

CHAPTER V

BUREAUCRATS IN THE SADDLE

*A criticism of administration is as much part of the policy
as administration itself*

Walter Bagehot

1. *Administration in Scotland*

The administrative system of Scotland was not reserved under the Treaty of Union, and the Scottish Privy Council was speedily abolished; but for a brief period the Scottish Secretary of State continued to function under the new dispensation. As early as 1711 Daniel Defoe, that master of English fiction, was denying that the office was necessary, and using arguments of the type with which we are now all too familiar: Scotland no more requires a Secretary than Yorkshire; the office is only a source of needless expense; and so on. The office in fact lasted, with some interruptions, only till 1725, but was revived briefly from 1741 to 1745. Otherwise, right up to 1885, the sole official Officer of State in Scotland was the Lord Advocate, although until 1827 he had to share the real power with some noble but unofficial 'Scottish Manager' who happened to have influence in the Cabinet and was given an uncontrolled exercise of patronage in Scotland. After 1827 the English Home Secretary took over Scottish affairs, but was supposed to act with the advice and help of the Lord Advocate.

So far as London was concerned, the Lord Advocate functioned from a small and dark room in the Home Office, and there was some doubt if it was even wholesome. Every Lord Advocate had, so to speak, to start afresh since he had no Department and no permanent staff. According to one story it was essential for him to be a tall man so that in Parliamentary voting the submissive Scottish members could be sure of

following him into the right lobby. The poor gentleman had to move continually between Edinburgh and London at a period when Edinburgh was farther in time from London than New York is to-day by one of the slower liners. The coming of the railways made his lot a trifle easier, but by no means enviable.

This strange and irresponsible system, or lack of system, may have worked in some ways to Scotland's benefit, for it was sometimes too inefficient to place obstacles in the path of progress. It was still possible, for example, to deepen the Clyde and turn Glasgow into the greatest ship-building centre in the world; and again to construct the Forth Railway Bridge as the first of the great bridges which are one glory of the modern age. Even so – the quotation is from a book by Mr. W. C. Smith in 1885, though it might have been written to-day –

'A feeling grew up in Scotland that national interests were neglected in Parliament; that the actual wants of the country were not understood by London departments; that necessary legislation was abandoned or delayed; that injustice was done in the matter of imperial grants.'

In 1885 through the influence of Lord Rosebery the office of Secretary for Scotland (now Secretary of State for Scotland) was revived. In 1919 he was allowed for the first time a Parliamentary Under-Secretary; and by 1964 he was assisted by a team of four – the Minister of State and three Parliamentary Under-Secretaries. When in that year the Labour Party came into power they continued the same system of organisation, which looks as if it may be relatively permanent.

The proposal that Scotland should have a Secretary of State was regarded in 1853 as a romantic extravagance and was dismissed contemptuously on the usual grounds. Yet after many vicissitudes it was accepted in 1885 almost without debate. Perhaps the proposal for a Scottish Parliament will have a similar destiny.

2. *The Little King*

The Secretary of State for Scotland has under him four separate departments – Agriculture, Development, Education, Health

and Home – which constitute the Scottish Office and have their headquarters in St. Andrew's House in Edinburgh. Apart from him these departments have no legal existence or independent functions. The six symbolic figures outside St. Andrew's House would represent the real position more accurately – as has been suggested by Sir David Milne in his book *The Scottish Office*¹ – if they could be replaced by statues showing the same man clad symbolically in different ways. The Secretary is responsible for administrative matters which in England are the concern of eight separate and independent Ministers. But even this is far from exhausting his functions. His office exercises a magnetic attraction on other administrative organisations concerned with Scotland, such as the Forestry Commission and the Office of the Crown Estates Commissioners. As 'Scotland's Minister' he has to defend decisions made by English Ministers with regard to Scotland – decisions for which he has no responsibility except as a member of the British Cabinet.

This is a system of one-man government reminiscent of Poo-h Bah in the *Mikado*, and the Secretary is sometimes described as the Little King of Scotland. No wonder his job is freely admitted to be quite impossible – certainly in private, but also in public, as by Lord Alness, who held the office as long ago as 1916–22. What is surprising is that the Scottish people should be expected to submit indefinitely to a system whose impossibility is admitted.

The Secretaries of State are always men of good intentions and sometimes of more than average ability. In the overburdened British Cabinet they are supposed to defend the interests of Scotland – a task too difficult for the less able and too compromising for the more ambitious. It is widely recognised that the best work in this office was done by Mr. Thomas Johnston – an unusually able man with no ambitions south of the Border. In 1941 he instituted an unofficial Council of State, as it was called, composed of all the ex-Secretaries from whatever party. By getting general agreement he was able to do a great deal for Scotland, notably by setting up the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board, an independent Scottish

¹ London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd.

institution which has been of real help to the Highlands, in spite of continual sniping from the South.

A Council of State of this type, though eminently desirable, is possible only under a Coalition Government, such as existed during the Second World War. As soon as Party strife was renewed, this experiment had to be abandoned.

The Secretary of State has both too much power and too little. He is responsible for duties far beyond the compass of one man, yet his freedom of action is narrowly restricted. His every footstep is dogged by a watchful Treasury in London, and his decisions must be adjusted to what has been done, or is about to be done, in England. If he has to deal with some problem unknown in the South – such, for example, as the modest subsidy required to help the production of a much needed Gaelic dictionary – the restrictions laid upon him are made painfully clear. The whole system, besides being incompetent to meet the needs of Scotland, is flatly opposed to the age-old tradition of Scottish democracy, which has always been hostile to one-man rule imposed from above.

4. *The Scottish Office*

Little need be said about the workings of the Scottish Office itself. The tales about telephone enquiries being greeted with the answer, 'oskins 'ere', may apply to the outposts of the invading Ministries from London, but the four Scottish Departments are in the main manned by Scotsmen familiar with the conditions of the country they have to govern. These gentlemen are as competent and well-meaning as civil servants normally are, but creative minds are not usually attracted to this profession; and if they are, the system itself may be counted upon to see that they become less creative. Civil servants are, and ought to be, if not 'yes-men', at least safe men: it is not their business to make revolutions, but to carry out scrupulously regulations imposed on them by others. As was once said – I think by Lloyd George – their proper place is between the shafts and not on the dicky.

Pioneer reforms in accordance with Scottish traditions are no more likely to receive an impulse from conscientious civil servants than from an over-burdened Secretary of State. What

is needed to supplement both is the breath of fresh air that would come, if it can come at all, from a Scottish Parliament directly concerned with the needs and ideals of the Scottish people. Without this the existing system is manifestly incomplete, and its working is determined far too much by quite other considerations than the interests of Scotland. The claim sometimes made even by Members of Parliament for Scottish constituencies that in virtue of such a bureaucratic organisation Scotland already enjoys Home Rule is too grotesque to merit serious consideration. There can be no Home Rule without an elected body of representatives to determine policy and to keep the administration up to the mark.

4. *Control from London*

If the story ended there, it would be easy enough to understand, but in fact administration in Scotland forms a kind of maze in which only the most expert can hope to find their way. More and more of the London Ministries have come to be directly responsible for affairs in Scotland, particularly economic affairs; and there is a wide-spread belief that they know little and care less about the special needs of that country. Even if this belief is sometimes exaggerated, it is only natural for civil servants in London to take the line attributed to one of them: 'Surely you don't expect to be treated any differently from the rest of the country.' To the more tidy minds among them the very existence of Scots Law appears to be an anachronism and an offence.

This is not the place to expound the details of the present system. They may be found, if not always too easily, in the Report of the Royal Commission on Scottish Affairs (1952-54).

Before 1914, as the Commission recognises, the Government interfered little with the concerns of the individual, but since then its encroachment on private activities has mounted with ever increasing velocity.

'Restrictions arising from two world wars, steps to meet the depression and unemployment in the inter-war period, the allocation of scarce materials, the rationing of capital

investment, the need to channel production – all these have called for regulations and controls, most of which have been organized on a Great Britain basis with ultimate authority resting in London.'

However inevitable these regulations and controls may have been in time of war, they enabled the Central Government to get a firm grip on the economic life of Scotland, and this grip they show no inclination to relax. I am inclined to think that the movement began even before 1914. Many years ago a very sweet and gentle old Oxonian, who – as I discovered to my surprise – had spent most of his life in the Scottish Office, assured me that Scotland had received a very raw deal ever since Lloyd George had insisted on his reforms being administered from London; and he also complained, as bitterly as was possible for a man of his nature, about the lack of understanding shown by English civil servants in Scotland.

At the time of the Commission the most powerful London Ministries determining the economic fate of Scotland were the Board of Trade, the Ministry of Supply, and the Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation. Since then some have been renamed; some have been amalgamated; and some have been split up; but all this in no way affects the general position, though it does make precise description difficult. They invaded the country with a series of subsidiary offices headed by gentlemen sometimes called 'Regional Controllers' and only too ready to act as such. Their need to refer matters to Whitehall was and is the cause of frustrations and delays. It also means, as the Commission itself remarks, that any one who holds a leading position in either public or private business in Scotland has to spend too much of his time in London. It said nothing about his money, though this too is a consideration, and sometimes British Railways takes its share of the swag by perversely charging heavier rates of fare to long-distance travellers.

We need not concern ourselves here with the long list of other London Ministries which – like the Ministry of Works and the Ministry of Fuel and Power – take a hand in domestic matters that should be decided in Scotland itself; but it may be observed

that the Secretary of State for Scotland is sometimes given joint responsibility with a London Minister. Even then it is to be feared that the ultimate decision still rests with Whitehall.

It is the big decisions of powerful economic Ministries in London which affect most seriously the life of Scotland; but continual interference on minor details is also a fruitful source of irritation. Some of the complaints concern matters so ludicrous that it is hard to credit them, but at the very least they illustrate the unhappy atmosphere which has been spread so thickly over Scotland. For example, it has been solemnly alleged – and I have seen no contradiction – that it is forbidden to send a haggis to Russia unless it first goes south to be packed by a London firm, and even then it cannot be sent in the same parcel as a Tam-o'-Shanter. And perhaps here it may not be out of place to put in a plea on behalf of Scottish dogs. In England the money paid for dog-licences goes to the local authority, but in Scotland it is whisked resolutely over the Border to London. It looks as if no loose Scottish revenue, however small, can escape the clutches of the Treasury; and even the most patriotic West Highland terrier, unlike English dogs, is prevented from contributing to the welfare of his own country.

A more dignified depredation affects the emoluments of the Lord Lyon and his Court. Formerly these came from the 'profits of the Lyon Court', though the Lord Lyon himself had a small salary as well. In 1867 the profits were transferred to the Treasury. At the same time the six Heralds were reduced to three, as were also the six Pursuivants. To this day the Heralds have been paid an annual sum of £25 each, and the Pursuivants £16 13s. 4d. In comparison the Lord Lyon enjoys the princely salary of £1,200 – much less than is paid to a Clerk of Assize in the County Courts of England. No wonder that the Treasury is said to make a substantial profit.

Let us turn to an example of the consideration which Scottish requests may meet in Whitehall. This concerns what was at the time the Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation.

At the beginning of 1960, even before the era of Dr. Beeching, the usual policy was being extended of closing branch lines in

the Highlands on the ground of expense. As this was, and is, devastating to thinly populated counties with inadequate roads, a large deputation was sent south at considerable expense to interview the reigning Minister – at that time Mr. Marples. According to newspaper reports, he first put the meeting forward by a quarter of an hour, and then kept them waiting for twenty minutes. When at last he arrived, 'sucking a sweetie' according to one version, he refused to see them unless two Members of Parliament left the room, although they were members of the deputation. He then spent a lot of time telling them how hard he was working in other fields and cut short their attempts to state their case. Finally he informed them that it did not matter what they said to him because the power to deal with the subject did not lie in his hands. It may be surmised that the deputation proceeded to tell him exactly what they thought of him, for he was reported to have finished by saying 'I am going to listen to no more. I will listen again to delegations from England, Wales, and even Northern Ireland. But this is the last bloody Scottish delegation I will ever hear'.

It is only fair to add that he later denied the use of the offensive adjective, but his attitude was inconsiderate enough even apart from the precise terminology in which it was expressed. The incident illustrates the worst side of the treatment that can be meted out to Scotland and also the difficulty of finding out the real source of oppressive decisions. If the Minister had no power to deal with the subject, why was the deputation not informed of this before setting out on so fruitless a journey? Is it really perverse of Scotsmen to want matters so intimately Scottish to be decided in Edinburgh, or does the perversity lie on the other side?

5. *Wheels within wheels*

As government intervenes more and more in every-day life, so the mechanism of administration becomes ever more complex. Scotland has to plead her cause, not merely with government Departments, but with other bodies centred in London. The most conspicuous of these we may perhaps call 'Corporations' – such as the British Broadcasting Corporation, British Railways,

British European Airways, the Coal Board, and so on. The fact that they are given different titles does not make the discussion of them any easier. Generally speaking, each is responsible to a government Minister; but they have a certain measure of independence, and their day-to-day working is commonly protected against questions in Parliament.

Apart from the increased possibility of 'passing the buck' – the occupational disease of civil servants – and the added difficulty of finding who is responsible for what, such a system tends to work against the interests of a country like Scotland, which has special problems in need of special solutions. Ministries are at least aware that too much neglect of Scottish claims may lead to political trouble. Corporations are less directly affected in this way, especially when they regard themselves, not as social services, but as enterprises for the making of profits. They sometimes seem, at least to a jaundiced eye, to prefer their own interests to those of Scotland. If they take special circumstances into account, it is to insist on Scotland paying higher charges than the rest of the country (as in the case of fuel). When Scotland enjoys natural advantages they may prevent her from reaping the full benefit.

We may take the Forestry Commission to illustrate this tendency, although it is a Corporation for which the Secretary of State for Scotland is supposed to have a joint responsibility. More than half the land to be afforested lies in Scotland, but the Commission's headquarters and its main research centres are kept resolutely in the South. When its headquarters were obliged to leave London, they moved no farther away than Basingstoke. The treatment of staff seems even more revealing. In 1955 the Professor of Forestry in Edinburgh wrote to the press saying that 'it seems to be the policy to send Scottish graduates to England and Wales and English and Welsh graduates to Scotland, irrespective of whether they are trained at a Scottish, Welsh, or English University'. In spite of demands for clarification no answer, so far as I know, has been given.

These Corporations perform so many functions that it is difficult to generalise about them, though they seldom fail to congratulate themselves on the many benefits they confer on

Scotland. Some of them, in the course of nationalisation, have taken over Scottish enterprises, and we may attempt a rough outline of what seems to happen in such cases (and also in take-over bids by large private businesses from the South). These Scottish enterprises, whether owned by private companies or by town-councils or by co-operative societies, usually have – or rather had – relatively larger reserves than corresponding enterprises in England. First of all, these reserves are swept over the Border to London, never to return; and protests are silenced by the familiar rebuke; 'Don't you realise, brother, that we must all learn to sacrifice ourselves in the interests of the wider whole?' When the take-over is complete, the staff is doubled, and two men are made to do the work that was efficiently done by one man before. Grandiose schemes are started at great expense with a flourish of trumpets and a lack of elementary caution. Then some genius in London discovers that the new branch office is no longer profitable. The formerly prosperous Scottish enterprise is closed down; the best of the workers are offered jobs in England; the less good become unemployed; and Scotland is deprived of necessary services – not to mention skilled men – which she can ill afford to lose.

You may say that this is a one-sided caricature; but there are more than enough happenings of this kind to make it a recognisable caricature.

Besides the Ministries (with their many Departments) and the Corporations responsible to them, there may also be intermediate organisations exercising control in Scotland. Let us take a comparatively simple example, though I cannot be sure of getting even this right. If the Scots consider an air-service inadequate, they have first to persuade British European Airways or some other line that they should fly an additional route. The Air Transport Licensing Board has to hear proposals from airlines wishing to fly particular routes, and must either accept or reject. There is an appeal to a Commissioner who advises the Board of Trade. The Minister can refuse to accept his advice, though in practice he seldom does so except where international routes (which may be the most important for Scottish business) are concerned. Thus a whole series of London

hurdles may have to be surmounted. It is hard to see why there should not be an independent Scottish airline which could do for Scotland what Aer Lingus does so successfully for Ireland.

One further point should be noted. There are also other organs of administration which we may call 'Consumers' Councils' (though they go by different names), and it looks as if these might enable the Scots to exercise some influence, at least on the 'regional' outposts of the London Ministries and Corporations. Such a hope would be in the main illusory. In the last resort – I have to speak very generally – the members of these Councils are themselves chosen by London; and their chairman may be partially silenced by being made a director on the board of the Corporation he is supposed to criticise.

There is yet one other device which can be used for the thwarting of Scottish influence on the administration. This is the 'Committee of Enquiry', as we may call it, though in its most august form it may be dubbed a Royal Commission as, for example, the Royal Commission on Scottish Affairs. The members of these Committees are chosen by the Government, and judicious selection may often, though not always, be able to secure whatever result is desired. Unwanted recommendations, and even undesired evidence, can be ruled out by carefully restricted terms of reference. If these devices do not wholly succeed, the enquiry itself takes a long enough time for outraged feelings to die down; and in any case its report can be pigeon-holed for consideration later. If some constructive enterprise is being examined, the delay may mean the dispersal of skilled staff and machinery, and so may make the project itself less profitable, and consequently more easy to condemn.

Besides all this elaborate machinery we have enjoyed since 1965 a supreme 'Overlord' – the Board of Incomes and Prices. However this may function in the future, it is in a position to ensure that Scottish workers – and even teachers – will never get higher remuneration or earlier increases than English ones. No doubt it could also do the reverse; but this would be a breach of the ordinary practice.

This vast structure of administration has not been devised in order to subjugate Scotland. On the contrary – apart from the

Secretary of State and the Scottish office – it has been imposed on Britain as a whole. What I am saying is that in fact it has given London an increasingly powerful strangle-hold on the life, including the economic life, of Scotland. No wonder that the Scot – if I may quote again from the report of the Royal Commission – begins to criticise 'what he regards, however erroneously, as the English government'.

It may be objected that since this new and vast machinery is applied to all parts of Britain, the more remote regions of England – that is, remote from London – might also be expected to suffer and complain. Why does all this outcry come from Scotland alone?

In actual fact the outlying regions of England – the North-East, the North-West, and even Cornwall – have suffered while London and the Midlands have grown ever more prosperous; and Lord Hailsham, now Mr. Quintin Hogg, was deputed to meet some of their complaints, at least in the North, by what was claimed to be an entirely new effort of 'regional planning'. But these regions have not enjoyed a long history of political independence, nor have they had, like Scotland, to battle against alien encroachments for centuries, both before and after the Union of the Crowns in 1603. History cannot be arbitrarily swept aside – least of all by English critics who attach so much importance to their own. Even geographically the situation in Scotland is very different from that in England and offers different problems to be solved. Besides, the myopic vision of the London official appears to descry the land very dimly north of Stratford-upon-Avon, while Scotland seems at times almost to be out of sight.

It may be added that in unofficial British or 'national' organisations, such as the Trade Unions or the corresponding bodies representing employers, or even the British Federation of University Women, claims from Scotland are apt to be received with disfavour. When the Government decided to transfer the headquarters of the Post Office Savings Bank to Glasgow, the Trade Union concerned, not only opposed the decision fiercely, but also threatened to expel a Scottish branch which refused to support the view of the English majority.

6. *The Royal Commission*

The terms of reference given in 1952 to the Royal Commission on Scottish Affairs were drawn up so as to exclude any discussion of self-government for Scotland. The only topic to be considered was 'administrative devolution'. Even under this head the working of the nationalised industries could not be examined, and there is nothing in the Report on the burning question of railways. 'Parliamentary devolution', as it was called, was expressly ruled out by the Secretary of State on the ground that this was a matter, not for a Commission, but for Parliament itself.

Here again we meet the assumption that a predominantly English Parliament can deal best with the future of Scotland if no attempt is made to discover and examine the opinions and desires of the Scottish people. The decision was particularly bitter because the Commission itself was set up after two million Scotsmen had signed the Covenant demanding 'a Parliament with adequate legislative authority in Scottish affairs'. Feeling at the time was running high, and it was generally believed, and only half-heartedly denied, that the Commission – like the earlier Catto Committee on Scottish Financial and Trade Statistics – was primarily a device to let this feeling die down and to postpone the problem indefinitely.

Within the limits of their remit the Commission did reasonably well. They claimed that unless there was conclusive evidence to the contrary, Scottish business should be disposed of in Scotland. When it had to be dealt with by English Ministers, these Ministers and their officials should recognise that Scotland is a nation and that she entered voluntarily into union with England as a partner and not as a dependency. Furthermore, Scotland's needs and point of view should be taken into account at all stages in the formulation and execution of policy, that is to say, when policy is being considered, when policy is decided, and when policy is announced. Effective arrangements should be made to ensure that Scotland's voice is heard at all these stages.

The principles laid down by the Commission are in themselves impeccable, but do they do more than express a pious

hope that quantities of oil may be poured into our creaking and top-heavy administrative machine? The very hope itself, if we are to trust past experience, would seem to be out of touch with reality. Only a very holy simplicity could expect over-burdened English Ministers and their officials to stop at every stage in their already difficult task in order to ascertain and weigh the peculiar needs of Scotland. It would seem so much more natural to let the Scots decide these matters for themselves.

7. *Northern Ireland*

That this would in many cases be possible is shown by the example of Northern Ireland, where a local Government and a local Parliament have privileges which Scotsmen can only envy. Ulster is neither a viable country nor one which had a long history of independence as a kingdom. Yet it was given these privileges with the utmost expedition because, as it seems to some Scotsmen, special English – or, if you prefer it, British – interests were at stake. Besides, although Ulstermen had a reasonable case (not unfamiliar to Scotsmen) against being dominated by a larger country to the south with different traditions, they had not let their case rest merely on rational arguments. They had loudly proclaimed that 'Ulster will fight, and Ulster will be right'.

There are eight Government Departments under the control of Ministers responsible to the Parliament of Northern Ireland. The mere fact that they are so responsible is a great advantage denied to Scotland. Furthermore, although some of the Departments perform functions similar to those exercised by the Scottish Office, there are others which have much more extensive powers. In particular, Northern Ireland has a Ministry of Commerce responsible for industry and trade inside its own territory. It has also a Ministry of Labour and National Insurance. The functions of these important Ministries are in Scotland controlled from London.

This topic was a delicate one for a Royal Commission narrowly restricted by its terms of reference. It could do little more than utter the platitude that these differences had their origin in past history. It also declared that in Scotland devolution was

exemplified by the presence of her Secretary of State in the British Cabinet – although manifestly the word ‘devolution’ is here being used in a totally different sense. Finally it referred in a gingerly way to the forbidden topic of Home Rule by mentioning what it called ‘a form of devolution more readily apparent’. If this were adopted, the Commission ‘felt’ – and ‘felt’ rather than ‘thought’ seems to be the appropriate word – that this would inevitably reduce the prestige and standing of Scotland and her representation in Parliament at Westminster, and would thereby weaken her voice in British and world affairs. Why this surprising result should be inevitable was not explained.

The burden laid on the unfortunate Secretary of State is indeed heavy. In addition to his other innumerable duties he should defend the special interests of Scotland in the British Cabinet wherever these may be involved – that is to say, in almost everything. We can picture his heroic efforts to do this in a body of Englishmen impatient to get on with business that is already beyond the capacity of finite human beings. If he is not to become an intolerable nuisance, he will have to select very carefully the questions that are of paramount importance to Scotland and let the rest go by default. If this system is to be regarded as a form of devolution, it must be admitted – to adopt the language of the Commission – that it is not a ‘readily apparent’ one.

The voice of Scotland should be heard loud and clear if she is to be worthy of her past. The voice of one man, however able and courageous, in the secret meetings of a British Cabinet can never be any kind of substitute.

8. *Local Government*

We are sometimes assured that the voice of Scotland requires no special organ: it is adequately heard in the instruments of local government, in town councils and other local authorities.

This is a strange suggestion: it puts forward one of those principles which no one would dream of applying to any other nation in the world, even the most primitive.

The local authorities contain some able, and a few supremely

able, men, but their official concern is with local, rather than national, interests. Even in local matters their powers are being steadily curtailed. Former functions have been taken over either by Government Departments or through newer agencies for gas, electricity, and so on. Other functions, such as housing and education, are shared with Government Departments from which the local authorities receive sums of money necessary to supplement the rates. So far from being able to criticise civil servants, it is civil servants who, quite properly, are able to criticise them – and even within limits to control them.

In any case what is badly needed is an elected national body which would be in a position to check and control the local authorities. To give one minor example, some local authorities are working havoc with the old stone houses of Scotland and replacing them with gimcrack erections which have no place in Scottish tradition and are doubtfully suited to the climate. They are said in these matters to take the advice of sanitary engineers; and the training of these gentlemen, at least in Scotland, does not commonly include a course in aesthetics. It has been widely alleged that some sanitary engineers are so hostile to traditional buildings that they prefer to drive roads precisely where this gives them an excuse for pulling down a row of stone cottages which could easily be remodelled at very little expense. This seems to be part of the campaign to iron out local differences and make every place look like every other. Every day we seem to hear of some old building being destroyed in the name of progress, and it is melancholy that such decisions should be in the hands of local authorities without any further appeal. We have not so many treasures in Scotland that we can afford to lose them.

So far from being substitutes for a Scottish Parliament, local authorities need to be supplemented by such a Parliament if they are to work in the interests of Scotland as a whole.

9. *Lamp-posts in Ecclefechan*

It may be replied that Scotland has her own representatives in the British Parliament and so should be able to deal efficiently with the vagaries of local authorities and of any other authorities

alleged to work against the interests of Scotland as a whole. Is it not precisely the function of question-time in Parliament to deal with matters such as these?

The members for Scottish constituencies try their best to make use of these opportunities, which occur, I believe, as often as one day in six weeks; but what they do in this way is not welcomed enthusiastically by the House of Commons. Some years ago the Speaker himself protested against the number of their questions, and in this respect contrasted Scotland unfavourably with – you will have guessed it – Yorkshire. More recently Mr Emanuel Shinwell, to the delight of many English members, chided the Scots for their parochialism and expressed contempt for questions dealing with ‘the construction of a lamp-post in Auchtermuchty or Ecclefechan’. But this alleged parochialism, however irritating, does not spring from any innate petty-mindedness in Scotsmen as such. It arises because they are deprived of any suitable body in which necessary questions about the administration of Scotland can appropriately be asked.

Scotsmen are put in such a position that they can get their special problems considered only by making themselves unpleasant, and this leads to what may be called government by snarls. Then their procedure is condemned as unreasonable. They have been charged, for example, on the B.B.C. with what was elegantly called ‘griping’ – a recent addition to our polite vocabulary. But what is the alternative? The gentleman who brought these charges told Scotsmen that instead of this they should get to know the right people and work behind the scenes. Apart from the fact that back-stairs intrigue is alien to the Scottish temper, this is a strange substitute for open and responsible government.

10. *The fundamental complaint*

Although something has been said here of the economic evils from which Scotland suffers under the present dispensation, it should not be thought that these are the only, or even the main, source of dissatisfaction. In the few discussions of Home Rule

permitted by the B.B.C. in Scotland, the opponents of self-government have sometimes contrived to give the impression that it is all a matter of pounds, shillings, and pence. As a result we had to listen to tedious and inconclusive arguments showing that if a change were made, a sixpence might be lost here but would be gained there, and so on indefinitely. This reduces the whole subject to a farce. Even in their most depressed state few Scotsmen can believe that they would manage their own affairs less economically and efficiently than is done by the present system of remote control; but the question is one that goes much deeper. The fundamental complaint is that Scotland is being insidiously deprived of all control over her own destiny. The spiritual effects of this may be more disastrous than the economic ones.