

For Scotland, See Wales?

Kenneth O. MORGAN (Lord MORGAN)
Visiting Professor in the Institute of Contemporary British History
King's College, London
kenneth.morgan@hotmail.co.uk

Résumé

Cet article s'intéresse dans un premier temps aux différences culturelles et historiques entre l'Écosse et le pays de Galles au sein du Royaume-Uni, et notamment aux succès contrastés des deux partis nationalistes, écossais et gallois, comme en témoignent les résultats qu'ils ont chacun obtenus aux élections législatives britanniques de 2015. Tandis que la demande d'indépendance se fait plus pressante en Écosse, le pays de Galles demeure très attaché à l'Union. Les deux nations disposent chacune de leurs propres instances législatives et gouvernementales dans le cadre constitutionnel de l'État britannique, mais la demande croissante d'autonomie fiscale de la part de l'Écosse a donné lieu à des revendications similaires de la part du pays de Galles, et l'évolution erratique du Royaume-Uni vers un modèle politique quasi-fédéral est suivie avec beaucoup d'intérêt au pays de Galles. Nous nous intéresserons à deux évolutions possibles à l'avenir : dans le premier cas, le pays de Galles continuera à faire preuve d'un enthousiasme beaucoup plus mesuré que celui de l'Écosse pour une forme quelconque d'indépendance (« Le pays de Galles n'est pas l'Écosse ») ; dans le second, le pays de Galles suivra l'exemple de l'Écosse, quoique plus lentement (« Pour l'Écosse voir le pays de Galles ? »). En tout état de cause, l'impact sur l'avenir du Royaume-Uni sera considérable ; il en ira de même pour les relations du Royaume-Uni avec l'Europe, dans la mesure où l'Écosse (et dans une moindre mesure le pays de Galles) est beaucoup plus europhile que l'Angleterre. C'est donc l'avenir même des deux unions que constituent le Royaume-Uni et l'Union européenne qui est en jeu.

Abstract

This paper focuses on the historical and cultural differences between Scotland and Wales within the United Kingdom, and the very different positions of the two nationalist parties there as shown by the results in the 2015 British General Election. Scotland is pressing hard for national independence; Wales is strongly wedded to the Union. At the same time, both nations are devolved in their government, pressure for Scottish fiscal autonomy has encouraged similar demands in Wales and the erratic progress towards a kind of quasi-federal structure in the United Kingdom will attract much interest in Wales. We will concentrate on two alternative future prospects – that Wales will continue to show far less enthusiasm for any kind of separatism than Scotland (“Wales is not Scotland”) or that it will, more slowly, follow the Scottish example (“For Scotland, see Wales?”). Which of these outcomes turns out to be correct will play a major part in determining the internal future of the United Kingdom. So too will it seriously influence British relations to Europe since Scotland (and to a somewhat lesser degree, Wales) is far more pro-European than England. The future of both unions, the United Kingdom and the European Union, is therefore in the balance.

Mots-clés : pays de Galles – Écosse – différence historique - dévolution

Keywords: Wales – Scotland – historical difference – devolution

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Introduction

The May 2015 General Election in Britain produced two rival interpretations after the event. One, ably argued by Labour's shadow Welsh secretary, Owen Smith, was that "Wales is not Scotland" (Smith, 2014). The results in the two countries were in total contrast. In Scotland, the SNP swept the board almost entirely. They captured 56 seats out of 59 and won over 50% of the Scottish vote in an election when the Conservatives won an overall majority in the United Kingdom as a whole. Scotland has had a SNP Government in Holyrood since 2011. Despite their leader, Nicola Sturgeon, saying the complete opposite during the independence referendum and General Election campaigns, the party was soon calling for a second referendum soon after polling closed, anxious to break up the Union as soon as possible. In Wales, by contrast, Plaid Cymru won only 3 seats out of 40 and were close contenders in only one other, Ynys Mon (Anglesey), which was retained by Labour. Despite their leader, Leanne Wood, appearing in televised debates, the Blaid won only a shade more than 12% of the Welsh vote. The self-styled "party of Wales" is in reality only the fourth party of Wales, behind Labour (37% of the vote), the Conservatives and Ukip, with the Liberal Democrats a little way behind. Welsh nationalism remains politically weak. The prospects for a Welsh independence referendum in any foreseeable future are absolutely zero.

The other interpretation was quite different – "For Wales, see Scotland", a play on the notorious entry in the old *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "For Wales, see England" (Morgan, 1963, 8). Welsh devolution, far weaker in its support than in Scotland at the time of the referendums in 1999, is mirroring that north of the border. The 2006 Wales Act gave the Welsh Assembly primary legislative powers (by a roundabout route), which Scotland had enjoyed since 1999. The Wales Act of 2012 gave the Assembly some fiscal and taxation powers, notably a Welsh income tax. The Wales Act of 2014 eventually (after pressure in the Lords) gave the Welsh Assembly reserved powers in relation to Westminster, like the Scottish Parliament. The Calman Commission on greater fiscal powers for Scotland was largely mirrored by the Silk Commission for Wales (Silk Part I, 2012). Pressure for devo-max for Scotland will have some impact on Wales too. So which of these very different scenarios is the correct one?

Of course, the two nations are historically very different. There had been for centuries a Scottish state and a sense of Scottish citizenship long before 1707. Modern Scotland is the product of an Act of Union. It retained its own established Church, its own distinguished educational system, and very importantly its own legal system, whereas Wales lost its last

remaining legal identity with the end of the Courts of Great Sessions in 1830, after which the Home Office and the Court of Chancery treated Wales and England as identical. Only in 2015 was the case for a distinct Welsh law revived. A Scottish Office was re-created as long ago as 1885. There has never, however, been a Welsh state – and no Welsh “Braveheart”. Modern Wales is the product not of an Act of Union but an act of conquest. Owain Glyn Dwr’s short-lived triumph in the early fifteenth century was partly thwarted by rival princes and was followed by full merger into the English constitutional system with the Act of 1536 in Henry VIII’s reign. Unlike Scotland, where the Gaelic language had been in decline since the fifteenth century and is spoken by about 1.1% of the people now, most of Welsh nationalism was cultural in form – shown in music, poetic literature and above all the enduring strength of the Welsh language. It is still spoken today by around 20% of the Welsh people, 575,000 in all, and the Welsh-speakers, of whom I am proud to be one, punch above their weight to this day.

A good deal of the sense of Scottish identity was historically elitist. There were the romantic sagas of Sir Walter Scott, and those Scottish aristocrats, surviving flowers of the forest, who were bearers of Scottish nationality after the Stuart cause perished at Culloden in 1746. It was members of the aristocracy like the Duke of Argyll, the Earl of Fife and the young Earl of Rosebery who led the campaign to revive the Secretary of State for Scotland in 1885, to which Gladstone acceded. In Wales, on the other hand, the pressure for identity and recognition came from below; the Welsh gentry (some of whom were Scottish anyway like the Earl of Cawdor and the Marquess of Bute) were on balance anglicized and Anglican in a mainly Welsh-speaking, nonconformist nation. Modern Welsh identity was a function of democracy. It led to Welsh pressure for having their own legislation, laws applying to Wales alone separate from England – Sunday Closing of the pubs (significantly, the first of all, in 1881), intermediate and higher education, land reform and above all disestablishment of the Church of England in Wales, finally achieved after a century of struggle in 1920 (Morgan, 1981, 36-43). There was also a new generation of political patriots, all Liberal like David Lloyd George – though it should be noted that this youthful Welsh home ruler went on to become British Prime Minister and ruler of the mightiest of all global empires. There were no Welsh Parnells or de Valeras (and no Welsh Ulster either). Welsh disestablishment, unlike that in Ireland, was not a precursor of home rule but an alternative to it. Wales broadly felt itself to be part of the Union and it still does.

The high noon of the Union for Scotland and Wales came with the First World War. There was a common sense of commitment and sacrifice throughout the United Kingdom, and high levels of recruitment in both nations. The Scots troops won glory at the Somme and at Passchendaele and suffered a higher rate of casualties than any other nationality, since Highland regiments amongst others were used as shock troops in the fiercest of combats. According to Sir Tom Devine, of 557,000 Scots who enlisted in the armed services, 26.4% lost their lives, compared with 11.8% for the rest of the British Army (Devine, 2000, 309). The Welsh also took pride in their fierce engagements at Mametz Wood and Pilckheim Ridge – and of course the war leader was himself a Welsh-speaking Baptist. As a result, after the war there was therefore a powerful mood of unionism with Lloyd George’s coalition Government triumphing in all parts of the Kingdom – other than in southern Ireland, of course. Nascent movements for “home rule all round” were slapped down. This was partly due to the unifying, uplifting effect of the war, shown in the legacy and message of war memorials erected after that. In addition, the paralysing effect of economic depression and

mass unemployment after the war seemed to kill off any sense of Celtic nationalism or separatism. The Labour Party and trade union movement, increasingly dominant in both Scotland and Wales after 1918, which had widely favoured Scottish and Welsh home rule before the war¹ now urged the class solidarity and unity of the working class all over Britain. The Labour Party became the most powerful force for unionism between 1918 and 1939. Meanwhile the fledgling Scottish National Party (1934) and Plaid Genedlaethol Cymru (founded 1925) were both tiny fringe parties with no mass following, while the Blaid was handicapped by the apparently neo-fascist views of Saunders Lewis, a Roman Catholic enthusiast for far-right French writers like Maurice Barrès and Charles Maurras of *Action Française* who wrote in praise of Mussolini and sympathized with Pétain (Davies, 1983, 29-30; Edwards, 1994).

There remained, however, a notable difference between Scotland and Wales. This was underlined during the Second World War, when the same sense of patriotic unionism prevailed. Tom Johnston, the powerful Labour Secretary of State for Scotland, was able to make the wartime Scottish Office a laboratory of change. Its own powers over the economy were strengthened and a Scottish Council of State (to vet Scottish legislation independently of Westminster) and Council of Industry set up. The North of Scotland hydro-electricity board for servicing the Highlands was a particular triumph. Christopher Harvie rightly states that Johnston “obtained what amounted to a promise of *de facto* home rule for the duration of the war” (Devine, 1999, 551-554; Harvie, 1977, 55). Johnston persuaded Winston Churchill and Herbert Morrison that, were all this not done, the Scottish Nationalists would see a surge in support, and indeed the SNP’s Dr. Robert McIntyre did briefly win Motherwell in a by-election right at the end of the war in April 1945. Scottish political nationalism was weak thereafter though the astonishing theft of the historic Stone of Scone, the “Stone of Destiny”, from Westminster Abbey by some robust youthful partisans on Christmas Day 1950 showed that the mood was still alive (the Stone is now safely back home in Arbroath Cathedral). But during and after the war Wales got nothing in terms of national recognition. There was no devolution in economic planning, no elected council, no regionalism in the nationalized industries, for all the efforts of James Griffiths within the Attlee government. Another Welsh socialist, the left-wing Aneurin Bevan, poured scorn on the whole idea of a Welsh Secretary of State in the first “Welsh Day” debate in 1944. Why have such a thing? he asked. Welsh and English sheep nibbled the same grass. “[...] I do not know the difference between a Welsh sheep, a Westmorland sheep and a Scottish sheep” (House of Commons, 1944). Two decades later Harold Wilson did indeed create a Welsh Secretary of State, but it was a weak department with only limited executive and administrative powers.

Then in the 1960s an unexpected surge in Scottish and Welsh nationalism occurred, at a time when both Britain’s economic strength and the imperial heritage appeared to be in irreversible decline. Britain’s standing in the world seemed to be in retreat, a mood symbolised for many by the devaluation of the pound, that virility symbol of great-power status, in 1967. A British application to join the European Common Market was one outcome; another was withdrawal from East of Suez to wind up the last vestiges of imperial greatness. A third was the rise of nationalism in Scotland and Wales. The Scots Nationalists won Hamilton with Winifred Ewing in a by-election in November 1967; Plaid Cymru’s leader, Gwynfor Evans, had earlier triumphed in Carmarthen in July 1966. The Blaid also threatened Labour strongholds in

¹ Witness Keir Hardie linking “The Red Dragon and the Red Flag” (Morgan, 1975, 118).

Caerphilly and Rhondda West in 1967-1968. Success in the last-named had been quite undetectable to the present writer when he wrote on the Rhondda in the Nuffield 1966 election survey a year earlier, when the most striking aspect of Plaid Cymru's campaign seemed to be that its party workers were largely below voting age (Morgan and Stead, 1966, 245-249). Wilson then set up the Crowther/Kilbrandon Commission with very broad terms of reference in a somewhat panicky response, and its report caused a political sensation in 1973.

But there was a notable difference between Scotland and Wales. The Scottish Nationalists drew strength all over the country from the distant Western Isles to Cumbernauld new town. There was no cultural emphasis: the case put forward was political and economic. In Wales, however, the valleys by-elections notwithstanding, Plaid Cymru was based overwhelmingly in Welsh-speaking rural areas, following the recent campaigns of the Welsh Language Society, Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg. When, following Kilbrandon, they were debated in Parliament in the 1970s (their ministerial sponsor being Michael Foot, the disciple and biographer of the great unionist socialist, Aneurin Bevan) the plan for Scottish legislative devolution was far more robust than for Welsh devolution, which was essentially executive. In the subsequent referendums of 1 March 1979, the Welsh Labour Party was half-hearted, with important MPs like the young Neil Kinnock and Leo Abse strongly opposed. The Prime Minister, Jim Callaghan and other ministers showed little enthusiasm for proposals they had been forced to make because of being a minority government dependent on nationalist votes. Scottish devolution did win a majority in the referendum (though not large enough for it to go ahead). In Wales devolution was routed by a four to one majority. Even in north Wales Gwynedd, the voters preferred to be governed by Westminster rather than by far-away Cardiff!

Scotland and Wales both reacted strongly against the Thatcherite regime in the eighties. But again the force of nationalism was more powerful by far in Scotland. It was made far more confident after 1980 by the riches flowing in from North Sea oil. Scottish civil society, in a land where the Conservatives had won the highest electoral vote back in 1955, now became fiercely anti-Conservative. They saw their nation being undermined by monetarist dogma. There was deindustrialisation and mass unemployment. Icons like Ravenscraig steel works, the Rover car plant at Linwood, and the mighty shipyards of the Clyde which had once kept the empire afloat were closed down as a result of changes in worldwide demand plus the monetarist dogmas of an English-based Tory government for which very few Scots had voted. Worst of all, there was the hated Poll Tax, first tried out, incredibly, in Scotland and which saw the whole nation rise up in passionate revolt: 700,000 warrants for non-payment of the charge were issued in the first year alone in Scotland. There now followed an important path-breaking Constitutional Convention, chaired by a man of the Church and powerful critic of Thatcherism, Canon Kenyon Wright. All major parties save the Tories were represented here, with the dominant figure of Labour's Donald Dewar who championed reserved powers for an elected Scottish Parliament. In Wales, developments were more low-key, even though the Welsh economy also suffered serious blows with mass pit closures after the national coal strike of 1984-5, and the winding up of great steel works at Shotton in Flintshire and East Moors in Cardiff. There was no constitutional convention here and devolution hardly played any part in the 1992 election when Neil Kinnock led the party's unsuccessful campaign. However, the Labour Party was now beginning to move in a more devolutionist direction too, and the issue figured on the party's 1997 General Election manifesto. In the famous phrase of

Ron Davies, Secretary of State for Wales under Tony Blair for a while, “devolution was a process not an event”.

The most striking elements of change though, were cultural – a new stimulus for the language from a powerful Welsh schools movement, and in the arts. These feature aspects of the creative arts not previously outstanding in Wales, such as the visual arts and the cinema. A shining example here was a fine Welsh-language biopic by Alan Llwyd, *Hedd Wyn*. It was, based on the life and death of a young shepherd boy, Ellis Evans, from Merioneth, whose poem *Yr Arwr* (the Hero) won the bardic chair at the 1917 national *Eisteddfod* at Birkenhead, a few days after his being shot down and killed at Passchendaele (Llwyd, 2008). It was highly commended at the Cannes film festival, the first non-English language film from the United Kingdom to be so honoured, and was also the first British film to be nominated as a foreign-language production for an Academy Award. Another refreshing development came in the world of pop music, Welsh-language groups like Catatonia, the Stereophonics and the Super Furry Animals adding immensely to this appealing aspect of Welsh culture, especially for the young. The message was strikingly different. In the sixties the Welsh troubadour, Dafydd Iwan, had sung mournfully “*Da ni yma o hyd*” (We’re still here). Now the sexy blonde soubrette of Catatonia, Cerys Matthews, told the world, “Every morning I wake up and thank the Lord I’m Welsh” – the language of optimism and hope replacing that of mere stubborn survival.

As is very well known, in the General Election of 1997, the Conservatives won no seats at all in either Scotland or Wales, a unique result. In the devolution referendums on 18 September 1997, the outcomes in the two nations were profoundly contrasting. The Scottish Parliament was voted in by an over two-thirds majority, with power to levy an income tax receiving almost as high a vote. The Welsh carried devolution by a mere 0.3% on a lowish poll. A swing, compared with 1979, in the south Wales valleys and in Swansea made all the difference, while a clinching final high turn-out in Cardiganshire and Carmarthenshire settled it once and for all. After all, as the Labour minister George Brown once famously remarked, one was enough.

After the creation of the elected Welsh Assembly in 1999 the Welsh became warmer in their view of devolution year by year. The battle for primary legislative powers for the Assembly was won in 2009, after the Jones-Parry Committee reported strongly in favour of it and confirmed in a national referendum in 2011 with a 64% vote in favour. Important elements of resistance within the Labour Party machine remained, especially in south Wales. The Wales Bills of 2012 and 2014 had a somewhat grudging acceptance. The winning of reserved powers for the Assembly in 2014 was the result of pressure by some Welsh peers in the House of Lords (the present writer included), plus the presence of Liberal Democrat ministers in the Government. But progress there unquestionably has been. The Scottish independence referendum of September 2014 has added a powerful new element in the mix, with the Union surviving by only a 10% margin. So, at what could be a historic moment of opportunity, where does all that leave Wales now?

Conclusion

The first conclusion must be that the Welsh are no nearer demanding independence than ever they were from the days of Owain Glyn Dwr onwards. Polls show support for it languishing in single figures, a mere 6% in April 2015. Political opinion in Wales, if anything, is moving slightly to the right, towards the Conservatives and perhaps Ukip, judging from the 2015 General Election. The test of this is the extension of fiscal devolution. It arouses only limited enthusiasm in Wales. There is fear that, in this relatively poorer part of the British economy, it might lead to a cut in Welsh resources, or at least that the Treasury might use it as an excuse for so doing. Wales, heavily dependent on public-sector spending, has already suffered disproportionately from Tory cuts, while there are other problems such as the relatively large proportion of its population who are the economically unproductive elderly, or retired people from England which puts a strain on the health services there. Also Labour point out that the bulk of the Welsh population live near the English border and would be able to migrate eastwards to a different tax regime. There has been much resentment about the operation of the Barnett Formula, based on population differentials, which depresses allocations for Wales, whereas the Scots get a huge bonus (Holtham, 2010). It is noticeable that the Scots claim that only independence will bring true prosperity, their confidence undented by the falling price of North Sea oil or the troubles of Scotland's financial services following the 2008 "credit crunch". Nevertheless the SNP demands retention of the Barnett Formula as well, in effect seeking the benefits of being inside and outside the Union at the same time, having their oat cake and eating it. Significantly, David Cameron included keeping the Barnett Formula in his five "vows" during the referendum campaign. It is a shameful policy that makes no recognition of Wales's much greater social and economic needs, and continues solely to bribe the Scots and to ensure that they are persuaded thereby to stay in the Union. Barnett remains while the borrowing limits of £500 million imposed on the Welsh Assembly in the 2014 Wales Act are unfairly lower proportionately than those accorded to Scotland (or indeed Northern Ireland). One Welsh peer, Lord Wigley, denounced them as "chicken-feed" (House of Lords, 2014). It does not persuade the Welsh to think of venturing into the deep waters of the globalised economy on their own.

And yet, secondly, Wales will nevertheless be part of the constitutional reforms to come, even if Cameron ignored it in post-referendum negotiations with the Scottish Government. All parties are now talking the language of national, regional and local devolution, and of pluralism. David Cameron in Cardiff declared in the so-called St. David's Day Agreement in February 2015 that "This is a party that believes in Welsh Devolution" (Cameron, 2015), an astonishing reversal from the heyday of Thatcherite Anglo-unionism, while Labour under Ed Miliband appeared to endorse far more devolved forms of economic and social planning. (The views here, as elsewhere, of Jeremy Corbyn, the new leader, are presently obscure). One strong link between Scotland and Wales is that opinion in both nations is favourable to Europe and remaining in the EU. Even in Wales, where Ukip has made some progress, and has an MEP, the need for economic protection along with cultural sentiment for a Europe of Nations mean that Europeanism remains powerful. There could indeed be a major constitutional crisis if Scottish and Welsh support for European membership in the In/Out referendum in 2017 is nullified by a massive Eurosceptic vote in England. That would mean a real crisis in the Union of the United Kingdom as well as in the EU. Beyond that, there will undoubtedly be a major transformation in our governing institutions, even if it happens without the Constitutional Convention demanded by Labour in its 2015 General Election

manifesto. The House of Commons (see the pressure for “English votes for English laws”), a reformed House of Lords to help bind the Union together, the central civil service with its “concordats” and “ministerial agreements”, all face change, and there is growing academic and other interest in a codified written constitution for our country. One powerful endorsement has come from a Commission undertaken for the Bingham Centre for the Rule of Law, which published its report at the time of the General Election in May 2015 and called for a Charter of Union (Bingham Centre, 2015). The status of Wales, as well as that of Scotland, will be in the melting pot now. It is ironic indeed that the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, that high water mark of unionist celebration in the United Kingdom, may now be marked by moves towards federalism or confederalism, and thereby make our Kingdom to that degree less united.

The movement to champion devolution in Wales and promote a Welsh national identity may disappoint a French audience. Opinion in France appears to me one-sidedly in favour of the SNP whose often contradictory policy positions are treated with some indulgence. Perhaps for the same mildly anglophobe reasons, the customers in a bar in Nantes shared my joy when Wales defeated England at Twickenham during the rugby World Cup in the course of my visit! But the national movement in Wales seems to me very significant. It is remarkable how rapidly opinion, originally so lukewarm towards devolution, has moved on in just a few years at the start of a new millennium. It perhaps could prove as important in the longer term as the more powerful nationalism in Scotland. Wales shows us that there is another way. It suggests that devolution is reconcilable with the Union, that it can be liberating and not merely destructive. There are alternatives to a disunited kingdom that do not involve erecting new barriers, border controls and customs duties between long-established nations who have flourished in harmonious partnership for three hundred years, and stirring up the dangerous force of nationalist emotion between them. The Welsh, often accused by their own nationalists of “political immaturity”, may actually be demonstrating their real maturity. Therein, in Cymru Fydd (the Wales that is to be), as the young David Lloyd George forecast over a century ago, may lie the way ahead.

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- See also: “The Guardian View of the 2015 Election in Wales”, *The Guardian*, 6 April 2015.

Notice biographique

Kenneth O. Morgan, anciennement professeur à l'Université d'Oxford (Queen's College) et président de l'Université du pays de Galles (University of Wales), est actuellement Professeur invité au King's College, London. Membre de la British Academy, il est également membre de la Chambre des Lords pour le Parti travailliste et siège à la commission de la Chambre des Lords chargée des questions constitutionnelles. Parmi ses quelques 35 publications l'on peut citer *Wales in British Politics 1868 – 1922* (1963), *Rebirth of a Nation: Wales 1880 – 1980* (1981), *Modern Wales: Politics, People and Places* (1995), and *From Revolution to Devolution* (2014). Son autobiographie intitulée *My Histories* est parue en septembre 2015 aux presses universitaires de Cardiff.

Biographical Information

Kenneth O. Morgan, formerly Fellow at The Queen's College, Oxford and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Wales, is Visiting Professor at King's College, London. He is Fellow of the British Academy, a Labour member of the House of Lords, and member of its Constitution Committee. His 35 books include *Wales in British Politics 1868-1922* (1963), *Rebirth of a Nation: Wales 1880-1980* (1981), *Modern Wales: Politics, People and Places* (1995), and *From Revolution to Devolution* (2014). His memoirs, *My Histories* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press) were published in September 2015.