

# WHY THE ENGLISH SHOULD WELCOME SCOTTISH INDEPENDENCE



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## INTRODUCTION

This coming 11th September 1997, the Scottish people will vote on whether to accept a limited degree of home rule. They are to be offered a parliament which will have wide jurisdiction in Scottish affairs, and that may have chosen to vary the standard rate of income tax by up to 3p in the pound.

For the Labour Government that is offering this, it is to be a final settlement of an agitation in Scotland that has been growing in importance since the 1970s. For many of its advocates and just about all its opponents, the measure represents the beginning of the end for the United Kingdom. It is believed that a Scottish legislature will progressively demand, and be given, further powers that will end in a total separation of Scotland from England.

In this article, I will give an English nationalist view on the matter. I will argue that a dissolution of the union with Scotland is in the best interests of England, and therefore ought to be supported south of the border. Indeed, there is now a very good general case for breaking up the United Kingdom from London, rather than waiting on events in Edinburgh.

## THE FACTS OF DIFFERENCE

Despite sharing a language and an island — despite even centuries of intermarriage — the English and Scottish are separate nations, each with its own distinct culture. Since 1707, there has been the formality of a common central gov-

ernment, but the obvious reality has been English domination. We are richer and more numerous than they. In any dispute between them and us, we must always prevail.

For the first two and a half centuries of “union”, the Scottish were willing to accept this in exchange for the advantages of sharing in the commerce and administration of a world power. But with the Empire gone, and with what seems a securely liberal world trading order, they see little reason to accept continued domination.

The unionists on both sides talk about shared cultural values. As I see it, however, we have less in common with the Scottish than we have with the Americans or even the Irish. They have not shared in our history of peaceful development under a weak government and the rule of law. Their own experience has been of despotism broken by periods of wild disorder. That has made them different. It has made them far more European in their outlook. In their culture, strong and often unlimited government is not an alien, uncomfortable notion. It is common sense.

This is what makes the Scottish Enlightenment so special. European thought in the 18th century can be seen as a long struggle to understand the English. Here was a people quite unlike any other — free, yet also strong and rich. The question was how these qualities — to the European mind not only separate, but even contradictory — could be reconciled. The English themselves could give no satisfactory answer. The French tried to explain us, but failed. It was the Scottish who succeeded. They had the advantages that French observers lacked, of a common language and very close acquaintance. At the same time, they were sufficiently different from us to see clearly the respects in which we were distinct from other peoples. Adam Smith and David Hume are among the greatest philosophers who ever lived, and they stood at the head of an uncommonly brilliant school of thought. But they also had the advantage of needing to understand and explain a civilisation that was alien to them, but to which their own had been joined.

The result was a codification of English civilisation into a set of doctrines known as classical liberalism. Reduced to a something that could be rationally discussed, and that seemed to work, the Scottish embraced liberalism, and for a while outdid the English in their radicalism. There followed more than a century of intellectual harmony between our two nations. They remained personally odd according to our notions of civility, but they thought what we felt; and that was good enough for both sides.

However, the decline of classical liberalism as an autonomous force has broken this harmony. The Scottish have reverted to their traditional views of the world; and while England has few outspoken classical liberals in public life, our culture remains essentially liberal.

Therefore the rise of Scottish nationalism. It began as a weird mixture of Fenianism and Nazism, and still contains enough oddities to shock or amuse those who go looking for them. But the real growth of the SNP since the 1970s has exactly coincided with the rebirth of classical liberalism in England. Before that, the two nations could just about get along. Since then, they have pulled inevitably apart.

Undeniably, the Thatcher revolution hit Scotland hard. But what made it hardest of all was that almost no one in Scotland appreciated what was being done. Like the French and other Europeans today, the Scottish took it for granted that the State could and should provide guaranteed employment

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for all at decent wages, plus an elaborate welfare state, and not go bankrupt in the process or turn the country into an economic desert. They saw these things denied to them by a Party they had rejected but able to count on large English majorities, and they increasingly opted for varying degrees of independence. And even when the Scottish elites had perceived the rationality of what was being done, there was no rebirth of the old harmony. The Scots simply incorporated a limited acceptance of markets into their centralised, interventionist view of economic policy. The result was “New Labour”.

Now, we have a New Labour Government. We are told it will hold office for a generation. I am not so sure. Every second voice in the new Government seems to be Scottish. As soon as the novelty of not having John Major any more wears off, there will be a growth of discontent in England, as Scottish notions of rationality and just authority are rammed down our throats. I can see trouble ahead. I lived in Czechoslovakia during the last days of the federation, and had an inside view of its collapse. I am beginning to feel the same drawing apart of English and Scottish as I saw between Czechs and Slovaks. And the differences between Czechs and Slovaks were minor compared with those between us and the Scottish.

And so there is a case for ending the union. It no longer serves any commercial purpose. There is the precedent of Irish neutrality for avoiding the threat of military encirclement. Most importantly, we no longer agree on how any united British kingdom ought to be governed, and elections are becoming a test of strength between two unequal sides, in which the weaker can win only in exceptional circumstances. It would be terrible if Scottish independence were to be denied long enough for the Scottish to become as embittered and degraded as the Southern Irish.

## ENGLAND FIRST

This being said, there is a case for ending the union from London. From its beginning, the debate over Scottish devolution has been cast in terms of their wanting something from us, and their triumphing over us if they get it. I really do not wish to see a repetition of the Hong Kong surrender repeated in Edinburgh. I can imagine the mobs in Glasgow, running through the streets, smashing symbols of the union, insulting anyone with an English accent; and I see the pencilling in of National Freedom Days in the Scottish calendar.

Much better for us if the disintegration of the United Kingdom were brought about by Englishmen demanding English independence. A little national pride would do us no harm at all. It might spur us to a modest revolution. Our present Anglo-Scotch ruling class is utterly corrupt and incompetent. It has been turning England into a fascist police state for much of the past generation. Before then, it was ruling us with the same benevolent — but worthless — despotism with which it had previously ruled the British Empire. We need a new English Government, run by uncorrupted Englishmen. It will be liberal in economics, and I believe open to persuasion on a full liberalism in social and political issues.

Certainly, English independence will make withdrawal from the European Union easier. In Scotland, the EU is overwhelmingly popular. Its statism is both understood and accepted there to a far greater degree than has ever been the case in England. And though it is a federal state in the making, its doctrine of subsidiarity will probably give the Scot-

tish people more effective control over those affairs in which they wish to be different than they currently enjoy as a constituent part of the United Kingdom.

There is a chance that a future British referendum on Europe would produce different results in Scotland and England — the Scots voting for, the English against. It might be that the English vote would swing the overall result. It is possible, though, that the Scottish vote would. In either case, a breakup of the United Kingdom might come about in circumstances far less favourable to future good relations than if the two issues of the United Kingdom and Europe were as separate as they currently are.

## SCOTLAND SECOND BUT STILL IMPORTANT

For Scotland, independence might be more beneficial than its opponents believe. Certainly, a rational English Government would do its best to enable a prosperous and friendly Scottish republic. No effort should be spared to cut Scotland adrift on the best possible terms. They should be given the oil revenue, and we should take over the whole national debt. Of course, there should be complete freedom of trade. There might even be a following of the Irish precedent in the granting of automatic rights of entry and settlement to Scottish citizens. With these advantages, it should be quite easy for a prudent Scottish Government to remain solvent and to allow brisk economic growth. A prosperous Scotland is obviously in English interests. And if the Scottish economy should fail, there should be no excuse given to the maniacs who lurk up there closer to the centre than ours do here to cry out that England has ruined their country.

## THE REST OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

This leaves the problem of what to do with Wales and Ulster. My solution is to force independence on them whether they want it or not. With any luck, the Welsh will accept the home rule that they are now being offered along with the Scottish. That ought to start their own slide to independence that can be greatly accelerated when we in England come to our senses.

The Ulster protestants should be given independence — again, whether or not they want it. Of course, they should also be given all they need to defeat the IRA, and should be encouraged to deal justly with their Catholics. But it will not be a problem for England if they decide to opt for the same ethnic cleansing as the Southern Irish carried out after 1922.

## CONCLUSION

Let us, then, take the opportunity that a “yes” vote on the 11th September will give us. Let us say a friendly goodbye to Scotland and devote ourselves to our own revival — as a free and independent nation. There is more to national greatness than military power and size of territory. England was a great nation before the union with Scotland, and will be a great nation again. We have only to give free rein to the spirit that has set England apart from all other nations since the middle ages.

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**Editorial Note:** The result of the Scottish devolution referendum was, despite a rather low turn-out, a firm Yes (to devolution) and Yes (to tax varying powers), a result which makes the argument of the above piece all the more pertinent to the current situation. The Welsh referendum, as this note goes to press, is still to come. This result now seems likely to be another yes, but less decisively than in Scotland.