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THE NORTHERN IRELAND SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC AND LABOUR PARTY

UNITED KINGDOM FACTS

Richard Rose and Ian McAllister

Centre for the Study of Public Policy

University of Strathclyde

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Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 1982 978-0-333-25341-0

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First published 1982 by
THE MACMILLAN PRESS LTD
London and Basingstoke
Companies and representatives
throughout the world

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Rose, Richard, *b. 1933*

United Kingdom facts

1. Great Britain — Politics and government—1945—

I. Title II. McAllister, Ian

320.9'41'085 JN231

ISBN 978-1-349-04206-7 ISBN 978-1-349-04204-3 (eBook)

DOI 10.1007/978-1-349-04204-3

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Introduction

The Crown in Parliament is the sovereign government of the United Kingdom, but it does not treat identically its major parts—England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The United Kingdom has existed since 1801, but there has never been a time when all four parts were governed by the same institutions, and the differences between the nations have always been significant to Scots, Welsh and Ulstermen.

The use of different labels to describe the United Kingdom—Britain, Great Britain or even England—reflects an important half-truth. The links between the different parts of the United Kingdom are strong, and in many respects the common factors of the United Kingdom experience are greater than those that differentiate its parts. In matters of international law, the United Kingdom is a unitary state, albeit the Republic of Ireland also lays a constitutional claim to one of its parts. In many matters of industrial and economic policy, Great Britain (that is, Scotland, Wales and England) is a unit, and separate provision is made for Northern Ireland. In matters of legislation, England and Wales are normally treated as one unit; separate provision is often made for Scotland and for Northern Ireland. In religious history—and, in the 1970s, in the party systems—each of the four parts of the United Kingdom differs from the others.

The rise of nationalist parties in Scotland and Wales and of a multiplicity of extra-British or anti-British parties in Northern Ireland has dramatically emphasised the ‘un-English’ character of parts of the United Kingdom. The response of successive British governments has further intensified differences between the government of England and of its non-English parts. In the 1970s, Northern Ireland was treated to such fundamental departures from Westminster conventions of parliamentary government as internment, civil war, power-sharing and a Constitutional Convention. In 1978 Parliament approved Devolution Acts establishing elected Assemblies for Scotland and Wales, proposing to govern each differently from the other, as well as differently from England. These Acts were repealed in 1979, but distinctive government of Scotland and Wales remains.

Anyone who seeks to ascertain basic facts about the different parts of the United Kingdom will often be stymied, for statistics may lump together information from all four under a single heading, or else wrongly describe as ‘British’ information that refers only to England, or England and Wales. What is distinctive about political phenomena in one nation may also be ignored. It is, for example, impossible to fit the Scottish or Welsh Nationalist parties or the whole of the party politics of Northern Ireland into an Anglo-centric account of the party system.

The justification for reducing the whole of the United Kingdom to England’s example is that it dominates the population of the United Kingdom, with almost five-sixths of its people. Moreover, the other three parts are themselves fragmented. Hence, any generalisation based solely upon English experience will fit most, though not all, of the United Kingdom.

The purpose of this book is to fill gaps in our knowledge of the United Kingdom by bringing together conveniently in one place basic facts about public life in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. English data and data for the United Kingdom as a whole are included when comparison is helpful. With this book in hand, the reader should be able to locate quickly information about major features of life in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland that would otherwise take years to compile. Wherever practical, information for each of these parts is systematically presented in a consistent format, so that a browser can note under what circumstances and to what extent the parts of the United Kingdom are similar or different. In this way, we hope to reduce the insularity that erects mental barriers within and between the parts of the United Kingdom.

Our starting point is 1945, the year that saw the end of the Second World War and the return of the first majority Labour government. All political data start with the Parliament elected in July 1945. Trend analyses have been carried forward to 1979, except when the publication of official statistics lags behind events. The whole period cannot, of course, be covered when major changes have occurred within it. For example, the chapter about public opinion must

take as its starting point the launching of public opinion surveys in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in the 1960s, and many references to Northern Ireland reflect the disjunction caused by the suspension of the Stormont Parliament in 1972. Chapter 9 explicitly examines the extent to which social and economic trends have made parts of the United Kingdom more similar or more different in the past twenty-five years.

The 'hardness' of the facts assembled is variable. Numerical data is least ambiguous, even though it may not be precisely accurate. For instance, the number of valid votes cast can be confirmed by official sources, but figures on turnout at elections can only be approximate, for we do not know how many names on the electoral register should be deleted because of death or emigration. In totalling votes by party, one must deploy judgement as well as knowledge, particularly in Northern Ireland, for party lines are not stable and simple, even though the differences between candidates and parties are great. At all times we have sought to secure information from primary sources, checking and cross-checking figures where practicable, to test reliability. By being clear and precise in our presentation of information, it is hoped that even persons with widely different attitudes toward United Kingdom politics can confidently use these facts as the basis for their value judgements and interpretations. We focus attention upon what needs to be explained, a necessary condition of any social science analysis. Too much writing—particularly about nationalism—offers explanations for phenomena that do not exist.

Understanding must proceed simultaneously with information. Of the making of books about Scotland, Wales and Ireland North and South, there is no end. There are few books, however, that encompass the life of the whole of the United Kingdom. To understand the similarities and differences of nations that are dispersed across two islands, with a territorial capital at one periphery—London is, after all, closer to France than it is to Wales, the Scottish borders or Ulster—requires both much travel and a respect for historical and contemporary differences. Both editors of this volume are currently engaged in research that may add some yeast of understanding to the facts reported herein. For a comprehensive listing of published and unpublished research, see Laurence Pollock and Ian McAllister, *A Bibliography of United Kingdom Politics* (Glasgow: University of Strathclyde, Centre for the Study of Public Policy, 1980).

In compiling this book, we have received assistance from officials in many different organisations and institutions described herein, and once again we are indebted for fast and accurate typing to Mrs R. West. Quantitative analysis has been made much easier by the facilities of the Social Statistics Laboratory of the University of Strathclyde.

The following have been particularly helpful in scrutinising and verifying portions of the manuscript: J. J. Campbell, Mrs Cindy Mitchell, Laurence Pollock, and A. S. B. Wilson. Richard Parry worked quickly and intelligently through government documents that are not often organised to facilitate understanding, and was particularly useful in compiling materials for Chapters 6–9 of this book.

The work has been undertaken within the context of a large-scale study of the political structure of the United Kingdom, financed by a Social Science Research Council grant (HR/4689).

We are solely responsible for any errors among the many facts contained herein, and would welcome corrections or suggestions for augmentation of the second edition of this book.

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