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Regional Government in England

This Paper is concerned with the accountability of regional policy, including pressure for the devolution of power to a democratically accountable regional tier. It is relevant to the *Regional Development Agencies Bill* [Bill 100 of 1997-98, Second Reading due 14.1.98] and the *Referendum (English Parliament) Bill* [Bill 9 of 1997-98, Second Reading due 16.1.98].

The *Regional Development Agencies Bill* would create RDAs, the functions of which are described in Research Paper 98/7. The Bill would enable RDAs to be made partially accountable to voluntary regional chambers comprised of representatives of local government and other regional interests.

The *Referendum (English Parliament) Bill*, which would provide for a referendum on the creation of an English Parliament, has been introduced by Teresa Gorman to highlight what she sees as the dangers of the Government's programme of constitutional reform. The implications of devolution in England for the "West Lothian Question" are discussed in Research Paper 98/3.

Research Paper 97/114 on the *Greater London Authority (Referendum) Bill* is also relevant to the issues raised in this paper.

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I Summary

This Paper is concerned with the accountability of regional policy, including pressure for the devolution of power to a democratically accountable regional tier. It is relevant to the *Regional Development Agencies Bill* [Bill 100 of 1997-98] and the *Referendum (English Parliament) Bill* [Bill 9 of 1997-98].

The Introduction describes briefly proposals for devolution in England from the Kilbrandon Report of 1973 onwards. It also describes the difference between devolution and federalism. Section II gives an account of the development of Labour Party policy on the English regions since the 1992 General Election, which some have described as a process of watering down Labour's commitment to creating directly elected regional assemblies. The 1995 Labour Party document **A Choice for England** proposed the creation of indirectly elected regional chambers of local authority representatives which would be responsible for "strategic co-ordination and democratic oversight," with directly elected regional assemblies to be created in time "where public demand existed." Developments since the General Election are discussed, including the publication of the White Paper **Building Partnerships for Prosperity** [Cm 3814] and the *Regional Development Agencies Bill* which is due to receive its Second Reading on 14 January 1997. The Bill would create RDAs, the functions of which are described in Research Paper 98/7. It would also enable the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions to designate voluntary regional bodies comprising representatives of local authorities and other regional interests as Regional Chambers. The RDAs would be accountable in part to the Chambers in areas where a Chamber exists. The Bill would not enable the Government to create directly elected regional assemblies, nor to hold regional referendums on such a move. Further primary legislation would be required to enable either development to proceed.

Section III of the Paper describes some of the reactions to the Government's proposals. The Conservative Party is concerned that RDAs as proposed in the Bill would be "creatures of Whitehall and will be unaccountable to the public." The possible creation of regional assemblies after the next election, on the other hand, could involve "step-by-step progress to a federal structure." The Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee, which published its report on Regional Development Agencies on 12 January 1998 [HC 415 of 1997-98] recommended that the accountability of the RDAs to the voluntary regional chambers should be more clearly specified by the Government, and in particular that the chambers approve the corporate plans and budgets of the RDAs.

Section IV describes the *Referendum (English Parliament) Bill* [Bill 9 of 1997-98], which is due to receive its Second Reading on 16 January 1998. This Private Member's Bill would provide for a referendum in England on the creation of an English Parliament; it has been introduced by Teresa Gorman as a means of highlighting what she sees as the dangers the

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Government's constitutional policies pose for the continued existence of the United Kingdom and the unfairness of such policies towards taxpayers and voters in England. The implications of devolution in England for the "West Lothian Question" are discussed in Section II of Research Paper 98/3.

II Introduction: Democratic Accountability in English Regional Government

The Constitution Unit's¹ report **Regional Government in England** distinguishes between "administrative decentralisation of government functions - essentially about the internal management structures of central government - and the devolution of power to regional bodies with their own democratic basis - a transfer of power from the centre to the regions" [1996, p13]. There is a history of administrative decentralisation within England at various points during the twentieth century, for example the regional structures put in place during the First and Second World Wars, the Regional Economic Planning Councils established by the Wilson government in 1964 and the Government Offices for the Regions established by the Conservative Government in 1994. Structures of this kind have tended to be established for purely administrative reasons. This Paper is concerned exclusively with the accountability of regional policy, including pressure for devolving power to a democratically accountable regional tier. The Constitution Unit report observes that this subject has been discussed at various points without any firm move towards implementation:

- A Royal Commission on the Constitution was established in 1969 and reported in 1973 ("the Kilbrandon Report")² The majority of its members recommended the creation of regional co-ordinating and advisory councils, partly indirectly elected and partly nominated. A memorandum of dissent published by two members of the Commission [Cmnd 5460-I] proposed a fully-blown regional tier of government for England, matching identical plans for Scotland and Wales.
- The Labour Government brought forward proposals for regional government in England in the mid-seventies, including a Green Paper **Devolution: the English Dimension** in 1976 [Dep 6965], which considered the implications for England of devolution to Scotland and Wales and provided a summary of the options for devolution in England. The Constitution Unit suggests that "no serious attempt was made to develop, or implement, any of the options. In part, this was because the issue of regional government really made an impact only in the North of England³, where the prospect of the Scottish economy benefiting from devolution, and the run-down of regional policy generally, raised the profile of the devolution debate. Opinion amongst Northern MPs and their supporters was mixed as to whether Scottish devolution should be opposed or whether proposals for a stronger regional body for the North of England should be pursued".⁴
- In 1977, the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party published a document **Regional Authorities and Local Government Reform** which put forward two models

¹ A research project based at University College, London

² Report of the Royal Commission on the Constitution 1969-73, Cmnd 5460

³ There has also been a long-standing campaign for devolution in the South West, however

⁴ "Regional Government in England", Constitution Unit, 1996, p18

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for regional government in England. This did not lead to the adoption of a clear regional policy by the party: "In the discussion within the Party which followed, there was general support for some form of elected regional authorities, but a lack of consensus on the exact functions of such authorities and opposition from local government and the trade unions. In the end proposals were put forward for regional authorities in two areas, the North, and Yorkshire and Humberside, with the view that these could act as a catalyst for action elsewhere. This proposal was rejected by the NEC."⁵

Because of its failure to make a stronger impact on English politics, regionalism in England was described by Christopher Harvie as 'the dog that never barked:' "'English history and politics still seem imprinted with a spirit inimical to regional government."⁶

The Constitution Unit also makes a distinction between the devolution of power to regional bodies and the creation of a federal system: "The fundamental difference in this context is that a devolved form of regional government is, by definition, created by the act of a superior body, devolving some of its own powers and responsibilities to a subordinate one and could be discontinued by act of the superior. In federal systems, the centre and regions stand equal with one another with the distribution of powers and responsibilities set out in a basic constitutional document" [ibid, p13]. The Unit suggests that it would only be possible to introduce a 'federal settlement' in the UK if it were embodied in a written constitution.⁷

⁵ Ibid, p18.

⁶ English Regionalism: The Dog that Never Barked, in B Crick[ed], "National Identities: the Constitution of the UK," 1991

⁷ Federalism and other constitutional arrangements such as regionalism or 'devolution all round' are considered in the context of possible answers to the West Lothian Question in Research Paper 98/3, section II

III Government Policy on Regional Accountability

A. Background

The party's 1992 Manifesto contained a commitment, based on the 1991 policy document **Devolution and Democracy**, to create Regional Development Agencies which would "later form the basis for elected regional governments." Local government would be reorganised into unitary authorities based, for the most part, on the existing district councils.

The 1995 Labour Party consultation paper **A Choice for England** proposed the creation of indirectly elected regional chambers of local authority representatives, which would have two main purposes: "strategic co-ordination and democratic oversight." Rather than being in competition with local government, the chambers "would be their regional voice" [p2]. The democratic element would be developed in time by the creation of elected regional assemblies "where public demand existed." A precondition for these would be the establishment of a predominantly unitary system of local government. The assemblies would not have tax-raising or legislative powers. Three safeguards would have to be met before a regional chamber could convert to an elected assembly [p3]:

1. The plan for a directly elected assembly would have to be drawn up and approved by the regional chamber, and therefore enjoy the support of most local authorities in the region;
2. It would have to be approved by Parliament; and
3. There would have to be clear evidence of public agreement which could include, if Parliament approved, a region-wide referendum.

This was described in the *Guardian* as "a 'triple lock' designed to shoot down Tory claims that Labour plans to set up an extra expensive tier of government for which there is no demand."⁸ The *Times* described the proposals as a sensible dilution of Labour's regional policy.⁹

A Choice for England treated London as a separate case, due to "the overwhelming desire of Londoners for an elected strategic authority for the capital." A new elected authority would be created, combining city-wide and regional functions.

⁸ "Labour retreats on English assemblies" 21.7.95

⁹ "A modest proposal" 21.7.95

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A similar approach to regional government was adopted in a September 1996 Labour policy document **A New Voice for England's Regions** and in the 1997 Manifesto. Both documents made clear that where there were calls for the creation of regional assemblies, popular approval would first have to be demonstrated in regional referendums. The Manifesto stated:

Demand for directly elected regional government so varies across England that it would be wrong to impose a uniform system. In time we will introduce legislation to allow the people, region by region, to decide in a referendum whether they want directly elected regional government. Only where clear popular consent is established will arrangements be made for elected regional assemblies.

The 1996 document [p12] stated that

The timescale for moving from regional chambers to regional assemblies is bound to vary from one region to another. In some regions, existing regional associations may today cover some of the functions of the regional chambers we propose. While some regions may want to move ahead quickly, there may be others which do not want to make this move at all.

B. Developments Since the Election, including the *Regional Development Agencies Bill*

The Government announced its intention to introduce legislation to create Regional Development Agencies in the Queen's Speech on 14 May 1997.¹⁰ The Labour Government's consultation paper on RDAs of June 1997¹¹ described them as "an essential first step to provide for effective, properly co-ordinated regional economic development... and to enable the English regions to improve their competitiveness." In the short term RDAs would be accountable through Ministers to Parliament, but the Government wished to see the Agencies become "fully responsive to the needs of their region and able to be called to account locally." The Government would therefore support the establishment of non-statutory regional chambers, "possibly formed by local authorities acting in partnership with regional business interests" as a step towards this objective.

The consultation paper did not mention the possible future creation of regional assemblies. On 3 December 1996 the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions John Prescott made a statement to the House announcing the publication of the White Paper **Building Partnerships for Prosperity**. He said: "As we made clear in our manifesto, we are committed to moving, with the consent of local people, to directly elected regional government in England."¹²

¹⁰ HC Deb Vol 294, c42

¹¹ Attached to Department of the Environment press release 214 of 11.6.97 "Regions invited to have their say"

¹² HC Deb Vol 302 c359

The White Paper [Cm 3814] contained a chapter on Regional Accountability. RDAs would have to take full account of local interests: "Organisations representing local interests, and above all the democratically-elected local authorities, have a right to contribute to the work of RDAs" [p52]. This would be recognised in appointments to the boards of RDAs, but "an additional means of consultation" was desirable. In addition, RDAs would create a new focus for the regions: "When local authorities come together to contribute to the strategy of the RDA, they will find further opportunities for cooperation and for developing the regional agenda. In doing this, we will build on the informal structures which the regions themselves have set up. The Government believe that the creation of RDAs will help to foster a sense of regional identity and develop a regional capability. In time, this may lead to further transfers of functions and responsibilities to regional structures" [p52].

The White Paper reiterated the Government's belief that it would be wrong to impose a uniform system or timetable on moves for further accountability. As a first step, the Government proposed to "build on the arrangements being put in place by local authorities and their regional partners to form voluntary regional chambers and use these as a mechanism through which RDAs can take account of regional views and give an account of themselves for their activities. We expect the cost of these arrangements to continue to be modest and to be met from within existing budgets."

The current state of play in the development of regional chambers was summarised as follows:

A regional chamber is a body that includes councillors from the local authorities in the region and representatives of the various sectors with a stake in the region's economic, social and environmental wellbeing. The current state of development of such chambers across the regions is not even. All regions are currently covered by regional planning conferences, or similar fora of local planning authorities, which advise the Secretary of State on the preparation of regional planning guidance (although these do not match the proposed RDA boundaries in all cases). In most regions, particularly at subregional level, there are many public, private and voluntary sector partnerships, especially with economic development aims. In some regions there are indirectly elected voluntary "assemblies" which represent the view of local government in the region. Also, in some regions, such indirectly elected assemblies are exploring how to involve other non-local government interests directly in their work. But almost all regions are making progress in the same direction: that is, to create a chamber which can provide a regional voice which includes all the regional stakeholders. The Government intend to reinforce these developments.

A more detailed description of the arrangements which existed in December 1996 is contained in **Regional Working in England**, a policy statement by the English Regional Associations of Local Authorities. The progress of the Regional Assembly for Yorkshire and

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Humberside (the regional chamber in that region) was described in an article in *LGIU Briefing* in July 1997 by the Director of the Assembly, Liz Kerry.

The Regional Assembly for Yorkshire and Humberside began life a year ago. It embraces three pre-existing local authority co-ordinating mechanisms: the Regional Planning Conference; the Yorkshire and Humberside Regional Association; and the Brussels Office. Its purpose is

- to provide a new, high level strategic body for local government in the region, which promotes democratically elected community leadership
- to promote the economic, social and environmental well-being of the region within the UK and beyond for the benefit of all who live here
- to act through partnership, securing consensus and observing subsidiarity.

The Assembly has the support of all 22 local authorities in the region, is funded by them through subscription, and it is leader led.

...In the Assembly's initial year we have been seeking greater coherence into what has been a fairly fragmented region, strengthening our partnership and establishing our credibility as an organisation.

The White Paper stated that there should be clear principles governing the composition of chambers. Although it was right that regional structures should develop to meet different regional circumstances, the Government proposed a number of criteria for the composition of regional chambers. First, "the partners to these voluntary arrangements should achieve an appropriate gender and ethnic balance" [p53]. In addition, the following criteria would ensure "the equitable involvement of all the regional partners:"

- i. The local authority element of the chamber should reflect regional, local and political balance, and type of authority;
- ii The non-local authority element should be open to representatives of the main regional economic development stakeholders with an interest in the work of the RDA;
- iii The local authority element within the chamber should be dominant, but the overall size of the chamber should enable the wide range of non-local authority interests to be represented;
- iv All the regional stakeholders should have the opportunity to contribute to the debates of the chamber and for their views to be reflected in its published statements.

Where regional chambers meeting the above criteria have been established, the Government intends that the RDA (subject to its ultimate accountability to Ministers) should be required to:

1. have regard to the regional viewpoint of the chamber in preparing its own economic strategy;
2. consult the chamber on its corporate plan; and
3. be open to scrutiny by the chamber, perhaps in the form of an annual hearing to discuss its corporate plan.

Clause 8 of the *Regional Development Agencies Bill* makes provision to this effect. The Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions would have the power to designate a body as a Regional Chamber if it was suitable to fulfil that role and was representative of those in an RDA's area having an interest in its work. The Secretary of State would then be able to give directions to an RDA requiring it to consult the chamber and have regard to any views expressed by it. In the absence of a regional chamber the Secretary of State would be able to give directions to the Agency to ensure that it carried out "appropriate consultation."

Clause 18 makes further provision about the relationship between RDAs and regional chambers, requiring an RDA, on receipt of directions from the Secretary of State, to supply specified information to the chamber, answer questions on that information and take other specified steps for the purpose of accounting to the chamber. The Clause also requires RDAs to hold a public meeting after the publication of their annual reports; the Secretary of State would be able to specify the format of the meeting etc.

The White Paper states that RDAs and chambers would be able to devise their own arrangements for consultation by agreement [p53]; the powers described above would presumably be used only where agreement could not be reached. In addition, the White Paper states that the Government will encourage RDAs to hold some of their board meetings in open session [p54].

The Bill does not give the Government powers to create regional assemblies, or even to hold referendums on the creation of assemblies. Further primary legislation would be necessary should the Government decide that there is sufficient local pressure to justify these steps. The Minister for Regions, Regeneration and Planning Richard Caborn has been quoted as saying that the Parliamentary timetable would not allow for the creation of regional assemblies before the next election.¹³ Giving evidence to the Environment, Transport and

¹³ *Scotsman* 27.6.97 "Blair faces English home rule revolt"

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Regional Affairs Committee, Mr Caborn outlined the timetable for the creation of directly-elected assemblies outside London as follows:

The way in which the [Regional] Chambers conduct themselves is one that will show to the people of those regions that they are useful institutions to have. Then they will be given the opportunity ... to make them directly elected at a time after the next General Election.¹⁴

The Government published a Green Paper, **New Leadership for London**, in July 1997. It proposed the creation of a strategic Greater London Authority comprising a directly elected mayor and assembly. The *Greater London Authority (Referendum) Bill*, which would provide for a referendum on the Government's plans, is currently before the House of Lords, having completed its passage through the Commons on 26 November 1996.

¹⁴ HC 415 of 1997-98, Q 561

IV Reactions to the Government's proposals

Responding to John Prescott's statement of 3 December 1997, the shadow Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, Sir Norman Fowler, said that¹⁵

The fundamental issue is not the goal of regional development, which we all want, but how it is to be achieved. We have serious doubts and concerns about the new development agencies that the Secretary of State is proposing. Will he confirm that the agencies will be not elected, but appointed entirely by Ministers? They are the creatures of Whitehall and will be unaccountable to the public.

The Secretary of State talks about the next step being regional assemblies. Is he aware that at the weekend his Minister of State gave an on-the-record interview to *the Scotsman*?¹⁶ The paper reported that the Minister signalled that, if Labour were to win the next election, it could pursue a federal structure for England. He left open the prospect of regional assemblies having law-making and tax-raising powers. What is the Government's constitutional agenda? Does it involve step-by-step progress to a federal structure?

As a west midlands Member, I want to see regional development and, as a party, we want to see regional development, but the Government's proposals amount to only more bureaucracy, less accountability, and duplication of effort, without any benefit for the regions.

The Constitution Unit report **Regional Government in England** [1996, p19] points out that although the Conservative Party supported devolution to Scotland during the late 1960s and early 1970s, it has never embraced regional government in England. The creation of the Government Offices for the Regions in 1994, and other developments introduced by the Major Government, were consistent with the view that regional policy is important but does not require the devolution of power from Westminster for its effectiveness. Bernard Jenkin, a Conservative spokesman on the constitution, is reported by the *Scotsman* as saying that "There is no real demand for elected assemblies in England, but there are some areas that are jealous of Scotland's funding. That is what is driving the regional agenda in England."¹⁷

The Liberal Democrats, on the other hand, have long supported regional devolution in England. The party's 1997 Manifesto promised the creation of the framework "to make existing regional decision-making in England democratically accountable, and enable the establishment of elected regional assemblies where there is demonstrated public demand" [p44]. Nick Harvey is reported by the *Scotsman* as giving a "luke-warm" to comments by Richard Caborn in the same newspaper on 1 December 1997: "Liberal Democrats would prefer to go faster and get on with it, but we are glad Labour have not abandoned the idea [of elected assemblies]. The more democratic it is and the more powers are devolved down, the better it will be."¹⁸

¹⁵ HC Deb Vol 302, cc 359-60

¹⁶ 1.12.97 "England's regions will get home rule"

¹⁷ "Demand for regional rule in England not great, say Tories" 2.12.97

¹⁸ Ibid

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There has been occasional speculation in the press that Ministers have decided to give a low priority to the devolution issue in England.¹⁹ Prior to the publication of the White Paper, the Campaign for a Northern Assembly took out a full-page advertisement in the *New Statesman* of 14 November 1997 publishing "A Declaration for the North" which called for an elected assembly for the region and claimed that it was suffering from "neglect and isolation from over-centralised government in London." The supporters of the Declaration included eleven Labour MPs. Jim Cousins, who has been a consistent supporter of elected assemblies, welcomed John Prescott's statement of 3 December.²⁰

The First Report of the Environment, Transport and the Regional Affairs Committee addresses the Government's proposals for the creation of RDAs.²¹ Owing to the politically contentious nature of the proposals, the Select Committee confines itself to "attempting to elucidate the proposals contained in the White Paper and the Bill and examining how effectively the Regional Development Agencies in the form proposed will be able to achieve their objectives" [p. v]. The Committee suggests that the role of the Regional Chambers requires further clarification:

The Government proposes "to build on the arrangements being put in place by local authorities and their regional partners to form voluntary chambers and use these as a mechanism through which RDAs can take account of regional views and give an account of themselves for their activities.". Witnesses sought greater clarity about this arrangement and how it would work. They sought clarification of the exact functions of the voluntary Regional Chambers and how Regional Development Agencies would be accountable to them for their Corporate Plans and budgets. They also sought clarification of when voluntary chambers would be made statutory bodies and eventually replaced by directly elected regional assemblies [p. vi].

The Local Government Association broadly supports the establishment of RDAs and the general approach adopted in the White Paper but has expressed reservations over some aspects of the Government's policy. On the issue of accountability, the Association has stated:²²

The LGA will examine the precise nature of the relationship between chambers and RDAs. The Association will want to be satisfied that the proposed requirement for RDAs to consult regional chambers will genuinely allow chambers to influence the new agencies. We will press the line developed in our responses to the issues paper last summer that RDAs should be required to work within the chambers' broader regional strategy and that the RDA's economic development strategy and business plan should be submitted to the chamber for approval. Good accountability is particularly important as

¹⁹ See for example *The Guardian* 22.9.97

²⁰ HC Deb Vol 302, c369

²¹ Regional Development Agencies, HC 415 of 1997-98

²² LGA Circular 452/97, 11.12.97

the White Paper makes clear that RDAs will be business-led and will be strategic as well as executive bodies.

The Labour Chairman of the LGA, Sir Jeremy Beecham, told the Select Committee the Association was disappointed that the establishment of regional chambers would be voluntary.²³ An article in the *Financial Times* of 30 December 1997²⁴ stated that the LGA will push for amendments to the *Regional Development Agencies Bill* in order to make RDAs more answerable to the regional chambers. Sir Jeremy is reported as having said: "It is essential that RDAs are regional institutions rather than an arm of central government in the regions. They must be part of a move away from old fashioned centralism." Responses to the June 1997 consultation paper by the existing regional associations developed similar themes, calling for the swift introduction of directly elected assemblies, the granting of statutory recognition for the regional chambers or the creation of a wide remit for the regional chambers.²⁵

The Select Committee's Report states:

We are concerned about the lack of clarity in the White Paper about how the Regional Development Agencies will be accountable to the regional, voluntary chambers. We recommend that the accountability of the Regional Development Agencies to these chambers be more clearly specified. In particular, we recommend the chambers approve the corporate plans and budgets of the Regional Development Agencies.

The previous Government's reorganisation of local government in the shire counties left a predominantly two-tier system in place. There is a consensus among authorities in two-tier areas that the review caused a great deal of acrimony and that there is little will to repeat the process. Labour's policy that directly elected regional government would require a predominantly unitary system of local government could impede progress towards agreement on the establishment of regional assemblies, therefore. Robin Wendt, the former Secretary of the Association of County Councils, has suggested that a unitary local government structure need not be a precondition of regional assemblies.²⁶

²³ HC 415 of 1997-98, Q 492

²⁴ "Ministers face clash with town halls"

²⁵ See for example South West Regional Planning Conference Response to the Consultation Paper on Regional Development Agencies, 28.8.97, para 3; A Regional Development Agency for Yorkshire and Humberside, 4.9.97, para 7; and A Response to Government's Consultation on Proposals to Establish Regional Development Agencies in the English Regions: A West Midlands Regional Perspective, August 1997, p7

²⁶ *Local Government Chronicle* 8.11.96 "Shed no more tiers"

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Some commentators have suggested that the introduction of regional government could lead to powers being taken away from local government.²⁷ Richard Caborn told the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee that the Government's intention was not to take powers away from local government: "If anything, it is to reinforce that and also bring them into a strategic overview of their region."²⁸ The Select Committee's Report welcomes the Government's commitment to the principle of subsidiarity but seeks clarification on how the principle will be implemented [p. xv].

Looking further into the future, the Constitution Unit's report **Regional Government in England** [1996] raised the question of what powers directly elected regional assemblies would have, in particular whether they would be simply a scrutiny body for the work of the RDA or whether they would assume direct responsibility for the RDA's functions. The report states that "there is no evidence of support in the English regions for a set of powers for Regional Assemblies that provide anything approaching the powers proposed for a Scottish Parliament" but suggests that to expend "considerable time and energy" setting up regional assemblies, only to give them the same functions as the non-statutory regional chambers, would be of doubtful value [p101]. The Constitution Unit sets out two possible models, which they term **minimalist** and **advanced** [p102]. The former goes only a modest way beyond the powers of the regional chambers and the latter would see regional assemblies assuming direct responsibility for certain functions currently exercised by the Government and by quangos. The advanced model might include making the assembly responsible for allocating resources to local government, although a 'senior local government figure' is quoted as saying that this would turn it into a "bear-pit" of competing interests. The progress of the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly on this issue might help to establish whether this is unduly pessimistic.

²⁷ See for example G Jones and J Stewart, *Local Government Chronicle* 17.3.95 "Key questions, open debate"

²⁸ HC 415 of 1997-98, Q 562

V The Referendum (*English Parliament*) Bill

This private Member's Bill [Bill 9 of 1997-98] was introduced by Teresa Gorman on 18 June 1997 and is due to receive its second reading on 16 January 1998. The Bill makes provision for the holding of a referendum in England on the establishment and tax-varying powers of an English Parliament. Ms Gorman has introduced the Bill as a way of highlighting what she sees as the dangers the Government's constitutional policies pose to the existence of the United Kingdom and the unfairness of these policies towards English taxpayers and voters.²⁹

But what is good for the Scottish goose is good for the English gander. Why should the English, who are the principal funders of the Union, get nothing at all out of Labour's shake up? An English parliament would not have an in-built Labour majority.

Blair has got plans for England. He wants to create regional assemblies. A collection of super councils would make it easier for Labour to keep control in England, as well as in Scotland and Wales.

South of the border we are only just waking up to the implications of Blair's election ploy. English taxpayers contributed to the cost of holding the referendum and will be expected to go on subsidising the Welsh and Scots.

"No taxation without representation" the huddled English masses will soon cry. If we are not to be represented in decisions on Scottish affairs then we should not pay for them. Nor can Scottish MPs expect to vote funds for their homelands from the pockets of English taxpayers.

That is why in January of next year I will introduce a Bill before the House of Commons calling for equal treatment for the English - an English parliament.

Tony Blair says the Scots will be content with the paltry powers vested in Edinburgh. That is more insulting to nationalists than the straight unionist view. Alex Salmond and co will use an Edinburgh assembly to secure more power and money from Westminster.

It would be contrary to their nature not to do so. They are happy to go on taking our money until they can worm their way out of the United Kingdom and start living on EU handouts.

...So what will be [Scottish MPs'] justification for Membership of the Westminster parliament? They know it won't be long before English MPs claim exclusive rights to deal with legislation affecting England.

Devolution cannot work. We cannot have elected assemblies competing for power like fleas arguing who owns the dog they are sitting on.

The establishment of one or more local parliaments must have two consequences - either the conversion of our unitary parliament into a federal state, with a written constitution prescribing restricted powers of the federal and local parliaments, or complete dissolution of the nation. There is no third alternative.

The implications of devolution in England for the "West Lothian Question" are discussed in Research Paper 98/3.

²⁹ T Gorman, "Wrong division", *Parliamentary Review*, Nov 1997, p81