

Scotland's government

It wasn't meant to be like this. Gordon Brown and Tony Blair pushed through devolution for Scotland, telling us that would kill off the nascent Scottish independence movement. I wrote at the time:

"Usually , the granting of more and more powers for separate development and separate government within a once unified state leads inexorably to stronger nationalist movements" (The Death of Britain? 1999)

I drew attention to the many ways a canny Scottish government could press for more powers and exploit the compromises of the settlement. It always looked like a political journey, not a fixed constitution. The SNP could blame the UK government for things that went wrong and demand more powers to fix them.

Some defenders of the Union still think Gordon Brown was right, if only the UK Parliament grants a few more powers. They naively think that there is some amount of power for a devolved Parliament that will satisfy nationalists. Surely we have seen enough to know that whatever powers they have they will want more, because they do want their version of independence.

Today I would be interested in your thoughts on the state of Scotland's government and Parliament. I myself have no intention of rushing to judgement or intervening in the tense battles between the present and former First Ministers. This is a debate best conducted between those involved and through the voices of the Scottish parliament, now at the very centre of the row. We have heard Mr Salmond's serious allegations about the conduct of the senior Ministers and Law Officers, including allegations of misleading the Parliament and obstructing the work of its Committee trying to get to the truth. We now need to hear the government's defence.