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Dear Sir,

Draft Wales Bill

Unfortunately rather late in the day, I have only just had the opportunity to read this Bill. Hardly ideal, but, as an individual with very many years of industrial and public service behind me and a strong sense of commitment to community and country, I wished to make a contribution to the debate. Perforce, however, I must now be brief in my comments, but I may well fail!

Personally, I have never felt that devolution (and all its trappings) has done much for the people of the United Kingdom as a whole, particularly in England, with some 80% of the population. It has been costly and divisive, especially in Scotland. Nevertheless, we are where we are and I see nothing in the Bill which, within the prescribed limits, should hinder the Assembly from introducing appropriate and necessary new or amending legislation.

I do, however, have some residual worries in this regard about the powers of Welsh Ministers in respect of the exercise of legislation, orders, directions and regulations. Granted, the Assembly itself must vote on (all?) these matters, but I suspect that some will come under the mantra of executive discretion! Here, as is almost universally the case, the snag is that the electorate chooses its members (representatives!), but NOT, at least directly, its Government.

The clauses (20/21) concerning a super-majority are welcomed and necessary, although limited in scope. Personally (again), I would feel outraged if the kind of changes described were effected without the consent of the people. One must remember that Devolution only just scraped through some 10 years ago, so there

was and possibly still is no overwhelming enthusiasm for it. Most people I speak to - and there are plenty of competent, questioning and well qualified citizens out here, who could be AM's, MP's, Councillors *et alii* but choose (for many good reasons) not to do this work - are disillusioned with politics, the naked ambition that often accompanies it, the pay, benefits and allowances, the bickering and failure to work together for the common good, the frequent lack of feed-back and the multi-tiered bureaucracies that we, the electorate, now have to endure.

The Secretary of State, in his foreword to the Bill, mentions "greater accountability to the Welsh people". That must go for all forms of government; there should be no room for people who are on some kind of ego-trip, or believe that, once elected, they have been given a blank cheque and *carte blanche* to do as they like. I am in favour of much more consultation along the lines of simplified, cheaper referenda, as practised in Switzerland - one of the most stable and successful countries in the world - and more regular and detailed information about the work of the Assembly and the Welsh Government - the "why's and wherefore's" of actions taken or proposed.

The provisions/clauses about the observance of EU Laws and Conventions <sup>and</sup> matters reserved wholly to the UK Government/Parliament are noted, as is the statement that "... the UK Parliament will not normally legislate in devolved areas without the consent of the Assembly, whilst retaining the sovereignty to do so". It seems to me that if the integrity, well-being, 'one nation' status of the United Kingdom is to be preserved in the eyes of the world - and, sadly, some doubt remains here - the primacy of our National Parliament and the key rôle of our Monarch must be recognised and upheld. Recent events in Scotland have been and still are very disturbing in this respect.

Mentioning Scotland brings me to the Secretary of State's remarks about devolved powers in that country and also to the question of Welsh funding relative to England. On the latter point, the statement seems reasonably satisfactory, given tax-raising possibilities for Wales. On the former, I have neither the time, nor opportunity to study Scottish legislation, but presumably your Committee and others will do so and compare like with like to ensure even-handedness. The fact that Wales has, for so many years and in so many areas, been joined with England should not mean now that Wales is at some disadvantage compared with Scotland and Northern Ireland.

With reference to devolved powers, in today's climate - very different indeed to that of my youth - they generally seem to make sense. I'm not sure, however, about the status of canals and inland waterways; nor have I seen any reference to the position of the Crown Estate in relation to the actual ownership of shores, foreshores and beaches within tidal regimes. Are these areas properly defined?

There are frequent references throughout the text to legality issues, perhaps a sort of warning to the Assembly/Government not to act *ultra vires*. To what extent are decisions challengeable in law and by whom and to whom? To the Supreme Court in Britain and/or to the European Court? I am not a great fan of Ombudsmen or Regulators (do we, or should we have them in Wales?), based on considerable past experience in my working life, but we need someone or some body to watch over, hold to account and closely scrutinise, on behalf of voters, the actions and decisions of the Assembly and particularly the Executive. Incidentally, I hold similar views in respect of City, County, Borough and District Councils!

I have one last question in this area: precisely who is and what is the rôle of the Presiding Officer? Is this just another name for the Speaker?

Overall, I think this Draft Bill makes a pretty good fist of addressing topical issues, which affect the lives of everybody who lives in Wales. This is a beautiful, culturally advanced and generally peaceful place in which to have one's home. There is a downside however: devolution can be perceived as weakening the unity of Great Britain by giving special consideration to the people of just 3 large areas of the present United Kingdom and thereby creating some resentment in England. In geographical, numerical and monetary terms - and in heritage, dialect and tradition too; - there is an equally strong case for Assemblies in the very different North East, North West, South East, South West and Central or Midlands areas of England!

Given that we will shortly have in Wales a settled state of affairs on which to build a stable economy and a good environment for now and the future (without frequent changes which have so blighted, for example, the NHS and our schools over many decades), there are several priorities which must be addressed. We need far more jobs, the restoration of industry and better communications. Some railways (or light tramways) should be re-opened; a decent road should be constructed to link North and South Wales and farming, fishing and policing relieved of the unproductive, tedium of far too much paperwork. Perhaps some old Victorian values of what can be done would not come amiss either.

Even if my frustrations have shown at times, I hope my comments will be, as intended, generally helpful in your deliberations.

Yours faithfully,

Y. Iwan C Bancroft