



Campaign for an English Parliament

Background: Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are recognised as political and constitutional entities within the United Kingdom (UK) with their own devolved administrations. Unlike Scotland and Wales, England is denied recognition as a country, or as a political and constitutional entity, being referred to as the regions of Britain, and the people of England are denied the right to express their will through their own parliament.

The people of England have the same right to a parliament as any other country or nation, including Scotland, and should be free to determine their own system of local government through an English Parliament.

Aim: The Campaign for an English Parliament (**CEP**) aims to put the issue of a separately elected English Parliament, with its own Executive, on the political agenda.

Strategy: The **CEP**'s strategy is to assemble the most powerful coalition of expert and public opinion possible in order to secure an English Parliament and Executive.

Policy: An English Parliament will represent all those for whom England is their chosen or inherited home and who are entitled to vote.

An English Parliament cannot come about without the co-operation and agreement of the House of Commons. The **CEP**'s role is to work with academics, business groups, trades unions, think tanks and the media to create the conditions where MPs see that there is no alternative.

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The **CEP** is a not for profit company limited by guarantee registered in England number: 03636739. It is a member of the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (number 10963) and also a member of the English Speaking Union

Devolution: In 1998 the UK/British Government passed Acts of Parliament which devolved responsibility for important domestic affairs to national administrations in Scotland and Wales and to Northern Ireland. These responsibilities are for:

- the National Health Service;
- schools and teacher training;
- further and higher education;
- local government finance and taxation;
- land-use planning and building control;
- the environment;
- passenger and road transport;
- economic development and financial assistance to industry;
- civil and criminal courts;
- prisons, police and fire services;
- food standards;
- certain areas of agriculture and fisheries;
- the arts and sport;

Ministers from these separate administrations can use devolved powers to formulate policies that suit the demands and needs of their citizens. They can give priority to local needs within natural, political, cultural and historical boundaries. In addition, they are able to represent the interests of their citizens to the British Government and the European Union (EU). Ministers from an English Parliament would similarly be able to pursue the interests of the people of England.

The powers retained by the British Government are reserved matters. The main ones are those that relate to:-

- the UK constitution;
- foreign policy and defence;
- employment legislation;
- social security policy and administration;
- transport safety and regulation.

Why create an English Parliament?

The people of England have an identity separate from a British identity and they need a parliament and constitutional arrangement which recognises that identity and serves their particular needs.

England was not offered devolution on a national basis but as dismemberment into regions, with no basis in English culture or history, and thus rendered

voiceless and powerless. It is for the people of England to decide, through their own devolved parliament, the shape and powers of English local government. An English Parliament would end the injustice of two classes of Westminster MPs. Those who represent constituencies in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, are able to act as Ministers for English affairs, scrutinise, revise, debate and vote on issues that affect only the people of England, while MPs elected to English constituencies have no such power over the rest of the UK. (The English and West Lothian questions).

How will an English Parliament benefit the people of England?

- **National Identity** - England should be recognised politically and constitutionally. An English parliament could inspire a more inclusive, civic sense of English identity and provide a partial realisation of the right to self government to which the people of all countries aspire; ¹
- **Equity** - England should have an English parliament if that is what the people want. A referendum, on the same terms as those for Scotland and Wales, would extend to England the principle of popular sovereignty;
- **Parliamentary Time** - An English parliament would allow for proper parliamentary time to be allotted for the debate of English matters and scrutiny of English legislation and also release time in the British Parliament for more scrutiny of reserved matters;
- **Democratic Accountability** – An English parliament would ensure all citizens of the UK had an equal voice in Westminster with equal representation and enfranchisement. It would ensure the accountability of MPs, and answer the West Lothian and English Questions. It would strengthen democratic control and make government more accountable to the people of England; ²
- **Ministerial Accountability** - An English parliament would ensure that ministers were directly politically accountable to the nation that their department serves;
- **Executive Accountability** - An English Parliament would ensure that legislation affecting England was proposed and implemented by MPs accountable to the English electorate;
- **Prime Ministerial Accountability** - An English parliament would give England political leadership;

¹ **United Nations Charter, Article 1.** “The purposes of the United Nations are ... (2) to develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self determination of peoples, and to take other appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace.”

² White Paper, **Scotland’s Parliament**, The Scottish Office 1997. Foreword by Donald Dewar MP, Secretary of State for Scotland. “The Scottish Parliament will strengthen democratic control and make government more accountable to the people of Scotland”.

- **Financial Transparency** - An English parliament would end the inequity of the Barnett Formula (see back page) and assure equality of funding and equitable taxation. It would stop the covert imposition of taxes in England that are not levied in the rest of the UK. It would enable the people of England to express their own priorities and direct spending where it is most needed;³
- **Internal Governance** – an English parliament would deliver government for England that is appropriate for England and of equal value to that of the rest of the UK. It would end any imposition upon England of divisive regional devolution by a British Government and allow England to organise its own internal governance;
- **An Equal International Voice** - An English parliament would give England political representation internationally. It would, at last, give England a voice in the EU and the British/Irish council;
- **The Preservation of England** – An English parliament would guarantee to the people of England protection of their ancient and hard fought for freedoms, liberty and rights and support and protect England's heritage, culture and local traditions. It would pursue policies which help preserve England's identity and improve its environment. It would ensure the future unity of England and allow us to control our own assets. It would prevent the submersion of England into Britain;
- **The Preservation of Britain** - An English parliament would rebalance the UK and help preserve the union because it gives Scotland and Wales equal ownership of British institutions instead of the continual conflation of "English" and "British";
- **Other Constitutional Reforms** - An English Parliament provides an opportunity to introduce a new electoral system and a more consensual politics. A reformed House of Lords could include a role in scrutinising the national parliaments or some other federal role; it could even become the British parliament dealing only with reserved issues.

Is the Westminster Parliament an English Parliament?

Some say that with the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh and Northern Ireland Assemblies and the majority of MPs at Westminster from English constituencies, the Westminster Parliament is effectively an English Parliament. That is a mistake.

³ White Paper, **A Voice for Wales**, The Stationery Office 1997. Foreword by Ron Davies MP, Secretary of State for Wales. "The Assembly will let Welsh people express their own priorities – for better schools and health services, for bringing the quangos under control and into the open, for directing the £7,000 million of Welsh Office spending where it is most needed. The environment, housing, transport and business would all benefit from a strategic view based on the needs of the whole of Wales ... An elected Assembly will give Wales

a voice – in Britain and in Europe – after years of neglect. It will equip us to tackle the challenges of creating the jobs and prosperity that the whole of Wales needs.”

The Westminster Parliament is the Parliament of the UK and is charged with pursuing the internal and external interests of the UK. It is not obliged to pursue the specific needs of England. Devolution has brought new channels of communication enabling the interests of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales to be fed directly to the British Government. These are considered when forming and implementing policy. However, there is no body through which English needs can be voiced. An English Parliament will enable England to deal with other parts of the UK and the British government on equal terms.

Is England too big?

Some claim that the population of England would dominate any federal union. In reality, that population dominates under any system. While a federal or confederal system where there is such disparity in size of the members has never been shown to work, entrenched disadvantage to the majority nation should not be acceptable. Federalism separates English matters from pan-UK concerns and allows the smaller nations of the UK equal ownership of British institutions of governance.

Others claim that devolving power from a body that represents 60 million people to a body that represents 51 million people would do little to bring power closer to the people. However, a parliament is about national governance and the size of a nation has never been, nor should be, a bar to national government. An English parliament does not prevent power from being devolved within England.

Is there a demand for an English Parliament?

Since the Devolution Acts, 12 of 14 polls have consistently shown that the people of England are dissatisfied with the status quo and wish for their country to be treated as a whole in equality with Scotland and Wales and to have some form of national self government.

Surely an English Parliament will create an extra layer of bureaucracy and cost?

No! There is no need for the expense of an additional parliament building and with the transfer of English domestic issues to an English Parliament the Westminster Parliament would deal only with reserved matters. These could be dealt with by a much smaller number of UK MPs and would release a large number of MPs from Westminster to allow for a separately elected English

Parliament at no extra cost. Objections on cost would engender more respect if British politicians intended to fire the 297 extra politicians that the English electorate have been, without their consent or consultation, supporting since 1998. Moreover, these costs were clearly not considered very important when granting devolution to the rest of the UK.

Will creation of an English Parliament lead to the break-up of the United Kingdom?

An English Parliament would be unlikely to cause any more difficulties for the UK than the Scottish Parliament. It is more probable that the lack of an English Parliament will cause instability and friction because the people of England will see that they are being discriminated against. That resentment is likely to undermine loyalty to, and identification with, the UK.

A more probable cause is the aspiration of Scottish nationalists for independence. At some stage there is likely to be political and constitutional conflict between the Scottish and Westminster Parliaments. A train of events has been set in motion that is heading towards Scottish independence and further autonomy for Wales.

How will an English Parliament affect the relationship between England and the EU?

Arrangements exist that enable the interests of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to be represented within the EU through their devolved governments. They can negotiate with the European Commission on matters concerning European Structure Funds, which are important sources of finance for economic, agricultural, social and environmental regeneration.

There are no similar venues for the interests of England to be fed into the machinery that help shape EU policy, the conduct of EU business, or the awarding of EU grants. Instead England is represented by an assortment of EU regional quangos which compete with each other and with the devolved territories.

An English Executive⁴ would be able to influence the making of UK policy on EU matters, and ensure that England's interests are represented early in EU policy formation. Ministers from an English parliament and their officials would be fully involved in discussions within the British Government about the formulation of

4 *What is in effect a Scottish government is referred to as the Scottish Executive in 'Scotland's Parliament'.*

5 *Such involvement will give English parity with Scottish involvement. See p16 'Scotland's Parliament': "The UK Government wishes to involve the Scottish Executive as directly and as fully as possible in*

the UK Government's decision making on EU matters. It is part of the Government's intention that Scottish Executive Ministers and officials should be fully involved in discussions within the UK Government about the formulation of the UK's policy position on all issues which touch on devolved matters."

the UK's policy position on all issues which touch on devolved matters.⁵

They would also have a role to play in relevant Council meetings and negotiations with other EU members. In appropriate cases, English Government Ministers could speak for the UK in EU Councils.

None of this means that the **CEP** either approves or disapproves of the EU. What it does mean is that while the UK is a member of the EU, England should have the same opportunities to pursue its interests as do other parts of the UK.

English Devolution

The only form of devolution that has been offered by a British political party to the people of England is dismemberment into powerless and unnatural regions. The Conservative promise of English votes for English matters (EVoEM) is the subject of a Coalition government commission thus putting off the resolution of the West Lothian Question. EVoEM is a procedural device, without the force of legislation, which can be reversed at any time without the formality of repealing an Act of Parliament. English laws would still be proposed by a British Government and scrutinised by a House of Lords, containing members from across the UK and abroad. There would be no administration devoted to English affairs and British MPs would still vote on British party lines.

Recently even this device has been diminished by the Conservatives so that consideration by British MPs of English constituencies of proposed legislation for England would only take place in the committee sessions but that the law for England would still be voted on by all British MPs. Thus after a lot of time and taxpayers' money taken up with deliberation the final product might be rejected on the votes of unrepresentative British MPs.

Conclusion

An English Parliament would bring greater fairness, equality and balance to a devolved UK. The people of England would benefit in having their common interests put to the British Government by one, separately elected, body. Such representation will put England on an equal footing with Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, and enable all of them to benefit from having the weight and status of the UK representing their interests within the EU.⁶ An English

6.. in appropriate cases, the Scottish Executive Ministers could speak for the UK in (EU) Councils. They would do so with the full weight of the UK's status as a large member state behind them, because the policy positions advanced will have been agreed among the UK interests. From *Scotland's Parliament*, Section 5.6 (They have already done so in fisheries negotiations)

Parliament would be able scrutinise EU legislative proposals to ensure that England's interests are properly reflected. A direct voice for England in EU policy formation could also improve the availability of grants for deprived areas of England. Other proposals for England's future do not answer the questions that arise from the current imbalance.

England will be financially and economically better off with its own parliament, the end of the Barnett formula and a new and fair system for allocating central government funds among the countries of the UK.

When the people of England realise how their interests have been ignored and discounted and how they are being financially penalised then loyalty to the Union, unionist parties and the UK will disappear. It is fair and reasonable that the same courtesy be extended to the people of England as was shown to the electorate in other parts of the UK.

The **CEP** advocates a modern and open democracy where governments are more accountable to those who elect them. Instead of changing the constitution on an ad hoc basis, the government should set up a convention for the purpose of producing a coherent national constitutional structure for England. That process should be as democratic as possible and interests and ideas from all parts of English society represented. This democratic approach contrasts with the imposition of unwanted or unworkable solutions on England without first giving the people of England the opportunity to express a preference for an English Parliament. If the aim of devolution is greater democracy, we should be asked what we want not told what we must have.

Funding of the UK nations and the Province of Northern Ireland

The British Treasury, with representation from Ministers from the devolved administrations of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland decides annually the block of funds from British tax revenues that shall be allocated to those territories. In addition any capital expenditure that the British government decides shall be spent in England attracts an additional 10% to be remitted to Scotland and 5% each to Wales and Northern Ireland. This is known as **The Barnett Formula**. It is not based on need but outdated relative populations. In 2008/9 British Government funding per head in England was £2,167 less than in Northern Ireland, £1,552 less than in Scotland and £1,249 less than in Wales⁷. This superior funding has enabled the Scottish and Welsh governments to offer their citizens smaller class sizes and shorter hospital waiting lists, free

prescriptions and personal care for the old and infirm, free tuition fees for university students and other benefits not available in England.

7(Office for National Statistics PESA 2010)