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Power lunch with David Mundell MP [1]

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David Mundell MP ? Conservative shadow Scottish Secretary ? was our guest at a Power Lunch in Westminster this week, where the Highland Spring was flowing freely. Naturally, much of the discussion focused on the Scottish Parliament, whether Alex Salmond can continue to succeed so spectacularly while having only a minority of MSPs, what might happen in the event of a Conservative victory in Westminster, and other issues of great interest to politicos.

David reminded us that Alex Salmond ? I was at university with him ? is a politician of national skill and status, well versed in the workings of Westminster, and how the lobby system and national political reporting works. Many other MSPs have never been involved in politics outside Scotland. So Salmond's touch can be a lot surer on a number of key issues. Perhaps it is why he has been able to identify and play up a number of issues ? like the future of the Lockerbie bombers ? where Westminster has seemed to push ahead without apparently realizing that its actions can cause offence and resentment North of the border.

There's certainly a case that the Labour party, having spawned the Scottish Parliament as a way of entrenching Labour rule in Soctland for all time, is rather flummoxed now that it's not actually running things there. Some Labour stalwarts seem to be going off the whole idea of a Scottish Parliament, if the Scots are uncharitable enough to vote in another party to run it.

Still, the chance of policy changing much seems slim. Some 54% of the population get their living from the public sector, so why should they vote for lower spending? It needs a national debate on how money is raised, not just (as at present) how it is spent. If Scotland had financial autonomy, that debate might happen. It might even go down the low-tax route that did so well for Ireland two decades ago. But there's not much sign of it right now.

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