

Muse Four.

The Shires & Counties Party

Government in this Country is in violation of Maxim Three; additionally Maxim Seven can apply to its operations.

This Muse offers one of the many options that may be considered superior to the present system.

Comment: I was canvassed by telephone during the 1992 Election. I was asked the expected questions, but before I allowed myself to be open to the usual 'spiel,' I requested they answer a question.

The question I asked was, "What is the prime function of Parliament?"

The answer given was, "To Rule the Country". This answer did not surprise me: it is symptomatic of the egocentric arrogance of politicians in general.

As previously stated in Maxim Three, the power was transferred to the Shires some 700 years ago: Now it has returned to the hands of the Barons, albeit they are in a modern guise.

Almost all power is now centralised nationally: given that 86% of Local Expenditure is funded by the Treasury, this is not surprising.

The Populace has little influence over the Policies of Central Government, nor, its Practise. Individual MPs - controlled as they are by the Party Whips - are not able to reflect the aims and aspirations of their constituents who are considered a necessary inconvenience that comes as a part of the package called democracy.

The evident insidious introduction of 'Closed Lists' reflects the added erosion of the notional democracy that remains.

When successive Governments have urged "Back to Basics" Policies they should have looked at the Structure of Government to set an example.

The first steps have been taken: the planned devolution of Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland has shown the first cracks in the stability of Central Government; confirmed by the adverse reactions of the Centrally based Control Freaks.

Such reactions are in vain. The juggernaut of Change: from a system perceived to be unsatisfactory: will be difficult to stop.

The murmuring for English Regional Devolution should have become a roar as the Scottish and Welsh Set-ups became operational and introduced benefits not shared by English constituencies. To date the apathy of a seemingly majority of constituents has suited those who wish to retain central control.

A strong argument against Devolution is the escalated cost of added tiers of both government and administration.

This would not arise if Central Government were reduced to the size of an essential rump proportional to a reduced role.

For example when devolution in Scotland and Wales was introduced, the parliamentary constituencies in those regions and their Members of Parliament could have formed the Regional Assemblies.

There would then be no additional tier and additional costs would be reduced to the administrative costs of the relevant Assembly. Modern Technology is such that it would not be necessary for MPs to attend at Westminster other than for the sessions allocated to Scottish and Welsh business: these could be reduced to an appropriate minimum and it is conceivable that they need not be on a regular basis.

Such an arrangement would minimise the necessity for second homes and the controversies that have arisen from the misuse of expenses associated with them.

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To this end the various forms (Units) of Local Government would have to undertake a more active role as Agents of Government under the control of the Regional Assemblies.

The prime function of the Assemblies would be to monitor and coordinate the Local Government Units, and thus enable the National Authority to be restricted to those functions of undisputed National Interest.

The Foreign Office, The Ministry of Defence, The Treasury, and The Home Office would inevitably have to be retained at full national strength and function.

The function and staff of all other departments should be devolved to the Regions with only a monitoring and information service retained nationally.

To these ends the following Regional Structure is suggested.

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Regional Authorities

- Scotland: This would possibly have parliamentary status.
- Wales.
- Northern Ireland.
- English Regions: Nine in number each controlling "n" number of Local Government Units i.e. Counties, Boroughs, and Unitary Authorities. Most of the Local Authority Units assigned to each authority will mostly be unquestioned; a minority may have to be placed according to tradition, convenience etc.; but only with the consent of the electorate in that 'Unit'. There should be little, if any, need to make changes to the structure or election practises of the Units.

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Regional Assembly.

As a first step each Assembly would contain a given number of the existing constituencies with some border constituencies having to be redefined by division and reallocation; however, serious consideration should be given to reducing the number of representatives to nearer a ratio of One per 100,000 of the Electorate, thus, each Assembly would have between 30 and 50 Elected Members. At the same time consideration could be given to relating each constituency to the physical structure and location of the Local Government Units such that each of these would elect one or more Assembly Members depending on the Population and Geography. The form of the Elections - regardless of System - must be of the Open List type in order to give equal opportunity to Independents.

Regional Bureaucracy

The Civil Service associated with each Assembly should be restricted to the minimum necessary to monitor and audit the Constituent Units, and to act as an Information Service for the Assembly.

There should be no necessity for such staff to be given any Authority over, or Responsibility for, any Staff or Function at Unitary Level.

The Local Government Units should be more or less autonomous for the application of the Policies set by The Regional Assembly.

The following Regional Departments will probably be required:

1. Assembly Administration.
2. Finance.
3. Law and Order.
4. Health.
5. Education.
6. Environment: Planning: and Transport.
7. Trade: Industry: and Agriculture.
8. Local Services: Infra Structure: Social Services.

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Assembly Elections.

The Leader And Deputy Leader to be elected by the Electorate from among the Assembly Members.

A possible Cyclic Timetable for Elections could be as follows:

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| Year 1. | Re-elect a half of the Members of the Local Unit. |
| Year 2. | Elect Members to the Regional Assemblies. |
| Year 3. | Re-elect the second half of the Unit Members. |
| Year 4. | The Election of the National, Prime Minister and Deputy. |

Obviously there would be a need for some variation during the initial Change Period.

The sitting, transferred MPs in their appropriate Regional Assembly would come up for re-election in the Year Two Regional Assembly Elections when the changes to constituency boundaries and structure should have been finalised.

The first Elections 'Proper' would take place in Year Six.

While all the Regional Assemblies are being established it may be advisable for the Incumbent Prime Minister and Deputy to remain in Office.

I see this as the weakest link in changing to a more democratic system as there is a possible vested interest for a political power faction to unnecessarily extend the transitional process period in order to retain unwarranted influence.

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Clearly such a transition means that the structure and role of the retained Westminster 'Rump' would need complete restructuring. This is considered below.

CENTRAL GOVERNMENT.

The House of Commons

This would be disbanded to be replaced by an Electoral College.

Unless the Regional Assemblies were all established on the same date there would be a transition period when The Regional Assemblies and Westminster would have to sit on different days. During this period an agreed number of delegated members would attend Westminster as and when required. The inconvenience of such a transient arrangement is the reason why this transition period be as short as may be practical.

We would hope that a repetition of the Strasbourg/Brussels arrangement with the European Parliament will not arise.

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After the transition is completed, the Electoral College would consist of Mandated Delegates from the Regional Assemblies in the ratio of One Delegate per 300,000 of the Regional Electorate.

The Electoral College would thus consist of about 144 Delegates: these would not receive a dual salary: They need not even be the same Delegates for every Session.

It is possible that some of these Delegates could represent the very large Local Government Units without being Members of The Regional Assembly: in this case they would replace one or more of the Regional Quota and would be deputed by the Authority of The Regional Assembly.

The Electoral College would not be in regular session: it would assemble for specific reasons to discuss changes to the existing Legislation and to listen to presentations, and suggestions, that must first have been discussed at the Regional Assemblies, National Institutions, and The National Executive.

The source of the subjects for discussion could be The Prime Ministers Office, any of the Regional Assemblies or The National Executive: the latter being the equivalent of the present Cabinet.

The Prime Minister would nominate the Executive, with each individual approved by the Electoral College. It would consist of about 18 members: One for each of the Functions retained at National Level, plus One for each Assembly to act as day to day liaison.

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The House of Lords.

If retained it would be in the form of Committees - replacing the existing parliamentary structure - one for each Region and one for each National Function i.e. 18 Committees each consisting of "x" Members. Its constitution and function would need to be agreed and ratified by The Electoral College and the Regions: it would be preferable if they were selected on the basis of ability and dedication rather than by birth, or worst, by political manipulation. Clearly the above does not address all the detail necessary for such a fundamental change. The detail is less important than the need to re-establish democracy as near to The Electorate as possible without escalating unnecessarily the Levels of Accountability and Bureaucracy. Party affiliations should always be secondary to the mandated opinions of the constituents.