approval through referendums in the nations and regions concerned (although in Spain there were not always referendums). As in Spain, it was also to be incrementalist and 'staggered', with some regions on a 'fast track' and others following behind. Like the Spanish case, the 'fast track' candidates – Catalonia, the Basque Country and Galicia in Spain; Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in the UK – had a 'national' character. The reason behind this was that the demands for devolution differed across the country in their intensity and sometimes did not even exist at all: in Scotland it was strong; in Wales it was weak, and, for most of England, it was non-existent. Northern Ireland, again, was a case apart. The first referendum in the UK was held in Scotland in the hope that this would trigger positive results in Wales and, later, in England. The referendum asked Scottish voters two separate questions: whether they approved setting up a Scottish Parliament (SP) and whether the Parliament should have the power to vary national income tax (by plus or minus 3 per cent), paid by Scottish residents. There was an overwhelming endorsement of the measures with a turnout of 60.4 per cent, of whom 74 per cent approved setting up the Parliament and 63.5 per cent giving it tax-varying powers. The result was narrower in Wales where the referendum asked just one question: whether a Welsh Assembly (the name was later changed to the National Assembly for Wales – NAW) should be established. There was a low turnout of 50.1 per cent, of whom 50.3 per cent voted in favour. Nevertheless, despite the low turnout and narrow result, this was legally sufficient to set up the Assembly. The Scottish result may have had a knock-on effect since the Welsh result represents, in effect, a swing in favour of devolution,

if we compare it with the 1979 Welsh referendum (see above). Would it also happen in England? The government adopted the same incrementalist strategy by planning to hold referendums in the northern regions of England, where they thought that regionalist demands were strongest. The North-East was chosen for the first referendum, since it seemed to have a strong regionalist movement (at least compared to the other English regions). Furthermore, the North-East borders Scotland and its quite vocal regionalists argued that the region was disadvantaged in attracting economic investment compared to its neighbour, which now had a strong parliament to help its lobbying. If the North-East set up its region, so the argument went, then the other English regions²⁶ would follow suit so as not to be left behind, as had happened in Spain. As it turned out, the referendum held in the North-East in November 2004 dramatically failed to attract enough votes (77.93 per cent voted NO with a turnout of 47.8 per cent). Following this overwhelming rejection, the government put the process of regionalisation in England on hold. In practice, it is unlikely that it will be resurrected in the near future, especially as its most ardent advocate, the former Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott, has now left the government (Sandford 2002).

With the exception of the proposed English regions, almost all the remainder of the devolution programme has been implemented. There are now a functioning and well-established Scottish Parliament and Welsh National Assembly. There is also a Greater London Assembly with a directly elected mayor and there have been attempts to strengthen local as well as regional democracy. Other innovations include the creation of a variety of electoral systems, including an element of proportional representation in the devolved assemblies, single transferable vote (STV) in Scottish local elections, and a variety of arrangements (including directly elected mayors) for the organisation of English (as opposed to Scots, Welsh and Northern Irish) local authorities. All of this has led to a high degree of institutional asymmetry across the United Kingdom.

Northern Ireland: Rethinking Sovereignty

As we have already noted at several points above, the relationship between Northern Ireland and Great Britain is quite different from that which exists between Scotland and Wales and England. We have already pointed out the constitutionally *conditional* relationship with the United Kingdom as one of the drivers of the conflict there. But there was a deeper reason for the stalemate of Northern Irish politics: the conflict revolved around two seemingly irreconcilable sovereign claims. The Irish government and northern Nationalists claimed *de jure* sovereignty over the whole island, while the British government and the Unionists claimed *de*

²⁶ There are nine English regions, established originally for planning and statistical purposes: North-East, North-West, Yorkshire and the Humber, West Midlands, East Midlands, East, London, South-East and South-West. None of these regions possessed a strong regional identity and culture with the exception, perhaps, of the North-East.

jure and *de facto* sovereignty over the six counties of the North. In effect, both protagonists based their claims on a traditional, absolutist understanding of national sovereignty and its relationship to territory and borders. What happened to make what had been a non-negotiable conflict into one that was negotiable? A number of factors may be highlighted. First, following the IRA hunger strikes in the early 1980s and the election of Bobby Sands to the Westminster Parliament, there was the discovery by the Republican Movement of the importance of a *political* as well as a *military* approach to their struggle. Secondly, the two sovereign governments, at the time led by Margaret Thatcher and Charles Haughey, began a series of bilateral meetings which produced a degree of common ground on Northern Ireland. The third factor is 'Europe', which played an important role by redefining the nature of the problem. The protagonists were paralysed by irreconcilable ways of defining the problem. 'Europe' helped to unblock this by relativising the absolute claims being made in these different definitions. What had been a conflict over non-negotiable and absolute issues – sovereign claims of the same piece of territory – were now placed in the broader context of a Europe in which national sovereignty was 'pooled' and where territory and borders were seen as bridges rather than barriers. This understanding also facilitated a more creative approach to institution-building allowing an asymmetrical and 'customised' institutional approach to respond to the three dimensions of the conflict (strand (i), between the two communities; strand (ii), between the two parts of Ireland; strand (iii), between Britain and Ireland) to be adopted.

Although devolution in Great Britain and the resolution of the Northern Ireland conflict were separate issues and demanded different institutional and political responses, they became entwined in the overall territorial reforms of the United Kingdom (Meehan 1999). Furthermore, as a result of membership of the European Union, both the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom entered into a new type of relationship after decades of suspicion and tension. All this was possible mainly because of the new European context in which the relationships were being forged.

The chief protagonists of the peace process which led to the Good Friday Agreement were the two governments of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland; the main northern Irish political parties – the UUP and DUP on the one hand and the SDLP and Sinn Féin on the other; and the paramilitary groups – the nationalist IRA and the loyalist UVF and UDA (see Table 3.3). Behind the scenes were the civil servants from the three countries. Tony Blair was a key figure and brought with him a united Labour Party with a large majority in the House of Commons as well as an open mind about the outcome of the process. The main features of the Agreement were the design of a set of institutions that related to the three sets of relationships (called the three 'strands') between the two communities in Northern Ireland and between the two countries. The internal Northern Ireland strand was met by a power-sharing Assembly elected by proportional representation accommodating the two communities; the all-Ireland strand by a North-South Ministerial Council, modelled on the EU's Council of Ministers whereby ministers

from the governments of Northern Ireland and the Republic holding similar portfolios (for example, tourism, economic development, agriculture) would meet regularly to devise common approaches for the whole island. For the Irish-British strand, an Inter-governmental Conference involving British and Irish ministers was set up and, finally, a British-Irish Council composed of representatives from the governments of the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, the United Kingdom, the Channel Islands, and the Isle of Man, to discuss areas of common concern. The new institutions were overwhelmingly accepted in referendums held in Northern Ireland and in the Republic (the first all-Ireland votes since 1918), although there was less acceptance on the Protestant side and the DUP at first opposed them. This reticence on the part of Protestants and the DUP led to several years of difficulty during which the new institutions functioned only sporadically. But, today (2010), they are at last working with the DUP leader Peter Robinson (preceded by the hard-line Ian Paisley) as First Minister and Martin McGuinness of Sinn Féin as Deputy First Minister.

Is There a Process of Resymmetrisation?

Although in strict constitutional terms, the Westminster Parliament is absolutely sovereign and could, theoretically, abolish all of the new institutions established by the devolution process, it is now highly unlikely that this could happen. In other words, devolution has created an *irreversible* process. There are today no important actors in the United Kingdom demanding the reversal of the devolution process. This is especially true as all of the new institutions have been ratified by referendums and, in the cases of Scotland and Northern Ireland, overwhelmingly so. Even in the Welsh case, there is now greater support for the National Assembly than was evident in the initial referendum and the likelihood is that this institution will be further strengthened. There are, nevertheless, other more informal processes and dynamics that might lead to a 'resymmetrisation', not in the sense of returning to the *status quo ante* but of those institutions which have less autonomy seeking to reach the level of those with more and also as a result of policy imitation across the different parts of the UK.

Another, more political problem is what is known as the 'West Lothian Question'. West Lothian is a Westminster constituency in Scotland and the question is why Scottish MPs elected to represent that constituency (and the other Scottish constituencies) in the Westminster Parliament can vote on matters which concern England while MPs elected to represent English constituencies cannot vote on those matters devolved to the Scottish Assembly. The question has been raised by the Conservative Party but, so far, it has not been answered. The root of the problem is that the Westminster Parliament represents both the United Kingdom as a whole and England in particular as the latter does not have special representative institutions. The logical solution would be to elect an English Assembly and to devolve matters to it similar to those devolved to the Scottish Parliament.

This, however, would mean the creation of a federal system and a complete 'symmetrisation' of the political system and this is unlikely to happen. The next solution was to create English regional governments but, as we have seen, this has failed. This, however, would have meant retaining the strongly asymmetric nature of the political system as the English regions would have devolved powers even weaker than those of the Welsh National Assembly. There remains, as a result, a 'black hole' in the devolution settlement which is unlikely to be resolved in the near future.

Institutional Dynamics

Clearly, there will remain a high level of asymmetry between Westminster/Whitehall and the devolved institutions. But there is also asymmetry among the devolved institutions themselves. There is at present a dynamic driven by the Welsh Assembly to upgrade its own powers to resemble those of the Scottish Parliament. This was the recommendation of the Richards Commission established by the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) to investigate the issue. This is similar to the Spanish situation where the slow-track ACs have sought to 'catch up' with those on the fast track. However, the difference between the UK and Spain is that, although the Scottish Parliament would also like greater powers, it does not feel it needs these to differentiate itself from Wales. Undoubtedly, had the residents of the North-East of England chosen to set up their own elected regional assembly, they too would have sought to emulate the Scottish Parliament or, at least, the National Assembly for Wales.

Policy Convergence and Divergence Across the UK²⁷

Another dimension of symmetry and asymmetry is whether there has been a shift in the UK's *policy* system towards: (i) convergence; (ii) divergence or whether, indeed, (iii) a more complex system of convergence and divergence is happening depending on the policy areas. Recent research suggests that it is (iii) which is occurring.

The establishment of new decision-making institutions in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales has led to the creation of new policy-making nexuses in Belfast, Edinburgh and Cardiff (Loughlin and Sykes 2004). We noted above that before devolution civil servants in the three countries were largely dominated by Whitehall and there were varying degree of policy autonomy or compliance, with Scotland the most autonomous, Wales the least, and Northern Ireland somewhere in between. Following devolution, although there is still a theoretically unified civil service in Great Britain and a separate Northern Ireland Civil Service, the tendency has been towards the creation of *de facto* Scottish and Welsh civil

²⁷ This section is based on ESRC-funded research involving about 70 interviews carried out by the author in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales in 2001–03.

services serving the two new institutions and, for the first time, engaged in policy development rather than simple policy implementation. This has been encouraged by the new political leaders in the two countries keen to mark out differences between their policy approaches and those of England and Whitehall. In Northern Ireland, the NICS always had a certain degree of autonomy simply because it was more isolated. What has changed there is the existence of an elected Assembly with local political leaders and their advisers now controlling the civil service. Given the peculiar nature of Northern Irish politics and societal conflicts, it was inevitable that the politicians would seek to develop a distinctive policy approach to these problems. Furthermore, existing policy communities (from the public, private and voluntary sectors) now have a new relationship with the decision-making centres in the three capitals and many have adapted their organisations to the new situation (Keating and Loughlin 2002; Loughlin and Sykes 2004).

Policy variation is possible given the nature of financial arrangements between London and the devolved territories. This takes the form of a block grant to each of the three areas decided on in the British Cabinet (albeit without the direct input of the three devolved political institutions but by the Secretaries of State for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland who represent them in the Cabinet). The Parliament and the two Assemblies are, however, free to decide their own priorities within the total spending grant. It is this room for manoeuvre which has allowed them to develop policies distinct from those in England. Some examples are the decision not to impose tuition fees for students attending Scottish universities and to postpone their imposition in Wales while they are imposed in England, or the abolition of charges for medicine (prescription charges) in Wales. But even outside the block grant spending, the three administrations have tried to mark their differences from England. For example, in rural affairs policy, there are quite distinctive approaches in Northern Ireland (where agriculture is still an important economic sector and is closer to the Republic of Ireland than to England) and in Wales (which contains many small hill farmers and where rural society is closely linked to Welsh language and culture). Scotland is different again, although the Lowlands are probably closer to English agricultural structures. Although much rural affairs and agricultural policy is decided by the European Commission, there is some room for manoeuvre on the margins and this was duly exploited by each of the three administrations outside Whitehall in order to develop its own distinctive approach.

This does not mean that we are witnessing a 'policy break-up of the United Kingdom', or a completely asymmetrical system. On the contrary, policy making, even at the devolved level, still takes place within the main parameters of the overall UK approach and, as noted above, even the UK is, in some areas such as agriculture, constrained by the European Commission (Bulmer et al. 2006). There thus remains a certain amount of symmetry even in policy areas. Furthermore, two other factors have facilitated a certain degree of convergence and symmetry. First, there is policy imitation across the three areas of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and even England, where policy makers now observe the experiences of the other areas with a view to policy learning. Secondly, until 2007, the Labour

Party has been the dominant party in London, Cardiff and Edinburgh and has provided the Secretaries of State for the three devolved territories. This has meant a broad set of parameters that all the regions can agree on even if there are different emphases. This is likely to change now with an SNP-led government in Scotland, a Labour-Plaid Cymru coalition in Wales and a DUP-Sinn Féin government in Northern Ireland. This is likely to lead to more severe policy disagreements, a situation which would have intensified if the Conservatives had won a clear majority in the 2010 Westminster elections. In fact, the new government turned out to be a Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition which may mitigate the potential disagreements.

Symmetry or Asymmetry of Welfare Policy

One important issue that has arisen is what is called the 'post-code lottery', which means that the level of public services may vary depending on the region (the 'post-code') in which an individual lives. This question is also linked to the form of government funding for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the poorest parts of the UK, which is governed by what is known as the 'Barnett formula', which basically provides a higher level of funding for these regions to compensate for the high levels of poverty. Since the Second World War, there has been a strong commitment to maintaining territorial equity through equalisation which takes place through the tax system and the Barnett formula. The question today is whether this commitment should be relaxed in favour of some form of fiscal federalism which means, in effect, an asymmetry in the level of services. There is something of a contradiction between the current drive towards regional and local autonomy, which favours asymmetry, and the attempt to maintain equity, which implies symmetry. Several government commissions are currently examining these issues, including local finances.

Future Perspectives

The foregoing analysis suggests that the UK devolution process will not go into reverse. On the contrary, it is likely that the system will evolve further. The general tendency is towards ever greater asymmetry, which is partly counteracted by the forces of institutional and policy imitation which are leading towards more symmetry. Nevertheless, what is striking is that the previous ability of the centre (Westminster/Whitehall) to control the periphery is now much weaker and devolution has created a dynamic situation of change across the UK. At the same time, there is still a broad symmetry of the general policy parameters which are largely determined by Westminster and Whitehall. This may change because of the presence of the nationalist SNP and Plaid Cymru in the Scottish and Welsh governments respectively. But, even more important is the possibility of a referendum on Scottish independence which the SNP have promised. Thus, the future is open.

Conclusions

Devolution has significantly altered the sets of political, administrative and policy relationships within the UK. To some extent, it was an attempt to recognise politically the already existing administrative asymmetry by adding democratically elected institutions. But it has led to new processes and tendencies of institutional symmetry and asymmetry, and policy convergence and divergence. What emerges from the foregoing analysis is that the terms 'symmetry' and 'asymmetry' need to be understood as descriptions of quite different dimensions of governance and that both features can coexist within the same state. We can thus distinguish the political, administrative, economic, fiscal, cultural and policy dimensions of symmetry/asymmetry. In the United Kingdom, the already existing administrative asymmetry which has resulted from the formation of the Union State has been completed by the political asymmetry of the devolution process. There are also cultural and economic asymmetries across the four nations. The Welfare State, to some extent, tried to correct these asymmetries by systems of equalisation and by ensuring that there were similar services right across the entire territory. This, however, is being undermined as a result both of the neo-liberal reforms of Mrs Thatcher and of the devolution process. Nevertheless, there are also forces of 'symmetrisation' present in the system. Wales seeks to become similar to Scotland and there is a certain amount of policy imitation across the different nations. The

Table 3.1 Position of Actors in Great Britain in Favour or Opposed to Devolution

Key Actors	In Favour of Devolution	In Favour of Unionism
Political Parties	Labour Party (except for 'Old' Labour members) Liberal Democrats SNP Plaid Cymru	Conservative Party Labour Party ('Old' Labour members especially in Wales)
Trades Unions	Trades Union Congress in Scotland and Wales	
Business		Confederation of British Industry (including branches in Scotland and Wales) Institute of Directors
Public Sector	Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) Local Government Association (England and Wales)	
Voluntary Sector	Various voluntary sector bodies in Scotland and Wales.	

Table 3.2 Actors in Favour of Symmetry or Asymmetry

Key Actor	Pro-symmetry	Pro-asymmetry
Political Parties	UK Labour Party Conservative Party	Scottish and Welsh Labour Parties SNP Plaid Cymru
Business	TUC CBI	
Public Sector		Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) Local Government Association (England and Wales)
Voluntary Sector	Some voluntary sector bodies in Scotland and Wales.	Some voluntary sector bodies in Scotland and Wales.

Table 3.3 Attitudes of Political Parties in Northern Ireland to Devolution Before the Good Friday Agreement

In Favour of Devolution with Power-sharing	In Favour of Devolution without Power-sharing	In Favour of Complete Integration into the United Kingdom	In Favour of Irish Unification in the Long-term
SDLP	DUP UUP (at certain periods)	UUP (at certain periods)	Sinn Féin

European Union, in certain policy areas, is also leading to symmetry. But, overall, it may be remarked that the forces for symmetry are weaker than those which are increasing the asymmetry within the United Kingdom.

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