

Is Westminster trying to undermine Holyrood?

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Ken Mathiason is a fairly regular commentator on this blog. He is Scottish and we share an interest in all things to do with accountancy, as well as Scottish politics. Ken [wrote this on the blog last week](#):

Unfortunately there are signs that the Tories are actively trying to undermine the Scottish Parliament. The other day Mundell (the Secretary of State for Scotland — which is his job title but doesn't describe how he acts) announced the opening of new offices for the UK in Scotland, with the proposal to hire 2900 civil servants. With a staff that size it's obviously not just a PR exercise, and where's he going to get them, other than denuding Holyrood of its civil service support? There are reports that the new organisation will channel UK Gov investment in Scotland and, given the Scottish Gov's restricted budgets and borrowing powers, it implies that Holyrood will be squeezed out of its role in the governance of Scotland.

The majority of Scots believe Scottish governance has improved since devolution, so quite how the Scottish public will react to an undermining of the devolution they fought so hard to get and have supported ever since is an interesting question. Civil disobedience on a grand scale is not unlikely.

He [then added this](#):

As a postscript to my posts above, here are some further thoughts on the proposals by the UK Gov to increase its presence and to start developing its own investment proposals in Scotland:

- 1. The mere presence of a significant UK Gov presence is likely to interfere with the governance by the elected Gov of Scotland.*
- 2. The UK Gov will make its policy and investment decisions for political reasons and not necessarily in the best interests of Scotland or its people.*
- 3. This could easily lead to UK Gov acting contrary to Scottish Gov policies (for instance nuclear power generation, immigration policy etc).*
- 4. The value of UK Gov investments and the costs of running their Scottish operation will almost certainly be deducted from the block grant allocation which funds the Scottish Gov's spending.*

5 This would inevitably result in an undermining of the Scottish Gov's policies and governance leading to confrontations. It's a racing certainty that these costs will be "charged" to Scotland in GERS and form part of the supposed "Scottish Fiscal Deficit". It could also lead to the cessation of the Barnett Formula processes by which Scotland's supposed share of UK investment spending is calculated (this is regularly mooted by the Tories). Mindell talks of having 2,900 civil servants to support this new venture, but where will he find them other than by transferring them from civil servant support for the Scottish Parliament? The Tories loathe the idea of devolution and it seems likely that they are planning to choke the Scottish Parliament to death and revert to direct rule from Westminster.

It's pretty obvious that any of these outcomes will raise the ire of the majority of Scots. Polls show that a substantial majority of Scots consider their governance by Holyrood as being markedly better than that of Westminster. It's also pretty obvious that any diminution of funding to the Scottish Government will imperil its budget and its policies of mitigating (from its own funds) the worst excesses of the Tories' austerity and welfare policies.

Ken raises a fundamental point - which is whether Westminster (and both major parties might be aligned with this goal) undermining Scottish independence?

I can see every reason to think that it is and that Ken's concern is justified. What Mindell is doing appears to be a deliberate full frontal challenge to Scottish government authority and action. And that cannot end well, for England. It's as if the end game has begun, and they have to get angry and spiteful before they give in. I just hope this phase is short.