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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 conspired 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 Kear, 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 denim clad young Tory 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 a referendum on devolution for as long as possible while undertaking a campaign of misinformation to down play the extent of North Sea Oil. Writing in the recent issue of "Scottish Review of Books" George Rosie states "But first, the Scots had to be persuaded that separatism 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 their mission to persuade, cajole 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; he wanted devolution "to be delayed for as long as possible consistently with honouring 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 hiding the true worth of North Sea Oil from the Scottish public the self same Unionist politicians were claiming that an independent Scotland would be like Albania 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 anorak would get excited about the contents of a 30-year-old historical document." (This is a bit rich coming from someone who still gets excited about a 300 year old historical document, but then he loves the Treaty of Union.)

The lies and deceit of over 30 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 Carnoustie. 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 administrations.

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 MI6 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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Editor's note:

On Friday 6th March, BBC Alba showed the documentary "Dìomhair" (Secrets) made by Caledonia TV: this was the introduction to that programme.

"For the past fifty years, Labour and Conservative governments have shared a common agenda - stopping Home Rulers and Scottish Nationalists from breaking up Britain and making Scotland independent. This programme will show you how both parties have resorted to spying and underhand tactics to discredit the SNP, its members and supporters. We will show you how official documents which supported independence were kept hidden. How politicians and civil servants tried to obstruct independence and keep the country united. In this programme we reveal how, in the past, civil servants, MI5 and Special Branch were used by Westminster to obstruct and even sabotage the Scottish nationalist movement."



SNP Euro candidates at the hustings at the SNP National Council in December. Left to right: Alyn Smith MEP, Councillor Drew Hendry, Councillor Grant Thoms, Ian Hudghton MEP, Dr Aileen McLeod and Dr Duncan Ross.