

Labour's devolution model fuelled the SNP

At the end of the last century Labour pushed through a devolved Parliament for Scotland and a devolved Assembly for Wales. They did so claiming it would end the growth of the emerging nationalist parties in both parts of the UK.

Instead in Scotland it gave a platform and more grievance to the modest minority campaigning for independence twenty five years ago, swelling their support and leading to an SNP government in Edinburgh always pressing for more powers and for full independence. Under Nicola Sturgeon the SNP became a very successful vote winning party, drawing the support of a much enlarged minority that did want an independent Scotland and adding to it others who thought it a good idea to have an aggressive Scottish government seeking to maximise money and support from the rest of the UK under threat of leaving.

It led directly to the need for an independence referendum, which the SNP said they would regard as a once in a generation opportunity. No sooner had they lost and they were looking for reasons to try again, wanting to commit Scotland to permanent uncertainties and painful divisions as long as they lacked a majority for their cause. Nicola Sturgeon managed to keep in office whilst fuelling the divisions,. She did not seek to use the governing powers she enjoyed to improve Scottish services, but as a battering ram against the Union. During covid she gained advance information on the views and understandings of the Union government, to always go earlier and for more lockdown than the rest of the country. There was no wish to work collaboratively at a time of public health danger common to all when the rest of the UK wished to help and share with Scotland.

Now she has resigned it is possible to have a more informed debate about why the Scottish devolved powers in crucial areas like health and education have not been used to make improvements in services and management, despite the more generous money allocations sent by the Union Parliament. It is possible to rethink the collision course Nicola Sturgeon was designing to raise the issue of independence again, despite losing a court case over another referendum. Her party can rethink its views in letting rapists serve sentences in women's prisons which proved to be a provocation too far even for the very tolerant UK government.

Meanwhile our Union is also threatened in Northern Ireland by the EU. Fresh from its success in standing up at last to the SNP by seeking to override its unwise law, the government of the UK now needs to complete the passage of this legislation to restore UK government of Northern Ireland.