

Scotland is different

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I have had less than two days in Scotland and can come to at least three very clear conclusions.

The first is that Scotland is very different to England. So too, I would add, based on experience, are Wales and Northern Ireland. But at present the Scottish difference is more obvious in a political sense. It's impossible to provide precise evidence of how and why this is the case, but it's tangible and real. My suspicion is it is based on a strong sense of identity that has been reinforced by recent experience, right across political divides. What cannot be doubted is the reality of it, and it's also stronger than it used to be, by some way.

The second conclusion is that Scotland is willing to create its own solutions. From the obvious vibrancy of the people from civil society I met on Wednesday to the council and civil society organisation leaders I met yesterday to the politicians I have had discussion with there is no sense that they need wait for anyone's permission to find a Scottish solution to problems, and are willing to do so. Some of the thinking, especially around health, seemed a little too stereotyped to give much chance of unique solutions arising. In other areas, e.g. in youth services, what I heard about was radically different from what I think is happening elsewhere. And simply better too in terms of what services are delivered, and how, and how integration is being aimed at, even if there is a long way to go.

And third? I have to say that this is that Scotland believes it can make its own future and ultimately no one can stop it doing so. And that belief is very, very powerful. I am used to England, Westminster and the sense of frustrating disempowerment that pervades almost everyone in politics that focuses there. There is just no such sense in Scotland. The belief in Scotland is that, despite all the obstacles they will achieve, come what may. And don't shout about oil - it's just something they say they would have taken in their stride, and got on with, and to a large extent I believe them.

So Scotland remains very different.

It's also changed since my last visit. There's a feeling that it was not oil that has derailed them, or the referendum. It was the currency debate that did that. And I have a feeling that another time there would be no discussion of the euro and no discussion of the pound. A Scottish currency would be on the agenda.

And in the meantime there is a growing awareness that they really might have influence at Westminster, which is, despite the long history of powerful Scottish politicians in the Labour party, something they have not felt they have had for a long time. It is this feeling that they want a distinctly Scottish voice heard that is, I think, motivating the SNP vote.

And what of the SNP? My feeling is it realises that it will have to use power responsibly. They know all about power after all. They have been in government for some time now. They can handle responsibility, and they know all about the compromises needed. It is a shame I will not hear Nicola Sturgeon speak today, but I have to be going south for the weekend. But I think the sense that working out positions that make compromise that will support Labour in power, now exists. And I believe that the compromises that will let the SNP say it is preventing austerity in Scotland and yet permit Labour to continue a deficit narrative are being made.

Which is where Green Infrastructure Quantitative Easing comes in.