

**Examining Scottish nation-building as  
trajectory: The role of welfare and shared  
values in the national discourses of  
Labour and the Scottish National Party  
1967-2014**

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## **Abstract**

This study examines a trajectory of the national discourses of Labour and the Scottish National Party (SNP), with reference to significant events during the course of contemporary Scottish politics, including the failed devolution referendum and election of a Conservative Government which sought to ‘shrink’ the welfare state in 1979; the establishment of a Scottish Parliament in 1999; the election of an SNP minority administration and then a majority Government in 2007 and in 2011, respectively; and the Scottish independence referendum in 2014. In doing so, it traces the development of nation-building over a period of nearly 50 years in Scotland. A nation-building battle between Labour and the SNP is uncovered, and the nature of that battle is examined in detail.

The argument presented is that Labour and the SNP based their nation-building strategies on arguments around welfare and social justice, and that they used their national discourses to construct narratives about which constitutional options best suited Scotland. The study portrays how, over time, the SNP outmanoeuvred Labour on the left of Scottish politics, and how their social democratic discourse supplemented their arguments for independence based on representation and the democratic right of nations to have independent statehood. Labour used its national discourse to challenge the nationalism of the SNP and the idea of independence; but also to reinforce the legitimacy of the UK state’s role in Scotland.

It is portrayed how the national discourses of Labour and the SNP were, in several respects, characterised by discursive continuity, from the late 1960s until the 2014 independence referendum. This reinforces the idea that nationalism and nation-building are remarkably consistent. However, nationalism is opportunistic, and this study portrays how major political events in Scotland have presented new challenges and opportunities to two different – but in many ways similar – Scottish nation-building strategies.

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# Chapter one

## Introduction

This study examines the nation-building strategies of Labour and the Scottish National Party (SNP) from 1967 until the Scottish independence referendum, which took place on 18 September 2014. It traces the development and maintenance of political discourse over time, in order to reveal the ideological nature of nation-building in Scotland. An important aspect of nation-building in Scotland is that two major political parties—Labour and the SNP—both claimed to be supportive of the welfare state and egalitarianism in Scotland, yet they offered alternative visions of state welfare, equality, fairness, solidarity and social justice within the UK (Labour), and in an independent Scotland (the SNP), respectively. These signifiers were articulated as ‘shared values’, and the meaning of such signifiers was contested, making them ‘essentially contested concepts’ (Gallie, 1956: 167–168). They were used by both parties to create a sense of nationhood—a social community.

According to Frederik Barth (1969), the social processes of exclusion and incorporation maintain discrete categories, despite the alteration of participation and membership over the course of individual life histories, and cultural differences can persist despite inter-ethnic contact and interdependence. This means that boundaries can persist despite the flow of people across them, and that an absence of mobility, contact and information is not necessarily required to make categorical ethnic distinctions (1969: 10), thus indicating that nationalists must find other ways to socially construct identity.

Therefore, in order to build and maintain support for their constitutional preferences, Labour and the SNP subtly constructed their own conceptions of the Scottish ‘nation’ not on ethnic lines, but by presenting slightly different versions of welfare. This helped to establish a nation-building competition in Scotland, which is the central investigation of this study. Indeed, according to Mooney and Scott (2016), arguments around welfare became important in Scotland’s constitutional debate, and filtered into the debate on Scottish independence.

To aid the study, the concept of 'political frontiers' is employed, enabling the researcher to investigate how Labour and the SNP discursively individuated identity and organised political space in order to establish and maintain competing identities, and to organise that system into support for their political causes. A trajectory of national discourse is examined in order to highlight how nation-building in Scotland changed over time, and what the implications of that were for Scottish politics.

### **An introduction to nationalism and nation-building**

Nationalism and the 'nation' are integral to our understanding of nation-building. According to Anthony D. Smith, nationalism is 'An ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity for a population which some of its members deem to constitute an actual or potential "nation"' (2001: 9). Therefore, nationalism is a way of thinking, or ideological consciousness, where nations, national identities, and national homelands appear as natural (Billig, 1995: 10). It can be considered a doctrine, whereby 'the people' within a nation believe that they are distinctive through shared culture, history, institutions, religion, or principles (Deutsch, 1954). Nationalism's aim is therefore to ensure that 'the people' are in charge of their 'collective destiny', which includes protecting the identity and the dignity of the people as a nation, and the maintenance of national unity. This is thought to be best achieved through a government in the nation's 'own state' (Harris, 2009: 4–5). Thus, the nation is an inherent focus of nationalism as an ideology.

In his seminal work, Benedict Anderson defines the nation as an 'imagined political community' (1983). The nation aspires for self-rule under a political system that expresses and reinforces their distinct characteristics. Nations, which are often defined as sets of people or tribes, are socially constructed, making it quite unclear who is included in 'the nation' and who is excluded (Kersting, 2011: 1645). For Smith, the nation is 'a named human community occupying a homeland, and having common myths and a shared history, a common public culture, a single economy and common rights and duties for all members'. The nation cannot be described as a state nor is it an ethnic community (Smith, 2001: 12–13).

Nation-building, then, is an ideological construct (Brown, 2000). It is a process of constructing a social community within a nation-state. Contemporary nationalists—who can take the form of parties, movements and states—attempt to assert power in

a particular territory in order to form a 'collective identity'. Existing institutions, customs and traditions are all important, as political actors attempt to redefine national characteristics. Nation-building is 'based mostly on values and beliefs that enhance support for and the legitimacy of the (new) state' (Kersting: 2011: 1645).

Early work on nation-building focused on the process of 'constructing identification with and uniting previously disparate communities, in newly independent states'. (Mitchell, 2014: 1). The process of decolonisation caused new states to emerge, but identification by the citizens in these new states was not present (ibid). Nation-building states, such as France, used institutions including education, the military, and administrative processes to create unitary state machinery, but to also establish a common sense of identity. However, the British state had a more pluralistic approach, allowing institutions such as the Church, the law, the education system and local government structures to remain in Scotland. This helped to sustain a sense of Scottish national identity, by maintaining a shared sense of national belonging, which produced a Scottish perspective on economic and social issues (Keating, 2009: 8).

Therefore, nation-building is the process whereby a common sense of identity is constructed, and institutions are presented as symbols of what binds citizens together within the state. This study expands on that, by arguing that discourse is used by political actors in order to enhance the nation-building process, and that welfare state institutions in particular—such as the National Health Service—were used as symbols by Labour and the SNP to supplement their nation-building projects.

The welfare state predominantly focuses on the production and distribution of social policies intended to provide social protection to its citizens (Esping-Anderson, 1990: 1). This is delivered by Government through public services (Ferrera, 2011: 2747), but also through welfare benefits (Van Kersbergen and Vis, 2014: 3). All welfare states have the common goal of eradicating poverty (Ringen, 1987: 141). In theory, if a strong welfare state is to be universally accepted, there must be an acceptance amongst citizens that they belong together in a community. This would mean an acceptance of the idea that they shared fate with one another, resulting in a universal moral obligation to others within the nation that goes beyond 'mere

humanitarianism' (Johnston, Banting, Kymlicka and Sokora, 2010: 349, 2010: 352). This indicates that welfare can be used to socially construct a sense of collective identity—the key goal of nationalist movements.

Nicola McEwen takes this idea further, arguing, 'welfare state institutions may serve a symbolic purpose in the politics of nation-building, generating national symbols of solidarity and mutual belonging which can resonate across regional as well as class boundaries' (McEwen, 2006: 16). Furthermore, shared values can help to understand what defines a group of people, and in Scotland, this applies to the values of social justice and egalitarianism (Henderson and McEwen, 2005: 176 and 183). This project takes those statements into account, and builds on them by portraying how discourse on the welfare state and shared values such as 'social justice' (i.e., the fair distribution of the resources of society through income<sup>1</sup>) and egalitarian commitments to fairness and equality, filtered into the broader nation-building strategies of Labour and the SNP over a trajectory of nearly 50 years. It should be noted, however, that welfare is contestable as a concept in the Gallian (1956) sense.

Nation-building can be complemented by effective state apparatus. This makes state-building worthy of consideration in this study of nation-building. Over time, state-building has moved from a focus on the formation of military states to the formation of welfare states i.e. the building of welfare state institutions (Flora, 1999). Contemporary state building is the focus on building state capacity, and the notion of good governance is central (Zartman, 2001: 2506). Significantly, Arnott and Ogza (2008) argue that one way to socially construct a national community is to confer particular meanings and attitudes onto social and public policy through discourse. By constantly comparing a national education system, for example, to other national education systems, political actors can reinforce or challenge national practices in a way that constructs a national community (ibid). A section on social policy and nation-building can be found in Chapter Three.

Therefore, welfare states—which are based upon the institutions of social and public policy and public services—are important in the consideration of state-building, and

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<sup>1</sup> Rawls discussed the idea of a fair distribution of the resources of society through income in Rawls, J. (1971). 'A Theory of Justice', Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA.

indeed nation-building. And as Henderson and McEwen (2006) indicate, ‘welfare state institutions’ have a role to play in nation-building projects. It is argued here that in the period after the SNP formed a minority administration in 2007, they compared social and public policy in Scotland, through political discourse, inward to the social and public policy of the UK Government, and outward to that of other small nations (mostly in Northern Europe). The intention was to present Scotland as a ‘potentially independent social democracy’ (Arnott and Ogza, 2008). This actually extended to the economy and to spending on public services, which also has implications for the welfare state and nation-building, as this project highlights.

### **Contemporary nationalism in Scotland: A brief introduction**

The 2014 Scottish independence referendum did not happen by accident. It was, rather, the result of nation-building over a period of nearly 50 years. In that sense, nation-building in Scotland can be viewed as a trajectory. The independence referendum is one, highly significant part of that trajectory (amongst other significant events<sup>2</sup>), and it was characterised by two antithetic visions: ‘Scotland’s destiny’ as an independent country and the shared achievements of the constituent parts of the UK as evidence of what Scotland could achieve within the Union. Those visions did not come by accident either—they were part of long term, alternative nation-building strategies by the SNP and Labour, on which this study has a particular focus.

Contemporary Scottish nationalism drove the idea that independent statehood was the ‘destiny’ of the Scottish nation during the independence referendum, and its roots are found early in the second half of the 20th century. The idea that Scotland had its own, distinct nation helped to maintain a perception that Scots were different, and that they required independent statehood, in the late 1950s. Indeed, for more than half a century, commentators such as J. M. Reid had questioned how a country like Scotland, which was at least to some extent a nation, could survive without being in any sense a state (Mitchell, 2014: 1). It was not the quixotic and divided home rule movement that kept Scottish home rule alive. Rather, it was an intrinsic feeling that Scotland was a distinct nation. Although no widespread support for a Scottish

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<sup>2</sup> There were other significant events on the trajectory, including the failed devolution referendum and election of a Conservative Government which sought to ‘shrink’ the welfare state in 1979; the establishment of a Scottish Parliament in 1999; and the election of an SNP minority administration and then a majority Government in 2007 and in 2011, respectively. The election of a Conservative-led coalition Government in 2010 is also significant.

Parliament existed during the 1950s and 1960s, the idea that Scotland should be recognised as a nation did have extensive support (ibid: 112).

During the latter half of the 20th century, the SNP was often divided on the *raison d'être* of independence, as well as how quickly independence should be achieved. Two tensions emerged. The first tension was between fundamentalists who wanted independence as quickly as possible, and gradualists who believed that a more pragmatic approach should be taken over time, which included the acceptance of legislative devolution as a step towards independence. The election of Alex Salmond in 1990 was significant in taking the SNP towards a gradualist approach (Lynch, 2013).

The second tension saw competition between those who sought independence on cultural grounds and the idea that the Scottish nation must have an independent state in order to flourish; and those who championed independence in order to deliver social justice and to protect public services. This was a significant battle, which, over time, was won by those who presented independence as a means to deliver social justice and strong public services. This supplements Linda Colley's argument that the rise of Scottish Nationalism was not as important as the type of Scottish Nationalism that arose (2014: 93). It is argued here that this was a form of Scottish Nationalism that fused national identity with ideology and shared values—an important development over time.

In particular, the modern SNP has articulated state welfare, and egalitarian principles such as social justice, fairness and equality together in its national discourse, as shared values. Within pro-independence discourse, this manifested itself within the discursive construct, the 'people of Scotland', and the concept of the sovereignty of the Scottish people, which has been present in SNP thinking throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. The SNP's nation-building strategy depended on the idea that certain values were inherently Scottish, and were thus shared by a social community—'the Scottish people'. This study highlights how this type of contemporary Scottish nationalism was formed, through the examination of the SNP's nation-building discourse over the course of nearly 50 years.

However, it would be inattentive for this study to focus only upon the Scottish nationalism of the SNP. Labour, too, presented of a form of nationalism, where

British citizenship was reinforced by the idea that the construction of the welfare state was a British endeavour, where each citizen contributed to the well-being of one another, including pensioners, the disabled, and those who are ill (McEwen, 2006: 171–172). This is what Michael Keating (2010) refers to as ‘welfare Unionism’. Whereas the SNP’s nation-building strategy relied on the negation of a constructed version of British identity (which depended upon the British Parliament and the pro-Union parties being treated and presented as ‘others’), Labour’s nation-building strategy depended on the construction of Scottish identity and British identity as mutually reinforcing—and Home Rule, specifically devolution, was central to that.

Devolution was presented by Labour as a means to give Scots a say in the matters that were closest to them—especially on public and social policy, and public services—in order to negate the nationalism of the SNP, and to reinforce the idea that Scotland was best served inside the UK (Lynch, 2013; Mooney, Scott and Williams, 2006). It is no accident that when devolution came to Scotland, many of the policy areas that were transferred were welfare specific. In short, the Scottish Parliament was able to take decisions on some aspects of the welfare state, such as education, health, and housing (Mooney and Wright, 2009). The ‘other’, in Labour’s case, was the SNP and a constructed version of Scottish nationalism. This version of Scottish nationalism was based on the articulation of a division of people in the UK, especially the working people of Scotland and the working people of rest of the UK. Independence was continuously negated by Labour, and this project portrays how Labour utilised political discourse to do this over a long period—something that adds to the originality of this project.

### **Outlining the scope of the study**

This project understands nation-building to be an ideological pursuit, given its grounding in nationalism as an ideology. As has been established, within nation-building, developing state welfare and values relating to it such as ‘social justice’ can help to nurture state consent and establish the bond of citizens to others within a national community. That idea is central to this study. In Scotland, state welfare and shared values were at the heart of the nation-building strategies of Labour and the SNP, and this was reflected in their national discourse. This is an interesting dynamic, and it raises the following question: how did Labour and the SNP construct

nation-building strategies based on state welfare and shared values, while maintaining separate nation-building agendas? That question informs the central research question: what role did articulations of state welfare and shared values play in the nation-building strategies of the Labour Party and the Scottish National Party 1967–2014?

Therefore, this study examines how the nation-building strategies of Labour and the SNP were ideologically informed by state welfare and shared values, and it takes into account the divergent goals of those nation-building strategies. This project also accounts for significant developments in contemporary Scottish nation-building, making it important to approach the object of analysis as a trajectory. By pinpointing significant moments in Scottish politics, one can discuss how this created new opportunities and challenges to the nation-building strategies of Labour and the SNP. This project seeks to shed light on how Labour and the SNP used political discourse in order to capitalise on new opportunities, and expose the challenges to their rival. This is an original and unique approach.

It is essential to establish, at an early stage, which events are considered by this study as the most important for examination along the trajectory of Scottish politics. They include the failed devolution referendum and election of a Conservative Government which sought to ‘shrink’ the welfare state in 1979; the establishment of a Scottish Parliament in 1999; the election of an SNP minority administration and then a majority government in 2007 and in 2011, respectively. The election of a Conservative-led coalition government in 2010 is also treated as significant. This is all helpful to bear in mind during Chapters 4–7, when an original analysis is undertaken. What follows below is a brief synopsis of these events, and how they relate to one another as sequential steps, culminating in the independence referendum in 2014.

During the 1960s, and after a General Election victory by Labour in 1964, a period of disillusionment followed that sparked discussion about the prospect of legislative devolution. This was fuelled by rising unemployment, and regional economic disparities between Scotland and more prosperous parts of the UK, with Scotland being treated as an undifferentiated ‘region’ (Pittock: 2008: 18). Additionally, the devaluation of the pound in 1967 raised question marks over Britain’s economic

credibility, and in the same year, the British Army withdrew its influence 'east of Suez'. The latter was symbolic of British Imperial decline, and even the end of the British Empire, according to Pittock (2008).

Then, in November 1967, the SNP overturned a Labour majority, as its candidate, Winnie Ewing, won the Hamilton by-election. The SNP's Welsh counterpart Plaid Cymru had won a by-election at Labour's expense the year before. Winnie Ewing's victory, the first in a Westminster election since the SNP's first seat was won in 1945 (Lynch, 2013: 121), was, and still is, highly significant. It reminded Scots that the SNP could be electorally relevant. Bochel, Denver and Macartney (1981) also treat the late 1960s as a significant period in Scottish politics because of the (re)emergence of Scottish nationalism. The relative success of the 'nationalist' parties led the Labour Government in 1969 to set up a commission, to look at the possibility of legislative devolution. The commission became known as the 'Kilbrandon Commission' after Charles J. D. Shaw, Lord Kilbrandon, who led the commission after the death of his predecessor, Geoffrey Crowther, Lord Crowther, and it produced a report supportive of legislative devolution (*ibid*). This gave the idea of devolution fresh credence. However, Scotland voted 'no' to devolution in the referendum of 1979, and it must be noted that the pro-Assembly campaign was divided along party lines (particularly between Labour and the SNP), and even within the Labour Party itself (Lynch, 2013; MacWhirter, 2014).

The 1980s was a period of further economic decline in Scotland, and the disparities that were first felt in the 1960s between Scotland and South East England were exacerbated by the decline of the manufacturing industry under consecutive Conservative Governments. Indeed, Margaret Thatcher's Governments (1979–1990) focused more on finance capital, at the expense of manufacturing. This approach, as James Mitchell has highlighted, impacted upon Scotland more heavily, due to its greater dependence on manufacturing industries. The job losses that came with this, coupled with a perception that Thatcherism was a market ideology, united many Scots against Thatcher and the Conservative Party (Mitchell, 2014: 209). The election of Thatcher's Conservatives in 1979 was a significant moment on the trajectory of Scottish politics, and it had a significant impact on the constitutional debate.

During the 1980s, many Scots felt that Thatcher's Government had been treating them unfairly and it is plausible to suggest that the Conservative brand was seen as toxic by them. As Mitchell indicates, the Scottish experience of Thatcherism led many Scots to know what they did not want from the state. Anti-Thatcherism came to represent a form of nationalism because, as Mitchell identifies, an 'imagined community' was formed, which understood Thatcherism to be in conflict with Scottish interests (ibid: 214). Political parties in Scotland—particularly the SNP and Labour—presented the Conservative party as 'anti-Scottish', in an attempt to build a case for self-government, but also to build electoral support (Lynch, 2013). This all helped to reinforce the idea that Scotland had its own nation—and a hard done by one at that.

Consistent with James Mitchell's theory that Thatcherism helped to build a case for self-government, this study argues that the policies, ideology and discourse of Margaret Thatcher's Conservatives had an important role in convincing Labour and SNP leaderships that political strategies based on arguments around state welfare and shared values would help to build support for a Scottish Parliament. The presentation of the Conservative Party as antithetic to Scottish values, it is argued, continued beyond the devolution referendum in 1997. This was a key aspect of the SNP's nation-building strategy after the formation of a Conservative-led coalition Government in 2010, and during the independence referendum campaign, in particular. The arguments presented here are examined in greater detail, throughout this study, in order to 'flesh out' the significance of 'Thatcherism' on nation-building discourse in Scotland.

In 1997, the Scottish electorate voted in a referendum on whether to have a Scottish Parliament. Home Rulers were successful, and a Scottish Parliament was established in 1999. It is argued here that the establishment of the Scottish Parliament was significant because it presented new nation-building opportunities for Labour and the SNP, as indicated by Mooney et al (2006) and Cook (2012). Labour used the Scottish Parliament to build on the idea that devolution was 'the settled will of the Scottish people' (Smith in BBC, 1999) by presenting it as the best constitutional option for Scotland (ahead of federalism or independence). This was done, as portrayed in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, by highlighting the 'achievements' of consecutive Labour-led Scottish Executives (Labour was in coalition with the Liberal democrats during two periods: 1999–2003 and 2003–2007). At the same time, the

SNP used its time in opposition (1999–2007) to present the idea that independence was required, by highlighting the perceived shortcomings of the Scottish Parliament (Hassan, 2009; Lynch, 2013). This was done by attacking the Labour-led administrations.

However, the SNP won the 2007 Scottish Parliament election to form a minority administration, and at the 2011 Scottish Parliament election, the party built on its success by winning 69 out of 129 seats, thus gaining a majority—something that the Parliament was designed to prevent (Lynch, 2013). This was significant, and it resulted in a ‘role reversal’ between Labour and the SNP. Labour attacked consecutive SNP administrations in order to highlight perceived weaknesses in the SNP’s independence strategy. The SNP used its time in administration to highlight the limitations of the Scottish Parliament, but also created public and social policy designed to demonstrate what a small, independent Scotland could look like. These battles are a significant part of the trajectory of Scottish nation-building, and they are examined more closely in Chapters 5–7.

Furthermore, it is argued here that the election of a Conservative-led coalition Government in 2010, and its attitudes and policies, allowed the SNP to construct a renewed form of anti-Conservative discourse. This was based on opposing Conservative ‘austerity’, and it was designed to make the SNP and independence appear more credible as social democratic alternatives to the economic and social policies of the Conservative-led Government. The perceived lack of opposition to Conservative welfare reform by Labour also gave the SNP an opportunity to present Labour as a ‘pro-austerity’ party, along with the Conservatives (for a recent example of this, see Khomami, 2015).

The election of an SNP majority in 2011 was, in itself, a significant moment. The SNP’s goal since 1998 was to hold an independence referendum, and a Parliamentary majority made it easier to design a referendum bill, but also to ensure that the Scottish Parliament supported it. Following negotiations with the UK Government, plans were set out to hold a referendum to the question ‘Should Scotland be an independent country?’ Both pro-independence and pro-Union campaigners set up respective campaigning organisations—‘Yes Scotland’ in favour of independence and ‘Better Together’ in favour of maintaining Scotland’s place in

the United Kingdom. Each acted as umbrella organisations for pro-independence and pro-Union parties and organisations, establishing their own offices, funding streams and grassroots networks (Adamson and Lynch, 2013: 1).

Significantly, Labour and the SNP were heavily active in Better Together (Labour) and Yes Scotland (SNP) during the long independence referendum campaign, which officially began in summer 2012. The independence referendum represented opportunities and challenges for both parties. For Labour, the prospect of independence was a threat, but it also gave them the opportunity to reinforce the position of devolution. It was the reverse for the SNP, as the prospect of independence was viewed as an opportunity, whereas the party was presented with the challenge of presenting coherent rationale for rejecting devolution within the UK.

Each party approached those opportunities and challenges by continuing to compete over concepts synonymous with social democracy, including social justice, equality, fairness, the NHS, and the welfare state in a nation-building battle. Discourse focusing on public and social policy, and institutions, played a major part in that competition, as Labour and the SNP sought to circumvent one another's claims on whether devolution within the UK, or independence, could best deliver social democracy and the protection of public services, including the NHS. This will be examined in greater detail throughout Chapter Seven.

### **The role of discourse analysis as methodology**

In order to address the research question, discourse analysis is undertaken throughout this study. There are different approaches within the broad field of discourse analysis, but this study utilises a different approach to the technical school of discourse analysis, which narrowly views discourse as speech or text. The form of discourse analysis undertaken here applies discourse theory to empirical case studies. Such an approach is not a new one. It follows the style of discourse analysis that was developed by the Essex programme. That programme sought to provide a new way to understanding how social systems are created and reproduced, and its approach is used to examine key political issues.

The Essex Programme developed an approach which could examine nationalist ideologies, the political construction of social identities (including national identities),

social movements, or the 'forms of hegemonic struggle'. This necessitated a focus on identity formation, production of ideology, the logics of social movements, and the structuring of societies through social imaginaries (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000: 1–2), that is, the set of values, institutions, laws and symbols that are particular to a social group and the corresponding society to which people gain an understanding of their social complexion. Charles Taylor defines the social imaginary as not a set of ideas, but rather what enables the 'practices of society', by making sense of such practices (2002: 91). Our understanding of the nation-building strategies of Labour and the SNP can be enhanced by examining their discursive nature. Specifically, discourse analysis can be utilised to examine the ways that Labour and the SNP undertook identity formation and structured society by referencing values and institutions—'social justice' and the NHS, for instance—to construct and reinforce their nation-building projects. Such examination can account for a 'hegemonic struggle' between the parties, as new opportunities and challenges were presented.

Within the Essex approach, there are two key concepts that this study draws heavily upon: 'articulation' and 'political frontiers'. By 'articulation', one refers to the process by which identity emerges, or is altered through the establishment of relations between signifying elements. This process has been important during Scotland's long constitutional debate, because Labour and the SNP continually articulated and rearticulated the meaning of various signifiers such as 'social justice' and 'welfare', and the relationships between them, in order to establish and maintain hegemonic order.

'Political frontiers' aid this process. 'Political frontiers' operate within political discourse to construct identity and organise political space through logics of equivalence and difference. Logics of difference aim to reduce the antagonistic potential of remaining, excluded groups in society, so that the hegemonic bloc may be expanded (Norval: 220). This process can create 'subject positions', which citizens, for example, can identify with, allowing them to feel part of a particular group in society (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000: 2–3). This is useful in gaining public support for a political cause, and political parties may use chains of equivalence i.e. sets of carefully selected signifiers, in order to expand the hegemonic bloc, to gain more support for a political cause. A 'subject position' may

be added to national discourse, therefore, in order to expand support for a 'national pursuit', such as independence.

Chains of equivalence can have either a positive or negative value. For example, Labour used the signifiers 'Westminster', 'the welfare state', 'Scotland' and 'Union' together in a positive chain of equivalence, in order to give the relationship between those signifiers a positive value. The SNP, on the other hand, used the same or similar signifiers, but in a negative chain of equivalence, in order to confer negativity onto the role of Westminster in its control over reserved aspects of the welfare state in Scotland, for example. This discursive battle is examined across a trajectory in Scottish politics, which has allowed the researcher to compare and contrast nation-building discourse over a long timeframe, leading up to the independence referendum in 2014.

Two further ideas can be introduced at this point: genealogy and deconstruction. Each idea is useful in order to further explain the form of analysis undertaken in this study. A genealogical approach indicates that the construction of Labour and SNP nation-building discourse can be studied partly as genesis, where dislocation, caused by events or successions of events, has allowed new discourses to emerge and compete within political parties, and between political parties. Thus, the central goal of genealogical analysis is to portray how what is considered to be unitary is actually fragmented (Norval, 1993: 58), and beyond that, it is necessary to historicise how 'contingent processes and struggles' (ibid: 61) operated to produce fresh discourse within political parties and beyond—with a range of new or existing signifiers—that allowed political actors to not only define new problems, but to present solutions to those problems.

It is argued here that the perceived neoliberal attitudes and policies of Thatcherism had a dislocatory impact in Scotland upon both Labour and SNP discourse. What that means for the object of this study is that a genealogical analysis (in the Foucauldian sense) can be undertaken in order to display how dislocation created an identity 'crisis' in Labour and the SNP during the late 1960s and 1970s, how verbal and non-verbal practices operated to form hegemonic discourses within Labour and the SNP, and then how those discourses competed for hegemony against one

another within the context of Scotland's constitutional debate. This can be extended to the other significant events that have been highlighted in this study thus far.

However, the genealogical approach is only one aspect to the analysis undertaken here. Another important aspect to the analysis is the deconstruction of Labour's and the SNP's political discourse. Essential to this is the concept of political frontiers, which as indicated, can shed light on how Labour and the SNP attempted to establish hegemony on Scotland's constitutional status since the late 1960s. Political frontiers can allow the researcher to map out—certainly in this case—how nation-building discourse and ideological discourse overlapped in order to dilute differences in society, and broaden hegemonic blocs in order to expand support for the Union and independence respectively. So, political frontiers define what constitutes an identity, but furthermore, they define what an identity does not consist of, by defining what an identity is opposed to, that is, a set of 'others' (Norval, 2000: 222). This is an important consideration throughout this analysis.

### **The parties: why Labour and the SNP?**

The SNP was formed in 1934, as a result of a merger between the National Party of Scotland (founded in 1928), and the Scottish Party (formed in 1932). The National Party of Scotland was born out of disillusionment with the political establishment—especially with Labour—after a series of Home Rule bills failed, during the 1920s. The Scottish Party, on the other hand, was set up by more moderate Scottish nationalists as an alternative nationalist party to the National Party of Scotland, which was seen as separatist and too left-wing (Mitchell, Bennie and Johns, 2012: 12). The Labour Party was established earlier than the SNP, in 1900, and had grown out of the Trade Union movement and various socialist political parties. This came at a time of expanding state activity (Jones and Keating, 1985: 27).

This study focuses on analysing the political discourse of Labour and the SNP. The reasons for this are logical. Firstly, Labour and the SNP have, between them, consistently been the two parties in Scotland with the greatest support and electoral success in the latter half of the 20th century. In the 1960s, Labour replaced the Conservative Party as the 'national party' of Scotland, as Iain Macwhirter has indicated (2014: 20), and although the SNP had 'barely registered in general elections until the 1970s', the party first won a Scottish Parliament election in 2007,

and then won a landslide majority in 2011. That majority was a turning point in Scottish politics and had sent a message to Westminster that it could no longer ignore the SNP's demands for a Scottish independence referendum (Macwhirter, 2014).

Secondly, both parties have claimed that they are social democratic parties, which place social justice, fairness, equality and protecting the NHS and public services at the heart of their political missions. However, they are on opposite sides of the fence in Scotland's constitutional debate, with Labour being traditionally pro-Union, whereas the SNP has been consistently pro-independence, in-keeping with its *raison d'être*. This has made for a fascinating discursive battle between the two parties, as each has sought to present the United Kingdom and Scottish independence, respectively, as mechanisms by which social justice, fairness, equality, prosperity, strong public services and a strong NHS could be delivered in Scotland. Therefore, the articulation of state welfare shared values has been essential in how Labour and the SNP have designed their nation-building discourse.

Of course, the roles of the Conservative Party, the Liberal Democrats, the Scottish Greens, the Scottish Socialist Party or United Kingdom Independence Party are not inconsequential when discussing constitutional discourses in Scotland, and the impact of Conservative actions in government, in particular, will be discussed where relevant. However, for the purpose of a clearly defined and manageable case study on Scottish constitutional and nation-building discourse *vis-à-vis* welfare, it is more fruitful to examine the political discourse of Labour and the SNP. This is because the parties were competing with one another for left-inclined or 'left-thinking' voters, unlike each party's relationship with the Conservatives in Scotland, a party that has a very different political outlook from both Labour and the SNP. Or at least, both Labour and the SNP have preferred to discursively construct their differences to the Conservatives, for electoral and constitutional gains. This, of course, was an added dynamic to the long Scottish constitutional debate.

## **A structural outline**

This thesis has eight chapters. Beyond this introductory chapter, therefore, there are seven other chapters to explain within the structure of this project. Chapter Two focuses on outlining the selected methodology for the research project, and

explaining the reasons for choosing to undertake a discourse analysis rooted in political discourse theory, using a specific set of concepts and methods. Chapter Three is a literature review, which discusses and examines material on the welfare state in Europe and in Britain; on the contestability of 'welfare' as a concept; and on the role of state welfare and shared values in constructing a conception of 'the nation'.

Chapters Four to Seven consist of the original analysis undertaken by this research project. The structure for those chapters is chronological, and this is appropriate due to the project's intention to analyse the trajectory of Scottish constitutional discourse over time—specifically, from the late 1960s (for reasons explained above) until the 2014 independence referendum. Chapter Four covers the period from the late 1960s to September 1997, when Scotland voted in favour of establishing a devolved Parliament after a devolution referendum in 1997. Chapter Five accounts for Scottish constitutional discourse from the beginning of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 to 2007, the year during which Labour lost power in Scotland, to be replaced by an SNP minority Government. Chapter Six covers the period consisting of the SNP's first term as the Scottish administration, from 2007 to 2011.

Finally, Chapter Seven explores Scottish constitutional discourse over the period from May 2011 to the independence referendum in 2014, a period when the SNP commanded an historic majority in the Scottish Parliament from 2011, and achieved a referendum on Scottish independence. An analysis of political discourse during the long independence referendum campaign will be undertaken in chapter seven. Chapter Eight is a concluding chapter, which summarises the major findings of the research project and discusses the wider implications of those findings. Comparisons will be drawn after having examined the trajectory of nation-building discourse in Scotland.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has summarised the key elements of this research project, including the topic and its parameters, the chosen approach and research methods, and a structural outline. It has been established that discourse analysis, rooted in political discourse theory, is the chosen method of analysis, and that the research question asks how Labour and the SNP used arguments around state welfare and egalitarian

shared values as an important component of their nation-building strategies during the period 1967–2014. It has been conveyed that this project is original, because it examines a trajectory in nation-building discourse in Scotland, vis-à-vis welfare. This sheds light on the ideological nature of nation-building in Scotland over a long timeframe. The project now turns to a chapter outlining the theory and methodology adopted throughout this study.

## **Chapter two**

### **Discourse analysis: A theoretical and methodological outline**

The concepts guiding this research, including the framing of the research question as well as the selection of relevant primary sources, are drawn primarily, though not exclusively so, from political discourse theory. This is because the research question is concerned with what role competing articulations of putative shared values and ideological positions played in the construction of both Labour and the SNP discourses pertaining to the state, welfare, and the nation.

Thus, the key to answering this question lies in a careful analysis of articulation, or in other words, examining how meaning was constructed, and how these ‘meanings’ formed part of competing ‘nation-building’ discourses. Political discourse theory offers the widest range of concepts, analytical tools and methodological techniques to aid the researcher in providing detailed results based on an analysis of the articulations themselves. Indeed, ‘articulation’ is one of the central concepts of discourse theory, and is central to the assumptions underpinning this study.

What follows is an introduction to discourse analysis, an extensive outline of political discourse theory, and a discussion on the concepts from political discourse theory which are utilised in this research project. Included is a discussion on the evolution of discourse analysis, which paves the way to outlining the different approaches in discourse analysis, and rationale for using political discourse theory. The final section of this chapter will briefly discuss the role of political discourse within the context of Scotland’s constitutional debate. First, however, a short section is provided, which focuses on the wider set of issues relating to the methodological considerations and choices that were made in approaching the topic.

#### **Key methodological considerations**

There were a number of considerations to be made before the writing process began. One of the first choices, aside from topic, was whether to undertake empirical fieldwork—particularly interviews with active and retired politicians. It was decided that no such fieldwork would be undertaken, and the reasons for that are based on a

logical approach to discourse analysis—that is, the analysis of speech in the written format. The purpose of discourse analysis, as indicated at several points throughout this thesis, is to examine and uncover the meaning of political discourse, within the context of the political terrain, trajectories, and narratives.

If the researcher had interviewed politicians as part of the data collection process, past or present, there was the risk that ‘bias’ and ‘opinion’ may have obfuscated the original analysis undertaken in Chapters 4 to 7. That is to say, politicians—especially currently elected members of Parliament or council—are more likely to interpret examples of discourse (especially on divisive issues such as the constitution) differently from their political rivals, resulting in possible contestation, which would not be conducive to an original analysis of political discourse in Scotland. Thus, it was considered that political interviews would hinder the process of uncovering meaning. A decision was made to examine ‘raw discourse’ instead using the methods and concepts outlined below, in order to undertake an original analysis—rather than relying on the analysis of elected representatives who may interpret data differently from political rivals.

‘Raw discourse’ in the context of this project is primary source material, and refers to political discourse in its written form, including political speeches, party manifestos and publications, Parliament official reports, political interviews and quotes in online editions of newspapers (and print editions, too, although online editions were the most convenient to access via online archives), websites of political parties and Governments, and Government publications. What speeches by party leaders (in the individual and collective sense), party manifestos and publications and political interviews and quotes (from senior party politicians) in newspapers have in common is that they often provide the ‘approved party line’ to party activists and the public on contested issues—including welfare and the constitution. In other words, they reinforce a party’s position on a wide range of political issues. Government websites and publications have a similar effect, when led by one party (as opposed to a coalition).

The primary source materials outlined above are completely appropriate and effective to use, in order to examine discursive trajectories in Scotland—and indeed in the UK. The majority of the primary materials were sourced online or from the

National Library of Scotland Special Collections section, in Edinburgh. Online sources include newspaper interviews and quotes, speeches from political party websites, some Government publications, speeches by key Labour and SNP politicians, and online Official Reports from Parliament. Additional primary materials were sourced at the National Library of Scotland, which holds many special collections relating to Labour and the SNP—often donated by former politicians. Those special collections included pamphlets and press releases, which were particularly helpful for examining party discourse before the digital age and mainstream use of the internet—particularly during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, when press releases and other discursively rich sources were published in print only.

A range of secondary source material is used, too, to help map out the time periods that are the object of the study. Those sources allow the researcher to better provide context by explaining the nature of the political terrain, and to account for changes and consistencies vis-a-vis political discourse over the time periods examined. This project draws heavily upon secondary sources from key authors on the topic of constitutional change, Labour in Scotland, and the SNP including James Mitchell, David Denver, Peter Lynch, Eric Shaw, Gerry Hassan and others. It should be noted that those authors have written extensively on those topics, and given the lack of other extensive secondary works in that regard, this project draws upon the more heavily than is preferable. That is, undoubtedly, a weakness of the secondary source material used in this project, but it is noted how comprehensive it is vis-a-vis constitutional change and political parties in Scotland. The vast majority of secondary material utilised in this project was sourced from the National Library of Scotland or through online journals, including literature on constitutional change and political parties in Scotland, nationalism, the welfare state and shared values, social policy and political discourse theory.

Another consideration was how to present the original analysis in Chapters 4 to 7. It was decided that the best approach was chronological for the topic, because that allowed the author to trace the discursive trajectories of Labour and the SNP over a long timeframe. It was decided that this would be best done by breaking the chapters into 4 important periods—the ‘devolution years’ leading up to the (re)establishment of a Scottish Parliament, the 8 years of the Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition executive, the SNP’s first minority Government and then the landmark period

beginning when the SNP won a majority in the Scottish Parliament, and ending with the Scottish independence referendum. By presenting the original analysis in such a way, the researcher was able to discuss critical moments in Scotland's constitutional history, as highlighted in the introductory chapter. Chapter Four is particularly long—and certainly longer than the other chapters. Although this may be highlighted as an issue, it is the necessary consequence of structuring the original analysis in a manner that allows the researcher to examine the object of analysis as intended—that is, discourse as trajectory. The researcher is better equipped, therefore, to map out and account for change and continuity in the discourse of Labour and the SNP over a long timeframe, as intended.

Finally, the researcher was faced with a choice about how to approach discourse during the independence referendum campaign, given the role of umbrella organisations, Yes Scotland (pro-independence) and Better Together (pro-Union), and the participation of the SNP and Labour, respectively, within them. The shift from SNP vs. Labour to Yes vs. No is elucidated in detail in Chapter Seven. However, the significant roles of the SNP and Labour within their respective umbrella organisations should be noted at this point. Given that element, and because the focus of this project is on the discursive battle between the SNP and Labour on the left of Scottish politics in relation to the constitution and welfare, Chapter Seven, which examines discourse during the independence campaign, focuses predominately on the SNP and Labour (as explained in Chapter One).

### **Discourse analysis: an introduction**

Discourse analysis has become an increasingly popular approach in defining and explaining problems across the humanities and social sciences (Howarth, 2000: 1). According to David Howarth, a number of factors have contributed to the increasing popularity of discourse analysis in the social sciences, including the growing dissatisfaction with the mainstream positivist social science approaches (and the weakening of their influence in disciplines like political science and sociology) and the emergence of a distinctive field of discourse analysis within the discipline of linguistics beginning in the 1970s, which was adopted by those in cultural studies and literary theory to form a novel approach in their respective disciplines (Howarth, 2000: 1–2). Additionally, the discursive and constructed character of the world has

become more apparent, as indicated by the frequent use of the signifier 'discourse', which is linked to the rapid transformation in social, economic and political circumstances since the industrial revolution (Glynos, Howarth, Norval and Speed 2009: 5).

It is important to note that discourse analysis has evolved during its development to collect additional meanings and connotations. On one end of the spectrum, it has been seen as a narrow tool that analyses, at most, a conversation between two people. Yet at the other end, discourse is interpreted as being synonymous with the 'entire social system', in which discourse constitutes the social and political world. In relation to the latter, Jacques Derrida argued that everything has become discourse ever since language became common to Man, and Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe have indicated that every social configuration (including patterns of behaviour) is meaningful (Howarth, 2000: 2).

This leads David Howarth and Yannis Stavrakakis to understand discourse theory in the following way: 'Discourse theory assumes that all objects and actions are meaningful, and that their meaning is conferred by historically specific systems of rules' (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000: 2–3). They elucidate this understanding by providing the following example of a forest that stands in the route of a proposed motorway. This example highlights a hypothetical 'problem', and explains how different approaches to the problem are formed:

The forest may be viewed as an obstacle that must be passed in order to rapidly implement the new road system, as a site of 'special interest' for scientists and naturalists, or as a symbol of the threatened natural heritage of 'the nation'. Whatever way the forest is viewed depends on the 'orders of discourse' that form its 'identity and significance' whether these discourses are of economic modernisation or are environmentalist, or conservationist. Each discourse is a 'social and political construction' which establishes a 'system of relations' between objects and practices, whilst creating 'subject positions' with which social agents can identify by attempting to amalgamate different strands of discourse in order to provide a dominant discourse or to fix identities in a certain way (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000: 2–3).

Howarth and Stavrakakis understand discourse analysis, therefore, as a method which deconstructs social and political systems of relations, including the 'subject positions' that constitute them.

According to David Howarth (2000: 6), discourse theory has experienced 'three significant transformations' that can be characterised by three specific phases. Traditionally, discourse analysis was seen primarily as an approach that analyses the set of rules that govern 'connected sets of sentences in speech or writing' (Howarth, 2000), and this is where its base as an approach to the social sciences can be found. So for example, speech act theory focuses on the premise that by saying something, we are doing something as well—we are performing a 'speech act' (in the language of Austin or Searle). Discourse analysts, in this tradition, seek to determine the intended meanings of a person's speech and the responses of those who hear it. Therefore, linguists such as Garfinkel (1967) have sought to interpret what speakers are doing, and how they are doing it, by analysing language (this is known as the method of ethnomethodology). Schegloff and Sacks (1973) have analysed the organisation and logic of 'turn-taking' in conversations in order to reveal an insight into the patterns of relations between individuals, the positions of individuals 'within larger institutional structures', and the overall organisation of society (ibid).

This rather limited conception of discourse, however, was extended to cover a wider set of social practices and political/social phenomena during the 1960s and 1970s, as structuralism, post-structuralism and Marxism all became central in the study of the social sciences (ibid). This represented the second phase of discourse theory. Michel Foucault's 'Archaeology' works, including 'The Order of Things' (1970) and 'The Archaeology of Knowledge' (1972), became particularly influential and have helped to shape political discourse theory. In particular, Foucault emphasised the way in which discursive practices form objects and subjects, which in turn, establish discursive formations (ibid).

So, discourses are 'practices that systematically form the objects of which we speak' (Foucault, 1972: 49) and are governed by 'historically specific' 'rules of formation' which allows subjects to 'produce objects, statements, concepts and strategies, which together constitute discourses' (Howarth, 2000: 8) (for example, an object could be domestic terrorism and the subjects could be different political parties which have different solutions to the problem of domestic terrorism, which in turn produces a plurality of discursive strategies, which compete against one another in an attempt to gain hegemony). In Foucault's 'genealogical' writings, he focused not on the

description of historical rules that allow sets of statements to be possible, but the way in which social practices shape discourses and how this affects social relationships and institutions (ibid).

The third phase of discourse analysis was a result of Foucault's contributions, as well as Jacques Derrida's Marxist and post-Marxist observations, with non-discursive practices and elements being included. Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis widens the scope of discourse theory 'to include the analysis of political texts and speeches, as well as the contexts in which they are produced' (Fairclough, 1989). Fairclough's approach, however, still viewed discourse as the 'semiotic dimension of social practice'—he understood it as being 'a distinct level of the overall system' of meaningful communication (Howarth, 2000: 8).

Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, contrastingly, expand the scope of discourse analysis 'to include all social practices, such that discourses and discursive practices are synonymous with systems of social relations' (ibid). This means that because all systems of social relations are defined by discourses and discursive practices, it is important to analyse the context within which forms of discourse are generated, in order to understand the full extent of social relations, and how social practices construct and contest the discourses that establish our understanding of reality (Howarth, 2000; Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000). It is this understanding of discourse analysis that David Howarth subscribes to, and indeed, authors including Aletta Norval, Yannis Stavrakakis, Stuart Hall, Jason Glynos and others who have played a part in building on the approaches of Derrida, Foucault and Laclau and Mouffe. This project also understands discourse analysis in this way.

### **An outline of different approaches to discourse analysis**

Generally, positivists and empiricists claim that discourses should be viewed as 'frames' or 'cognitive schemata' (i.e., conscious efforts by groups in society to create shared understandings of the World and of themselves that legitimise and motivate collective group actions). Discourses viewed as 'frames' are instrumental devices that create common understandings and perceptions for a specific purpose. According to this approach, the role of discourse analysis is to assess the effectiveness of these discourses in achieving specific ends (Howarth, 2000: 3).

Realists, however, place greater emphasis on the ontological dimensions of discourse theory and analysis. The central idea is that the social world constitutes an 'independently existing set of objects' that hold inherent properties and 'intrinsic causal powers'—'The contingent interaction of these objects with their 'generative mechanisms' causes events and processes in the real World'. Thus, realists treat discourses as objects that hold their own properties and powers making language a structured system. The task for the realist approach to discourse analysis is to unravel the 'elisions and confusions' that language uses to hold its respective power (Howarth, 2000; Howarth and Stavrakakis; 2000).

Marxists share the underlying principles of the realist understanding of discourse analysis, but emphasise the belief that discourses have to be explained in relation to 'the contradictory processes of economic production and reproduction' (Howarth, 2000: 4). In this sense, Marxists tend to view discourses as being 'ideological systems of meaning' that obscure and naturalise uneven power and resource distribution. Critical discourse analysis, for Marxists, is thus a tool to be used for exposing the mechanisms of deception, filtering into their critique of capitalism, more generally.

Critical discourse theory places considerable emphasis on the 'actions and reflexivity of human agents in reproducing and changing social relationships'. Fairclough (1989) argues that the relationship between discourse and the social systems in which they function is mutually constitutive. This indicates that the task of critical discourse analysis is to expose how the powerful use language and meaning to deceive and press on the 'dominated'. However, the limitation of Fairclough's understanding of discourse is that it remains 'a distinct level of the overall system' because discourses are the 'semiotic dimension of social practice' (Howarth, 2000: 4).

A final (broad) approach to discourse theory and analysis is that of post-structuralists and post-Marxists such as Jacques Derrida, and Michel Foucault, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. They add an extra dimension to 'social meaning' by treating social structures as 'inherently ambiguous, incomplete and contingent systems of meaning' (ibid). This addresses a gap in Saussure's structuralist work that treats the linguistic system as 'closed and complete' (ibid: 30).

Derrida argues that the human and social experience is structured around the logic of difference (i.e. the signifier and signified are understood to be unidentical, meaning that the written word cannot be understood as a mere representation of the spoken word, and that words must be understood in relation to what they oppose, e.g., 'good' must be opposed to 'bad', and so on), while Foucault asserts that discourse analysis can be used to reveal the nature of the link between 'discursive practices' and wider sets of 'non-discursive' activities and institutions (ibid: 4). Foucault also draws our attention to the condition that discourses constantly undergo change. New utterances are added to them, which can lead to fresh starts being continually made, for example, regarding the entities of sociology or psychology (Foucault, 1991: 54).

Laclau and Mouffe deconstruct the Marxist conception of ideology, whilst drawing upon post-structuralist philosophy (from deconstruction, Derrida's notion of undecidability and from Lacanian theory, point de capiton, or in Laclau and Mouffe's (2001: xi) terminology, 'nodal point') to develop a theory of discourse which treats the practices and meanings that shape a community as social actors (Howarth, 2000: 5). For Laclau, discourse theory attests that 'the very possibility of perception, thought and action depends on the structuration of a certain meaningful field which pre-exists any factual immediacy' (Laclau quoted in Gooding and Pettit, 1993: 431). Therefore, Laclau argues that pre-established discourse articulates the meaning of various acts of speech and cognition (Torfing, 1999: 84)—'politico-hegemonic articulations retroactively create the interests they claim to represent' (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001: xi). Discourses form symbolic systems and social orders, and the task of discourse analysis is 'to examine their historical and political construction and functioning' (Howarth, 2000: 5).

Modern discourse theory places great importance on the 'historicity and variability' of discourse, meaning that empirical events continuously alter transcendental conditions (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001: xi), which gives rise to the idea that pre-established discourses change over time in structure, as a result of historical watersheds. Therefore, discourses are understood as 'a differential ensemble of signifying sequences in which meaning is constantly renegotiated' (Torfing, 1999: 85). The theory of dislocation, as referred to previously, is relevant here and it argues that understanding social reality is not the same as understanding what

society is, 'but what prevents it from being'. What prevents society from being what it promises to be is known as the force of dislocation, where we see different ideologies emerge or re-emerge, which attempt to reach an impossible goal of a society that is essentially perfect, according to our understanding of what we want it to be (Stavrakakis, 2000: 100).

The relevance for this study is that pre-established discourses exist and have been cemented. However, as this study sets out to prove, significant political events in Scottish politics have altered the meaning of objects and actions in the 'social system' in Scotland over time, which has had an impact on the political discourse of Labour and the SNP, as they reacted to the challenges and opportunities that were caused by political and social change. For example, the opportunities and challenges presented by the 2014 independence referendum caused the emergence of competing national discourses from the Scottish Socialists and Green Party at national level. These discourses became more influential throughout the independence referendum campaign, as they began to challenge the hegemony of the more established parties vis-a-vis national discourse (Gillen, 2014).

It is the final approach (as outlined from page 26) that this study draws upon and embraces, an approach which has been developed from Laclau and Mouffe's research programme, and which draws upon and critically engages with modern Marxist, post-structuralist, post-analytical and psychoanalytic theory (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000: 1). The approach does not remain purely at theoretical level, nor does it dismiss science and rationality in relation to important questions of method and epistemology. Alternatively, it searches for points of convergence within this plurality of approaches and attempts to construct justifiable explanations of the social and political world based on empirical evidence. In particular, the approach used is designed to analyse key political issues, allowing the researcher to analyse 'Issues of identity formation, the production of novel ideologies, the logics of social movements and the structuring of societies by a plurality of social imaginaries' (ibid). Essentially, the method allows one to approach and interpret discourses differently, enabling the researcher to contest and/or build upon other empirical and theoretical accounts. This forms the basis of the approach used in this study, which will now be elucidated more fully.

## **Elucidating an approach**

This study follows Howarth (2010: 325) in treating discourse analysis as an approach that answers questions about social practices, their nature and function, and their purposes, meanings and effects. The approach taken here adopts some key concepts from political discourse theory, including 'empty signifier', 'nodal point', 'chains of equivalence', 'political frontier', and 'subject position', and the following set of statements form the basis of that approach.

According to Howarth and Stavrakakis, 'discourse theory investigates the way social practices systematically form the identities of subjects and objects by articulating together a series of contingent signifying elements available in a discursive field' (2000: 7). It is posited 'that all objects and actions are meaningful, and that their meaning is a product of historically specific systems of rules' (Howarth, 2000: 8). Discourse theory attempts to explore 'the way in which social practices construct and contest the discourses that constitute social reality' (ibid). Social systems are contingent and thus can never exhaust a field of meaning completely. But whilst all social identity is understood as contingent, discourse theory does not deny that meaning can be partially fixed. Indeed, it is both possible and necessary (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000: 7). The signifier 'devolution' is a good example of this, because as the analysis chapters in this study highlight, its meaning changed over the course of Scottish politics.

For Howarth, three 'basic categories' must be elucidated in order to make sense of the above statements. The first category is the discursive: 'All objects are objects of discourse, in that a condition of their meaning depends upon a socially constructed system of rules and significant differences' (Howarth, 2000: 8). Going back to the forest example in the previous section, the forest may be seen as an object of natural beauty, an obstacle to the new motorway that is to be built, or a unique ecosystem, depending on the rules and differences that confer meaning onto it. The discursive does not reduce everything to be language, rather, it argues that we live within a world of 'signifying practices and objects' in the sense that we are born into a world constructed of 'meaningful discourses and practices', making us therefore able to identify and engage with the objects around us (ibid: 9). So, discourse can help to construct our interpretation of practices and objects, and how we relate to

them. An example of this is the NHS, an institution which Labour and the SNP used as part of their nation-building discourse, in order to supplement their cases for devolution and for independence, respectively.

The second category is discourse, which refers to 'historically specific systems of meaning which form the identities of subjects and object. . . At this lower level of abstraction, discourses are concrete systems of social relations and practices that are intrinsically political, as their formation is an act of radical institution which involves the construction of antagonisms and the drawing of political frontiers between 'insiders' and "outsiders" ' (ibid). Therefore, the exercise of power and consequent structuring of relations between different agents (e.g., logics of equivalence and difference and through political frontiers) is heavily involved in the construction of political discourse. According to Howarth and Stavrakakis, each discourse is a 'social and political construction' which establishes a 'system of relations between objects and practices, while providing (subject) positions with which social agents can identify' (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000: 3).

A political project therefore will attempt to fix the identities of objects and practices in a particular way by weaving different discourses together in order to dominate or organise the field of meaning (ibid): 'all signs are moments in a system and the meaning of each sign is determined by its relations to the other signs' (Phillips and Jorgensen, 2002: 26). Furthermore, discourses are constantly vulnerable to political forces that remain outside their production, due to their nature as contingent and historical constructions. This means that discourses are contingent and thus never complete, as discussed above. They are prone to influence by other discourses that claim to offer 'completeness'. Thus, discourse refers 'to systems of meaningful practices that form the identities of subjects and objects' (Howarth, 2000: 9).

The final category is discourse analysis, which 'refers to the process of analysing signifying practices as discursive forms' (ibid: 10). Discourse analysts examine a broad range of linguistic and non-linguistic material (such as speeches, reports, manifestos, historical events, interviews, policies, ideas, organisations and institutions) as texts or writings that allow subjects to 'experience the world of objects, words and practices' (ibid). Discourse analysts can then draw upon

concepts and methods in linguistic and literary theory to analyse discursive formations.

Also relevant to this methodology is the contribution of Laclau and Mouffe in highlighting three further concepts to the study of discourse, besides the concept of discourse itself. They are articulation, nodal points and empty signifiers (ibid: 7). Articulation is defined as 'any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice'. Laclau and Mouffe argue that 'all identity emerges through the articulation or re-articulation of signifying elements' (1985: 105). For them, discourse is therefore 'the structured totality resulting from this articulatory practice' (ibid).

Nodal points are 'privileged signifiers or reference points...in a discourse that bind together a particular system of meaning of "chain of signification"' (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000: 8). Slavoj Zizek uses the example of Communist ideology to demonstrate how a nodal point works:

...in the ideological space float signifiers like 'freedom', 'state', 'justice', 'peace'...and then their chain is supplemented with some master-signifier ('Communism') which retroactively determines their [Communist] meaning: 'freedom' is effective only through surmounting the bourgeois formal freedom, which is merely a form of slavery; the 'state' is the means by which the ruling class guarantees the conditions of its rule; market exchange cannot be 'just and equitable' because the very form of equivalent exchange between labour and capital implies exploitation; 'war' is inherent to class society as such; only the socialist revolution can bring about lasting 'peace', and so forth. (Zizek, 1989: 102).

Therefore, the intervention of a nodal point transforms elements to fit into a particular discourse, and the meaning of each element is partially fixed in relation to the signifier that holds the structural position of a nodal point (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000: 8). Thus, a nodal point is a 'privileged sign around which the other signs are ordered; the other signs acquire their meaning from their relationship to the nodal point' (Phillips and Jorgensen, 2002: 26).

In nationalist discourses, 'the people' is a nodal point (Torfig, 1999). 'The nation' (in the case of this study, the 'Scottish' or 'British' nation) is too, and can be often interchanged with 'the people'. In terms of the constitutional debate in Scotland, 'Union' and 'independence' were the nodal points of Labour and the SNP

respectively (see Adamson and Lynch, 2013 and 2014), with other constitutional signifiers such as 'devolution' or 'self-government' being added or sometimes replacing 'Union' or 'independence' in national discourse. All the while, neither Labour nor the SNP have dropped their commitments to the Union or independence, despite those signifiers not necessarily appearing in every piece party discourse. Beyond that, a set of empty signifiers (see next paragraph) came into play, such as social justice, fairness and equality, which were given meaning within the context of the constitutional debate (Union vs independence) by Labour and the SNP, but also helped to shape a wider understanding of what the Union or independence meant, such as commitments to a strong NHS and public sector, to tackling poverty, and to ensuring fairness and social justice for all within 'the nation'—something discussed in Chapter Three, aided by the work of McEwen, Henderson, Sutherland, and Keating in particular.

In relation to work on nodal points, Laclau further developed 'the logic of discursive structuration' by introducing the empty signifier category (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000: 8). Because of the contingency of social and political systems, the social field can never be closed: ...'political practices attempt to 'fill' this lack of closure...'; they articulate closure as being possible, despite the reality that complete closure is unachievable (ibid). Societies are thus organised based on the idea that 'closure and fullness' are achievable in a social field that can never be complete. Therefore, 'the articulation of a political discourse can only take place around an empty signifier that functions as a nodal point...emptiness is now revealed as an essential quality of the nodal point, as an important condition of possibility for its hegemonic success' (ibid).

An 'empty signifier' functions much in the same way that an 'essentially contested concept' does, in that the 'proper general use' of the term is contested. For example, the statement 'This picture is a work of art' is contested due to disagreement about the use of the term 'work of art'. Each party maintains that their interpretation of the term 'work of art' (or for example, 'democracy') which performs functions on their behalf, is the correct or only possible understanding, and can thus only fulfil those specific functions to which they claim the concept fulfils (Gallie, 1956: 167–168). 'Social justice' is a particularly important empty signifier in this study, as both Labour and the SNP continually attempted to dominate its meaning, in order to convince voters that either the Union or independence was a better vehicle for delivering it.

John Rawls (1971) may have defined social justice as the fair distribution of the resources of society through income, but its meaning is ultimately contested. For the SNP, social justice became more important as a concept over time, having been less important in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. This theory is elucidated throughout this thesis.

A final category to be used in this study is logics of equivalence and difference, developed by Laclau and Mouffe (1985). The logic of equivalence creates 'equivalential identities that express a pure negation of a discursive system' (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000: 11). In her account of the Mexican Revolution, Rosa Buenfil indicates that the phenomenon can be 'understood as an overdetermination of different social movements organised around a mystical discourse' (ibid), with 'the people' experiencing a weakening of their internal differences and organising themselves under the banner of 'the oppressed', by rising in opposition against a set of 'others' (ibid). The logic of equivalence thus divides society by organising the social structure into a political frontier.

Political frontiers are used heavily by political parties—and certainly by Labour and the SNP—in order to create 'subject positions' which the electorate can identify with. Chains of equivalence are used to create these political frontiers, whereby a privileged signifier (nodal point) is given form and meaning by the way other signifiers are presented together in a piece of discourse, thus creating a 'subject position'. A political actor may wish to attract the support of those using public transport for example, and could use the signifier 'commuter' to signify that those using public transport are 'commuters'. The signifier 'commuter' may then be used alongside other positive signifiers relating to public transport, designed to promote a certain cause, in order to discursively construct the idea that the political actor will best represent the interests of public transport users i.e. commuters. The construction of a 'subject position' would often be part of a political actor's wider discursive strategy. Regarding the above example, that strategy could be part of a Government's attempts to deflect criticism over poor performance on transport issues.

However, negative signifiers may be utilised simultaneously, to confer a negative role onto a political rival, making the concept of 'empty signifier' pivotal. In short, an

empty signifier has less of a 'fixed meaning' than other signifiers, and is thus more easily contested by competing discourses. The signifier 'commuter' as explained above is an example of an empty signifier, because by associating political rivals with 'commuters' in a negative way, a political actor can present them as having a negative impact on 'commuters' and on public transport, more generally. This example informs our understanding of how political actors attempt to influence a system of social relations, especially during moments of 'dislocation', when new challenges and opportunities emerge. Thus, by identifying empty signifiers, nodal points, political frontiers, and chains of equivalence in a piece of discourse, the essence of discourse analysis is to deconstruct discourse according to these concepts, or in other words, piece together how a discourse consisting of these features has been articulated, in order to understand a system of social relations during moments of 'crisis'. This helps to account for alterations in discourse in Scottish politics, especially during the events which have been highlighted in Chapter One.

### **Political discourse analysis and nation-building**

Following Aletta Norval, this study recognises that with discourse comes a set of verbal and non-verbal practices and rituals, which constitute and maintain a sense of reality and understanding of the nature of society. In order to understand the political grammar of a particular discourse, political context must be analysed, and logics must be revealed (Norval, 1996: 2). Therefore, the analysis of political discourse is important because it can reveal how understandings of reality and society are constructed by political actors.

Political frontiers have operated as part of discursive formations during the Scottish constitutional debate. This is a starting point—'there is only politics where there are frontiers' (Laclau, 1990: 160). Equally, the practice of articulation has occurred over time, in order to bring together 'contingent social demands into political projects or coalitions that can bring about social change' (Glynos et al, 2009: 36). This idea forms Laclau and Mouffe's theory of hegemony, and the construction of nodal points is important in that regard. Nodal points partially fix the meaning of 'various social elements' (ibid). That translates over to this study, as 'devolution' and

‘independence’ have partially fixed meanings, which have been altered during significant events over the course of Scottish politics.

Both Labour and the SNP have organised their discourse around nodal points in order to achieve hegemony over one another in relation to the Scottish constitutional question. A hegemonic discourse is defined as the forging of consent, or when domination is present. However, justification even for domination must be provided (Norval, 1996: 4). Labour has organised its constitutional discourse around the nodal point of ‘Union’, whereas the SNP has organised its constitutional discourse around the nodal point of ‘independence’. Naturally, therefore, Labour and the SNP sought to promote their nodal points. However, they also sought to negate the nodal points of their political opponents.

As highlighted above, political frontiers have been employed during Scotland’s constitutional debate, and they have developed as a result of the articulation of the rival discourses that structured Scotland’s constitutional debate. Beyond that, key signifiers, such as ‘social justice’, ‘fairness’, ‘equality’ and ‘NHS’ were articulated in various chains of equivalence over time, in an attempt to control the meaning of the nodal points ‘Union’ and ‘independence’, and thus gain hegemony in a nation-building competition between Labour and the SNP. Within this process, there was an element of change over time, but there was also consistency. This argument will be expanded throughout Chapters 4–7.

As an example of what has been discussed in this section thus far, take the independence referendum, and the debate around ‘social justice’—or more precisely, the debate over the delivery of social justice. As touched upon before, ‘social justice’ is a concept that both Labour and the SNP used during the independence campaign, and was central to their cases for the Union and for independence, respectively. ‘Social justice’ is an example of an ‘empty signifier’ (Laclau, 1996)—what Walter Bryce Gallie has called an ‘essentially contested concept’ (1956). During the independence referendum campaign, Labour and the SNP conferred different meanings onto the concept of social justice by adding it into their chains of equivalence, along with their respective nodal points of ‘Union’ and ‘independence’. So, what this means is that the empty signifier ‘social justice’ was

articulated by Labour and the SNP to mean something quite specific, and it will be shown here how this was achieved, as part of each party's nation-building strategy.

Labour deployed an articulation of the signifier 'social justice' by adding it to a chain of equivalence, with the party's nodal point of 'Union'. Labour sought to portray the message that the Union was something to be proud of, and was something that Scotland benefitted from being part of. By articulating the UK as a mechanism by which social justice could be delivered, Labour was attempting to present the defence of the Union as equivalential with the pursuit of social justice. But within the articulation that the Union was good for social justice, was the articulation that British identity was equivalential with social justice, or in other words, social justice was an integral part of British identity. The passage below, taken from a speech by Anas Sarwar MP to the Scottish Labour Party Spring Conference 2014, indicates what is explained above:

Together we have built a nation. Together we came through the aftermath of the second world war and together we delivered an NHS and a Welfare State. Together we recognised that inequality and discrimination was intolerable across the UK and that is why we delivered the Race Relations Act and the Disability Discrimination Act. Together we wanted to end the scandal of people being paid a pound or two an hour so we introduced across the whole of the UK a National Minimum Wage. These examples [are] the very building blocks of equality and fairness. Our journey as a movement has been a proud one, we have moved forward, but the pursuit of social justice never ends. That is why today we set out our values, aspirations and ambitions for our people, our communities and our country. (Sarwar, 21 March 2014).

Sarwar used a positive chain of equivalence to put forward the positive case for keeping Scotland in the UK. He used the signifiers 'together', 'built a nation', 'second world war', 'NHS', 'welfare state', 'Race Relations Act', 'Disability Discrimination Act', 'National Minimum Wage', 'equality', 'fairness', 'proud', 'social justice', 'our communities' and 'our country'. Sarwar presented the UK joint effort during WWII, the National Health Service, the Welfare State, equalities legislation, fairness, social justice and community as values shared across the UK and as institutions built by the unity of the UK. Thus values and institutions were presented as inherently British — they gave meaning to the concept of 'social justice' and 'welfare'—and so to defend the UK was to defend a particular, constructed conception of the Union—one of social justice, which included a national health service, a welfare state, equality, and fairness. But wider than that, the articulations above were designed to give a

sense of meaning to British identity, so to cherish and fight for social justice was an inherently British value, and Labour hoped that such a discursive strategy would convince voters (particularly the working class and health professional middle class<sup>3</sup>) that the Union was worth saving. Labour hoped that Scots who felt a sense of British identity could identify with the above construction, which was also dependent upon the implicit presentation of the Scottish NHS as safe within the UK.

The SNP also attempted to dominate the field of meaning regarding the concept of social justice. The SNP tied the concept of social justice to nationhood—specifically, to ‘Scottishness’—by constructing a political frontier, with independence presented as a delivery mechanism for social justice. SNP leader and First Minister of Scotland, Nicola Sturgeon, speaking as deputy First Minister, said as much:

The reason is simple. I joined the SNP because it was obvious to me then—as it still is today—that you cannot guarantee social justice unless you are in control of the delivery. And that is my central argument to you today. Not just that independence is more than an end in itself. But that it is only by bringing the powers home, by being independent, that we can build the better nation we all want. (Sturgeon, 3 December 2012).

However, there was an additional element to the SNP’s attempt to impose its meaning on social justice. The party presented the Union as prohibiting the delivery of social justice, challenging the Labour argument that the Union and British identity were characterised by a commitment to social justice. In order to achieve hegemony over the concept of social justice, therefore, the SNP used a series of political frontiers. In the following passage, Sturgeon presented the Union as something contrary to the pursuit of social justice:

Social justice becomes a policy to be bartered against other interests — wars, nuclear weapons and welfare cuts. In the end the Blair Government elected in 1997 was not an alternative to Conservatism. It was business as usual. So when the promise of ‘no more boom and bust’ went bust and ordinary families [were] left to pay the price—facing joblessness, bankruptcy, falling living standards, a sense of uncertainty about the future and the prospect of being the first generation unable say with confidence that our children will be better off than we are. (ibid).

Nicola Sturgeon took Labour’s nodal point of ‘Union’, and articulated it as equivalential with putting ‘wars’, ‘nuclear weapons’ and ‘welfare cuts’ ahead of the pursuit of social justice. Furthermore, Sturgeon presented Labour from 1997

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<sup>3</sup> Such as nurses, practitioners, and GPs. See Esping Anderson, 1990.

onwards as a continuation of Conservatism, arguing that when Tony Blair's Government came to power in 1997, it 'was business as usual'. In SNP discourse, Conservatism functioned as a specifically Unionist version of social injustice, to contrast with articulations of the SNP as the party of social justice in Scotland. This is indicated by the attachment of several negative signifiers to the nodal point of 'Union', in a chain of equivalence, including 'ordinary families', 'pay the price', 'joblessness', 'bankruptcy', 'falling living standards' and 'uncertainty'.

There are three interesting points to be made about this passage. First, Nicola Sturgeon argued that Westminster politicians prioritised wars, nuclear weapons and welfare cuts over the pursuit of social justice. Thus, she argued that the needs of the vulnerable in Scotland were being neglected by Westminster, and that Westminster politicians of the established UK parties instead cared about pursuing war and building nuclear arsenals. Second, Sturgeon challenged Labour's claim to be the party of social justice in Scotland by presenting them as an extension of Conservative ideology. Finally, Sturgeon equated the Union with 'joblessness', 'bankruptcy' and 'falling living' standards, with the implicit argument that if the Union really stood for social justice, then none of these signifiers could be associated with the UK. This was part of a complex nation-building strategy by the SNP, where the party built on the negative experiences of Thatcherism in Scotland and equated Labour with Thatcherism. But it is also important to note how the SNP supplemented its nation-building discourse in this example, by presenting the idea that social justice could be delivered by an independent Scotland.

In the same piece of discourse, Nicola Sturgeon presented social justice as equivalential with democracy—'My conviction that Scotland should be independent stems from the principles, not of identity or nationality, but of democracy and social justice' (ibid). Within that, Sturgeon conferred the SNP's meaning onto the concept of social justice:

Today I want to set out why independence is essential for Scotland—not as an end in itself but as a means to achieve the Scotland we seek. A country with a stable economy that works for the many and not just the few; one that knows it must create the wealth it needs to support the strong public services we value; a country that manages our vast resources responsibly, with an eye to the future; a country that gets the Government it votes for; a country that has fairness

at its core and allows all of us as individuals to reach our full potential. That is the destination of our journey—Scotland. The Scotland we want to be. (ibid).

First, Nicola Sturgeon stated that independence was ‘not as an end in itself’ but as a mechanism by which a specific vision of Scotland could be attained. This vision included a focus on economic prosperity, wealth redistribution, investment in public services to strengthen and maintain them, and economic planning for future generations. This is indicated through the use of the signifiers ‘stable economy’, ‘many and not just the few’, ‘strong public services’, ‘manages our vast resources responsibly’ and ‘eye to the future’. Furthermore, Sturgeon presented an independent Scotland as a country that would ‘get the Government it votes for’, that ‘has fairness at its core’ and that valued the principle of allowing individuals to flourish.

It can be seen here how Nicola Sturgeon presented a particular vision of social justice, one that prioritised an economy that focused on wealth redistribution, strong public services, economic forward planning, and fairness. But she paired this conception of social justice with the idea of Scotland being in control of delivering social justice, by getting the Governments it voted for. This indicates that social justice was an integral signifier within the SNP’s conception of ‘democracy’, which in turn played into the case for independence. There was also an element of nation-building in the passage above, as Nicola Sturgeon presented the above values as the values that ‘we’ hold and seek. This indicates a rather subtle element of nation-building—that to be Scottish and/or to live and work in Scotland, one therefore held the values that Sturgeon presented as important to Scotland’s citizens, and to the lives of their fellow citizens (see Johnston et al, 2010). This plays into the idea that articulations of shared values and state welfare are crucial to understanding how Labour and the SNP have constructed their nation-building strategies in Scotland.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has outlined the key features of discourse theory and analysis, as well as the conceptual framework which will be employed throughout this thesis. Drawing on this conceptual framework, it has been demonstrated how discourse analysis, as a conceptually-related set of methods, will be used in analysis. The rationale for the selection of sources has also been explained. It has been established that discourse

analysis will be used, in particular, the concepts of empty signifier, nodal point, political frontier, chains of equivalence, and subject position. These concepts have been ‘borrowed’ from political discourse theory, and examples have been used in order to indicate how the major research question and material will be engaged with. The approach chosen here enables the researcher to expand upon the literature on the role of welfare and shared values in nation-building discourse in Scotland—which will be analysed in Chapter Three—by examining the trajectory of national discourses (by Labour and the SNP) over the course of contemporary Scottish politics.

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## **Chapter three**

### **The role of welfare and shared values in nation-building**

It has been established in Chapters 1 and 2 that discourse on ‘state welfare’ and ‘shared values’ was integral to the nation-building strategies of Labour and the SNP 1967–2014. Specifically, political discourse analysis will be used to examine the ways that Labour and the SNP undertook identity formation and structured society by referencing values and institutions—such as ‘social justice’ and the NHS—to establish and reinforce competing nation-building discourse. Working definitions of ‘welfare state’, ‘social justice’ and ‘nation-building’ have been established in Chapter One, and the role of shared egalitarian values in nation-building has been previously highlighted.

This chapter goes further, however, discussing the contestable nature of the welfare state, as well as the nation-building role of the welfare state and how retrenchment or expansion of the welfare state can impact upon nation-building projects. Finally, a critical literature review is undertaken, on the relationship between discourse, shared values, and nation-building. That section discusses and critically analyses a key body of work on social policy and its relationship with nation-building, as well as the relationship between nation-building and shared values in Scotland. The role of political discourse in nation-building, something that this project expands upon, is also discussed.

#### **The ‘welfare state’, its contestable nature and its role in nation-building**

In their study on the development of welfare states, Flora and Heidenheimer make two important observations regarding the nature of modern welfare state development. First, they discuss the development of the welfare state in relation to the evolution of mass democracy, and state that:

In thus linking welfare state development with the evolution of mass democracy, one may interpret the welfare state as an answer to increasing demands for socioeconomic equality or as the institutionalisation of social rights relative to the development of civil and political rights. (1981: 22).

Flora and Heidenheimer build on this by stating that the welfare state is more than an outcome from the shift to mass democracy over time, but that its existence indicates a 'basic transformation' of the state, including its structure, its functions and its legitimacy (ibid: 22–23). Therefore, one interpretation is that the development of the welfare state had not only a reactive role to play in securing demands for socio-economic equality, but a transformative one too, by transforming state structure, functions, and legitimacy. Second, Flora and Heidenheimer discuss the welfare state within the context of the growth of capitalism. A Marxist perspective on the welfare state is to understand it as an attempt to solve the issues relating to 'capitalist development', class conflict, and recurring economic crises. Welfare measures, according to a Marxist, are in fact an attempt to integrate the working class into society without radical change to the institution and distribution of private property (ibid: 23).

For Flora and Heidenheimer, both perspectives are complementary, and not in contradiction with one another. However, they expand on this to argue that Fascist regimes after WWI established institutions and policies of the modern welfare state, as did the Soviet Union post-1917. This indicates that the development of the modern welfare state is more a 'general phenomenon of modernization', and is not a product exclusive of the 'democratic-capitalist' tradition (ibid).

Furthermore, according to Gøsta Esping-Andersen, that by studying the welfare state, one can learn about the 20th century phenomenon, whereby what were once 'night-watchman states, law and order states, militarist states, or even regressive organs of totalitarian rule', have transformed to become institutions that predominantly focus on the production and distribution of social policies intended to provide social protection to their citizens (Esping-Anderson, 1990: 1). All welfare states have the common goal of eradicating poverty, although the responsibility and willingness of Governments to do so varies (Ringen, 1987: 141). This indicates that even if the majority of public spending serves welfare aims, the type of welfare being provided by each Government will be qualitatively different (Esping-Anderson, 1990: 1). It also means that the achievements of the welfare state can be challenged, and this has happened ever since the 1970s and 1980s, when welfare states were challenged by a wide variety of external economic pressures (Clarke, Gewirtz and McLaughlin, 2000; Schmidt, 2002). What the above statements indicate is that

Governments (or political parties) can approach the welfare state differently to other political actors within a system of social relations, making 'welfare' contestable as a concept.

In relation to that, the idea of welfare reform is important. It occurs in all advanced capitalist democracies, but the extent, degree and consequences of it vary widely (Van Kersbergen and Vis, 2014: 2; Esping-Anderson, 1990). Welfare reform is change, in any direction, in the organisation and implementation of social policies that construct the welfare arrangements of a nation. Welfare state reform can come in a variety of forms. Given its significance to the national discourse of Labour and the SNP during the 1980s in particular, but also during the 1990s and since 2010 (when the Conservative-led coalition was elected and continued to reform the welfare state), the category of welfare reform most relevant to this study is 'retrenchment'. This covers the scaling back of social security as well as other state interventions, such as state interference in the free market. The intention of retrenchment in this context is to increase the market dependence of the individual citizen, and the type of reform that would fit into this category includes the lowering or capping of benefit payments and the tightening of eligibility criteria (Giuliano, Vic, and Taylor-Gooby, 2000; Van Kersbergen and Vis, 2014).

Indeed, when Margaret Thatcher's Conservative Government came to power in 1979, it was announced that the role of the state, in providing social security, would be scaled back, and that cuts to Government expenditure would be made. This represented the beginning of a shift away from state protection to privatisation of public services as well as to means-tested benefits (Mabbett, 2013: 43). During 'Thatcherism', control of social security spending was seen as a major issue against forces in motion to increase public expenditure including a vast increase in unemployment, and there was a shift towards means-tested benefits to help deal with the weight of expenditure, as well as a steady erosion of state pension. The latter resulted in pension inequality, with some being well-off due to a good private pension, whilst others ended up poor due to a low state pension, having to turn to means tested benefits (ibid: 44–47).

Welfare state retrenchment, certainly in its Thatcherite form, created new opportunities and challenges in Scotland. Labour and the SNP used the perceived

welfare retrenchment of consecutive Thatcher Governments to argue that self-government was a requirement. They referenced institutions and values, including the NHS and social justice, in doing so, as part of their wider nation-building discourse. The result of this was that self-government was presented as a 'solution' to Thatcherism by Labour and the SNP, and a means to 'protect' the welfare state from a perceived entrenchment by consecutive Thatcher Governments.

Thus, the idea of welfare retrenchment is an important consideration in this thesis. However, as previously established, the idea that a strong welfare state can supplement nation-building is important to this project. Indeed, maintaining the viability of the welfare state is fundamental to nation-building (Miller, 1995: 96). In theory, if the concept of a strong, publicly owned welfare state was to be universally accepted, there would have to be an acceptance amongst citizens that they belonged together in a community. This would, in theory, lead to an acceptance of the idea that citizens shared fate with one another, establishing a moral obligation of the majority within a nation to ensure that fellow, less well-off citizens were socially secure (Johnston et al, 2010: 352).

Furthermore, it has been identified (Johnston et al, 2010) that national identity has a twofold role in sustaining a viable welfare state. Firstly, national identity can create feelings of sympathy for poorer community members, initiating the motivation for concern for the disadvantaged and policies to help the disadvantaged improve their standard of life. Secondly, and of equal importance, national identity can create a sense of trust; that if one has the desire to help others within their nation, they must be assured that they will receive such help if they one day require it (Johnston et al, 2010: 352).

This applies particularly to redistributive elements of the welfare state, where the better off—as benefactors to the poorest through state-controlled redistribution—must have feelings of loyalty towards their fellow citizens through their common national identity, and a sense that they will be repaid if they experience tough circumstances, whereby they require state help, in order to accept generous welfare and unemployment benefits (*ibid*). In Miller's words, 'A shared identity carries with it a shared loyalty, and this increases confidence that others will reciprocate one's own co-operative behaviour' (Miller, 1995: 92). Interpersonal trust is therefore key (*i.e.*,

the belief that all within a nation will subscribe to the same redistributive values and to do what they state asks of them), although there is a secondary role for institutional trust (Johnston et al, 2010: 352).

Such views are echoed by Brian Barry, who stated that nationhood facilitates redistributive measures ‘within the polity’, by generating ‘fellow feeling’ and a sympathetic approach to the interests of the co-citizen, resulting in trust that co-citizen’s will protect the needy, if and when required (Barry, 1991: 174–177). This has implications for nation-building in Scotland after the Scottish Parliament was established in 1999 — a time when the constitutional debate moved to whether or not the Scottish Parliament should remain devolved (within that, there was the debate about further devolution), or be completely independent of Westminster, through Scottish independence (McCrone and Paterson, 2002: 55). It is argued here that devolution presented new nation-building opportunities by transferring control over segments of the welfare state to the Scottish Executive.

Thus, the relationship between nation-building and state welfare is important. A symbiotic relationship exists, in that a strong sense of community can help to maintain a strong commitment to welfare state and social justice from Government (due to the consequent nation-building potential), yet a strong sense of community can also be established and maintained through a strong welfare state and the idea of mutual responsibility of citizens to ensure that the least well off are protected by the state. This relationship is critical to understanding the nature between state welfare and shared values—based on core commitments to public services, the NHS, social justice, and fairness—and the nation-building strategies of Labour and the SNP over the course of a trajectory in Scottish politics.

### **Policy making, nation-building and shared values in Scotland: A critical literature review**

Devolution is much more than an event; it is a process. That process is dynamic and contested, and it affects the whole of the UK as an entity. Since devolution was introduced, Scotland’s political landscape has altered significantly, and the pace of change has accelerated around debates about the constitution and independence (Mooney and Scott, 2016). In Scotland, devolution was about meeting demands for self-government, at least in part. Devolution was, and currently is, also tied up in

debates about nationhood, nationalism and nation identity in Scotland—but in Wales, also. Decentralisation is also an important consideration for devolution, and in England, devolution to the English regions and a greater role for local Government in London. New Labour presented devolution as a means to overcome the ‘democratic deficit’ argument in the UK, by addressing territorial needs and interests, and empowering local Government (Mooney, Scott and Williams, 2006: 485–486).

An examination of social policy can help to develop a critical understanding of the process of devolution (ibid: 483). Devolution in the UK brought with it a consciousness of the pre-existing differences between England and the devolved nations vis-à-vis their experiences regarding social problems and how their individual policy responses are organised. This has raised questions over the UK’s perception as a highly centralised unitary state, and the differing ‘degrees of autonomy in the history and development of intervention in fields such as social security, housing, education, health and social services’ (Mooney and Wright, 2009: 361). Furthermore, devolution has precipitated opportunities to establish new welfare settlements through ‘more pluralist and participatory, political and institutional formations’ (ibid). This has opened the possibility of comparison between multiple levels of Government within the UK—that is, between the central state level and sub-state level—but also beyond the UK.

The Scottish Government, for example, has a distinctive approach to policy in devolved areas such as housing, education and justice—namely, one characterised by a consultative and cooperative style, known as the ‘Scottish approach’. The Scottish approach relies on information gathering and support building for the Scottish Government’s policy aims, and civil servants work with groups including ‘voluntary groups, Unions, professional bodies, the private sector and local and health authorities’ in order to achieve this (Cairney, Russell and St Denny, 2016: 333). This ‘distinctive’ approach has—certainly in the Scottish case—enabled comparison to be made between the Scottish approach, and the approach of the UK Government. According to Cairney et al, the UK Government can be made a convenient target, as comparisons are made between the Scottish and UK policy styles, with the Scottish Government being portrayed positively, sparing critical examination of its approach to problem solving (ibid: 334).

Furthermore, devolution has brought into sharp focus questions regarding territorial justice, identity and inequality—raising questions about allocation of resources and thus, the ‘nature and permanency’ of social solidarity in the UK, and filtering into the debate on UK citizenship (Mooney et al, 2006: 484). Social ‘problems’ and ‘needs’ are constructed, imagined, and contested at devolved level, and Mooney et al (2006) are interested in how this is done, and by whom this is articulated. In Scotland, the process of developing a specific vision of its approach began in 2007—eight years after the devolved Parliament was established, and towards the end of the Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition Executive. Sir John Elvidge, according to Cairney et al, spoke of ‘the “Scottish model of Government” and the potential to exploit its compact size and close links to public sector bodies...[he] proposed to abolish policy-area specific departments and to give “organisation wide responsibilities” to civil servants who were previously responsible for discrete areas’ (2016: 338).

However, such an approach truly took off under the SNP, who were elected as a minority Government in May 2007. The SNP introduced the National Policy Framework (NPF), which is a Government-wide policy framework. NPF is a shift towards using long term outcomes as yardsticks of success, based on a ten year ‘vision’. The stated ‘core purpose’ of NPF is, according to Cairney et al, to ‘create a more successful country, with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish, through increasing sustainable economic growth’. Included within NPF are 5 strategic objectives: wealthier and fairer, healthier, safer and stronger, smarter, and greener—which cover areas such as wealth distribution, but importantly, the fairness in sharing that wealth; helping people to sustain and improve their health; helping communities to flourish, to have improved opportunities and to have better lives; expanding opportunities from nurture to lifelong learning; and improving Scotland’s natural and urban environment, and sustaining it for the enjoyment of the public (Cairney et al, 2016: 338). This ‘different’ approach is a point of divergence from the approach of the UK Government, vis-à-vis policy-making, particularly in terms of policy guidance.

Despite the distinctiveness of the Scottish approach, Cairney et al understand there to have been little difference to policy outcomes in Scotland (2016, 340). Some reviews of the Scottish approach, including that of Mooney and Poole (2004), and Law and Mooney (2006), have suggested that inequalities in areas such as education, health, and crime have remained ‘stubbornly high’ (Mooney and Scott,

2012; Scott and Mooney, 2009, 380–1). Yet Cairney et al suggest that the Scottish approach may refer to the shift away from a top down approach to policy implementation, towards a more bottom up approach. With communities leading policy, local authorities and their partners can shift policy implementation away from central direction (Cairney et al, 2016: 340–341).

Cook (2012) takes a slightly different view. He posits that successive Scottish Governments have had a policy focus on social exclusion, and that some of the measures that they have implemented have minimised the ‘adverse effects’ of the approaches taken by successive UK Governments, led by New Labour (1999-2010) and a Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition (2010-2015). Research and ‘real data’ have been at the root of the Scottish Government’s approach, and there has been an aversion to base an approach on the conclusions of the Centre for Social Justice, and other pressure groups.

Significantly, Cook argues that in areas of social policy that are reserved to Westminster, social exclusion has worsened. He does, however, acknowledge that the Scottish Government could do more in some key areas, including wage improvement, child poverty, tackling poverty in particular parts of Scotland, and addressing the correlation between poverty and ethnicity (Cook, 2012: 52). One could argue that the SNP-Scottish Government have begun to address income poverty, and in-work poverty, by funding the Scottish Living Wage Accreditation Initiative, which seeks to encourage businesses to pay their staff Scottish the living wage. The Scottish Government is a living wage employer, and it recognises the link between pay and poverty:

Low pay is one of the three main drivers of in-work poverty, which has been an increasing feature of poverty statistics in recent years. In 2013/14, half of working age adults in poverty lived in working households, as did more than half of children in poverty. There is a need to ensure that those in work get fairly rewarded, supporting those on lowest incomes and protecting public sector jobs. (Scottish Government, Living Wage, accessed 6 June 2017).

Cook argues that in Scotland, the ideal set of circumstances for tackling social exclusion would be a UK Government that rejected neoliberal economic and social policy, and the ability of the Scottish Government to adapt the wider framework to meet social problems specific to Scotland. This is based on the premise the UK

Government will continue to set macroeconomic and fiscal policy in the event of further devolution (which has become reality, through the additional powers over social security as part of the 2015 Scotland Act) and through independence (assuming that an independent Scotland would have continued to share Sterling with the UK) (Cook, 2012: 52).

Therefore, Cook (2012) indicates that there is a different approach in Scotland to social exclusion, but that such an approach is challenged by the neoliberal approach of successive UK Governments. Yet, in Scotland, there is more that can be done—and the Scottish Government has a role to play in mitigating some of the worst effects of ‘Westminster policy’, according to Cook (2012). Indeed, Nicola Sturgeon and other SNP politicians have articulated the Scottish Government’s role in such terms:

We are committed to mitigating against the harmful effects of Westminster welfare reforms where we can—but the majority of the cuts are still to come. These changes to the Budget will not only impact on the most vulnerable in our society, they will also set our progress on tackling poverty back by at least ten years. (Nicola Sturgeon quoted in the Scotsman, 7 April, 2014).

Certainly, the Scottish Government has a reputation for ‘doing policy differently’ through its ‘Scottish approach’—and a good reputation at that, when compared to the UK’s ‘neoliberal’ Government and governance. However, according to Cairney et al, ‘the danger is that this comparatively good reputation distracts us from detailed analysis of the extent to which the Scottish Government faces the same problems as any other, and addresses them often in similar ways. Some policy problems are territorial, but many are universal’ (2016: 346). So, although it has been established that there is a distinctive approach to policy-making in Scotland, it does not necessarily result in problems being addressed differently. There is, according to Cairney et al (2016), still the problem of how to define and address cross-cutting, ambiguous and universal problems that affect both Scotland and the rest of the UK.

### **Beyond policy-making only**

Mooney and Scott have shifted the debate from policy-making only, towards consideration of ‘the imaginings and visions of an Independent Scotland also come to be heavily reliant and premised upon particular claims about the kind of social

welfare system that would or could be developed with Independence' (2016: 247). They argue that Enlightenment thinking—including ideas such as reason, rational thinking, social progress, and universalism—has shaped the 'dominant narratives and representations of contemporary Scottish society' (ibid). They indicate that those ideas are important in framing how we think about Scotland's past, present, future, and they ask whether Scotland, as a modern capitalist society, can achieve its economic ambitions, particularly growth of the economy, whilst simultaneously meeting its targets on equality, fairness and prosperity for all (ibid: 239–240).

It is argued in this thesis, however, that articulations of those ideas are also important. Political actors have a role in controlling the meaning of key concepts such as fairness, equality and social justice in order to promote and subvert respective party positions on independence and Union. Mooney and Scott do highlight the role of the SNP Scottish Government, in particular, in promoting the idea of something akin to a 'second' or 'new' Enlightenment. They also indicate that Enlightenment ideals have been used to help shape and guide visions of a 'new' independent Scotland, 'founded upon progressive and socially just aspirations' (ibid, 240). So, articulations of social justice and equality are important in informing the debate about the future of the welfare state, which as indicated above, and by Mooney and Scott (2016), was in no small part informed by the debates around the constitution and independence.

Regarding the point above about 'socially just aspirations', Kirstein Rummery asks whether Scotland is indeed a 'beacon for fairness' under devolution. According to Rummery, Scotland has always claimed to be different in social policy terms, and the argument that 'social justice' and 'fairness' were the 'hallmark of Scottish society' was a significant part of that claim—and it was made by both Labour and the SNP as Rummery indicates (2015: 139). Scotland has, since before devolution, had different history, culture, legal and education systems to that of the rest of the UK, and this was characterised in policy terms by, according to Rummery, 'a commitment to social housing and ending homelessness; free university education; and a resistance to marketisation in health care' (ibid). Yet, in areas like health and social care, Scottish policy has been remarkably similar, apart from some key policies including free personal care, mental health legislation and children's criminal justice (ibid).

Turning to the Scottish independence referendum and the period after in more detail, ideas regarding a 'socially just' or 'better society' have become central, and social policy has become a key tenet in visions of a 'future' Scottish nation. Mooney and Scott point to an emphasis by policy-makers on improving childhood, particularly the idea of eliminating poverty and creating 'better communities' by focusing on children's needs and education—an idea developed by post-Enlightenment thinkers including Robert Owen. Because poverty still exists—and Scotland is no exception in that regard: early education and good quality childcare are referenced in debates about 'better society' by political actors. Therefore, arguments from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by thinkers such as Robert Owen—and indeed John Locke, who understood it to be a parental responsibility to help with the learning and mental processes of a child, and that the best possible conditions should be established to aid those processes—have heavily influenced the contemporary debate about a 'better society' in Scotland, which has helped shape the independence debate (Mooney and Scott, 2016: 240–241).

According to Scott and Mooney (2016), 'Social welfare is playing a key role in the imaginings and visions of what an independent Scotland would be like' (ibid: 243). Arguments about the 'shape and future trajectory of social welfare' are heavily entwined in debates about Scotland's constitutional status, and this is not solely to do with further devolution of powers—although that does play into the narrative on articulations of a 'better society', and a 'new' and independent Scotland (ibid). Interestingly, however, those visions 'invoke the past'. Indeed, they look backward and forward simultaneously. The vision of a future welfare state invokes nostalgic visions of how the welfare state was perceived before Thatcher—a 'classic' UK welfare state which was based on the principles 'fairness, universalism, and social democracy' (ibid). This is the type of welfare state that springs to mind when one hears the term 'cradle to grave'. Both sides, Yes and No, referenced that nostalgic vision of the welfare state in the independence debate.

### **Welfare reform, gender equality, and the independence debate**

A further consideration to make when discussing the idea of a 'new Scotland' is whether gender equality has been part of the debate on a future welfare state. Aspirations on welfare were high during the independence referendum, but Angela

O'Hagan (2016) asks whether 'the possibility of a more gender equal Scotland' was at the heart of such discussions. Specifically, O'Hagan asks:

What proposals for the social security of the citizens of a future Scotland were forthcoming from the political parties and the plethora of civil society organisations engaged in the independence debate and specifically for the social protection, well-being and independence of the women in Scotland? Was the economic, political and social status of women a central political concern beyond the organised feminist movement? (2016: 650).

She uncovers a 'disconnect' between arguments advanced by 'feminist voices' and 'policy discourses' of the political parties, and that paid work, care, income, time, and voice are not included as part of the dominant policy narrative of either the UK Government—and to a lesser extent, the Scottish Government—regarding social security reform. Women outside Government in Scotland, in small, interconnected polities, have power and capacity to politically engage, but in reality their perspectives and core demands are not incorporated as part of mainstream policy-making (ibid).

O'Hagan argues that despite the prominent status of women as political, social, and economic citizens, they appear to have had limited political influence on social policy, as there has been a consistent failure to 'locate gender equality as a central policy focus'. Despite the opportunities that the constitutional debate has presented to address the issue of equality for women in respect of social policy, the voice and presence of women has not resulted in the institutional engagement and commitment to 'gender analysis' that is necessary to address gender inequity. There has been no tangible shift from designing policy based on the traditional 'Male Breadwinner Model' and single-earner households in Scotland, to something that supports women in parenthood and primary caring roles, but yet takes into account their role as 'economic agents' (ibid: 665–666).

Meryl Kenny examines the public role of women more closely, and points to the independence referendum campaign as an example of male dominance of the debate about Scotland's future. Unlike the devolution campaign in the 1990s, when women played a 'significant role' in shaping the new institutions, and helped to achieve 'Parliamentary equal opportunities committee, equality policy machinery, and the implementation of 'family friendly' working hours, among other innovations',

the independence referendum debate was characterised by all-male or male dominated panels of experts. This was despite the prominence of some key female politicians, including Nicola Sturgeon, who was deputy First Minister during the referendum campaign (Kenny, 2014: 323–324). Interestingly, since the independence referendum, three of Scotland’s main political parties have appointed female leaders, but gender issues rarely feature during TV debate shows, or during First Minister’s Questions, for example.

In terms of female representation in the Scottish Parliament, the numbers have dropped. In the lead-up to the 1997 devolution referendum, female activists from across the political and interest spectrum called for 50:50 representation, and Labour contributed to the eventual 37.2 per cent figure by introducing gender quota measures. The SNP also introduced gender quota measures by placing women favourably on the regional list. However, since a high of 39.5 per cent in 2003, the percentage of female MSPs has stuttered: 33.3 per cent in 2007 and 34.8 per cent in 2011 (ibid: 327).

The fifth Scottish Parliament returned the exact same proportion of female MSPs as the fourth, in 2011. This was despite the strict gender quotas that were introduced by the SNP, under Nicola Sturgeon as leader, ahead of the 2016 Scottish Parliament election. Women made up 40 per cent of the SNP’s constituency and list selections, and that has worked, with 43 per cent of SNP MSPs now women, compared to just 27.5 per cent in 2011 (Kenny, Mackay and Murtagh, 2016). 46 per cent of current Labour MSPs are women, but only 19 per cent of Conservative MSPs are women. The Liberal Democrats have no female MSPs, and the Greens have 1 from their team of 6 MSPs, Alison Johnstone.

Beyond the numbers, Kenny, Mackay and Murtagh (2016) argue that whilst some political parties in Scotland have taken gender representation seriously, others have not, and they conclude, ‘For real and lasting progress, warm words must be backed up with statutory measures to embed equality in our political institutions’ (ibid). Gender equality reforms, therefore, can slip off the agenda if vigilance is not observed, and women can play a part in ensuring that both sides of the constitutional debate, which provides opportunities for female voices in respect of institutional reform, constitutional reform and gender equality, are held to account in that regard

(Kenny, 2014: 330). It is indicated above that more women in politics, both at Holyrood and on TV panels of 'experts', would aid that process.

Regarding nation-building, the SNP would perhaps benefit the most by expanding its support amongst women. Traditionally, men have been more likely to vote for the SNP than women, and there has been a similar gender gap in support for independence (ibid). A more gender based approach, aimed at attracting women could, in theory, bridge the gender gap between women who reject and support the idea of independence. But as Kenny (2014) indicates, there requires to be a greater effort in linking that gap 'with issues of women's political under-representation', and there is arguably a role here for a tangible shift towards policies that allow women to continue as 'economic agents' but also take into account their role as Mothers and carers, as O'Hagan (2016) indicates.

### **Austerity and social justice in Scotland**

According to McKendrick et al, '[i]n economic terms, austerity describes the reduction of Government budget deficits during adverse conditions, the drivers of which appear to be fiscal, but which may also have political or ideological underpinnings' (2016: 454). The public's understanding of 'austerity' has shifted in recent years, having entered public and political discourse, to refer to a societal shift caused by reduced Government spending. The meaning of 'austerity' has gone beyond fiscal policy, therefore (ibid). In the UK, on one hand, centre-right proponents of austerity argue that it is necessary to 'balance the books', 'live within our means' and thus, be fiscally prudent whilst critical of state aid portrayed as being given generously to those who do not 'deserve' it. Those to the left-of-centre are critical of the centre-right in that regard, and chastise austerity due to its ostensible unfairness towards the most vulnerable in society, who are perceived as the 'most deeply affected by spending cuts and regressive employment practices' (ibid: 454–455).

The evidence indicates that austerity is having a negative impact on Scotland, the UK, and some parts of Europe—and that it is indeed the most disadvantaged who are suffering more. Over one million people made use of foodbanks in 2015 according to the Trussell Trust in 2014–15, and over 100,000 of them were in Scotland. Many cited benefit delays and changes; and low income as the reason for requesting emergency food aid and support. For McKendrick et al, '[e]vidently this

illustrates some of the challenges facing individuals in receipt of benefits or those on low-incomes, which warrants further investigation' (2016: 455).

McKendrick et al posit that risk has been shifted to vulnerable individuals, groups and communities, and although the UK and Scottish Governments use measures designed to mitigate the negative impact of risks—as the state continues to provide social security during austerity, but not as generously as before — austerity is making the most disadvantaged more vulnerable and ensuring that they remain of the fringe of society (ibid). Yet according to Davidson, Virdee, Morrison and Mooney (2016), the SNP in Scotland has not yet mounted a serious challenge on neoliberalism or the politics of austerity through social policy, despite anti-austerity rhetoric. This is displayed, by the SNP's record in office—which indicates a neoliberal framework or growth and competitiveness, at odds with fairness and social justice (Mooney and Scott, 2009; Mooney, 2016). This is, according to McCormick, understandable given the inability of the Scottish Parliament to break entirely from Westminster, due to its reliance on the block grant (2014: 105).

However, Rummery (2015) argues that there is potential to fix 'disastrous' UK Government social policy. She indicates that, for example, the new welfare powers coming to Scotland as part of the Scotland (2015) Act could allow the Scottish Government to follow the German model of paying stepped benefits to all disabled Scots based on need. This could be done without means-testing or requiring the need to spread benefits for the disabled across a range of different support streams, like what is currently the case in the UK. By removing means-testing and making the benefits system simpler, social cohesion can improve, which may be attractive to the Scottish Government (Rummery, 2015).

Politically, the main proponents of austerity in Britain is the Conservative Party, whose Government has proposed and successfully passed through Parliament several austerity budgets, as a coalition Government with the Liberal Democrats (2010–15), as a majority Government (2015–17), and then as a minority Government with support from Northern Ireland's Democratic Unionist Party (since June 2017), after a snap general election). The Conservative mantra of 'we are all in it together' was a key discursive tool used to justify austerity in the UK, and it indicated recognition of the UK public's attachment to principles including 'fairness' and

‘collective, mutual security’. For McKendrick et al, this indicates that risk pooling—that is, the transferal of social risks such as ill health and unemployment from households to society—has endured as a viable articulated ‘political and policy option’ in the UK (McKendrick et al, 2016: 472–473).

Theresa May, who at the time of writing is UK Prime Minister, defended austerity when pressed by opposition leader Jeremy Corbyn in July 2017, repeating the Conservative mantra that failing to ‘deal with the deficit’ could result in economic collapse (and subsequent slipping in and out of recession), like in Greece in 2015 (Stewart and Walker, 2017). This indicates that 7 years after forming its coalition Government with the Liberal Democrats, the Conservative party was still committed to austerity measures. In reality, many examples of this can be highlighted, although the intention here is to provide a snapshot, rather than a detailed analysis of a Conservative commitment to austerity.

The role of austerity in Scotland is still developing, but it is evidently important. The SNP-Scottish Government has not deviated far enough from neoliberalism for some on the left on the independence movement (Fowler, 2017), and has arguably relied on anti-austerity rhetoric, and the language of fairness and social justice—only achievable through independence. Yet according to Rummery (2015), there is potential through the additional welfare powers which have been transferred to Scotland under the Scotland (2015) Act, to create a genuinely more socially just and fair set of social policies. This could help improve social cohesion in Scotland, yet Rummery questions whether this will help the independence movement, or hinder it, as she argues that the SNP may rely in future on building the case that Scotland needs full control over all aspects of welfare, in order to truly deliver social justice and fairness.

### **Nation-building and the role of ‘shared values’**

This project accepts and embraces the role of shared values in conferring meaning onto collective identity. Shared values can help to pinpoint what defines a group of people, and it is argued here that Labour and the SNP designed their political discourse in order to attract voters to the Union or Independence by articulating specific sets of shared values. This is not to say that the discourse of shared values is the only important variable in determining the creation of national identity. There

are a variety of economic, cultural, social and political factors that help to create a sense of national identity. However, the discourse of shared values can help to explain how identity is both discursively constructed and maintained, whilst remembering that discourse and identity are contingent (Henderson and McEwen, 2005).

Three purposes are served by shared values nurtured within political discourse. They are 'the pursuit of ideological or policy goals; the mobilisation of the population; and the promotion of inter-regional solidarity and identity' (ibid). First, in the pursuit of ideological or policy goals, political actors often attach the supposed values of the population to the promotion of particular policy initiatives (ibid: 174). In Scotland, the SNP attempted to do this during consecutive SNP Scottish administrations, by constructing social and public policy aimed at creating a universal moral obligation between citizens; thus creating a sense of 'shared fate' amongst them. This echoes the work of Johnston, Banting, Kymlicka, and Sokora (2010) as highlighted in Chapter One. For example, the SNP designed and implemented universal policies such as free university education, a council tax freeze, and free school meals for P1–P3 pupils—policies designed to benefit not only the working class, but the larger middle class.

Furthermore, political actors often encourage support or sacrifice in times of stress by drawing upon the notion of shared values. Henderson and McEwen (2005) argue that the dominant discourse in the USA after the 9/11 attack relied heavily upon the defence and reaffirmation of what was believed to be American values, such as freedom, democracy and the 'civilised world' (ibid). These values were also presented as intrinsic in Scotland and the UK, as their respective Governments chose a similar response in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks 9/11 and indeed 7/7. This was a form of political mobilisation, designed to unite the majority against a minority. It is argued here that Labour and the SNP have drawn upon the notion of shared values at times of 'crisis', caused by significant events over the course of contemporary Scottish politics, when new opportunities and challenges emerged. The welfare retrenchment of Thatcherism, as discussed above, was a key policy within the context of this thesis. It created new opportunities and challenges for Labour and the SNP, as they sought to defend the welfare state as part of their wider national discourse, and they shared values to help them create a sense of shared

identity in that regard. Thatcher's welfare retrenchment altered the scope of the welfare state in Scotland (Mabbet, 2013).

In addition, political actors may draw upon the notion of shared values in their political discourse for the purpose of nation-building within multinational states (*ibid*). This has implications at both the state and sub-state level. State level actors use discourse in order to strengthen inter-regional solidarity and a sense of shared identity and mutual sense of belonging across the territorial boundaries within the unitary state. This is an important process if state integrity is under threat from sub-state nationalists. At the sub-state level, political actors may seek to, through discourse, promote a set of shared values not only to create a sense of shared identity and cohesion, but also to demarcate difference from the rest of the population in the multistate (Henderson and McEwen, 2005).

Thus, the concept of political frontiers is important, as they are deployed by political actors by using language (in particular, important signifiers) that people can relate to, based on the notion of shared values, thus creating 'subject positions'. Then, on the other hand, political frontiers use divisive and negative language when referring to the 'political enemy', as such, in order to create a sense of 'otherness' (Triandafyllidou, 1998). This reinforces the earlier discussions on the role of discourse in a nation-building battle between Labour and the SNP over a period of nearly 50 years. Therefore, of particular interest to this project is the discursive construction of national identity, because 'all identities are viewed as relational, and are considered to be constructed, incomplete and always subject to change'; and 'how a national identity is collectively defined is thus intimately linked to the process of discourse production' (Henderson and McEwen, 2005: 176). These statements are relevant to the approach taken in this research project, too. This project, however, extends beyond the analysis of Henderson and McEwen (2005), for example, to examine the inter-party dynamic of nation-building at the sub-state level. This is significant, because it allows the researcher to examine how major political events along the trajectory of Scottish politics impacted the national discourse of Labour and the SNP—an original investigation.

In relation to that, it is plausible to suggest that mainstream Scottish political discourse focuses on the values of enterprise, social justice, and support of

egalitarianism (McEwen, 2006). This was reinforced during consecutive Conservative Governments (1979–1990), and the idea that Scots held a clear and opposing set of values to ‘Thatcherism’—including its actions, ideology and discourse—emerged. There was a heightened sense of ‘nationalism’ in Scotland in reaction to Thatcherism, which coincided with the gradual decline of the Conservative vote in Scotland, and an increased demand for Scottish self-government (Henderson and McEwen, 2005: 183). Significantly, the SNP extended its rejection of Thatcherism to include the Labour Party, as the SNP argued that Labour was too weak to protect Scotland against Thatcherism. By doing so, the SNP presented the politics of Westminster—through its national discourse—as contrary to Scottish values and ideals. This argument is discussed in greater detail, in Chapter Four, and although Henderson and McEwen (2005) allude to it, they do not spend much time discussing it. This an indicator of the original analysis offered by this project.

Claire Sutherland (2005) also highlights the relationship between discourse and national-building: ‘nationalism can be usefully understood in terms of discourse in general and ideology in particular’ (2005: 185). This indicates that the analysis of nationalist political discourse can reveal something important about nationalism and nationalist ideology. In particular, discourse theory helps to explain how the national ‘nodal point’ is rearticulated through the ideological construction of ‘the nation’ (ibid). By ‘nodal point’, Sutherland is referring to a privileged signifier, which is given form and meaning through its interaction with other important signifiers and/or concepts (a discussion of the concept of ‘nodal point’ can be found in Chapter Two) (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000: 8). In the case of nationalism, the nodal point is ‘the nation’. Political discourse analysis, therefore, treats nationalism as an ideology, as opposed to attempts to explain nationalism causally and universally (Sutherland, 2005: 186). There is theoretical crossover in that regard, with key nationalist authors (Billig, 1995; Brown, 2000; Smith, 2001).

This idea can be developed and it can be argued that successful nationalist mobilisation occurs when people have identified with and internalised nationalist symbols, institutions and rhetoric to the extent that they are understood as ‘common sense’. This is the end goal of nationalist projects, including alternative national constructs made by minority nationalist actors. Minority nationalist movements may

use nationalist ideology in order to rearticulate the meaning of any given political arena/context in a bid to challenge the perceived hegemony of a rival and dominant nation-building project, and to establish the dominance of their own nation-building project in its place (Sutherland, 2005: 193–194). Thus, discourse analysis can be used to examine the SNP’s attempts to dominate the meaning of key values and institutions—including the NHS—as part of their national discourse, as well as Labour’s role in challenging the SNP’s discourse; represented in a battle between alternative national discourses. This contest—although Claire Sutherland (2005) does not discuss it—has manifested itself over the course of contemporary Scottish politics in the form of political frontiers, deployed across a range of issues including welfare, in order to promote specific nation-building projects, whilst challenging alternative nation-building projects.

But the impact of welfare state expansion on nation-building is also important. The development and expansion of the welfare state over time ‘enhanced the extent of the state in the everyday lives of its citizens’, and that process promoted ‘political and policy debate’ at the national level (McEwen, 2006: 81). This is a particularly useful point to consider in a study of the relationship between state welfare and nation-building in multinational states such as the United Kingdom and Canada. It is also plausible to suggest that the welfare state may strengthen the bond between citizens and state by meeting at least minimum social and economic requirements, thereby forging an attachment of national minorities to the state, rather than to the sub-state (Beland and Lecours, 2006; McEwen, 2006; Johnston et al 2010). Furthermore, there is the idea that as a symbol of the nation, the welfare state can embody the ‘mutual solidarity and commitment of the people’, and thus build inter-regional solidarity and a feeling of belonging—as a national community—to the state (Beland and Lecours, 2006).

Turning to Scotland specifically, the British welfare state established a new set of institutions that became the symbol of protecting British citizens from uncertainty and risk. The British welfare state reinforced the centrality of national institutions and electoral politics, resulting in politics and power being conducted at the national level and leaving sub-state nationalism marginalised in political debate (McEwen, 2006: 93). Nation-building discourse was present during the period of reconstruction during the Second World War—and, indeed, afterwards—and the architects of the British

welfare state were aware of its nation-building potential (ibid). Certainly in the British case, the task of building the welfare state had a nation-building element, and, over time, the Labour Party in particular came to believe that the 'institutions and economic resources of the British state' were the best means of ensuring that Scotland's social and economic requirements were met (ibid: 96). These points have particular implications for this study, as they provide context for an analysis of the role of welfare in the long term nation-building strategy of Labour.

However, as established, the role of Thatcherism is an important consideration of this thesis. A mix of Thatcherite policy and 'rhetoric' may have undermined the nation-building qualities of the welfare state in Scotland (Hall, 1988; McEwen, 2006). Because, as has been well documented, Margaret Thatcher's reforms proved particularly unpopular in Scotland—especially the introduction of the 'Poll Tax' and her Government's policies towards the Trades Unions and the Scottish manufacturing industry (Hassan and Shaw, 2012, Mabbett, 2013; Mitchell, 2014). It is within this context that the Conservative articulation of Scottish identity—characterised by the values of 'family responsibility', 'self-help', 'hard work' and 'enterprise'—locked horns with the articulation by Labour and the SNP that 'Scottishness' was composed of the values of social justice and egalitarianism (McEwen, 2006: 126; Mitchell, 2014). Thatcherism—including its policies (welfare retrenchment) and its discourse—was dislocatory, because it enabled Labour and the SNP to build alternative nation-building strategies around institutions and concepts, including the welfare state and social justice, which then competed, and placed each favourably with an electorate that had remained loyal to the idea of a social democratic welfare state (Keating, 2010: 371).

Finally, Devolution in the UK transformed Scottish politics (Mooney and Scott, 2016). According to McEwen, 'The establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 led to a system of multi-level Government and substantial decentralisation of policy-making in key areas of the welfare state' (2006: 168). The tax and benefit system, including social security, remained reserved at Westminster. However, important decisions on aspects of the welfare state were devolved to the Scottish Parliament, such as housing, education and healthcare. This enabled a shift in 'governing mode' from consecutive Labour-led administrations to consecutive SNP administrations. During the Labour-led coalition administrations, policy on devolved areas such as

education, for example, took on an 'English dimension' of choice, privatisation and standards (Arnott, 2005; Croxford & Raffe, 2007). However, under the SNP, social and public policy, including education policy, was set in a particular direction, underpinned by a discursively constructed shared project:

The shared meaning is highly dependent on a narrative that is (implicitly) nationalist in its references to a shared 'project' that is social democratic with a Scottish accent. The implicit narrative is one that understands the necessary reference to fairness in conjunction with wealth, and the prioritisation of certain 'wicked issues'...endemic in Scotland and associated with poverty such as poor health (including mental health and alcoholism). (Arnott and Ogza, 2010: 339).

Addressing the consequences of poverty by pairing the economic growth and the targeting of resources is central to the shift from the 'historically-embedded qualities of the Scottish polity' towards a newer, more contemporary discursive trend (ibid). This indicates that although it is not the core focus of this thesis, state-building has a role to play in nation-building, by creating opportunities to develop social and public policy both in practice, but significantly, discursively. The Scottish Parliament emerged, therefore, as an alternative nation-building institutional structure. It allowed political parties in Scotland—particularly the SNP—to establish sometimes (and in the SNP's case, often) divergent devolved policy, which created new opportunities for alternative nation-building projects, exploited through national discourse. This was, ultimately, disruptive to the British welfare state. Although, as detailed in the previous section, the extent to which a 'Scottish approach' to social policy has been effective is debatable (Cairney et al, 2016).

Devolution has transformed the UK political system by making it asymmetric. By reserving social security policy to Westminster (except for in Northern Ireland, which has a much smaller population than Scotland or England), the UK Government has maintained a 'prominent role' in shaping the UK welfare state. However, the ability of the UK Government to maintain that role has been inhibited, because whilst the devolved countries of the UK have decision-making power over aspects of the welfare state, the UK Government legislates not only for reserved matters there, but also for England, which does not have its own, federal Parliament. This has made it more difficult for the UK Government to maintain national unity and to forge inter-regional solidarity (McEwen: 169). The pressure by English Conservative MPs on the

Government to introduce 'English votes for English laws' characterises the problem of not having an English federal Parliament. This issue was revisited after the Scottish independence referendum in 2014. The lack of control by the UK Government over the majority of social policy in the devolved countries has led to concerns about the maintenance of social citizenship in the UK, with the charge that the UK Government had failed to construct a meaningful articulation of British social citizenship post-devolution being voiced by some, including Jeffery and Wincott (2006).

That is not to say that attempts have not been made to articulate a discourse of 'commonality'. Prominent Scottish Labour politicians (Brown, 1999; Alexander 1999), in particular, have made efforts to articulate a discourse of shared values across the UK, which includes a commitment to the welfare state and to the British state. British citizenship, was reinforced by the idea that the construction of the welfare state was a British endeavour, where each citizen contributed to the well-being of one another, including pensioners, the disabled, and those who are ill (McEwen, 2006: 171–172; see also: Johnston et al 2010). To have access to the welfare state pertains to British citizenship, according to Labour, and this was a post-war consensus. Despite Scotland having a separate NHS to the rest of the UK, the idea that the welfare state was a British institution was a key part of Labour's 'welfare Unionism', and this was challenged by the SNP through its national discourse. Indeed, Michael Keating highlights the importance of the welfare state to cultivating national identity in the UK:

The welfare state (largely neglected in Bulpitt) has been one of the pillars of the modern Union as an expression of British-wide solidarity and particularly central to Labour conceptions of Union. (Keating, 2010: 371).

This reinforces the idea that there is a strong relationship between welfare state and nation-building/state (McEwen, 2006; Arnott and Ogza, 2008; Johnston et al, 2010) and that the concept of 'welfare Unionism' most accurately applies to the Labour Party.

The major difference between Scotland and England in approaches to the welfare state, according to Keating, is that Scotland has firmly rejected the neoliberal approach to state welfare (2010). The more that someone identifies as Scottish, the more likely they are to believe that there are different sets of laws for the poor and

the rich (Keating, 2010: 371). Amongst those who identify as Scottish, there is a slight tendency towards social democracy, and hence Scottish nationality has been built upon the values of social justice and egalitarianism. Party competition is centred on slightly different versions of welfare (ibid), a point that this study examines in great detail, and expands upon, to convey how a discursive battle between Labour and the SNP over the meaning of welfare influenced a nation-building competition between them.

Furthermore, New Labour's political discourse represented a 'less hostile' attitude to welfare and public services than the previous Conservative Governments. However, consecutive Labour Governments alienated the Scottish middle classes, and helped to break the link between 'the state and social solidarity of public services'. This was influenced by 'New Labour's' attacks on public service professionals and 'dogmatic' support for private provision in the delivery of public services (Keating, 2010). When Labour returned to power in 1997, welfare reform was one of its highest priorities, and business—in one way or another—was central to attempts to solve articulated problems with the social security system, including high spending and inefficient services (Farnsworth, 2006: 817). There were three main aims: first, gearing social policy towards the needs of the profit making sector in order to increase competitiveness and welfare expenditure; second, involve business people and organisations in social policy in order to improve efficiency from the public sector; and third, increase spending on the welfare infrastructure through private firms. However, this attempt at welfare reform caused problems. This included disruption and additional costs to public services (ibid: 817 and 838).

Alongside the attempted reform of public sector services, Labour continued and expanded the Conservative means testing, including the reforms made to childcare. Labour introduced the Childcare Tax Credit in 2003, which aimed to assist parents in paying for childcare by up to 80 per cent of the total cost. The level of support a parent could receive depended on means, the number of children in day care (up to two), and the type of childcare chosen (Daly, 2010: 435). Additionally, the Working Families' Tax Credit was introduced, and the overall effect was to increase the number of those receiving means-tested benefits (ibid). Such policies are evidence of the paradigm shift under New Labour, from concerns about equality to an emphasis on social inclusion and equality of opportunity, as well as a focus on social

obligation (often articulated through the empty signifier 'responsibility') as opposed to social rights (Lister, 1998: 215).

The state and nation fall apart, according to Keating, when the state no longer acts as the 'institutional expression and foundation for national solidarity' (2010: 372). The result of this was the emergence in Scotland of support for universalism, and a challenge to the private delivery of healthcare and other public services (ibid). Finally, it is noted here that 'Scotland does not necessarily have to be 'different' in order to exist (McCrone, 2001; Keating, 2010: 379); 'It is, rather, a territorial and social framework and a set of identities on which a political community can be rebuilt in the modern circumstances of a weakened state, transnational integration and a failure of the old Union formula' (Keating, 2010: 379). It is within this context that the SNP in particular not only presented a different approach to state welfare as a central element of their nation-building discourse—at least in terms of public discourse—but actually implemented public and social policy that suggested support for universalism and the idea that the Scottish NHS should be exempt from privatisation. Labour in Scotland also had a role to play here, as they sought to challenge the nationalism of the SNP, and by doing so, produced their own understanding of the 'nation' through their nation-building discourse. This discursive battle is examined in detail throughout Chapters 4–7.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed the contestable nature of the welfare state, as well as the nation-building role of the welfare state and how retrenchment or expansion of the welfare state can impact upon nation-building projects. It has been established that because the welfare state is contestable—which is indicated by the different attitudes and approaches towards it—it has developed differently across Europe. It has also been shown how welfare retrenchment can have a dislocatory effect, causing forms of nationalism to (re)emerge, and include the protection of the welfare state as part of its national discourse. This has had profound implications on the Scottish political terrain, and it has been displayed how Thatcherism and the establishment of the Scottish Parliament enabled the emergence of alternative nation-building strategies based on protecting and reinforcing the welfare state, articulated through national discourse.

The role of ‘shared values’ in nation-building has also been discussed. Shared values can reinforce nation-building by creating a sense of shared identity and mutual sense of belonging. This is central to successful national discourse. It has been argued that ‘welfare’ was in itself an important concept over the course of contemporary Scottish politics, as Labour and the SNP sought to slightly alter its meaning to fit within their national discourses. This goes too for what this thesis calls egalitarian shared values, such as ‘social justice’, and ‘socialism’ and ‘solidarity’—signifiers that are closely examined in Chapters 4–7. The welfare state, the notion of shared values, and nation-building are closely related, and national discourse can help to unite these concepts to reinforce or challenge the state.

However, the role of social policy has also been examined, with reference to austerity, social justice and gender. Examination of social policy can help uncover the differences between policy making in England and Scotland, creating opportunities to articulate Scotland as having a different set of needs and interests. Yet, according to Cairney et al (2016), the UK and Scotland face many of the same challenges. The independence and pro-Union movements must continue to consider closely the impact of social policy in Scotland, including the impact of the devolution of further welfare powers as part of the Scotland (2015) Act.

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## **Chapter four**

### **The national discourse of Labour and the SNP from the late 1960s to 1997**

This chapter provides an historical and analytical account of the national discourse of Labour and the SNP, from the late 1960s, until the devolution referendum in 1997. Discourse analysis is used to convey that welfare state and shared values were referenced by Labour and the SNP as part of their nation-building strategies. This shall shed a light on the process of identity formation and structuration of society in Scotland during the period, and will help to account for the ‘hegemonic struggle’ between the parties, as the new opportunities and challenges were presented. Significant events are referenced—the most relevant being the election of Margaret Thatcher’s Conservatives in 1979, and the 1997 vote to establish a modern Scottish Parliament—in order to account for changing party discourses, party competition, changing party system dynamics, and behavioural patterns.

The chapter has two main parts. Part one discusses the modern history of legislative devolution from the mid-1960s up to and including the 1979 devolution referendum. The period after the 1979 referendum is also discussed, covering a wide range of key issues such as class identity and the idea of a (social) democratic consensus during the 1980s; the 1987 general election when Scotland was seen to reject a Conservative Government; and finally the process towards the 1997 devolution referendum, and the successful campaign for a Scottish Parliament.

The second part of the chapter focuses on an original analysis of the individual approaches of Labour and the SNP towards self-government, and adopts the methodology outlined in Chapter Three, which will be used to examine how Labour and the SNP presented shared values and the protection of the welfare state as part of their discursive nation-building strategies from the late 1960s until 1997. This represents an original analysis of a trajectory in Scottish politics up until the establishment of the Scottish Parliament, which accounts for new political opportunities and challenges and changing political discourse.

## **Part one: A historical analysis of the events leading up to the 1997 devolution referendum**

### **The road to the 1979 devolution referendum**

The idea of legislative devolution gained traction in the period 1966–1968, when the Scottish National Party (SNP) and Welsh counterparts, Plaid Cymru, had electoral success in Parliamentary by-elections and local elections (Bochel, Denver, Macartney, 1981: 1). In the case of Scotland, the SNP's Winnie Ewing won the Hamilton by-election of 1967 (a seat traditionally held by Labour) to become the SNP's only MP at the time, and the SNP also returned 69 councillors during the 1967 local elections (Lynch, 2013: 121). Partly as a result of the support of Nationalist parties at the polls, the Labour Government appointed a Royal Commission in 1969, which had the job of examining 'the present functions of the central legislature and Government in relation to the several countries, nations and regions of the United Kingdom, to consider...whether any changes are desirable in those functions of otherwise in present constitutional and economic relationships' (Kilbrandon, 1973: iii, iv).

Led first by Geoffrey Crowther, Lord Crowther, and then by Charles James Dalrymple Shaw, Lord Kilbrandon, the Royal Commission on the Constitution produced a report in 1973, commonly referred to as the 'Kilbrandon report'. The Kilbrandon report indicated the view of the Commission's members; that Scottish and Welsh Assemblies should be established (as opposed to independence or federalism), given the evident demand for devolution as evidenced by opinion polls and the continuing electoral success of Scottish and Welsh Nationalist parties (Bochel et al, 1981: 1). Further to the Kilbrandon report, and after the February 1974 general election which produced further Nationalist gains (the SNP won seven seats), the new minority Labour Government released a consultative document entitled 'Devolution within the United Kingdom: Some alternatives for discussion' (1974). The document outlined the main recommendations from the Royal Commission, and following consultations, the Government issued the White paper entitled 'Democracy and Devolution: Proposals for Scotland and Wales' (1974).

Only a month after the introduction of the white paper, another general election was called, at which the SNP won 11 seats and a 30.4 per cent share of the Scottish vote. In terms of popular support in Scotland, this put the SNP second behind Labour and represented an all-time high in popular support for the SNP. This was significant as the SNP now presented the potential to challenge Labour's notion of 'welfare Unionism' (see Keating, 2010). Indeed, the SNP did attempt to do so, through its national discourse. Two further white papers were then introduced: 'Our changing democracy' (November 1975) and 'Devolution to Scotland and Wales: Supplementary statement' (August 1976) (Bochel et al, 1981: 2). November 1976 saw the Scotland and Wales bill published, but a failed guillotine motion by the Government meant that the bill was lost (Kerr, 1978). However, separate Scotland and Wales bills were then introduced, and by July 1978, Parliamentary approval and Royal Assent was achieved for both bills (Bochel et al, 1981: 2).

Scotland's first ever devolution referendum was held on 1 March 1979, and although a small majority voted Yes, this Yes vote fell beneath the required 40 per cent of the entire Scottish electorate needed to implement the 1978 Scotland Act (Harvie, 1998: 195). Yes votes only registered 32.9 per cent (Bochel and Denver, 1981: 141), which was well short of the required threshold. The referendum result was widely interpreted as a defeat for the Yes camp, and victory for the Noes, despite claims by Yes (in particular, by the SNP) that the Government should implement the 1978 Scotland Act by virtue of the majority of those having voting 'Yes' (ibid). George Cunningham's 40 per cent rule was a major thorn in the side of pro-change campaigners. The 'rule' made it even more important for the Yes campaign to maximise turnout, and if a simple majority had have been required to determine the result of the referendum, Yes would have won—the result was 52 per cent to 48 per cent in the Yes campaign's favour (Macwhirter, 2014: 198).

According to Bochel et al (1981), the decline in support for self-government and the eventual failure of the Yes campaign indicates that No simply had a stronger argument, campaigning successfully on the costs of devolution, the over-bureaucratisation that devolution would cause, and the argument that devolution would break-up of Britain. Bochel et. Al (1981) point to the significance of an ITN referendum day poll, which showed that the three most important issues to No voters were 'the potential break-up of Britain' (31 per cent), 'the cost of devolution' (31 per

cent) 'and the creation of another level of Government' (23 per cent) (ibid: 144). An additional factor to the failure of Yes, according to Bochel and Denver (1981), was the division amongst devolution supporters, and division within Labour. There was a Labour Vote No Campaign, which caused confusion amongst Labour supporters, according to Bob McClean, and the Scottish Council of the Labour Party voted against participation in any cross-party pro-devolution campaign (2005: 41–42). A final factor was the lack of popularity of Labour and the SNP, the two parties most closely associated with the campaign for devolution, in contrast with the popularity of the party most associated with No, the Conservative party, which saw its vote in Scotland increase in 1979 (Botchel et al, 1981). The proportion of Conservatives intending to vote 'Yes' was cut in half during the campaign period, and although the party presented itself as favourable towards devolution, it argued that Labour's Scotland Act had to be defeated (Mitchell, 1992).

### **The 1979 devolution referendum and beyond**

Labour and the SNP were the big losers of the 1979 referendum, and bitter recriminations took place between the two regarding the lack of unity within sections of the Yes camp. Both Labour and the SNP had different motives for campaigning for a Yes vote, meaning that voters and supporters were being met with conflicting messages (Bochel and Denver, 1981: 145–146). The SNP blamed Labour for what it saw as deception in delivering devolution, causing the failure of the Yes for Scotland campaign (Denver, Mitchell, Pattie and Bochel, 2000: 27). Not only had Labour MPs helped in the implementation of the 40 per cent rule, but the Labour referendum campaign was uninspired, with several party members and representatives supporting a No vote (ibid: 27–28). The ultimate result was that the SNP withdrew its support for the Labour Government led by Prime Minister James Callaghan, in 1979, further undermining Labour's legitimacy in Scotland. Later, a general election was called after Callaghan lost a motion of no confidence, and Margaret Thatcher's Conservatives were elected. Labour responded to losing that general election with severe criticism of the SNP, the party that Labourites saw as having caused both the downfall of a Labour Government, and the election of Thatcher's Tories (Denver et al, 2000, McLean, 2005).

Within the Conservative Party, although it was perhaps the form of devolution on offer (as introduced by Labour), rather than devolution itself that the majority of the party rejected, it did not take long before the 1979 referendum result was interpreted as an anti-devolution victory. Pro-devolution Conservatives became marginalised or retired, and the party took a hard-line anti-devolution stance under Thatcher. This made it ever-more clear to devolution supporters across all parties that co-operation was needed between those who advocated some form of home rule. However, the idea of Labour and the SNP co-operating on the home rule issue was hard for many to fathom, especially after the recent bitterness between the parties (Denver et al, 2000: 28). The lack of willingness of consecutive Thatcher Governments to seriously engage with the idea of legislative devolution, created an opportunity for Labour and the SNP to discursively construct the idea that self-government was required to protect public services in Scotland—particularly the NHS—against Thatcherism (a theme that has previously been discussed in previous chapters).

### **Class and identity: The (social) democratic consensus in Scotland**

As established already, nation-building in Scotland is central to this thesis, but so, too, is Labour and SNP party ideology, as class and ideology is an important factor in understanding nation-building in Scotland. The period 1979–1999 is crucial in establishing an understanding of how and why national identity was constructed in certain ways by various political actors in Scotland, with regard to self-government, but with wider implications for the stability of the Union, too, and for the ideological development of party discourse in Scotland.

When the post-referendum period began in Scotland, it was class and national identity that were in conflict with one another. This was a continuation of the trend throughout the 1960s and 1970s, which was at least indicated by relations between Labour and the SNP; the party of the working class (as Labour was popularly known) and the party of Scottish independence and ‘separation’ from the UK, respectively. At least, that was how each was traditionally seen. However, consecutive Conservative Governments helped to alter this narrative, and a very different relationship developed between class and national identity in Scotland (Denver et al, 2000: 28), as indicated by the national discourse of Labour and the SNP (see part 2 of this chapter).

Before the general election on 18 June 1970, the Conservative shadow cabinet decided that the next Conservative Government would be different from that of its predecessors, Harold Macmillan and Alec Douglas-Home. The way forward, they decided, was to break with consensus, and take an approach that included a more free-market emphasis, a tougher stance on welfare, a determination to 'let so-called 'lame ducks' drown', and a willingness to confront the power of the Trades Unions with the Industrial Relations Act (McLean, 2004: 42). Margaret Thatcher took these ideas on into her own Governments from 1979 to 1990, after she had replaced Edward Heath as Conservative leader in 1975. Thatcher was seen as a more determined champion of 'new Toryism' (ibid: 43, Mitchell, 1992). She wanted to take forward her 'Thatcherite' project of privatisation of public services, and a tough stance of welfare. This was characterised by classic liberal ideas about free market forces and the self-interested pursuit of individual wealth (Hall, 1988, Mitchell, 1992), ideas which are classified as 'neoliberalism' here.

Indeed, consecutive Conservative Governments during the 1980s were more determined to pursue a strategy of reining back what they saw as an 'overly expansive and uncontrolled welfare state' more vigorously than what had ever been experienced in post-war Europe (Alcock: 1990: 88). Thatcher's leadership challenged and changed the political terrain in Scotland, and ideas about the free market and pursuit of welfare were embedded in 'Thatcherite discourse' (see Hall, 1988). As support of the Conservative Party declined in Scotland (certainly by 1987, except for a minor recovery in the 1992 general election), support for devolution rose and became the leading issue in Scottish political affairs (Denver et al, 2000: 28). As Scotland felt the effects of Thatcherism, Labour and the SNP challenged the Conservative Party through their national discourse by presenting themselves as being prepared to protect the welfare state in Scotland. It is plausible to argue, then, that Thatcherism had a dislocatory effect in Scottish politics, and within the national discourse of Labour and the SNP.

From Labour's perspective, the association of devolution with a 'radical interventionist economic policy' gained traction in the party's discourse. Labour began to argue that a separate Parliament could provide a democratic institution that would be both able and willing to pursue such an economic policy. The 'alternative regional strategy', an idea developed by the inner circle of the Labour Party, set the

ball rolling for an attempt to reconcile social democratic policy with home rule (McLean, 2005). And as Scots increasingly believed that the Thatcher Government was imposing policies on Scotland that they did not want, especially economic and social security policy, Labour pushed the idea that a Scottish Assembly would be preferable having seen the policy decisions that the Conservative Government was making; decisions that Labour firmly opposed. This came despite residual Labour suspicions of the SNP (Denver et al, 2000: 29–30).

The link between class and national identity in Scotland began to emerge more clearly during the 1983–1987 Parliament. The idea that Scotland was being treated as a guinea-pig for unpopular Conservative policies was developing (such as the ‘Poll Tax’), and the 1983 general election, where the Conservatives had a 3 per cent decrease in support, marked the beginning of a period of Conservative unpopularity in Scotland. Additionally, the threatened closure of steel factories in Scotland, for example, was met with public campaigns against the Conservative Government (ibid: 30). The closure of the Gartcosh and Ravenscraig steel plants were particularly drawn out affairs, and they were kept at the forefront of Scottish politics. Added to those closures, were the closures of Massey Ferguson in Kilmarnock, Coats Patons, Peugeot Talbot at Linwood, Hoover, and British Leyland. Those closures represented the ‘industrial revolution in reverse’, and signify what MacWhirter has termed ‘the supports of the Union...being kicked away one by one’ (2014: 203). This was much to the disadvantage of the Conservatives: ‘Scotland was collateral damage in Thatcher’s class war’ (ibid: 209). Labour and the SNP would ensure that voters knew about this development, and did so by structuring their national discourse around the idea that Thatcherism was ‘destroying’ the welfare state in Scotland.

Indeed, and of great significance to the constitutional debate, Labour, the Unions and the SNP all campaigned in protest against the closure of Scottish businesses and industries (Denver et al, 2000: 30). The campaign against the ‘Poll Tax’ would become significant here in the period after the 1987 general election, and led to an increased emphasis on the Scottish dimension, Home Rule, and constitutional reform (Hassan and Shaw, 2012: 36). The very public rejection of factory closures, as well as opposition to what was seen as proposals for an unfair ‘Poll Tax’, helped to reinforce anti-Tory sentiment, and although the Conservative Party won re-

election in 1987, it took less than 25 per cent of the vote in Scotland, losing over half of its Scottish seats. This indicated an increasing dependence on 'English votes' by the Conservatives (Denver et al, 2000: 31).

In relation to nation-building specifically, Labour and the left-leaning section of the SNP had made conscious efforts to pin on the Tories an 'anti-Scottish label'. When he was SNP vice-convenor for publicity, Alex Salmond had launched a campaign to ensure that the Tories were portrayed as being bad for Scotland, for example (Lynch, 2013). Denver et al (2000) have argued that this was an effective campaign by the SNP—which achieved some Labour support due to the links that were being made between class and national identity—as they argued that the Tories were not only class enemies, but enemies of Scotland. At this point, it should be remembered that Labour and the SNP were competing for the anti-Tory vote. So, although they both supported self-government, they did so differently through their national discourses, designed to build support for devolution and for independence, respectively.

### **Towards a second devolution referendum**

The 1987 general election was indeed a political watershed in Scotland. The unpopularity of Thatcher's Conservatives in Scotland was all too clear, and the reaction to the introduction of the 'Poll Tax' (a year earlier than the rest of the UK) encapsulated the resentment towards Thatcher and her Government. Indeed, Scottish politicians from all of the main parties, including some in the Conservative Party, found that decision to be morally outrageous (MacWhirter, 2014: 220). The right-leaning agenda that Thatcherism was interpreted to encompass, and the perceived anti-Scottish nature of Thatcher's Governments (as constructed through the national discourse of Labour and the SNP), created a powerful tide against the Conservative Party in Scotland, and this led to Conservative rule lacking popular legitimacy to rule over the Scottish people (Denver et al: 31–32). Such an attitude was voiced throughout the 1980s, particularly by both Labour and the SNP. By 1987, class and national identity, which had once been at odds with one another in Scotland, were now 'mutually reinforcing' (ibid).

At around the same time, support for a Constitutional Convention was growing, with the left-Nationalist magazine *Radical Scotland* calling for such a convention in order

to plan a strategy to respond to the continued rule of the Thatcher Government. At the heart of the Convention was to be a 'Claim of Right' to self-government. This was an attempt to repeat the success of the post-war Constitutional Convention and its National Convent, which two million Scots signed in 1951 (MacWhirter, 2014: 225). Being reduced to only ten Scottish seats put the Tories into a vulnerable position, but although Labour now had fifty seats, they, too, were put on the defensive (McLean, 2005). The SNP's high profile mass civil disobedience campaign over issues related to the 'Poll Tax' saw Labour outflanked. Scottish Labour MPs were referred to and branded as 'the feeble fifty' as the political saliency of the 'Poll Tax' issue increased (Denver et al, 2000: 33). This indicates that major differences between Labour and the SNP still existed, despite both rejecting Conservative Government in Scotland, making the investigation of national discourse at the time particularly important.

In 1980, the Campaign for a Scottish Assembly (CSA) was established—a cross-party pressure group of home rule supporters. Ahead of the 1987 general election, Bob McLean, one of the CSA's more active members, and a Labour Party member, made the suggestion that their focus must be on the 'Doomsday Scenario'—the possibility of another Conservative Government (McLean, 2005). Furthermore, the term 'no mandate' was adopted—especially after the 'Doomsday Scenario' became reality—to signify the idea that Scotland no longer voted Conservative, and that 'the Tories' had no mandate to introduce unpopular policies in Scotland, such as the 'Poll Tax' (Mitchell, 2014: 227).

Significantly, the CSA issued the 'Claim of Right for Scotland' document in July 1988, which proposed the establishment of a Constitutional Convention to agree upon a settled notion and form of devolution and to implement the subsequent blueprint. Things were not straightforward for the CSA in driving forward a Constitutional Convention, and the existing tensions between Labour and the SNP played a part in making that the case. However, constitutional and socio-economic politics became intertwined during the late 1980s, and the Labour leadership responded in 1989 (McLean, 2005) by agreeing to participate in the Constitutional Convention after having considered proposals from a CSA committee. Labour agreed that it would be safer for the party to join Constitutional Convention and have a majority, rather than stay on the outside looking in (Denver et al, 2000: 33). Labour took time to warm to the idea of cross party support, therefore, despite being pro-

home rule. Labour's internal conflict over devolution was notably influenced by mistrust of the SNP, yet Labour did learn from past misgivings, and were aware that they were required to work with the SNP in order to achieve home rule. But for Labour, legislative devolution was as far as things should go (McClean, 2005). It should be noted how important John Smith's role was in his short time as Labour leader (from 1992, until his untimely death in 1994), who 'famously described the question of a Scottish Parliament as "unfinished business" and committed the party firmly to devolution for Scotland and Wales' (Tomaney, 2000: 682). Although Smith's successor, Tony Blair, was less enthusiastic about devolution, he described it an inevitable, and saw no reason to ride against the tide (McClean, 2005).

However, the SNP approached the idea of a Constitutional Convention, or at least a directly elected one, with trepidation. Labour's dominance of the convention, the SNP feared, could have left the party's new policy of 'independence in Europe' (a policy formed by Jim Sillars) vulnerable to attack. When the Convention was officially launched in 1989, Labour, the Liberal Democrats, Greens, trade Unions, local authorities, churches and several other civil bodies had all joined, but the SNP had not (Denver et al, 2000, McLean, 2005). Indeed, the SNP had concerns about supporting a campaign (the CSA) that had goals short of independence (McLean, 2005: 50). This meant that the SNP could not shape devolution from within, and it reinforced the party's hard-line, fundamentalist image (Mitchell, Johns and Bennie, 2012: 31). In order to counter this, the SNP publicly committed to work with any group that wanted home rule, and Jack Brand (the CSA's Chair) responded by saying the CSA was such an organisation (McLean, 2005: 50). It took a meeting between Gordon Dewar with the SNP's Alex Salmond and Margaret Ewing, and an assurance that there would be no glass ceiling to independence as a result of legislative devolution, to encourage the SNP to campaign for a Scottish Parliament alongside Labour and the Liberal Democrats (McLean, 2005: 164).

In any event, the Convention had gained support from the two biggest broadsheets in Scotland—*The Scotsman* and *The Herald*—but exposed was the reality that co-operation between Labour and the SNP was still difficult to achieve. The conflictual nature of the Labour-SNP relationship had not been aided by tensions between the two parties over the closure of steel plants and the 'Poll Tax' (Denver et al, 2000:

33), who although united in opposition to the Conservative Government over such issues, still had their own nation-building agendas, as previously indicated.

Despite its difficulties, the Convention agreed a scheme of broad principles that followed the provisions laid out by the 1978 Scotland Act, and was broadly similar to a bill that Donald Dewar proposed in the autumn of 1987, on behalf of the Labour Party. At this stage, the SNP were still on the side-lines. The blueprint for a Scottish Parliament, *Scotland's Parliament; Scotland's Right* was published in 1995, and it proposed an elected Parliament (by proportional representation), with some revenue raising powers, power to legislate on a wide variety of domestic issues, as well as power to vary the rate of income tax by 3p in the pound (MacWhirter, 2014: 228). A framework was now in place for a Scottish Parliament, but the SNP had little input, which was significant in itself, and it legitimised the SNP's later claims that the Scottish Parliament had significant limitations.

Despite initial confusion in dealing with Tory criticism over the 'tartan tax' (the term that the Conservatives used to criticise the tax varying proposal)—particularly from Michael Forsyth—Labour's leadership (Tony Blair; John Prescott; Gordon Brown) decided that a devolution referendum should be held, asking Scots two questions. This gave Labour's leadership an opportunity to display courage and risk, and a willingness to challenge the status quo (Hassan and Shaw, 2012: 72–73). One issue concerned the question of whether Scots wanted their own Parliament, the other, the ability of a Scottish Parliament to hold tax-varying powers (Denver et al, 2000: 42–43). Regarding the latter, the Labour leadership believed that they could dodge the criticism over the 'tartan tax' by claiming that they were letting the Scottish people make the decision over tax varying powers. However, Labour's Shadow Scottish Secretary, George Robertson (now Lord Robertson), had previously said that there were no proposals for a referendum: now, a referendum was to take place. The Conservative Party was not slow to point this contradiction out, criticising Labour for u-turning over the issue of holding a referendum. As ever over the issue of devolution, a number of Scottish Labour MPs spoke out against having a referendum. Additionally, George Kerevan, a former senior Labour councillor, quit the party to join the SNP (ibid: 43), and he became an SNP MP in May 2015.

Clearly, the decision to hold a referendum was a controversial one within the Labour Party. However, in 'New Labour manner', critics from within the party over the referendum were 'ruthlessly' ousted and replaced by trusted members (Hassan and Shaw, 2012). In 1997, after Labour's general election majority victory, the party moved to implement its manifesto commitment to hold a Scottish devolution referendum. Preparations for the referendum began almost immediately. Donald Dewar was appointed Secretary of State for Scotland, despite George Robertson having held the Shadow role, for which he came in for much criticism over the referendum U-turn. Dewar was seen as a consistent supporter of devolution, was a 'cultural nationalist', and it was believed that he was more willing and more able to work with the SNP in a joint referendum campaign (Denver et al, 2000: 45–46).

The Referendum (Scotland and Wales) Bill was the first public bill to be introduced in the new Parliament. It was introduced on 15 May 1997, and its second reading was a week later. The bill was for pre-legislative referendums, that is, they would be held before the actual devolution legislation detailing the nature and powers of the respective Parliaments, and if both the Scottish and Welsh referendums achieved Yes votes, respective devolution legislation would be treated separately. In an important change from the 1979 Scottish referendum, there was to be no qualified majority requirement (MacWhirter, 2014), and given the massive Commons majority that Labour had achieved in the 1997 general election, it was considered that the Government's devolution proposals, which were only published after the Referendum Bill was passed, had positive endorsement (Denver et al, 2000: 48).

The period from 1979 to 1997, then, was characterised by turmoil for the SNP and Labour. Equally important, though, was political change. The 1979 result left pro-devolutionist dejected and pessimistic about the prospects of Home Rule, not to mention fragmented. The eighteen years of Tory rule left a high number of Scots feeling animosity towards Tory Governments that they had not voted for, which had showed little interest in constitutional reform. But by 1997, Scotland was on the verge of a major constitutional change, and the key to understanding this change, according to Denver et al, is when working-class identity and national identity converged to reinforce one another, and this was in no small part to the policy and actions of successive Tory Governments (ibid: 48–49, Lynch, 2013, Mitchell, 2014).

The significance here is that as class and national identity came to reinforce each other, Labour and the SNP found themselves increasingly contending for the votes of a similar section of the electorate—mostly the working class and middle class healthcare professionals, such as nurses, practitioners and GPs. Although the SNP had flirted with social democratic principles in the 1970s, the party made a conscious and decisive move towards the left during the 1980s—ground which was traditionally Labour territory (Lynch, 2013). This meant that key issues such as ‘Poll Tax’, the decline of Scottish industry, and devolution were issues of contention, because although Labour and the SNP may have fought for similar outcomes, they were mindful that electoral success and their long term objectives depended on attracting a large section of their rival’s support (Denver et al, 2000: 49). Labour eventually adopted a referendum as an electoral tactic, and when Scots came to vote in the 1997 general election, they had the choice of either electing another unpopular Conservative Government, or replacing 18 years of successive Conservative rule with a new, fresh Government, that had a tide of popularity across Britain in its favour. Britain elected Tony Blair’s Labour into Government on a landslide (418 seats to the Conservative’s 165 seats, according to Hassan and Shaw, 2012), and things in 1997 were much different, as devolution was more widely supported, compared with 1979.

## **Part two: the nation-building discourse of Labour and the SNP from the late 1960s to 1997**

As discussed in Part One, class and identity came to reinforce one another in Scotland, particularly during the 1980s. Part two is concerned with how that trend impacted upon Scottish nation-building, and the national discourse of Labour and the SNP. As previously discussed, certain events created opportunities for alternative nation-building discourse to emerge, including the ‘No’ vote in the 1979 devolution referendum; the election of Thatcher’s Conservatives to Government, also in 1979; the drastic fall in support for the Conservatives at the 1987 general election in Scotland; and the successful devolution referendum in 1997. In particular, Thatcherism and Thatcherite discourse, as well as perceived welfare retrenchment, helped to create conditions for alternative political nation-building projects during the 1980s.

Thus, this section examines the trend towards a mostly united Labour front for devolution (from an earlier division between pro and anti-devolution Labourites), and the SNP's shift to the left, as well as the shift from a fundamentalist to a gradualist approach towards independence. In order to do so, the approaches of Labour and the SNP during the mid-1960s to 1997 period must be examined. Discourse analysis, or particular concepts and methods adopted from political discourse theory, will be applied in order to examine how Labour and the SNP articulated state welfare and shared values as part of their nation-building strategies.

### **The Labour Party's approach to nation-building from the late 1960s to 1997: devolution and Union**

According to Frances Wood, the rise in support for Scottish Nationalism during the mid-1960s necessitated a reaction from Labour (Wood, 1989: 100). As Iain McLean, Jim Gallagher and Guy Lodge have put it, 'the threat to Labour's hegemony in the whole UK was serious' (2013: 151). Labour came to 'embrace decentralism', and increasingly focused on formulating policies that aimed to reverse the trend towards support for Scottish nationalism (Wood, 1989: 100). Perhaps, however, Labour did not fully accept the idea of a distinctive Scottish nation. Thus, as a party that opposed any notion of Scottish Home Rule in 1958 and throughout the 1960s, Labour came to re-adopt the idea in August 1974 to tackle Scottish nationalism. Wood indicated that this sway towards support of Home Rule in Scotland was likely to have been a panic reaction, aimed at stopping the SNP stone dead (*ibid*), and thus preventing the nationalists from further eating into Labour's traditional Scottish support base (bearing in mind that the SNP had seven MPs—its biggest ever tally by that point—by the time Labour re-adopted the policy of Scottish Home Rule in August 1974). Certainly, there were fears amongst Labour supporters and MPs that devolution would lead to Scottish independence, and by the time the Scotland Bill had passed its third reading in the House of Commons, a 'Labour Vote No' campaign had already been established, led by Brian Wilson as chairman (McLean, 2005). This indicates that Labour was divided on the issue of self-government for Scotland.

In one respect, Labour's first devolution experience was similar to that of the SNP's, in that Labour, like the SNP, had internal conflict over whether or not to support devolution throughout the 1970s. However, that was for different reasons, and unlike

the SNP, Labour went into the 1979 referendum without a clear stance on devolution, with groupings both for and against an Assembly, such as 'Yes for Scotland', and in opposition; 'Labour vote No'. This was the result of a divide between anti-devolutionists including Tam Dalyell, Brian Wilson, Robin Cook, Adam Ingram and Eric Milligan (ibid: 41), and pro-devolutionists, such as Gordon Brown, Douglas Alexander, Alex Eadie and Jim Sillars, about how best to defend the Union. Labour Pro-devolutionists saw an Assembly as a means to achieve a Labour majority in Scotland, which could act as a platform from which to attack 'Westminster Tories' (Wood, 1989: 100), to promote a form of 'socialist' Government, and to halt the trend towards increased support for Scottish nationalism.

Labour anti-devolutionists, on the other hand, viewed the status quo as preferable, believing that a Scottish Assembly 'would be divisive' (Labour Party, March 1970: 1) and that 'Labour representatives', working 'within a framework of a United Kingdom Government' (ibid: 3) was the best solution for working people. Labour used a very similar argument during the independence referendum campaign, as Chapter Seven indicates. Labour's nodal point was 'Union' during this period, although the signifiers 'Assembly' or 'devolution' were added to the chain of signification by pro-devolutionists in order to present devolution as something that would keep the UK intact. Yet Labour also sought to convince SNP sympathisers and supporters that it would fulfil the demand for stronger decision-making influence in Scotland.

From a tactical perspective, Labour pro-devolutionists increasingly saw a Scottish Assembly as a means to have Labour control over Scottish devolved affairs no matter what colour the Government was at Westminster, as well as a means to douse the flame of Scottish nationalism that was ignited by the SNP. The SNP had not faded away, something that was assumed would happen after the SNP lost the Gorbals by-election in 1969, as well as some of its membership. The first signs of the SNP's comeback came in the Stirling and Falkirk Burghs by-election in September 1971, where although Labour held its seat, the SNP saw their vote double to 13,048 votes (Eadie, Ewing, Robertson, Sillars, 1974: 7). The Kilbrandon report is likely to have had an effect here too on Labour thought at the time, indicating that support existed for a devolution settlement in Scotland, and that 'separatism' (a Labour term often used to refer to independence) and 'federalism' should be rejected (Eadie, Ewing, Robertson, Sillars, 1974: 11).

In short, Labour pro-devolutionists saw a Scottish Assembly as a means to achieve the support of the Scottish people, who they believed wanted power closer to them, whilst maintaining Scotland's status in the Union. This was a core argument of the Royal Commission on the Constitution:

In both Scotland and Wales we have found that, while only small minorities favour complete independence, there are larger numbers of people who wish their distinctive national identities to be recognised in the system of Government in some way falling short of political separation. (1973: 330).

The Labour Party had chosen to go it alone during the 1979 referendum campaign (Bochel and Denver, 1981: 145), with the Labour movement Yes campaign stating that the party would not 'soil its hands' by working with other parties, particularly the SNP, for a yes vote. At the same time, the activities of Tam Dalyell, Brian Wilson, Robin Cook, Adam Ingram and Eric Milligan, who supported the Labour vote no campaign, split Labour internally, and confused voters and Labour supporters (McLean, 2005: 41). It is not clear whether or not most Labour activists, or even large numbers, would have joined the Yes umbrella group if the Party had recommended them to. Such an outcome was unlikely according to Bochel and Denver, because of the sheer bitterness between Labour and the SNP, sometimes at personal level, making co-operation difficult (*ibid*).

Unlike the SNP, Labour did not appear to interpret the referendum result as anything like a victory for devolutionists: the Party Executive affirmed Labour's commitment to devolution, but did not call for the Scotland Act (1978) to be implemented. After the Labour Party Scottish Conference in March 1979, at which anti-devolution chair Janey Buchan oversaw the withdrawal of emergency resolutions on devolution and refused to call any Labour MPs to join in at the debate, West-Stirlingshire MP at the time, Dennis Canavan (later to be chairman of the pro-independence campaign, Yes Scotland), attacked Buchan and the Conference. He argued that Buchan had gagged her critics and had only invited 'traitors' to speak, who had 'collaborated with the Tories and used court action to gag their own party during the referendum' (Kellas, 1981: 147). In terms of the 'Scotland said Yes' campaign, it was only the SNP and the small, breakaway Scottish Labour Party led by Jim Sillars who were involved, with no input from the Labour Party. The campaign was faced with the sober reality that neither the Government nor the people of

Scotland believed that the referendum result indicated decisive support for devolution (ibid: 148).

For Labour after the 1979 referendum, the political battle had now moved to Westminster, where the Labour Government, composed mostly of English Labour MPs (with support from the Liberals and the nationalist parties) was at risk. As it became apparent that Labour was ready to shelve its commitment to Scottish devolution, topped off by Prime Minister James Callaghan refusing to lay the order to repeal the Scotland Act (1978) before Parliament within a three week period, the SNP wanted to send a clear message by tabling a motion of no confidence in the Callaghan Government. The Conservative Party then tabled its own motion of no confidence, which was carried in Parliament by one vote on 28 March 1979. A general election was later called, and the election led to the formation of a Conservative Government led by Margaret Thatcher (ibid).

Much of the Labour Party's time thereafter was spent on finding ways to devolve power within the party, rather than power within the United Kingdom. By the time of the next general election, in 1983, Labour found itself battling hard with the Liberal-SDP Alliance to maintain its position as the main opposition party to the Conservative Government (McLean, 2005: 45). However, Labour did still set out a case for an Assembly during the 1980s, as a means to indicate how Labour could do things differently in Scotland to Thatcher's Conservatives. The nation-building role that this had within Labour's national discourse will be examined.

### **Labour's nation-building discourse during the 1970s and the appeal to working class Scots: solidarity; socialism; and local democracy**

Pro-devolutionists within Labour argued that a Scottish Assembly was the most democratic option for Scotland (reinforced by the report of the Kilbrandon Commission). Specifically, pro-devolutionists argued that devolution would begin a process of bringing power closer to the Scottish people, and that it could deliver 'socialism' in Scotland. Labour pro-devolutionists simultaneously presented a Scottish Assembly as an alternative to the long term goal of the SNP, independence, or 'separation', as they often labelled it. Interestingly, a similar position was taken in the period leading up to the 2014 independence referendum and Labour's support of further devolution, over independence. This will be discussed in detail in Chapter 7,

and it highlights a degree of consistency in Labour's nation-building discourse. In its simplest terms, the goal of Labour pro-devolutionists was to stamp Labour's brand on devolution—as suggested by pamphlet titles such as 'Labour's Scottish Assembly' (dated March 1978)—and to halt the SNP's relative success during the 1970s.

During the mid-1960s and 1970s, Labour reacted to the increased support for the SNP and Plaid Cymru, at least in part, by taking on devolution as party policy (despite divisions within the party on self-government). Initially, the Labour Party had pledged to 'examine the present functions of the central legislature and Government' and to consider what changes to the current constitutional and economic arrangements may have been desirable, in the interests of 'prosperity and good Government' (Harold Wilson, quoted by the Labour Party Scottish Council, 1969: 5). This was by no means a guarantee that devolution would be implemented by Labour, but after the Royal Commission on the Constitution produced its report the Labour Government produced its devolution white paper in 1974, entitled *Democracy and Devolution for Scotland and Wales*. The white paper stated:

The Government agree wholeheartedly with the Commission on the Constitution in rejecting separatism and federalism as a solution. (The United Kingdom Government, 1974: 1).

Indeed, Labour signalled its intention to legislate for a devolution settlement. Labour offered devolution to Scottish and Welsh voters as an alternative to the independence of the SNP and Plaid Cymru. However, there was a wider strategy than that, as Labour offered devolution as something that could bring about a socialist, Labour, Government in Scotland, as well something that would bring power closer to Scots. This position was intended to convince Scottish voters that even if there was a Conservative Government in London, there would at least be a Labour Government in Edinburgh. But in particular, Labour was appealing to working class Scots, indicated by the centrality of values such as solidarity, socialism, and local democracy. These principles, which were central to Labour's nation-building strategy during the 1970s, are now examined in turn. Although it is not the object of this section, it should be remembered that Labour in Scotland was split over devolution, indicated by Jim Sillar's approach of setting up the Scottish Labour Party.

## Solidarity

Labour's starting point was the position that the unity of the UK must be maintained:

The unity of the country and of the economy is essential both to the strength of our international position and to the growth of our industry and national wealth. (The United Kingdom Government, 1974: 1).

Labour also argued that Scots did not want independence, as it was not in Scotland's interests economically, and that the nationalism of the SNP set workers against one another (particularly across the UK, but also within Scotland). This was a position not only of 'common sense', but there was also an ideological and political aspect, as Labour sought to promote the 'worker' subject position by convincing working class Scots that the SNP, and thus its goal of independence, would divide the British working class, and also the Scottish working class. Such a strategy is indicated below in Labour's publication 'Scottish Assembly: Towards a Manifesto' (1978):

We are resolutely opposed to the separatist aims of the Scottish Nationalists. We do not believe the Scottish people want separation. We do not believe it to be in Scotland's interests. There are positive benefits which derive from the economic unity of the U.K. Any attempt to destroy it would put at risk the jobs and futures of thousands of Scots. For the Nationalists, the Assembly is to be a Trojan horse to independence. Their ultimate objective is to set worker against worker and inflict on those who are Scots a future they do not want. We and the majority of Scots must unite to ensure that their objective remains unrealised. (Labour, March 1978: 2).

Labour built a negative chain of equivalence around the nodal point of independence here, by using the signifiers: 'We'[Labour], 'opposed', 'separatist', 'Scottish Nationalists', 'risk', 'jobs', 'futures', 'Nationalists', 'Assembly', 'Trojan horse', 'worker against worker' and 'do not want'. The intention was to provide reassurance to devolution sceptics that an Assembly would not lead to independence. Independence and the SNP were presented as equivalential, and as a means to divide Scottish workers: 'Their ultimate objective is to set worker against worker'.

Independence was also presented as a 'risk' that would cost jobs and a future for 'thousands of Scots'. This latter point was something closer to what Labour anti-devolutionists argued, so there was some convergence in that respect, even though Labour's ranks were divided on the constitutional question. There was a nation-

building element here. By claiming that independence and the SNP would divide workers, Labour were presenting the Union as standing up for Scottish workers, and that workers would be safer through solidarity with the British working class. Solidarity, then, is an important concept in the construction of Labour's nation-building discursive strategy, as indicated through the signifier 'unite'.

That idea is further indicated by the UK Government's white paper, which argued that the unity of the UK was important as the centrality of UK economy would allow Scotland to benefit from 'the redistribution of resources in favour of all the less prosperous areas of the United Kingdom' (The United Kingdom Government, 1974: 1). This was an important idea in Labour thinking, and was in itself a justification for not devolving economic policy to Scotland. Labour's concept of the 'redistribution of resources across the UK', in favour of less prosperous areas, manifested itself again during the independence referendum campaign, under the guise of 'pooling and sharing resources'. The latter signifier will be discussed in Chapter Seven.

## **Socialism**

Furthermore, one of the key ideas behind pro-devolution Labour support for an Assembly was the idea that, through a Labour Scottish Government in Edinburgh, 'socialist' policies could be delivered to the Scottish people. This was an important position for Labour to take, as Scots had voted Labour in large numbers traditionally on the premise that they were a more 'socialist' option than the Conservatives, particularly since the 1964 general election, when Labour made gains on the Conservative Party, which lost support in Scotland throughout the 1960s. The strategy was also to assure Scots that even with a Conservative Government at Westminster, they could still have a Labour Government in Edinburgh. Below is an example of such a strategy:

Firstly, we are a socialist party. We are committed to the eradication of the extremes of wealth and poverty which still distort the lives of our people. We will advocate control and planning of our society to the extent that the human dignity and potential of all our people can then flourish. We will shape a society based on co-operation, not competition, a society responsive to need not greed. (The Labour Party, March 1978: 1).

In this passage, taken from the Labour document 'Labour's Scottish Assembly' (which in itself is quite revealing, as it indicates Labour's claim to being the party of

Home Rule), Labour used the signifiers and phrases 'socialist party', 'eradication', 'extremes of wealth and poverty', 'our people', 'advocate', 'our society', 'co-operation' and 'need not greed'. By doing so, Labour established a positive chain of equivalence, and presented devolution as an entrenchment of socialism rather than a national cause. The articulation was that, by establishing an Assembly through a Yes vote in the referendum, Labour could lead an Assembly that implemented socialist policies. This would, in turn, fulfil Labour's aims to eradicate 'the extremes of wealth and poverty' in Scotland (and in Britain), to establish equality of opportunity, and to create a society of co-operation over competition.

Those aims were all articulated in the passage above. Thus, Labour, 'socialism' and an Assembly were presented as equivalent in order to attract Labour supporters, the Scottish working class, and those on the Scottish left to the idea of devolution within the Union. However, it could also be argued that Labour simultaneously attempted to attract self-government supporters to the Labour Party, and away from their electoral rivals, the SNP. Therefore, Labour's version of the Union was one of 'socialism' and 'solidarity', which were presented as 'shared values' across the UK, and not only in Scotland. This reinforces the idea that Labour sought to establish a 'subject position' through its national discourse, aimed at attracting 'working class' Scots, who feared that independence would break working class solidarity, and challenge socialist aims. There was, however, another component: local democracy.

### **Local Democracy**

Labour pro-devolutionists argued that an Assembly would be the start of the process whereby democracy would be brought closer to the people. A commitment to local democracy was an important concept within the discourse of the Royal Commission on the Constitution:

...more decisions should be taken in the regions by people living and working there and possessing a greater knowledge of the regions' needs and interests. (Royal Commission on the Constitution, 1973: 329).

Labour then reproduced such a position in its white paper:

Because the circumstances of the two countries [i.e., Scotland and Wales] are so different, the present arrangements for their Government are not the same and it will not be surprising if their

future systems of Government are different. What is important is that the needs and aspirations of the Scottish and Welsh people are properly met. (1974: 1–2).

Labour's discourse in the year leading up to the 1979 referendum then took on a similar discursive content, as the passage below indicates:

...we are a democratic party. We are committed to the devolution of accountable power downwards and outwards to people in their communities and workplaces. Furthermore, the power developed must be real so that people play a significant and growing part in shaping their own lives. (March 1978: 1).

In the above passage, again taken from 'Labour's Scottish Assembly', Labour used the signifiers 'democratic party', 'devolution', 'accountable power', 'communities', 'workplaces', 'people' and 'shaping their own lives'. In this instance, Labour presented devolution, the Labour Party and local democracy as equivalential, so that Labour supporters would vote in favour of an Assembly, but also to attract the support of those who wanted more decision-making power for Scotland, but did not necessarily vote Labour. In particular, people who had voted SNP in recent elections. Decentralisation of Government was traditionally important in Labour's discourse, so devolution fit nicely into that. Thus, the idea of local democracy is also important to Labour's nation-building discourse. The concept was linked to other principles such as democracy, to present the Union as a protector of democracy not just in Scotland, but across the UK.

What can be seen during the 1960s and 1970s, then, is the construction by Labour of a political frontier. In order to capitalise on the Kilbrandon Report's recommendations, Labour had not only to adopt them, but reflect them in their own party discourse by linking devolution to solidarity, socialism and local democracy. This, as indicated above, was done by linking devolution, solidarity, socialism and local democracy into one nation-building project, which presented an inclusive British identity and the Union as a protector of Scottish workers and Scottish socialism.

On the other hand, Labour sought to negate the SNP's nodal point of independence by weaving 'independence' and the SNP into a negative chain of equivalence with economic failure, loss of jobs, and a division working class Scots both internally, and from their counterparts in the UK. The SNP and its nationalist aims damaged Scotland, according to Labour, and devolution was a means to not only protect the

Union, but deliver socialism and greater democracy to Scotland. The attempt to forge an attachment of Scots to a British and Scottish dual identity, therefore, was the ultimate aim here by Labour. That is why Labour focused on the 'workers' subject position, in an attempt to build and maintain a feeling of kinship in Scotland towards working class people across the UK, in solidarity for 'socialism' and 'democracy'.

### **Labour's nation-building strategy during the 1980s: Devolution, Thatcherism, and making Scotland a 'Tory free zone'**

The principles discussed above filtered into Labour's discourse during the 1980s. In 1981, Scottish Labour reaffirmed its commitment to devolution on the grounds that devolution was 'democratic and socialist' (Labour Party: Scottish Council, 1981: 1). However, at the beginning of the 1980s, Labour was now a party of opposition. Labour's main task during the 1980s was to grapple governance back from the hands of the Conservatives, and devolution was part of the strategy aimed at doing so, as indicated by its national discourse. The Labour Party argued that Scotland would be protected from becoming a test bed for unpopular policies, such as the 'Poll Tax' (Fraser, 2004: 128). It is also shown below how this played into Labour's national discourse in the late 1980s.

Margaret Thatcher's first term in Government was characterised by a huge increase in unemployment, and Scots were hit hard, with many feeling the pain of job losses in the manufacturing and industry sectors. There were closures of some of the mainstays of Scotland's economy, including the Peugeot Talbot's Linwood plant, and the Invergordon aluminium smelter (Hassan and Shaw, 2012: 24). Midway through 1983, unemployment had risen to 11.6 per cent (Q2), displaying a leap in unemployment under Thatcher from under 6 per cent when her Conservative Party took up Government (ONS, May 2014).

Additionally, as highlighted before, progress towards legislative devolution was halted during Thatcher's Conservative Governments, as she did not see devolution as a priority. The following passage is an example of how Scottish Labour attempted to keep discussion about devolution in circulation, whilst attaching devolution to 'traditional Labour values', as the party had done before the 1979 referendum:

We can expect an Assembly only from a Labour Government. But the Assembly itself might have to work with either a Labour or a Tory Government. If we had an Assembly at present (on the lines of the 1978 Scotland Act), we would be better placed to resist the attack of the Tory Government. We would not be spared the public expenditure cuts, because we would have no tax powers and would be dependent on the Block Fund the Tory Government provided. But we would be in control of education, housing, the health services and social work policies, as well as a good deal else. We would, therefore, be in a better position to minimise the effects of Tory policies. (Labour Party: Scottish Council, 1981: 1–2).

Scottish Labour produced a political frontier here. A positive chain of equivalence was constructed, with the signifiers 'Assembly', 'Labour Government', 'control', 'education', 'housing', and 'health services'. Placed on a negative chain of equivalence were the signifiers 'Tory Government', 'public expenditure', 'cuts', 'attack' and 'Tory policies'. This political frontier presented the idea that the Conservatives were a party that damaged Scotland through 'public expenditure cuts'. Labour presented itself as the party to stand up to 'Tory cuts' and bad Conservative policy, as well as usher in devolution to balance-out Conservative rule at Westminster. This would be achieved through a Scottish executive (implicitly, one run by Labour) in control of Scottish public policy in areas such as education, housing, and healthcare. However, it must be noted that Labour also saw an Assembly as a means to control and protect parts of the welfare state in Scotland from within the UK, compared with the SNP, who sought independence. This was the basis of a consistent battle between Labour and the SNP throughout the latter half of the 20th century.

There was an important nation-building element here. Labour was presented as a party that would defend the welfare state in Scotland even if the Conservative Party, which was presented as harmful to the welfare state—was in power at Westminster. This was not only a means to reinforce the idea that devolution was good for Scotland, but that Labour was good for Scotland. Labour presented Scottish identity as synonymous with the shared value of supporting and protecting the welfare state, indicated by the signifiers 'public expenditure', 'education', 'housing' and 'health services'. Furthermore, Labour was presented as the protector of state welfare in Scotland and thus, the party claimed to share the same interests as working class Scots. Devolution was presented as the political system that would allow Labour to protect the interests of the Scottish people. These elements came together in order

to reinforce the 'workers' subject position that Labour had constructed throughout the 1970s.

Additionally, Labour was fully prepared to lay blame on the doorstep of the Conservatives over lack of progress towards devolution:

The incoming Tory Government lost no time in removing all trace of Labour's devolution legislation from the statute book, thus exposing the Tories 'commitment' to devolution for the hollow façade it always was. (Labour Party: Scottish Council, 1981: 1).

This was an attempt by Labour to deflect any negative criticism—from the SNP in particular—in the aftermath of the 1979 referendum about Labour not being united in its support of devolution. It was important for Labour to do this in order to maintain the idea that Labour would stand up for the welfare state and for 'Scottish interests'. However, it was also an attempt to differentiate Labour from the Conservatives and present themselves as the only realistic choice in delivering devolution and by extension, a strong welfare state. This was a key appeal to Scottish voters, as Labour presented itself as a party that stood up for Scotland, and the Conservatives as a party that presented false promises on devolution (as indicated by the previous quote).

Beyond the initial reassertions that devolution was necessary in Scotland for socialist and democratic reasons, Labour was aware that it had to change in order to adapt to circumstances, and this was certainly the case for Scottish Labour, in particular. The Labour Co-ordinating Committee (LCC) in Scotland brought together a group of activists, councillors and feminists (many who later became MPs and MSPs, including Margaret Curran, George Galloway, Mark Lazarowicz, and Johann Lamont), which quickly identified some themes for Scotland. This included the imperative of pursuing a socialist agenda at local Government level, a 'feminist political sensibility', which resulted in the LCC (Scotland) Women's Committee, and particularly, the specific Scottish dimension and the question of devolution (Hassan and Shaw, 2012: 26–27).

As the consensus built in Scotland against the increasingly unpopular Thatcher Governments during the 1980s, Labour increasingly viewed devolution as a means to reverse what the party presented as Scottish decline under Thatcher. At the Scottish Labour Conference of March 1982, those on the left of the party pressed for

a more powerful Scottish Assembly than what had previously been proposed. Internal party devolution was also high on the agenda for the Labour left, at the March conference. However, any commitments to devolution had to be carefully worded, as tensions and disagreements within the party, and even within the left, emerged, over issues such as the power of the British state, Labour's centralism, and the need to promote a Scottish dimension and encourage Labour's traditional value of de-centralisation (ibid: 28–29). Nonetheless, a trend emerged in Scottish politics: the claim that the Conservative Government had 'no mandate' in Scotland (Mitchell, 2014: 227), as previously indicated. Although this articulation was initially on the fringes of Scottish Labour discourse, alongside the discourse of the SNP (which will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter), it would over time gain credence and help to re-shape Scottish politics throughout the rest of the 1980s, and into the 1990s (Hassan and Shaw, 2012: 34), in favour of devolution.

At the same time, Labour's discourse became more 'nationalist' and supportive of self-government, as the anti-Conservative consensus in Scotland grew (Lynch, 2013: 172). This point is also made by Hassan and Shaw (2012: 33–34). A former Scottish Labour Cabinet minister of the 1970s, went so far as to say:

We are certain to lose the next election in England. We will return even more MPs from Scotland, but we will be out of office down here for another ten years. We will have to play the nationalist card in Scotland. We will have to go for an Assembly with substantial economic power short of independence, but not much short. (*The Scotsman*, 28 July 1982, quoted in Hassan and Shaw, 2012: 34).

Thus, there was a strong element in pro-devolution discourse of Labour pragmatism during the 1980s, that is, an articulation of devolution as a means to ensure Labour's hegemony in Scotland, at least, even if there was a Tory Government at Westminster. Furthermore, the above quote indicated that Labour knew national identity in Scotland would or should be an important element to the party's strategy towards self-government.

### **1983–1987: A crucial period**

As the 1983 general election approached, Labour found itself in an uncomfortable position. The party was divided, Thatcher's Tories were resurgent, and there was a genuine prospect of Labour being pushed into third place, behind the Tories and the

Liberal-SDP Alliance (which also represented a threat to the SNP at the same time). Scottish Labour, however, was not in as precarious a position, as the Conservatives had become more unpopular, the Liberal-SDP Alliance was less of a challenge in Scotland than in England, and the SNP was still in the shadow of the No vote in the 1979 referendum (Hassan and Shaw, 2012: 33).

Indeed, the 1983 general election did see Labour's share of the vote decline across the UK. That share was significantly low at 35.1 per cent, the party's lowest share of the vote since 1931 at that point. However, Labour's dominance in Scotland continued, with 41 MPs elected (ibid: 34), and attempts were made by Scottish Labour to create a wider coalition in support of devolution. The Brown-Godman proposals (two newly elected MPs: Gordon Brown MP for Dunfermline East and Norman Godman for Greenock and Port Glasgow) attempted to forge a pro-devolution middle ground between radicals and sceptics in the Labour Party, with a focus also on convincing English Labour colleagues of the merits of devolution. It took the support of the late John Smith to win over many Labourites to the Brown-Godman proposals. In 1984, Labour reaffirmed its commitment to a Scottish Assembly, in its Green Paper on devolution, and Labour's language was becoming ever-more radical, with a quasi-nationalist emphasis (ibid: 35–36).

The period 1983–1987 was most significant for Scottish Labour, as both the miners' strike and 'Poll Tax' became major political issues. The latter, in particular, gave rise to the importance of the Scottish dimension, the home rule question, and future constitutional reform. The 'Poll Tax' was introduced in Scotland a year before the rest of the UK, which led to opponents describing Scotland as a 'guinea pig nation' (Radical Scotland, 1985, Lynch, 2013). SNP MP Donald Stewart claimed that Scots were treated 'as guinea pigs for measures which would be unacceptable in the Tory shires of the Home Counties' (*The Scotsman*, 6 April 1985 in Hassan and Shaw (eds.), 2012: 39).

The aim of the 'Poll Tax' was to tackle what the conservatives claimed was the high public spending culture of Scottish local Government. This would be addressed by 'massively expanding' the section of society responsible for paying for local services to include the unemployed and students. (Hassan and Shaw, 2012: 39–40). Many saw this as unfair, given that the unemployed would have to pay 'Poll Tax' from their

unemployment benefit, and students out of their grants, savings or earnings from part-time employment. As the political opposition to the 'Poll Tax' became more pronounced, it also became connected to the Scottish dimension and the issue of democracy in Scotland (ibid: 40). The idea of Scotland getting a Conservative Government that it did not vote for became a prominent issue leading up to the 1987 election, characterised by Radical Scotland's coining of the phrase 'Doomsday scenario' (*Radical Scotland*, 1985).

The 1987 general election saw the re-election of the Conservatives to Government, which was never really in doubt (Hassan and Shaw, 2012). However, although Neil Kinnock's Labour only picked up twenty MPs more than in 1983 across Britain, and nine of those were in Scotland. Labour was responsible for Conservative defeats in several Scottish constituencies, including Aberdeen South, Edinburgh Central, Edinburgh South, Strathkelvin and Bearsden and Renfrewshire West and Inverclyde. The Conservatives saw their number of Scottish seats drop dramatically from twenty-one to just ten, as the SNP and Liberal Democrats also took seats from the party (McLean, 2005). Now that Labour had achieved a Scottish landslide of fifty MPs, branded by them as the 'fighting fifty', questions arose about what they were fighting for, and what their strategy would be. Such questions were difficult for Labour to address, and opened up the possibility of the SNP to challenge Labour's authority. After an initial honeymoon period for Labour after her positive election results (especially in Scotland), the SNP did indeed challenge Labour's authority, and branded Labour's fifty MPs the 'feeble fifty', an alliterative spin on Labour's 'fighting fifty' branding (Hassan and Shaw, 2012: 42, MacWhirter, 2014). This is a reflective snapshot of the nation-building competition between the two parties, as each sought to present themselves as standing up for Scotland.

### **1987 and its aftermath**

In the aftermath of the 1987 general election, Labour argued that in Scotland, the result was not only a rejection of the Conservatives, but also a show of support in particular for Labour. However, Labour's Donald Dewar, a man who was at the forefront of Labour's political narrative from the late 1980s until his death in 2000, was aware that questions were to be answered of his party, and that the SNP was waiting in the wings to challenge Labour's dominance in Scotland:

The Nationalists have been quick to accept the scale of Labour's Scottish victory and to lay down their challenge. Can Labour deliver? Can 50 MPs protect Scotland from Mrs Thatcher? Can the 'Poll Tax' be stopped? Can Labour set up the Assembly? (Dewar, 1987: 15).

Labour also presented the idea that the Conservatives would pay if they did not recognise the interests of 'the real representatives of a real majority', referring to the Scottish result in 1987 (ibid: 17), and they built a political frontier based on the idea that a Scottish Assembly would have protected Scotland from the worst of Thatcherism:

Labour's commitment to devolution and setting up a Scottish Assembly will make up for the wasted Thatcher years. There has been a growing centralisation of power in the UK since Thatcher became Prime Minister, with serious attacks on local democracy at local level. The existence of a Scottish Assembly would have gone a long way to prevent the worst of these bland policies'. (Labour, 1987).

On one hand, Labour built a positive chain of equivalence using the signifiers 'Labour', 'commitment', 'devolution', 'Scottish Assembly' and 'prevent the worst'. On the other, he constructed a negative chain of equivalence using the signifiers 'growing centralisation', 'Thatcher', 'attacks', 'local democracy' and 'bland policies'. The intention was to present Labour as the champions of devolution, a policy which would stop Thatcherism and its unpopular policies (such as the 'Poll Tax', which Dewar (1987) highlighted) in its tracks, and would protect Scots against further Thatcherite policies which were 'bland' and damaged 'local democracy'. Dewar expanded upon the positive articulation of Labour and devolution:

Labour believes that Scots should have a greater say over Scotland's affairs. That's why a directly elected Assembly will be set up and the necessary Bill introduced in the first year of the new Parliament. It must be changed within the framework of the United Kingdom—strengthening our system by proving it can adapt to meet Scotland's wishes. (Dewar, 1987).

Here, Donald Dewar used the signifiers 'Labour', 'Scots', 'greater say', 'Scotland's affairs', 'directly elected Assembly', 'framework of the United Kingdom', 'strengthening our system' and 'meet Scotland's wishes'. Dewar presented Labour as wanting to deliver self-government, but within the UK system rather than through independence. Implicit in that was the view that there were 'Scottish affairs' and 'Westminster affairs', indicating a set of relations whereby Scotland would not gain control of all aspects of Government (the obvious ones being foreign policy, defence

and social security). Despite such positive language from Dewar, Dennis Canavan, believed that there was no clear strategy in place for Labour to deliver Home Rule in Scotland (Hassan and Shaw, 2012: 44). But it is the case that throughout the 1980s, Labour's devolution discourse was consistent with the 1970s, in that it was based around a similar articulation that Scottish devolution would protect workers and the working class, and bring democracy to Scotland. Once again, Labour presented their own version of 'Union', through the maintenance of a 'workers' subject position based on solidarity, social justice, and local democracy, as indicated not least by Donald Dewar.

Added to that narrative was a negative construction of 'Thatcherism', and how Thatcher's Conservatives harmed the welfare and local democracy in Scotland through its policies. Therefore, the impact of 'Thatcherism' on Labour's devolution thinking was critical, something that Jack McConnell indicated when commenting in 1989:

Home Rule for Scotland, within the United Kingdom, has never been so widely supported. A decade of Tory rule imposed from London—creating the Poll Tax, privatising public assets, cutting public services, restricting civil liberties—has strengthened both Labour's commitment to a Parliament for Scotland, and developed our understanding of why such decentralisation of power is necessary. (McConnell, 1989: 2).

This also highlights the nation-building element in Labour's discourse. Labour presented power as being imposed from London by a Conservative party that wanted to dismantle the welfare state. However, they simultaneously presented the idea that Labour would protect the welfare state, as indicated by the signifiers 'Poll Tax', 'privatising public assets' and 'cutting public services'. This was presented by Labour as the *raison d'être* for devolution, as indicated above by the signifier 'Parliament for Scotland'. This all added to Labour's articulation that it was Scotland's party: the party that would protect the welfare state in Scotland and, therefore, the interests of the Scottish electorate. Devolution was added to the chain of signification, in that regard. This argument characterised Labour's national discourse throughout the 1980s, and into the 1990s, too.

It is quite plausible, then, to suggest that Labour's discursive strategy at the time had a wider role to play, in that it offered the Scottish electorate an alternative to the

nation-building strategies of the SNP and the Conservatives. It presented devolution as a mechanism that could protect the welfare state, and enhance local democracy, but within the UK (as opposed to the SNP, who argued that independence was required to protect the welfare state). This alternative was presented as a solution to Thatcherism and Scottish nationalism, but limitations were also set, as indicated by the signifier 'Scotland's affairs'. At the heart of this was the need to 'strengthen our system' as Dewar put it; or reinforce the UK state, in other words. This would later become a problem for Labour, as the SNP sought to highlight the limitations of devolution by arguing for the devolution of additional powers to the Scottish Parliament. This fit within the SNP's national discourse, and its independence narrative, especially during the course of the Scottish Parliament.

### **Labour's nation-building discourse during the 1990s**

Between the 1987 general election and the 1992 general election, Labour had engaged in the 'Stop It' campaign against the 'Poll Tax', the STUC Anti-Poll Tax Steering Committee, and the Scottish Constitutional Convention, where the party signed 'A Claim of Right', which was a declaration of 'the sovereign right of the Scottish people to determine the form of Government best suited to their needs' (A Claim of Right, 1989). Labour adopted the Convention's 1990 plan for a Scottish Parliament in its 1992 General election manifesto (Dawson, 10 March 1995). By the time the general election in 1992 came around, Margaret Thatcher had already been forced to resign by her party, to be replaced by the more consensual John Major (Hassan and Shaw, 2012: 60). During the 1992 general election campaign, Major had decided to put defence of the Union at the heart of the Conservative campaign—a defining campaign moment. The Conservatives clawed back some support during the campaign in Scotland, polling 27.7 per cent, an improvement of 1.7 per cent, as Labour slipped 3.4 per cent to 39.0 per cent. In the end, Scotland swung 2.5 per cent from Labour to Conservative, whilst in England and Wales, Labour made gains. Major's majority was reduced to twenty-one seats (ibid: 61–62).

After the 1992 election, Scotland United was formed, which brought together Labour and the SNP, and it held rallies to push the idea of a multi-option referendum on devolution. However, this was not an official Labour Party organisation, and consisted of dissent Labour Party members. Labour adopted the idea of a multi-

option referendum, but it was rejected by the Government, and Labour failed to take action to move towards a referendum just after (ibid: 63). Scotland United collapsed after a few months (Dawson, 10 March 1995). As time passed, though, Labour moved towards a more coherent plan for a devolution referendum. Under John Smith, Labour committed to hold a referendum during its first term in Government, and it was accepted widely within the party that John Smith's devolution was the 'settled will of the Scottish people', as the late party leader put it himself (Macwhirter, 2014: 228).

Even Labour devolution sceptics, such as Brian Wilson, gave public support for devolution, stating in 1995 that 'Devolution offers the prospect of a stable, enhanced relationship within the Union' (Wilson, 10 March 1995). However, Wilson has continued to be sceptical of devolution, stating in 2008 that self-government was a 'disaster for the Labour Party' (Wilson, 2008). This gives an interesting insight into how some within Labour viewed devolution: as something that could have made or broken the fortunes of Scottish Labour. Indeed, devolution presented challenges and opportunities to Labour (and the SNP), and this was represented by Labour's national discourse during devolution, as examined in Chapters 5–7.

At the same time, the Scottish Constitutional Convention had continued post-1992, and in 1995 published 'Scotland's Parliament, Scotland's Right'. The document was a 'more coherent and impressive set of proposals', with certain economic powers, tax-raising powers, and areas of domestic policy being proposed for devolution—this was influential in the thinking of Labour (Hassan and Shaw, 2012: 72). Although by that time John Smith had died, and was replaced by Tony Blair in 1994, Blair stuck with Smith's devolution commitment despite being quite indifferent to the project (Macwhirter, 2014: 229).

The Blair leadership was concerned about the tax-raising aspect of legislative devolution, and the Conservatives branded proposals to allow a Scottish Parliament to raise taxes as 'Labour's tartan tax' (Hassan and Shaw, 2012: 72–73). This was a smart tactic by the Conservatives, particularly from Michael Forsyth, who attempted to appeal to Scots worried about the possibility of paying more tax under Labour, by playing up the old 'tax and spend' image of the Labour Party that the Blair leadership was so desperate to replace (with an image based on a pro-business outlook)

(Mitchell, 2014: 245). Then in 1996, despite concerns about tax-raising powers and the then Shadow Secretary of State for Scotland, George Robertson, having publicly downplayed the holding of a referendum, Labour officially adopted a two question, pre-legislative referendum as party policy (Hassan and Shaw, 2012: 73). This was a U-turn, and meant that Labour would now offer voters a referendum before the appropriate legislation was passed through Parliament. Tony Blair's rationale for this was quite simple: 'The tactic was obvious: get the people to say yes, then the Lords could not say no' (Tony Blair quoted in Hassan and Shaw, 2012: 73). Labour quickly legislated for a devolution referendum soon after coming to power on a landslide in 1997, ending up with a 179 seat majority and 45.6 per cent of the popular vote—up from 39.0 per cent in 1992 (Hassan and Shaw, 2012: 77).

### **Labour's discursive strategy from the late 1960s to 1997: A summary**

It is accurate to say that Labour's nation-building strategy was consistent throughout the period examined in this chapter. The key difference during the 1980s in particular was that an anti-Thatcherite discourse developed. However, rather than replacing Labour's commitments to socialism, local democracy, solidarity and devolution, arguments against Thatcherism were consistent with those principles. Thus, anti-Thatcherite discourse reinforced Labour's articulation of why a Scottish Parliament was required, and as Scotland consistently voted Labour rather than Conservative—a different pattern to that in England—it became a more powerful discursive tool to present Thatcherism and Conservatism as contrary to the values held in Scotland; that of socialism, local democracy, solidarity, and a commitment to the welfare state.

Labour pursued such a strategy in order to establish and maintain Labour's political hegemony in Scotland by attacking the Conservatives, but also by presenting Labour as the only party that could stand up to Thatcherism, in an effort to promote devolution in the UK and to negate Scottish nationalism. Labour undertook a careful nation-building project by articulating themselves as Scotland's Party, and one that could stand up for 'workers' within the UK and in Scotland, negating the notion that independence was required to defeat Thatcherism and protect Scottish public services including the NHS, as well as protect working people in Scotland.

## **The Scottish National Party: Independence, evolution of approaches to devolution, and ideology.**

Devolution presented both threats to, and opportunities for the SNP during the 1970s and beyond. Most internal conflicts within the SNP, particularly in the period 1974–1979, were caused by tensions and division over the devolution issue, and devolution came to be the party's dominant issue ahead of independence, oil, or any other matter (Lynch, 2013: 155). This is not to say that independence did not remain the SNP's primary goal—it certainly remained so. The SNP did go on to campaign in favour of devolution at the 1979 referendum, but there were obstacles that had to be overcome, and SNP pro-devolutionists had their work cut-out in convincing the party faithful to back devolution, especially the fundamentalists (i.e. those who sought independence immediately) who had traditionally been the strongest and most influential voices within the SNP, and who feared any compromise on independence. It was not until the party's 1976 annual conference in Motherwell, that SNP delegates voted to 'accept' devolution by a small margin of 4 per cent (52 per cent–48 per cent), in what Peter Lynch has described as 'a classic, gradualist-fundamentalist compromise over devolution' (ibid: 156), with the party committing to 'accept' devolution 'as a possible stepping stone' (SNP, 1976: 23) to independence.

During the years before a Scottish Parliament was established, it can be said that the SNP's nodal point was 'independence', as it is at the time of writing. The SNP set its nodal point of 'independence' against the nodal point of Labour (and the other Unionist parties)—Westminster or Union—which were used interchangeably throughout the SNP's national discourse to attack the Westminster establishment and various economic, political and social aspects of the United Kingdom. However, many times leading up to the 1979 devolution referendum, 'devolution', 'Assembly', 'self-government' or 'Parliament' would appear in SNP nation-building discourse, often replacing the signifier 'independence' entirely. That is not to say that the SNP gave up on its goal of independence. Rather, it indicates that the SNP merely chose not to publicly link devolution to independence in an obvious way. As previously stated, the SNP saw an Assembly as a stepping stone to independence. Therefore, by not linking devolution to independence explicitly in the lead up to the 1979 referendum, the SNP was playing a low risk strategy by not isolating voters who wanted devolution of power to Scotland, but did not necessarily want independence.

The overwhelmingly positive aspect of devolution for the SNP was that the party's mission of self-government for Scotland was finally being discussed by the UK Government. Indeed, nationalist arguments took a prominent position in debates over Scotland's constitutional future, as self-government became a major issue in UK politics, beginning during the late 1960s and spanning throughout 1970s (Lynch, 2013: 154). Because self-government was on the UK Government's agenda, the SNP now had a platform to raise additional issues relating to self-government, as well as discuss the limits of Labour's devolution plans as a means to push for more powers, and to promote independence. The SNP, therefore, supported devolution 'as a half measure', but suggested improvements to Labour's devolution proposals on issues such as economic and taxation powers, as well as oil revenues (ibid).

On the negative side, devolution, especially in the form that Labour was proposing, fell far short of the SNP's founding goal of independence. The SNP had suspicions that devolution was part of a Labour move to stem the flow of the SNP's growing popularity, and had the view that devolution had been forced on the Labour Government, as such. SNP suspicions of Labour's motives grew after the failure of the Scotland and Wales Bill, which was withdrawn by the Labour Government after a failed guillotine motion in 1977. Furthermore, devolution was not under the SNP's control (ibid).

So, although there were internal differences about how best to proceed towards gaining independence throughout the 1970s, by the 1979 referendum campaign, the SNP moved to take the position that the establishment of a Scottish Parliament was 'the essential first step' (SNP: 1974a: 2) in achieving democracy in Scotland. This articulation came within the wider goal of independence: 'The achievement of a democratic, independent Government in Scotland is the SNP's primary aim' (SNP, 1974a: 3). During the 1970s, the SNP argued that Scots should be in charge of their own destiny and that self-government was needed for that. This extended to a wide range of issues, including economic prosperity, industrial relations, welfare, housing and other domestic affairs, defence and foreign affairs, as well as other issues (SNP, 1974b). Furthermore, the SNP argued that Westminster rule in Scotland was undemocratic, as Scotland had fewer MPs and could potentially be outvoted on any issue.

In policy terms, the SNP's most notable campaign was 'It's Scotland's Oil', of which Gordon Wilson was a key architect. That campaign ran in two phases. The first phase began as the campaign kicked-off in September 1972, which sought to publicly highlight the SNP's assessments of the value of tax revenue of North Sea oil to the UK treasury, and to any future Scottish administration. There was a focus on presenting North Sea oil as proof that Scotland could afford to be independent, which reversed the traditional argument that Scotland could not afford independence. The second phase asserted Scottish ownership of North Sea oil in absolute terms, but there was also an element articulating that in relative terms; that Scotland should receive a proportion of UK oil revenues in order to invest in a Scottish economic development fund (Lynch, 2013). 'It's Scotland's Oil' was present in the SNP's discursive strategy, as indicated by, for example, the following extract from 'SNP & You':

The choice for Scotland has become even more urgent. The discovery of massive oil-fields in the Scottish sector of the Continental Shelf has given us a unique opportunity. If we fail to grasp this, then future generations of Scots will look back in despair at the great chance which was missed. If this present generation of Scots have the right spirit to take what is theirs by right, we can rapidly overcome the bitter legacy of centuries of poverty, inequality, unemployment, emigration and cultural neglect. Scotland can face a new future with dignity and confidence. (SNP, 1974: 3).

Oil was, evidently, presented as an opportunity to end social injustice in Scotland, as indicated by the signifiers 'poverty', 'inequality', 'unemployment', 'emigration', and 'cultural neglect'. Oil was very much linked to the SNP's economic case for self-government, and arguments around welfare and social justice were entwined in that regard.

Through-out the 1980s, Gordon Wilson continued to believe in 'It's Scotland's Oil' as a strategy, whilst playing up the idea of Scottish self-government. However, 'It's Scotland's Oil' was not particularly successful, as the SNP was too internally divided (Lynch, 2013: 176). Nevertheless, the SNP did launch another oil campaign in 1980, which presented the idea that Scottish self-government and control of Scotland's oil could be a lever for tackling Scotland's unemployment, as well as its economic problems. Campaigning in favour of devolution so soon after the 1979 No vote may have been problematic for the SNP, but it certainly was possible for the party to link

oil to self-government and economic independence. Such a strategy had an additional aim of taking the moral high ground against Thatcher's Conservative Government (ibid).

### **SNP discourse during the 1970s**

From the beginning of the period of analysis—that is, the late 1960s—it can be said that the SNP had one clear motivation: independence. The SNP's case for independence was, and still is, based on the idea that the Scottish nation is sovereign, and that the Scottish nation can only fully flourish within an independent state, thus echoing Harris (2009) and Mitchell (2014). Within the overarching goal of independence, came several other ideas that were used by the SNP as part of its national discourse. This included ideas relating to equality of opportunity, wealth distribution, personal freedom, and social justice.

The SNP's 1974 'Scotland's Future' manifesto, for example, set out that the sovereignty of the Scottish people underpinned the campaign for self-government, but that there was a nation-building element to the SNP's independence strategy, encompassing various concepts and ideas. Take the following two passages as an example of that:

The vast majority of the people of Scotland recognise that Scotland is a nation and that it could exercise privileges and responsibilities as other nations do, through a Parliament entrusted with the sovereign rights of the people of Scotland. (SNP, 1974b).

In the first instance, the SNP constructed a positive chain of equivalence, using the signifiers 'people of Scotland', 'Scotland', 'nation', 'privileges', 'other nations', 'Parliament', and 'sovereign rights'. Using those signifiers in such a way was an attempt to positively associate the Scottish nation as an entity with the ideas that Scots should have the same privileges and responsibilities as other nations, and that a Scottish Parliament could represent and act upon the sovereign rights of the 'people of Scotland'. It must be remembered throughout the reading of this thesis that no matter how complicated SNP discourse was at times, the idea that the Scottish nation should have equal rights and responsibilities as other nations underpinned the SNP's self-government discourse, with a Parliament being presented as the only way to fulfil the ambitions of the Scottish nation.

Interestingly, the use of the signifier 'other nations' indicates that part of the SNP's discursive nation-building strategy was to compare Scotland to other small independent nations that did have statehood. This was a consistent theme in SNP nation-discourse. In addition to this, the idea of the Scottish nation being able to influence its own future is essential to understanding the SNP's nation-building strategy: 'Every nation worthy of the name demands the power to shape its own destiny in freedom, to determine the lines of its own progress, and to mould its own national life' (SNP, 1970). The SNP presented independent statehood as a 'grown-up' notion.

The SNP's national discourse during the 1970s had similarities to their national discourse during the independence referendum. The example below indicates that shared values were an important part of the SNP's national discourse during the 1970s, as the party attempted to challenge the notion that Labour was the only left-leaning party in Scotland:

All human beings, no matter how different in gift or achievement, are entitled to equal opportunity and consideration, and society should be developed, and wealth distributed, so as to give everyone the freedom and dignity which is his or her right. The SNP recognises the need to build towards a true fraternity of all nations, with policies based on the rule of law; freedom of conscience, expression and worship; collective defence and positive measures to remove the poverty and injustice which threaten the peace of the world. (SNP, 1974b).

The SNP built a positive chain of equivalence here. The party used the signifiers 'equality of opportunity', 'wealth distributed', 'freedom', 'dignity', 'rule of law', 'collective defence', and 'remove', 'poverty', 'injustice' together in its national discourse to present a particular notion of what it meant to be 'Scottish'. It is interesting that at this early stage, the SNP presented the Scottish nation as holding the shared values of equality of opportunity, wealth redistribution, and a commitment to tackle poverty and injustice; all characterised by the signifier 'social justice'. Therefore, it would be inaccurate to claim that the SNP did not have considerations about social justice as part of its nation-building strategy during the 1970s. Instead, the party articulated social justice as a shared value amongst the Scottish nation, and did so long before Alex Salmond and Nicola Sturgeon became the party leaders, when they also presented social justice as an innate characteristic of the 'people of Scotland'.

The SNP was not only constructing a conception of what it meant to be Scottish, but was also presenting itself as the party to stand up for Scottish values. This process was mutually reinforcing, therefore, and both aspects depended on one another to be coherent. The mutually reinforcing aspect helped to form two main prongs within the SNP's national discourse in the 1974–1979 period, and especially in the lead-up to the 1979 devolution referendum: 1). self-government as a means to take Scotland's decisions into Scotland's hands and; 2). self-government as a means to ensure representation and accountability. During that period, arguments for social justice, for example, were less of a part of the SNP's case for self-government, unlike during the independence referendum. However, in as early as the 1970s, there was some understanding in the SNP as to the powerful role of the discourse of shared values and state welfare in nation-building. This indicates an internal contestation in the SNP, between those who supported independence so that Scottish nation could be, in their eyes, truly 'free' or 'independent' to control their own destiny, and those who supported independence due to a commitment to social justice.

### **1974–1979: Building support for an Assembly**

The SNP's national discourse during this period indicated a focus on self-government generally, and devolution was included in that—indeed, it was a significant part of the SNP's national discourse. However, at the same time, the SNP made references to independence, and this was sometimes done without actually using the word 'independence', as indicated below. The SNP attempted to capitalise on the national debate on self-government, by building support for the idea that Scotland had a 'collective destiny', and by establishing legitimacy for a new state (at least a partial one, through devolution).

#### **1). Self-government as a means to fulfilling 'collective destiny'**

The SNP argued that the Scottish people needed self-government in order to have democratic control over their own future, to promote and protect their Scottish heritage, and to protect for their economic and social wellbeing. The following passage, taken from the 'SNP & You' (1974a) pamphlet, indicates an example of how the SNP created a positive chain of equivalence in order to promote such an argument:

The SNP has a deep commitment to democracy, to Scotland's distinctive history and culture and to the social and economic well-being of the Scottish people. In order to further these objectives, we believe that the establishment of a Scottish Parliament is the essential first step. Without political power Scotland cannot control her own economy...will always be at the mercy of others...there can be no hope of regenerating Scottish society. When the Scottish people have this vital power, it will be up to them to choose their own social and economic priorities. (SNP, 1974a: 4).

A positive chain of equivalence was built using the signifiers 'SNP', 'commitment', 'democracy', 'Scotland's', 'distinctive', 'history', 'culture', 'social and economic well-being', 'Scottish people', 'Scottish Parliament', 'first step', 'political power', 'vital power', and 'own social and economic priorities'. The SNP brought together disparate ideas and concepts as part of its national discourse, in order to present self-government as an attractive and necessary 'first step' towards independence, without explicitly saying so. The SNP presented the Scottish nation as having a 'distinctive' 'history' and 'culture', in an attempt to mobilise support for the idea that the Scottish nation was unique. This argument indicates consistency with Deutsch (1954) and Smith (2001)<sup>4</sup>. The idea that Scots had a particular set of social and economic needs was also established by the SNP, as part of the construction that the Scottish nation was unique.

By 1977, some within the SNP presented the idea that voting in favour of a Scottish Assembly in the 1979 referendum would send a message that the Scottish people actively sought sovereignty:

The basis of the 'yes' [vote] will be the determination among Scots of all shades of political opinion to take control of their own economy and resources. (MacDonald, December 1977).

Further to that, the indented passage above from 'SNP & You' (1974a) presented—through a negative chain of equivalence—the signifiers 'mercy', 'others', 'no hope' to indicate the idea that without self-government, Scottish requirements would not be fulfilled. The UK Government was, implicitly, presented as damaging the 'uniqueness' of the Scottish nation, therefore. It was argued that by leaving power at the hands of a Westminster Parliament—and the majority of non-Scottish MPs within it—who would not focus on a regeneration of Scotland's economy. This, essentially,

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<sup>4</sup> According to both Deutsch (1954) and Smith (2001), a key goal of nationalists is to present the nation as 'unique' for political purposes, and key to this is presenting the nation as having a different history and culture.

was the basic democratic-deficit argument for self-government. It was extended to apply to the campaign for an Assembly, as well:

If Scotland fails to return a decisive 'Yes' result Westminster's response will be—"Let Scotland stew in her own juice." Westminster will conclude that Scotland is all bark, no bite—that the movement of Scottish opinion since the late 1960s has been a bluff. Scotland's power at Westminster-and Scotland's prestige in the eyes of the world-will both fall to a new low. (Wolfe, 28 February 1979).

By drawing a political frontier between self-government and the status quo in such a way as displayed above, the SNP presented self-government as the democratic option for the Scottish people and that the status quo was undemocratic, because it denied the Scottish nation control over its own affairs. Thus, the idea was constructed that a majority English institution was holding the Scottish nation back, and therefore self-government was required to put the fate of the Scottish nation into Scottish hands. The argument presented here indicates consistency with nationalist authors such as Harris (2009) and Kersting (2011).

## **2).Self-government as a means to improve representation and accountability**

In terms of representation and accountability, the SNP presented the UK Parliament as lacking in both qualities, and that a Scottish Assembly or Parliament was the democratic alternative for Scotland. Thus, the SNP constructed a positive case for a Scottish Assembly, and contrasted that vision with Westminster. Take a passage from Stephen Maxwell, for example, who was the Yes campaign's director and SNP Head of Press. He built a positive chain of equivalence around the nodal point of an 'Assembly':

Assemblymen and women, directly accountable to the Scottish people and free of the control of London Party Whips, will be able to speak out clearly for Scotland without fear or favour...What is more, Assemblymen and women, in addition to legislating for Scotland on education, health, housing, welfare and so on, will be able to scrutinise the decisions of Westminster MPs on industrial policy, regional development policy, block grant negotiations and the policies for the nationalised industries, to ensure that they reflect Scottish needs. (Maxwell, 23 February 1979).

Maxwell used the signifiers 'Assemblymen and women', 'directly accountable', 'Scottish people', 'free', 'London Party Whips', 'speak out', 'for Scotland', 'legislating for Scotland', and 'reflect Scottish needs'. The SNP presented an Assembly as

directly accountable to the Scottish people without influence from the centre, and as a body that would put the needs of Scotland first over key policy areas, thus representing Scotland's interests (and implying that Westminster did not put the needs of the Scottish people first).

Furthermore, a Scottish Assembly was presented as a body that could put pressure on Westminster to deliver policies that were fair to Scotland, but which also could legislate on key areas of the welfare state, including 'education', 'health' and 'welfare'. Therefore, the SNP presented an Assembly as a body to hold Westminster to account, but also as a means to deliver a Scottish semi-state, which could protect aspects of the welfare state. Thus, the SNP attempted to reinforce the link between nationalism and the welfare state, which as McEwen (2006) and Johnston et al (2010) indicate, is an important nation-building strategy.

In contrast, a speech by Douglas Henderson, then SNP MP for East-Aberdeenshire, can be used as an example of the construction of a negative chain of equivalence in relation to representation and accountability:

The stark legacy of Westminster neglect is ample evidence of the urgent need for the return of a Parliament to Scotland...Control by a remote and unsympathetic Government in London has left us with high unemployment, appalling social conditions and a higher cost of living than any part of the U.K. apart from the affluent South-East of England...Now, after Westminster's persistent failure to tackle any of Scotland's problems, the No-men have the nerve to tell us that we cannot be allowed even limited power to deal with them ourselves.' (Henderson, 27 February 1979).

Henderson built a negative chain of equivalence around the nodal point of 'Westminster', using the signifiers 'legacy of Westminster', 'neglect', 'remote', 'unsympathetic', 'Government in London', 'high unemployment', 'appalling social conditions', 'higher cost of living', 'affluent South-East of England', 'Westminster', 'persistent failure', 'Scotland's problems', and 'the No-men'. Henderson presented Westminster as unaccountable because it was 'remote and unsympathetic', but also unrepresentative of Scotland because it did not concern itself with tackling Scotland's socio-economic problems, had left Scotland worse off economically and socially, and had given preferential treatment to the South-East of England. From a nation-building perspective, the SNP presented Scotland as being mistreated by Westminster both economically and socially in order to reinforce the idea that

Scotland had special socio-economic circumstances that could only be addressed through self-government. The SNP presented this idea to establish and reinforce the political construction that Scotland had a 'collective identity' and a 'collective' destiny.

Thus, there were similarities between the SNP and Labour during the 1970s, as each made references to protecting the welfare state through self-government, but their intentions for doing so were different. Labour wanted to reassert the role of the UK state, and the Labour Party itself, in protecting the welfare state in Scotland. The SNP, however, presented the UK state as unable and unwilling to represent Scotland's socio-economic interests, and did so by nurturing support for the idea that Scotland had a collective identity—represented by the articulation of a unique set of interests—which was being ignored. Presenting the idea that parts of the welfare state required to be devolved, so that they could better reflect Scotland's 'unique' needs, was part of that political construction.

### **The SNP's approach during the 1980s and 1990s**

Whereas the 1970s had been characterised by growth and electoral success for the SNP, the 1980s were characterised by internal conflicts, electoral weakness, and organisational decline, as the SNP struggled to survive after the No vote at the referendum, on 1 of March 1979. The SNP only exceeded 20 per cent twice in opinion polls between the 1979 general election and the 1988 general election; and they were a minor force in elections during that period. The success of the Liberal-SDP Alliance also took support away from the SNP (Lynch, 2013: 171–172). However, despite the gloomy picture for the SNP at times during the 1980s, there were three elements that improved their political fortunes.

The first aspect was that the party managed to resolve the plaguing internal conflicts of the early 1980s. From 1984 onwards, the SNP leadership and activists moved forward in a strategically consensual manner. The modest gains at local and national elections in 1984, 1986 and 1987, indicates that a more united party existed, moving into the second half of the 1980s. Further evidence of the SNP's stability in the latter half of the 1980s was the united front behind the SNP's decision to support 'independence in Europe' as its fundamental political goal, a policy idea of Jim Sillars. Additionally, the party was united in its stance of non-payment of the controversial poll-tax (Mitchell, 1990(b), Lynch, 2013).

Secondly, as highlighted previously in this chapter and in Chapter 2, the electoral dominance of the Conservatives in the UK had a profound impact upon the political landscape in Scotland. The existence of a Government that pursued a right-leaning, neo-liberal agenda, made it easier for the SNP to make a comfortable transition to the left, as Labour became more supportive of self-government, and more nationalist in nature (Lynch, 2013). Thatcherism, put simply, gave new impetus to demands for self-government in Scotland, and this aspect became magnified after the 1987 general election, when the Conservatives lost out heavily in Scotland, and relied on English votes and seats in order to get back into Government (Lindsay, 2009). Indeed, in 1987 Iain Lawson, who switched to the SNP from the Conservatives, authored a booklet that discussed the Tory Government's 'most blatantly anti-Scottish decisions', including the decrease 'in real terms' of regional aid, 'the fact that over 200,000 Scots' were unemployed, and the introduction of the 'Poll Tax' in Scotland before England (Lawson, 1987). Labour's defeat at the Govan by-election to Jim Sillars—who joined the SNP in the early 1980s—kept up the pressure on them to seriously consider devolution proposals, in light of Conservative policy in Scotland. A third factor was that the Liberal-SDP Alliance, which had been electorally successful in the early 1980s, lost its electoral appeal and was in disarray after the 1987 general election, which opened up a political vacuum that the SNP could occupy (Lynch, 2013: 172).

Within the SNP, the period after the referendum to 1983 was characterised by two major reactions. One was whether the party needed to stake out a clearer ideological position on the left-right spectrum, whilst the other was whether the party needed to emphasise its support for independence, given the views of some that devolution was a trap laid by Labour (Mitchell, Bennie and Johns, 2012: 27). The former came mostly in the form of the '79 Group, which adopted three core aims: independence, socialism, and republicanism. The '79 Group consisted of many younger SNP members, as well as the experienced Margo MacDonald and Stephen Maxwell. Alex Salmond was a leading member of the '79 Group, and was intent on carving out a clear-cut centre-left position for the SNP (ibid: 28–29). In addition, Stephen Maxwell was one of the '79 Group's most important and influential thinkers, and urged Scottish nationalists to consider national identity and class as two sides of the same coin: 'When a vital sense of nationality combines with the interests of a powerful

class, the nationalism which results is a formidable force' (Maxwell, 1981: 6). He advanced the argument that—with the decline of the Scottish middle class at the time—the Scottish working class was the only social base possible to build support for Scottish nationalism (ibid: 24). Maxwell attempted to bring signifiers such as 'working class' into SNP discourse. However, as time told, the working class shrank as a social entity (Bornschieer, 2009: 4).

Gordon Wilson was now leader of the SNP (from 1979–1990), and although he had supported the SNP's campaign for devolution, he was less closely associated with it than his leadership rival Stephen Maxwell, who had directed the SNP's Yes campaign (Mitchell et al, 2012: 29). In 1983, Wilson chose to brand the SNP as a 'moderate left of centre' party, which was slightly ambiguous, but at least allowed the party to develop some consensus after years of internal wrangling. The SNP's image as a left-wing party was supplemented greatly by its support of the campaign of non-payment of the 'Poll Tax' in the late 1980s (ibid). During his leadership, Wilson also had a role in attempting to bridge the gap between fundamentalists and gradualists in the party. At the party's 1983 conference, he argued in a speech that fundamentalism had built a barrier between the party and the electorate, and at the same conference, a resolution was passed that confirmed that independence was the SNP's ultimate goal, but that devolution would in no way be obstructed (ibid: 30).

The SNP did edge more towards a pro-devolution stance throughout the 1980s, however, the party's refusal to take part in the Constitutional Convention reinforced a hard-line, fundamentalist image. The party voted against taking part in the Convention in March 1989, with members worried about Labour dominating affairs. However, by the time that Labour came to power in 1997, a variety of factors meant that the SNP chose to take part in the cross-party campaign for a Scottish Parliament in the lead-up to the 1997 devolution referendum. Those factors included Alex Salmond's ability as a leader (a role he assumed in 1990) to convince his party of a gradualist stance, the lessons learned from opposition to devolution in Parliamentary term after the No vote in 1979, and the impact of eighteen years of Conservative Government (Mitchell et al, 2012, Lynch, 2013).

## **An upturn in fortunes**

The 1980s were difficult for the SNP, both in terms of its organisation, as well as electorally. The expulsion from the party of leading '79 Group members Alex Salmond, Kenny MacAskill and Stephen Maxwell indicate the internal issues the party was having in terms of its future direction, especially in the early 1980s. As the party moved into the 1990s, a more promising decade was on the horizon. Alex Salmond became SNP leader in 1990, and he took the party down a modernisation path. The 1990s were the 'Salmond decade'—a period of improved fortunes for the SNP, that would form the basis for further success post-1999. As leader, Alex Salmond offered the SNP a strong personality, effective media performances, and high work ethic (Lynch, 2013: 203). The SNP became more effective and professional at fundraising, with larger donations being made to the party.

This surge in funding allowed the SNP to undergo its modernisation process more easily. Additional research, political communications, and fundraising staff helped move the SNP's modernisation process along, and extra funding was now available for the SNP to campaign in a more professional way, too (Mitchell et al, 2012; Lynch, 2013). Thus, the SNP became better organised, and more professional under Alex Salmond. Although Salmond himself helped to transform the SNP's public image—with his various media appearances—media-management generally became a strength of the party, with Mike Russell as Chief Executive at the time, and Kevin Pringle as the SNP's Communications manager (Lynch, 2013: 231).

Over time, Alex Salmond transformed the SNP into a mainstream Scottish political party, and for the first time, the party was able to play a large and more stable role in Scottish politics. Indicative of Salmond's success as SNP leader during the 1990s is the coincidence of his leadership with the SNP's best electoral performance since the 1970s, and the emergence of the SNP as the second largest party at the 1999 Scottish Parliament election (Mitchell et al, 2012). Incidentally, this turned the SNP into Labour's biggest electoral rival in Scotland, which was Salmond's aim all along, according to Peter Lynch (2013: 203). This sort of electoral performance was to be used as a platform from which to make the SNP the largest party in Scotland, a feat which it achieved at the 2007 Scottish elections, and then further built upon by achieving a landside majority in the 2011 Scottish elections. Additionally, Salmond's

leadership during the 1990s coincided with the 1979 devolution referendum, which returned a Yes vote and a Scottish Parliament (ibid: 203–204).

### **The SNP's national discourse during the 1980s and 1990s**

As established, The SNP's discursive strategy in the period leading up to the 1979 referendum focused on two major articulations: 1). Self-government as a means to have Scottish control over Scottish affairs; and 2). Self-government as a means to improve representation and accountability. Both of these aspects were linked to a notion of collective Scottish identity and to democratic control—what is known in contemporary British politics as the 'democratic deficit'. Moving onto the 1980s, arguments relating to Scotland having its own Parliament, with implications for decision making, representation, and accountability were maintained. However, the '79 Group helped to put issues such as a greater redistribution of wealth and opposition to nuclear weapons on the agenda (Mitchell et al, 2012: 28). And as discussed previously, references to social justice and the welfare state can be found in the SNP's national discourse during the 1970s and 1980s.

Furthermore, Stephen Maxwell argued that although the Scottish working class could act as a base for the growth of nationalism in Scotland, broader appeal was required by attracting the public sector middle class with a commitment to the Scottish public sector, for example (Maxwell, 1981: 22). As Mitchell et al (2012) allude; the anti-nuclear movement was seen as a target for support, too. Generally, though, it is often found during the 1980s that SNP nation-building discourse was rather similar to that of the 1970s, only that Thatcherism was used as a means to flesh out arguments for self-government, by indicating that Thatcher was against Scotland, particularly poorer and under privileged Scots. This, in itself, indicates that the election of Thatcher's first Conservative Government was a critical moment in how it influenced SNP discourse during the 1980s. The discourse of Thatcherism, as defined earlier, forced all political parties to the left of the Conservatives to adapt their discourses. Thatcherism was a sea change—or dislocatory event—that caused the requirement of a new discursive response from Labour and the SNP.

## **Discursive reproduction: Destiny, control, representation and accountability**

The arguments that a Scottish Parliament would allow Scots to decide their own future, based on their sovereign will and the idea that all nations should have equal privileges and responsibilities; and that Westminster was unaccountable and unrepresentative of Scotland, were again prevalent in SNP discourse throughout the 1980s and 1990s. This, once again, came in the form of political frontiers in the SNP's national discourse, which were designed to present the British political system as unaccountable and unrepresentative, and a Scottish Parliament as the solution to the 'democratic deficit' caused by Scotland not having the same privileges and responsibilities as other nations, to address its 'unique' set of circumstances.

The nature of the SNP's national discourse during the 1980s is highlighted in this section, and it is conveyed why the signifier 'Thatcherism' was added to the SNP's discursive lexicon. The passages chosen for examination show how inter-related the arguments about democratic control, representation, and accountability were:

The British political system offers Scotland no hope of improvement. A further term of Thatcherism will devastate the Scottish economy, concentrating more wealth and power in the South-East of England. The weak and divided Labour Party is powerless to protect Scotland, and has failed us too often in the past to be trusted. Scotland's MPs, in a tiny minority at Westminster, will be continuously outvoted by English MPs. Whichever English party wins the election, regional aid will be redirected to the Midlands of England, to Scotland's disadvantage. (Wilson, 1983a: 1).

The above passage, taken from Gordon Wilson's introduction to the SNP's 1983 general election manifesto, built a negative chain of equivalence around the nodal point of 'Westminster', using the signifiers 'British political system', 'Scotland', 'no hope', 'tiny minority', 'Thatcherism', 'devastate', 'Scottish economy', 'concentrating', 'wealth and power', 'South-east', 'weak', 'divided', 'Labour Party', 'powerless', 'failed us', 'Scotland's MPs', 'Westminster' 'outvoted', 'English MPs', 'English party', 'Midlands' and 'Scotland's disadvantage'.

This was a complex chain of signification, which presented the Conservatives and Labour as part of the same inflexible and unrepresentative party political system. The idea was constructed that the British Government—in this case Thatcher's Conservative Government—cared little about economic and social progression in

Scotland, and instead focused on improving the economic and social prospects of the South-East of England. The Labour Party was presented too as having failed Scotland, due to weakness and division. Finally, the SNP indicated that Scottish representation at Westminster was inadequate. The party argued that Scotland would have no ability to influence decision-making at Westminster, and that no matter which UK-wide party won the 1983 general election, regional aid would be focused upon the English midlands, to the detriment of Scotland and thus adding to the articulation that Westminster was unrepresentative of Scottish needs.

In the same piece by Gordon Wilson, he simultaneously built a positive chain of equivalence around the nodal point of independence:

But there is an alternative—to choose Scotland. Never has the need for an independent Scottish Parliament and a Scottish Government been greater. Only with our own Government will Scotland have the will and the resources to reverse our economic decline and end mass unemployment. Only a Scottish Government will remove all nuclear weapons from our soil. Only a Scottish Government will be able to tackle the appalling social conditions in which many of our people have to live. The independence we seek is taken for granted by other nations. The Scottish people have the right to self-determination—only by exercising that right will we have control over our country's destiny. (Wilson, 1983a: 1).

On this occasion, the following signifiers were used: 'alternative', 'choose Scotland', 'independent Scottish Parliament', 'Scottish Government', 'own Government', 'reverse', 'economic decline', 'end mass unemployment', 'Only a Scottish Government', 'remove all nuclear weapons', 'tackle', 'appalling social conditions', 'independence', 'other nations', 'The Scottish people', 'self-determination', 'control', and 'destiny'. Here, Gordon Wilson was presented self-government—particularly independence—as the only way to reverse economic decline and tackle mass unemployment in Scotland, remove Trident nuclear weapons from Scotland and improve the living conditions of the Scottish people. Furthermore, Wilson presented self-government as natural for nations around the world, and therefore, that self-government was a natural right of Scotland as a nation: 'The independence we seek is taken for granted by other nations. The Scottish people have the right to self-determination'.

Implicit in that idea, is that the Scottish people deserved the right to have a Government completely accountable to them. The positives that self-government

could offer, according to Wilson, were directly related to independence here, given that defence, economic policy and welfare benefits, for example, were still areas that would remain reserved at Westminster under devolution. However, Wilson also presented the idea of 'our own Government' in a way that would not necessarily alienate voters who did not want independence, mostly because the term 'our own Government' is quite ambiguous given the type of debate that was had at the time.

Thus, Gordon Wilson presented a Scottish Government and Scottish Parliament as being representative of Scottish needs and preferences, such as the removal of Trident from Scottish soil, and this represented a continuation of the SNP's underpinning ideas of the sovereignty of the Scottish people, and of the Scottish people being in control of their own destiny, through their own Parliament. This, again, reinforced the construction that the Scottish nation was 'unique', that Scots had a 'collective identity', and that only self-government could offer the effective state apparatus to—in this case—oppose Thatcherism.

Finally, the political frontier presented by Gordon Wilson, (and Douglas Henderson and Stephen Maxwell, as indicated by the section on the SNP's discourse during the 1970s) was re-produced by Alex Salmond, as party leader in the 1990s. In his introduction to the SNP's 1997 general election manifesto, Salmond stated:

Can Tory or New Labour change anything? Can they get Scotland back to work, can they rebuild a truly National Health Service, can they help schools and our young people, can they secure new jobs? No They Can't. So Scotland needs something different. Scotland needs a return to the virtues of enterprise and compassion, which taken together make a country really great: great to live in, great to work in, great to learn in, and great to grow old in. I want to see that type of Scotland. A Scotland that doesn't ask where you've come from, but where we are all going together. A Scotland free at last to look after her citizens and play her part in the world. (Salmond, 1997).

Salmond used the signifiers 'Tory', 'New Labour', 'Scotland', 'back to work', 'National Health Service', 'Schools', 'young people', 'new jobs' and 'can't' in a negative chain of equivalence in order to present the Westminster parties and UK political system as incapable of instigating the positive change that was necessary in Scotland. On the other hand, Alex Salmond weaved together the signifiers 'Scotland', 'something different', 'enterprise', 'compassion', 'great', 'free', 'look after', 'citizens' and 'the

world' in a positive chain of equivalence. Salmond presented a vote for the SNP as a vote for change and progress in Scotland.

Implicit in his argument was self-government as an enabler of such change and progress, or more precisely, that self-government was the only way to achieve change and progress in Scotland, and to have Scottish needs catered for (implicitly) through representation and accountability. Although Alex Salmond did not specify in which form self-government would come in, it should be remembered—as already discussed in this chapter—that Alex Salmond was in favour of devolution as second only to the ultimate goal of independence. Thus, Alex Salmond re-produced an earlier political frontier around the idea of a democratic deficit in 1997, and this, as will be shown, was re-produced yet again in the post-devolution era by the SNP. In terms of nation-building, Alex Salmond presented the UK party political system as unable to protect the welfare state. In contrast, he presented self-government in Scotland as enterprising and compassionate (the discourse of enterprise and compassion were key to contemporary SNP discourse (Arnott and Ogza, 2010), and as a means to ensure that people in Scotland were looked after. Salmond also presented a form of civic nationalism, indicated by the phrase 'A Scotland that doesn't ask where you've come from, but where we are all going together'. This indicates inclusiveness, and sought to weaken differences in race, creed, colour or place of birth in Scotland, to expand the idea of 'collective' identity, thus challenging the idea that the SNP were ethnic nationalists, and attempting to wider support base for independence.

### **Opposition to Thatcherism and carving out a position on the left**

The SNP used its opposition to Margaret Thatcher's Conservative Government for two, inter-related purposes. The SNP accused Thatcher's Government of being 'anti-Scottish', in the sense that it penalised Scotland by prioritising England, as Gordon Wilson displayed above. But the party also took the opportunity to oppose Thatcherism on ideological grounds, arguing that Thatcher's Government was penalising the poor and underprivileged—poverty and NHS cuts were two areas the SNP chose to challenge the Tories over (see Fairlie, 1981, Wyllie, 1983)<sup>1</sup>. This strategy had the additional benefit of allowing the SNP to attack Labour's credibility

as the party of opposition at Westminster, thus allowing the party to attack the entire Westminster political system.

Very much related to the idea that Scotland required democratic control and representation through an accountable Parliament, based in Scotland, was the specific argument that Thatcher's Conservative Governments, in particular, were unelected as far as Scotland was concerned, and had no right to implement the closure of manufacturing plants, and a shift away from investment in public services during the 1980s. In short, the articulation was that the Tories had 'no mandate' to rule in Scotland. This sentiment reached its peak in 1987: as previously indicated, there was a great deal of anti-Tory sentiment in Scotland, and for some, the prospect of a third Tory-Thatcher Government was too much to bear. Thatcherism was presented as critically damaging to Scotland, as the passage below indicates:

A third dose of Thatcherism would probably be fatal, sealing the fate of a whole generation of Scots who have never known what it is to have had a real job or enough money to provide for their basic needs. They have been cast aside by an uncaring Tory Government, whose only concern has been profits and jobs for the Tory heartland of London and the South East of England. (SNP, 1987).

A negative chain of equivalence was built here, using the signifiers 'third dose', 'Thatcherism', 'fatal', 'sealing the fate', 'Scots', 'real job', 'enough money', 'cast aside', 'uncaring', 'Tory Government', 'profits and jobs', 'Tory heartland', 'London', 'South' and 'England'. The intention was to present Thatcher's Conservative Governments as undemocratic, by arguing that they only cared about the economic and employment interests of London and the South East of England, areas which mattered to the Conservative Party, from an electoral perspective. Scots, as a result, were presented as being 'cast aside', unable to support even basic needs. This was the articulation of a battle between London and the South East of England, and Scotland, which was caused by an 'Anti-Scottish' (SNP, 1987) Conservative Government. Challenging Thatcherism was a major part of the SNP's national discourse during the 1980s.

Furthermore, the SNP saw an opportunity to use Thatcher's (perceived) attempts to create a residual welfare state (Mabbett, 2013: 43) by offering a 'nationalist'

message of defiance—that Scotland must stand up for itself or be in line for more cuts. The way to do that was for people to vote for the SNP:

Because you may be sure that if we do not stand up for ourselves the Nationalist way, Mrs Thatcher's vandals will decide that Scotland will stand for anything—Factory closures, nuclear dumps, the destruction of our health service, the ruin of our schools and colleges. Every additional Nationalist vote, and especially, every additional Nationalist MP, will help build that essential barrier to stop Thatcher at the border. (Wilson, 1983b).

Gordon Wilson built a political frontier, by weaving together a positive and negative chain of equivalence. On the negative side, he used the signifiers 'Thatcher's vandals', 'Scotland', 'stand for anything', 'factory closures', 'destruction', 'health services', 'ruin', 'our schools', and 'colleges'. By doing so, he presented Thatcherism as destructive in Scotland, and as treating Scotland as somewhere that could be disregarded to the extent that public services could decline, and jobs could be lost. Essentially, the argument was that Thatcher's Governments did not care about Scotland; that they were vandalising Scotland. This had the effect of presenting Thatcher's Conservatives as anti-Scottish, as previously indicated.

But by focusing on public services and jobs, Wilson also presented Thatcher's Government as attacking working class Scots, thus attempting to carve out a subject position that working class Scots could relate to, in a similar way to Labour during the same period. Gordon Wilson contrasted the negative articulation of Thatcherism in Scotland with a positive articulation of the SNP and the 'nationalist way'. He did so by building a positive chain of equivalence with the signifiers 'stand up for ourselves', 'Nationalist vote', 'Nationalist MP', and 'stop Thatcher', in order to represent the SNP as a party that would stand up for Scotland's working class against Thatcher's policies, and by doing so, he hoped to see the party gain a greater platform to put forward the nationalist case for self-government.

In relation to the latter, Labour was presented as failing to stand up for Scotland's working class, and that self-government was the only way to protect Scotland against Thatcherism. Unsurprisingly, the NHS took centre stage here:

...The Scottish health service desperately requires increased funding, not less—But only a Scottish Government can have the commitment and the resources to provide that. The Scottish people must not be fooled by the false promises of the British Labour Party, for it is as impotent as any other London-based party to solve Scotland's problems. (Wilson, 1984).

Gordon Wilson built another political frontier, with a positive and negative chain of equivalence operating to separate Labour and self-government. Wilson used the signifiers 'Scottish health service', 'increased funding', 'Scottish Government', 'commitment' and 'resources' in a positive chain of equivalence, and 'The Scottish people', 'fooled', 'false promises', 'British Labour Party', 'impotent', 'London based' in a negative chain of equivalence. The political frontier here operated by presenting Labour and the Westminster political system as failing to solve Scotland's problems, making 'clear' the 'need' for Scotland to have its own Government and its own Parliament. Implicit was the argument that a Scottish Government could do more to tackle Scotland's problems than the British Government—and British parties—could ever do. There was a strong element of nation-building here. By negating Thatcherism, and presenting Labour as unable to prevent Thatcher's neoliberal agenda, the SNP presented itself as the only true opposition to Thatcherism, but also presented self-government as a means to stop Thatcherism's supposedly destructive role in Scotland, especially in relation to reductions in funding for public services and equal opportunities to prosper socially and economically.

Therefore, the SNP presented itself as the only party that could stand up for Scotland, and in particular, working Scots—manifested by the protection of public services, including health services. The intention here was to build a sense of collective identity and shared fate, by constructing the idea that protection of the welfare state was consistent with the wishes of the people of Scotland; that it was an inherently Scottish principle. This was a central aim of the SNP's national discourse during the 1980s.

Under Alex Salmond's leadership, the SNP continued to put opposition to the Conservatives as the top of its agenda, as indicated in the party's 1997 manifesto:

The Scottish National Party is committed [*sic*] to a socially just Scotland—the type of Scotland which the Tories have systematically tried to destroy for 18 years: A Scotland in which poverty is eradicated and those in need are assisted to the maximum degree possible; the Scotland that all Scots want. (SNP, 1997: 14).

This further indicates that the SNP saw potential electoral success by opposing the Conservatives, and thus outmanoeuvring Labour on the left of Scottish politics. This is indicated by the SNP's willingness to link the 'Tories' to the denigration and

destruction of social justice in Scotland, which was contrasted with the SNP, who were presented as a party that would eradicate 'poverty' and help 'those in need'.

### **The SNP's nation-building discourse from the late 1960s to 1997: A Summary**

The SNP's national discourse lacked a completely coherent structure during the 1970s and 1980s, with regard to self-government. The party was committed to self-government, but was often vague in outlining whether its support was for devolution or for independence outright. The conflict between gradualists and fundamentalists within the party is a major reason for that. During this period, the SNP also attempted to carve out a position on the left of Scottish political spectrum. By opposing Thatcherism, including the much hated 'Poll Tax' and industrial factory closures in Scotland, the SNP appeared to carve out a centre-left position, in an attempt to challenge Labour's hegemony in Scotland. Ultimately, the SNP's vision for Scotland was not so different from that of Labour. However, the SNP attempted to put distance between itself and Labour by presenting its rival as unable to stand up to Thatcherism, leaving the SNP as the only social justice supporting, pro-welfare party that could 'stop Thatcher at the border'.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has conveyed how Labour and the SNP formed discursive strategies aimed at nation-building in Scotland from the late 1960s until 1997. Both parties often formed their national discourse in similar ways, especially in relation to Thatcherism, which each party presented as a destructive force in Scotland. Thus, anti-Thatcherite discourse acted as a supplementary to each party's claims to be Scotland's party of social justice or socialism; and protectors of Scottish 'workers' and of the welfare state. Both parties, nonetheless, were in direct opposition for votes and support, so each presented themselves as the *only* party that could stand up for social justice, egalitarianism, and the welfare state, in their respective attempts to establish national support.

What ultimately divided Labour and the SNP, in terms their production of national discourses, was that the former was pro-Union, and the latter was in favour of Scottish independence. In order to gain support for devolution (and thus the role of the UK state in Scotland), Labour reinforced the 'workers' subject position, which

was based on the values of social justice, solidarity of workers across the UK, and a commitment to the welfare state. And although the SNP did support devolution at both the 1979 and 1997 referendums, this was only as a ‘half-measure’ and a ‘stepping stone’ to independence. This was made more apparent during the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, when the SNP often presented the two major British parties during that period—Labour and the Conservatives—as parties that either could not, or would not tackle Scotland’s socio-economic problems, nor stand up for the Scottish NHS, welfare state, or indeed the Scottish people, thus highlighting the constraints of the UK state.

Therefore, Labour’s nation-building project was based on a commitment to democracy, worker solidarity, ‘socialism’ and the welfare state across and within the UK. The SNP’s nation-building project was underpinned by the idea that the Westminster system and parties did not address Scotland’s socio-economic problems, and that only the SNP and self-government could (whether in the form of devolution or independence). This indicates that articulations of state welfare and shared values are crucial to the nation-building strategies of Labour and the SNP from 1967 to 1997.

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## **Chapter five**

### **New opportunities and challenges: devolution from 1997 to 2007**

The 1997 General election was an important moment in Scottish politics, as it yielded not only a landslide victory for Labour, but also the onset of devolution through a referendum in September of that year and the subsequent passing of the Scotland Act in 1998 (Lindsay, 2009; Lynch, 2013; Mitchell, 2014). The 1997 devolution referendum was something that Labour had pledged in its 1997 general election manifesto.

The establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 produced a new structure to potentially alter political interactions between Labour and the SNP. This was manifested as a discursive opportunity for both parties. It gave Labour the opportunity to reinforce the idea that Scotland's interests were best served in the UK, with a 'strong' Scottish Parliament. Labour could use the new state apparatus that emerged with the creation of the Scottish Executive (Arnott and Ozga, 2010). Scottish nationalist discourse took on a new emphasis, as the SNP attempted to use any shortcomings of the Labour-led Scottish Executive as part of its pro-independence strategy. The new opportunities and challenges to Labour and the SNP—precipitated by the establishment of the Scottish Parliament—are examined here.

#### **New Labour's approach to the welfare state**

When Labour came to power in 1997, welfare reform was one of their highest priorities, and business, in one way or another, was central to attempts to solve the problems with the social security system, which were presented as high public spending and inefficient public services (Farnsworth, 2006: 817). The Labour Government had three main aims: 1). Gearing social policy towards the needs of the profit-making sector in order to increase competitiveness and welfare expenditure; 2). Involving business people and organisations in social policy in order to improve efficiency from the public sector; 3). Increasing spending on the welfare infrastructure through private firms (in policy terms, known as Private Finance

Initiatives, or 'PFIs'). However, this attempt at welfare reform caused problems (Farnsworth, 2006: 817). This included disruption and additional costs to public services (ibid: 838).

Alongside the attempted reform of public sector services, Labour continued and expanded Conservative means testing policy, including policy relating to childcare. Labour introduced the Childcare Tax Credit in 2003, which aimed to assist parents in paying for childcare by up to 80 per cent of the total cost. The level of support a parent could receive depended on means-testing, the number of children in day care (up to two), and the type of childcare chosen. Additionally, the Working Families' Tax Credit was introduced, and the overall effect was to increase the number of those receiving means-tested benefits (Daly, 2010: 435). Such policies are evidence of the paradigm shift under New Labour, from concerns about equality of outcome to an emphasis on social inclusion and equality of opportunity, as well as a focus on social obligation (often articulated through the empty signifier 'responsibility') as opposed to social rights (Lister, 1998: 215).

These policies presented challenges to Scottish Labour. Political opponents—particularly the SNP in Scotland—presented welfare reform and the maintenance and expansion of means-tested benefits as 'privatisation', regressive and unfair. The SNP were given opportunities to present Labour policy in Government as a continuation of Thatcherism, whilst offering an alternative approach to welfare in Scotland. However, Labour's political discourse remained social democratic in nature, as protection of public services and progression of society were presented as key Labour values. In Scotland, Labour often cited perceived progress in public services, as an exemplar of how devolution enhanced the welfare state in Scotland, but from within the UK state structure. There was a reactive and defensive nature to Labour's national discourse during consecutive Labour-led coalition executives, as the party sought to challenge the SNP's argument that devolution was limited and that further powers should be transferred to Edinburgh, from Westminster.

### **Labour's nation-building discourse 1999–2007**

The 1997 election landslide for Tony Blair's Labour Party marked the first Labour general election victory since October 1974, and was quickly followed by the Referendum (Scotland and Wales) Bills, introduced on 15 May. It was clear that

Labour would hold true to their promise of holding a devolution referendum in Scotland; one of the pledges they had made in their 1997 General election manifesto. The swiftness and design of such legislation was intended to signal that legislating for devolution would be straightforward, compared to the process during the 1974–1979 period. Indeed, the Referendums (Scotland and Wales) Bill was short, concise, and set out clearly the terms of devolution referendums in Scotland and Wales. The Bill achieved Royal Assent on 31st July 1997, after a smooth and quick passage through Parliament (Hassan and Shaw, 2012: 81). The Scottish devolution White Paper, 'Scotland's Parliament', was published on 24 July, and reproduced articulations from previous documents on Scottish devolution; that 'Scotland will remain firmly within the United Kingdom' and that 'The UK Parliament is and will remain sovereign' (Scotland's Parliament, 1997: vii).

Before the first election to the Scottish Parliament, Scottish Labour had to select a leader, and Donald Dewar was the only candidate nominated, taking 99.8 per cent of the vote at a special one day conference (Falkirk West's CLP abstained from voting, unhappy at Dennis Canavan's exclusion from the MSP selection process) (Hassan and Shaw, 2012: 87 and 89–90). However, although Dewar became leader, it fell to other influential Scottish Labour politicians to construct a strategy ahead of the 1999 Scottish election, including MPs Gordon Brown and Douglas Alexander (ibid: 93). One aspect of Scottish Labour's strategy in 1999 was to articulate Scottish politics as a battle between the social justice of Labour, and the 'separation' politics of the SNP. This was indicated in the lead-up to Scottish Labour's 1999 Spring Conference, with the 'Divorce is an Expensive Business' strategy, along with the strapline 'It won't be a trial separation with the SNP' (ibid). This strategy presented a vote for the SNP as a vote for the costly process of 'separation', and was designed to challenge the SNP's claim that they were Scotland's party of social justice and welfare.

In addition, UK Labour launched a tax-cutting first budget, which reduced the standard rate of income tax by one penny in the pound. Scottish Labour was able to attract big business endorsements, and engaged in a high-profile advertising Scottish election campaign. The SNP responded with the 'Penny for Scotland' campaign, as discussed later in this chapter, which Hassan and Shaw (2012) interpreted as an 'ill-judged, snap decision'. Additionally, Alex Salmond's TV broadcast, where he called the British-supported NATO intervention in Kosovo 'an

unpardonable folly', created a controversy that did not help the SNP's popularity (Hassan and Shaw, 2012: 94). The result of the 1999 Scottish election saw Labour take 56 seats to the SNP's 35 seats, making Labour the clear winner, although not by a landslide. Former Scottish Labour Chairman, Bob Thompson, was left to reflect on Labour's 1999 strategy by saying that 'the campaign was dispiriting and there was little politics in it beyond Labour bashing the Nats' (Thomson, quoted in Hassan and Shaw, 2012: 94).

### **Labour and the lead-up to the 1999 Scottish Parliament election**

Agree with Bob Thompson's interpretation of Labour's 1999 strategy or not, Labour was certainly intent on challenging the SNP's arguments for independence. And as indicated above, there was an emphasis on blocking any notion that the SNP was a social democratic party, yet there was also a reassertion that Labour was the true party of social justice in Scotland, and that devolution was the 'settled will'. This strategy set the trend for Labour's discursive strategy, which was centre-left in tone, in the Scottish Parliament. Below is an example of this, produced ahead of the 1999 Scottish Parliament election:

Yet for the Nationalists, issues of social justice have always been, and must always be, secondary to issues of national identity. For left of centre parties, indeed for most concerned people, social justice comes first. So whereas for Labour, allocation of resources would be on the basis of need (which incidentally benefits Scotland), the SNP would inevitably argue the needs of a millionaire in Scotland before a poor pensioner in England. (Alexander and Brown, 1999: 33–34).

Making use of a political frontier, Douglas Alexander and Gordon Brown used the signifiers and phrases 'Nationalists', 'national identity' and 'needs of a millionaire' in a negative chain of equivalence, and the signifiers 'left of centre', 'social justice', 'Labour', 'basis of need', 'benefits', 'Scotland' and 'poor pensioner' in a positive chain of equivalence. Labour argued that the SNP prioritised national identity and the interests of wealthy Scots ahead of the needs of the poorest in Scotland, and that Labour was the party to stand up for social justice and for the poorest people not only in Scotland, but also across the United Kingdom, thus creating political frontier. Therefore, Alexander and Brown reinforced the idea that working class Scots were best protected by trusting in Labour and the Union, as opposed to the SNP and

independence. The 'working Scot' subject position that was cultivated throughout the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, was maintained as part of Labour's nation-building project in 1999—that Scots were part of Britain through their dual identity, based on the solidarity of workers across the UK.

In relation to the Union, Labour attempted to expand the political frontier above to include an articulation of Scotland's place within the United Kingdom, and the role of Scottish Labour and the Scottish Parliament within it:

'Labour's Values, Scotland's Values' defines our approach to the coming election. Our vision is Scottish solutions for Scottish problems built on the rock solid of Scottish values. Where it is right to do so we will take a different approach to Westminster. Labour offers Scotland the right to secure the benefits of independent decision making without the costs of walking out of Britain. (Dewar, 1999).

Donald Dewar equated Labour's values as Scotland's values, and presented the Scottish Parliament as being built upon such values. This indicates that the presentation of shared values was important in Labour discourse, as the party sought to reassert dual identity and the legitimacy of the UK state. In addition, Dewar presented the Scottish Parliament as giving Scots enough scope to be self-governing, without having to leave the UK. This was achieved by setting out a positive chain of equivalence, using the signifiers 'Labour's Values, Scotland's Values', 'Scottish solutions for Scottish problems', 'different approach from Westminster', 'independent decision making' and 'costs of walking out of Britain'.

Thus, it was presented that leaving UK would be costly, and that devolution offered Scots the right balance between independence and pre-devolution Britain. Donald Dewar's articulation was designed not only to present the idea that independence would be costly, but that Labour's values were the values of Scotland. This was in order to both negate the SNP's goal of Scottish independence, but also to cement Labour as the party to trust in making devolved decisions in Scotland. Once again, shared values are shown to be a critical element of Labour's national discourse, and although Dewar did not define them in the passage above, those values included 'social justice' and redistribution of wealth from the richest to the poorest, as indicated by Alexander and Brown (1999) above.

Furthermore, by constructing the argument that Scottish Labour would take a 'different approach from Westminster', Donald Dewar attempted to gain support for Labour on the back of the pro-devolution sentiments that the 'present constitutional circumstance denies Scotland responsive and effective democracy' (Scotland's Parliament, *Scotland's Right*: 1995: 6), and that Scotland, Wales and the regions had strong identities of their own (United Kingdom Government, 'Scotland's Parliament', 1997: 10). The Scottish Parliament was to reflect the views and interests of the Scottish people, Dewar articulated, and he hoped that by asserting the independence of Scottish Labour from the UK party, the movement could be presented as not simply a branch of the UK Labour party, but a Scottish party with its own sets of values and policies. This was undoubtedly a strategy designed to negate SNP criticism of Labour in Scotland.

A final aspect of Labour's national discourse leading up to the 1999 Scottish election was to present UK Labour as having already delivered for Scotland since coming to power in 1997:

We said that we would deliver a Scottish Parliament in the first year of a Labour Government and we delivered. We promised to find extra money for the Scottish people's priorities: jobs, hospitals and schools and we delivered. We promised a National Minimum Wage to end poverty pay and we delivered. (Scottish New Labour, 1999).

The idea here was to present UK Labour's track record as proof that Scottish Labour could be trusted to run reserved affairs in Scotland, in the best interests of the Scottish people, as the Scottish Executive. This was indicated by the use of signifiers 'Labour Government', 'extra money', 'Scottish people's priorities', 'jobs', 'hospitals', 'schools', 'National Minimum Wage', and 'end poverty pay' in a positive chain of equivalence. Scottish Labour made a conscious effort to present itself as a social democratic party, that working class Scots could trust to protect and support public services, by referencing left-leaning policies such as more funding for public services, and the introduction of a national minimum wage.

Inevitably, Scottish Labour rode the wave of the successful Yes vote to establish the Scottish Parliament, by referring to the Scottish Parliament as a Labour promise fulfilled. By extension, however, Labour was also articulating the Union as having delivered for Scotland, especially in relation to the welfare state and social justice, as

indicated by the focus on hospitals, schools and the national minimum wage. Once again, the importance of articulations of shared values and state welfare were shown to be important as part of Labour's national discourse.

### **Labour in the Scottish Executive**

For all of Scottish Labour's dominance in Scotland, being in Government in 1999 revealed that such dominance did not yield much governing experience, other than at local level. There was much political and popular expectation, but little in the way of collective experience, or experience of developing and sustaining leadership. This became increasingly apparent over time (Hassan and Shaw, 2012: 98–99). It is interesting to note that some of the more influential Scottish Labour figures, including Gordon Brown and Douglas Alexander, chose to continue as MPs, rather than stand to be MSPs.

The early part of Scottish Labour's first term in office saw media criticism over a range of small issues, but also larger ones, such as the rising cost of the future Scottish Parliament building at Holyrood. Additionally, Donald Dewar's first legislative programme drew negative comments from some, including Peter Jones, who argued that that programme 'lacked a populist edge' and that it was seeped in dullness as its architects were too careful not to be controversial (ibid: 99), so as not to 'rock the boat', as such.

After the sad passing of Donald Dewar in early October 2000, Henry McLeish won a leadership contest, and was then elected as First Minister by the Scottish Parliament on 26 October 2000. McLeish's aim was to push forward an agenda that was both ambitious, and that would also enable him to make his mark. He sought to tackle problems in Scotland such as the declining workforce, and an aging population. The latter, McLeish believed, could be addressed by introducing free care for the elderly (ibid: 105). By November 2001, however, McLeish had been involved in scandals, culminating in 'Officegate', where it was revealed that his constituency office had been let out to various different organisations, something not permitted by Parliamentary regulations. Despite paying back the amount of money received from subletting since 1987, McLeish was in an untenable situation, and resigned his post as First Minister and Scottish Labour leader. This left the door open to Jack McConnell, who had challenged McLeish in the previous leadership contest.

McConnell was elected Scottish Labour leader on 17 November 2001, then as First Minister on 22 November (Hassan, 2004; Hassan and Shaw, 2012: 107 and 110).

On the issue of the constitution, Labour attempted to convey both how devolution was working for Scotland, but also that independence would halt any progress that was made, particularly in relation to public services. There was an element of continuity here, and only a slight adaptation of Scottish Labour's discursive strategy before devolution was achieved. In constructing the positive case for devolution, Henry McLeish as First Minister pointed to policies implemented through devolution, including the provision of nursery places for all four years olds, the reduction in long term unemployment for young people, the working families tax credit, and the promise of central heating being fitted in the homes of all pensioners (McLeish, 16 February 2001). By highlighting the benefits of devolution for each major age group of Scottish society, Henry McLeish was constructing the argument that devolution was good for all Scots, no matter what their age. McLeish also presented reasons as to why devolution worked, and for whom:

Devolution is working because it is about partnership—about how we get on together. And we are making it work: Labour in Government in Westminster and in Edinburgh too... It works because the UK economy is strong; so that within the UK we can work to deliver our social justice agenda for all the people of Scotland. (McLeish, 16 February 2001).

Devolution, according to Henry McLeish, worked because of partnership between a Labour UK Government and a Labour Scottish Executive. By working together, McLeish presented the idea that the wealth of the United Kingdom could be used to deliver social justice in Scotland. The signifiers 'devolution', 'partnership', 'Labour', 'Westminster', 'Edinburgh', 'UK economy is strong', 'social justice' and 'people of Scotland' were presented together in a positive chain of equivalence, in order to dominate the meaning of the concept of 'devolution' as a settlement that enabled Labour to deliver 'social justice' for 'the people of Scotland'. This was opposed to the SNP's articulation that devolution as failing Scots (an argument that will be discussed later in this chapter), which led the party to argue that independence would deliver social justice in Scotland. Therefore, for Henry McLeish, the economic case for Scotland staying in the Union was important, arguing that Scotland was benefitting from the strength of the UK economy and from the Labour partnership across the UK, in terms of achieving social justice. Thus, the concept of social justice

was central to Labour's attempts to cement the idea that the Union was good for 'working Scots'—they were mutually reinforcing, again indicating the role shared values in Labour's national discourse.

Meanwhile, as the SNP continued to attack Labour at Westminster and in Edinburgh (a strategy that will be discussed in the relevant SNP section of this chapter), Labour accused the SNP of point-scoring over the Barnett Formula, and defended the devolution set-up, including the Barnett Formula. Labour also attacked the SNP's goal of independence, and the articulation that the Union (and Labour) failed to invest in the public sector:

There is no doubt that Scotland gets more back in terms of public expenditure than it pays in taxes and other revenues...Nationalist demands for a separate Scotland would simply hurt Scotland by reducing public expenditure or raising taxes, and increasing the instability of resources available. (McConnell, 22 June 2000).

When he was still Minister for Finance, Jack McConnell presented independence as costly and risky, indicated by the use of the signifiers 'hurt Scotland', 'reducing public expenditure', 'raising taxes' and 'instability' in a negative chain of equivalence, as he attacked the SNP's 'independence' nodal point. The argument that an independent Scotland would have to choose between reducing public expenditure and raising taxes was later reproduced, especially during the long independence referendum campaign. It is also evident how Jack McConnell presented Scotland as receiving more in public spending, than it contributed in taxes, thus indicating the argument that Scotland was economically dependent on the UK state.

### **Scottish Labour under Jack McConnell's leadership 2001–2007**

When Jack McConnell became First Minister, he spoke about his ambition for change. He was the third Labour First Minister since 1999 (Leydier, 2015). Even before he took office as First Minister, he had spoken and written about a form of politics that was 'impatient at the inadequacies of contemporary Scotland' (Hassan and Shaw, 2012: 110–111). On 16 January 2003, a debate was held at the Scottish Parliament on Iraq, which was called after an SNP anti-war motion. The issue was divisive in Scottish Labour, just as it was in the UK Labour Party, and it added to the constitutional debate, too. Tom McCabe, a Labour MSP at the time, re-produced the 'sovereignty of Westminster' argument, by stating that the issue of going to war in

Iraq was an issue reserved to the Westminster Parliament (Hassan and Shaw, 2012: 112). For the SNP, Iraq was an example of why the Scottish Parliament should have control over defence and foreign policy—achievable through independence—in order to exempt Scotland from participating in what it called ‘illegal wars’.

As for Labour’s national discourse under Jack McConnell, it focused on constructing Scottish Labour as a party of all of Scotland and for *everyone in Scotland*. As indicated above, this is something similar to what Henry McLeish had tried to do. So, there was discursive continuity, and it is plausible to suggest that this presented a ‘business as usual’ style tactic, which was designed to divert attention from Labour’s division over the Iraq war. Jack McConnell presented Labour as delivering for Scotland to reinforce the construction that devolution worked, especially in terms of public sector investment and reform, but as also wanting to do more. Additionally, Scottish Labour focused on presenting the party’s biggest rival in Scotland, the SNP, as unfit for Government, in a bid to deflect attention from division over the Iraq war and to deflect challenges from the SNP. Indeed, as with McLeish’s leadership, part of Labour’s strategy under McConnell was to challenge the SNP’s case for independence. This again indicates discursive continuity throughout Labour’s first two terms in the Scottish Parliament.

Jack McConnell’s positive case for devolution within the Union, like his predecessors, was focused on using the Scottish Parliament to establish equality of opportunity, and improvements in public services:

Labour in Government must represent every part of Scotland. We want to create opportunities and tackle inequality in every area, large or small. My priorities for education, transport and health really matter in rural Scotland. Only support for Labour will guarantee the stability, but most of all the principles, that will keep making a difference to rural and island Scotland (McConnell, 22 April 2002).

McConnell was keen to stress that Labour’s agenda for Scotland was to be spread across the whole of Scotland, and not just the major cities or the ‘central belt’ of Scotland (such as Stirling, Falkirk, or Livingston). Thus, by constructing a positive chain of equivalence using the signifiers and phrases ‘Labour in Government’, ‘every part of Scotland’, ‘opportunities’, ‘tackle inequality’, ‘education’, ‘transport’, ‘health’, and ‘rural Scotland’, Jack McConnell equated the Labour-led coalition administration

as supporting public services and social justice in all of Scotland—again reinforcing the role of welfare and putative shared values in Labour’s national discourse. However, there was also an attempt by Scottish Labour to assure rural and island communities in Scotland that they would be included in decision-making about Scotland’s future, thus creating a pro-Labour subject position for rural communities to challenge the Liberal Democrats and SNP in areas they dominated, such as the Highlands and Islands (Labour took just one of eight seats in the Highlands and Island constituency during the 1999 Scottish Parliament election).

As First Minister, Jack McConnell was also intent on conveying the idea that the Labour Scottish Executive was not only investing in and improving public services, but that its ambition was to do more:

Tony Blair’s vision for improvement and change in Britain is one that I share and one that will resonate with all Scots. We have matched the record new spending plans set out in our Scottish Budget with a programme of change and reform. But I want to see the pace of change increase in Scotland still further. We are building more hospitals and modernising more schools through our PPP projects than people would ever have thought possible just a few years ago. We are improving services for patients and pupils faster than before. But more needs to be done. (McConnell, 1 October 2002).

Interestingly, through use of the signifiers ‘improvement’, ‘change’, ‘Britain’ and ‘Scots’, Jack McConnell presented the direction of Britain as a positive thing under Tony Blair’s Premiership, and that every Scot would share that direction, and Tony Blair’s vision for them and for Britain. This piece of discourse, therefore, was subtly Unionist in nature and had a nation-building rationale, in that a collective identity was presented. Jack McConnell also presented the role of Scottish Labour as important in improving public services in Scotland, and that the ‘pace of change’ was something that needed to increase, thus implicitly arguing that he and his Scottish Executive would drive change and improve public services ‘for patients and pupils’ through the ‘Scottish budget’. Therefore, Jack McConnell’s discourse as First Minister indicates that there was a will to drive forward change and improvement in public services in Scotland, an area over which the Scottish Labour had devolved control. By extension, the Union was once again presented as the defender of the welfare state in Scotland, as a means to legitimise the UK state’s influence in Scotland.

## Challenging the SNP

Under Jack McConnell's leadership, Labour also attempted to undermine the SNP's credibility. The SNP was the largest opposition party in the Scottish Parliament, and was Scottish Labour's most dangerous threat to re-election in 2003. The SNP was presented as financially irresponsible, for example:

The reality is that protesting about the Government having a contingency fund demonstrates the SNP's complete lack of experience. Having a contingency fund in reserve is part of the normal process of prudent Government'. (Peacock, 27 September 2002).

Peter Peacock, deputy Finance Minister for Labour at the time, presented the SNP as being too inexperienced for Government, by indicating that the party's criticism of Labour's contingency fund highlighted a lack of understanding of how to run public finances. On another occasion, Patricia Ferguson MSP suggested that every SNP announcement indicated that it was an 'irresponsible opposition party' that was not fit for Government, based on the articulation that the SNP's plans were uncosted and lacking in detail, and that the SNP would 'promise anything to make them look electable' (Ferguson, 13 January 2003). Another aspect to the 'character assassination' of the SNP was to argue that voters could not trust them:

Dorothy-Grace Elder's dramatic resignation statement shows the level of distrust and bitterness within SNP ranks. If they don't trust each other how can they ever expect to gain the trust of the Scottish people. (McAveety, 2 May 2002).

Additionally, Labour attempted to present the idea that independence was a solution to shortfalls of devolution, both on economic issues, and on issues relating to the financing of public services:

This is the most in depth study yet of the costs and risks involved in breaking up the United Kingdom. I am obviously pleased that this independent report has shown that separation would not necessarily improve life for people in Scotland and would be likely to make things worse. What this book shows is that even the process of negotiating a divorce would be a disaster for Scotland's economy. If that wasn't bad enough, Scotland's vital public services would be solely dependent on the prices of oil. If the prices of oil fell, investment in public services would be cut. (Kerr, 17 September 2002).

Andy Kerr, Scottish Labour's Finance Minister, indicated that Labour linked the economics of independence directly to the funding of public services in an

independent Scotland. Kerr built a negative chain of equivalence around the SNP's nodal point of independence and the idea of an independent Scottish economy, using the signifiers 'costs', 'risks', 'breaking up', 'United Kingdom', 'independent report', 'separation', 'people in Scotland', 'make things worse', 'divorce', 'disaster', 'Scotland's economy'.

Kerr presented independence as costly, and as a risk to Scotland's economy. In addition, Andy Kerr used the signifiers 'public services', 'prices of oil', 'prices of oil fell', and 'cut' in a negative chain of equivalence, to argue that an independent Scottish economy was dependent on oil, and that because prices of oil were (and are) prone to fluctuation, there was the risk that if oil prices fell, then money for investment in public services would be reduced, resulting in public sector cuts. The nation-building aspect here was to reinforce the idea that the Union, unlike independence, would protect public services. There was an element of consent building for the UK state here.

Indeed, the articulation of independence as being harmful not only to Scotland's economy, but specifically to Scotland's public services, was a key part of Scottish Labour's strategy in deflecting SNP attention away from any criticism over how Scottish Labour ran public services:

When will the Nationalists learn that talking about the constitution will not improve Scotland's vital public services? ... [T]he Nationalists' constitutional upheaval would deliver nothing but a multi-million pound deficit at the heart of Scotland's finances. (Jamieson, 1 May 2002).

Once again, it can be seen how Labour linked independence to a struggling Scottish economy, and an argument that Scotland's public services, articulated as 'vital', would suffer. Additionally, it can be seen how Labour presented the SNP as caring only about constitutional issues, rather than about improving public services. Therefore, Scottish Labour used two main strategies to negate voter support for the SNP, 1). To present the SNP as incompetent, disorganised and untrustworthy; and 2). To negate the SNP's goal of independence by referring to independent expert research, and by constructing the argument that the SNP's economic case for independence was over-reliant on oil, which could result in disaster for public finances if Global oil prices dropped. The latter is certainly an argument that was made again, especially during the long independence referendum campaign. Labour

wanted to discredit the SNP in the minds of voters, as the parties were competing for the same voter base.

### **Labour and the 2003 Scottish Parliament election**

The war in Iraq was poor preparation for Scottish Labour's 2003 Scottish election campaign, and it reminded voters that Scottish Labour's fortunes were often tied to the fortunes of UK Labour. Indeed, Labour's support fell at the election, as the party took 6 fewer seats than in 1999 (Hassan and Shaw, 2012: 114). The SNP also fell back in support, meaning that Scotland's two largest parties lost seats in the Scottish Parliament (Labour 56 to 50, SNP 35 to 27), opening the door to the breakthroughs of the Scottish Socialist Party and the Scottish Greens. For Labour, a particularly worrying trend was that its constituency losses were to parties from across the spectrum—the Conservatives, SNP, Lib Dems, and an independent. Additionally, the party lost regional votes to the Socialists and the Greens (Gillen, 2014).

Scottish Labour's strategy for the 2003 election presented both Labour's role in Scotland, and the Scottish Parliament's role, as essential for the next four years. In Jack McConnell's introduction to Labour's 2003 Scottish election manifesto, there was a focus on building upon work already done, including the legislation introduced to create better public services such as 'nursery places for every three and four year old, free personal care for elderly Scots and free local bus travel' (McConnell, 2003: 2), and encouraging higher growth, but also working to improve public services (McConnell, 2003: 3). These were all presented as aims for Scottish Labour in the Scottish Parliament, and echoed McConnell's previous discourse arguing how devolution was good for Scotland, but that there was more work to be done. As stated previously, this strategy was designed to maintain the idea that a strong Labour Party in Scotland meant a strong Scottish welfare state. However, Jack McConnell continued to challenge the SNP's independence cause:

We can build on what we've started, inside the UK, using the powers of devolution to take our country forward or we can rip it all up and start again with the Nationalists' plans for a separate Scottish state and risk all the upheaval and uncertainty that would create at this difficult and challenging time in Scotland and elsewhere. (McConnell, 2003: 4).

McConnell constructed a negative chain of equivalence, using the signifiers 'rip it all up', 'start again', 'the Nationalists', 'separate Scottish state', 'risk', 'upheaval',

'uncertainty', 'difficult' and 'challenging'. Jack McConnell presented the idea that independence would not only undo the good progress made in the Scottish Parliament, such as policies that introduced 'free personal care' or 'new rights for victims of crime' (see McConnell, 2003: 2), but that it would also create risk, uncertainty and upheaval in a 'difficult and challenging time' in both Scotland, but also globally.

Seen in the context of the Iraq War, McConnell was at least partly presenting the idea that such events accentuated the risks of Scotland becoming independent, albeit implicitly. But it should be said that the use of such signifiers is ambiguous, in that 'risk' and 'uncertainty' are empty signifiers that are open to interpretation and contestation, especially when not linked to any specific trend or event. The ultimate goal behind the strategy highlighted above was to validate devolution by attacking independence, or in other words, to ensure that devolution appeared to be much better than independence as an alternative. This became more important after Thatcherism's demise—Labour required a different 'other' to maintain its nation-building discourse: the SNP and independence.

### **Labour's nation-building strategy from 2003 to 2007**

In terms of policy after 2003, Scottish Labour embarked on a number of high-profile initiatives. This included the Anti-Social Behaviour Act, which shifted the responsibility for 'children in trouble' to the courts, rather than children's hearings. Such an agenda had support from working-class, older, traditional Labour voters, particularly in the West of Scotland. However, children's rights organisations heavily criticised the agenda, and middle-class, liberal-minded voters were turned-off by the idea. Moral authoritarianism appeared to have come to the fore in Scottish Labour's ranks. Cathy Jamieson, Margaret Curran, and Johann Lamont all supported the Scottish Government's measures, in a retreat from left-leaning, feminist politics (Hassan and Shaw, 2012: 116).

The second McConnell administration also launched the Fresh Talent Initiative, which offered foreign students an extended stay in Scotland after graduating from a Scottish University (a deal had to be reached with the UK Government to enact this), as well as creating a Scotland-Malawi partnership (which was a form of foreign policy, despite foreign policy not having been devolved to Scotland) and introducing

individual pieces of legislation to tackle sectarianism, but not a Bill on Government action on sectarianism (something which McConnell later regretted). McConnell was attempting to enact and create a culture of change, in order to offer a different kind of politics to voters (Lynch, 2013: 116–117, Leydier, 2015). This was done by utilising the state apparatus created by the establishment of the Scottish administration.

The 2005 UK election was Jack McConnell's first Westminster election as First Minister, and Scottish Labour experienced difficulty due to some divergent policy in Scotland and in England. At one point during the election campaign, McConnell admitted that waiting lists in Scotland could be twice as long as those in England, which was seen as a major slip-up (Laffin and Shaw, 2007; Hassan and Shaw, 2012). The Labour Party saw its vote reduced, but still had a workable majority of 66 MPs. In Scotland, Labour lost 5 seats to 41, and the SNP gained 2 seats, to 6.

Policy-wise, Labour presided over the legislation that enacted the smoking ban in public buildings (March 2006), an initiative that was initially a backbench motion by SNP MSP, Stewart Maxwell, building on work by his SNP colleague, Kenny Gibson MSP (Cairney, 2009). The introduction of this legislation is one of the most significant public health measures taken by any Scottish Government, and set the trend for the policy to be introduced across the UK. In terms of sovereignty, Jack McConnell introduced the idea of the 'Union dividend', which aimed to explain to voters how Scotland benefitted from being in the UK financially (Hassan and Shaw, 2012: 120). This becomes particularly interesting in the context of Labour's argument that independence would create a 'multi-million pound deficit at the heart of Scotland's finances'. The 'Union dividend', thus, did not work on its own, and relied upon a negative articulation of a prospective independent Scotland's finances. In relation to this, Jack McConnell also argued that it did not make sense to argue for more powers, before making fullest use of the powers already in Scotland's hands. These arguments were designed to challenge independence, and the Union dividend was an argument that aimed to reinforce the legitimacy of the UK state in Scotland.

Scottish Labour's discursive strategy during the Party's second term in office followed very much in the footsteps of Jack McConnell's discourse in his first term as First Minister, in that the party focused on what had been achieved so far, and that

Labour could deliver more (but not more powers in the Scottish Parliament) for the Scottish people, if given the opportunity:

Labour is in its second term of the devolved Government in Scotland and already we are making a difference. Attainment in our schools is rising, waiting times for treatment of life-threatening diseases is falling, we are building new schools, hospitals, roads and railways and more opportunities are opening up for more of our young people than ever before. But we have always known that, to make the scale of improvements needed in Scotland following decades of Tory neglect, would take more than just a few years. To instil confidence and ambition in our communities, to weave fairness, solidarity, tolerance and respect back into Scottish society would take more than just two terms of devolved Government ... Labour is the party of enterprise, ambition and opportunities in Scotland. The only party that is on the side of decent hard working families in Scotland. We have got here because our policies in the past have been right for Scotland. With your help, we can shape policies for the future that are best for Scotland and best for our people. (Muldoon, 2004).

Labour argued that they were already making a difference, early into their second term in office, by citing improvements to public services, and increased opportunities for young people in Scotland. Additionally, part of Labour's discursive strategy was to indicate that Labour had a substantial task in improving the quality of life in Scotland, after 'decades of Tory neglect'. By doing so, Labour attempted to reach consensus with voters in Scotland that Conservative rule was so neglectful and ruinous, that it would take considerable time to improve conditions in Scotland.

Labour built a positive chain of equivalence using the signifiers 'confidence', 'ambition', 'fairness', 'solidarity', 'tolerance', 'respect' and 'Scottish society' in order to present those values as the values of Scotland, and as such, they were the values that Labour would instil in order to improve life for people in Scotland. This claim is further supported by the assertion 'We have got here because our policies in the past have been right for Scotland' (Muldoon, 2004).

Therefore, Labour values and policies were presented as being in tune with the needs of people living in Scotland, in particular, 'decent hard working families', who were more attracted to ideas such as 'fairness', 'ambition', and 'opportunities'. The reassertion of putative shared values indicates their role in nation-building here. There was, then, an element of reinforcing the idea that a Labour Scottish executive was good for social justice and the welfare state in Scotland, and that was presented as a great improvement on Thatcherism. Thus, the idea that the Union was good for

the welfare state and social justice was once again presented, in order to legitimise the UK state in Scotland.

Indeed, Scottish Labour's constitutional approach in 2005 can be pinpointed in Scottish Labour's UK election manifesto for enterprise, skills and science, within which the party presented, in particular, the economic benefits for Scotland within the UK. Such benefits included the strength of the British economy, which Labour argued had grown for 51 consecutive quarters; and rising living standards (Scottish Labour, 2005: 6). For Labour, the strength of the British economy was a key element to the case for Scotland remaining in the UK:

These are big challenges, but we are confident that Scotland, as part of the UK, is well placed to succeed in the new global economy. Devolution is offering Scotland the best of both worlds—a strong base from which to build and the power to create conditions tailored to our needs. (Scottish Labour, 2005).

A positive chain of equivalence was built, using the signifiers 'challenges', 'Scotland', 'part of the UK', 'succeed', 'devolution', 'best of both worlds', 'strong base' and 'tailor our needs'. Scottish Labour argued that the strength of the UK economy would help Scotland to flourish in the 'new global economy', a signifier that indicates Labour's attraction to globalisation trend. The signifiers 'strong base', and 'tailor our needs' were then positively articulated together to indicate that the UK economy gave Scotland an economic base within which the Scottish Executive could design and implement specifically Scottish policy, hence the phrase 'best of both worlds'. The signifier 'best of both worlds' was a signifier often repeated by Labour, especially during the long independence referendum campaign. The signifier 'challenges' was chosen to validate devolution despite any current or future shortcomings.

### **The road to the 2007 Scottish election and defeat to the SNP**

The latter half of 2006 saw the SNP begin to build a lead over Scottish Labour, on both the constituency and regional vote. This trend was maintained moving into 2007, with a March 2007 TNS poll putting the SNP on 39 per cent and Labour on 34 per cent for the constituency vote, and on the regional vote, the SNP was also ahead, with the party leading Labour 33 per cent to 26 per cent. At the same time, a YouGov poll also had the SNP leading (Hassan and Shaw, 2012: 121). Scottish Labour were faced with several problems as the 2007 Holyrood election neared,

including the unpopularity of Tony Blair as Labour Prime Minister, Alex Salmond's relative popularity compared with Jack McConnell, and internal divisions both at UK and Scottish level. After the marginal passing of an STUC General Council motion, which stated that Labour in office was best for Scottish workers, and significant opposition to that motion from several Unions, including the Fire Brigades Union, UCU University lecturers, and Unison, Jack McConnell decided to go on the offensive against the SNP. He presented the idea that Alex Salmond had the choice to prioritise education, the economy and independence, and that he chose independence:

Last week Alex Salmond had the opportunity to debate with me and spell out his priorities. He was given the choice between education, the economy and independence. He chose independence. (Jack McConnell in *The Herald*, 18 April 2007, quoted by Hassan and Shaw, 2012: 121).

It is argued here, indeed, that not only did Labour go on the offensive towards the SNP, but Alex Salmond in particular, in order to present him as obsessed with independence, and unfit to be First Minister—thus highlighting his 'lack of legitimacy' as First Minister. It will be shown in Chapters 6 and 7 how Scottish Labour used such a strategy when the SNP was in Government, with Salmond as First Minister. Additionally, in the foreword to Scottish Labour's 2007 Scottish election manifesto, Jack McConnell presented the election as a choice between the Union and independence:

Everything my Party and I have done in the last four years has been for the people of Scotland. It is the people of Scotland who drive me and my Party forward. That is why this election is so important. Perhaps the most important in Scotland for a generation. Our country stands at a crossroads. On 3rd May our people have a choice between two futures. Between building up Scotland or an uncertain route to breaking up Britain. (McConnell, 2007).

Jack McConnell presented the Labour Party, and by extension devolution, as endeavouring to improve the quality of life for the 'people of Scotland'. McConnell articulated devolution positively as 'building up' 'Scotland', in a positive chain of equivalence. Thus Labour, and devolution, were presented as forces of progress in Scotland. On the other hand, independence was presented in a negative chain of equivalence along with the signifiers 'breaking up', 'Britain' and 'uncertain'. This presented independence as both a threat to the Union, but also as too much of a

risk to consider. Implicit in that was the idea that independence would risk reversing any notion of progress under Labour since 1999. The signifier 'a choice of two futures' reinforces the idea that attacking independence was central to Labour's attempts to validate devolution.

A further problem for Labour was that the SNP was now competing with it for the support of the business community. By securing the support of former RBS chairman, Sir George Mathewson (a supporter of a Yes vote in 2014), the SNP had improved its fortunes in attracting members of the business community. Added to that, support for Labour from business had shrunk by 2007, compared to the heady days in the latter half of the 1990s. Labour was also struggling for media support, with Alex Salmond and the SNP being preferred to Labour. The Daily Record was the only newspaper that Labour could trust to stick by the party's message. As Gordon Brown became Labour leader and Prime Minister, the media shifted to present a battle between he and Alex Salmond, somewhat diminishing the role of Jack McConnell in the process. Labour's message focused on stressing the importance of the Union, and presenting independence as dangerous. This message was seen as negative amongst voters, who noticed a contrast between Labour's negativity, and the positive campaigning of the SNP. In addition to the perception that the SNP was positive, and that Labour was negative, Alex Salmond was the preferred choice amongst voters to be First Minister, ahead of Jack McConnell (as indicated by Hassan and Shaw). A YouGov poll had Alex Salmond as the favoured choice to be First Minister at 31 per cent, to Jack McConnell's 18 per cent (Hassan and Shaw, 2012: 121–122).

The result of the 2007 Scottish election was tight, with the SNP winning 47 seats to Labour's 46 seats. This was a critical event, as it represented both the SNP's first national electoral victory, and the defeat of a Labour Government in Scotland. However, because the result was so tight, it was not seismic in the sense that the 2011 result was to be. Some Labourites believed that the SNP's victory was just a 'blip', and that normal service would resume sooner rather than later. However, that depended on the SNP's success in Government, the reaction of Labour and the other parties to the SNP's success, and the wider British and Global political landscape (ibid: 125). Normal service did not resume, and the 2007 election result only marked the beginning of a decline in Scottish Labour's fortunes. It is argued

here, also, that the SNP's discursive strategy had a role to play in cementing the SNP's position in Government in the 2007–2011 period, and beyond.

### **The national discourse of the Scottish National Party from 1999 to 2007**

Although the SNP had initially resisted a firm commitment to devolution after the 1997 general election, the party leadership took steps to seek assurances that devolution was a step in the right direction, and that the form of devolution outlined by the Constitutional Convention would be followed. Alex Salmond, for example, met Nigel Smith, Chief Executive of Scotland Forward at the end of May 1997, and this paved the way for further discussions between the SNP and Scotland Forward. On 24 July 1997, the SNP's National Council voted overwhelmingly in favour of a motion supporting Scotland Forward and a 'Yes, Yes' vote at the forthcoming devolution referendum. Alex Salmond had, by this point, managed to convince party traditionalists of his gradualist strategy towards the ultimate goal of Scottish independence. His strategy was seen to work within the party, as the SNP gained electorally, meaning that the party could directly challenge Labour in the Scottish Parliament (Lindsay, 2009; MacWhirter, 2014).

Additionally, the SNP knew that by supporting devolution, they could potentially benefit electorally from something that the Scottish public generally favoured (Lynch, 2013: 235–236). The SNP looked back to its experiences of the 1979 referendum, and ensured that it had members on the Executive of Scotland Forward from both the gradualist and fundamentalist sections of the party. Thus, the SNP was determined that the mistakes of 1979 were not repeated (ibid: 236). Compared with 1979, the SNP and Labour co-operated well as constituent parts of Scotland Forward, despite the conflictual nature of their relationship, historically.

In any event, devolution presented both opportunities and problems for the SNP. However, despite having been on the winning side during the 1997 devolution referendum, the atmosphere was glum in the SNP, during the early years of devolution. This was for a variety of reasons. First, in 2000, Alex Salmond stood down as party leader and decided not to seek re-election to the Scottish Parliament in 2001, instead choosing to remain as an MP (Hassan, 2009: 40). Salmond was replaced as leader by John Swinney, who presided over the party in a tough period of electoral decline in the 2001 General Election, and again in the 2003 Scottish

Parliament election. During this period, the SNP experienced internal divisions, fuelled by the dissent of a small number of MSPs who disagreed with the party's election procedures ahead of the 2003 Scottish Parliament election. John Swinney took much of the criticism. Despite a steadied ship after internal reform of selection procedures, and of the organisation of the party, Swinney lost his position as leader, mostly due to faltering electoral performances. John Swinney resigned after the 2005 elections, where the SNP again performed poorly (Mitchell, 2014: 264). Then, in a surprise to many, Alex Salmond announced his intention to stand in the SNP leadership contest in 2005—a contest that he won—and the 2006/7 period marked a gradual rise in momentum that culminated in the SNP's narrow Holyrood election victory in 2007, which gave the party its first taste of Government (Lynch, 2013: 233–234). Whilst Salmond was elected party leader again, Nicola Sturgeon was elected as his deputy (Mitchell, 2014: 266).

### **Preparing for Parliament: The SNP's national discourse in the lead-up to the 1999 Scottish Parliament elections**

The big question asked of the SNP going into the 1999 Scottish Parliament election, was how could a pro-independence party effectively fight an election to a devolved Parliament? The SNP leadership indicated that the party would produce two manifestos: one detailing the policies that a SNP Scottish Government would implement, and one focusing on the type of policies that the SNP would like to introduce in an independent Scotland. This announcement caused internal and external difficulties for the SNP, however. First, the dual manifesto strategy, the predominant focus of the SNP on devolved issues, and independence being only tenth on the SNP's pledge card, led some within the party to believe that the leadership had 'gone soft' on independence (Lynch, 2013: 239).

Second, by announcing an independence manifesto so quickly after devolution was achieved, the SNP opened itself up to criticism from political opposition, who attacked the SNP's strategy and goal of independence, thus diverting attention from the party's Scottish Parliament policies. Indeed, the SNP was forced to defend independence without an independence manifesto even being published. As a result of the SNP's Scottish Parliament campaign strategy and the criticism it received, the public became confused about the SNP's central message. Therefore, the SNP

faced the dilemma of striking the right balance between persuading the Scottish electorate that it was capable of governing over devolved issues, whilst ensuring that its long term of independence was not compromised. In one sense, the SNP could not win, because by focusing on devolved issues, the party was still attacked by opponents as using that strategy to conceal its 'hidden' agenda of independence (ibid: 240). The Party improved in its handling of this strategic dilemma throughout the lifetime of the Scottish Parliament. However, as James Mitchell indicated, the SNP struggled to adapt to life after the devolution referendum (Mitchell, 2014: 263)

### **The SNP's discursive strategy for the 1999 Scottish Parliament election**

It was well publicised that the SNP did not publish an independence manifesto in the end, but the party did produce a manifesto for the 1999 Scottish Parliament election, which focused mainly on devolved issues (Lynch, 2013). The SNP's national discourse during the 1999 Scottish election campaign focused on presenting themselves as the party for the Scottish people in the Scottish Parliament—the party that would represent Scottish interests, first and foremost in Parliament. The SNP's plans for the Scottish Parliament were presented positively, and were contrasted with the policies of the UK parties, particularly Labour's policies. This made strategic sense, as Labour was the SNP's fiercest electoral rival in Scotland, and had been for decades. The SNP also wanted to challenge the Labour notion that devolution was the 'settled will'. However, although mostly focused on devolved issues, the SNP manifesto for the 1999 Scottish election made it clear that the party was committed to the goal of an independence referendum—a commitment that would be acted upon if the SNP was elected to govern in Scotland (Salmond, 1999).

Alex Salmond's introduction to the SNP manifesto for the 1999 Scottish Parliament election indicates the SNP's national approach to the 1999 Scottish election:

This is Scotland's Parliament—a Parliament that can focus on our needs and on our potential. The SNP is Scotland's Party—working in Scotland, for the benefits of Scotland and with Scottish priorities at the heart of its concerns. Scotland's Parliament needs Scotland's Party. A Party in tune with Scottish needs and hopes, and always with Scottish priorities at the forefront of our thinking. A party that does not dance to Westminster's tune. (Salmond, 1999: 1).

Alex Salmond presented the Scottish Parliament—by building a positive chain of equivalence—as requiring a party that put the needs of Scotland first, and that the

SNP was the only party that could work in Scotland's best interests, and put 'Scottish priorities at the heart of its concerns'. Alex Salmond also presented the SNP as 'in tune with Scottish needs and hopes', which always put Scottish priorities first, and as a break from Westminster politics: 'A party that does not dance to Westminster's tune'. Therefore, the Scottish Parliament was presented by the SNP as a body that could focus on the 'needs' and 'potential' of Scotland, and that voters in Scotland could ensure that their needs and interests would be best catered for by voting SNP. The repetition of the signifiers 'Scotland' and 'our' reinforced the nation-building element here—that Scots had a specific and unique set of needs and interests, and that only the SNP could represent and protect Scottish needs and interests. The SNP was, according to Salmond, 'Scotland's Party'; a key signifier indicating that to vote SNP was to vote for making Scotland a better country, due to the SNP's [perceived] understanding of Scottish needs and interests. This was an important articulation, underpinned by the perception that only the SNP understood what Scots wanted, whereas the other (UK-wide) parties did not.

More specifically, the SNP wanted to tie welfare, social justice, public spending, and the nation-state together. They attempted to do so through the 'Penny for Scotland'—a policy and slogan around which they articulated their national discourse in 1999. The 'Penny for Scotland' policy was officially adopted at the SNP's Spring Conference in 1999. It sought to demarcate a different approach to tax and public spending to the UK parties, and in particular, the Labour Party. Thus, there was a reactive element to the policy, and it had been debated by the SNP Treasury team after Labour Chancellor, Gordon Brown, announced in his budget speech the proposal to reduce the basic rate of income tax by 1p to 22p (Mackay, 2009; Lynch, 2013). More significantly, though, the policy was designed to present the SNP as supportive of public services and social justice. The idea behind the policy was that by raising income tax for the better off, there would be more money available to be spent on public services. This idea, which is based on redistribution, is explored in more detail below.

Despite the controversial and risky nature of the 'Penny for Scotland' strategy, there was little opposition to the policy at the SNP Spring Conference, and it was officially adopted. It was recognised that the safer option of doing nothing, in the face of a decline in public support according to recent opinion polls, was not an option (Lynch,

2013: 241–242). The ‘Penny for Scotland’ policy not only aimed to convince voters that the SNP represented their hopes, needs and aspirations, but it was also designed to negate the national discourses of the UK parties, and ultimately their nodal point of ‘Union’, in the Scottish context. In particular, the Labour Party was a focus of attack for the SNP’s ‘Penny for Scotland’, as they sought to challenge Labour’s announcement that the basic rate of tax would be reduced by a penny in the pound.

‘A Penny for Scotland’ established a political frontier, by presenting a positive prospective role for the SNP in the Scottish Parliament, especially regarding the protection and expansion of public services, whilst negatively articulating the intentions of their main electoral competitor, Scottish Labour. ‘A Penny for Scotland’ pledged:

We will not increase the basic rate of tax during the four years of the Parliament. We will not implement the Penny Tax Bribe in Gordon Brown’s disastrous budget for Scotland. We will devote the income from this penny—Scotland’s penny—to education, health and housing. (SNP, 1999a: 2).

The Labour UK Government’s decision to reduce the basic rate of tax by a penny was presented as a cynical ploy, indicated by the signifier ‘Penny Tax Bribe’. And implicit in the SNP’s pledge to freeze the basic rate of tax in order to improve and maintain public services, was the argument that Labour’s ‘Penny Tax Bribe’ would deprive Scottish spending in education, health, and housing, as indicated below. By focusing on prospective higher public spending, the SNP presented investing in state education and healthcare; and the building of more homes, as meeting the needs of Scotland. The SNP was presented as the party that could deliver in those areas. This message was produced consistently, and the SNP’s national discourse here represents part of a democratic contest between Labour and the SNP.

For example, according to a 1999 Scottish election communication, produced for SNP candidate Greg McCarra, Scotland’s priorities were ‘better education’, ‘better health’, and ‘better housing’. These areas were linked to the ‘Penny for Scotland’ strategy in McCarra’s election communication (McCarra, 1999), and in Jean Urquhart’s election communication (1999), for example. The main point here is that the SNP used its ‘Penny for Scotland’ strategy to present themselves as the party of

welfare in Scotland—a party that supported strong public services, a strong public sector, and ultimately a strong welfare state. The nation-building aspect was important here, as the SNP tied together the ideas that it was ‘Scotland’s Party’, and that it would stand up for the welfare state, in order to construct a particular interpretation as to what it meant to be Scottish: a commitment to strong public services.

In contrast to the SNP, ‘A Penny for Scotland’ singled Labour out as unrepresentative of the needs and interests of Scots, and as a continuation of the style of Conservative Party policy that many Scots resented during the 1980s:

New Labour has taken on Tory principles. Tax cuts, rather than public services, are New Labour’s priority. But Scotland’s vital public services have been cut year after year, with results that are obvious to all—run down hospitals, dilapidated and under-resourced schools, and poorer and poorer housing. We cannot afford to cut taxes while such a situation affects everyone of us, and particularly the young, the old and the vulnerable. Scots have said they are prepared to invest in public services, if given the choice. The SNP is now giving that choice. (SNP, 1999a: 2).

The SNP articulated Labour and the Conservatives in the same negative chain of equivalence, linking them both to negative developments such as ‘tax cuts’, cuts to ‘Scotland’s vital public services’, ‘run down hospitals’, ‘under-resourced schools’, and ‘poorer housing’. So, in other words, Labour policy and principles were presented as synonymous with Conservative Party policy and ‘Tory principles’, in an attempt to convince Scottish voters that the UK-wide parties, whichever one was in power at UK level, did not represent the interests, or address the needs of ‘Scots’.

Furthermore, by articulating Labour and the Conservatives as equivalential, the SNP presented the idea that none of the Westminster parties would stand up for public services and by extension, the welfare state. Instead, it was presented that Labour stood for tax cuts for the richest, along with the Conservatives. Here, the SNP challenged Labour’s argument that Labour and the Union were the champions of strong public services and a strong welfare state, which in turn challenged Labour’s nation-building project, the nature of which has been discussed in great detail thus far. The SNP hoped that by presenting themselves as an alternative to Labour and the Conservatives, they could win the election and gain decision-making power over the devolved parts of the welfare state in Scotland.

The SNP's attacks on Labour went further, however, and this was indicated in much of the SNP's 1999 Scottish election material. Take for example, an election communication produced to promote Jean Urquhart for election to the Scottish Parliament, as an SNP candidate:

Labour hangs on to the Tories discredited PFIs and to tolls on the Skye bridge. Labour won't use Scotland's Penny to improve Scotland's health, education and housing. Labour jacks up road fuel prices, already the highest in Europe. People in Scotland give higher priority to key public services than to tax cuts but so called Scottish New Labour does not. Because New Scottish Labour is just London Labour and its policies are made down south. (Urquhart, 1999).

On this occasion, Labour was presented as supporting 'discredited PFIs', and as uninterested in improving 'Scotland's health', 'education' and 'housing'. Again, the principle of protecting public expenditure for health, education and housing was presented. Reinforced also, was the idea that people in Scotland prioritised 'key public services', ahead of 'tax cuts'. This articulation indicates the SNP's attempts and willingness to present the party as more left than Labour, and to attract the votes of traditional Labour supporters, who believed that the PFI scheme, which was presented as a form of privatisation ran contrary to traditional Labour values.

In addition, the SNP argued that the policies of Scottish Labour were actually policies decided by 'London Labour', with the implicit message that such policies would not put the interests and needs of Scotland first. This was, in itself, a discursive construct. An SNP election card added the Conservative Party to the negative chain of equivalence: 'unlike New Labour—we don't take our orders from London, and our policies from the Tories!' (SNP, 1999b). As such, the SNP maintained a 'workers' subject position that disgruntled Labour voters could identify with. The SNP presented Labour as being run from London in an attempt to challenge the authority and legitimacy of Scottish Labour, and the ideas that Labour represented the values of Scotland (which according to the SNP was 'key public services', but implicitly a strong welfare state) or would protect the welfare state.

There were both positive and negative implications for the 'Penny for Scotland' policy. On the negative side, Labour had cut income tax at Westminster, and had pledged not to take advantage of the 'Tartan Tax' in Scotland. The SNP, on the other hand, was proposing to freeze the basic rate of income tax at 23p. Initially, the SNP

gave no indication of how the extra estimated £690 million from the prospective income tax freeze would be spent, and although the party did outline that detail over two weeks after the policy was adopted, there was a fundamental failure to do so effectively in the form of clear policy goals or initiatives. This communication issue made it easier for Labour to challenge the SNP as a party for wealthy Scots, despite the SNP's propositions on income tax and public spending in Scotland. This represented a competition on 'social justice' between the two parties—each party wanted to present themselves as the party of social justice and welfare in Scotland. A final negative is that the amount of public money to be available from the freeze was actually rather modest, as a proportion of the whole Scottish budget (Lynch, 2013: 242).

However, the Penny for Scotland policy did have its benefits for the SNP. It was designed in such a way so as to pose a challenge to Labour on the issue of public service funding. By offering more public sector investment, the SNP was deliberately targeting the support of Labour voters. This was, as has been established, a key part of the SNP's political strategy from the 1980s onwards (*ibid*). By adopting such a strategy at this point in time, the SNP hoped to attract, in particular, a public sector workforce that had seen constraints on public expenditure under New Labour at Westminster. Through the 'Penny for Scotland', the SNP sought to prove that they were a social democratic party, by arguing that they would raise taxes, to invest more money into public services (Mackay, 2009).

Additionally, although the Penny for Scotland policy was not repeated at Scottish Parliament elections in 2003, 2007 or 2011, the SNP's image in voters' minds helped the party begin to move to the left of Labour, as Labour moved further to the centre and right of the political spectrum (Mackay, 2009; Lynch, 2013). It is argued here that the SNP's political discourse, as examined above, was an important element in convincing voters that the SNP would stand up for public services in particular, but more widely, the welfare state in Scotland. This theme was maintained and expanded on throughout the 2000s to build a case for independence, based on the articulated shared values of social justice and a Scottish commitment to a strong welfare state. This aspect will be examined in detail throughout the rest of this thesis, because it has significant implications for an examination of the SNP's national discourse over the course of devolution.

Finally, although the Scottish Parliament had not even been officially opened by the time of the 1999 Scottish election (the election was in May, and the opening of Parliament was in July), the SNP nonetheless presented the Scottish Parliament as part of a process towards independence, with their commitment to holding an independence referendum within the first four years of an SNP Government:

The new Parliament is an important step forward, giving Scotland control of some of her own affairs. But Scotland needs control of all aspects of Government, and all our resources. Scotland is the process of independence—and the Parliament is a vital part of that process. The process will only end with independence within the European Union. In Government an SNP administration will hold a referendum on independence within the first four years of the Parliament. (SNP, 1999a: 10).

This is an important piece of discourse. Indeed, the Scottish Parliament was presented as a ‘vital’ part of the process towards independence, reflecting the gradualist influence on SNP policy in the late 1990s. The SNP’s ‘independence in Europe’ idea from the late 1980s onwards also appears to have had an influence on SNP thinking here, with the party maintaining that commitment. It was presented that a Scottish Parliament only gave Scotland control over ‘some of her own affairs’, but that Scotland did not have full control over all areas of Government, and of Scotland’s resources. This latter aspect was a repetition of previous SNP discourse, as discussed in the previous chapter: that Scotland needed to control its own destiny through the mechanism of self-government. As is conveyed throughout the next section and in other chapters, the presentation of devolution as limited, particularly in relation to welfare and social justice, was consistent in SNP discourse.

### **Challenges and opportunities: the SNP’s national discourse in opposition**

The 1999 Scottish election saw the SNP finish second behind Scottish Labour, with 35 MSPs to Labour’s 56 MSPs. Although the party had fallen back in the polls by that point, it had succeeded in encouraging 7 per cent of Labour’s voters in 1997 to directly switch to vote SNP in 1999 (Lynch, 2013: 246–247). Nonetheless, the SNP was far behind Labour both in the polls and in terms of seats in the Scottish Parliament, and found itself as an opposition party alongside the Conservatives (albeit the larger of the two), thus being excluded from Government by the Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition administration. Indeed, the main tabloids came out

against the SNP, and the party had no national publication's support (Mitchell, 2014: 264).

Strategically, the SNP went down the path of criticising the Labour-led administration's policy on devolved issues, such as education, health and housing, but also highlighting the perceived flaws in the devolution set-up, and highlighting how independence would solve such flaws. This included the arguments that independence was needed so that Scotland could have appropriate European Union representation (given that Scotland is, at the time of writing, treated as a region in the UK, for the purposes of European elections and negotiations), as well as have fiscal autonomy (Lynch, 2013: 246–247). This was all part of the SNP's nation-building strategy at the time, and an attempt to establish independence as the best means to fulfil Scottish interests. Central to that was building support for the idea that devolution did not offer a fit for purpose welfare state, but that independence could. In SNP national discourse, this was often done without reference to 'independence', given how recently devolution had been delivered.

Being in opposition to the Labour-led administration gave the SNP ample opportunity to attack Labour policy and strategy in Scotland, during the 1999–2003 period. Strategically, this made sense for the SNP, given that Labour was the SNP's fiercest electoral threat both traditionally, and because Labour had beaten the SNP in 1999. For the SNP, it was important to do the ground work, in the hope that the party's electoral fortunes would improve to the extent that voters trusted the party to govern in Scotland. Often, the SNP used disasters and crises to present Labour not only as incompetent as the senior partner in the Scottish administration, but also as failing Scotland's public services:

The current flu outbreak shows that a shortage of resources is stretching the Scottish NHS to breaking point. The failure to ensure that all GP patients aged 75 or over were vaccinated against flu—against the advice of the Chief Medical Officer last autumn—is fundamentally because of a lack of resources. But problems in the health service in Scotland were evident long before the current crisis. The picture of ward closures, staffing cuts, and cancellation of non-emergency operations is similar in almost every area of the country. The problems this year are dreadful, but Labour underfunding of health in Scotland means that they could get even worse. (Ullrich, 9 January 2000).

Kay Ullrich, the SNP's Shadow Health Minister (until she was appointed chief whip after John Swinney became party leader in September 2000), built a negative chain of equivalence, using the signifiers 'flu outbreak', 'shortage', 'resources', 'Scottish NHS', 'breaking point', 'lack', 'crisis', 'ward closures', 'staffing cuts', 'underfunding', and 'health'. With the help of such negative signifiers, Ullrich used the outbreak of flu to attack Scottish Labour's approach to NHS funding, arguing that Labour was not dedicating enough public spending to the Scottish NHS, thus depriving the institution of valuable resources. Ullrich also argued that the outbreak of flu was only a catalyst that highlighted the under-lying problems of the Scottish NHS, which was to be blamed on Labour, and that Labour had failed to listen to expert advice. Finally, Kay Ullrich presented a bleak picture, stating that because Labour was underfunding health services, the situation could get even worse.

Interestingly, this piece of discourse is not dissimilar to Labour's discourse when in opposition in Scotland after 2007, yet the nation-building purpose was different, something that is drawn out in the next chapters. Kay Ullrich challenged the notion that the NHS was secure within the UK, and she did so by critiquing devolution and the Labour-led administration. However, it is also plausible to suggest that the sentence 'Labour underfunding of health in Scotland' indicates an argument that the UK Labour Government was underfunding Scottish health through the Barnett Formula. Ullrich's challenge had a nation-building aspect, and is consistent with the SNP's earlier nation-building discourse, because of her core argument that the Scottish welfare state was unable to flourish within the Union. The SNP's Nation-building discourse was, once again, closely tied to public services, particularly the NHS, indicating discursive continuity.

Thus, the knives were sharpened, and the SNP made attempts to negate any positive articulations of Labour's record in Government, so as to prepare the ground for offering voters something different. Alex Salmond and the SNP leadership believed that offering change could be fruitful for the SNP (Lynch, 2013: 260). Now that a Labour-led administration had direct policy influence on the Scottish NHS, the SNP saw an opportunity to attack Labour's record on the NHS. By doing so, the SNP presented Labour as unable to protect the Scottish NHS through what it called 'underfunding of health in Scotland'. By extension, the SNP contested Labour's claim to be the party of social justice and good Government in Scotland.

At the same time, the SNP used its role as the main opposition to the Scottish Executive to highlight the limitations of devolution. SNP Shadow Minister for Housing and Social Justice, Fiona Hyslop, used 'all time high' homelessness figures to argue first that Labour were failing to invest in housing, but secondly, and more pertinent to the point on highlighting how devolution was failing, that Scotland's vast oil and gas resources should lead to bigger investment in public sector housing:

Instead of an ideologically-driven policy to end the role of councils as housing providers, and take the step that not even Thatcher tried of extending the right to buy to Housing Associations—undermining the entire concept of social housing—Scotland needs a programme of investment in public sector housing. When the chancellor is sitting on a war chest worth billions of pounds—a third of it made up of North Sea oil and gas revenues—it is absurd and deeply damaging that we are investing far less in public sector housing than we were two decades ago. (Hyslop, 2000).

Here, it can be seen that elements of the SNP's national discourse from previous years and months were repeated, including an articulation that Labour policy was a continuation of London policy and Conservative Party policy, and an articulation that Labour, both North and South of the border, was underfunding the public sector (on this occasion, housing). But additionally, the focus by Hyslop on North Sea oil and gas, which since their discovery were presented as 'Scotland's resources' by the SNP since the 'it's Scotland's Oil' campaign of the 1970s, had the intention of presenting devolution as inadequate, because Labour Governments were failing to provide Scotland with enough resources for housing (but more generally, for public services).

Therefore, all of the aspects of Fiona Hyslop's arguments (above) on housing were continuations of the SNP's national discourse throughout the previous three decades, but within the context of the Scottish Parliament. And this is indicated through the use of the signifier 'North Sea oil and gas', which was linked to other important signifiers such as 'housing', 'the chancellor', 'deeply damaging' and 'investing less' in a negative chain of equivalence. The significance of the signifier 'North sea oil and gas' is that it was repeated on several occasions, when the SNP were discussing public sector revenue, and was linked to fiscal autonomy and control over 'Scotland's resources'. This effectively produced the argument that in order to have the appropriate funding for Scotland's public sector, full budgetary and

resource control (particularly over oil and gas resources) was needed in the Scottish Parliament. For the SNP, independence was the most direct route towards that goal. Thus, the nation-building aspect here was that Scotland should have control of her own resources in order to support and protect the Scottish welfare state.

As SNP Shadow Minister for Children, Nicola Sturgeon also focused on presenting Westminster policy as detrimental to Scotland. In this case, Sturgeon was referring to the transfer of DSS resources to local authorities:

This is an interesting question about where this decision will ultimately lie—social security is a reserved power but local Government is devolved. I hope the Minister will assure Parliament that this decision will be taken by the Scottish Executive and in line with Scottish interests, not Westminster's. (Sturgeon, 2000).

On this occasion, the SNP presented decisions made in Scotland as representing 'Scottish interests'. In isolation, some may argue that this was slightly contradictory, as the SNP often criticised Scottish Labour Ministers in the Scottish Executive for making the wrong decisions. However, it represented a continuation of the argument that decisions about Scottish welfare could only be good if they were made in Scotland, rather than at Westminster. The SNP attempted to build legitimacy for the idea decisions about Scotland should be taken in Scotland, and this extended to areas of reserved policy too, especially social security, which was not devolved to Scotland, despite being devolved to Northern Ireland.

Additionally, because the SNP often presented itself as the solution to problems in devolved policy areas, it is reasonable to argue that the SNP saw attacking the Labour Government in Westminster, and the Scottish Executive, as a two-pronged strategy that would allow the party to prepare the ground for being voted for winning the 2003 Scottish election. The nation-building aspect was important here. Nicola Sturgeon argued that only a Scottish executive would represent the interests of Scots in relation to social security, thus further polarising the link between the Westminster system and Scotland. This fit nicely into the SNP's Scotland versus Westminster narrative. Alex Neil did something similar, as SNP social security spokesman at the time, only he explicitly linked that constructed dichotomy to independence (which is unsurprising, given Alex Neil's fundamentalist position at the time):

The SNP believe that independence is the only way to achieve a decent standard of living for Scotland's pensioners. Too many pensioners are living in poverty and successive Tory and now Labour Governments in London have failed to make the Union work for them. It is time for change. (Neil, 2 August 2000).

Therefore, through its national discourse, the SNP sought to challenge the notion that devolution was the 'settled will', as well as the idea that devolution could deliver social justice and a strong welfare state. The goal was to undermine the legitimacy of the UK state in Scotland by highlighting the limitations of devolution, whilst offering an alternative through independence, sometimes without using the term 'independence'.

### **The SNP's national discourse during declining finances, and stagnating electoral fortunes**

By the time of the 2003 Scottish election, the SNP had undergone some major changes. Its finances were being greatly stretched, and began to decline once the party was in Parliament. After the 1999 election, the party's finances were reaching a deficit of £600,000, and this led to internal conflict over campaign expenditure. Then, in 2000, Alex Salmond stood down as party leader, and was subsequently replaced by John Swinney, who had been effectively SNP deputy leader. Swinney was seen as the choice of continuity, as he, like Salmond, supported a gradualist strategy. Alex Neil, as the leading remaining neo-fundamentalist within the SNP and who opposed Swinney for leadership, did not have as widespread appeal as John Swinney (Lynch, 2013: 247–250).

Under John Swinney's leadership, the SNP had the unprecedented challenge of delivering success at the 2001 Westminster election, despite being heavily critical of Westminster, and championing the Scottish Parliament instead. All of the SNP's MPs had become MSPs as well, which spawned opposition criticism that SNP MPs were not spending enough time attending Westminster, and taking part in voting in the House of Commons. The party had to almost entirely field a quorum of new candidates in the 2001 election. These factors helped stack the odds against the SNP at the 2001 election, despite Alex Salmond confirming that he would stand (Mitchell, 2014: 264). By that point, opposition parties had already had months to

mount the attack that the SNP was not interested in representing Scots at Westminster, or in sending its best politicians South (Lynch, 2013: 250).

Perhaps rather surprisingly, the SNP focused its 2001 Westminster election campaign on devolved issues, instead of Westminster issues. This gave the party the opportunity to present policy preferences on public services, ahead of the 2003 Scottish election. Therefore, areas such as health and education were prioritised, rather than reserved matters such as defence, foreign affairs, macro-economy, and social security (ibid: 252). The SNP also focused on criticising New Labour's record on public services, and pledged to invest in the number of public service staff across the board.

A further strand to SNP strategy in the 2001 Westminster election campaign was the idea of devolving fiscal autonomy to the Scottish Parliament. As discussed above, this was an idea the SNP had been focusing on building support for. Full tax and spending powers would help extend the powers of the Scottish Parliament, SNP finance spokesman Andrew Wilson argued. At the same time, the SNP attacked the 'gradual tightening' of the Barnett Formula (the formula used to determine public spending in the devolved countries in proportion to public spending in England), arguing that public services were being underfunded in Scotland as a result, and that full tax powers and independence were needed to resolve that problem in Scotland (ibid). This represented a new discursive project—that of fiscal autonomy (Heald and McLeod, 2002). The eventual result in 2001 set the trend for the SNP; that the party would do relatively well at Scottish elections, but not so well at Westminster elections (Mackay, 2009; Lynch 2013; Mitchell, 2014).

Indeed, the 2003 Scottish election produced a better result for the SNP than at the 2001 Westminster election. However, compared to 1999, the SNP's performance in the 2003 Scottish election was poorer. The party dropped from 35 MSPs to 27 MSPs, as both its constituency and list share of the vote was reduced (Lynch, 2013: 252). This was seen as a crisis for the SNP in the media, and the party was worried that it would return to the 'outer fringes' of Scottish politics, according to Iain MacWhirter (2014). The 2003 election produced the 'rainbow Parliament', which consisted of a wide variety of representation from not only the established parties, but also the Scottish Green Party (7 MSPs), the Scottish Socialist Party (6 MSPs),

the Scottish Senior Citizens Unity Party (1 MSP), and independents including the late Margo MacDonald, formerly of the SNP and Dr. Jean Turner (MacWhirter, 2014: 264–265).

In the build-up to the 2003 Scottish election, the SNP took a more emotive approach, and presented the idea that if they were elected as the largest party, they could prove why independence was needed:

What we are asking for on May 1st is the chance to prove ourselves to you. To make as much of a difference as we can with the current powers of the Scottish Parliament, and to show why we need the powers of Independence. (SNP, 2003: 2).

The impassioned approach is indicated with the use of signifiers such as ‘prove ourselves’, and ‘show you why’, presenting the SNP as a party that really cared about the wishes of Scottish citizens, and wanted permission to enact their wishes, too. By adding the signifier ‘independence’ to that positive chain of equivalence, the SNP presented the idea that independence was a rational next step from devolution.

Additionally, compared to other SNP manifestos from 1997 onwards, independence was put at the top of the SNP’s agenda. The Scottish Parliament was now four years old, and the SNP believed that it was time to put independence back on the agenda. This plays into the idea that the period 1999–2003 was used by the SNP, as the main opposition in the Scottish Parliament, to show how devolution was limited, and to offer change through first an SNP Scottish Government, and then independence. The SNP repeated its commitment in 2003 to hold a referendum in its four year term of Government, if elected (SNP, 2003: 2). But it should be noted as well that the SNP, in its 2003 manifesto, had the dual aim of not only showing how devolution was limited, but also using its role in Government (if elected) to display what could be achieved if Scotland’s Parliament had the extensive powers of independence, by effectively using the limited powers of devolution as a benchmark to deliver more for Scotland:

We will demonstrate what an independent Scotland could be by showing what our Government can do. We will give our economy, the engine of our prosperity and our future, all the attention that it needs. We will increase our links to Europe and the wider world. We will get our public services back on track after years of neglect and mismanagement. Throughout all areas of public life we will deliver (SNP, 2003: 2).

This latter aspect is important to bear in mind when absorbing the next two chapters, as it became essential to the SNP's national discourse when in Government. The SNP argued that it would improve every aspect of public life, by supporting a strong economy, strong public services, and an outward-looking perspective. The SNP presented themselves as an ambitious party, but that devolution did not match their expectations, thus highlighting the perceived limitations of devolution. This represents the idea that economic progress and investing in public services were central to the SNP's national discourse at the time.

Aside from what has been discussed already about the SNP's discursive strategy in its 2003 manifesto, there remained a pledge to commit to strong Government support for public services:

A country that looks after its public services looks after its people. After all, what is more important than the health and education of our population and a justice system that is fair and equal? The SNP want high quality public services that Scotland can be proud of. (SNP, 2003: 5).

'Public services', 'people', 'health', and 'education' are all signifiers that had previously been used together in a positive chain of equivalence, in order to convince Scots that the SNP had their best and most necessary interests at heart. Again, by focusing on public services as a means to present the SNP as a caring party, the SNP hoped to persuade traditional Labour voters that they could be trusted to protect and invest in public services. This is further indicated by the articulation that Labour and the Conservatives had failed on public services:

For too long our public sector has been neglected. The needs of services, staff, and infrastructure have been at best mismanaged and at worst ignored by successive Tory, Labour, and now Labour-LibDem coalition policies. (SNP, 2003: 5).

Thus, a political frontier was once again created by the SNP over public services. Labour and the Conservative Party were presented in the same negative chain of equivalence as underfunding, mismanaging, and neglecting public services in Scotland, including services, staff, and infrastructure. The SNP was essentially offering change on public services, therefore, in order to become more appealing to working and middle class Scots, and to attract support to the SNP, and away from Labour. As indicated several times before throughout this thesis, that was a tactic

that the SNP employed regularly, as through necessity it pitched the SNP up against its electoral rival; Labour. This was conducive to nation-building, as the SNP argued that it could deliver a 'Scottish' welfare state, and that successive UK Governments could not. The SNP was building support for independence, but again, without regularly using the signifier 'independence' in its discourse.

### **Re-organisation, the return of Alex Salmond and the election of an SNP minority Government**

In the period before the 2003 election, John Swinney had taken the SNP in the direction of organisational reform. There were problems relating to candidate selection, as well the issue of party activists being able to easily mobilise, and stand a stalking horse candidate for leadership at party annual conferences. It took only one branch to stand a candidate for leadership, which meant potential for instability (Lynch, 2013: 255). Swinney's reforms, endorsed at a special party conference in the spring of 2004, updated the party's rules, so that such problems would cease. The party became better organised and funded. Despite Swinney's success in that regard as SNP leader, he resigned in June 2004. This was after a poor share of the vote at European elections, making it three poor elections results in a row for the SNP with Swinney as leader (MacWhirter, 2014). Then, after initially ruling himself out, Alex Salmond returned as party leader after Swinney's resignation, with a 75.8 per cent share of a leadership contest. Under Salmond, the SNP lost ground in the 2005 Westminster election, despite gaining two seats (Lynch, 2013: 258). However, the party began to build momentum in 2006, making a series of policy announcements ahead of the 2007 Scottish Parliament election, and then going from strength to strength in the Scottish Parliament.

In terms of the SNP's national discourse during the 2003–2007 Scottish Parliament (now based at the new Scottish Parliament building at Holyrood), the party continued to attack the Labour-led administration. This was on a variety of issues, but the SNP often focused on the public sector, as it had done throughout its time in the Scottish Parliament (and before). As the SNP's spokesperson in the Scottish Parliament, Nicola Sturgeon led such a line of attack, in the absence of leader Alex Salmond, who was still an MP at Westminster:

I remind the First Minister that in Scottish Labour's manifesto for the 2005 election he promised "more hours for more weeks of the year for every child." On 17 April 2005, his spokesman said that a fully costed plan for 15 hours a week of nursery education would be produced before the end of summer 2005. Some 18 months later, absolutely nothing has happened, even though the First Minister knows how important early years education is and that many working families struggle with the cost of child care. I am sure that every parent in Scotland will want the First Minister to tell them why absolutely nothing has happened since he made that pledge. (Scottish Parliament Official Report, 2 November, 2006).

Nicola Sturgeon presented the Labour-led administration, and the Labour First Minister Jack McConnell in particular, as failing to deliver on early years education. She weaved Labour and inaction of provision of early years education into a negative chain of equivalence, and presented Labour's 'inaction' as damaging for both children themselves, and for their parents. This is indicated by the use of the signifiers 'nothing has changed', 'working families struggle' and 'cost of childcare'. And on health, Shona Robison MSP attacked Labour's record on NHS Scotland waiting times, which she argued had turned people to private healthcare instead:

Despite all the bluster, is the First Minister not concerned that the increase in the number of people taking up private medical insurance in Scotland, which is faster than the increase south of the border, reflects people's frustration and concern about waiting too long for treatment? (Scottish Parliament Official Report, 10 March, 2005a).

Therefore, the SNP was turning up the heat on the Labour-led executive by often attacking Labour's record on public services and on the Scottish NHS. The SNP presented Labour as the party failing to invest in public services, failing to meet targets, and as privatising public services. By doing so, the SNP was further challenging Labour's claims to be the party to protect public services in Scotland. Once again, this indicates a competition between Labour and the SNP over the welfare state.

In addition, the SNP's national discourse once again focused on fiscal autonomy of the Scottish Parliament:

Does the minister agree that there is a compelling case for a target annual growth rate in Scotland? Over the past 25 years, economic growth in Scotland has trailed that in the rest of the United Kingdom and has been lower than that of most small European countries. Further, it has been dwarfed by economic growth in Ireland—over the past 25 years, Irish economic growth has been 5.2 per cent a year compared with 1.8 per cent in Scotland. Does the minister

accept that those indicators amount to a compelling reason why Scotland should have the full economic and financial power that independence would bring to allow us to strengthen the Scottish economy? (Scottish Parliament Official Report, 10 March 2005b).

SNP Finance Spokesman, John Swinney, argued that Scotland's economy suffered as part of the United Kingdom economy (Lynch, 2013), causing it to trail behind the economies of 'most small European countries'. Furthermore, Swinney presented independence as being able to offer the Scottish Parliament the ability to 'strengthen the Scottish economy', by having 'full economic and fiscal power'. As such, John Swinney articulated a political frontier, presenting the UK state structure as holding back the Scottish economy, and by positively associating independence with the idea that the Scottish Parliament could have the power to take the best economic decisions for Scotland. John Swinney compared Scotland's economy to small, independent nations, thus indicating that the economy of a small independent Scotland—without influence from the UK state—would perform better.

All of the articulated failings of the Labour-led administration were used to make the case that the only way that Scotland could progress would be for the Scottish Parliament to gain further powers:

Nearly seven years of the devolved Scottish Parliament have confirmed the need for more powers and greater control. It is now time to take our Parliament and nation forward. It is, once again, time for decisions. It is time to move on. (Salmond, 2005: 4).

There was, thus, a two-pronged strategy by the SNP of attacking Labour's record on public services, the NHS and economy, whilst arguing that the only way to improve Scotland's economy, public services and NHS, would be for Scotland to control over the economy and all aspects of state welfare. Preferably for the SNP, independence was the party's means of delivering fiscal control through the Scottish Parliament. Once again, state welfare and shared values were central to the SNP's nation-building discourse.

### **The SNP and the 2007 Scottish election**

It is plausible to suggest that devolution constrained nationalism and support for the SNP and independence in the first couple of Scottish Parliaments, as the party struggled to find a clear nation-building strategy. However, impetus for the SNP had been propelled as Alex Salmond returned to become party leader, and John

Swinney's reforms helped to modernise the structure of the party. Additionally, by the time the SNP won the 2007 Scottish election, Tony Blair's Labour Party had been in power at Westminster for ten years, and Scottish Labour had been in coalition with the Liberal Democrats for eight years. This gave the SNP the opportunity to offer change, and to capitalise on any voter disenchantment with Labour in particular, both at Westminster and at Holyrood. Another factor in the SNP's 2007 success was that the smaller parties saw their support collapse (Lynch, 2013: 260). The Greens fell back to 2 MSPs from 7, and the SSP lost all of its 6 MSPs, having been deeply divided over the Tommy Sheridan scandal (Gillen, 2014: 127–128).

The SNP's discursive strategy for the 2007 Scottish election campaign was once again focused on offering change to voters in Scotland, but was more expansive (and perhaps more optimistic) in articulating a vision of Scotland's future:

The SNP has no doubt Scotland can be healthier with vital health services kept local. We know local communities can be safer with more police on local streets. And families across Scotland can be wealthier with the unfair Council Tax scrapped. We will introduce a fairer system based on ability to pay. The vast majority of families and individuals will be better off. The SNP is working hard to earn the trust of the people of Scotland. And we trust you to decide on independence in a referendum. It's time for fresh think and a new approach. (SNP, 2007a).

Again, the SNP focused on promoting a strategy using discourse that was social democratic in nature, indicated by the signifiers 'healthier', 'health services', and 'unfair Council Tax'. The SNP presented themselves as a party that prioritised public sector healthcare, and the removal of blanket taxes that disproportionately affected some people in society, such as the Council Tax, by arguing for a 'fairer system based on ability to pay'. This argument targeted families in particular, with the promise that they could be 'wealthier' than they currently were. Thus, there was a universal element here, as opposed to the means testing often favoured by New Labour and by Thatcher.

However, the SNP also attempted to expand its appeal beyond the working class, or lower-middle class in Scotland, by outlining centre-left policy alongside a tough stance on crime, by presenting their policy of more police on the streets of Scotland as leading to safer communities. Additionally, the passage above indicates an element of localism to the SNP's national discourse, by linking its centre-left and policing policies to a community-centric ideal, indicated by the signifiers 'local',

'communities', and 'local streets'. Finally, the centre-left and localism elements of the SNP's discursive strategy for the 2007 election were linked to independence. By articulating independence on the same positive chain of equivalence as ideas based on social justice and local democracy, the SNP presented a contemporary vision of an independent Scotland—a fairer and more just society, through fairer and safer communities. Thus, there was a strong nation-building element here, by constructing the idea that the values of social justice and fairness were shared amongst Scottish citizens, and that a fresh approach was required in order to strengthen such values. That fresh approach was presented as supporting the SNP in the election, and independence.

This vision was contrasted with the record of the current Labour-led administration, which was presented as having low ambition and vision for the Scotland:

After almost eight years of a Labour and Liberal Democrat Executive, it is clear that too little has been achieved for our nation. Scotland could and should be doing better and yet we are held back by an Executive with too little ambition and a Parliament with too little power. (Salmond, 2007: 4).

Here, the SNP presented the Labour-led coalition as failing to deliver for the Scottish people, but it was also presented that the Scottish Parliament itself had too little power. Therefore, the SNP's broad political frontier during the 2007 election focused mainly on the idea that voting SNP meant a fairer and more equal society, particularly for families, as well as a safer Scotland, and the ambition for Scotland to be as equal as England, or indeed any other country in the World. To vote for Labour, on the other hand, was presented as voting for low ambition and low achievement. Thus, a positive vision was presented alongside a negative one, with the intention of making change appear attractive in the form of a vote for the SNP. This strategy helped deliver the SNP success in 2007.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has argued that there was continuity in the national discourse of Labour and the SNP, between the period before devolution, and the period immediately after. However, devolution presented opportunities and challenges for both parties. Labour led two consecutive Scottish administrations, but they were open to criticism from the SNP, because of the policies of consecutive UK Labour Governments

(including perceived privatisation and retrenchment of welfare in Scotland). Labour had the opportunity to design public and social policy aimed at legitimising devolution. However, the SNP—over time—challenged the idea that devolution was the ‘settled will’.

The SNP also challenged the role of the UK Government in providing welfare within the UK state structure, in an attempt to discredit the notion that the Scottish Parliament was ‘fit for purpose’. Devolution presented the SNP with the opportunity to convey how they would do things differently, and the party made references to public services, social justice, and the NHS in their national discourse in order to mobilise support for an alternative social democratic approach to consecutive Labour-led administrations. By 2007, independence was back on the agenda, and the concept of independence was closely related to shared values, the welfare state, and the idea that devolution was limited, within the SNP’s national discourse. So, although there was discursive continuity within the national discourses of both parties, devolution gave them opportunities to develop their nation-building strategies, but it also presented challenges in that regard.

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## Chapter six

### **The nation-building discourse of Labour and the SNP 2007–2011: new opportunities for the SNP, and new challenges for Labour**

This chapter covers the entirety of the 2007–2011 Scottish Parliament, a Parliament that saw the SNP form a minority administration after the 2007 Scottish Parliament election, three different leaders of the Scottish Labour Party (Jack McConnell, Wendy Alexander, and Iain Gray), and the formation of a UK coalition Government led by the Conservatives in May 2010. A trend of cuts resumed during coalition Government, and there was a renewed focus on control over public spending. Indeed:

Cuts that were not politically possible the first time around have been managed today [the time of writing]. Policy is more coercive and options for low-income households are more limited. (Mabbett, 2013: 52).

This reinforced the toxic image that the Conservatives had in Scotland. However, it is important to remember that for the first 3 years of the SNP's minority administration, the UK Government was a Labour administration, and the SNP continued to present Labour as underspending and mismanaging public services—as well as privatising them.

The SNP used its first administration to prove what a nationalist party could do in office (Hassan, 2009; Cairney, 2015), as well as to highlight the limitations of devolution by pointing out how and why the Scottish Government administration was, at time, constrained. The SNP administration also conducted the National Conversation initiative, which was designed to engage civic society in a debate about constitutional change. These developments, and their impact upon the political discourse of Scottish Labour and the SNP, will be discussed.

After the Liberal Democrats and the SNP failed to agree on a deal that could have formed an SNP-Liberal Democrat coalition in Scotland post-election, the SNP formed a minority administration. The Liberal Democrats wanted the SNP to drop its demand for an independence referendum, and the SNP declined to do so (Lynch, 2013: 265).

Alex Salmond was elected as First Minister by 49 votes to Jack McConnell's 46, with the two Green MSPs backing Salmond (Hassan and Shaw, 2012: 126). Independent MSP, the late Margo MacDonald, also supported Salmond's nomination for First Minister. In return for the Greens supporting Alex Salmond's nomination as First Minister, the SNP agreed to oppose new nuclear power stations, produce early legislation to address climate change, and to transfer one of its committee convenorships to the Greens (Lynch, 2013: 265).

### **Labour's national discourse from 2007 to 2011: a role reversal?**

In August 2007, Jack McConnell stood down as Scottish Labour leader, and Wendy Alexander took over the party leadership in September. Alexander, in her victory speech, stated both that Labour would be a party for 'all of Scotland' (reflecting a similar sentiment as her predecessors), and that her leadership would be characterised by a tough stance towards the SNP minority Government:

Under my leadership we will hold the SNP's minority administration to account for every broken promise and every pledge they fail to keep (BBC News, 14 September 2007 quoted in Hassan and Shaw, 2012).

From September 2007, onwards Scottish Labour often presented the SNP as a Government and a party of 'broken promises'. Labour even tabled a motion of no confidence in the SNP in Government in its first 100 days. Iain Gray opened the debate, stating:

They say that, if one is going to tell a lie, it might as well be a big one. In exactly the same way, if one is going to break a promise, it might as well be a big promise. (The Scottish Parliament, 4 October 2007(a)).

Here, Iain Gray presented the SNP as untrustworthy, with the help of the signifiers 'lie' and 'break a promise', by insinuating that the SNP had failed early on to stick to its promises. Andy Kerr also used negative signifiers: 'lack of delivery', 'misleading the Scottish public', and 'big lie' (The Scottish Parliament, 4 October 2007(b)), as part of a cohesive Scottish Labour strategy of presenting the SNP as untrustworthy.

As the main opposition to the SNP, Scottish Labour took it upon themselves to hold the SNP to account at every turn, especially on education, by focusing on a range of issues from funding for children with disabilities, to funding for nursery places, and to

the construction of schools and funding for education. The strategy was to present the Scottish Government as having made specific promises on education (but on other areas of welfare as well), and Labour as being the party to ensure that those promises were kept. After the leadership issues of the past, this was understandable, as Scottish Labour attempted to regain the trust of the Scottish electorate.

More specifically, Scottish Labour's criticism of the SNP was focused around the protection of the most vulnerable in society, including children, and those with disabilities, and their families. As leader, Wendy Alexander sought to present the SNP as dishonest and incompetent. Indeed, those were two signifiers that she used to describe the SNP administration in her leader's speech at the Scottish Labour Spring Conference in March 2008: 'I will lead by exposing the dishonesty and incompetence of the SNP administration' (Alexander, 2008). The passage below is an example of how Wendy Alexander attempted to do just that:

The parents of those 50,000 disabled children, from throughout Scotland, have written to MSPs of all parties, asking us to raise the issue directly and personally with the Government. The Government promised an answer in mid-November. We have still not had it. I give the First Minister a final opportunity to give those parents and children the reassurance they need that the £34 million will not be diverted to other purposes, and will be spent on the respite care that those families campaigned for and which they were promised. (Scottish Parliament, 6 December 2007).

As it is shown above, Wendy Alexander presented the SNP as having promised reassurances that funding for disabled children and their families would indeed be allocated to them, but as having not delivered on such promises. This strategy fitted into the 'broken promises' attack on the SNP, especially on welfare. The strategy was also to present Labour as having been better for Scotland than the SNP, who either would not, or could not deliver improvements in school infrastructure:

I return to the issue. Labour delivered the largest-ever school building programme in this country's history. We built or refurbished 328 schools and promised to build 250 more, 45 of which were already in the pipeline at the election. Last week, the Minister for Schools and Skills tried to claim credit for those 45 schools to mask the fact that the SNP Government has no school building programme. The First Minister has been in Government for nine months. When will he commission his first school? (The Scottish Parliament, 7 February 2008).

Here, Wendy Alexander built a positive chain of equivalence by associating Scottish Labour with 'the largest-ever school building programme' in Scotland's history. In contrast, the SNP was presented in a negative chain of equivalence as having failed to initiate its own school-building programme. By doing so, Wendy Alexander presented Labour as a party committed to investment in education, and the SNP as a party which failed to invest in schools (and by extension, in the education of Scotland's children). Thus, again, the SNP was presented by Scottish Labour as a party that failed to deliver on its promises of public sector funding, through dishonesty, incompetence, or both. Scottish Labour even went so far as to present the SNP as a party of cuts:

The Scottish National Party boasts of record funding for councils this year, so why do teachers, their Unions and Scotland's directors of education agree that most councils will suffer education cuts this year? (The Scottish Parliament, 5 June 2008).

This indicates an ideological element to Scottish Labour's strategy in opposition. Labour presented the idea that funding for education was being cut under the SNP, whether or not this was actually the case. Therefore, in opposition, Labour presented the SNP as being unable to deliver its promises on state welfare by failing to invest in public services such as early years care, and education. Indeed, the SNP was presented as cutting education funding, for example, as indicated above. This indicates further consistency in Labour's nation-building discourse, in that Labour continued to negate the SNP's claim to be a party of the welfare state and social justice. However the party appeared to take a more negative approach under Wendy Alexander than under her predecessors. It must be remembered that this was the first time that Labour had been in opposition in Scotland, and the party challenged the SNP's record, as a reactive measure. Labour had switched roles with the SNP in a classic 'role reversal', as the SNP went from opposition to Government, and for Labour, it was the reverse. However, the Government vs opposition dynamic was accentuated by the independence vs Union dynamic.

### **Scottish Labour and the constitution**

In relation to constitutional issues, Scottish Labour pushed the idea of a review of devolution, and efforts to provide 'a more balanced home rule package' (Hassan and Shaw, 2012). Wendy Alexander suggested establishing an independent, expert-led

Scottish constitutional commission, and she called on Unionist party leaders at Westminster and Holyrood to establish such a commission. This was an attempt to challenge the SNP's 'national conversation' (ibid: 131), which was highlighted in the introduction to this chapter, and which will be discussed in the SNP section.

Wendy Alexander's leadership was stormy throughout, with several controversies and allegations (Bort, 2008). The allegations included the charge that Alexander's leadership campaign donations were each intentionally under £1000, meaning that they did not have to be declared publicly, that she had broken Holyrood rules on MSPs using Parliamentary facilities for party fundraising, and that she had channelled £12,000 from the Labour-supporting Scottish Industry Forum to fund her constituency office in 2002 and 2003 (Hassan and Shaw: 130–131). Wendy Alexander attempted to draw attention away from such issues at the Scottish Labour conference in March 2008, by reinforcing the idea that Scottish Labour had the interests of Scotland at heart:

Scotland is a country I love to the core of my being. However, 'Scotland' is not a political philosophy. 'Scotland' can just as easily be Adam Smith as it can be John Smith. The world over, politics comes down to a choice: right versus left, conservatives versus progressives, nationalists versus internationalists. (Alexander, 2008).

This is an example of how Scottish Labour continued to draw a distinction between Labour and the SNP, but also between Labour and the Conservative Party, on this occasion. By presenting the SNP as 'nationalists', and Labour as 'internationalists', and by drawing a distinction between the two, Alexander presented a zero-sum battle where only Labour stood for social justice and egalitarianism. Indeed, in the same speech, Wendy Alexander went on to say 'Cutting poverty against cutting taxes. Rewarding hard work versus unearned wealth. Socialist versus nationalist' (ibid). This represented a step back into Scottish Labour's comfort zone—attacking the SNP by presenting it as a party that supported the wealth of the rich over the struggles of the poor. There was also an aspect of managing national expectations here, indicated by Alexander's references to Adam Smith and her love of Scotland. Labour wanted to remind people that they did not have to support the SNP or independence in order to be 'patriotic'.

One of the most significant events in terms of the constitutional debate during Wendy Alexander's time as Scottish Labour leader was her 'Bring it on' interview—in May 2008—when she appeared to support the idea of a Scottish independence referendum. Wendy Alexander argued that there was nothing to fear about an independence referendum, as the Scottish people would—as she understood it—reject independence (Mackay, 2009). This was an attempt to seize the initiative in a time of pressure on her leadership, but left Scottish Labour destabilised. Initial confusion soon gave way to indications that Wendy Alexander had not discussed her position with Labour Prime Minister Gordon Brown, as Brown distanced himself from her call for a referendum. Despite this, Wendy Alexander insisted on her referendum demand, and doubts began to emerge over Gordon Brown's ability to control matters north of the border (Bort, 2008: 11). This damaged Labour's image in Scotland, and of equal damage, was that Scottish Labour had legitimised the idea of an independence referendum.

By this point, Wendy Alexander had also played a part in setting up the Calman Commission to look at further powers for the Scottish Parliament, within the devolution setup. Interestingly, Labour under Jack McConnell in 2007 appeared the least likely of the 4 main parties in Scotland to support the devolution of additional powers (Johns, Mitchell, Denver and Pattie, 2008: 212). Labour appeared to have made a u-turn between 2007 and 2009, moving from a position where they did not even wish to discuss more powers for Holyrood in 2007, to now wanting to develop devolution in 2009 (Bort, 2008: 6). The commission examined issues such as financial accountability, and ruled out fiscal autonomy for the Scottish Parliament (Bort, 2008; Hassan and Shaw: 134–135). New financial powers were recommended by the Commission in its final report, some of which were adopted by the Conservative-led coalition Government in its Scotland (2012) Act. The Scotland (2012) Act introduced the Land and Buildings Transition Tax, to replace Stamp duty, and the Scottish Rate of Landfill Tax, to replace the UK Landfill Tax in Scotland.

### **Wendy Alexander resigns, Iain Gray takes over, and Labour's national discourse is maintained**

After the consistent pressure and negative press experienced by Wendy Alexander, as well as the ruling by the Scottish Parliament Standards Committee that she had

broken Parliamentary rules by failing to register donations, she resigned from her position as Scottish Labour leader on 28 June 2008 (Bort, 2008: 13). In July, Labour was forced to contest a by-election in Glasgow East, after David Marshall resigned as Labour MP for the constituency. The result was disappointing for Labour, as their candidate Margaret Curran was defeated by the SNP's John Mason, meaning that Labour had lost its third safest seat in Scotland. According to Hassan and Shaw, Labour's campaign for the by-election was unfocused, whilst the SNP conducted a professional operation (Hassan and Shaw, 2012: 132–135).

The resignation of Wendy Alexander necessitated an election for a new leader, with a three-way battle developing between MSPs Iain Gray, Cathy Jamieson, and Andy Kerr—all prominent Labour representatives at Holyrood. In the end, Iain Gray won with 46 per cent of the vote, to Cathy Jamieson's 33 per cent, with Andy Kerr lagging behind both in third (Bort, 2008: 25; Hassan and Shaw, 2012). Iain Gray set out his agenda, by arguing that Scottish Labour had to move on from the 2007 election, and by arguing against the idea of an independence referendum, claiming that the party would not support a 'rigged referendum', but that Wendy Alexander was right to have challenged Alex Salmond in her 'Bring it on' statement (Hassan and Shaw, 2012).

During Gray's time as Scottish Labour leader, the Labour movement in Scotland saw its fortunes improve in some respects, as the party's vote rose by 3.1 per cent at the 2010 General Election, and Scottish Labour took a commanding lead over the SNP in the opinion polls. This lead would last until February 2011, and in the intervening period, it gave Iain Gray cause to claim that Scottish Labour was 'on the way back' (ibid: 137–142). Gray presented Scottish Labour as a party that had learned from recent defeats, as well as various trials and tribulations, and that it had renewed itself and reconnected with voters (Ibid: 241).

With Iain Gray now as leader, Scottish Labour's discursive strategy remained largely similar to what it was when Wendy Alexander was leader. Iain Gray's party focused on issues such as the construction of new schools, and as Wendy Alexander did before him, Gray attacked the SNP for failing to invest in schools:

What is Ms Hyslop going to do when she runs out of Labour schools to open? What are our construction workers going to do when they run out of Labour schools to build? We have yet to see a single school project initiated on this First Minister's watch. When will his education

secretary be able to open a school that has been commissioned, planned and built by the Scottish National Party? (Scottish Parliament, 13 November 2008).

Additionally, Iain Gray presented the SNP as being too lenient on knife crime (Scottish Parliament, 14 May 2009), and as failing to protect jobs, for example:

I think that the First Minister's problem is that he does not have an answer to my question. Of course Scottish Labour supports any attempts to keep those 1,600 jobs in Scotland. Those are exactly the discussions that I have had this week with the banks and the Unions that represent those workers. It is true that the First Minister meets FiSAB throughout the year—he met it in February and he will meet it again in December. The point is that the First Minister promised to strain every sinew for the Diageo workers, but he blew off the chief executive to draw a raffle on television. (Scottish Parliament, 5 November 2009).

These, once again, were all attempts to present the SNP, the Scottish Government, and First Minister Alex Salmond as failing to deliver on their promises and on their duties to the Scottish people. At a speech to the Scottish Labour Conference in November 2010, Iain Gray set out how his party was to tackle the SNP:

It is the SNP's track record they are so desperate to blot out in a hail of glossy leaflets and shiny slogans. The promises broken: Student debt, First time buyer grants, Class sizes, Nursery teachers, Teacher numbers. The projects cancelled: Edinburgh Airport Rail link, Glasgow Airport rail link, Our school building programme. The jobs cut—in the good times: 3000 teachers, 1000 classroom assistants, 4000 health service workers. But this track record of failure will not be hidden. We will make our case directly to the voters of Scotland. This will be a doorstep election. A word of mouth campaign. The kind of campaign which won us by elections in Glenrothes and Glasgow and won us 41 seats in the general election. Every day in Holyrood your MSPs are working to expose the failings of the SNP. In the chamber and committees the Labour group has harried, hounded and hamstrung SNP ministers. I want to thank every one of our Labour MSPs for their work over the past three years. (Gray, November 2010).

Iain Gray did something quite specific here. He built a negative chain of equivalence, using the signifiers 'SNP', 'desperate', 'promises broken', 'Student debt', 'projects cancelled', 'jobs cut', and 'failure' to present the SNP as a failure in Government. The use of the signifiers 'promises broken' and 'track record of failure' indicates an attempt to present the SNP Government as untrustworthy and incompetent, which indicates continuity throughout Scottish Labour's first term as the main opposition in the Scottish Parliament. Additionally, by focusing on student debt, a lack of first time buyer grants, and SNP 'failure' on education, and public sector job cuts, Iain Gray

attempted to maintain support of the Scottish public-sector middle class, by arguing that Alex Salmond's SNP Government had failed them in providing their children with adequate education circumstances and opportunities to get on the housing ladder, and in helping them to maintain their public sector job. Of course, by this point, the Global credit crisis was in full effect, and Iain Gray cleverly pinned public sector job cuts on the SNP Scottish Government.

Labour's national discourse challenged the SNP in every aspect of public life, and in relation to this thesis, the passage above indicates Labour's central argument when in opposition—that the SNP were failing to invest in public services by cutting jobs, and failing to improve transport infrastructure, nor invest in schools. There was an attempt to discredit the SNP's record on public services, as a means to challenge independence, often without specific reference to independence. However, Labour did challenge independence more explicitly at times, too:

But conference. There are some people who agree with the SNP. Dan Macdonald, the property developer agrees. He says we should have fiscal autonomy so that Scotland could turn itself into a tax haven for rich people like him. Not Iceland or Ireland, no. We could aspire to be like the Channel Islands. That's the vision of Scotland's future the SNP line themselves up with. A brass plate tax haven. That is not my Scotland. I am too proud of my country for that. I believe too much in the skill and ingenuity of my countrymen and women for that. I know too much about the history of my country and all that it has created and invented and achieved in the past for that. I care too much for the future of my country to see it risked for separation. Conference. I love my country too much to be a nationalist. (Gray, November 2010).

Iain Gray presented the SNP's goal of independence as a ploy in order to create a tax heaven for the wealthy, and there was discursive continuity in that regard. Additionally, Iain Gray presented independence as risky, something that Jack McConnell has done before him. Gray built a negative chain of equivalence, using the signifiers 'SNP', 'fiscal autonomy', 'Scotland', 'tax haven for the rich', 'Scotland's future', 'risked', and 'separation', construct those arguments. Iain Gray also presented the Labour Party as truly caring about Scotland, and as being patriotic about Scotland. Gray built a positive chain of equivalence, using the signifiers 'my Scotland', 'proud', 'my country', 'skill', 'ingenuity', 'my countrymen', 'history', 'created', 'invented', 'achieved', and 'love'. Iain Gray intentionally presented the idea that one did not have to be a Scottish nationalist, nor have to support Scottish independence to be patriotic about Scotland.

Overall, there was an attempt to present the SNP as a party of the wealthy, and independence as something that risked Scottish creativity, inventiveness, and achievement. In other words, 'Scotland's future'. The aim of this strategy was to convince voters that the SNP would only represent the interests of the wealthy, and that Scottish patriotism was welcome in Scottish Labour, meaning that Labour supporters who wished to express 'Scottishness' did not have to vote SNP, nor support independence.

The nation-building aspect of this, which came in the form of a political frontier, was the articulation that SNP's vision of Scotland was for the rich, whereas as Labour's vision of Scotland within the Union was patriotic and with working Scots at its heart. There was a battle going on here between Labour and the SNP, as Iain Gray attempted to 'out-nationalist' the nationalists, and encourage Scottish patriotism in a bid to win support based on the idea that Scots had a collective identity, through shared history and achievement, but within the UK. This was a means to manage national expectations in Scotland. Labour did not seek to build support for independent statehood. Rather, Labour presented the idea that rejecting independence was not 'unpatriotic'.

### **Scottish Labour and the 2011 Scottish election**

As Scottish Labour moved into 2011, it was the favourite to win the Scottish election to come later in the year. In January, a TNS-BMRB opinion poll put Labour ahead on 49 per cent on the constituency vote, and 47 per cent on the regional vote, to the SNP's 33 per cent for both. It was hypothesised by Nick Pearce of IPPR (Institute for Public Policy Research) that Labour would be able to remain favourable, by effectively presenting itself as the party to protect Scotland from a Conservative-led UK Government. By comparison, the SNP was projected to 'suffer from incumbency and a sense of drift' (Hassan and Shaw, 2012: 143). However, on 16 February, the first indication that the story would be different emerged, as an Ipsos-MORI poll put the SNP in the lead over Labour by 37 per cent to 36 per cent in the constituency vote, and by 35 per cent to 33 per cent in the regional vote projections. This was a significant moment in the lead-up to the 2011 Holyrood election (ibid).

Scottish Labour's 2011 manifesto did not mention the SNP once in order to marginalise them and render them irrelevant (Hassan and Shaw: 2012). Labour

presented themselves as Scotland's best defence against the Conservative-led Government which was elected in May 2010, but they were fighting on strong SNP ground, making it difficult for this strategy to gain traction (Johns, Mitchell and Carman, 2011). Labour focused on the articulation of the Conservatives as a threat to Scotland, now that they had been in coalition at UK level for a year:

In the 1980s I taught in a secondary school in Edinburgh. I saw teenagers lose their future and their hopes to the spectre of unemployment and to a Government that did not care. That is why I am standing to be First Minister of Scotland, so that this Tory Government cannot repeat the mistakes of yesterday and blight all of our tomorrows. The difference today is our own Scottish Parliament. We can take a different path. (Gray, 2011 in Scottish Labour, 2011: 3).

The use of the phrases 'teenagers lose their future and their hopes', 'unemployment', 'Government that did not care', 'this Tory Government', and 'blight all of our tomorrows' in a negative chain of equivalence indeed indicates the articulation from Scottish Labour that it was the Conservative Party that posed the biggest threat to Scotland. A Scottish Parliament, Gray argued, was the safety net that would stop Scotland succumbing to Conservative policy. This resembles the type of argument presented by Labour in favour a Scottish Assembly during the 1980s, when Margaret Thatcher's Conservatives were in power at Westminster.

In contrast to the SNP and its 'forward-looking, aspirational, optimistic' tone, Scottish Labour's party strategy was ill-focused and unable to react to the polls shifting in the SNP's favour. Labour, as a movement, failed to understand the SNP and support for the party, and since 2007 has embarked upon a strategy of denial and opportunistic opposition to the SNP minority Scottish Government. Put simply Labour failed to react and adapt to the SNP, as *The Sun* newspaper came out in support of the SNP, as well as a range of business and public figures. The result of the 2011 Scottish election is widely acknowledged as a watershed, as the SNP won by a landslide and gained an overall majority for the first time in the Scottish Parliament, taking a remarkable 69 seats to Labour's 37 seats (Hassan and Shaw, 2012: 144–145; MacWhirter, 2014). The SNP's landslide also gave the party the mandate to hold an independence referendum, given that the commitment to hold one featured in the SNP's 2011 manifesto.

The 2011 Scottish election left Scottish Labour in shock, with recriminations as to why the party had failed so miserably. Gordon Brown was singled out as being to blame for his perceived poor performance as Labour leader and Prime Minister (2007–2010), but the problems lay much deeper than at the feet of one man, and Brown's reach into the Scottish party did not extend as far as some believed it to do (ibid). The SNP had successfully campaigned on presenting themselves as competent managers of the economy, and independence was kept distant as an idea by the SNP in Government, in order to assure (Labour) voters that they had nothing to fear from the SNP (Robertson, 2011: 2).

That is not to say that independence was not discussed or referenced in SNP discourse; on the contrary, it was, as the next section argues. However, the SNP attempted to strike the right balance, in order to attract Labour voters, and also keep its own supporters on board. As the discussion below on the National Conversation indicates, independence was discussed more as part of a wider debate on the constitution by the SNP. At the same time, Scottish Labour had entered uncharted waters. This was perhaps exacerbated during the next term of the Scottish Parliament, and the independence referendum added another dimension into the mix for Scottish Labour. Ultimately, Scottish Labour were unclear on the question of more powers for the Scottish Parliament, as they went from being resistant to the idea, to supporting a referendum on independence, and then to rejecting that referendum under Iain Gray.

### **New Government; new opportunities: The SNP's national discourse, 2007–2011**

The SNP had finally made its breakthrough to Government in 2007, after a long history of failure to do so because of the first past the post electoral system used for general elections, fluctuations in party support, and marginalisation at Westminster (Lynch, 2013: 263). The SNP had become better funded and supported (9,540 members in 2003 to 13,844 members by the end of 2007), put a keen emphasis on positive messages and attractive policies, and had understood the 2007 election not to be about independence versus Union, but about electing a Government to deliver policy through devolution (ibid: 266–267). These factors all contributed to the SNP's election victory, as the party swept up more supporters of independence as opposed

to 2003, as well as those who trusted the SNP most to protect Scottish interests (Johns et al, 2008).

The establishment of the Scottish Parliament had radically altered the potential for short term and long term SNP success. The mixed electoral system of the Scottish Parliament (a combination of first-past-the-post and proportional representation, known as the Additional Member System) presented the SNP with a greater chance of getting elected on a Scotland only platform. The SNP was able to present its policies on a range of areas that the Scottish Parliament was responsible for, including education, health, agriculture, law and order, environment, transport and housing, amongst others. But the Scottish Parliament also provided the SNP with a political forum and a constitutional mechanism that could be used to argue for independence (Mitchell, Bernie and Johns, 2012; Lynch, 2013: 263), as the previous chapter has highlighted.

With a substantial number of MSPs, the SNP could now present devolution as being far from perfect, that the Scottish Parliament required more powers, and that the process towards independence would 'complete' the devolution process (Lynch, 2013). Because the Scottish Parliament did not have control over reserved areas, including taxation, foreign affairs, defence and economic policy, the SNP had the opportunity to argue that these powers required being in the hands of the Scottish Parliament, and independence was presented as the means to achieve that. Another area of contention was budgetary control (ibid). Thus, the SNP had a double-pronged strategy in Government. And in that sense, the SNP's discursive strategy was actually quite similar in Government as it was to in opposition. Only now, the SNP had actions and a record in Government to defend.

Being in Government, therefore, gave the SNP a national platform to present devolution as limited, and to argue why change was needed (Cairney, 2015). Independence was presented as an important part of the change required to improve the quality of life for those living in Scotland. The aim of a nationalist Government was not only to implement policy, but to create positive conditions for independence—national discourse had a role to play here. Government for the SNP was a means to an end (Lynch, 2013). The SNP could use the Scottish Parliament as a mechanism through which an independence referendum could be mandated

and legislated for, and the Scottish Parliament could also be a tool in order to build the SNP's reputation as an effective and professional Government (Johns, Mitchell and Carman, 2011) resulting in what the party had hoped would be more favourable public attitudes towards independence.

This strategy had limited success, as although it contributed to the SNP's popularity, attitudes towards independence remained static throughout the SNP's term as a minority Government, and well into the SNP's second term, as a majority Government (Johns, Mitchell and Carman, 2011; Curtice, 2013; Lynch, 2013). Support for independence did grow, however, in the lead up to the independence referendum in September 2014, and the eventual result indicated a dramatic change in attitudes towards independence (Yes: 44.7 per cent, No: 55.3 per cent).

Thus, it is argued here that devolution presented opportunities to the SNP when in Government, but also problems, as the party now had a record of Government to defend. The SNP's national discourse had a role to play in presenting the SNP's public and social policies as attractive and as consistent with the 'shared identity' of Scottish citizens; and as presenting independence as the next logical step from devolution.

### **The SNP's national discourse as a minority Government: Building an economic case for independence, and the rival discourse of universalism**

It is important to understand the SNP's political strategy as the Scottish Government, in order to understand the direction of policy and how that filtered into the SNP's goal of independence. One of the key issues for the SNP's first term in Government (and indeed, the second term) the Scottish budget, and related issues such as the allocation of funding under the Barnett Formula, growth, 'austerity cuts' and jobs. The Scottish Government attempted to pin blame on the UK Government for under-funding the Scottish budget, as the example below indicates:

Yesterday's budget was a grave disappointment and a missed opportunity by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. It failed to deliver the vital targeted stimulus that is required to safeguard economic recovery. The decision not to deliver further capital acceleration comes at a severe cost—not to people in this Parliament and not to the Labour Party—of 4,000 Scottish jobs. As I have said—this information will be placed in the Scottish Parliament information centre this

afternoon: the budget confirms a 1.3 per cent real-terms cut in Scottish budgets in the year ahead in departmental expenditure limits. (Scottish Parliament, 25 March 2010).

As First Minister, Alex Salmond used the signifiers 'budget', 'grave disappointment', 'missed opportunity', 'failed to deliver', 'severe cost', '4,000 Scottish jobs', and 'real-terms cut' in a negative, in order to present the UK as delivering a poor budget for Scotland, as well as fostering poor growth and jobs potential. By arguing that the UK Government offered Scotland poor economic prospects through its economic programme, Alex Salmond was reinforcing the idea that Scotland's economy—and indeed all of Scotland's affairs—should be the sole responsibility of an independent Scottish Parliament. This argument is further reinforced by the SNP's 2011 manifesto, where the party argued for devolution of fiscal powers such as borrowing and job-creating responsibility (SNP, 2011). Indeed, Salmond indicated as much in a speech to the SNP Autumn 2010 Conference:

The referendum we wish to have is first and foremost a jobs referendum. The Independence I seek is the independence to create jobs. The powers I wish for us all are powers to protect us all. This is not an arcane question removed from the people—it is the people, you and me, and how we protect our society, and grow our economy. (Salmond, October 2010).

Interestingly, if the latter quote is anything to go by, then the articulation of the Scottish economy as being best served by an independent Scottish state was central to the SNP's wider case for independence by the end of 2010. Thus, the SNP created a political frontier on the future of Scotland's economy by contrasting an articulation of the UK Government as mismanaging Scotland's economy, with an articulation that independence would create jobs and grow Scotland's economy. This was an important tactic throughout Scotland's constitutional debate for the SNP, but it certainly appeared to be central to the SNP's case by the end of 2010. This very much indicates Alex Salmond's influence as leader, who often focused on jobs and the economy. By comparison, there was more emphasis on 'social justice', 'fairness' and welfare-related issues during the independence referendum campaign from the SNP, as the next chapter will discuss in detail. It must be remembered that the meltdown of the Global financial system happened early into the SNP minority administration (Bort, 2008), creating the conditions for the SNP to challenge the role of the UK state in managing Scotland's economy, especially in the context of the Conservative-led Government's 'austerity programme'. This is highly significant.

In keeping with the economic theme, given its importance to the SNP's arguments for independence in Government and because of how economy and public finances are linked, one of the SNP's major arguments for independence was to compare Scotland with other small, independent European countries, with a similar sized population, and similar natural resources. During one Scottish Parliament debate, John Swinney compared Scotland to Norway, another country with oil reserves, and with a similar sized population to Scotland:

...Scotland and Norway are near neighbours with populations of roughly the same size. Both countries are equally rich in oil. However, according to the United Nations human development index, Norway ranks as the most prosperous country in the world, while Scotland, even as part of the UK, struggles to make it into the top 20. Critically, our other near neighbours—Iceland, which Mr Purvis also mentioned, and Ireland—rank second and fourth respectively in the same UN survey and again fare far better than Scotland. It is no coincidence that Norway, Ireland and Iceland all achieved their independence in the 20th century and that they have all achieved their wealth by not being part of a larger political Union. As a result, the Government takes the view that the economic case for Scottish independence is compelling. Although we are making that case, we also recognise that there is more that we can do within the Parliament's existing powers. (The Scottish Parliament, 21 November 2007).

By comparing Scotland to Norway, John Swinney did what other SNP politicians had done in the decades before. Indeed, the discourse above is similar to that from John Swinney when the SNP was in opposition, as the previous chapter examined, indicating continuity. He used the signifiers and phrases 'Norway', 'Scotland', 'same', 'equally rich', 'oil', 'prosperous', 'Iceland', 'Ireland', 'independence', 'fare far better than Scotland', 'not being part of a larger political Union' and 'compelling' in a positive chain of equivalence to present the idea that Scotland could flourish economically, if it were an independent country. By comparing Scotland's oil resources to the oil-rich Norway, which was ranked at the time as the most prosperous country in the world, John Swinney presented Scotland as being better off as an independent country, outside of the UK. John Swinney also compared Scotland to Iceland and Ireland, which both had growing economies until the Global financial crash (<sup>5</sup>see footnote). This was a particularly positive argument for independence, but there was also a negative argument for independence, as John

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<sup>5</sup> The economic 'boom' in Ireland was known as the 'Celtic Tiger' (Gallagher, 2010), and the SNP minority administration compared Scotland to Ireland, as a relatable example of a small, independent country constructing a successful economy. This association did not last, as the Global recession damaged Ireland's economy.

Swinney presented the Union as holding Scotland's economy back, which contributed to a political frontier here. The SNP's national discourse during its minority administration sought to undermine the UK state's role in managing Scotland's economy. Nonetheless, despite this, John Swinney did make the case for doing more within the remit of the Scottish Parliament, and the SNP's 2011 Manifesto commitment to argue for more fiscal powers indicates this (SNP, 2011).

The SNP wanted to present themselves as competent managers of the economy, and the idea that by having control over more of the fiscal levers; the SNP could deliver progress through the Scottish Parliament. This would also help the SNP to present itself as a Government that was attempting to make the most of the Scottish Parliament, whilst also arguing for independence as a means to build on such work (by highlighting the limitations with the current arrangements). By doing so, the SNP hoped to minimise criticism that it was not fully using the powers of the Scottish Parliament, as the minority Scottish Government.

The SNP's one hundred days strategy brought forward the scrapping of university tuition fees, the scrapping of tolls on the Forth and Tay road bridges, a council tax freeze (which was thereafter continued at least until the time of writing), and the first stage of the scrapping of prescription charges (which was completed before the 2011 Scottish election) (Bort, 2008). One policy that was particularly prominent was an end to university tuition fees. In a debate on the Graduate Endowment Abolition (Scotland) Bill, Fiona Hyslop, then Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, set out the ideological rationale for abolishing tuition fees:

With this bill, we are finally abolishing tuition fees. The Scottish National Party Government has promised to do so before and today we can deliver that commitment. The graduate endowment fee was a sleight of hand that replaced up-front fees with a back-end charge on graduation—a new burden for our students as they leave university to enter the world of work. Today the chamber has the opportunity to get it right for our young graduates by scrapping that unfair fee and removing the financial hurdle that they face when they leave university. Access to education should be based on the ability to learn and not on the ability to pay. Today the SNP Government is providing the Parliament with the opportunity to restore free education in Scotland. (The Scottish Parliament, 28 February 2008).

This articulation was a cornerstone of the SNP's first term in Government. The idea of free education for all Scots was an essential element in the SNP's national

discourse in Government, as it not only presented differences between England and Scotland, but in putting forward the case for universal public and social policy i.e. policy designed to impact upon as many families as possible, across Scottish society. In building the case for abolishing tuition fees, Fiona Hyslop used the signifiers and phrases 'tuition fees', 'The Scottish National Party Government', 'opportunity', 'right', 'unfair fee', 'removing', 'financial hurdle', 'ability to learn and not on the ability to pay', 'restore', 'free education' and 'Scotland' in a positive chain of equivalence. Hyslop argued that tuition fees were an unfair financial restriction for young people (Scots) who wished to go to University, and that the ability to learn should be the determining factor in access to education, rather than ability to pay. That principle; the ability to learn over the ability to pay, was presented as a distinctly Scottish principle, as Hyslop sought to distinguish between education in Scotland, and education in England (and in the rest of the UK), which required students to pay tuition fees.

Thus, there was not only an element of social justice and inclusion in SNP national discourse by presenting Scottish education policy as having a universal virtue at its heart, but it was also argued that Scottish education policy was different from English education policy. This added to the argument within the SNP's national discourse that Scotland was different from England, with its own distinct education system, legal system, culture and values, a key nation-building strategy of the SNP. One of the key nationalist strategies is to present the nation as 'unique' (Deutsch, 1954; Kersting, 2011).

Additionally, the SNP focused on strong public services. In particular, a strong and 'publicly owned' Scottish NHS was prioritised by the SNP. In the passage below, this articulation of the Scottish NHS was contrasted with a negative articulation of arguments for privatising healthcare in Scotland:

I think there is a battle of ideas going on about the future direction of healthcare. A battle between the values of the market, of internal competition and contestability and the values of public service, of cooperation and collaboration. We have set out our stall with absolute clarity. NHS Scotland is, and always will be, a service that is owned by the people of this country. We will continue to ensure that our policies reflect the ethos and the principles upon which the NHS was founded back in 1948. I am firmly opposed to the commercialisation of healthcare and to

this end, the Scottish Government will legislate to make sure there is no privatisation of GP services by the back door. (Sturgeon, 8 July 2008).

Nicola Sturgeon constructed a political frontier here. She used the signifiers 'values of the market', 'internal competition' and 'contestability' in a negative chain of equivalence, to be contrasted with a positive chain of equivalence, which included the signifiers and phrases 'values of public service', 'cooperation', 'collaboration', 'set out **our** stall' (emphasis my own), 'NHS Scotland', 'owned by the people of this country', 'ethos', 'principles', 'Scottish Government', and 'no privatisation'. Sturgeon chose her language in such a way so as to map out a specific vision of what the Scottish NHS is and always will be: a health service that would be accountable to the Scottish people by maintaining public ownership.

Through its national discourse, the SNP presented public ownership as a specifically Scottish principle, and as a principle that the SNP Scottish Government was committed to supporting. The SNP presented themselves as supporting the founding principles of the NHS, such as free, universal access for members of the (Scottish) public. This vision was contrasted with 'backdoor' privatisation, which was presented as a market driven, competitive process, and which characterised the direction of healthcare in England, according to the SNP. Sturgeon also indicated that any moves towards NHS privatisation were anti-Scottish, essentially. This is an interesting piece of discourse. Through its national discourse, the SNP sought to challenge the role of the UK state in establishing and protecting the welfare state, and this was made easier because the NHS in Scotland has always been a separate entity to the English and Welsh NHS. The SNP presented the Scottish NHS as different from the English NHS. Thus, as with the SNP's education discourse at the time, the party's health discourse played into its national discourse, in order to present the idea that Scotland and England were different.

It should be noted that as an administration, the SNP was left to implement its own manifesto pledges, because there was no coalition. This would, of course, be challenging due to the SNP administration's status as a minority Government. The SNP sought to phase out prescription charges over the four years of Government, phase in free school meals, produce a 50 per cent increase in free nursery places for 3- and 4-year-olds, reduce class sizes for P1–P3 to 18 pupils per class, reduce the

size of Government, replace council tax with a local income tax, increase the number of police officers 'on the beat' in Scotland to 1000, and as examined, remove tuition fees for 'home domiciled' students (Lynch, 2013: 270). As popular as some of these policies were, it was difficult to implement them as a minority Government. This reality was exacerbated by the economic downturn during the SNP's term, as progress on nursery places and class sizes was minimal. The local income tax policy was dropped, and council tax was frozen instead of it being replaced (Bort, 2008 and 2011; Lynch, 2013). The SNP faced problems in passing budgets, and was defeated on decisions, such as the decision to cancel the Edinburgh Tram project (Lynch, 2013: 272–273).

The SNP's strategy of comparing Scotland to prosperous small European countries such as Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Ireland and Norway (aided by the work and research of the Council of Economic Advisors, which provided longer-term economic advice to the Office of the First Minister and Scottish Government) in order to present independence as an opportunity for Scotland to join the 'arc of prosperity' also ran into difficulty, as the economic crisis in 2008 led to economic downturns in Iceland and Ireland, in particular. This made it more difficult for the SNP to argue that small countries flourished economically, as the countries they once championed began to struggle in the midst of economic downturn and banking sector collapse (Kenealy, 2016). Despite the tough economic circumstances, the SNP importantly pledged to build more homes, continue to fund free personal care, and protect universal provision of public services (Lynch, 2013: 272–273).

### **The National Conversation and its impact upon the constitutional debate**

Despite not implementing the manifesto pledge for an independence referendum (the party did not command the majority required to pass a referendum bill), the Scottish Government held the National Conversation from 2007–2009, which was a range of debates, documents and consultations with civic society and local communities (Harvey and Lynch, 2013). Support for independence remained static during the process, but the legacy of the National Conversation was to engage civic society and Scottish Government machinery over the idea of constitutional change. The SNP-Scottish Government built itself an agenda setting role, which ran beyond the conclusion of the National Conversation. The SNP faced opposition in legislating

for an independence referendum, but produced a draft referendum bill in 2010, which was designed to appeal to beyond independence supporters, by including 'devo-max' as an option for constitutional change, as well as independence (Lynch, 2013: 273). The draft bill lost significance before the 2011 Scottish election, but became influential afterwards, particularly its idea of a 'devo-max' option on the ballot for a potential constitutional referendum, as political parties, pressure groups, NGOs and the media came to discuss stronger forms of devolution short of independence (Harvey and Lynch, 2013).

For the SNP, the National Conversation had structured the internal workings of the Scottish Government civil service to produce Scottish Government policy positions on a range of issues (Lynch, 2013: 274). This became useful after the SNP won a landslide in 2011, making it a reality that an independence referendum would be held within four years. Furthermore, the National Conversation allowed the SNP to 'democratise' its independence discourse, by opening up the sovereignty strand of the party's discourse beyond party competition, and to include all citizens (Adamson and Lynch, 2014: 49–50). Below is such an example of this:

Ten years on from devolution, the National Conversation has prompted extensive debate across Scotland on the options for the future of the country: continuing with the current situation; extending the responsibilities of the Scottish Parliament and Government; and independence for Scotland. A referendum on the options for Scotland's future would give the people an opportunity to have their say (The Scottish Government, 2009: 3).

The signifiers 'debate', 'options', 'future', 'extending', 'Scottish Parliament', 'Government', 'independence', 'referendum', 'the people', 'opportunity', and 'have their say' were presented together in a positive chain of equivalence. Those signifiers were used together to present the idea that a referendum on Scotland's constitutional options was both necessary and democratic, as it put the future of Scotland into the hands of Scotland's citizens. Independence was presented as one of those options, thus adding legitimacy to the idea of a referendum that asked people whether they wanted independence. This piece of discourse filtered into the SNP's national discourse, as the party sought to use more inclusive and democratic language when referencing independence; preferring to characterise conversations on more powers for Scotland as a 'debate', rather than a set of demands. The

signifier 'debate' also indicates participation from all sides of the constitutional debate, thus reinforcing the legitimacy of a referendum on the constitution.

### **The SNP's 2011 Scottish Parliament Election strategy**

The SNP returned only 6 MPs in the 2010 Westminster general election, an election where no single party won a majority. The Conservatives and Liberal Democrats entered coalition talks, and agreed to form a Government together (Bochel and Powell, 2016). A year later, the SNP took part in the 2011 Scottish Parliament election. In a continuation of the SNP's strategy in the years immediately before, the party again focused primarily on economic arguments, not only for independence, but for bringing further job creating powers to the Scottish Parliament, through devolution. Again, as a discursive continuation, the SNP presented itself as the party to protect the Scottish NHS, and as a party that put fairness at the heart of its Government strategy.

In relation to the Scottish economy and devolution, Alex Salmond presented a positive role for both his Government, and the Scottish Parliament:

Jobs will be a top priority for our next term. We are stepping up our efforts with new support for young Scots. Youth Employment Scotland will offer 100,000 training opportunities including 25,000 modern apprenticeships each year for the next five years. As part of our work to secure more jobs for Scotland we will continue our efforts to bring new job-creating powers to the Scottish Parliament. (Salmond, 2011: 3).

Salmond used the signifiers 'jobs', 'top priority', 'support', 'young Scots', '100,000 training opportunities', '25,000 modern apprenticeships', 'more jobs', 'Scotland', 'new job-creating powers' and 'Scottish Parliament' in a positive chain of equivalence. By doing so, he presented the SNP as a party that would prioritise jobs, especially for young people, so as to encourage Scotland's youths and families to support the SNP in its campaign to be re-elected. And by stressing the commitment to more job creating powers for the Scottish Parliament, Salmond presented the SNP as a party committed to making the most of devolution for the people of Scotland (SNP, 2011). However, in the same passage from his introduction to the SNP 2011 Scottish election manifesto, he stressed that there was also an economic case for independence, beyond what devolution could deliver:

And we will bring forward our proposals to give Scots a vote on full economic powers through an independence referendum. We can enhance the Bill and give our nation the freedom it needs to flourish by taking on more responsibilities here in Scotland. The independence we propose for Scotland is exactly for this purpose. It is with independence—the natural state for nations like Scotland—that we will have the ability to determine our own destiny and build the best future for our country. We, the people of Scotland, have the greatest stake in our future. That is why we are best placed to govern ourselves. (Salmond, 2011: 3).

Here, Alex Salmond fused economic arguments for independence with a more 'nationalist' discourse on Scotland's 'right' to be independent. He used the signifiers 'Scots', 'full economic powers', 'independence referendum', 'our nation', 'freedom', 'needs to flourish', 'more responsibilities', 'Scotland', 'independence', 'natural state', 'nations like Scotland', 'destiny', 'best future', 'our country', 'the people of Scotland' and 'govern ourselves' in a positive chain of equivalence.

Alex Salmond presented full economic powers for Scotland as part of the same chain of equivalence as the idea that Scotland should be able to take responsibility for making its own decisions, and controlling its 'own destiny'. Salmond invoked the 'sovereignty of the Scottish people' argument; that 'the people of Scotland', who had the 'greatest stake' in the future of Scotland, were fully qualified to take full responsibility for governing Scotland, and that the independence of the Scottish nation was 'natural'. Thus, Alex Salmond attempted to move debate away from the idea that devolution was the best constitutional option for Scotland, to the idea that Scottish independence was natural, that Scots should decide their own destiny by governing Scotland without influence from 'London', and that Scotland's economy could flourish once independent. The idea that a referendum on Scottish independence should be held was part of this as well, and it was legitimised in SNP national discourse because it was presented as part of an inclusive national 'debate' on Scotland's future.

Also, in the build up to the 2011 Scottish Election, the NHS was presented as important to the SNP; one that was fully funded and kept in public hands. This was a continuation of SNP discourse throughout its first term in Government, as the earlier passage from Nicola Sturgeon (8 July, 2008) indicates. Take the following passage as an example of this discursive reproduction:

We are pledged to protect the NHS budget in Scotland. Scotland's National Health Service will receive in full the Barnett consequentials from increases in health spending down south. This will allow us to continue improving treatment, with a particular focus on faster cancer diagnosis and treatment and more flexible access to primary care. And Scotland's NHS will remain firmly in the public sector. We will not follow the route in England which will lead to the dismemberment of the NHS. (Salmond, 2011: 3).

Alex Salmond constructed a political frontier that was specifically designed to present the paths of the Scottish NHS and English NHS as leading in different directions. In a positive chain of equivalence, Salmond used the signifiers and phrases 'protect the NHS', 'Scotland', 'continue', 'improving treatment', 'faster cancer diagnosis and treatment', 'more flexible', 'access', 'primary care', 'Scotland's NHS' and 'public sector'. The SNP presented the idea of a ring-fenced NHS budget in Scotland as enabling healthcare to improve in Scotland, and improvements in healthcare were very much presented as something that the SNP was supportive of.

But Alex Salmond also presented the idea that the Scottish NHS should remain in public hands (as Nicola Sturgeon did, too), thus playing to the interests of patients, NHS staff, and those left of centre. This was a direct challenge to Labour. In contrast, the SNP presented the English NHS as being dismembered, a reference to the argument that the English NHS was being privatised. This became a recurrent theme during the independence referendum campaign as well, and can be pinpointed as one of the SNP's most powerful discursive tools in encouraging voters to identify with their 'Scottishness' more than any sense of 'Britishness'.

Therefore, the SNP's NHS discourse was designed to differentiate the SNP and Scotland from the Conservatives and the Union, as well as to try to stay left of Labour. Another element to the SNP's discourse in trying to outflank Scottish Labour, as well as build a case for independence, was to present Scotland as a 'fairer nation', and the SNP as a party committed to 'reducing inequality':

We care about reducing inequality in Scotland so we can create a fairer nation. The countries with the least inequality are also the most successful. We will continue our efforts to strengthen our society, with more Scots sharing in our nation's wealth. (Sturgeon, 2011: 5).

Nicola Sturgeon built a positive chain of equivalence, around the nodal point of 'independence', by using signifiers such as 'reducing inequality', 'a fairer nation', and 'more Scots sharing in our nation's wealth', in order to set out a vision of what kind of

country Scotland could be through, of course, independence. The SNP had, in their 2011 manifesto, pledged to hold an independence referendum, so independence was still very much in the minds of the SNP leadership. The articulation that Scotland was a fairer nation, and that independence would enable Scotland to reduce inequality through Scottish control over Scottish resources, became an even more essential aspect of the SNP's discourse during the independence referendum campaign, as the next chapter will discuss in detail.

And with such discourse, there were echoes of what many SNP politicians had constructed before as part of the party's nation-building project: that independence would enable Scotland to flourish economically through Scottish control over Scottish resources, including oil and gas, to the benefit of all Scots, something that the Union failed to deliver. An independent Scottish economy would allow the Scottish Government to retain its commitment to public services, the NHS, the welfare state, and the 'shared values' of social justice and fairness.

The SNP's strategy proved successful, as it won the 2011 Scottish election by a landslide, taking 45.4 per cent of the constituency vote, and 44 per cent of the regional vote (Lynch, 2013: 277). This made the idea of an independence referendum truly likely, as a pledge to hold an independence referendum was a key commitment of the SNP going into the 2011 election, and long before. Such a landslide for the SNP gave the party virtue to call for a referendum based on what it called a 'mandate'. However, as Lynch has stated, there was not yet a means to deliver an independence referendum (ibid: 280), and the process by which an independence referendum was agreed to will be discussed in the next chapter.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has established that the election of the SNP minority administration presented both challenges and opportunities to Labour and the SNP. Labour had the opportunity to present the SNP as too inexperienced to govern, and as mismanaging public services. Although Labour's political discourse at the time indicates that they followed that strategy, the party ultimately failed to out-flank the SNP on the left of Scottish politics. Labour presented themselves during the 2011 election campaign as the party that could stand up to the Conservative-led coalition Government, thus indicating consistency with Labour's earlier national discourse on protecting Scotland

from the worst effects of a Conservative Government. However, this had become strong SNP ground. Instead, the challenges for Labour over the constitution hampered them, as they presented a confusing strategy towards further powers for the Scottish Parliament. Although the Calman Commission did lead to additional powers for the Scottish Parliament through the Scotland (2012) Act, the SNP had taken control over the constitutional debate in Scotland, aided by the National Conversation, and electoral success (especially at the 2011 Scottish election).

The SNP's national discourse during the 2007–2011 also indicates continuity. The SNP's national discourse during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s had focused on protection of public services, and self-government (including independence) was presented as an important mechanism in that regard. The SNP used their first term as the Scottish administration to challenge the authority of consecutive UK Governments in delivering a strong Scottish economy, which was linked to the delivery of public services in their national discourse. The party argued that UK Government's mismanaging of the economy was damaging, and that the levers of fiscal control must be transferred to the Scottish Parliament, including job-creating powers and enhanced borrowing powers. The SNP also argued that consecutive UK Governments (including consecutive Labour administrations) had privatised public services, including the NHS. In Government, the SNP used its national discourse to convey the idea that Scotland was different, that it had a unique set of interests and (for example, economic interests) and shared values (for example, protecting the Scottish NHS from privatisation and universalism). There was discursive continuity, in that regard. However, the National Conversation enabled the SNP to present further powers, and independence, as part of a 'debate' on Scotland's future, thus legitimising the idea of a constitutional referendum, whilst challenging the idea that devolution was the 'settled will' (this was, by extension, an attack on the legitimacy of the UK state in Scotland).

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## **Chapter seven**

### **The opportunities and challenges of the independence referendum: 2011–2014**

The SNP's remarkable victory in May 2011 was unprecedented, given the party's inconsistent electoral support as well as the European trend that parties in Government generally lost support due to the 'compromises of office' (Lynch, 2013: 277). The SNP took 69 seats, giving them a landslide and a Parliamentary majority. A pledge to hold an independence referendum was in the SNP's 2011 manifesto (SNP, 2011), and the landslide gave them what they called a 'mandate' to hold an independence referendum. The election result made an independence referendum inevitable (Johns, Mitchell and Carman, 2011), presenting the SNP with an opportunity to finally achieve what it had set out to do in 1934: achieve Scottish independence. The SNP's national discourse would be important if they were to achieve independence in 2014. However, there were difficulties, as the SNP was challenged over the credibility of independence by the No campaign, which included Labour.

For Labour, the SNP's victory at the 2011 election represented a double loss. Labour lost seven seats, and then grappled with new challenges as they sought to defend Scotland's place in the UK, during the independence referendum campaign. Labour had two major challenges during the referendum campaign. One major problem was that its biggest rival in Scotland—the SNP—based its independence campaign on arguments about the protection of the Scottish welfare state and the delivery of social justice. As Chapter Six established, the SNP had out-manoeuvred Labour on the left of Scottish politics, and this was a challenge during the independence referendum for Labour.

#### **The SNP's majority, steps towards an independence referendum and the formation of campaign umbrella groups**

The SNP presented a professional image during the 2011 election campaign. They presented themselves as 'The Scottish Government', and voters were being asked to 'Re-elect the Scottish Government'. This was a popular strategy, as a competent

Government and favourable First Minister in Alex Salmond contributed to a positive view of the SNP at the time (Denver, 2011: 48). Performance on policy and competence in Government ultimately led to the SNP's upsurge in support, rather than any sudden rise in support for independence (Lynch 2013: 178).

Now that the SNP had a majority at Holyrood, with 69 MSPs, the party had the opportunity to dictate the constitutional agenda, and to claim that the people of Scotland had endorsed a mandate for the SNP-Scottish Government to legislate for an independence referendum. However, the SNP was also, at least publicly, open to the idea of other constitutional options such as 'Devo Max' (Adamson and Lynch, 2014: 51), and the pro-Union parties did begin to offer a more unified approach in 2012 (Lynch, 2013: 279). Indeed, after the referendum result, although the Scottish Government did not get the result it wished for, John Swinney stated in December 2014 that:

On behalf of the Scottish Government I welcome the contents of the [Smith Commission] report but regret that a wider range of powers has not been delivered (Swinney, 2014).

This presented the Scottish Government and SNP as willing to make use of every new power that came to the Scottish Parliament, but continued to argue that a settlement beyond what the Smith Commission recommended was required<sup>6</sup>.

The route towards passing the Referendum Bill was not easy, and the idea of an independence referendum itself was heavily scrutinised by the pro-Union parties. However, on 10 January 2012, the UK Government announced that there would be a UK consultation on a Scottish independence referendum at the House of Commons, and later that evening, Alex Salmond announced the intention to hold an independence referendum in Autumn 2014 (Lynch, 2013: 283–284). Two days later, Alex Salmond went further, announcing a Scottish Government consultation a prospective independence referendum. Thereafter, there were months of discussion, as both the UK Government and Scottish Government sought to control the referendum issue. Several topics were discussed between the Governments, such as the franchise for the referendum, the constitutional options on offer and the nature

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<sup>6</sup> For a full list of recommendations, see <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2014/nov/27/scottish-devolution-smith-commission-key-points> (accessed 7 October 2017).

of the question to be on the ballot papers (Lynch, 2013; MacWhirter, 2014; Mitchell, 2015).

On 15 October, 2012, the Edinburgh Agreement was signed between the Scottish Government and UK Government, which set out a legal position for the Scottish Parliament to be 'lent' the power to hold a one-off independence referendum, after the passing of a section 30 Order. The Edinburgh Agreement allowed the referendum to be conducted without the fear of legal action by various political actors and individuals (Tickell, 2014).

During the independence referendum campaign, the picture was not quite as simple as the Labour vs SNP battle that had characterised the constitutional debate on the left of Scottish politics since the 1960s, at least. The independence referendum pitted two campaign umbrella groups against one another, with Labour as part of the pro-Union Better Together, and the SNP as part of pro-independence Yes Scotland. Although this chapter is interested in the parts of the independence referendum campaign driven by Labour and the SNP, it is important to establish an explanation for the shift from Labour vs SNP, to No vs Yes.

Each campaign, due to their cross-party nature, had the challenge of appearing united over their constitutional message, despite traditional differences between the parties within them. Better Together comprised of two parties in coalition as the UK Government (Conservatives and Liberal Democrats), and then of Labour, which was in opposition. This was, in itself, a significant challenge in terms of keeping 'Better Together' on message. Although anti-immigration, anti-establishment pro-Union parties were vocal in support of the Union as well, such as the British National Party and United Kingdom Independence Party, they were never formally part of 'Better Together', and 'Better Together' did make it clear that they did not welcome support from those parties (Aitken, 5 May 2013).

Better Together was similar in some regards to Yes Scotland (see below), especially in relation to campaign activities and approach. There was acknowledgement at leadership level that it would ultimately be the activists of political parties—that is, the Conservatives, Labour, and Liberal Democrats—doing much of the heavy lifting, which made sense, since 'ready-made' activists were available. Politically, Better Together's composition and campaign structure presented benefits and problems. It

was an advantage that there was a 'lowest common denominator', in the sense that something each of the campaign parties could agree on was opposition to independence. This resulted in 'often broad, fairly vague and general statements on Scotland's role in the UK' (Adamson and Lynch, 2013: 14). This provided coherence and substance to Better Together's campaign message.

Yet, more specific political messages may have alienated some voters, and caused disunity between the main three partners in Better Together. The role of the Conservatives and the UK Government, in particular, was a challenge. The UK Government supported Scotland remaining in the Union, yet its support of austerity policies contrasted with Yes' positive vision of an independent Scottish economy (ibid). However, separate campaigns were established by some of the parties in Better Together, including Labour's 'United with Labour', which argued for Scotland remaining within the Union, but from a Labour perspective (Shaw, 2014). This indicates that despite the presence of Better Together as an umbrella campaign for the Union, the participating parties could, separately, articulate their own pro-Union messages.

Labour's role in Better Together was significant. In Scotland, Labour had the largest supporter and activist base out of all three main pro-Union parties. Additionally, the role of senior Labour figures in Better Together was significant. Alistair Darling led Better Together as their chairman, including speaking at public events and providing several news interviews during the course of the long referendum campaign. Darling also took part in a two-part debating series before the referendum against Alex Salmond, as Scotland's First Minister (Pederson et al, 2014). Gordon Brown, a former Labour Prime Minister, also intervened in the referendum campaign, arguing that the UK was a 'Union of social justice', and he took on some important leadership responsibilities in Better Together (Mooney and Scott, 2015).

Brown's role appeared only to grow stronger during the referendum campaign, particularly in the final weeks and days of it, as he held rallies and events to encourage a 'No' vote (ibid). His final intervention included the announcement of a timetable for delivering further powers to the Scottish Parliament. Within that timetable, Brown announced that a draft of a new Scotland Bill would be published by the end of January 2015 (Riley-Smith, 8 September, 2014). The draft bill was

published on 22 January 2015, and it was based on recommendations by the Smith Commission, which had been established to examine and agree upon proposals for further powers to the Scottish Parliament (BBC, 22 January 2015).

Given the traditional ‘toxic’ image of the Conservative Party in Scotland—an image that Labour and the SNP helped to construct and maintain over the course of contemporary Scottish politics—and the traditional support in Scotland for Labour, it is understandable why senior Labour politicians took a leading role in Better Together. Other notable Labour MPs who became involved in the campaign are Douglas Alexander, and UK Labour party leader Ed Miliband (2010–2015). However, although Labour did have an important role in leading Better Together, important Conservative and Liberal Democrat politicians also had important roles. For the Conservatives, Prime Minister David Cameron and Scottish party leader Ruth Davidson had significant roles, as did senior Scottish Liberal Democrats, including the late Charles Kennedy, Alistair Carmichael, Michael Moore and Danny Alexander (all of whom, except for Charles Kennedy, held positions in the UK Government at one time or another, during the long referendum campaign).

Yes Scotland was launched in May 2012, and brought together a range of political parties and individuals, including the Scottish Green Party, the Scottish National Party, and the Scottish Socialist Party. Individuals also played their part in the formation and launch of Yes Scotland, including Musician Pat Kane, who sat on the Yes Scotland Advisory Board, alongside party representatives such as Scottish Government and SNP deputy, Nicola Sturgeon and Colin Fox of the SSP. Most intriguingly, the SNP was the largest, most well supported, organised and financed party in Yes Scotland, and sought to play a formative role in Yes Scotland. However, the SNP aimed to step back in order to allow Yes Scotland the freedom to develop organically, rather than become a branch of the SNP or the Scottish Government, for that matter (Lynch, 2013: 284, Adamson and Lynch, 2013).

Yes Scotland sought to establish a new, cross-party and non-party ‘network’ of independence campaigners in Scotland, and although the structures and personnel of the pro-independence parties were important—particularly that of the SNP, and to a lesser extent the Scottish Greens—there was a grassroots and ‘DIY’ element to campaigning (Lynch and Adamson, 2013: 6). One of the major reasons for setting

the campaign up this way was to ensure differentiation from the SNP and the SNP Scottish Government, as indicated above (ibid). By keeping the Yes campaign open and fluid, campaign leadership hoped to present the idea that independence had support from across the board, including the Scottish Socialists, the Scottish Greens, Radical Independence, Women for Independence, National Collective, Labour for Independence, and of course, the SNP. Plurality of membership was encouraged and promoted. Furthermore, leading Yes figures were not aligned with the SNP, including former Labour MSP and MSP, Dennis Canavan as Chair, and former BBC Journalist, Blair Jenkins, as Chief Executive (ibid).

Aside from the SNP's role in Yes Scotland, Alex Salmond took his all-SNP Scottish cabinet on a referendum tour around Scotland in the years and months preceding the referendum. Members of the public had the opportunity to question the Scottish Government on a wide range of issues, including independence. This built on the Scottish Government's National Conversation work and the Summer Cabinet series that the SNP undertook since 2008 as a minority Government (Harvey and Lynch, 2013).

As with pro-Union Better Together, each participating party and body within Yes presented slightly different versions of an independent Scotland, and the SNP had the greatest platform to do so, given the mainstream coverage that the party had (and still has at the time of writing), including television and radio interviews with senior politicians, party conferences, and SNP-led Scottish Government debates on the constitution, at Holyrood. The Scottish Greens presented a more radical case for independence than the SNP, and focused more than the SNP on tackling capitalism and Global Warming (Gillen, 2014). Yet, the Greens and the SNP presented a coherent, pro-independence message based on 'fairness', 'equality' and 'social justice'.

The final period of the referendum campaign saw both campaigns play their 'Trump Cards', with Yes Scotland and the SNP focusing specifically on the NHS, as they presented the idea that a Yes vote would keep the NHS in public hands and free from privatisation. Better Together, particularly senior Labour politicians, challenged that position, as well as pledging a 'vow' of further powers for the Scottish Parliament after a No vote. On the latter, Gordon Brown's intervention was significant, as he

became a figurehead for the No campaign's 'vow'; that if Scots voted No, the Scottish Parliament would gain an enhanced version of devolution.

### **Labour's national discourse during the independence referendum campaign: Reinforcing the role of the UK state in delivering social democracy**

The first thing to remember when discussing Labour's position during the referendum period, and its discursive strategy, is that something was being defended. Labour wanted to protect the Union, as a pro-Union party, and they did this by presenting, maintaining and advancing a Labour version of the Union, and Scotland's place within it. Through its national discourse, Labour focused on its traditional strategy of presenting the Union as the best means to deliver social justice, protect the poor and vulnerable; and protect public services, including the NHS. These themes that can be traced back to the years and decades before the independence referendum campaign, as this project has indicated throughout. Labour's discursive strategy during the referendum, in that case, was both positive and negative.

On the positive side, Labour presented the Union as something that brought people together across the UK through the common good of working people: in a word, solidarity. Thus, just as the SNP presented independence as the best for Scotland within its Scottish Nationalist narrative, Labour presented the Union as best for Scotland, with its own version of Labour Unionism. This theme has been identified throughout the period examined by this study. Furthermore, by presenting a 'No' vote as equivalent with Labour goals and values, Labour pinned its referendum strategy to the longer term strategy of preparing the ground for the 2015 Westminster election, and then the 2016 Scottish Parliament election (incidentally, Labour lost ground in both elections).

On the negative side, Labour focused on presenting independence as equivalent with the plight of the poor, pensioners, and public services, including the NHS. The SNP, in particular, was targeted in Labour's challenge of independence, and they often presented the SNP as the sole actor of the Yes Campaign. Beyond that, Alex Salmond and the SNP were presented by Labour as untrustworthy, autocratic, and as contrary to the interests of working people in Scotland by putting their 'obsession' with independence ahead of the needs of the people of Scotland. This is indicated by the 'Scotland on pause' signifier, which was often presented along with the perceived

failures of the Scottish Government, in relation to public services and the NHS. This indicates that there was continuity in Labour's national discourse, as they sought to build on their self-government discourse by presenting a positive role for the UK state in delivering social justice and in protecting the welfare state, and by presenting independence as leading to a reversal of the achievements of the UK state in Scotland.

Welfare was an important issue during the independence referendum campaign, especially in relation to Labour and SNP national discourse. Labour's national discourse during the referendum campaign brought together ideas such as the 'pooling and sharing of resources' across the UK, and the idea that the UK welfare system was something that all nations in the UK had built together, as rationale for keeping the UK state together, and for protecting public services within the devolved (and asymmetric) UK state structure. These ideas and values were continuations of Labour national discourse, although they took on a new discursive role, as a response to the direct challenge that independence made to the UK state. They merit discussion in the context of Labour's national discourse.

### **'Pooling and sharing'**

The idea of 'pooling and sharing of resources' was an important element of Labour's national discourse during the referendum campaign. It was the idea that the wealth produced by all nations in the UK should be collected by the UK Treasury, and then distributed based on need. This was a reassertion of the role of the UK state in managing Scotland's economy, which was linked to the funding of public services. Labour presented the idea that economic risks were shared across and thus absorbed by the larger UK (state) economy, putting less of a 'burden' on any one nation to pay for public services, for example. This was a long standing idea within the Labour Party in Scotland, and the fact that it emerged again in Labour's discourse during the referendum is indicative of its consistency in Labour's national discourse over the course of contemporary Scottish politics.

'Pooling and sharing' also challenged the SNP's argument that if Scotland had complete control over its own resources, especially North Sea oil and gas, then an independent Scotland could afford to maintain a strong welfare system and NHS. From a discourse perspective, although the signifier 'pooling and sharing' had been

used infrequently before the referendum, it was nonetheless part of a discursive reproduction within Labour's national discourse, based on solidarity and a having strong welfare state across the UK, which were presented as shared values.

The modern-day champion of 'pooling and sharing' was Gordon Brown, who had written about resource distribution across the UK in his 'Red Paper' publication (Brown, 1975, see Hepburn and Baldacchino, 2016: 3). During the referendum campaign, Brown presented 'pooling and sharing' as a mechanism to deliver social justice, ahead of other areas such as defence, or the environment; and as 'the most modern case for the Union':

I could put the case for the Union by talking about how our defence needs are common, our security needs are mutual, our environmental concerns are shared, that we are part of one single island. But I want to make the case, the most modern case for the Union, for the pooling and sharing of resources so that we are in a position to tackle poverty, unemployment together. (Brown in *The Herald*, 13 May 2013).

Brown presented the idea of 'pooling and sharing resources'—with its implicit ties to solidarity—alongside the concept of social justice, as indicated by the use of the signifiers 'tackle poverty' and 'unemployment'. By doing so, he supplemented Labour's national discourse, and reinforced it, by reasserting the role of the UK state in delivering social justice in Scotland. Thus, Gordon Brown presented a Labour version of what it meant for Scotland to remain in the Union: through 'pooling and sharing' resources across the UK in order to deliver social justice, but within the UK state structure. The passage below further reinforces this argument:

The whole point of sharing risks and resources across the UK is that it is right and proper that the British welfare state bears the rising cost of Scottish pensions as the number of old people will rise from 1 million to 1.3 million. As the internal DWP document makes clear, it is fairer and better for everyone that Britain's faster rising working-age population rather than Scotland's slow rising working-age population covers the cost of the rising numbers of elderly in Scotland, because we have contributed in UK National Insurance all our lives to spread the risks of poverty in retirement. (Brown in *New Statesman*, 22 April 2014).

On this occasion, Gordon Brown built a positive chain of equivalence using the signifiers 'sharing risks and resources', 'right', 'proper', 'British welfare state', 'rising cost', 'Scottish pensioners', 'Britain', 'faster rising', 'working-age', 'rising number of elderly in Scotland', 'we have contributed', 'UK National Insurance' and 'spread the

risks'. Gordon Brown did two things here. Firstly, he set out rationale and reason for 'pooling and sharing', arguing in this case that Scotland's population was becoming older than the rest of the UK's population, meaning that fewer Scots would be of working age than in previous generations.

By remaining part of the UK, Brown argued that Scotland's 'burden' of an older population would be offset by UK National Insurance, something that all British workers had paid into. However, Gordon Brown did something of equal importance, as well. He presented the concept of sharing resources across the UK as something that would allow the British welfare state, and thus the Scottish welfare state, to persist. Simultaneously, Gordon Brown negated the idea that there was a separate Scottish welfare state. This was to appeal to those who wished for Scotland's place within the UK to remain intact, and also to those who supported the idea of a strong welfare state. Thus, Brown presented the UK as being able to protect the welfare state, and independence as being unable to. This was nothing new, and can be traced back along the trajectory of Labour's national discourse, throughout the previous five decades at least.

Secondly, by focusing on pensioners, Brown appealed to a 'pensioner' subject position. By arguing that pensioners would be spared the 'risks of poverty in retirement' by Scotland remaining in the UK, Gordon Brown attempted to attract pensioners to Labour's referendum nodal point of 'Union', and the idea that Labour and the Union would protect pensioners. Indeed, this was not the only occasion where Gordon Brown targeted pensioners for his 'pooling and sharing' strategy (see endnotes).

'Pooling and sharing' had a general remit as well, however. Brown presented his 'pooling and sharing' idea as a solution to the constitutional question:

The purpose of a reformed United Kingdom should be to provide a strong and sustainable basis on which to tackle the unparalleled challenges of the times we live in, including the pooling and sharing of our resources for the delivery of opportunity and security for all. (Brown in Sky News, Monday 10 March 2014).

This is indicated by the signifiers 'reformed United Kingdom', 'strong', 'sustainable', 'challenges', 'pooling and sharing', 'our resources', 'opportunity' and 'security'. Brown argued that the UK would be strong and sustainable by pooling and sharing

resources from across the UK, to deliver 'opportunity' and 'security', which are understood here as empty signifiers, and which taken within the context of Labour's national discourse were relatable to social justice.

Therefore, the 'pooling and sharing' idea played right into the heart of Labour nation-building discourse, which is and has been throughout the period analysed in this study to present solidarity across the UK, which would enable social justice, as a rational and desirable reason for Scotland remaining in the Union. This has nation-building implications. It indicated continuity in how Labour discursively constructed the Scottish nation, and constructed and maintained the idea that Scotland depended on the UK state, and that Scotland shared the values of solidarity, social justice and a strong welfare state with the rest of the UK.

### **Shared institutions**

As indicated in the previous section, Labour presented the NHS and welfare state as shared institutions, which were built through the joint efforts of the nations that comprised the UK. This was a strategy aimed at convincing voters that together, the nations of the UK could achieve great institutional accomplishments, and once again indicates that the principle of 'solidarity' was an important part of Labour's national discourse. Take the following excerpt from Alistair Darling's Better Together launch speech as an example of that:

We have achieved so much together, in times of peace and war. We created and then dismantled an empire together. We fought fascism together. We built the Welfare State together. The BBC and the Bank of England were founded by Scots. The NHS was founded by a Welshman. The welfare state was founded by an Englishman. And we would not have achieved half as much if we had not been a United Kingdom, advancing together. (Darling, 25 June 2012).

Here, Alistair Darling built a positive chain of equivalence by weaving together the following signifiers: 'achieved', 'much', 'together', 'fought fascism', 'built', 'Welfare State', 'The BBC', 'Bank of England', 'NHS' 'United Kingdom', 'advancing', 'Scots', 'Welshman' and 'Englishman'. As Anas Sarwar had also done (see Chapter Three), Darling presented the Welfare State as part of the fabric of the UK in Labour's national discourse, by weaving the 'Welfare State' together with other traditional UK institutions including 'the BBC' and 'the Bank of England' together with historic

events and achievements including creating and dismantling the British empire and fighting fascism during World War II.

These achievements were presented as being accomplished by people from every part of the UK in an interdependent relationship, with Scots contributing to the UK as much as Welsh, English or Northern Irish, whilst Scots could not enjoy the NHS if it were not for its creation by a 'Welshman'. The repetition of the signifier 'together' by Darling indicates solidarity, and reinforces the idea that Labour presented the Union as necessary to the progression of everyone across the UK, including those living in Scotland. Thus, Labour's nation-building discourse during the referendum also presented the idea that because Scots helped 'build' Britain and also benefited from the 'achievements' of other nations as part of Britain, solidarity across the UK was proven to work best for Scotland. Solidarity, once again, was presented as a shared value between Scots and citizens of the rest of the UK, but as with Labour's 'pooling and sharing' idea, the signifier 'solidarity' was not necessarily used, perhaps given its connotations with archaic notions of 'socialism'.

In the following passage, Labour's Douglas Alexander also presented the joint efforts of all of the nations within the UK as beneficial to Scotland. However, on this occasion, he extended it to the issues of state welfare and social justice more specifically (and less implicitly than in other passages reviewed in this section). Additionally, Alexander presented the SNP's relationship with social justice and the welfare state in a negative chain of equivalence:

In her speech in December, the Deputy First Minister [Nicola Sturgeon] said this: "My conviction that Scotland should be independent stems from the principles not of identity or nationalism but of democracy and social justice." And contained within that short statement is a chasm of error. It misunderstands the past. And it misunderstands the present in its thinly veiled attempt to clothe the arguments of nationalism in the guise of those advancing social justice. It misunderstands the past because the great advances that were struggled for and secured by working people across the UK—the Welfare State, trades Union rights, our National Health Service, Equal Pay, a National Minimum Wage, even the Scottish Parliament and Welsh and Northern Irish Assemblies—were secured by the votes of working people in Cardiff, Liverpool and Newcastle, just as surely as people in Dundee, Edinburgh or Glasgow and have benefited all of us, whatever our national heritage. (Alexander, cited in *New Statesman*, March 2013).

Firstly, a negative articulation of the SNP's nodal point of independence was made. Douglas Alexander challenged Nicola Sturgeon's claim that the SNP sought independence for reasons of 'democracy and social justice' with an articulation of the supposed reality: that Sturgeon's statement misunderstood the history of social justice in the UK, and that a narrow conception of 'nationalism' was still at the heart of the SNP, but that the party attempted to hide this, using the veil of 'social justice'. This was an attempt to present the SNP as untrustworthy and ignorant of Scotland's role within the UK, and to negate the SNP's nodal point of independence in particular. Thus by discrediting the SNP, Alexander was attempting to discredit independence and, in relation to welfare and social justice, the possibility of independence to delivering social justice and a strong welfare state.

Alongside the negative articulation of welfare and social justice in an independent Scotland, was a positive articulation of the welfare state within the UK, which was weaved together by equating the cornerstones of the Welfare State ('trades Union rights, our National Health Service, Equal Pay, a National Minimum Wage') with people from all corners of the UK. In this sense, it was a similar strategy to Alistair Darling. However Douglas Alexander went a step further, to present state welfare within the UK as built upon the efforts of 'working people'. Here, Alexander was reinforcing Labour's 'workers' subject position, this time based on the notion that 'working people' have 'struggled for and secured' the principles of social justice together as part of the UK.

This may not appear significant on its own, but seen in the correct context, it plays into Labour's long term national discourse, which attempted to gain support for the Union from working class and health professionals. Alexander went onto argue that it was not assured that there will be 'infinite Tory Governments' who refer to workers as the 'feckless poor' (ibid), which again reinforced the idea of worker's solidarity across the UK, and against the Conservatives. Alexander also set out a general articulation of Labour's vision for Scotland which included, in relation to state welfare, 'prioritising full employment and higher wages', 'raising living standards and funding public services' and 'deliberate redistribution' (ibid). This was a persistent theme in Labour's national discourse over the course of contemporary Scottish politics.

Another interesting development over the course of the referendum debate on welfare was Scottish Labour's pledge to produce a 21st century Beveridge report, entitled 'Beveridge 21'. The aim of 'Beveridge 21' was to plan for the future of the NHS over the next seven decades, in order to 'build an NHS fit for the 21st century' (Sarwar, 21 March 2014). This was one of the headline initiatives to come from Scottish Labour's final party conference before the independence referendum vote. This pledge came alongside the commitment that Labour would never privatise the NHS (ibid). However, 'Beveridge 21' fell down the order in Labour's political discourse soon after it was announced, especially as the referendum campaign heated up, and Labour focused on negating the Yes Campaign's arguments for independence, as well as pledging further powers for the Scottish Parliament. Indeed, the signifier 'Beveridge 21' cannot be traced in Labour discourse in 2015, 2016 or 2017, indicating its irrelevance in the longer term. Nonetheless, 'Beveridge 21' indicated Labour's willingness to put welfare and the NHS at the heart of its national discourse during the referendum campaign.

### **The economy, oil and social justice**

During the referendum campaign, arguments about welfare and the economy overlapped. Labour's national discourse challenged the credibility of the SNP's economic ideas, and targeted the fluctuating nature of oil prices, in particular, as Labour knew how important oil would be to an independent Scottish economy. In 2013, average estimates put Scottish tax revenue based on oil at between 10 per cent and 20 per cent (BBC News, 25 November 2013). Labour—certainly within Better Together—also attacked the SNP's currency plan to share Sterling with the rest of the UK, if Scotland became independent (Shaw, 2014). But Labour also tied their economic arguments to social justice and the 'common good'. Below is an example of Labour's challenge to the SNP's economic arguments for independence, with a particular focus on oil:

Let's be clear. When the economy was booming, the SNP said independence. When it slumped they said independence. Once Whisky was our future. Then it was oil. Then it wasn't. Now it is again. Once it was the Scots pound, then the Euro, now sterling, perhaps because that could lead to a Scots pound and then the Euro. (Lamont, May 2013).

Here, former Scottish Labour leader Johann Lamont used the signifiers 'economy', 'SNP', 'independence', 'slumped', 'whisky', 'Scots pound', 'Euro' and 'sterling' in a negative chain of equivalence, in an attempt to present independence—the SNP's nodal point—as lacking in credibility. Lamont presented the SNP's economic strategy for an independent Scotland as flawed and as inconsistent. Anas Sarwar linked the fluctuation of oil prices in Scotland to social justice and the common good:

Real change in our economic model. An economic model that in future doesn't link opportunity and social justice to the ups and downs of the stock market or the price of a barrel of oil. An economic model that recognises the contribution we all make to the common good. (Sarwar, May 2013).

On this occasion, Sarwar put forward a positive economic case for social justice within the Union, by suggesting that the Union was more secure economically, and would not rely on 'the ups and downs of the stock market', or oil prices to have a strong economy. In an extract from another speech, Sarwar put forward the main Labour rationale for Scotland's economy being better off in the UK:

Today when we are facing challenges like the cost of living crisis or a global recession, when energy bills are going up but wages are falling, when household budgets are being squeezed but household incomes aren't keeping pace with the rate of inflation. The answer is not to turn our back on the rest of the UK, to seek shelter in the concept of independence. But rather to come together as we have always done to tackle head on our biggest challenges. (Sarwar, 13 January 2014).

Sarwar used the signifiers 'cost of living', 'crisis', 'global recession', 'wages', 'falling', 'household budgets', 'squeezed', 'turn our back', 'UK' and 'independence' in a negative chain of equivalence. He also used the signifiers 'come together', 'tackle', and 'our biggest challenges' in a positive chain of equivalence. By doing so, Anas Sarwar built a political frontier, with the overall argument being that economic unity across the UK was necessary in order to tackle the economic problems (in Scotland) of the day, such a 'cost of living crisis' or the global credit crunch. Implicitly, Sarwar indicated that an independent Scottish economy would be unable to deal with economic crises. But Sarwar was doing something else that we have seen in Labour's previous national discourse. He presented a positive role for the UK state in managing Scotland's economy, which as Labour's national discourse has shown us in the past, was linked to funding for public services.

Thus, Labour's economic arguments during the referendum were based on the idea that the Union provided economic security through the economic unity of the UK state, and that independence would leave Scotland's economy vulnerable, through the presentation of a reliance on North Sea oil, which was and is subject to global oil market values. This was also indicated by Labour's consistent referral to an Institute of Fiscal Studies report, which indicated that an independent Scotland would face a choice between borrowing more or cutting services:

If Salmond seriously cared about the NHS he would be explaining how he could possibly afford to fund it properly after a yes vote—with the £6 billion cuts to public services which the independent Institute of Fiscal Studies say would come over and above what George Osborne is planning. That is the equivalent of half of all that Scotland spends on the NHS. (Burnham, 20 August 2014).

This was important. Andy Burnham linked the economic risks that his party associated with independence to the presentation of the idea that an independent Scotland would have to cut public services, or to borrow more. In this example, Labour's national discourse sought to challenge the SNP's argument that independence would lead to more investment in public services, and an end to privatisation. Furthermore, Labour presented the SNP's economic plans as inevitably more damaging than the 'austerity budgets' of the Conservative-led UK Government, which was a tactic to reinforce Labour's traditional support, and to mobilise it against independence. Thus, Labour challenged the SNP's economic arguments for independence, and they linked that to arguments about welfare, too.

### **'Scotland on pause': challenging the credibility of the SNP**

A final, key strand of Labour's national discourse during the referendum was to present Alex Salmond and his SNP Government as having an obsession with independence, that was taking time away from the issues that 'matter most to people', and that Scotland was therefore 'on pause'. The SNP was also presented as the sole supporter of independence, despite the pro-independence stance of the Scottish Greens and Scottish Socialists, for example (Gillen, 2014).

Scottish Labour, in particular, used its position as the main opposition to the SNP in the Scottish Parliament between 2011 and 2014 to present those arguments on a national platform. Extracts from contributions to Parliamentary debates from Labour

MSPs Johann Lamont and Jackie Baillie, represent occasions when Labour presented the Scottish Government as neglecting its duties by focusing ‘too much’ on the independence referendum:

The First Minister would do well to listen to the lesson of Dunfermline. The people of Scotland want Scotland off pause; they want him to stop obsessing about independence, and for him to do his day job. As a bonus, he might, once in a while, answer a question. I asked him what his view is on the energy freeze, and he said nothing. (Lamont, 31 October 2013).

In this first passage, taken from a speech by Johann Lamont after Scottish Labour’s victory in the Dunfermline by-election, she constructed a negative chain of equivalence around the SNP’s nodal point of ‘independence’, using the signifiers and phrases ‘First Minister’, ‘Dunfermline’, ‘The people of Scotland’, ‘Scotland’, ‘pause’, ‘obsessing’, ‘independence’, ‘do his day job’ and ‘answer a question’. By doing so, Lamont presented two ideas. Firstly, she argued that Alex Salmond and his Government did not care about the needs of the Scottish people, but only cared about—and spent too much time on—securing a Yes vote in the referendum. Lamont pointed to the SNP’s defeat to Labour at the October by-election in Dunfermline, by a margin of 2,873 votes (bbc.co.uk, 25 October 2013), as evidence that Scots did not want independence, but rather wanted Alex Salmond to ‘do his day job’, that is, to focus on improving public services, for example.

Secondly, Lamont presented Alex Salmond as dishonest, indicated by the sentence ‘As a bonus, he might, once in a while, answer a question’. This was a form of character assassination, and it was a common theme in Johann Lamont’s political discourse, especially during the referendum campaign at First Minister’s Questions, and at other Holyrood debates. In the passage below, another example can be seen of this, this time related to a specific issue of contention: the ‘Bedroom Tax’:

Is it not the case that the cabinet secretary is arguing for people in Scotland to be put on pause—for people who are threatened with eviction because of the bedroom tax to be abandoned—and that the SNP Government will do nothing for at least three years? The Scottish Government has the power to do something now to protect tenants and to help landlords. Why will it not use the powers that it has now to help people in Scotland? (Baillie, 4 September 2013).

Scottish Labour shadow health minister, Jackie Baillie, built a negative chain of equivalence around the nodal point of independence in a similar way to her (at the

time) leader at Holyrood, using the signifiers and phrases ‘people in Scotland’, ‘put on pause’, ‘bedroom tax’, ‘abandoned’, ‘SNP Government’, ‘do nothing’ and ‘do something now’. Here, the intention was to present the Scottish Government, including specific Ministers and Cabinet Secretaries, as failing to protect ‘people in Scotland’ against the ‘Bedroom Tax’ despite having the powers to do so. The SNP argued on contrary, that only with the powers of independence could the Scottish Government protect people from the ‘Bedroom Tax’. For the SNP, this meant abolishing the ‘Bedroom Tax’ in an independent Scotland, whereas Scottish Labour argued that a UK Labour Government would abolish the ‘Bedroom Tax’. Indeed, Ed Miliband pledged as much at the Labour Party Conference in Brighton, September 2013, if Labour were elected to govern at the 2015 general election (independent.co.uk, 21 September 2013).

In the end, Labour and the SNP came together to vote in favour of a Scottish Government fund to completely mitigate the ‘Bedroom Tax’, in a rare example of a compromise between the two parties. But by making the case that the SNP could ‘use the power that it has now to help people in Scotland’, Jackie Baillie was also presenting the idea that devolution already gave the Scottish Government the power to solve the problem of the ‘Bedroom Tax’, and therefore independence would not be necessary. Labour did something similar on other issues, such as the pressure the party put on the Scottish Government to adopt its proposal to ensure that all public sector contracts be subject to a living wage of £7.65 an hour.

This had an interesting political element, as Labour sought to negate the SNP’s position that independence would improve workers’ wages, ahead of the referendum (BBC, 13 May 2014). This was particularly important, given that the Yes campaign attempted to appeal directly to Labour voters and ‘workers’. Furthermore, this aspect of Labour’s national discourse indicates that the party actively sought to present devolution as able to deliver social democratic policies, and that independence, therefore, was not required. This again indicates continuity in Labour’s nation-building strategy, as the party sought to reassert the role of the UK state in delivering social justice, and the devolved Scottish Parliament was presented as the mechanism that could deliver social democratic public and social policy.

## **The SNP's national discourse during the independence referendum campaign: social justice and the NHS**

The SNP's role within Yes Scotland was significant. It had the most activists, members and financial backing. Therefore, the SNP was pivotal to the initial and long term success of Yes Scotland, as far as door-to-door campaigning for a Yes vote was concerned, as well as concerns relating to funding. During the referendum campaign, independence was, once again, presented as the democratic option for the people of Scotland by the SNP. The SNP's national discourse presented a variety of factors as dependent upon a Yes vote to Scottish independence. This included the protection of the Scottish NHS, a fair welfare system, a fairer and more progressive tax system, Scotland being a 'good Global citizen' in its approach to international affairs, removing Trident nuclear weapons from Scottish territory, creating a 'revolution' in childcare provision, and delivering a written Scottish constitution (enshrining Scottish values, aspirations, citizens' rights and institutions), amongst other things.

In fact, the SNP's national discourse on such matters was rather similar to that of the Scottish Greens and Scottish Socialists, which made it easier for Yes Scotland to remain discursively consistent and robust. However, the SNP did differ from the Scottish Greens and Scottish Socialists in some respects, mostly in relation to currency (the SNP preferred Sterling, in a currency Union with the rest of the UK, which was an idea rejected by the Scottish Greens and Scottish Socialists), NATO membership (which the SNP supported, and the Scottish Greens did not) and having Elizabeth II as the de facto head of an independent Scotland (again, something the SNP supported, but was not supported by the Scottish Greens or Scottish Socialists). There were also disagreements on ideological matters, for example, whereas the Scottish Greens were cautious about relying on North Sea oil and gas, the SNP focused heavily on the resource in its case for independence (Gillen, 2014). The similarities and differences between the pro-independence groups were accentuated on publication of the Scottish Government's White Paper, which was branded by the SNP-Scottish Government as a 'blueprint' for independence.

## **Democratic control and representation**

One of the SNP's long-running, fundamental strategies in convincing voters that independence was needed, was to present Scottish sovereignty as necessary due to the perceived lack of influence and democratic control Scotland had within the UK state. In a speech given by former SNP defence spokesman and deputy leader Angus Robertson (MP for Moray until June 2017), he presented independence as paving the way to a true Parliamentary democracy for Scotland, and he constructed a political frontier by contrasting that vision with the Westminster Parliamentary system and Scotland's lack of influence within it. This argument was ever-present in SNP national discourse. In the following passage from the speech Robertson referred to above, it can be seen how he constructed a political frontier between a Parliamentary democracy in an independent Scotland, and the Westminster Parliamentary system:

At the heart of the independence prospectus is the proposition that decisions about Scotland will be taken by the people who care most about Scotland—that is the people who live and work in Scotland. Our national democratic life will be determined in an independent Scottish Parliament elected entirely by people in Scotland which will replace the current Westminster system. Under that current antiquated and inadequate system, elected representatives from Scotland make up just 9 per cent of the 650 members of the House of Commons and the House of Lords is wholly unelected. Governments in an independent Scotland will always be formed by parties that win elections in Scotland. It will no longer be possible for key decisions to be made by Governments that do not command the support of the Scottish electorate. (Robertson, 20 January 2014).

Angus Robertson took the nodal point of 'independence' and articulated it as equivalential—in a positive chain of equivalence—with the signifiers 'the people', 'care most', 'Scotland', 'live and work in Scotland', 'democratic', 'independent Scottish Parliament', 'people in Scotland' and 'Scottish electorate'. The overall intention was to present pure Scottish Parliamentary democracy as only being possible through an independent Scottish state, elected only by people in Scotland, without influence from people outside of Scotland (i.e., people in the rest of the UK). This would, according to Robertson, mean that only parties elected in Scotland could make decisions in Scotland. The rationale for voting in favour of such a 'prospectus' was the assurance that the people who cared most about Scotland—the people

living and working there—would be the people (in this case, politicians within political parties) making the decisions on behalf of the Scottish people.

In a negative chain of equivalence, Angus Robertson presented the Union as undemocratic, evident from the use of the signifiers ‘Westminster’, ‘antiquated’, ‘inadequate’, ‘House of Commons’, ‘House of Lords’ and ‘wholly unelected’ . Although Robertson made no mention of the Conservative Party and the UK coalition Government, he presented the UK party political system as unaccountable to the people of Scotland and unrepresentative of them. The SNP’s national discourse often presented UK Parliamentary elections as undemocratic (Mitchell, 2014), and the referendum was no different in that regard, especially as the Conservative Party only had one MP in Scotland. Independence was presented as a means to reverse this situation, because an ‘independent Scotland will always be formed by parties that win elections in Scotland’ (Robertson, 2014), or in other words, nations in the rest of the UK would not decide which party made Government decisions in Scotland. Thus, the SNP’s national discourse during the referendum presented the UK Parliament as having no legitimacy in making decisions concerning Scotland. This indicates strong consistency between the SNP’s national discourse during the referendum, and their national discourse trajectory over the course of contemporary Scottish politics.

A second facet to the SNP’s presentation of what democracy in an independent Scotland should look like, was the idea that the Scottish state should ensure the needs, interests, and shared values of its citizens. The SNP presented a written constitution as a mechanism to enshrine Scottish values, rights and institutions within the fabric of an independent Scottish state:

The Scottish Government’s proposal is that an independent Scotland should have a written constitution which expresses our values, embeds the rights of its citizens and sets out clearly how institutions of state interact with each other and serve the people. This will contrast with the UK’s largely unwritten constitution in which the Westminster Parliament can do anything except bind its successors. The Westminster system has sometimes led to major decisions being taken by the Government without the possibility of challenge (for example, the decision to go to war in Iraq in 2003). There has long been a distinct Scottish constitutional tradition, affirmed by the Scottish Parliament as recently as January 2012—the sovereignty of the Scottish people and their right to choose the form of Government best suited to their needs. (Scottish Government, 2013: 6).

The piece of discourse above is from a Scottish Government source; the independence 'White Paper'. However it is treated here also as an SNP source, given that the SNP was in Government at the time, and because SNP Scottish Ministers will have signed it off (as is Scottish Government procedure). The White Paper constructed a political frontier between Scotland and Westminster in relation to the quality of democracy offered. A positive chain of equivalence was built around the nodal point of independence using the signifiers and phrases 'independent Scotland', 'written constitution', 'expresses', 'our values', 'embeds', 'rights', 'citizens', 'institutions', 'state', 'distinct', 'Scottish constitutional tradition', 'sovereignty of the Scottish people', 'right to choose the form of Government', 'best suited' and 'needs'.

The White Paper presented the ideas that Scotland held a distinct set of values, and that the rights of the Scottish people should be protected in the form of a written constitution. As with previous SNP national discourse, the role this piece of discourse played was to accentuate the differences between Scotland and the UK state, and to present the UK state as undemocratic and unrepresentative of Scotland's shared values, especially because it did not have a written constitution. The intention was to undermine the legitimacy of the UK state in making decisions that affected Scotland, whilst presenting independence as a mechanism to legitimise Government decisions in a prospective independent Scotland.

Furthermore, the White Paper built a negative chain of equivalence around the nodal point of 'Union'/'Westminster', using the signifiers and phrases 'Westminster system', 'major decisions', 'the Government', 'without', 'challenge' and 'war in Iraq'. Westminster's form of democracy was presented as inadequate and broken, that it was illiberal and autocratic, as unchallengeable decisions were sometimes made, such as the decision to invade Iraq in 2003. This again indicates consistency in the SNP's national discourse, as they argued something similar during the Thatcher years, for example.

Thus, in an attempt to present closure to an incomplete form of democracy, the White Paper presented an alternative vision, through a written constitution, as a means to express Scottish values, protect the rights of citizens in Scotland, and adhere to the principle of 'sovereignty of the people' and their right to choose the form of Government that suits their needs best, as recognised through the Claim of

Right (Electoral Reform Society Scotland, 2013: 14). This vision, therefore, was presented as a more democratic system than the UK state system, but that it could only be delivered through independence.

### **Independence for a 'fairer and more equal society'?**

Arguments based around welfare and social justice were as large a component of the SNP's national discourse as it was Labour's, as the parties debated in the Scottish Parliament and in television studios. Issues such as the 'Bedroom Tax' and the rise in food banks in Scotland were two of the biggest issues relating to the welfare state in particular during the referendum campaign, and the SNP made it part of its national discourse to present independence as the solution to ending such unpopular, 'Tory-imposed' UK policies (such as austerity) and as a means to tackle poverty (Mooney and Scott, 2015).

And although welfare was a running and contentious issue, as well as one of the central planks to the case for independence, the SNP and Yes campaign focused specifically on the protection of the National Health Service in Scotland in the final weeks and days before the 18 September vote. It was argued that Westminster austerity measures were having a negative effect on Scotland's NHS, because the Scottish Government's block budget had been cut in real terms by the UK Government (The Scottish Government, 2013). This argument challenged the role of the UK state in delivering funding for public services, but it also defended against the challenged by Labour; that the SNP were failing to use their role in Government to tackle poverty. Additionally, the SNP argued that the English NHS was being privatised, which would result in less money available for the Scottish Government to keep the Scottish NHS in public hands (Clarke, 25 August, 2014).

As an extension to the arguments above about representation and democratic control, the SNP presented a vote for independence as a vote for shared values such as 'fairness' and 'social justice', as well as a vote for the NHS and welfare state. These concepts were often inter-related in SNP national discourse during the referendum. Nicola Sturgeon, for example, stated that:

My conviction that Scotland should be independent stems from the principles, not of identity or nationality, but of democracy and social justice. (Sturgeon, 3 December 2012).

The use of the signifiers 'Scotland', 'independent', 'principles', 'democracy' and 'social justice' indicates that Sturgeon was attempting to deflect accusations that independence—as a means to achieve Scottish self-determination—was a pursuit based on nationality, and to allay any fears that independence was a tool of division. By introducing the concept of social justice, Sturgeon presented independence differently from the version of independence presented by Labour, as a means not to divide the nations that comprise the UK, but to establish a democratic, fairer and socially just Scottish society.

In fact, the idea of Scotland being an equal nation, delivered by independence, was a recurrent argument and theme during the referendum in SNP national discourse, as indicated by a speech given by Nicola Sturgeon at the University of Edinburgh in June 2013 entitled 'Independence: a renewed partnership of the Isles'. The underlying focus on democratic control was continuously a central element to the SNP's national discourse, but by focusing more on the principles of 'social justice' and fairness, this enabled the SNP to present such principles as being unique to the collective identity of the Scottish nation and that only independence could allow the Scottish nation's collective identity to flourish.

In the three passages below, it can be seen how Nicola Sturgeon constructed a political frontier that presented two antithetical visions and perspectives on democracy in Scotland and the UK, with implications for 'social justice' and how democratic control and delivery of social justice were linked. In the first passage, Sturgeon built a positive chain of equivalence around the nodal point of independence, as she focused on having the power to deliver social justice in Scotland:

I joined the SNP because it was obvious to me then—as it still is today—that you cannot guarantee social justice unless you are in control of the delivery. And that is my central argument to you today. Not just that independence is more than an end in itself. But that it is only by bringing the powers home, by being independent, that we can build the better nation we all want. And I ask you, as you make up your minds over these next two years, to base your decision, not on how Scottish or British you feel, but on what kind of country you want Scotland to be and how best you think that can be achieved. (Sturgeon, 3 December 2012).

Nicola Surgeon used the signifiers 'SNP', 'social justice', 'control of delivery', 'better nation', 'Scotland' and 'powers of independence' in a positive chain of equivalence

with 'independence' to present independence as a social democratic pursuit, something that the SNP stood for (and has done so for a long time), and that social justice could not be achieved in Scotland without a Yes vote in September 2014. Sturgeon further presented independence as not about how British or Scottish you felt, but about achieving the best for Scotland, and that progress towards social justice was about control over its delivery. For Nicola Sturgeon, the delivery of social justice in Scotland was presented as best in the hands of Scots. Implicitly, this was an argument about independence vs Union. The SNP were challenging the role of the UK state in delivering social justice, and indeed, arguing that the pursuit of social justice was a Scottish value, rather than a British one. This plays into the articulation that independence was needed because the best placed people to make decisions about Scotland were those who lived and worked in Scotland:

It is better for all of us if decisions about Scotland's future are taken by the people who care most about Scotland—the people who live and work here. (Sturgeon, October 2013).

Again, implicit in the SNP's discourse was the presentation of the idea that the UK state did not share the same values as Scotland, and that an independent Scottish state could. During the same speech, Nicola Sturgeon gave an example of a more evocative and discursively loaded piece of SNP national discourse, when she discussed the role of successive UK Governments in failing to deliver social justice in Scotland, in quite hyperbolic fashion. In a negative chain of equivalence, Sturgeon presented the UK as a danger to social democracy:

The poverty and inequality that is a scar on the face of our nation, the lag in economic growth, the flow of our brightest and best out of Scotland: these are not recent problems. These are long-standing and long-term challenges that UK Governments of whatever colour have failed to address. The UK today is the 4th most unequal society in the developed world. 1 in 5 Scottish children live in poverty. 800,000 Scots live in fuel poverty. Over the past 50 years, Scotland's average economic growth rate has been 40 per cent lower than equivalent, independent countries. (Sturgeon, 3 December 2012).

Here, Sturgeon used the signifiers 'poverty', 'inequality', 'scar', 'the nation', 'lag', 'economic growth', 'UK Governments', 'failed', 'fuel poverty' in order to present the Union as unfair and socially unjust. Sturgeon presented the idea that successive UK Governments, whether Conservative and Labour, had failed to address—and had indeed caused—Scotland's problems, including inequality, child poverty, fuel poverty

and lower economic growth than in other independent countries. Thus, a political frontier was presented by Nicola Sturgeon.

On one hand, it was argued that independence was the catalyst for the delivery of social justice in Scotland, as it meant having the control necessary to deliver it. It was presented that such control would inevitably lead to social justice in Scotland, as the people who 'care most about Scotland' would be the people making decisions about Scotland. Thus, it can be seen here how the SNP's national discourse attempted to legitimise a prospective independent Scottish state. In contrast, the idea that social justice was not a concern of successive UK Governments was presented by the SNP, which by extension, was an attack on the Conservatives, Labour and the Liberal Democrats. The role of the UK state in delivering social justice in Scotland was challenged, in order to de-legitimise the UK state in Scotland.

Therefore, Nicola Sturgeon presented two futures: the delivery of social justice through independence, which was presented as 'natural'; and the delivery of social justice through the UK state, which was presented as having failed to protect the most vulnerable people in Scotland. The SNP's national discourse was quite intriguing. Publicly, Nicola Sturgeon presented the idea that a vote for independence was not dependent on nationalism. Yet at the same time, the SNP's discursive strategy during the referendum—as indicated through discourse produced by Nicola Sturgeon—was dependent upon constructing and maintaining the idea that the pursuit of social justice was a shared value, unique to the Scottish nation. Thus, there was an attempt to construct and reinforce collective identity in a particularly social democratic fashion, given the focus on social justice, fairness, and tackling poverty. Successive UK Governments, on the other hand, were presented as acting contrary to the shared values of Scotland, in an attempt to challenge the social democratic credentials of the UK state, and the UK state's role in delivering public and social policy in Scotland (for example, social security).

Finally, as stated previously, the future of the NHS was an important issue during the long independence referendum campaign. Both Labour and the SNP presented a strong NHS as part of their future plans for Scotland. Whilst Labour presented the NHS as a shared British institution (see Keating 2010), the SNP focused on the idea that the NHS in Scotland was under threat from NHS privatisation in England, and

that only independence could protect the Scottish NHS from that 'trend'. The passage from Alex Neil, former Scottish Government Health Cabinet Secretary, indicated such a strategy:

As long as Scotland's finances are tied to Westminster, every cut made to pay in England, every cut to services through privatisation in England, has a direct impact on the budget available to the Scottish Government. The only way we can protect Scotland's NHS in the future is to put Scotland's resources in Scotland's hands, and only a Yes vote will deliver that. (Neil, 19 October 2013).

Alex Neil constructed a political frontier here. First, Neil used the signifiers and phrases 'Scotland's finances', 'tied', 'Westminster', 'cut', 'services', 'England', 'privatisation' and 'budget' in a negative chain of equivalence. Second, Neil weaved together the signifiers 'the only way', 'protect', 'NHS', 'Scotland's resources', 'in Scotland's hands' and 'only a Yes vote' in a positive chain of equivalence. This was a classic problem, then solution articulation in SNP national discourse. The problem, according to Neil, was that the cuts and privatisation of (health) services in England had the knock-on effect of cutting the Scottish Government's budget. What Neil did not make clear was that his argument was based on the operation of the Barnett Formula, although that is implicit, and it is likely that he sought to 'water down' the issue to make a more emotive case for independence. The solution to Scotland's budget and therefore publicly owned NHS being threatened by 'cuts', according to Neil, was for Scotland to become independent.

The SNP once again referenced the NHS as part of its national discourse. Particularly during the referendum, the SNP attempted to park its tanks on the NHS lawn. The SNP argued that the idea of a strong, publicly owned NHS was a specifically Scottish value, and this is indicated through the political frontier displayed above, which presented the British Government as failing to protect the NHS. This is further indicated in the passage below:

And for me, it just makes Jeremy Hunt's attack on the pay of NHS staff all the more shocking. For the Tories to try and steal the promised pay rise back from workers' hands would destabilise the NHS in England and damage staff morale. This is nothing short of bad faith from Jeremy Hunt and a betrayal of the NHS...Hunt's aim is clear, he wants to undermine the publicly-owned NHS. He wants to break it up for further privatisation and American-style health insurance. My message to Hunt is unequivocal: Scotland rejects your politics, your attack on staff and your desire to destroy the real NHS... (Ibid).

Alex Neil argued that the Conservative health minister, Jeremy Hunt, as well as his party, wished to ‘undermine the publicly owned NHS’, which was an attack on staff and on the ‘real NHS’, as he called it. For Neil, the ‘real NHS’ was one that was publicly owned and he pledged that independence would protect that ethos: ‘we must ensure that our health service is kept [in] public hands, is [*sic*] free at the point of need’ (ibid). Thus, the SNP presented the idea that the only way that Scots could protect and maintain a publicly owned Scottish NHS was to vote Yes to independence in September 2014. SNP national discourse reasserted the notion that a publicly owned NHS was a uniquely Scottish value, and that the only way to protect that value, and thus the collective Scottish identity, was through an independent Scottish state. The alternative was presented as remaining in the UK, which would cause the NHS to become further privatised. As Alex Neil stated: ‘The NHS in Scotland is on a different road to the NHS in England’ (ibid).

Thus, independence was presented as the only way to protect Scotland’s unique collective identity, and the UK state was presented as threatening that collective identity. This political frontier was constructed through the SNP’s national discourse, with specific reference to protecting the NHS, which was presented as a shared value in Scotland, and one that could only be protected through an independent Scottish state. A subject position was constructed here, designed to attract members of the public who had benefitted from the NHS, as well as health workers who disagreed with the direction of healthcare under the Conservative-led coalition Government.

### **Independence and economic prosperity**

The SNP has often presented independence for Scotland as a ‘natural’ next step from devolution, but also as completely achievable, because other small, independent countries have been able to create a high quality of life for their citizens. The SNP has argued that small, independent economies are desirable and sustainable, and has often compared Scotland’s economy to the economies of small, independent countries in Europe (as indicated in Chapter Six). Take the following passage as an example of that:

Recently, the Economist Intelligence Unit published its ‘where to be born’ index that looks at a range of quality of life measures. The UK ranked 27th. But four out of the top five countries—

Switzerland, Norway, Sweden and Denmark—are countries with many similarities to Scotland. What do these other small countries have that we don't? It's not resources, talent or the determination of our people. What they do have is the independence to take decisions that are right for them. The example of these other countries should tell us that the challenges we face today are not inevitable. The problems can be solved—but only if we equip ourselves with the powers we need to solve them. (Sturgeon, 3 December 2012).

Sturgeon used a positive chain of equivalence, again around the nodal point of independence, and she used the signifiers and phrases 'quality of life', 'UK', 'Switzerland', 'Norway', 'Sweden', 'Denmark', 'similar to Scotland', 'decisions' and 'right for them'. She presented the idea that other small, independent nations in Northern Europe had a higher quality of life than Scotland within the UK, and that because they were 'similar to Scotland' and had the ability to make decisions that were 'right for them', this was an indicator that an independent Scotland could improve the quality of life of its citizens. There was a nation-building element here: that the Scottish nation could flourish in a global economy. But there was also an attempt to merge the idea that a flourishing independent Scottish economy would allow the Scottish Government to improve the lives of all Scots. Implicitly, this would include measures to tackle poverty. By referencing the low ranking of the UK in life quality measures, Nicola Sturgeon challenged the role of the UK state in managing Scotland's economy and tackling poverty.

This contrast went wider, and was an important articulation in SNP national discourse. The SNP argued that Scotland would start life as an independent country as better off than the rest of the UK, and that Scotland contributed more in tax receipts to the UK Treasury than it received in public spending. This was a more recent development in the SNP's national discourse on the economy, and became possible ever since the publication of Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland (GERS), which began during the 1990–1991 financial year. An extract from a speech by Alex Salmond, who was a key figure in developing the strategy highlighted above, provides an example of this:

I want to begin by stressing a crucial point—Scotland is a nation of great wealth and extraordinary potential. Per head of population, we have the 14th highest GDP in the Organisation for Economic co-operation and Development. We have contributed more in tax revenues, per head of population, than the rest of the UK in every one of the last 33 years. We have oil and gas reserves that will last for decades and renewable energy reserves that will last

forever. We have more universities in the world's top 200, relative to our size, than any other country on the planet. (Salmond, 17 July 2014).

Salmond used the signifiers 'Scotland', 'nation', 'great wealth', 'extraordinary potential', '14th highest GDP', 'contributed more', 'tax receipts', 'UK', 'oil and gas', 'renewable energy' and 'universities' in a positive chain of equivalence. Salmond presented the case that an independent Scotland would have a strong economy, and by indicating that per head of population, Scotland contributed more in tax revenues than the rest of the UK in each of the last 33 years, he attempted to diffuse the argument that Scotland's economy relied on management by the UK state. This was absolutely crucial to the SNP's economic case for independence. By presenting the idea that Scotland had the 14th highest GDP in the OECD, along with the signifiers 'oil and gas' and 'renewable energy', as well as the idea that Scotland had several universities in the World top 200 'relative to our [Scotland's] size', Alex Salmond portrayed an independent Scotland as having ample natural and human resources to be a long term economic success.

Alex Salmond presented Scotland's finances as strong in both the short and the long term, to legitimise the economic credibility of an independent Scottish state, and to challenge the role of the UK state in managing Scotland's economy. The SNP's national discourse was constructed in such a way as to provide a rebuttal of Labour's argument that the Scottish economy was too weak for Scotland to become independent without either borrowing more, or cutting public services (Burnham, 20 August 2014).

## **Conclusion**

Labour's national discourse during the independence referendum was designed to promote the role of the UK state in managing Scotland's economy, delivering social justice, and protecting the welfare state. The role of institutions, welfare and shared values were important. Labour's national discourse presented the welfare state in Scotland as dependent upon the wider management of the UK state, and often referred to the notion that a strong welfare state was part of the collective identity of the British people, and not as unique to Scotland. The UK's role in managing Scotland's economy was promoted as a mechanism to deliver a strong welfare state in Scotland, but also to deliver social justice.

The discourse of solidarity was the glue that held Labour's wider national discourse together, through signifiers such as 'pooling and sharing'. At the same time, Labour's national discourse sought to challenge the legitimacy of an independent Scottish state, by attacking the notion that Scotland could be economically dependent from the UK state. This challenge was linked to the provision of public services, and it was argued that Scotland's economy was not strong enough to maintain public services, and to invest in them, without its integration within the wider UK economy. This strategy ultimately represented an attack on the notion that an independent Scotland would have a strong welfare state.

During the independence referendum campaign, the SNP reinforced their previous arguments about Parliamentary democracy and representation—and linked them to the concepts of social justice and fairness; and protecting the welfare state. But arguments about the economy were also important here, and overlapped with arguments about the delivery of social justice, and protecting the welfare state. The SNP's national discourse during the referendum sought to socially construct collective identity, and arguments about welfare, social justice, and the economy were all central to that.

However, the SNP's national discourse had an additional role to play, as the party sought to challenge the role of the UK state in managing Scotland's economy, delivering social justice, and protecting the welfare state. Thus, the pursuit of social justice and protecting the welfare state were presented as uniquely Scottish values, in order to establish and reinforce a collective Scottish identity, and to present independent statehood as the 'only' mechanism that could protect that collective identity, from a UK state which sought to damage it. This indicates remarkable similarities in the SNP's national discourse, as the SNP continuously sought to construct collective social identity over the course of Scottish politics.

In the end, the SNP was on the losing side of the independence debate. However, although it is not the object of this study to examine the post referendum period, it is accurate to say that the independence campaign aided the SNP, as support for independence was greatly boosted, as was support for the SNP specifically (Dennison, 2015). The SNP went onto win 56 seats in the 2015 General Election, and in 2016, the party became a minority Government for the second time, taking 63

seats and 46.3 per cent of the constituency vote share at the 2016 Scottish Parliament election. Labour, on the other hand, lost 13 seats, as the party took just 24 seats (BBC, 2016). This is interesting, because by 2016, it was evident that the SNP had firmly supplanted Labour as the dominant party in Scotland, quite the reversal from Labour's 'fighting fifty' group of Scottish MPs in the 1980s, and consecutive Labour successes in Scottish Parliament elections in the 2000s.

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## **Chapter eight**

### **Examining the trajectory of national discourses: what has been learnt in the Scottish context?**

This thesis has examined how both Labour and the SNP articulated the welfare state, and specific elements of it, (such as the NHS, education, employment and social security), as central components of their respective nation-building strategies during the period from the late-1960s until the independence referendum in 2014. The role of national discourse was essential in enabling Labour and the SNP to present arguments for and against their respective nodal points of 'Union' and 'independence', as both competed to control the meaning of 'welfare' and the 'welfare state', in order to fulfil their nation-building objectives. Arguments about the economy and social democracy filtered into the discursive battle over the welfare state, as the parties simultaneously promoted and challenged the legitimacy of the UK state, and a prospective Scottish state, respectively. 'Thatcherism' and devolution in particular gave the battle over the welfare state a specific, Scottish dimension.

It has been established that dislocatory events, including but not limited to the election of Thatcher's Conservatives in 1979, the vote to establish the Scottish Parliament in 1997, the electoral success of the SNP in 2007 and again in 2011, and the independence referendum in 2014, have presented challenges and opportunities to Labour and the SNP. By examining and referencing those events, this study has accounted for continuity and change in the respective nation-building strategies of Labour and the SNP. This highlights the importance and originality of this study, which examines a key trajectory of Scottish nation-building discourse.

#### **The national discourse of Labour and the SNP from 1967 until 1997: self-government and Thatcherism**

The central role of Labour's national discourse was to reinforce Scotland's place in the UK. However, the party's divisions during the 1970s and 1980s over self-government and legislative devolution presented challenges to the coherence of Labour's national discourse, despite the party's official stance, which was to support

a Scottish Assembly. This indicates that Labour had a long way to go to before forming a mostly united front on devolution, which was eventually achieved in the 1990s. On one hand, Labour anti-devolutionists—such as Tam Dalyell—viewed an Assembly as a ‘slippery slope’ to independence, and argued instead that socialism and a strong welfare state could only be assured by a Labour UK Government.

However, on the other hand, Labour pro-devolutionists built a case for self-government based on the articulation of three core values—solidarity, socialism and local democracy—as values shared not only by working Scots, but by ‘workers’ across Britain. These concepts were central to Labour’s self-government discourse, as the party sought to promote the idea that Scots shared a collective identity with citizens in the other nations of the UK. Labour focused particularly on ‘workers’, and constructed and maintained a ‘workers’ subject position through the shared values of solidarity, social justice and local democracy. Labour argued that they were primarily a socialist party, and that they were committed to tackling the dichotomy of extreme wealth and poverty. Human dignity, it was argued, was the primary concern for the Labour Party. In addition, Labour presented devolution as a means to bring power closer to the Scottish people, and away from Westminster. Labour argued that by establishing an Assembly, they could deliver ‘socialist’ policies in areas such as health, education and housing, which were presented as key components of the British welfare state. Labour presented devolution as a mechanism to manage national expectations in Scotland, whilst ensuring that Scotland remained within the UK state structure.

However, such articulations were nothing without the principle of solidarity, which was a key principle in Labour’s national discourse. Labour argued that the economic strength and unity of the UK was essential to the economic well-being of Scotland. This was primarily an argument to convince working Scots that although a Scottish Assembly was desirable in order deliver local democracy and socialism in Scotland, such a transformation could only be achieved through the strength and unity of a strong United Kingdom and central economy. However, it is important to note that these arguments were closely linked to arguments about the welfare state by Labour, as they sought to control the meaning of welfare, as part of their wider nation-building discourse. Thus, it was argued that the welfare state could only be

protected by Scotland remaining in the UK, because of the supposed ability of the UK economy to fund strong public services.

This project has also established the idea that nation-building cannot be successful without challenging rival constructions of national identity. In a country where there are rival nationalisms, like in Scotland, this often means that pro-state actors compete with sub-state nationalists (whether that was under administrative devolution, or later under the terms of political devolution in Scotland) to establish a dominant understanding of 'the nation'. Undoubtedly, Labour's nation-building discourse during the 1970s challenged the SNP's attempts at nation-building. In particular, Labour utilised the principles of solidarity and unity in order to challenge the SNP. Labour presented Scottish nationalism and independence as threatening to 'set worker against worker', which would harm the unity of the working class. In other words, Scottish independence was presented as weakening worker solidarity across the UK, in turn rendering the Scottish working class weaker, in an attempt to undermine the legitimacy of a prospective independent Scottish state. This articulation was also designed to challenge the idea that nationality had a bearing on class identity, in the British context. In addition, Labour presented a strong, centrally managed economy as capable of redistributing resources based on need across the UK, again reinforcing the role of the UK state in managing Scotland's economy and in protecting public services.

Therefore, Labour's national discourse during the 1970s was designed to reinforce a sense of collective British identity amongst Scots; to present a united collective front between workers across the UK, in order to reinforce Scotland's place within the Union. The role of the UK state in managing Scotland's economy and public services was reinforced, although pro-devolution Labourites presented self-government as a mechanism to manage national demands, whilst maintaining Scotland's place in the UK. Thus, devolution played the role in reinforcing Labour's nation-building project, which sought to present socialism, local democracy and worker solidarity as shared values, in order to establish and reinforce a socially constructed notion of collective identity in Scotland. That collective identity was maintained by Labour's national discourse, and it was dependent upon the notion that Scottish and British identity were mutually reinforcing.

Those themes in Labour's national discourse continued into the 1980s and 1990s. However, a major development during the 1980s was the electoral dominance of Margaret Thatcher's Conservative Party at elections. This was significant, as Thatcherism largely became the 'other' in Labour's national discourse, thus replacing to some extent the 'nationalism' of the SNP. That is not to say that Labour's national discourse ceased challenging independence. On the contrary, Thatcherism helped to reinforce the idea presented during the 1970s; that devolution could manage national expectations in Scotland but within the Union, and with a Scottish Labour Government making decisions on welfare in Scotland. The policies and discourse of Thatcherism (particularly regarding welfare retrenchment) created an opportunity structure for Labour, enabling them to argue that a Scottish Labour Government could protect particular aspects of the welfare state in Scotland, including housing, health, education, and other public services:

...we would be in control of education, housing, the health services and social work policies, as well as a good deal else' (Labour Party Scottish Council (1981: 1–2).

Scotland would no longer be a 'test bed' for unpopular policies such as the 'Poll Tax', if devolution could be implemented, according to Labour. Thus, Thatcherism enabled welfare to take a Scottish dimension. This project has also portrayed how, during the 1990s, Labour's national discourse presented a line in the sand between what were 'devolved issues', and which issues were to remain reserved to Westminster. It is no coincidence that aspects of the welfare state were devolved to Scotland, but areas such as defence and foreign policy were reserved to Westminster under Labour's 1997 devolution settlement, as Labour had designed its national discourse on strong public services, and socialism.

It is also argued here that within Labour's national discourse, was the presentation of the idea that the more control they had in Scotland, the more able Scotland would be to achieve 'socialism'. Labour presented themselves as the only party that could protect Scotland from Thatcher's policies, which included factory closures, welfare retrenchment, and the erosion of Trade Union influence. The idea that only Labour could protect Scotland from Thatcherism was a constant theme throughout the 1980s. This was an attempt to maintain the idea that Labour's values were Scotland's values, and in doing so, Labour also attempted to challenge any notion

that the SNP and independence could deliver a strong welfare state. Therefore, a Labour version of Union, including devolution, was presented in order to maintain Labour's values as being Scotland's values (socialism, local democracy, solidarity), and to present the Conservatives (particularly Thatcherism) and the SNP as contrary to those values. The role of the UK state was reinforced in Labour's national discourse, but only if Labour were in Government. This discursive strategy ran into difficulties later, however, when the SNP won the 2007 and 2011 Scottish Parliament elections, and a Conservative-led Government was established in 2010.

For the SNP, devolution came to be seen as a 'stepping stone' to independence. Constructing arguments for self-government was and still is the SNP's primary concern, but because of the gradualist-fundamentalist tension within the party through the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, their immediate constitutional goals were sometimes unclear. Sometimes the signifiers 'self-government' or 'an Assembly' were present in SNP discourse in order to address the gradualist-fundamentalist complication, and to promote the idea that Government decisions should be made in Scotland, rather than at Westminster. What this indicates is that arguments for a Government based in Scotland, whether through legislative devolution or otherwise, played into the SNP's wider aim of independence.

At the heart of the SNP's case for self-government was the idea that the Scottish people were a sovereign and equal nation, but with a unique set of interests and requirements. Indeed, this is still at the heart of the SNP's rationale for independence. Of utmost importance for the SNP, therefore, was to construct the case that self-government was the only way that the ambitions and needs of the Scottish nation could be fulfilled. In order to construct that case, the SNP socially constructed through their national discourse a conception of what constituted the Scottish nation, and what made it unique. This was a continuous process, and devolution presented the SNP with new opportunities to argue why a fully independent Scottish state was required, as they presented (perceived) limitations of devolution, whilst challenging UK Government policy on reserved matters, especially in relation to social security, but also in other areas such as defence and foreign policy.

As the analysis in Chapter Four has indicated, the SNP did make attempts to build an understanding of Scotland as a social democratic nation in favour of social justice, freedom and dignity. This social construction of a social democratic, socially just Scottish nation was linked to the sovereign right of 'the people of Scotland' to have their own independent state (just like other small nations). This was an idea extended right throughout the period examined in Chapter Four, indicating discursive continuity in the SNP's national discourse, pre-devolution. It was argued that political power was necessary to enable Scots to choose their preferred 'social and economic priorities', thus presenting the idea that the 'people of Scotland' had their own, unique priorities, in an attempt to socially construct a collective identity in Scotland. Those priorities, according to the SNP, were the protection of public services and the signifier 'social justice' was also used in the SNP's national discourse.

During the devolution referendum campaign in 1979, for example, the SNP attempted to build a case for an Assembly based upon arguments about state welfare, and Scottish control over certain components of the welfare state in Scotland. It was argued that control over education, housing, health policy and welfare benefits should be exercised by a Scottish Government, which was voted for by the 'people of Scotland', and without influence from the other nations in the UK. This argument reinforced the idea that the Scottish electorate voted differently to the rest of the UK, because the 'people of Scotland' had a unique and therefore different set of interests. On one hand, Labour's and the SNP's national discourses were quite similar during the 1970s, as they both presented self-government as a mechanism to have control in Scotland over parts of the welfare state. However, slight nuances in their respective discourses provide an insight into the differences in the nation-building strategies of each party, as Labour sought to reassert the legitimacy of the UK state in Scotland, whereas the SNP sought to challenge it. This indicates the importance of the analysis undertaken in this study. Discourse analysis helps to reveal slight nuances in national discourses in order to reveal more about their 'true' nature and to provide a fresh understanding of them.

Indeed, the Westminster party-political system bore the brunt of the SNP's attacks on the Union, as they sought to undermine the role of the UK state in decision-making in Scotland. The SNP continued in its social democratic approach to the issue of self-government by presenting Westminster not only as remote, but also as

unsympathetic. The party argued that the role of the UK state in Scotland was to produce high unemployment and a high cost of living, as well as poorer social conditions than the South-East of England. Furthermore, Scotland was presented as being at the 'mercy of others', which further reinforced the argument that a 'wealthy' and 'remote' Westminster elite was making unfair and undemocratic decisions about Scotland, whilst favouring the South East of England. Implicit in that argument was that English MPs dominated at Westminster, meaning less representation from Scotland on decisions that affected Scotland.

Thus, whilst the SNP presented Scotland as a social democratic and socially just country, Westminster was presented as an antagonism. And, indeed, the SNP did explicitly raise the complaint that English MPs dominated the much smaller number of Scottish MPs:

Whichever English party wins the election, regional aid will be redirected to the Midlands of England, to Scotland's disadvantage. (Wilson, 1983a: 1).

Quite explicitly, Gordon Wilson presented Scotland as being in direct competition with English regions for resources, in an attempt to undermine the legitimacy of the UK state in protecting the welfare state in Scotland.

Thatcherism gave fresh impetus to the SNP's campaign for self-government, after the initial disappointment post-referendum, and a period of instability for the party. Thatcherism, including its policies and discourse, enabled the SNP to present a Thatcher vs Scotland conflict, as they argued that the Conservatives disliked Scotland (or were uninterested in addressing Scotland's 'unique' set of requirements and interests), and sought to punish poor and underprivileged Scots. The SNP also used the dominance of the Conservatives from the 1980s to the mid-1990s to present Labour as weak, and as unable to stand up for Scotland's 'unique' interests and requirements. The SNP branded Labour the 'feeble fifty'—a reference to the fifty MPs that Labour had after the 1987 General Election—to present the idea that no matter who Scots voted for, they would either get a party that could not stand up to the Conservatives, or a Government that did not care about Scottish interests. This was, once again, an attempt to undermine the legitimacy of the UK state in Scotland, and it was represented in the SNP's national discourse by references to protecting the welfare and delivering social justice.

When Alex Salmond became SNP leader in 1990, he manoeuvred the party towards the position that devolution was a stepping stone towards independence. Arguments about controlling parts of the welfare state were central to the SNP's devolution campaign, as too were arguments about delivering social justice, fairness and equality. These ideas were presented together in the SNP's national discourse, to present self-government, initially in the form of devolution, as better than the alternative: a full role for the UK state in administering the welfare state in Scotland.

### **1999–2007: Labour, the SNP and devolution: a new discursive horizon**

The establishment of the Scottish Parliament presented new opportunities and challenges to Labour and the SNP, and this is indicated during the 1999–2007 period, when Labour led two consecutive coalition administrations in Scotland. The period began for Labour with an element of discursive continuity, in the sense that the party sought to reinforce the idea that it was a social democratic party, motivated by concerns about social justice. However, Chapter 5 has indicated that Labour in Scotland designed its social justice strategy specifically to challenge the SNP: the party identified as Labour's main opposition in Scotland now that a Scottish Parliament had been established and its goal of independence.

Given the electoral weakness of the Conservatives in Scotland by this point, Labour and the SNP competed directly for control of the Scottish Parliament, and issues around social justice and state welfare took centre stage, especially now that elements of the welfare state were to be devolved to the Scottish Parliament. There was a battle between the SNP and Labour, as they both referenced the values of protecting the welfare and delivering social justice in their national discourses, to dominate the meaning of welfare, and to reinforce or subvert the role of the UK state and a prospective independent Scottish state in protecting the welfare state. At the same time, the parties were competing with one another over the same voter base.

Labour attempted to challenge the notion that the SNP was a party that supported social justice, as they claimed to do. Labour presented themselves as the true party of social justice, whilst presenting the SNP as narrow 'nationalists', who put millionaires' needs ahead of the needs of the rest of Scottish society. Indeed, this argument had been used in the past by Labour, in order to challenge the SNP's nation-building project, which was based on the idea that independence would fulfil

Scotland's social democratic tendencies, and protect the Scottish welfare state. The party-political aspect accentuated this, as Labour and the SNP were competing for the same voters in Scottish Parliament elections. In addition, Labour presented the Labour UK Government as already having delivered its promises on the welfare state and social justice in Scotland, including extra funds for hospitals and schools, and the introduction of minimum wage legislation. Labour, therefore, continued to build and reinforce the 'working Scot' and 'health workers' subject positions. Their national discourse reasserted the legitimacy of the UK state in delivering progressive public and social policy in order to subvert independence and highlight the relevance of Scotland's place in the Union.

The Labour-led Scottish administration built the case that devolution within the UK delivered for Scotland. Labour's national discourse referenced perceived achievements made by the Scottish administration, in relation to public services and the welfare state, whilst challenging the notion that the SNP was fit for Government or that independence was a desirable constitutional option. This necessitated both positive and negative constructions here. On the positive side, Labour sought to maintain the idea that it was a party of welfare and social justice, and that it was the party responsible for defeating the Conservatives in 1997. In addition, Labour presented the idea that Scotland's fortunes were improving under a Labour administration in Scotland, but that they required more time to 're-build' Scotland after nearly two decades of Conservative Government. This was only possible under Labour and within the Union, it was argued.

On the negative side, one of Labour's main strategies in administration was to present an independent Scotland as being over-reliant on oil-tax revenues, which would result in funding gaps for Scotland's public services. Indeed, this argument would become a regular theme in Labour's challenge to the SNP's nation-building strategy. For example, Labour used precisely the same argument during the independence referendum campaign. Such an argument played into Labour's strategy of presenting the SNP as untrustworthy; and lacking in both economic credibility, and in its commitment to public services and social justice. In short, independence was presented as disastrous for Scotland, and it was argued that independence would disrupt Labour's attempts to rebuild Scotland's economy, public services, and welfare state after Thatcherism.

For the SNP, there were two main goals after the devolution referendum in 1997: to win the 1999 Scottish Parliament election, and to build a case for independence, within the Parliament. During the first two terms of the Scottish Parliament, the SNP presented a dual strategy. They attempted to show how they could do a better job of protecting and investing in public services than Labour in Scotland, and they presented independence as the next step from devolution by highlighting the perceived limitations of devolution, thus challenging the UK state. This was an extension of the SNP's pre-devolution national discourse, in the sense independence was always been presented by the SNP as a means to challenge and block Westminster's influence on Scottish matters, one way or another.

In terms of the SNP's strategy for Government, and then when in opposition, the party largely focused on areas of the welfare state that had been devolved including public services—particularly health, education, and housing. These policy areas were the focus of the SNP's 'Penny for Scotland' strategy, as discussed in Chapter 5, which sought to present the SNP as the only party that would invest in and protect public services, arguing that Labour had failed in that regard since 1997, and that Scottish Labour would also fail if elected as the largest party in 1999. This was an attempt to challenge Labour's credibility as an aspiring party of Government in Scotland, and as unable to protect and invest in the Scottish welfare state. The idea behind this strategy was to challenge Labour for the same voters, but also to prepare the ground for independence. Although the 'Penny for Scotland' strategy failed to convince voters that the SNP were ready to govern in Scotland, it helped to establish the idea that they were a social democratic party in the minds of the electorate. Additionally, in opposition, the SNP presented the idea that the Scottish Parliament must have fiscal autonomy in order to strengthen Scotland's economy and thus be able to invest further in public services. This was a direct challenge to the role of the UK Government in managing Scotland's economy.

In opposition to the Labour-led Scottish administration, and on the negative side of the SNP's national discourse 1999–2007, the party continued to attack Labour's record on public services, and thus their ability to protect the welfare state in Scotland. The SNP wanted to present Labour as incompetent in managing the welfare state in Scotland, in order to present themselves as a credible alternative. Simultaneously, the SNP highlighted the perceived limitations of devolution, arguing

that the powers of the Scottish Parliament were not comprehensive enough, especially in relation to the economy.

Thus, the nation-building strategy of the SNP 1999–2007 was to present Labour and devolution as incapable of protecting the Scottish welfare state and delivering for Scotland. The SNP offered an alternative: an SNP Government and additional powers for the Scottish Parliament. The SNP argued that it could deliver public services that ‘Scotland can be proud of’ (Salmond, 2007), thus reinforcing the idea that the SNP sought to challenge Labour for the same voters. On the other hand, the SNP challenged Labour’s record in Government, and argued that more powers were needed to deliver for ‘the people of Scotland’. Thus, during the 2007 Scottish Parliament election, the SNP presented voters with a choice between themselves, who were ambitious about Scotland’s future, and Labour who were not. In short, the SNP’s national discourse presented [and reinforced] the argument that they were ‘Scotland’s Party’.

Thus, the 2007–2011 period was characterised by a battle between Labour and the SNP, as they sought to dominate the meaning of welfare, as part of their nation-building strategies, but also because they were competing with one another for the same voter base. That voter base was important, because their support was required by Labour and the SNP to reinforce their cases for the Union and independence, respectively.

### **2007–2011: Role reversal; opportunities and challenges**

After the SNP formed a minority Scottish administration in 2007, Labour’s strategy as the main opposition party was to discredit the SNP’s record. Labour’s main strategy for doing so was to present the SNP administration as breaking its promises on public services (the fact that they did this only 100 days into the SNP administration accentuates this point), which was presented as evidence of the SNP caught ‘lying’. This strategy not only had the intention of discrediting the SNP as an entity, but it also had the more specific intention to challenge the SNP’s claims that it could protect and invest in Scottish public services, and protect the most vulnerable in society. Labour challenged the SNP in this way by focusing on a range of welfare issues including funding for children with disabilities, funding for nursery children, the construction of schools, and funding for education.

Thus, Labour presented the SNP as having broken promises on welfare, and that they would challenge their record, to 'hold the SNP to account'. In fact, this strategy was central in Labour's attempt to win back support after its 2007 election defeat, as Wendy Alexander indicated at the party's Spring Conference in 2008:

I will lead by exposing the dishonesty and incompetence of the SNP administration (Alexander, 2008).

Under Wendy Alexander, Labour even went as far as to present the SNP as a party of cuts, especially on education, in an effort to win back support and to contest the SNP's ability to protect the welfare state.

Labour, under the leadership of both Wendy Alexander and Iain Gray in Scotland (and Gordon Brown at Westminster), put particular emphasis on reasserting Scotland's place within the UK, in an effort to legitimise the UK state in Scotland, and to challenge the SNP's independence narrative. There is continuity in Labour's national discourse, in that regard. Wendy Alexander argued that no political party could reasonably claim to be supportive of leftist goals whilst supporting 'nationalism', which in the Scottish context, was attached to independence by Labour and other pro-Union parties. She established a political frontier, as she presented the political debate in Scotland as 'socialism' against 'nationalism'. This was an argument that aimed to challenge the SNP once again, and its claims that it was a social democratic party, whilst also attempting to maintain the idea that Labour was a party that held 'socialist' principles. This strategy is quite similar to Labour's strategy during the 1970s, for example, as it challenged the notion that Scottish nationalism and class ideology were mutually supportive.

In supplementing that articulation, Labour presented the SNP and its goal of independence as standing for rich Scots, ahead of the interests of working people across the UK. Again, this element of Labour strategy was reproduced over time to challenge any notion that the SNP represented working Scots, indicating continuity in Labour's national discourse. Labour's national discourse was predominantly negative in opposition from 2007–2011, and it was designed to challenge the SNP, independence, and any notion that either could protect the welfare state. This was an attempt to win back electoral support from the SNP. After the Conservative-led Government was elected in 2010, Labour's national discourse indicates that the

party tried to draw inspiration from its time in opposition to the Conservatives during the 1990s, especially in the lead-up to the 2011 Scottish Parliament election, by arguing that a strong Labour Scottish Government could protect Scotland from Conservative Party policy. This was an intriguing development and its examination here supplements the originality of this thesis.

As for the SNP, they continued to build the case for more powers in Scotland, whether through devolution or independence. The SNP argued that the powers available to the Scottish Parliament were limited, but now did so from within Government. The SNP undermined the legitimacy of the UK state in managing Scotland's economy, arguing that other small, independent nations were better off because they had full control over their economies. In addition, the SNP attempted to use the devolved state apparatus to design public and social policy that could reinforce a sense of collective Scottish identity, as the social policy literature review established, in Chapter 3. The SNP's national discourse was essential in enabling them to do this. The party employed a discourse of 'universalism', supported by policies such as the removal of tuition fees for Scottish University students, and the removal of prescription charges. This enabled the SNP to establish and reinforce the idea that Scotland's interests and values were 'unique', and that they were different to the values of the UK state. Devolution gave the SNP the opportunity to reinforce collective identity, whilst challenging the role of the UK state.

This idea extended to the economy. The SNP presented an independent Scottish economy as a mechanism to deliver a fairer and more equal society. The SNP's national discourse compared Scotland's economy to that of other small, European nations, with similar sized populations, and with similar demographics. Norway, in particular, was highlighted as an example that an independent Scotland could follow (because both Norway and Scotland held significant oil reserves). Greater prosperity through independence, it was argued, would lead to a better society. Indeed, to compare Scotland to other small European nations was a strategy used before by the SNP (see Chapter Four), but the SNP used the strategy again during the rise of the 'Celtic Tiger' in the early 2000s, and then in comparison with oil rich Norway, to argue that small (oil-rich) European nations can be successful with economic independence.

These arguments related to independence, but also ‘fiscal autonomy’ and greater fiscal powers for the Scottish Parliament. Thus, a wider picture has emerged. The SNP’s national discourse sought to present a vision of an independent Scotland, which was based on strong public services; a strong and publicly owned NHS; and a commitment to universal goods such as free university education, which benefitted the middle class as well as the working class. However, this vision was underpinned in SNP discourse by arguments for full independence of the Scottish economy, or fiscal autonomy within the Scottish Parliament as a step towards independence.

With the SNP now in Government in Scotland, the UK state was once again presented as holding Scotland back. Again, the SNP focused on the economic implications of the Union, and the affect that had on public services and social justice. The UK Government’s economic strategy was presented as hampering growth, which in turn limited the ability of the SNP administration to invest in public services. Such a strategy was later to develop into a specific anti-austerity approach during the independence referendum. This ‘anti-cuts’ or ‘anti-austerity’ strategy was made possible by the ‘austerity programme’ or ‘deficit reduction programme’ of the UK Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition Government, indicating that the SNP sought to offer voters an alternative to ‘austerity’ for strategic purposes. An anti-austerity approach was linked to the protection of the Scottish NHS, and of public services.

### **2011–2014: The independence referendum and discursive continuity**

During the independence referendum campaign, there was a great degree of discursive continuity from both Labour and the SNP. For Labour, the strategy was to present a vote in favour of the Union as a vote to protect public services, the NHS, the poor and most vulnerable Scots, and to deliver social justice. Underpinning that approach in Labour’s national discourse was the concept of ‘solidarity’, and the idea that strong public services and social justice could only be delivered in Scotland through the UK state—and this was evident through the use of signifiers such as ‘pooling and sharing resources’. Labour attempted to consolidate its current and traditional support into a vote for the Union, but they also tried to appeal to ‘left-minded’ undecided voters. As with previous periods, this pitted Labour against the SNP. It is argued here that Labour was also mindful of the upcoming UK and

Scottish Parliament elections, and wanted to present the idea that they, as a party, could protect the welfare state in Scotland, either through devolution or in Government in London.

Given that Labour's version of 'Union' was under threat during the independence referendum, they often took a defensive position in their national discourse, whilst attacking the SNP's vision of independence and the SNP itself (and, by extension, the Scottish Government), particularly SNP leader and First Minister Alex Salmond. Labour's central challenge to independence was based around argument that an independent Scotland would be too reliant on oil, which would result in a fiscal 'black hole' in the Scottish Government's budget and result in either more borrowing or cuts to public services. In short, Labour argued that the SNP could not be trusted on economic issues, in an attempt to delegitimise the idea of an independent Scottish economy. The intense scrutiny of the Scottish Government's proposals for a currency Union between an independent Scotland and the remainder of the UK state was part of Labour's strategy to present the SNP as economically incompetent.

In addition, the SNP and Alex Salmond were presented as untrustworthy, and as having an 'unhealthy obsession' with independence, which took time and resources away from improving public services and improving the lives of the most vulnerable in society, including children and the elderly. This was signified by the term 'Scotland on pause'. Thus, Labour challenged the SNP's economic case for independence, and they did so to dismantle the SNP's economic credibility, as well as to present the idea that public services would suffer from under-investment in an independent Scotland. This highlights the idea that central to Labour's national discourse was presenting independence as leading to the death of the Scottish welfare state.

When building a positive case for the Union, Labour's national discourse focused mainly on the ideas of 'pooling and sharing' resources across the UK, and of promoting shared UK institutions, which had arguments about state welfare and public services at their heart. With regard to 'pooling and sharing', Labour argued that essential institutions such as the NHS, public services, and pensions would all be protected by the economic strength and unity of the UK, which would provide Scotland with the appropriate funding to maintain and improve public services (it was presented that this relationship already existed), as well as protect personal finance

already delivered through the UK state, particularly pensions. In doing so, Labour focused again on workers, public health professionals, and pensioners by creating subject positions, in an attempt to reinforce support within those sections of Scottish society.

In addition, by presenting the NHS and the welfare state alongside other British institutions, such as the British role in World War Two, the creation of the Bank of England, and the creation of the BBC as shared endeavours between Scotland and the other nations of the UK, Labour sought to reinforce the idea that all four UK nations contributed to the UK state in a manner that made Great Britain, 'great'. Therefore, a sense of 'Britishness' was reinforced by the ideas that working people across the UK could stand together to deliver a strong welfare state through a strong, shared economy, and that the welfare state, as well as other British institutions, had only been made possible by the Union between all nations that comprised the UK.

For the SNP, the referendum campaign was an opportunity to reinforce the pro-independence arguments of the past, which related to representation; and democratic control and accountability. On the former, this mostly came down to the argument that the people who best represented Scotland were those who lived and worked in Scotland, as opposed to decisions being made by political parties that Scotland did not vote for. The 2010 General Election result, where the Conservatives only took one Scottish seat, yet formed a Conservative-led Government, was often referenced in SNP national discourse, to convey the idea that Scotland did not get the Governments that it voted for in UK elections. Within the context of the independence referendum, this argument was designed to resonate with voters who opposed the policies and ideology of the Conservative Party.

In addition, the SNP argued that independence would make the Scottish Parliament and Government more accountable to the Scottish people, as it was solely the Scottish people who would elect it. The concept of the sovereignty of 'the Scottish people' was again presented by the SNP, as it had been done consistently over consecutive decades, and it was linked to a potential Scottish constitution, to enshrine the rights and values of the 'people of Scotland'. The SNP presented the idea that the 'people of Scotland' had the right to choose their own form of

Government (as opposed to voting for ‘anyone but the Tories’, and still getting a Conservative Government), and that the ‘Scottish people’ shared values that were unique to Scotland. The SNP challenged the notion that the UK state had legitimacy to make decisions about Scottish issues, whilst presenting Scotland as having a unique set of interests and values.

The SNP supplemented that argument by referencing ‘social justice’, ‘fairness’ and strong public services in their national discourse. With a Conservative-led Government in power in London, introducing unpopular policies such as the ‘Bedroom Tax’ and benefit sanctions (due to missed appointments at job centres, for example), the SNP saw an opportunity to outmanoeuvre Labour, which voted in favour of Conservative policies such as capping welfare benefit payments, and introducing £30 billion more of ‘efficiency savings’ or ‘cuts’. In doing so, the SNP hoped to attract Labour supporters to independence.

By focusing on social justice, fairness and public services in its national discourse, the SNP also hoped to gain support for independence from left-leaning Scots. Indeed, the Scottish Greens and campaigns like Radical Independence similarly argued for independence based on the articulated shared values of social justice and fairness. Nicola Sturgeon, for example, constructed the argument that the only way to guarantee social justice was to be in control of social justice, and that delivering social justice in Scotland therefore necessitated independence. The SNP also argued for the protection of the Scottish NHS from privatisation, and within the context of the SNP’s national discourse, that represented an attempt to present the idea of a strong, publicly financed NHS, as a value unique to Scotland. At the same time, the SNP argued that England’s NHS was being privatised. Thus the SNP presented the idea that only independence could ensure the protection of the NHS in Scotland. This became a major argument for the SNP during the referendum—especially towards its climax—as they sought to present differences between the roles of the UK state and an independent Scottish state in protecting the NHS, but more widely, the Scottish welfare state. In addition to arguments around state welfare and social justice, the SNP presented Scotland as being rich in natural resources, and they linked that to the idea that a strong welfare state was only possible in an independent Scotland.

## **Concluding remarks**

By examining a trajectory of the national discourses of Labour and the SNP, this study has traced the development of nation-building over a period of nearly 50 years. A nation-building battle between Labour and the SNP has been uncovered, and the nature of that battle has been examined in extensive detail. Labour and the SNP based their nation-building strategies on arguments around welfare and social justice, and they used their national discourses to construct narratives about which constitutional options were better for Scotland.

This thesis has portrayed how, over time, the SNP outmanoeuvred Labour on the left of Scottish politics, and how their 'fresh' and 'appealing' social democratic discourse supplemented their arguments for independence based on representation and the democratic right of nations to have independent statehood. Labour used its national discourse to challenge the nationalism of the SNP and to legitimise the role of the UK state in Scotland, and this was a consistent theme over the course of contemporary Scottish politics. Arguments about self-government were part of that strategy. However, Labour also argued for self-government during consecutive Conservative Governments (1979–1997), as a means to control aspects of the welfare state in Scotland, and to maintain its image as a party concerned with protecting the Scottish welfare state.

Devolution presented new opportunities and challenges, as Labour and the SNP grappled over devolved aspects of the welfare state in order to control the meaning of 'welfare' Scotland. They referenced welfare and social justice in their national discourses, in order to legitimise the role of the UK state in Scotland, and to build consent for the idea of an independent Scottish state, respectively. By doing so, the parties battled to reinforce their socially constructed notions of collective identity in Scotland.

Labour argued that the welfare state could only be protected within the UK state structure (and later, through devolution within the UK), and this notion depended on the articulation of unity and solidarity across the UK. The SNP argued that support for a strong welfare state was an inherently Scottish pursuit, and that Scotland was therefore unique within the context of British politics.

The national discourses of Labour and the SNP were, in several respects, characterised by discursive continuity, from the late 1960s until the 2014 independence referendum. The parties continuously sought to supplement and reinforce their attempts to socially construct collective identity in Scotland, and arguments about welfare and putative shared values, such as social justice, were central to that. This reinforces the idea that nationalism and nation-building are remarkably consistent. However, nationalism is opportunistic. This case study has portrayed how major political events in Scotland have presented new challenges and opportunities to two different, but in many respects similar Scottish nation-building strategies, and how political discourse has been used by Labour and the SNP in their attempts to manage those challenges and to capitalise on potential opportunities.

Moreover, this thesis has mapped out an ideological battle, where one party, Labour, is fighting for its electoral survival in Scotland, and must directly compete with another political party, the SNP, which has supplanted it to become the dominant party in Scotland. That represents a complete reversal of the situation when the thesis period begins in the late 1960s. It was an intriguing and fascinating competition between the two parties, who battled one another over the same symbols that represent the essence of modern politics, what democracy is, who 'the people' are, which 'nation' is more important, the meaning of 'welfare' and 'social justice', and our understanding of 'progress'. When all of this is examined 'under the microscope', and when discourses are treated as granular objects<sup>7</sup>, one can uncover a trajectory that can be traced back, to account for slow change over time, vis-à-vis changes in the party political system, and the rise and fall of political hegemony. This thesis has, therefore, investigated the construction of meaning and what that reveals about a complex political reality, through an examination of competing discourses, which have been fighting over the same political terrain for the control of symbols like 'welfare', 'fairness', 'social justice' and 'the nation' in order to establish a dominant understanding of 'Scotland'.

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<sup>7</sup> Take, for example, my analysis of 'Scotland on pause' and 'pooling and sharing resources' as discursive concepts in chapter 7.

## Ideas for further research

Discourse analysis helps to examine and uncover the meaning of political discourse, within the context of complex political terrains, trajectories and narratives. It is, therefore, a useful tool for studying ideology, including nationalism. In that regard, the methodology here can be applied to other topics, such as the political discourses of rival political parties in areas such as Catalonia or Quebec. The methodology could also be used to examine the political discourses of other political parties, such as the Scottish Conservatives or the Scottish Liberal Democrats, or it could be applied to a study focusing specifically on, for example, economic arguments during the 2014 independence referendum campaign, and the competing discourses of Yes Scotland and Better Together. This could be extended to, or even compared with, other referendums, including the referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union, in 2016.

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<sup>i</sup> Speech by Jim Farlie, SNP VC for policy, Wednesday 13 May 1981, 'SNP warn of 'poverty headache' and speech by SNP social services spokesman Ron Wyllie at an SNP party meeting in Ayr, calling for STUC to have a special conference to discuss health service and future cuts, Friday 15 July 1983, 'SNP call for health conference'.

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