SESSION DE 2008

CONCOURS EXTERNE
DE RECRUTEMENT DE PROFESSEURS AGRÉGÉS

SECTION LANGUES VIVANTES ÉTRANGÈRES :

ANGLAIS

COMMENTAIRE DE TEXTE EN ANGLAIS

Durée : 6 heures

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MR CALLAGHAN’S DESSERTS

Mr Callaghan has had a wretched spring. But none of his misfortunes to date have compared with the stunning punishment he received at the hands of the electorate on Thursday. The Wales Bill, to which he and his colleagues have pinned their prestige and their considerable influence, in his own political fief, suffered rejection virtually without precedent in its finality. In Scotland – contrary to all expectations – the margin in favour of the Scotland Bill was so derisory that the likelihood of Parliament advancing the Bill to the Statute Book, whatever the Government’s wishes, must be remote. In England two by-elections suggested that an early General Election would produce a landslide victory for the Conservative party. Yet the outcome of the referendums has dramatically increased the chances that an early election will not be avoidable.

So the theatre of British politics has undergone another transformation. Presumably Mr Callaghan will be quite undeterred by the narrowness of the Scottish results from inviting Parliament to proceed with the Scotland Bill regardless. Since concern for the good government of Scotland – let alone of the rest of the United Kingdom – has never remotely entered his calculations it would be out of character for him to shrink back now.

He will be able to count on the votes of the Nationalist protagonists of separatism; and presumably most of the Liberal MPs will be prepared to back him too – if only in the hope of one more stay of execution for themselves. As for Labour’s anti-devolutionists, they will be subjected to every refinement of political blackmail to make them come to heel. Their constitutional duty to resist such blackmail is self-evident; and in practice they can probably be relied upon to do so.

Even the shattering body-blows will not suffice to persuade Mr Callaghan to go quietly. If he is deprived of the support of the Nationalists, he can be expected to switch his considerable ingenuity to the concoction of yet one more shabby deal, with the Ulstermen. But Mr Powell’s ability to sweet-talk his fellow Ulster MPs into the Government lobby, whenever needed for a motion of confidence, must be problematical.

So after all, Mr Callaghan, having shrunk from what would probably have been a narrow electoral defeat last autumn, looks like having soon to lead his party to disaster at the polls. It is hard to think of a richer example of poetic justice in modern British political history.

Meanwhile “devolution” is dead. The fact that one voter in six in Wales, and that one voter in three in Scotland, could be found to support these constitutional monstrosities, is a signal tribute to the maturity of the electorate. Of course it does not mean that nationalism has been exorcised (although it suggests that the Nationalist MPs are in for decimation when the election comes). But it does mean that the next Conservative Government will have an invaluable breathing space in which to produce a sensible response to the emotions which nationalism has reflected.

Nationalism in Scotland and Wales is essentially a heart-cry against the excessive power of the modern State. If that power is not sharply and swiftly diminished, then the fortunes of SNP and Plaid Cymru will soon revive: and next time there may be no stopping short of the full disintegration of the United Kingdom.

But the Conservative party is given the chance to make a reality of the only genuine alternative. That is true devolution: not from one layer of bureaucracy to another, but from the State to the private citizen.