

**FACTIONS, TENDENCIES AND CONSENSUS IN THE SNP
IN THE 1980s**

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I bitterly regret the day I compromised the unity of my party by admitting the second member.⁽¹⁾

A work written over a decade ago maintained that there had been limited study of factional politics⁽²⁾. This is most certainly the case as far as the Scottish National Party is concerned. Indeed, little has been written on the party itself, with the plethora of books and articles which were published in the 1970s focussing on the National movement rather than the party. During the 1980s journalistic accounts tended to see debates and disagreements in the SNP along left-right lines.

The recent history of the party provides an important case study of factional politics. The discussion highlights the position of the '79 Group, a left-wing grouping established in the summer of 1979 which was finally outlawed by the party (with all other organised factions) at party conference in 1982. The context of its emergence, its place within the SNP and the reaction it provoked are outlined. Discussion then follows of the reasons for the development of unity in the context of the foregoing discussion of tendencies and factions.

Definitions of factions range from anthropological conceptions relating to attachment to a personality to conceptions of more ideologically based groupings within liberal democratic parties⁽³⁾. Rose drew a distinction between parliamentary party factions and tendencies. The former are consciously organised groupings with a membership based in Parliament and a measure of discipline and cohesion. The latter were identified as a stable set of attitudes rather than a group of politicians but not self-consciously organised⁽⁴⁾. This distinction has value when considering extra-parliamentary parties. A third element identified by Rose was the non-aligned party membership. This element is critical and results from "an active concern with only the gross differences between electoral parties, from a passive attitude towards policy issues, or from a calculated desire to avoid identification with particular tendencies or factions in order to gain popularity within the whole electoral party".⁽⁵⁾

Factions are often perceived to connote "illegality, if not malevolence and pathology".⁽⁶⁾ A tendency may have considerable influence and consequently will not require to be consciously organised with a

membership, discipline or organised structure. A dominant tendency has the advantage of avoiding the connotation of illegality. Weaker tendencies may feel a need to organise in order to challenge the dominant tendency but lose out by the very act of becoming an organised faction. Indeed, many who would otherwise be associated with a tendency might, having recognised this danger, disown or distance themselves from the faction. The importance of the dominant tendency – or tendencies, as these differ in terms of personnel depending on the issue – cannot be understated within a political party as open and democratic (almost to the point of disproving Michels' iron law of oligarchy) as the Scottish National Party.

The referendum in 1979, and the subsequent general election marked a turning point in the fortunes of the SNP. They marked the outbreak of open and often bitter divisions and the emergence of the '79 Group which established itself as a socialist republican grouping. Defeats and setbacks have the effect of bringing to the fore existing and often deep rooted divisions which are less obvious at times of electoral success. The staggering setback suffered by the SNP brought these to light, especially after the period of heady optimism which had preceded the Spring of 1979.

Party vs Movement

The cliché that political parties are broad churches is as appropriate in the SNP as any other party. While much of the debate is conducted in conventional left-right language, the SNP's tendencies are more complex. This is not to say that Nationalist politics are not marked by debates along conventional lines. Left-right divisions do exist and cannot be avoided. For any Nationalist party which is attempting to build support for its cause and which has gained sufficient support to give it elected representation, whether at parliamentary or local government level, there will be a need for the party to decide how it should vote on the conventional issues which dominate political debate.

Not only do Nationalist parties operate and seek to gain support by making known their position on socio-economic issues, they are obliged to develop some kind of ideological image including a conventional left-right component in order to explain the kind of new state they wish to establish. Nationalist parties will find it very difficult to portray themselves in exclusively nationalist terms sterilised of class politics. An ideal of self-government which excludes any notion of socio-economic affairs would be skeletal and lack appeal in modern liberal democracies where the notion of the state is so intimately connected with welfare, public sector intervention and social justice. The distinctiveness of sub-state nationalism in developed liberal democracies, as opposed to Third World nationalism, is partly found in the nature of the existing state. Otherwise, as the SNP discovered in the 1960s and 1970s, Nationalist parties leave themselves open to attack from both the left and right.

The 1969 party conference involved a challenge to the leadership on the issue. The incumbent chairman was defeated by Billy Wolfe, who believed that the party needed to develop a moderate left ideological position. The dominant view during most of the post-war period, personified by the defeated chairman, had been that the SNP should be a movement for independence rather than a conventional political party with a programme of policies. However this was never fully developed during the 1970s partly because there was a feeling that it was somehow possible to develop a programme of policies without accepting a clear ideology. In fact, a left of centre ideology was developed though many senior party members would deny this. Part of the reason was that most of the SNP seats won in 1974 were won from Tories and there was a fear that it was necessary to play down the party's left-wing position. This misunderstanding of the SNP's support – which was clearly not based on disaffected Tories but an anti-Tory coalition – played a part in the party losing support in 1979.

Left vs Right

Of course, left and right are relative terms, and compared with other British parties represented in Parliament the SNP's centre of gravity is further to the left. In recent years debate over defence has been waged not over whether the party should be unilateralist. Unilateralism has never been seriously challenged in the SNP since it was adopted as policy in the early 1960s. The contentious issue has been membership of NATO. The SNP was anti-NATO for a period in the 1960s and returned to this position at its 1981 conference in the context of the revival of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and the international political climate. It is highly significant that this was the only significant left-right division on an issue of policy which came before party conference in the 1980s and emerged outwith the context of factional politics.

When socio-economic policy is considered, the SNP's consistent position as a party of the left is evident. At the 1979 party conference which is sometimes inaccurately interpreted as marking a lurch to the right saw the party enthusiastically accept a resolution accepting the primacy of the public sector in the regeneration of the Scottish economy and demanded that oil revenues be used to eliminate poverty and deprivation rather than fund tax cuts. This was at a time when both the Labour and Conservative Parties were vying with one another to be seen as providers of tax cuts. It is also notable that supporting the resolution were Stephen Maxwell and Margo MacDonald who were defeated in their bids to win the two leading offices in the SNP.

A case could be made that the party vs. movement and left vs. right tensions are one and the same. The lack of anything approaching a right-wing prospectus and the existence of agreement on most policy issues

suggests that many described in internal SNP debates and beyond as “right-wing” are more accurately “cultural nationalists”. Their aims are principally the maintenance of a sense of Scottish identity, not necessarily defined in terms of political institutions or citizenship.

Fundamentalist vs. Gradualist

The fundamentalist position rejects the legitimacy of the existing state and would perceive any measure of self-government short of independence with suspicion. From this perspective, devolution might be viewed not as a step on the road to independence but as a sop designed to dissipate energies and appease national sentiment. The refusal of central authorities to countenance any measure of devolution prior to the emergence and growth of support for Nationalist parties can be expected to evoke cynicism and might be seen as confirming the view that devolution involves not a measure of self-government but appeasement.

The remarkable unity within the SNP during the late 1970s in support of the measure of devolution contrasts sharply with the reaction and disunity following the referendum in 1979. Though the SNP held a debate at its annual conference in 1976 at which opposition to devolution short of independence was expressed, the margin of support for accepting the “stepping stone” was considerable and the party fell behind this position with little public disagreement.

It was only after the failure of Westminster to implement its scheme of devolution in 1979 following the referendum and the subsequent loss of nine of its eleven seats that the SNP reacted against devolution. At the party conference in 1979 a resolution was passed by a large majority stating that the SNP would “not engage in any more dealings in assemblies, devolution, or meaningful talks.”⁽⁷⁾ Ironically, the election of the Conservative government made this fundamentalist line redundant in that there was then no prospect during Mrs Thatcher’s tenure of “assemblies, devolution or meaningful talks”. The fundamentalism of Thatcher’s unionism was the mirror image of the fundamentalism of the SNP’s nationalism. This was the most important debate at the conference and the results in the elections of national office-bearers reflected this. The new chairman, Gordon Wilson, and the senior vice-chairman were both elected in the reaction against devolution. The reaction following electoral defeat led the party back to fundamentals, which meant “independence nothing less”, as the hardliners put it.

Over the course of the 1979-83 Parliament this was recognised to be an untenable position. Gordon Wilson slowly returned the party to a more gradualist position, having himself been elected chairman on a fundamentalist platform. The need for unity across the fundamentalist-gradualist divide required a bridge which Wilson found in the form of a

constitutional convention. The idea involved the election by proportional representation of a Scottish convention which would determine Scotland’s constitutional status. The constitutional options available to Scots would range from the Conservative’s support for the status quo to the SNP’s preferred option of independence within the European Community. The convention idea eventually won support at the party’s 1984 conference. The previous year’s conference had defeated – by 173 to 141 – an amendment to a resolution supporting a Convention. The idea allowed the party to campaign for independence, thus appealing to the fundamentalist wing, while not rejecting anything short of that goal. It amounted to self-determination rather than self-government and was a *modus vivendi* between these two tendencies in the party.

The convention idea has a curious pedigree. The Conservatives had proposed a convention in the late 1970s as an alternative to the Labour government’s devolution proposals. With the Conservatives divided on the issue but largely opposed to a Scottish Assembly, fearing that their support would decline if they opposed devolution and determined not to oppose it openly, the convention idea allowed a degree of unity around a commitment bridging tendencies in that party and simultaneously committing it to nothing in particular. The device was similarly used in the SNP but from a different vantage point. Similarly the Convention supported by the Campaign for a Scottish Assembly in recent years is motivated purely by the desire to bridge differences between the parties favouring some measure of Home Rule and it has little if any support in itself.

These three underlying tensions in the SNP – party vs movement, left vs right, fundamentalist vs gradualist – do not make up the complete picture. The role of personalities is important. The divisions over issues such as European Community membership does not seem to fit any of the three tensions very comfortably. Fundamentalists might be expected to oppose it on the grounds that it involved the loss of a degree of sovereignty; the left might be expected to oppose it as did the Labour left as some capitalist conspiracy (though the British left’s hang-up over the European Community, as the British right’s, is wrapped up in notions of Parliamentary sovereignty and British nationalism which should not afflict the SNP left); while those who see the SNP as a movement might be expected to see the issue as irrelevant. In fact, the divisions on these issues have been difficult to classify. The *ad hoc* nature of the alliances on the question suggest that factional politics failed to divide the party on all important issues which arose during the period of great factional activity in the early 1980s. This may have been explained by the fact that the ‘79 Group itself was divided with some leading members deeply opposed while others were strong advocates of European Community membership.

The Emergence of the '79 Group

The months between the referendum and general election in Spring 1979 and the party conference in the Autumn brought into the open existing differences.

The '79 Group was set up during this period, offering a left-wing critique of the party's recent history. It had initially called itself the Interim Committee for Political Discussion but soon became known as the '79 Group. The aptness of the name was probably never fully appreciated either by its members nor by its critics. It was not just the year the Group was set up but represented a constant reference point around which debate centred throughout its short history. The reaction, intolerance and catastrophic electoral and psychological defeats which marked 1979 were features which over-shadowed internal debate during the early 1980s. The '79 Group and the reaction to it were merely manifestations of the reaction to the events of Spring 1979.

At its inaugural meeting in August, the '79 Group adopted three aims— independence, socialism and republicanism. It would be a mistake to take these aims at face value or to assume that the failure of its candidates in elections to party office at conference was the result of right-wing sentiments amongst delegates. However much the '79 Group attempted to portray itself as the organised left and its opponents as right-wing, the most important reason for its lack of success and eventual forced disbandment in 1982 was the combination of a fundamentalist backlash, fear that the constitutional issue was being demoted, the acrimonious terms of political debate in the context of recriminations following defeat, and concern that the party's fissiparous tendencies were getting out of control. The position of the non-aligned dominant tendency within the party was crucial in initially deploring the establishment of the Group but tolerating its existence, as conference voted in 1979. It was also critical in the decision in 1982 to proscribe all organised factions in the party.

The '79 Group clearly viewed the need for the party to develop a sharper left of centre position. It therefore belonged to the party rather than movement tendency. Though there were a few individuals who were hardline fundamentalists in the Group, it was generally associated with the gradualist tendency. At its inaugural meeting a paper was accepted critical of the fundamentalist position and its membership included some who had been closely identified with the gradualist position.

Around this time another faction emerged, also out of disillusionment and in reaction to the defeats in 1979. Sion Nan Gaidheal (SNG) was a fundamentalist movement believing in militant direct action. If it had a conventional ideological position, it was right-wing. In many respects it was the antithesis of the '79 Group. SNG was not, however, a faction within the SNP though its members were largely drawn from the party. The divisions

in the SNP might be expected to have been deepest between these groups. In fact, a degree of mutual self-interest operated, resulting in cross-factional support. An early attempt to proscribe each group separately failed in December 1980 when they combined in turn to support each other. With the support of non-aligned members these moves failed. The cross-factional support was, not untypically in political parties, motivated by support for the right to organise in groups rather than agreed aims or outlook.

Typology of SNP Factions, 1979-83

<p>'79 Group Left Gradualist Party</p>	<p>Sion Nan Gaidheal Right Fundamentalist Movement</p>
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The '79 Group's existence was deplored at conference in 1979 but an attempt to proscribe it failed. At the SNP conference in Aberdeen in 1981 the '79 Group reached its apogee. Conference accepted a resolution supported by '79 Group members demanding that a campaign of effective civil disobedience should be organised in opposition to the rising levels of unemployment. This was hailed as a great victory for the '79 Group but the conference's support was really only a delayed reaction to the referendum.

Two other key resolutions were targeted by the Group—one calling for an independent Scotland to withdraw from NATO and adopt a policy of armed neutrality, the other calling on the party to recognise the collapse of the Scottish controlled private sector of the economy and to plan for an enlarged, democratically controlled public sector. The SNP had always been unilateralist and had previously supported withdrawal from NATO. A number of senior party members outside the Group who had joined the party in the early 1960s, such as Billy Wolfe and Isobel Lindsay, had been long-standing CND supporters and the chairman of Scottish CND at the time had been an SNP parliamentary candidate. The change in policy owed little to the influence of the '79 Group and far more to the international political climate, the revival of CND and a long-standing unilateralist tradition in the party. Neither was the other resolution a great break with the party's previous policy. It had, after all, voted for a similar resolution at the 1979 conference, a conference which was seen as unfavourable to the '79 Group. None of these resolutions, nor the election of Group members to key offices, could be entirely credited to the '79 Group. This was not appreciated, least of all by its membership. Support for each of these reflected the dominant non-aligned tendency in the SNP.

The '79 Group misinterpreted these votes and the election of Sillars as Policy Vice Chairman. The '79 Group assumed that it had made great progress but the resolutions it had targeted were acceptable to the

dominant tendency and support for them owed little to the activities of the Group. On the central issue of the fundamentalist/gradualist tension, the party had shown signs of moving from its more fundamentalist position but retained its suspicion of devolution. But by linking the civil disobedience campaign to the Scottish Assembly building the party alienated a number of members (and provided an excuse for others) on the fundamentalist wing of the party.

The party's mood had been misread by the '79 Group and the subsequent party conference saw a backlash. The role of the Campaign for Nationalism in this was important but probably less so than appeared at the time. A number of party members had wanted the '79 Group proscribed from its inception but they were never a significant enough number to bring this about. By organising themselves into an alternative faction, the Campaign for Nationalism forced the issue. Once more the critical element in the party was the non-aligned membership. Rose's comments regarding this element's greater concern with the gross differences *between* parties, their passive attitude towards policy issues and determined effort to avoid identification with particular factions is significant. It would be mistaken to see the non-aligned element as entirely passive, at least in the case of the SNP, but the primacy placed on ensuring unity within the party is certainly evident. Additionally, in the eyes of many SNP members, the Group – with its preponderance of young and abrasive members – conformed with Beller and Belloni's comments that factions tend to be seen as illegal, malevolent and pathological. The party had been tolerant but the debacle of the civil disobedience campaign, severely damaged the Group's position. The support for proscription of all groups reflected a fear amongst the non-aligned that things were getting out of hand. However, the return of Jim Sillars as Vice Chairman suggested that the party did not intend a witchhunt.

By May 1983, the SNP had still to find prospective candidates in 32 constituencies (out of 72). When the election came, the party was in an even less prepared state than was Michael Foot's Labour Party. Its vote fell by almost a third from 17.3% in 1979 to 11.8%, with 53 deposits lost. It would be entirely wrong to blame the '79 Group, Jim Sillars, civil disobedience, the Campaign for Nationalism or Gordon Wilson for the result. The failings can be explained by the psychological blow – the greatest achievement of the anti-devolutionists such as Brian Wilson, Neil Kinnock, Teddy Taylor and Margaret Thatcher – which was inflicted on the National Movement in Scotland. The internal feuding witnessed in the SNP between 1979 and 1983 were functions of the high expectations of success in the late 1970s and defeats in 1979.

Instead of building up its credibility and establishing a clear profile on central economic and social issues, the SNP had spent four years reacting to and recovering from the Spring of 1979. In retrospect, many party members

view the period as difficult but ultimately involved a process of strengthening the party. Billy Wolfe's forging of steel metaphor in his *Scotland Lives* comes to mind. The years 1979 to 1983 were remarkable in the history of the party in exacerbating differences. Though these still exist, a degree of unity developed following the salutary effect of the electoral setback in 1983. Defeat had acted as a schismatic force following a period of great optimism in 1979 but acted as a cohesive force after 1983.

The Emerging Consensus: 1983-1987

As in the Labour Party, the election in 1983 served to strengthen the leadership and inject a new realism into the Scottish National Party. A consensus had already emerged, almost unnoticed, during 1979-83. As early as 1981 Gordon Wilson had used the term "moderate left of centre" to describe the SNP. This came into common usage during this period and served as a base for the consensus which developed. In August, Gordon Wilson announced that he wanted the party to change its policy in three areas. First, he wanted to reverse the anti-NATO policy; second, he sought to commit the party explicitly in favour of European Community membership; and third, he sought to move away from the fundamentalist, anti-devolution position.

As mentioned earlier, the party had a tradition of unilateralism and opposition to NATO and on this the chairman failed to move the party. Notably, his principal opponent was Isobel Lindsay who had been a strident critic of the '79 Group and a number of '79 Group members were believed to be equivocal on the matter. The issue of Europe might have been expected to have divided the party along its fundamentalist/gradualist line, with fundamentalists arguing that membership of the Community was a negation of full Scottish sovereignty. The fact that the party's only Euro-MP, Winnie Ewing, was a vehement supporter of Community membership was certainly influential in delivering a substantial body of the fundamentalist wing in support. Similarly, the strong support for Europe of Jim Sillars and Alex Salmond ensured that a wide body of members rallied behind Gordon Wilson. Once more, Isobel Lindsay opposed the policy.

For Sillars, European Community membership offers the SNP a means of countering the "jibe of separatism" and provides a clear and credible constitutional option.⁽⁸⁾ Though he had campaigned against continued membership in 1975, he accepted the result and his short-lived Scottish Labour Party had supported independence within the European Community. Winnie Ewing's conversion appears to have resulted from her experience in the European Parliament. The pro-Europe policy of the SNP followed the turn around in the position of Plaid Cymru which dramatically reversed its former opposition to membership during the 1983 election campaign.

Wilson's third change was his most important in terms of attempting to find a *modus vivendi* between the fundamentalists and gradualists. However, this was to prove the most contentious of his proposals. Once more, his success was due to the support of leading members across the party. Wilson presented the idea of a constitutional convention to the party. This was to involve the election by proportional representation of a convention which would have full powers to determine the constitutional status of Scotland. All political parties would be able to contest elections on their respective constitutional platforms. As well as uniting the party's wings it was designed to attract the support of other parties in Scotland.

Obvious practical difficulties ensue from this. Any scheme accepted by the Convention short of independence would clearly have to be acceptable to the rest of the United Kingdom as it was bound to have implications beyond Scotland. The notion that Scotland could make a unilateral declaration of devolution, as was implicit in the Convention proposal, is absurd. However, the Convention idea allowed Wilson to unite the party. On the one hand, the SNP could campaign for independence which kept many on the fundamentalist wing of the party happy while on the other hand this did not mean rejection of anything short of independence if the Scots rejected independence. From the point of view of facilitating unity within the SNP, the policy succeeded to a large extent though some members remained sceptical.

The agreement on the latter two matters, together with the return to membership and the party's executive of prominent '79 Group members aided the party in its campaigns. At the Euro-elections in 1984 Winnie Ewing was returned with a much increased majority contrary to the predictions of pundits, and the Nationalists won 18% of the vote. In local elections the SNP began to reverse the downward trend. At the District elections in 1984 the party had mixed fortunes but won control of Angus. There, the new SNP Provost was the former MP, Andrew Welsh, who was to regain the parliamentary seat from the Solicitor General in 1987. In 1986, the Nationalists performed well in Tayside – mainly in Angus – and in North-East Scotland. These were to be the areas which returned the three SNP MPs at the 1987 election.

Essentially, the 1983-87 period involved the party recognising that its internal battles during the previous Parliament had been electorally damaging. The consensus which was emerging by the 1987 election revolved around the party accepting a left-wing pro-European Community position. The fundamentalist/gradualist tension was eased by support for the Convention and the recognition that unity was essential. But it was not until after the 1987 Election that the greatest opportunities for advance were presented to the SNP.

Independence in Europe and the Poll Tax

Two developments wholly outwith the control of the SNP offered the party opportunities in the period after 1987. The imposition of the poll tax and heightened awareness of the European Community allowed the SNP to grab the initiative and set the agenda of Scottish politics for the first time since the mid-1970s. The poll tax was important as a symbol of a Government policy foisted on Scotland and Labour's palpable failure to prevent this. The Independence in Europe theme providing the SNP with the clearest articulation of the constitutional goal it was seeking at any stage in the party's history. In the context of debate on "1992" the Nationalists were offering a substantive, realistic and positive message alongside their poll tax campaign.

The most remarkable aspect of both the Scotland in Europe and non-payment positions was the degree of unity which was achieved. The party conference in Inverness in 1988 saw resolutions explicitly supporting these matters passed overwhelmingly. The Govan by-election in November 1988 provided the SNP with the necessary platform on which to argue this two-pronged position. No more effective articulator of the SNP case could have been found than Jim Sillars. The Govan Campaign demonstrated the degree of unity in the SNP. The support of figures who were members of the '79 Group as well as Winnie Ewing, Gordon Wilson and Margaret Ewing was significant. The party membership failed to divide into factions on either issue. Any disagreement on either the poll tax or Independence in Europe did not correspond with the fault-lines – and notably the fundamentalist/gradualist tension – identified earlier.

The one issue which had the potential to damage the party was the Convention. The *modus vivendi* achieved between gradualists and fundamentalists was severely strained when the Campaign for a Scottish Assembly adopted the SNP policy and following Govan set about establishing a cross party Convention. The CSA had earlier invited a committee under Sir Robert Grieve to suggest means of establishing a Convention. The *Claim of Right for Scotland* used the language of popular sovereignty which was central to the SNP's proposals but in practice the proposals had no popular democratic component. In essence the CSA's practical proposals – as opposed to the SNP's policy – allowed for the dominance of a minority party within the Convention. It would be extremely naive to imagine that the Labour Party would have failed to use the forum in the lead up to the European Elections to mount a sustained attack on the SNP. That the SNP should have realised this well in advance of their decision not to participate is the only criticism that can be made of the party.

The SNP decision not to participate was supported across the party at National Council in March 1989. The meeting in Port Glasgow was one of the largest the party had seen in years. Gordon Wilson's Government of

Scotland Bill proposing a directly elected Convention presented in Parliament in March 1980 had been the first attempt to win support for the idea (only four Labour MPs had supported it, one voted against it and the remaining 39, including Donald Dewar, abstained). Jim Sillars had moved the resolution supporting an elected Convention at SNP conference in September 1984. That Wilson and Sillars, along with Margaret Ewing, were the SNP negotiators at the Campaign for a Scottish Assembly meetings and recommended that the party should not participate was undoubtedly important.

The mood of the SNP had changed dramatically from the early 1980s when the shadow of 1979 coloured all decisions and had led to charges and recriminations. The potential for a split on fundamentalist/gradualist lines in 1989 was lessened by the fact that many of those who were closely associated with the gradualist position were calling for non-participation. That some of those who called for the SNP to participate in the Convention were opponents of Independence in Europe weakened their position. Indeed, the manner in which leading supporters of participation articulated their position suggested that they viewed the SNP less as a political party and more as a movement attempting to exert pressure on other parties. Isobel Lindsay's speech to National Council was in this mould. But the dominant view within the SNP by the late 1980s was that it was a political party with a clear position on the left-right axis and a far clearer idea of the constitutional settlement it sought.

Conclusion

Oliver Brown's sense of irony was better developed than that of many SNP members who appear to have taken all too literally his words quoted at the beginning. Like all political parties, the SNP has its different tendencies which have erupted into organised factions. Journalistic short-hand tended to misrepresent the essential nature of debate within the SNP. The party has long gravitated towards the left – getting it to recognise/admit/proclaim/build on this were aims of '79 Group members. Overlying and confusing this debate was the central tension at the heart of the SNP between gradualism and fundamentalism. On this the SNP has been less consistent and tends to react more to circumstances. At moments, the dominant tendency within the party has favoured one then the other position.

The case of the SNP confirms that the emergence of factions can principally result from a severe electoral setback after a period of great optimism. The need to explain the setback, seek some way of reversing it and simply come to terms with the disillusionment of defeat provide an inauspicious background for party unity. The underlying tensions which exist in any party will be exacerbated in such circumstances. The '79 Group were a manifestation and not cause of the SNP's difficulties in the early 1980s. On the other hand defeat can act as a catalyst leading to unity as the

1983 result demonstrated.

Journalistic approaches to the SNP which attempted to pigeon-hole every difference in left-right terms – something which many '79 Group members were guilty of – confused attempts to understand the Scottish National Party. Organised factions in political parties which have little history of them are bound to be suspect. The great danger is in assuming that a party has divided clearly along the lines of Group formation or that when a policy or approach is adopted which is part of the programme of a Group that this is largely due to its activities. Political parties are too complex and the role of the non-aligned party membership too great to assume either of these things.

If the essentials of the '79 Group's aims is considered – or at least those of its most prominent members – it is clear that they commanded latent support in the SNP. The typology developed earlier showing the Group to support a left-wing, gradualist party (as opposed to a right/apolitical, fundamentalist movement) were achieved. Arguably, these essentials were frustrated by the very existence of the '79 Group. The connotation of illegality and malevolence associated with organised factions meant that what the Group advocated was tainted.

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