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Electric Scotland's Weekly Newsletter for November 17th, 2017

To see what we've added to the Electric Scotland site view our What's New page at:

<http://www.electricscotland.com/whatsnew.htm>

To see what we've added to the Electric Canadian site view our What's New page at:

<http://www.electriccanadian.com/whatsnew.htm>

For the latest news from Scotland see our ScotNews feed at:

<http://www.electricscotland.com/>

Electric Scotland News

As it's getting near Christmas thought it would be a good time to give a plug to one of our regular advertisers... The Celtic Croft. This company is also where I purchase my haggis from. You can find them at <http://www.kilts-n-stuff.com/gifts-and-home/> where you can purchase anything from kilts to gifts all with a Scottish theme.

Economists

I've been reading about the almost total failure of economists to predict how well Britain has done since the referendum vote on Brexit. Almost all remarks and predictions were gloomy and they have all proven to be wrong. In the news items below we have an interesting new article "UK can expect £135bn windfall after Brexit, say Economists for Free Trade" so we'll see how this new predication pans out in the years ahead.

Scottish News from this weeks newspapers

Note that this is a selection and more can be read in our ScotNews feed on our index page where we list news from the past 1-2 weeks. I am partly doing this to build an archive of modern news from and about Scotland as all the newsletters are archived and also indexed on Google and other search engines. I might also add that in newspapers such as the Guardian, Scotsman, Courier, etc. you will find many comments which can be just as interesting as the news story itself and of course you can also add your own comments if you wish.

Wanted: Island Ranger for remote Scottish isle of Handa

For those fed up with the daily grind of the nine to five, an exciting opportunity to work as a wildlife ranger on a remote Scottish island is available.

Read more at:

<http://www.scotsman.com/regions/inverness-highlands-islands/wanted-island-ranger-for-remote-scottish-isle-of-handa-1-4610162>

Bill Shankly

Legendary Scottish manager's fire still burns brightly in Liverpool

Read more at:

<http://www.bbc.com/sport/football/41932500>

These Islands

Announcement of a new web site pro Britain.

Read more at:

<http://chokkblog.blogspot.ca/2017/11/these-islands.html>

Rant from a Grumpy Granny

By Jackie Anderson

Read more at:

http://www.thinkscotland.org/thinkculture/articles.html?read_full=13364

Sir James Dyson speaks to Andrew Marr about Brexit
Great video to watch... we should be encouraged.

View this at:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bzky_cqYZF4

Where Are You From?

Last weekend I took a trip home to Islay, the Inner Hebridean island where I spent my formative years.

Read more at:

<http://chokkablog.blogspot.ca/2017/11/where-are-you-from.html>

The EU's hand is weaker than it claims

The UK can afford to walk away from a bad deal, the EU can't

Read more at:

<https://capx.co/the-eus-hand-is-weaker-than-it-claims/>

Brexit Pros and Cons from the Scottish Review

Anthony Seaton and Alastair McIntyre argue about the impact of British withdrawal

Read more at:

<http://www.scottishreview.net/TheCafe317a.html>

Supreme Court backs Scottish minimum alcohol pricing

The UK Supreme Court has ruled that Scotland can set a minimum price for alcohol, rejecting a challenge by the Scotch Whisky Association (SWA).

Read more at:

<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-41981909>

What are China's plans for Africa?

China sees Africa's tremendous potential

Read more at:

<https://capx.co/what-are-chinas-plans-for-africa/>

UK can expect £135bn windfall after Brexit, say Economists for Free Trade

The findings are sharply at odds with most mainstream economists.

Read more at:

<http://home.bt.com/news/uk-news/uk-can-expect-135bn-windfall-after-brexit-say-economists-for-free-trade-11364228719072>

Electric Canadian

Industrial Canada

Added volume 8 which you can read at:

<http://www.electriccanadian.com/transport/industrial/index.htm>

Musical Canada

Added volume 9 to our collection which you can read at:

http://www.electriccanadian.com/lifestyle/music/musical_canada.htm

Canadian Highlanders

A Scottish Lament, words by Lillie A Brooks, music by Ernest R. Bowles (pdf) which you can read at:

<http://www.electriccanadian.com/lifestyle/music/CanadianHighlanders.pdf>

Canadian Scottish Regiment
(Princess Mary's)

I found out about this regiment by watching a documentary on CBC where relations were trying to trace their missing relatives around the Vimy Ridge area in France. They got permission to dig from the local farmer but during this dig it was closed down by some French official. They didn't mention his name but apparently he was quite rude. That rather infuriated me which is why I went immediately to the Internet to procure some information which I now present here at:

http://www.electriccanadian.com/forces/canadian_scottish.htm

James Wickes Taylor

A Biographical Sketch by Theodore C. Blegen which you can read at:

<http://www.electriccanadian.com/history/bc/jameswickestaylor.pdf>

Métis

Found two interesting accounts of Métis settlements...

Caslan Métis Settlement at: <http://www.electriccanadian.com/history/first/metis/caslan.pdf>

and

The Buffalo Lake Métis Site at: <http://www.electriccanadian.com/history/first/metis/buffalolakemtiss.pdf>

Conrad Black

I've always had a lot of time for Conrad Black and so as he writes from Canada on a number of issues of interest from around the world I'm intending to include links to his writings for you to view.

In response to falling test results, teachers' federation proposes ending testing

<http://www.conradblack.com/1348/in-response-to-falling-test-results-teachers>

Electric Scotland

An Account of the Scottish Regiments

With the Statistics of each from 1808 to March 1861 which you can read at:

<http://www.electricscotland.com/history/scotreg/AnAccountofScottishRegiments.pdf>

Memoirs of Sir Andrew Agnew of Lochawe, Bart

By Thomas M'Crie, D.D., LL.D. (1850) (pdf)

You can read this at: http://www.electricscotland.com/history/other/agnew_andrew.htm

Brexit Update 11th November 2017

Did a video and posted it to YouTube which you can view at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E5KKsjdYNDA&feature=youtu.be>

Account of the life and writings of John Erskine, D.D

By Sir Henry Moncreiff-Wellwood (1818)

I have added this account to his short biography page in our Significant Scots section.

You can read this at: http://www.electricscotland.com/history/other/erskine_john4.htm

Archery

By C. J. Longman and Col. H. Walrond (1894)

You can read this at: <http://www.electricscotland.com/history/sport/archery.pdf>

The Bass Rock

Its Civil and Ecclesiastic History, Geology, Martyrology, Zoology and Botany.

You can read this at: <http://www.electricscotland.com/history/edinburgh/bassrock02.pdf>

Four Years Campaign in India

By William Taylor (1875) which you can read at:

<http://www.electricscotland.com/history/india/Four-Years-Campaign-In-India.pdf>

The Transactions of the Proceedings of the Dumfriesshire and Galloway Natural History & Antiquarian Society

I have found a number of issues of this publication and will add them over time and to start here is the Sessions 1883-84, 1884-85, 1885-86 which you can read at:

<http://www.electricscotland.com/history/galloway/index.htm>

Beth's Newfangled Family Tree

Got in the December 2017 section 2 issue which you can read at:

<http://www.electricscotland.com/bnft/index.htm>

Galloway in Ancient and Modern Times

By Peter H. McKerlie (1891). Added the Preface and Contents to our page on Raiderland with a link to this book.

Here is what the Preface has to say...

The taste for history reading is not so general as it should be, and is to be regretted, for without correct historical knowledge no one can be considered to be complete in education. In the present day it is specially required. As an example, the ignorance in regard to ancient Irish history has given rise to erroneous ideas connected with the present inhabitants in Ireland, as of late years shown in a marked manner by prominent men.

Some call history dry and uninteresting, which arises to a considerable extent from the many sensational publications affording temporary pleasure, and therefore much in request, to the neglect of useful subjects.

This history, from its title, and the little known of Galloway by the public, may probably be viewed as another dry production, and one which few can take any interest in. We have therefore to direct attention to the table of Contents, as it will show to Scotsmen, Irishmen, and Englishmen, possessed of national feelings, that interesting information will be found in the volume. The style may be considered more or less dry, for we have had to meet the desire for a mediumsized volume at a moderate price, so as to be within purchasable reach of most classes. To carry this out terseness was required, with the absence of interesting stories in flowery descriptive language to attract and please readers. We have, however, dealt with subjects of a character which should afford some interest to those who peruse books.

Instead of dividing the volume into chapters, we have given it in continuous form, the commencement of each separate subject being notified in the margin. This, we think, is preferable to the old chapter style, which often interrupts the pleasure when interesting matter is being perused, and is also troublesome when reference to certain subjects is required.

P. H. M'KERLIE.

You can read this at: <http://www.electricscotland.com/history/raiderland/>

General Sir John Maxwell

By Sir George Arthur in which there is a very detailed account of the work of the British army in Egypt.

You can read this at:

<http://www.electricscotland.com/history/scotreg/General-SirJohnMaxwell.pdf>

The Story

This weeks story comes from a new web site... The Islands.. which can be found at:

<http://www.these-islands.co.uk/>

What the United Kingdom is good for

Nigel Biggar, Regius Professor of Moral and Pastoral Theology at the University of Oxford, offers a personal perspective on what the Union is good for.

One of the most dismaying features of the campaign leading up to the September 2014 referendum on Scottish independence was the faltering inarticulacy of unionists in explaining what the United Kingdom is good for, and therefore why some kinds of independence would be bad for everyone, including the Scots. In retrospect, this was a symptom, not of the Union's intellectual

bankruptcy, but rather of the natural difficulty of describing the very ground upon which we have long been standing. One of the benefits of the referendum was that it provoked unionists like me to lift up our feet, look down, and contemplate what it is that supports us. What I discovered is that the UK is good for three things: the greater external security of liberal democracy, a depth of multinational solidarity of which the European Union can still only dream, and the upholding of a humane international order. And all of that will remain true, whether or not Brexit comes to pass.

Safer liberal democracy

The United Kingdom is good for the stronger security of political liberty. In 2015 we celebrated the 800th anniversary of Magna Carta, when the English Church and barons compelled King John to accept certain limitations on royal power. Partly as a consequence of this, foreign observers in the late medieval period—not least in France—remarked on the extraordinary extent to which English monarchs were held accountable by parliament. And one reason that some Scots in the 16th and 17th centuries hoped for unification with England was that English law might come to constrain the arbitrary feudal powers of the Scottish nobility.¹ After the Union of England and Scotland in 1707, the Scots together with the English, Welsh, and Irish—that is, the British—pursued a political path that led to increasing constraints upon royal power and increasingly accountable government. This path was not universal: many other countries didn't follow it, and in the 19th and early 20th centuries Britain's constitutional, and increasingly democratic, model was widely admired by liberals throughout Europe. However, after the end of the Second World War in 1945 with the defeat of Nazism in Germany, and especially after the end of the Cold War in 1989 with the collapse of the Soviet Union, liberal democracy became more widespread, not least in Europe. As a consequence the political model that the British had pioneered came to appear less exceptional and more normal. As a Foreign Office official once put it to me, we British had become the victims of our own success.

Sometimes, however, appearances deceive, and they do so here. Recent developments in the world should remind us that the liberal democratic political system that we, the British, have played a leading part in developing is really not so normal. It's not a piece of the cosmic furniture. It's not the natural, default position of human political life. It's contingent and vulnerable and precious. It's an important historical achievement, which cost our forebears much sweat and some blood to build and defend, and which we really could lose. In the light of Russia's recent veering in an autocratic and aggressively nationalist direction, in the light of the rise of an increasingly belligerent China ruled by a Communist Party that is neither liberal nor democratic, and in the light of the atrociously inhumane politics of Islamic State in Syria and Iraq and of other jihadist movements in Nigeria and Sudan, it should now be clearer to us that the political liberty, accountability, and humanity that we have achieved in Britain should not be taken for granted. They may not be unique in the world, but nor are they universal or secure.

Of course, if Scotland or Wales were to secede from the Union, or if Northern Ireland were to be absorbed into its southern neighbour, they would most probably continue to maintain the liberal democratic political institutions and customs that the British had developed together. Nevertheless, there's no doubt that a United Kingdom would be stronger both in soft and hard power, and so better able to secure liberal democracy at home and promote it abroad, than would a set of small, vulnerable, independent nations and a diminished English rump. As Mark Lyall Grant, has recently written:

As British ambassador to the UN, I watched with some anxiety from New York the final days of the Scottish referendum campaign in September 2014. My Russian opposite number ... sympathised with barely suppressed glee at the prospect of the UK dismembered and its permanent seat on the UN Security Council called into question. It was clear to me that Scottish independence would have had a devastating impact on the UK's standing in the world, much greater than withdrawal from the EU ever would.

A model of multi-national solidarity

Stronger external security for liberal democracy is one thing that the UK is good for. The second is peace, trust, and solidarity among the four nations in the British Isles. We often forget, especially if we're English, that the UK is a multinational state, comprising a union of English, Welsh, Scottish, and Irish peoples. Each of those peoples has maintained its own national customs and has either retained or acquired its own institutions. Within the UK, the Scots have always preserved their own law, established Church, and education system, and their culture now thrives; Welsh language flourishes far more strongly in Wales than Irish language does in the independent Republic across the water; and Northern Ireland has enjoyed its own legislative assembly much longer than either Wales or Scotland. So flexibly successful has our union been that the thought of violent conflict erupting (again) between its constituent peoples is almost unimaginable.

Contrary to Alex Salmond's easy reassurances that the extraordinary 'social union' between England and Scotland would happily survive Scottish independence, a 'Yes' vote in 2014 would probably have kindled a degree of mutual hostility that these islands have not witnessed since the 18th century. The negotiation of separation would have been tough and fraught. The separating Scots would not have got all that they wanted, they would have been frustrated, and their traditional resentment of England would only have deepened. For their part the English, having woken up to the costs and risks of the dissolution of the UK, including the permanent weakening of Britain's international prestige and power, would have discovered a general resentment of the Scots that they had never before had reason to feel. Anyone who thinks this speculation unduly pessimistic only has to contemplate the anxious uncertainty, domestic divisiveness, and potential for international alienation of the current process of extracting the UK from the European Union. Britain has been partly integrated into the EU for a mere forty-three years. England and Scotland, on the other hand, have been

united for more than three centuries; England and Northern Ireland for more than four centuries; and England and Wales for more than seven centuries.

Maybe the mutual alienation caused by the dissolution of the Union would have lasted only two or three generations—as in the case of Ireland. Maybe, unlike Ireland, no blood would have been shed. But maybe not. One of the nobler intentions of the Union was precisely to end recurrent warfare between Scotland and England, and it has been one of its finest achievements to make bloody conflict so unimaginable as to appear impossible. But appearances deceive here too: imagination is no constraint upon possibility. Anglo-Scottish peace (like European peace) is a fragile historical achievement—not a cosmic fixture. And as we know from the bloody disintegration of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, and, less remotely, from the thirty year-long ‘Troubles’ in Northern Ireland, history can sometimes roll alarmingly backwards.

Peace, however, can be more than just the absence of violence; it can also be widespread trust and solidarity, and in Britain it has been. In this respect the United Kingdom already is what the European Union can still only dream of becoming. In general, taxpayers in wealthy London no more complain when their taxes are transferred to poorer people in Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland than when they’re transferred elsewhere in England. That is because, in general, they identify with the Welsh, Scottish, and Northern Irish, recognising them as their own people—as fellow-Britons. Compare that with the appalled reaction of most Germans to the prospect of having to bail out the crippled economies of Greece or Italy in the wake of the recent financial crisis—and their adamant refusal to countenance the Eurozone becoming a transfer-union. The contrast brings to the surface the extraordinary depth of habitual solidarity among a plurality of nations that we have achieved here in the UK.

These are the terms in which Gordon Brown explained his vision for the future of the UK in his 2014 book, *My Scotland, Our Britain: A Future Worth Sharing*.⁴ The rationale for the Union, according to Brown, is to be found in the common advantages that all Britons enjoy from having an integrated economy, from the pooling of risks, and from the transfer of resources from richer to poorer across the whole territory of the UK. That’s why it’s vital that the Westminster government continues to insist upon retaining control over such things as national insurance and the state pension, and to refuse dogmatic nationalist demands for full fiscal autonomy. It’s vital for the common well-being of all the British peoples.

A tradition of responsibility for liberal, humane international order

Stronger external security for liberal democracy and multinational solidarity are two things that the Union is good for. A third is the habit of taking responsibility for upholding a liberal and humane global order, if necessary by deploying hard power. This, of course, is the legacy of empire and manifests itself in Britain’s retaining a place among the permanent members of the UN Security Council.

Scottish nationalists (along with left-wing idealists) typically despise this, seeing Scotland’s becoming independent, dissolving the United Kingdom, and adopting a more ‘Nordic’ role in international affairs as an act of repentance from Britain’s immoral tradition of imperial aggression and domination. They regard the British policy-elite’s hankering after the imperial power and role of global policeman, albeit now with the reduced status of deputy to the US’s sheriff, as at once delusory, pathetic, and immoral. It’s delusory, because Britain no longer has the power to rule the world as she once did. It’s pathetic because it makes the British play poodle to America. And it’s immoral, because it involves threatening and dominating other peoples, often by waging war against them, sometimes in violation of international law. Instead, they argue, the UK should shake off its post-imperial hangover, follow Europe rather than America, surrender its nuclear weapons, concentrate on wielding soft power, and limit its military activity to UN peacekeeping operations. And if the UK will not choose to do that, then Scotland will force her—by breaking the Union.

The reasons for refusing that option are several. First, the history of the British empire was not one of relentless aggression and oppression. Yes, it presided over the infamous massacre at Amritsar in 1919 and the outrages of the Black and Tans in Ireland in 1920-22, but it also pioneered the suppression of the slave trade throughout the 19th century and was the only major opponent of European fascism in the field from May 1940 until June 1941. The present fact of the Commonwealth is evidence that the empire’s historical record is not simply execrable. Rather, it is morally mixed—as is the record of any nation-state.

Second, it simply isn’t true that post-war Britain has always meekly trotted along behind the US. Harold Wilson refused to send British troops to Vietnam; Margaret Thatcher arm-twisted Ronald Reagan into supporting the ejection of the Argentines from the Falkland Islands in 1982; and Tony Blair publicly embarrassed a very reluctant (and resentful) Bill Clinton into deploying US military force in Kosovo and Serbia in 1999.

Third, if the UK is expected to give up the use of hard power, is that because no one should use it at all or because someone else should use it instead and better? Unless we buy into an impossibly sunny view of human being and ignore the obvious lessons of history, we have to acknowledge that intractably malevolent leaders can sometimes move nation-states (like empires) to do atrocious things. And unless we’re pacifist, we also have to acknowledge that sometimes atrocious things must be stopped by armed force. Perhaps we think that the UN should do the policing—but the UN has only as many regiments as nation-states choose to loan it. No doubt a thoroughly post-imperial, ‘Nordic’ Britain would lend its troops for peacekeeping purposes. But who, then, would fight the wars to make the just peace to be kept?

Maybe what the nationalists want is not exactly the UK's abandonment of hard power, so much as its strict submission to the collective will of the UN Security Council. If so, they would be content for the enforcement capacity of the UN to be at the mercy of the threat of veto by Putin's Russia and the Communist Party's China, neither of whose records of humanitarian concern are exactly famous. They would also join Alex Salmond in condemning NATO's 1999 military intervention to end ethnic cleansing in Kosovo as a "misguided" policy of "dubious legality and unpardonable folly". Embarrassingly, however, this would align them against the then UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan. It would also set them at odds with the majority of international lawyers. Commenting on the Kosovo intervention, the eminent Finnish historian and philosopher of international law, Martti Koskenniemi, has written that "most lawyers—including myself—have taken the ambivalent position that it was both formally illegal and morally necessary".

The truth is that, in the world as we have it, the upholding of international order and the rescue of the innocent from mass atrocity do sometimes require the naked use of armed force. That is a lamentable and tragic fact, but it is a fact nonetheless. Hard power, then, is morally necessary and we need some liberal-democratic states to be ready to exercise it. Very few European ones are willing and able to do so, however: two generations after the end of the Second World War most of them still prefer to free-ride on US power. Understandably, the Americans are getting increasingly fed-up. For Britain to take the nationalists' preferred 'Nordic' option, then, would be a major desertion of international duty and leadership, and it would probably be the last straw that broke the US's already wavering faith in Europe. The United Kingdom shouldn't kick its post-imperial habit; it should keep it—for the world's sake.

The possibility of justified independence

None of this is to deny that there could be a cogent case for the dissolution of the United Kingdom. No nation-state is guaranteed eternal life. Historically it is surely true, as Benedict Anderson and Linda Colley have argued, that nation-states are human constructs, not natural facts. As they have evolved, so they will change and perhaps pass away. The United Kingdom did not exist before 1707. The United States could have ceased to exist in the early 1860s. Czechoslovakia did cease to exist in 1993. And Spain might cease to exist, if today's Catalan separatists get their way.

It could be, therefore, that membership of the United Kingdom's multinational state continues to inflict some serious and chronic injustice on Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland, for which remedy has long been sought but never found. Perhaps one of the constituent nations has been under-represented at Westminster, with the result that its reasonable aspirations have been stifled, its concerns systematically neglected, or its needs unfairly met. However, in order to justify taking the risks that almost invariably attend political divorce, the motivating grievances do need to be serious, not trivial. They also need to be chronic, not temporary, having sought in vain for remedy within the unit. And they need to be current, not merely historic. To enter upon the risks of divorce for grievances that are trivial, temporary, and in the past would be reckless and imprudent and therefore morally wrong.

What about Irish unification?

There are two main, current challenges to the integrity of the United Kingdom: Irish nationalism and Scottish nationalism. After the creation of Northern Ireland in the 1920s, Catholic nationalists north of the border suffered various kinds of unfair discrimination (e.g., in housing and employment). Their grievances erupted into civil protest in the late 1960s and then, on the part of a republican minority, into physical violence in the early 1970s. In response, the British government sought, not only to contain and suppress the violence, but also to address the economic and social grievances. After the I.R.A. had been fought to a standstill, the republican leadership and most of their followers agreed to swap the bullet for the ballot in the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. In return, London agreed to cede Dublin a role in upholding the interests of Catholics in Northern Ireland, to establish a power-sharing constitution, to reform the police service, and to respect the result of any future popular referendum on Irish unification.

Whether or not it is right that Northern Ireland should secede from the UK should not be determined by the political exploitation of historic, self-romanticising Irish nationalist hostility to the British. Rather, it should depend on whether the UK government has in fact shown itself willing and able to right the wrongs that Catholic nationalists have suffered, whether the one million-strong Protestant unionist population consent to be absorbed into the Irish republic, and whether that republic is ready to pay the costs of absorbing them. Right now it would be fair to say that London has shown both the willingness and the ability to reform, that the vast majority of Protestants remain opposed to Irish unification, and that Dublin's readiness to absorb a reluctant unionist minority and shoulder the burden of Northern Ireland's £10bn annual fiscal deficit—notwithstanding the Brexit-inspired resurgence of unification-rhetoric—is very much in doubt.

What about Scottish independence?

The second main challenge to the integrity of the UK, and still the greater one, is that posed by the Scottish nationalist campaign for Scotland's independence. One of its commonest claims is that national independence is its own justification. As one of his former colleagues observed of Alex Salmond, "when you went through all the arguments you were left with the impression that he didn't know if Scotland would be better or worse off as an independent country. All that mattered was that Scots should rule themselves".⁹ But national independence is not its own justification, any more than national existence is. In both cases, the reasonable question arises, 'What's it good for?'

In the 2014 referendum campaign, the blind pursuit of independence for its own sake led Salmond to advocate a position that would actually have diminished Scots' power of self-determination. On the critical issue of the currency, he defiantly asserted what no one actually denied—the right of the Scottish people to exercise their sovereign will in choosing to keep the pound. What he passed over was the equal but awkward truth that the Scots' sovereign will had neither the right nor the power to dictate how the rest of the United Kingdom (rUK) would respond. Salmond argued that it would be in everyone's interests to enter into a formal currency union. However, whether true or not, such a proposal attracted two problems. One was that it would inevitably involve Scotland agreeing to compromise its independence by suffering constraints on its tax and spending policies. The other was that the leaders of the UK's main political parties, backed up by the Canadian Governor of the Bank of England, had all said that it would not be in the rUK's interests to enter into a formal currency union with an independent Scotland, and that they wouldn't agree to it.

Without a formal currency union, the Bank of England would set interest rates to suit the rUK's economy, not Scotland's. Sooner or later the situation would arise where Scotland needs higher rates, say, to calm a property boom, but the rUK needs lower rates, say, to stimulate a sluggish economy. In that case, the Bank of England would look to rUK's needs, not Scotland's. This is exactly what happened in the Republic of Ireland in the run-up to the financial crisis of 2007. The value of property there was rocketing unsustainably, because the European Central Bank, with its eye fixed mainly on Germany, kept interest rates low at 2%. The result: the Irish property bubble burst, with values tumbling by up to 50%—a fall from which they have only recently recovered.

As long as it remains part of the UK, Scotland has a seat at the table of the Bank of England's deliberations, in which its needs will continue to figure. But were it to leave, it wouldn't. Thus an independent Scotland could keep the pound unilaterally, but only at the price of losing all control over its own interest rates. Hence the irony at the heart of the 'Yes' campaign's position in 2014: that its kind of 'independence' would actually have amounted to less national self-determination.

So national 'independence' is not its own justification. It can take a variety of forms. That, then, raises the question, 'Which one should be chosen, and why?' In the Union Scotland has always been somewhat self-governing, possessing its own Kirk, law, and education system. With the establishment of the Scottish parliament in 1999 its autonomy expanded dramatically to include control, for example, of the Scottish NHS. In 2012 the Westminster parliament overcame opposition from the Scottish National Party (SNP) to pass the Scotland Act and increase the Scottish government's tax-raising and borrowing powers. Four years later a new Act gave the Scottish government complete power over all rates and bands of income tax (except that on savings and dividends) and complete power to raise (or lower) a range of welfare benefits. So the question that now poses itself to Scottish nationalists is, 'What further powers do you now want, and for what good purpose?'

Before and after the referendum, Scottish nationalists—like their Catalan and Lombard counterparts—claimed that independence would make their country wealthier. That claim was doubtful in 2014; it is incredible now. During the campaign, nationalists asserted that an independent Scotland would be economically viable on the basis of an oil price of \$110 per barrel and wildly optimistic assumptions about production volumes and profitability. Critics warned of the excessive optimism and the vulnerability of an independent Scotland's economy to the volatility of oil prices, but their warnings were breezily dismissed as the 'negative' propaganda of Project Fear. However, a mere four months after the referendum the price of oil plummeted to \$50 per barrel, which rudely intruded a £7bn shortfall into the 'Yes' campaign's fiscal forecast for the first year of independence alone. Earlier this year Andrew Wilson, the former SNP Scottish parliamentarian and RBS economist now charged with chairing the SNP's Growth Commission, admitted that the 2014 economic case for independence depended crucially on its oil prospectus, and that it was false. Scotland's fiscal deficit in 2016-17—according to the Scottish Government's own published figures—is estimated to be over £13 bn. Amounting to 8.3 per cent of GDP, compared to 2.4 per cent for the UK as a whole, this figure is almost twice as high as that of any member state of the EU. The highest reported deficit in the EU is currently Spain's, which stands at 4.5 per cent of GDP. It would therefore be an understatement of heroically polite restraint to observe that the claim that independence would make Scotland wealthier has not been substantiated.

Of course, nationalists don't argue only that independence would make the Scots wealthier; they also argue that it would free them to build a better kind of society. They claim that the Scots as a whole prefer a left-of-centre, social democratic polity with a more generous welfare state, whereas, judging by its propensity to elect Conservative governments, the English electorate's centre of gravity is markedly further to the right and more favourable to the free market. As a consequence, the Scottish people's legitimate aspiration to a fairer, more equal society has been consistently stymied by a neoliberal Westminster.

If this were true, it would certainly be a reason for greater Scottish autonomy and a further devolution of powers from Westminster to Edinburgh, although not necessarily for outright secession from the UK. As it happens, however, the narrative of nationalist politicians doesn't tally with the recent resurgence of Corbynite Labour among the English, even in Tory strongholds like Kensington and Canterbury. Nor does it tally with the hard social scientific data about the Scots. According to analysis of the British Social Attitudes survey of 2010:

It seems that Scotland is not so different after all. Scotland is somewhat more social democratic than England. However, for the most part the difference is one of degree rather than of kind—and is no larger now than it was a decade ago. Moreover, Scotland appears to have experienced something of a drift away from a social democratic outlook during the course of the past decade, in tandem with

public opinion in England.

From this the authors—including the doyen of Scottish psephologists, John Curtice—conclude that “the task of accommodating the policy preferences of people in both England and in Scotland within the framework of the Union is no more difficult now than it was when devolution was first introduced”. Awkwardly for those campaigning for independence, the late Stephen Maxwell, nationalist intellectual and founder of the modern SNP, agreed that there is “nothing in Scotland’s recent political record to suggest a pent-up demand for radical social and economic change waiting to be released by independence”. The fact that the current nationalist government at Holyrood has so far declined to use the Scottish Parliament’s powers (since 1998) to raise the rate of income tax upwards, so as to increase funding for public services, suggests that they know that Maxwell spoke the truth.

Nevertheless, in the future should a nationalist government change its mind and decide to increase tax and spending, in order to build a different kind of society in Scotland, it now has ample power to do so. The 2012 and 2016 Scotland Acts give Edinburgh sufficient fiscal autonomy to do something significantly different. All that is possible within the United Kingdom.

And what about Brexit?

If the UK is such a good idea, then isn’t the EU an even better one? And if it’s good for the UK to leave the EU, wouldn’t it also be good for Wales, Scotland, or Northern Ireland to leave the UK? The answer to both questions is that, yes, it could be. The crucial question is whether it really is or would be.

It’s true that all of the good things that the UK serves to promote--the stronger security of liberal democracy, multinational solidarity, and the habits of responsibility for liberal international order—are also promoted by the EU. How well they are promoted is a matter of controversy, however. On the one hand, the accession of former communist countries into the EU seemed to strengthen their development of liberal democratic institutions; on the other hand, that development is now in doubt in Hungary and Poland, and deeper questions remain about the democratic accountability and legitimacy of political and judicial power in the EU as a whole. On the one hand, the EU’s ‘fourth freedom of movement’ has generated a sense of European citizenship and identity; on the other hand, it has provoked nationalist reactions against what are perceived to be excessively high levels of immigration. And on the one hand, the EU has invested heavily in promoting the good of political stability in its near-abroad (the Middle East and North Africa); on the other hand, its leading member, Germany, is still virtually pacifist, and wealthy Europe as a whole continues to depend upon the US for its own defence—three generations after 1945. It may be that what the UK is good for, the EU is more or less good for, too. But that isn’t yet to establish that the EU is sufficiently reliable or successful to have the UK dissolve into it.

As for whether the Welsh, Scots, and Northern Irish should decide against the UK’s version of stronger liberal democracy, multinational solidarity, and international responsibility in favour of the EU’s version, the implication of the previous paragraph is that they’d be unwise to. What is more, the economic importance to the four British nations of the UK’s single market far exceeds that of the EU’s: Scotland, for example, still exports four times more to the rest of the UK than it does to the rest of the EU. Further still, the disintegration of the UK would undermine Europe’s own external security and international power by dealing a body blow to one of its two leading military powers.

On telling the unionist story

The United Kingdom is good for the stronger external security of liberal democracy, for multi-national solidarity within the British Isles, and for a liberal international order beyond them. The dissolution of the UK would inflict serious damage on each of these, and should be vigorously resisted. But resistance alone is not enough; saying ‘No’ to Scottish independence or Irish unification will not suffice. Nor will saying ‘No’ with better economic reasons than ‘Yes’.

For sure, it remains important to keep on challenging the sincere naïvetés of separatist nationalists, their inconsistencies, their false claims, and their unfair denigration, for, as penitent Islamists testify, the best way to undermine a political zealot’s faith is to sow seeds of doubt and then give time for the penny to drop. But it’s always much easier to let go of a political faith, if one has something else to believe in. So unionists need to develop and broadcast a positive story about the Union, articulating the ground beneath our feet and bringing back to common consciousness all the remarkable things it’s still good for. And then they need to stimulate a sustained and nationwide public discussion—involving people across the political spectrum—which will let such a story gather momentum, grow wings, and take to the air. That’s what These Islands is about.

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And that's it for this week and I hope you all have a great weekend.

Alastair

