

‘Dark Omens’ and ‘Horror Shows’: Scottish Independence, Power and Propaganda

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Region: [Europe](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

Established power hates uncertainty, especially any threat to its grip on the political, economic and financial levers that control society. And so it is with elite fears that the United Kingdom, formed by the [1707 Acts of Union](#), could be on the verge of unravelling.

No informed commentator doubts that elite interests will do all they can to maintain hegemony in an independent Scotland, should that historic shift occur following the referendum of September 18. But if it does happen, there will likely be significant consequences for the Trident nuclear missile system, the future of the NHS and the welfare state, education, climate policy, energy generation and other industry sectors, the media and many additional issues; not just in Scotland, but beyond, including Nato and the European Union. There is clearly a lot at stake and established power *is* concerned.

Just over a week ago, to the consternation of Westminster elites and their cheerleaders in media circles, a YouGov [opinion poll](#) showed that the ‘Yes’ vote (51%) had edged ahead of ‘No’ (49%) for the first time in the campaign, having at one point trailed by 22%. The *Observer* [noted](#) ‘signs of panic and recrimination among unionist ranks’, adding that ‘the no campaign is desperately searching for ways to seize back the initiative’. The panic was marked by ‘intensive cross-party talks’ and underpinned George Osborne’s [announcement](#) on the BBC Andrew Marr show on September 7 that ‘a plan of action to give more powers to Scotland’ in the event of a No vote would be detailed in the coming days.

Confusion reigned in the Unionist camp, and in media reporting of their befuddlement. According to the rules governing the referendum, the UK and Scottish governments are forbidden from publishing anything which might affect the outcome during the so-called ‘purdah period’ of 28 days leading up to September 18. So, how to reconcile the opportunistic ‘promise’ during purdah to grant Scotland new powers following a ‘No’ vote? BBC News [dutifully reported](#) the government sleight-of-hand that:

‘the offer would come from the pro-Union parties, not the government itself.’

Voters, then, were supposed to swallow the fiction that the announcement came, not from the UK government represented by Chancellor George Osborne, but from the pro-Union parties represented by senior Tory minister George Osborne!

However, Alastair Darling, leader of the pro-Union ‘Better Together’ campaign, [told](#) Sky News that all new powers for Scotland had already been placed on the table before the

purdah period. What had been announced was ‘merely... a timetable for when the Scottish Parliament could expect to be given the limited powers already forthcoming.’

Thus, an announcement setting out a timetable for enhanced powers was completely above board and not at all designed to influence the very close vote on independence. This was establishment sophistry and a deeply cynical manipulation of the voters.

Media manipulation was exposed in stark form when Nick Robinson, the BBC’s political editor, was rumbled by viewers able to [compare](#) his highly selective editing of an Alex Salmond press conference last Thursday with what had actually transpired. Robinson had asked Salmond a two-part question about supposedly solid claims made by company bosses and bankers – ‘men who are responsible for billions of pounds of profits’ – that independence would damage the Scottish economy. Not only did the [full version](#) of the encounter demonstrate that Salmond responded comprehensively, but he turned the tables on Robinson by calling into question the BBC’s role as an ‘impartial’ public broadcaster. The [self-serving report](#) that was broadcast that night by Robinson on BBC News at Ten did not reflect the encounter which the political editor summed up misleadingly as:

‘He didn’t answer, but he did attack the reporting.’

The distorted BBC News reporting was picked up on social media and no doubt encapsulated what many [viewers](#) and [listeners](#), particularly in Scotland, have been observing for months, if not [years](#). One reader wrote an excellent [email](#) to us in which he said:

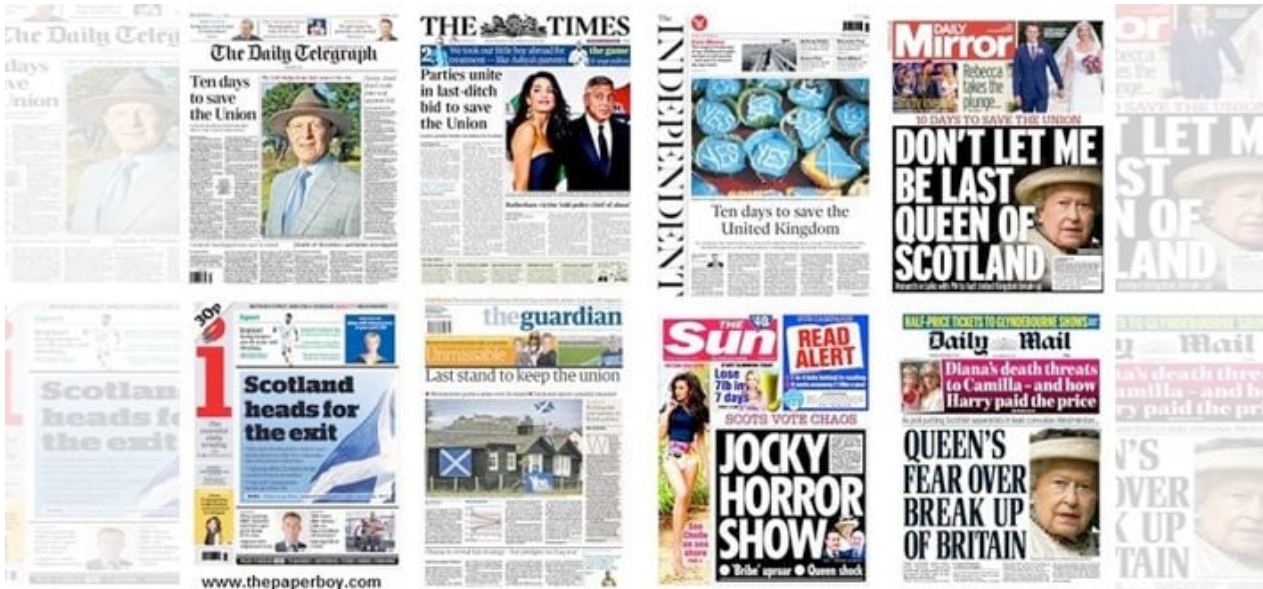
‘Honestly, this is just ONE example of pathetic bias which more and more Scots are seeing through. I’ve long been a follower of your site, and I make a point of reading each and every alert. This is the first time I’ve taken to contacting you, and as I said, I imagine lots of others will be doing just that on the same subject.

‘I’ve seen so much media bias with BBC Scotland since the turn of the year, but it’s now getting to laughable proportions. And now that we have the entire London press-mafia crawling all over it too, it’s daily headline news – all doom and gloom about how Scotland will fail, Scotland will be bankrupt, there’s no more oil left, jobs will go, etc etc. It’s been diabolical.’

The BBC’s dismissive [response](#) to the public complaints about Robinson’s skewed report concluded with the usual worn-out boilerplate text:

‘the overall report [was] balanced and impartial, in line with our editorial guidelines.’

It is not only the bias in BBC News reporting that has alienated so many people, but the way the public broadcaster [fails](#) to adequately address public complaints – on [any number of issues](#).



Scaremongering-A-Go-Go

On the day following the YouGov poll result (September 8), [frantic headlines](#) were splashed all over the corporate media:

- 'Ten days to save the Union' (Daily Telegraph)
- 'Parties unite in last-ditch effort to save the Union' (The Times)
- 'Ten days to save the United Kingdom' (Independent)
- 'Scotland heads for the exit' (i, a tabloid version of the Independent)
- 'Last stand to keep the union' (Guardian)
- 'Queen's fear of the break up of Britain' (Daily Mail)
- 'Don't let me be last Queen of Scotland' (Daily Mirror)

And, of course, the laughably over-the-top *Sun*:

'Scots vote chaos. Jocky horror show'

Corporate journalists pressed on with their scaremongering over Scottish independence. In the *Telegraph*, business news editor Andrew Critchlow [intoned ominously](#):

'Scottish homeowners face mortgage meltdown if Yes campaign wins.'

The same newspaper published a piece by Boris Johnson [arguing](#):

'Decapitate Britain, and we kill off the greatest political union ever. The Scots are on the verge of an act of self-mutilation that will trash our global identity.'

A *Times* editorial twitched nervously:

'The British political class is in a fight for which it seemed unprepared. It needs to find its voice'. ('Signifying Much', September 8, 2014; access by paid subscription only)

Larry Elliott, the *Guardian's* economics editor [warned](#) that an independent Scotland 'would not be a land flowing with milk and honey'. [Jonathan Freedland](#), the *Guardian's* executive editor who oversees the paper's opinion section and editorials, [bemoaned](#) that:

'If Britain loses Scotland it will feel like an amputation...the prospect fills me with sadness for the country that would be left behind.'

Freedland quoted with obvious approval an unnamed 'big hitter' in the 'No' campaign who claimed:

'none of this would be happening if there were a Labour government in Westminster.'

This is the classic liberal-left fairytale that things would be different if only Labour were in power: a delusion that all too many voters in Scotland, as elsewhere, have seen through ever since it was obvious that Blairism was a continuation of Thatcherism.

Freedland sighed:

'When I contemplate the prospect of waking up on 19 September to discover the union has been defeated, I can't help but feel a deep sadness.'

Given Freedland's role as a *Guardian* mover and shaker, with a big input to its editorial stance, it was no surprise when a *Guardian* [leader](#) followed soon after, firmly positioning the flagship of liberal journalism in the 'No' camp. The paper pleaded: 'Britain deserves another chance'. But the pathetic appeal for the Union was propped up by a sly conflation of independence with 'ugly nationalism', notwithstanding a token airy nod towards 'socialists, greens and other groups'. The paper's nastiness continued with the unsubstantiated assertion that 'a coded anti-English prejudice can lurk near the surface of Alex Salmond's pitch'.

Ironically, one of the *Guardian's* own columnists, Suzanne Moore, had a [piece](#) published two days earlier that inadvertently preempted the nonsense now being spouted by her paper's own editors:

'The language of the no camp - Westminster, bankers, Farage, Prescott, the Orangemen and Henry Kissinger - is innately patronising.'

To which we can now add the *Guardian*.

She continued:

'Do not give in to petty nationalism, they say. Just stick with the bigger unionist nationalism; it's better for you.'

In the *Observer*, sister paper of the *Guardian*, Will Hutton was virtually [inconsolable](#):

'Without imaginative and creative statecraft, the polls now suggest Scotland could secede from a 300-year union, sundering genuine bonds of love, splitting families and wrenching all the interconnectedness forged from our shared history.'

He ramped up the rhetoric still further:

'Absurdly, there will be two countries on the same small island that have so much in common. If Britain can't find a way of sticking together, it is the death of the liberal enlightenment before the atavistic forces of nationalism and ethnicity - a dark omen for the 21st century. Britain will cease as an idea. We will all be diminished.'

Writing for the pro-independence [Bella Caledonia](#) website, Mike Small [responded](#) to Hutton's apocalyptic warnings:

'Unfortunately he has misunderstood the basic tenor of the British State, that is to cling to power, to centralise it, and to shroud it in obscurity.'

Small added that Hutton's caricature of the 'Yes' camp as 'the atavistic forces of nationalism and ethnicity' is 'such an absurd metropolitan misreading of what's going on as to be laughable.'

Small's crucial point is one we should remember when listening to senior politicians; that their first priority is always to cling to power. Craig Murray was [scathing](#) about the leaders of the main Westminster political parties, and their last-ditch desperate trip to Scotland last Wednesday to 'save the Union':

'Cameron, Miliband and Clegg. Just typing the names is depressing. As part of their long matured and carefully prepared campaign plan (founded 9 September 2014) they are coming together to Scotland tomorrow to campaign. In a brilliant twist, they will all come on the same day but not appear together. This will prevent the public from noticing that they all represent precisely the same interests.'

Murray nailed what is at stake when he said that the 'three amigos' 'offer no actual policy choice to voters', and he gave a list showing how tightly they march together:

- 'They all support austerity budgets
- They all support benefit cuts
- They all support tuition fees
- They all support Trident missiles
- They all support continued NHS privatisation
- They all support bank bail-outs
- They all support detention without trial for "terrorist suspects"
- They all support more bombings in Iraq
- They all oppose rail nationalisation'

In short:

'The areas on which the three amigos differ are infinitesimal and contrived. They actually represent the same paymasters and vested interests.'

These 'paymasters and vested interests' are surely trembling with fear at the power now residing in the hands of voters in Scotland. As George Monbiot [observes](#):

'A yes vote in Scotland would unleash the most dangerous thing of all - hope.'

He expands:

'If Scotland becomes independent, it will be despite the efforts of almost the entire UK establishment. It will be because social media has defeated the corporate media. It will be a victory for citizens over the Westminster machine, for shoes over helicopters. It will show that a sufficiently inspiring idea can cut through bribes and blackmail, through threats and fear-mongering. That hope, marginalised at first, can spread across a nation, defying all attempts to suppress it.'

Whatever happens on Thursday, skewed media performance on Scottish independence - in particular, from the BBC - has helped huge numbers of people see ever more clearly the deep bias in corporate news media.

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