How Westminster carved up Scotland’s Oil Revenues

More revelations on UK government’s campaign of lies and deceit

Following on from the McCrone Papers which revealed that the balance of payments gain from North Sea oil would easily swamp any existing budget deficit whatever its size, and transform Scotland into a country with a substantial and chronic surplus, the latest documents to emerge from the 1970s show that London civil servants and the Labour government conceived to prevent Scotland laying claim to the majority of North Sea Oil revenues in the event of independence.

After the SNP’s major advance in 1974 on the back of the “It’s Scotland’s Oil” campaign, in 1975 a UK Treasury department carved up the seabed to ensure Scotland’s share would be greatly reduced. The Treasury would simply override the Continental Shelf Order of 1968, which was accepted by the United Nations, and set the Scottish jurisdiction of the North Sea due east of Berwick. London’s proposals were to introduce a Shetland Sector which ran down to the east of Caithness and further reduce the “Scottish” sector by extending the English border in a north-easterly line from Berwick so as to incorporate 4 known oil fields into the “English” Sector.

Meanwhile an Under Secretary at the Department of Energy, Graham Kerr, wanted Orkney and Shetland to be hived off from Scotland and the Orkney and Shetland movements for autonomy were to be encouraged.

This new map of the North Sea was presented as having sound legal basis by a denizen clad young Tony economist called Andrew Neil on BBC TV’s Tomorrow’s World which was at the time watched by millions every week (and prompted the writer’s first angry letter to the BBC).

The Treasury also stopped assigning oil and gas revenues to the relevant UK economic regions, mainly Scotland and East Anglia, and created a new offshore economic region.

The Labour government was then determined to ensure that the proposed Scottish Assembly would have no control over energy or any North Sea Oil activity.

The civil servants also suggested to a willing Labour government that they delay or devolve on devolution for as long as possible while undertaking a campaign of misinformation to downplay the extent of North Sea Oil. Writing in the recent issue of “Scottish Review of Books” George Rose states “But first the Scots had to be persuaded that separation would be bad for them. Judging by the official papers the men of Cabinet Office Constitutional Unit, which was set up to make devolution work...very slowly, saw it as a mission to persuade, caution and threaten the Scottish majority into resisting the blandishments of the SNP and remain in the fold of the United Kingdom.”

Among those who wanted to stop devolution was Sir David Walker, who is currently investigating the Banking crisis on behalf of Gordon Brown, was wanted devolution “to be delayed for as long as possible with continuing the government commitment to move down the devolution road and containing the SNP lobby in parliament.” This was agreed by Dennis Healey, Tony Benn and Roy Jenkins and it was not until 1979 that the rigged referendum was held.

Whilst lifting the true worth of North Sea Oil from the Scottish public the said unionist politicians were claiming that an independent Scotland would be like Alberta or Bangladesh.

The startling revelations were ignored by Scotland’s “National” newspaper The Scotsman and by Scotland On Sunday. Typically the UK parties tried to play down the significance.

Murdo Fraser, the deputy leader of the Scottish Conservatives, said: “Only a political anorexic would get choked about the contents of a 50-year-old historical document.” (This is a bit rich coming from someone who still gets excited about a 500 year old historical document, but then he loves the Treaty of Union.)

The Ten and Deceit of over 50 years ago were repeated as recently as 1999 when Henry McLeish “quietly moved” England’s North Sea fisheries boundary 60 miles north just before devolution took place.

The former boundary between English and Scottish waters ran due east from Berwick to a median line between the UK and Norway. But a new “demarcated” limit has been created 60 miles further north at Camaret. The new boundary has been drawn up under international maritime regulations to identify a zone within British fishery limits for which Scottish ministers will be responsible in the future. The boundary shift was established by an order carried out at Westminster under the Scottish Adjacent Boundaries Order (1999).

The order was passed by the House of Lords and the Committee on Delegated Legislation on March 23, 1999 but was not openly debated in the Commons.

It was moved by McLeish – then a Scottish Office Minister – and received minimal opposition from a committee containing three other Scottish MPs - Tam Dalyell, Sir Robert Smith and John McAllion.

Now we know where they got that idea from.

Westminster has just passed plans to give the Big Three London political parties a role in the running of the Electoral Commission. Pete Wishart MP says the plans threaten the Commission’s status as an independent regulator, and will undermine its legitimacy as a UK-wide body by excluding smaller parties running elections in devolved administration.

The Electoral Commission also oversees the financing and conduct of referendum campaigns.

The relevance of the latest secret documents should not be lost on those who will be campaigning for independence. The UK government, the Scotland Office, and MIB will pull out all the stops to discredit the Scottish Government and the SNP at taxpayers’ expense.

You ain’t seen nothing yet.

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