

The UK and the European Union: Dimensions of Sovereignty and the Problem of Eurosceptic Britishness

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ABSTRACT

Sovereignty is at the core of the UK's chronically contentious relationship with, and within, the European Union (EU). In order for EU membership to be an expression rather than an erosion of British sovereignty governments must influence the direction of European policy and the level of UK involvement. Labour has, it is argued, established an effective accommodation between continued membership of the European Union and British parliamentary sovereignty understood as the continued efficacy of executive power. Nevertheless, this policy has lacked a wider legitimacy and in key respects Euroscepticism has been reasserted by the Labour leadership. Consequently, when viewed from the perspective of popular sovereignty, the nation and the people, the UK's relationship to the European Union remains highly contested and unresolved. It is this aspect of sovereignty that is central to the Conservative Party's continued Euroscepticism. In the political mainstream, it is argued that Eurosceptic Britishness has become politically dominant however this is complicated by the UK's multi-nationalism and the rise of pro-Europeanism in separatist and regional politics. Alongside this it is proposed that British conceptions of economic sovereignty are in flux following economic crisis, contributing to an overall uncertainty in the UK's European trajectory.

THE DIRECTION of recent British politics on Europe was set in September 1992 when the UK was unceremoniously forced out of the Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM). The pro-Europeans' case that the EU, rather than America or the Commonwealth, was where post-imperial Britain belonged had always depended more on economic arguments than anything else. Outside of the ERM, the British economy entered a long boom on the back of cuts in interest rates, a devalued currency and with membership of the Euro ruled out for the foreseeable future. Ironically, this was overseen by the pro-European Ken Clarke at the Treasury and coincided with the gradual withdrawal and marginalisation of Tory pro-Europeans from the centre of British politics.

The civil war that erupted inside the Conservative Party was less about pro and anti-Europeanism than a conflict between hard and

soft(er) Eurosceptics. Hard Eurosceptics, such as Bill Cash, believed that the Delors Commission supported by France and Germany was pursuing full economic and political Union and that the only reasonable stance for a British government to take was outright opposition. They were not appeased by Major's softer Eurosceptic policy with its emphasis on cautious engagement but hostility to federalism in the pursuit of a flexible, globalised Europe. The virulence of Euroscepticism on the right of the Conservative Party in the context of a small parliamentary majority put paid even to Major's guarded European policy. The final days of his government were characterised by intransigence in European negotiations and non-cooperation over the beef crisis. The Major years then firmly established the UK as a Eurosceptic state.²

The election of New Labour implied a new start in the UK's relations with the European Union. Blair appeared comfortable expressing his pro-Europeanism most clearly evident in his 1998 speech to the French National Assembly. This proved to be more than a change of style when the government reversed the Conservative opt out on the Social Chapter and negotiated the Amsterdam Treaty. Furthermore, the 1998 St Malo Declaration signed by the UK and France laid the basis for the common European Security and Defence Policy. Yet Labour has also managed Europe in ways that are considered to be consistent with established ideas of the national interest. They pursued economic liberalism, most notably leading on the Lisbon Agenda which put an end to any possibility of a more interventionist European employment strategy. Controversially, Blair aligned himself with European leaders on the right, such as Berlusconi in Italy and Aznar in Spain, alongside the new member states in central Europe that were viewed as more favourable to the Anglo-Saxon model of capitalism. This was seen to give rise to a divided Europe that became particularly evident over Iraq when the UK led a coalition of "new Europe" in support of the US invasion of Iraq in opposition to a "core Europe"³ that continued to defend a distinctively European approach to global affairs.

British cooperation in European negotiations has been conditional on agreeing opt outs, and 'red lines' were publicised before negotiations were entered in to. On the crucial matter of the Euro, Labour had already committed itself to holding a referendum on the issue while Gordon Brown, as Chancellor, put forward five economic tests that would have to be passed if the government was to support entry. Any broader commitment to monetary union as a political and economic good was firmly subordinated to the national economic interest based on tests that for some critics remained rather arbitrary. Indeed Brown did not enthuse about Europe to the same extent as Blair, being prepared to lecture Europeans on the superiority of British economic policy. As Prime Minister, his late arrival for the signing of the Lisbon Treaty was viewed as symbolic of his general attitude to the EU.

Nevertheless, in contrast to Conservative governments of the 1980s and 1990s, Labour's relationship to the EU has not been characterised by British isolationism and detachment. Often its strategic objectives have been shared by other member states and it established and consolidated strong working alliances within the Union. Notably, in the pursuit of flexible and globalised markets, Labour's approach has been in line with the general direction of European policy.

In her evaluation of Labour's record on Europe, Smith notes that despite being one of the most positive UK governments on Europe in recent history, little effort was made to win over the British people.⁴ Similarly, Bulmer argues that while Labour's 'utilitarian supranationalism' successfully reconciled the national interest with European policy, it avoided garnering public support for this strategy.⁵ Indeed, it has actively sought to reduce the electoral salience of the issue. This can be viewed as part of a wider paradox in that 'while governance becomes multi-level, and multi-dimensional, the elements of democratic representation, party loyalty and core political loyalty remain deeply rooted in the traditional institutions of the nation state'.⁶ For a number of authors it is the issue of British national sovereignty that is the key to understanding the problematic aspects of the UK's relationship with the European Union.⁷ According to David Baker, it 'remains the most complex and most contentious aspect' of this relationship and goes 'to the heart of the debate in Britain'.⁸ This article aims to address directly the complexity of UK sovereignty in relation to the European issue which at present remains somewhat under-developed.

While sovereignty may have multiple meanings, it is possible to understand it along three lines which help to clarify its implications for UK/EU relations. First, is the idea of sovereignty as a political principle which in the UK is understood as parliamentary sovereignty but which includes important elements of monarchical sovereignty. The most important contemporary characteristic of parliamentary sovereignty is centralised executive power and its efficacy. Nevertheless, parliamentary sovereignty in itself is an insufficient basis for political authority and is increasingly dependent upon, and should be kept analytically separate from, the popular legitimation of power. The second dimension is then that of popular sovereignty with its democratic connotations of rule by the people as citizens usually, but not only, within a national political community. Through the extension of citizenship rights the demands for greater popular sovereignty have been grafted on to parliamentary sovereignty without necessarily challenging its overall supremacy. However, the explicit incorporation of political nationalism, often taking the form of overt populism, has become a significant feature of UK political elite discourses and strategies in the face of legitimacy deficits. A third dimension is that of economic sovereignty which is understood here in terms of the separation of public power from private property and the market. This is a contested

boundary characterised by disputes over legal regulation, state intervention and the commodification of everyday life. While analytically distinct, both parliamentary and popular sovereignty have been employed in the UK context to maintain and contest this boundary.

The particular way in which these three dimensions of sovereignty have been institutionalised within the UK determines relations with, and within, the EU in ways that reproduce key tensions in that relationship. Of these three, it is argued that the dilemmas of locating and constructing popular sovereignty in a multi-national state are central. Thus, the UK's relationship to Europe should be situated in contemporary debates surrounding national political identity. Here it is proposed that the inclusion and exclusion of 'Europe' within these debates has become a key component of a wider politics of Britishness.

Parliamentary sovereignty, interdependence and constitutional flexibility

The formation of the UK under English supremacy witnessed the subordination of other institutions to the sovereignty of the Westminster parliament.⁹ This was adapted to the demands for democratic representation and the establishment of a mass political party system. It was an incremental process in which the principle of parliamentary sovereignty was continuous with monarchical sovereignty (Crown in Parliament), conferring the power and authority of the monarch on to the executive within a system of single party majority rule. The implication of these principles of sovereignty has been a system in which political power is considered to be comparatively centralised. The monarchical powers of the executive and the convention that one parliament cannot bind another gives a government considerable power to exercise its authority. Nevertheless, this has been somewhat paradoxical as it did not give rise to an organised unitary state but to a system of flexible arrangements which granted considerable autonomy to other territorial units whether the domestic 'nations' or overseas territories and colonies. What was notable about the British Empire and, is still somewhat evident with devolution, are the different statuses that are accorded to the various constituent parts. As Gamble notes, the British state's 'institutional arrangements have in practice permitted varying degrees of autonomy and dispersal of power, whereas its formal constitutional doctrines have always asserted the unqualified supremacy of the executive'.¹⁰ However, this constitutional flexibility may only be stretched so far and examples from history, such as the American and Irish claims to independence, suggest that there are limits.

In the case of Europe, some of the fiercest objections to UK entry into the Common Market came from those who regarded it as an attack on the British principle of parliamentary sovereignty. It enabled politicians on the right and the left, most notably Enoch Powell and

Tony Benn, to find common ground and argue against membership in the 1975 referendum. Yet as a political principle the idea of core British sovereignty has had to adapt to the realities of the modern world and has been radically reformed since the Second World War. In varying degrees, it has been replaced by the idea of interdependence and British governments have been key players in institutions such as the UN and NATO. However, what remains significant about the European Union is the extent to which it has emerged as a supranational legal and political order within which nation-state power is exercised but constrained within a set of confederal institutional arrangements.

That Labour have normalised everyday political relations within the European Union is a testament to their constitutional reformism and reappraisal of the role of government in the context of social and economic change. Antony Giddens' Third Way philosophy provided an important intellectual rationale for the New Labour project that was rooted in an analysis of globalisation.¹¹ A central claim of the Third Way was that the nation-state alone could not meet the challenges of an interdependent world and must embrace the complexity of global governance. Either at home or abroad, whether it is devolution or climate change, Labour has pursued proactive agendas for new forms of governance and institutional reform. What this adds up to is a significant modernisation of the principle and practice of UK national sovereignty. Undoubtedly, this has been essential for embedding the UK into the post-Maastricht European Union, something the Conservatives were simply not placed to do, and on a range of issues such as the environment and asylum and immigration they can be seen to have embraced an effective pooling of sovereignty that the EU offers.

There is therefore a sense in which European decision making has been made manageable by Labour in power in ways that are consistent with the pursuit and acceptance of increased interdependence and inter-governmentalism in world affairs. For Blair sovereignty was not articulated as a sacrosanct principle located in British political traditions and institutions but 'the power to maximize our national strength' and is 'deployed for national advantage'.¹² In the case of Europe, the implications of this are that British governments have eschewed the European ideal in favour of an approach that prioritises the national interest. As Geddes has shown in relation to European asylum and immigration policy, the aim here is to have the 'best of both worlds' and involves opting into those European rules that are considered to enable the achievement of key domestic policy goals.¹³ So the UK opted out of the free movement, asylum and migration provisions of the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997) and remains outside of Schengen but has opted into half of the European measures agreed between 1999 and 2004. This has enabled the UK to address issues of asylum and irregular migration through European cooperation that

increases immigration controls within other European states. In effect this means the externalisation of territorial borders without necessarily compromising national control over internal borders. In this example, sovereignty is not a zero-sum game but is maximised through the differential and conditional application of European rules. Of course in some areas of policy making the UK is not in a position to be so selective about what it can and cannot opt into, however often these are less contentious areas such as the single market where the liberalisation of markets has been firmly in line with domestic policy. In terms of the latter, the points of contention emerge over the EU's regulation of employment conditions such as the UK's recent resistance to ending the voluntary opt out of the working time directive.

Clearly, the principle of opt outs and 'red lines' in European negotiations has become enshrined as the British way of dealing with the EU enabling continued engagement conditional on the basis that it is in line with domestic policy agendas. The issue is therefore not whether sovereignty is compromised by interdependence but how. It is crucially linked to the expression and efficacy of executive power, ensuring that European decisions are in line with a government's domestically mandated policy agenda implies that British parliamentary sovereignty remains intact. The problem, however, is the increased complexity of governance in the context of regional and global integration that ties the UK into systems of rule making and application that cannot be aligned with executive power because they are concerned with holding executives to account, as in the example of the European Court of Justice. As the Eurosceptic right has consistently argued, and which is evident in the Conservative's position that they will never adopt the Euro, there is a point at which British sovereignty may be chronically compromised by European integration. There is a clear contradiction at work here in that the shift towards an idea of sovereignty as expressed through interdependence both reinforces and challenges executive power as the reservoir of sovereignty and the national interest.

Multi-level governance the British way

Two competing models, the Differentiated Polity Model (DPM) and the British Political Tradition (BPT) highlight the recent dilemmas of UK statehood. The DPM proposed by Bevir and Rhodes,¹⁴ and seen as applicable to the UK, involves a comprehensive hollowing out of state power, shifting authority and responsibility upwards to the forms of international and transnational governance and downwards to regional authorities as well as the market. This implies a move away from static asymmetric and hierarchical power relations towards more diffuse and plural networks in which power is constantly negotiated. In contrast, the BPT model has identified the continuation of a 'limited liberal notion of representation and a conservative notion of responsibility, which, together, entail a "top-down" notion of democracy in which

government knows best'.¹⁵ Such an approach involves an analysis of challenges to BPT as occurring within a path dependent context by which is meant the capacity of central government and political elites to structure and contain challenges in ways that enable the reproduction of established power relations. In the case of UK/EU relations, the continued assertion of executive power is consistent with the BPT model yet the evident incorporation of the UK into a complex system of policy linkages and networks points to the DPM.

Baker, among others, has argued that the tension between multi-level governance and traditional British political authority is particularly acute in the UK because parliamentary sovereignty has been the 'only fully legitimate source of sovereignty'.¹⁶ Yet this incompatibility should not be overstated as it is the constitutional flexibility offered by the Crown-in-Parliament that enables considerable accommodation to EU governance. For instance, it would be expected that the incorporation of UK devolved authorities within an increasingly regionalised European Union would threaten Westminster centralism. Devolved authorities have considerable responsibility for policies with a significant European dimension (agricultural, environment, economic regeneration) and they are often at the frontline in terms of implementing European regulations. Whether this implies autonomy in shaping the direction of European policy in the UK is, however, less certain. What is noticeable about the British devolutionary settlement is how it is continuous with previous arrangements in that administrative autonomy for the subnations was already part of the Westminster system.¹⁷ In effect, these powers have been transferred to the devolved authorities and made democratically accountable to territorial electorates. In terms of the coordination on European issues, informal practices of intragovernmental accommodation in operation before devolution have largely been adapted to enable cooperation on policy across the different authorities. This appears to have been successful in enabling central government to establish intergovernmental agreements on a unified UK policy line that can then be taken to Europe. The by-passing of Westminster by autonomous regions, which one might expect in a system of multi-level governance, appears limited when regional interests are effectively channelled through and by central government. This certainly is the conclusion of Bulmer *et al.*'s research on the impact of devolution of the UK's policy towards the European Union.¹⁸ It does not mean that the devolved authorities do not have robust and independent positions on European policy and neither does it stop them developing direct links with Brussels and establishing horizontal alliances in forums such as the Committee of the Regions. While Bulmer *et al.* note that the devolved authorities are able to shape EU policy in ways that would not have been possible pre-devolution, this is effectively managed and channelled in ways that avoid conflict and significant divergences from the official UK position. This has been enabled by an informal but

inclusive approach to the devolved authorities in EU policy making by Westminster that allows them access to information as well as to key decision-making arenas such as the EU Council meetings. Nevertheless, access and influence is dependent on cooperation and a willingness to support the UK line. A form of domestic inter-governmentalism has been established that builds on previous arrangements and is considerably open to coordinating on policy with the devolved authorities, but in relationships that are ultimately dependent and conditional. The informality of this relationship is typically British and means that the rules of the game can change to suit central government and implies the possible exclusion of those who adopt a more conflictual approach. Furthermore, the lack of formality in the organisation of influence means that the extent to which the different constituent parts of the UK are included or excluded is *ad hoc*, most obvious in the extent to which England could be said to be both under and over represented.

In the UK case at least, the mobilisation and expression of regional and sub-national distinctiveness inside a system of European multi-level governance may not be sufficient to significantly challenge a subtly reconfigured Westminster model. While British sovereignty understood as the dominance of executive power in European decision making remains intact following devolution, there is a certain degree to which this may be contingent on a number of key factors. Clearly agreement on a UK line has been made easier for the Labour government because the Party has also held power in regional authorities for much of the period of their existence. The stakes are raised once you have, as in the case of Scotland, a nationalist government which increasingly challenges the extent to which Westminster government speaks for the Scottish people. For instance, Alex Salmond has challenged the idea that global issues such as climate change and terrorism necessarily lend themselves to a unified UK wide position as, he argues, they 'have a particular Scottish aspect. If you take immigration, for example, we're not full up in Scotland, we have a key skills shortage ...'¹⁹ In the case of the SNP then, its clear goal is to exercise independent power inside the European Union, as Alex Salmond stated in a speech in 2007:

I cannot be alone, however, in noting the irony that over the next six months Slovenia will chair and set the agenda for all meetings of the Council - while Scotland, a rich country and society, with more than twice the population, huge economic potential, and with vital interests at stake - is without a seat at the table.²⁰

Here, existing British relations to the EU are contested by appeals to the interests and identity of an alternative national community. Compromises and continuities in how parliamentary sovereignty is exercised become problematic as part of broader conflicts over the political legitimacy of decision making. In short, parliamentary sovereignty is dependent on the vagaries of UK popular sovereignty/ies.

Eurosceptic Britishness: the failure of Labour

Europe entered on to the British political scene, and into the national consciousness, at a point when the meaning of the nation and the national interest was uncertain and fractured as a consequence of the emerging realities of post-imperial decline. Both within and across the main parties, the European issue has become a source of division that has made it difficult to separate the particularities of European policy without evocations of the nation, sovereignty and the British people. Evidently, Labour under Blair and Brown has been relatively successful in reducing Europe's impact as a live political issue. This has, however, required considerable political maneuverings on issues such as the Euro which has involved continual commitments to the principle of membership alongside a considerable degree of ambiguity about when in fact the time, economically and politically, would ever be right.²¹ At the time of the 2003 assessment of the UK's entry into the Euro, Nick Clegg, then an MEP, referred to British politicians attempts to 'shape Britain's destiny in Europe in their own image' and, in particular, 'Brown's spectacularly self-deluding assumption that he can single-handedly reform Europe in the Treasury's image'.²² Clegg captured the extent to which the argument for the UK in Europe has had to be made on terms that largely exclude normative commitment to the European ideal and, instead, evoke British superiority. In a speech in 2006, Blair expressed optimism at the recent trials of the European project following rejections of the European constitution as an opportunity to 're-shape a different vision of [Europe's] future; and for Britain to feel comfortable within it'.²³ The belief that the UK is somehow exceptional and can contribute something distinctive that is assumed to be missing in Europe has been a consistent theme of the Labour government and is continuous with its Conservative predecessors. Gordon Brown has referred to the importance of 'British values... in persuading a global Europe that the only way forward is inter-governmental, not federal; mutual recognition, not one-size-fits-all central rules; tax competition, not tax harmonisation, with proper political accountability and subsidiarity, not a super-state'.²⁴ European integration in this discourse is caricatured as centralising and homogenising and clearly opposed to more liberal 'British values'.

On the one hand Labour have attempted to depoliticise the European issue in British politics, such as treating the Euro as largely an economic and technocratic issue and refusing to hold a referendum on the Lisbon Treaty. Yet, on the other hand, there has been a strong emphasis on the Anglicising of Europe and, a degree, of national triumphalism in dealings with the European Union. Most notably in the case of Gordon Brown, what we've seen is an attempt to counter British Euroscepticism and justify the UK's continued membership, not

by championing the European Union in itself but in terms of what the UK brings to the European Union. This is consistent with Brown's Britishness which does not look to the European social democratic tradition but draws its moral inspiration from English and Scottish liberalism and North American conceptions of civil society.²⁵ The adoption of the Eurosceptic language of a dystopian 'European super-state' should be viewed alongside his assertions of Britishness as an expression of liberty, pluralism, and a moral civil society. That 'Europe' is either absent or antithetical in Brown's Britishness simply confirms the UK's status as a Eurosceptic state and largely reduces the legitimisation of the European Union in the UK to the pursuit of an Anglo-Europe.

Evidently, there remains a distinct problem of giving popular legitimisation to the continued inclusion of the UK into a structure of European governance. However, the reluctance of British political leaders, or most national elites for that matter, to engage in the Europeanisation of their national citizens is perhaps unsurprising. Neither does it necessarily imply that European political socialisation does not take place. Cram argues that the search for an 'heroic' nationalism in the study of European Union identity is mistaken and, following Billig,²⁶ she argues that a 'degree of "banal Europeanism" is intrinsic to a range of very different national identities each of which is developed in different historical and cultural contexts and each which is predicated upon quite different imaginings of the role and utility of the EU'.²⁷ As the EU becomes a normal part of political life of a country so it is 'enhanced' by citizens and accepted at an everyday level in patterns of communication and implicit images. EU identity formation does not involve replacing national identity or adopting a form of European nationalism but is often quite instrumental, 'banal, contingent and contextual'.²⁸ This form of Europeanism is compatible with a shift towards multi-level governance as citizens adapt to and identify with different levels of decision making in a context with which older forms of exclusive nationalism begin to weaken. However, while Labour have gone some way to consolidating European governance as a part of British political life, there is little evidence that banal Europeanism has taken hold among the wider public. Survey evidence continues to show low levels of trust in the EU compared to the rest of the EU (25% against 47%) with far fewer UK citizens viewing EU membership as a good thing (32% against 53%).²⁹ While there is some evidence of growing support for EU decision making in areas such as immigration and the environment, support for the Euro remains particularly low (28% against 61%). The position of a majority of UK citizens is for opting out of economic and political union in favour of a looser arrangement with Europe based on free trade and cooperation on common policies.³⁰ There remains considerable evidence that banal Europeanism has not taken hold in the UK

and in fact the public's perception of the European Union is characterised by external 'otherness'.

That the European Union is so central to domestic political decision making, as well to the UK's place in the world, yet remains so contested and lacking in legitimacy indicates a distinctly British-European democratic deficit that is largely ignored by government. For instance, the current 'Governance of Britain' programme initiated by the Ministry of Justice is focused on strengthening national political identities in line with the Prime Minister's concern with Britishness. Yet without consolidating a degree of banal UK Europeanism, achieving the government's stated objective of a stronger sense of what it means to be British may simply reinforce anti-Europeanism. Brown's rhetoric on Europe's limitations has been an attempt to align Labour governments with British Eurosceptic public opinion. This is, however, to accept Euroscepticism as a legitimate expression of national identity.

The conservatives and Europe: no turning back

Labour may have attempted to establish its own Eurosceptic credentials, however these look weak when compared with the Conservative Party which has emerged from the European battles of the 1980s and 1990s as the most overtly Eurosceptic mainstream party in the European Union. For many Conservatives, the 'otherness' of the European Union has defined their contemporary politics of nationhood even while there has been a reluctance to make the issue central during recent campaigns.³¹ In policy terms, the Party has positioned itself against further integration and, in some areas such as social policy and employment, it is committed to taking back powers from Europe. However, what is of particular interest considering the Conservative's general approach to constitutional matters, is the extent to which the European issue is increasingly viewed more as a matter of popular rather than parliamentary sovereignty. This was initiated with the Maastricht rebellion in 1993 when Eurosceptics campaigned for a referendum on Treaty and was followed by pressure for a referendum on Euro which the Major government eventually agreed to in 1996. The current Conservative position is that 'a Conservative Government would also amend the 1972 European Communities Act so that any future EU Treaty that transfers powers from the UK to the European Union would be subject to a referendum of the British people'.³² In recent years, this position has been most vociferously put forward by the Shadow Foreign Secretary William Hague during the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty. After concerted pressure the Blair government had agreed to a referendum on the European constitution but this was rejected for its replacement, the Lisbon Treaty, on grounds that it did not have constitutional implications. In contrast, the Conservative commitment to a referendum on the Treaty is presented as a fundamental issue of democracy:

Be clear that if a Conservative Government takes office while the Lisbon Treaty remains on the table but unratified by any one nation of the EU, the referendum on that treaty will take place within the opening months of the new government. It is a matter of trust; it is a matter of faith in politics; and our commitment rests on the truth that, in a democracy, lasting political institutions cannot be built without the people's consent.³³

The Conservative pursuit of referenda on Europe reflects the continued importance of a populist Euroscepticism to the Party. On this the Party is supported by the large majority of Conservative Party members, the popular press and a range of influential anti-European pressure and campaign groups. Europe is therefore an issue on which the Conservative Party looks to popular sovereignty reflecting the extent to which British Euroscepticism divorced itself from mainstream party politics during the 1990s and was reconfigured as a national right wing movement. Notwithstanding the divisions and tensions within this movement and the general public's apparent lack of interest, it has established in the popular imagination the belief that European integration remains a chronic threat to national identity and has been entered into by political elites without the consent of the British people. In this context, while the Cameron leadership may wish to adopt a more pragmatic approach to Europe, this looks unlikely as on this issue, as Major found to his cost, the Eurosceptic forces at work on the Party are particularly difficult to contain. The pressure on a Conservative government to deliver on its Eurosceptic promises will be intense and it is difficult to see how it can do this and maintain any kind of constructive engagement in Europe. Illustrative of this is the controversial decision to withdraw its MEPs from the centre right European People's Party following the 2009 European elections despite opposition from a number of Conservative MEPs who hold key positions in the EPP.

At the heart of contemporary Conservative Euroscepticism is a defence of the popular sovereignty of the British people against the incursions of Brussels and against the drive for further integration. An important component of this narrative is the threat posed by the European Union to Britishness. It is the Conservative's role to defend the British people, as Hague's tribute to Conservative MEPs illustrates:

They have delivered by preventing unnecessary interference from Brussels in people's lives: on keeping traditional British loaves and pints of milk in our shops, our old organs in our churches and our narrow boats in our canals. They've stood up for local producers and businesses by winning special status for British produce, including, Stilton Cheese, Cumberland sausages, Melton Mowbray pork pies and Cornish pasties, and Newcastle Brown Ale. They have done great work for British citizens in the EU, ensuring that the property rights of ex-pats in Spain were protected. And, I am proud to say, all our South-Western MEPs have been excellent representatives for their constituents in another place we always stand up for: Gibraltar.³⁴

The dominant perspective within Cameron's revitalised Conservative Party continues to be that UK/EU relations are largely a zero-sum game in which UK power has been progressively eroded. It is fair to argue that at the core of this is a traditional Conservative attachment to parliamentary sovereignty as the essence of UK state authority. Nevertheless, to shore up this political principle they have increasingly appealed to the British people against the European Union. As Cameron has made clear in his attack on Brown's 'grand top-down schemes' to revive a sense of national identity:

it is not standing up for Britishness when you undermine our Houses of Parliament by passing more and more power to Brussels without giving people the referendum you promised.³⁵

Beyond Anglo-British euroscepticism

It is a traditional Anglo-British conception of the national political community that the Conservative's wish to evoke against Europe. Indeed it makes more sense to replace the word British with English in the above statement by Hague. In contrast, it is possible to argue that the EU is playing a positive role for the expression of alternative national political identities within the UK.

Since the early 1990s, the Scottish National Party moved away from its opposition to European integration to one that had begun to advocate for an independent Scotland in Europe. Membership of the European Union has allowed Scottish nationalists to counter the argument that Scotland was too small to be a viable independent nation-state outside of the protection of the UK. It would also guarantee the continuation of free movement of labour and goods with England. For the SNP, Europe is considered to be of strategic and electoral importance. Polling evidence shows that support for Scottish independence increases when the question is in terms of Scotland being 'a member of the European Union in its own right'.³⁶ Europe is also central to the SNP's redefining of Scottish nationalism. The Europeanisation of the SNP reflected a shift towards a more inclusive and civic conception of national political identity that could be seen to be more compatible with European 'multi-level governance'. From his analysis of election manifestoes, Leith argues that 'the predication of belonging is no longer based on firm factors such as birth; nor is any ethnic boundaries erected. When an idea of belonging is presented and where any sense of Scottishness is employed, which is rare, it is very civic/inclusive in nature'.³⁷ It is this inclusive Scottish identity that Alex Salmond, as Scotland's First Minister, has identified as the basis for an independent Scotland in Europe:

Scotland is a nation that has always combined many layers of identity, from the local to the global. Scottishness has always meant far more than a simple

identity with nation. It is founded on cosmopolitanism, on decency, on humanity - on advancing ideas and common interests. This is the basis on which we consider our relationship with and our position in Europe. And this is why Scotland is at ease as we consider our future within the European Union.³⁸

Scotland then is presented as a 'committed' and 'instinctive' partner in Europe, despite significant reservations on areas of EU policy. The example of the SNP is consistent with evidence from across European regional elites which suggest that European integration is used to validate and legitimate their movements.³⁹ Plaid Cymru, for example, have also positioned their demands for Welsh independence alongside a strong commitment to the European Union. Indeed, Wyn Jones has shown that Europeanism has been a longstanding feature of Welsh nationalism that existed before the establishment of pan-European institutions and 'allowed an alternative framing of Welsh politics that looked beyond the Empire-oriented geopolitical mindset that dominated British (and Welsh) politics well beyond the post-World War II era'.⁴⁰

Research suggests that pro-Europeanism is not peculiar to regional parties that seek independence, but is also evident amongst regional representatives of mainstream parties. A practical example of this pro-Europeanism was the work the previous Scottish Labour government embarked on with the Commission to counter Euroscepticism in Scotland and the low rates of recognition and understanding of the European Union.⁴¹ In their study of politicians in Wales and Cornwall, Mols and Haslam found opposition to central government's EU stance across the political spectrum, alongside the belief that there was a strong compatibility between their own regional identity and the European Union.⁴² The motivations of regional politicians could not be reduced to instrumental attitudes, for example opportunities for EU funding but often reflected a deeper attachment between the regional/sub-national political community and Europe. In interviews, this identification with 'Europe' was contrasted with the dominance of English Euroscepticism. In the words of Welsh liberal democrat this English Euroscepticism reflected 'an island mentality' while 'the connections between the Celtic parts have always appeared to be stronger ...'.⁴³ It is reasonable to conclude that, whether separatist or not, a pro-Europeanism is being pursued in opposition to the perceived dominance of what is considered to be English Euroscepticism.

However what should also be noted is that Eurosceptic citizens in Scotland and Wales share many of the same attitudes and opinions as English Eurosceptics yet for them this is an expression of their Britishness. As Haesly notes for this group 'underlying Euroscepticism is a strong feeling of Britishness'.⁴⁴ What this indicates is that Euroscepticism is consistent with Anglo-Britishness, defined by the

political domination of England in the Union, but not necessarily reducible to Englishness. However, to what extent a popular Anglo-British Euroscepticism could find significant appeal outside of England remains questionable if the centrifugal forces of devolution are pulling in a different and more pro-European direction.

Sovereign markets and economic Britishness

Often neglected in discussions of the British sovereignty but more pertinent than ever in the current economic context is the issue of economic sovereignty. This third dimension of sovereignty to be considered is usually seen to have been eroded as the UK has become a more open market economy and, since the Thatcher governments of the 1980s, the champion of globalisation. The partial nationalisations of the banking system and the call for more financial regulation appear to bring to an end a period in which the market was sovereign. This potentially challenges a core dimension of the UK's approach to Europe which has been opposition to the regulatory and interventionist European social model. For those on the Left, the UK's opposition to European Union has been consistent with its Anglo-American neo-liberal trajectory:

Had Labour reversed Thatcherite hostility and actively embraced membership of the European Union, it would have joined a project of inter-dependent government. Instead it continued to play the role of "reluctant partner" to EU integration, while showing an obsessional commitment to the "special relationship"; the twin pillars of Euro-detachment and globo-Atlanticism form a core part of its neo-liberal outlook.⁴⁵

This neo-liberal political economy is not new and is consistent with the historical role the British state has played in constructing and maintaining the global economy. Rather than being viewed as something that has been eroded, economic sovereignty should be seen as having had a very specific articulation in the UK context. A key role of any modern liberal state has been to maintain the boundary between the economic and political ensuring that commercial and financial activity can proceed as private activities protected from political interference. While this is an inherently contested boundary, the UK state has historically been quite effective at policing and reinforcing the sovereignty of market and this has been central to constructions of Britishness. Thus, when Brown referred to equipping Europe for global competition it was on the basis of 'British ideas' of 'flexibility, openness and free trade' 'whose time has come'.⁴⁶ Similarly, the one consistent theme in Conservative approaches to Europe has been its commitment to the principle of a free trade Europe which is often cited as the original basis of Treaty of the Rome that has been distorted by European bureaucracy and regulation. Undoubtedly, the associations of economic liberalism with the ethos and values of Britishness have had

considerable currency both domestically and globally in recent years and connect economic policy to British national identity. The UK has been seen to be in line with the overall direction of the world economy while Europe, at least 'old' Europe, is associated with outdated economic models that account for its low growth rates and higher levels of unemployment. Notwithstanding Brown's recent claims to global leadership, such triumphalism looks out of date and out of step with a period in which the relationship between the political and economic has resolutely shifted in the direction of the former. This shifting balance has been seen in the debates over the introduction of a European directive to regulate hedge funds and private equity that will impose new levels of transparency on the financial markets and has been met with fierce resistance from the City (*The Daily Telegraph*, 29 April 2009). As the realities of a more regulatory capitalism begin to take shape, it is unlikely that UK governments will give up their role as defenders of market sovereignty mainly because of the historical interpenetration of the British state with the core UK economic institutions such as the City and Bank of England. However, while Alistair Darling may have defended the British economy as 'diverse, flexible and resilient' (*The Guardian*, 22 April 2009), the heyday of 'pro-globalisation' Britishness is certainly over for the time being. The tide had clearly turned by the end of 2008 when the German Finance Ministers criticisms of the UK's response to the economic crisis, 'from decades of supply-side politics all the way to a crass Keynesianism is breathtaking' (*The Times*, 11 December 2008).

Conclusion

Despite inheriting a Eurosceptic state, in crucial respects, Labour normalised relations with the EU and undertook some effective domestic management of the European issue. The willingness to engage in Europe reflected a broader commitment to the modernisation of governance. This has involved a flexible approach to British sovereignty and the constitution that suggests that these institutional factors are not the barriers to UK/EU relations that they were once considered. Nevertheless, when it comes to the issue of popular sovereignty, it has been argued that Labour has been unsuccessful in Europeanising Britishness and, instead, has been complicit in reinforcing a national Euroscepticism which has been concomitant with its economic liberalism. At the forefront of the analysis presented here has been the broader problem of contemporary Britishness and, in particular, the 'otherness' of Europe in Anglo-Britishness that is most clearly evident in modern Conservatism. Yet, it appears increasingly in tension with the multi-national direction of British politics. In short, a chronic uncertainty continues to characterise the UK's relationship to the European Union for the foreseeable future.

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