

Introduction:

With the 20th Century coming to a close and the advent of the 21st Century, Scotland decided to change its political structure once and for all and this transition took place over a period of two years, i.e. from 1997 to 1999, with a referendum being put into place to a Scottish Parliament inside the United Kingdom. This report aims to look at the changing nature of Scottish Politics from 1999 till date and present an analysis of the cumulative effect of such changes.

Body:

Ever since 1707, since Scotland and England became entwined in a political union, the de jure legislature for Scotland has been the United Kingdom Parliament. However, in 1997, a referendum to establish a separated Scottish Parliament inside the United Kingdom was raised and was met with a clear majority voting in favor of creation of such a Parliament. Following this, the United Kingdom passed the Scotland Act of 1998 which set up the Scottish Parliament. On a whole, it was described as ‘extraordinary achievement’; a set of decisions to ‘transform a highly centralized unitary state into a devolved and quasi-federal system of government in the space of only three years’, without causing the ‘break-up of Britain’ by Hazell (2000: 3; 5). Following is a year wise depiction of the changes in the Scottish political scene following devolution in 1999:

- 1999:

In 1999, the political landscape of Scotland was dominated by the Scottish Labour Party and other parties were getting used to the idea of a new Scottish Parliament. The Labour party reveled in the devolution it managed to bring about and formed the government with Donald Dewar was the First Minister and a total of 56 members in the Parliament. On the other hand, the now powerful Scottish National Party was floundering to secure a foothold in the Scottish Parliament and ended up becoming the second biggest party in the Parliament in terms of members in the Parliament with 35 seats and formed the opposition. The Scottish Conservative Party was still in two minds about the Scottish Parliament and about devolution on a whole and majority of its members did not approve of devolution or the existence of the Scottish Parliament.

The reason why this period could have been that of turmoil in the Scottish political landscape was that the people and the policy makers were getting a taste of something new, i.e. autonomy and owing to this, many citizens and government officials had differing views on the matter and this is reflected in the above lines which outline the difference of opinion of various parties.

- 2000-2001:

In the year 2000, Donald Dewar passed away due to a brain hemorrhage and was succeeded by Henry McLeish as the new First Minister. However, his term was short-lived to little more than a year after his resignation following allegations of him subletting a part of his subsidized Westminster office without having the office registered in the register of interests as per Miranda (2001). He was succeeded by Jack McConnell as the First Minister in 2001 and McConnell would have a bigger role to play for the country in the years to follow. Thus, it can be seen that the first term of the Labor Party as majority was a very tumultuous one seeing the death of a First Minister and a scandal laced resignation of the other. However, the years to follow were ones of stability.

- 2003:

In 2003, Scotland held its second General Elections and in terms of the final result, the situation was the same. The Labour Party again formed the majority with Jack McConnell serving as first minister. But, the underlying changes in the political outlook were of more importance. The Labour Party, though in power, lost 6 seats in the Parliament and had a total of 50 members and came into power after forming a coalition with the Liberal Democrats. The National Party too faced a downfall in members, falling down to just 27 members in the Parliament. This change in the composition of seats in the Parliament was owing to the rise of smaller parties and other independent candidates seeing a surge of success as per McCall (2016).

The reason why the smaller parties saw an uptick in this period of time could have been because of the negative impact of the Office gate scandal on the Labour Party's

perception and because of the less popularity of the National Party amongst the Scottish Populace.

- 2007:

The year 2007 saw a significant change in the political scenario prevalent in Scotland. The people considered the Labour Party to have become uninspiring as per McCall (2016). That year saw the gradual shift of power from the Labour Party to the National Party. The National Party managed to score majority in the Parliament with the Labour Party forming the opposition for the first time. Apart from that, the National Party also won the popular vote, thus, for the first time in Scottish political history receiving mandate to form the government. The smaller parties faced the brunt of this competition between both the major parties. The National Party tried to form a coalition with the Liberal Democrats, but, that didn't come to be, so it formed a minority administration with Alex Salmond as the First Minister.

The reason why the National Party won this election was because of the stagnation of the Labour Party and because of the negative fall-out from the Iraq War as per McCall (2016). Following the devolution referendum, the Labour Party did not put into effect many groundbreaking policies (apart from a few like the policy which allowed for free health care to the elderly) thus, leading to the people starting to consider other parties owing to the Labour Party's plateau effect.

- 2011:

In the 4th General Election of Scotland, the gradual rise of the National Party was finally seen with the National Party winning a clear majority. The Labour party on the other hand faced humiliating defeat. The Liberal Democrats saw the same situation and ended up with a total of 5 seats in all. The leaders of the Liberal Democrats, the Labour Party and the Conservative Party soon announced their resignation. The National Party formed the government with Alex Salmond as the First Minister. He resigned in 2014 after a

referendum for independence showed that people were not in favour of independence as per BBC (2014).

The National Party at this point of time had a clear majority because of the fact that the National Party performed better than what was expected of them by the people when they elected the National Party in the previous term and because they expected them to do maintain this in their second term as per Carman, Mitchell and Johns (2011). Further, with the people considering the Labour Party to have stagnated, this, acted in the National Party' favour.

- 2016:

2016 also saw the National Party holding on to its majority. The Labour Party went further down the hill by coming down to 24 seats. They were replaced by the Conservative Party as the second largest party in the Parliament with 31 seats as per BBC (2016). The National Party formed the government with Nicola Sturgeon as the First Minister. As per Curtice (2015), the reason why the National Party has come to hold power in Scotland is because it is viewed as a party which aims to create a more equal society.

Analysis and Conclusion:

Since 1999, five general elections have occurred in Scotland and they have been outlined above. From an analysis of these elections, one can conclude that the political views of Scotland and its people saw a gradual shift. The people first preferred the Labour Party owing to the fact that it enabled Scotland to devolve from the UK. However, once the sheen of this concept wore off, the people saw the Labour Party to be competent, though uninspiring. This shift in preference was the main point to be noted in the 2007 election in which the National Party edged to a narrow victory and the shift was set in concrete in 2011 when same party won by a huge majority. The result was the same in the 2016 election which shows that people's views towards the Labour Party have changed and the National Party is the political man of the hour.

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