

Decapitating the Union, Seceding from the United Kingdom: The Scotland Drive for Independence

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Region: [Europe](#)

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It is a union that has lasted 307 years. On September 18, Scotland goes to the polls to see whether it will secede from the United Kingdom. The polls are getting closer, and shocks have been felt with the suggestion that the Yes vote may well get across the line.

There is much going for the Yes group. Britain suffers the curse of centrism. London is everything, and sees itself as everything. The great, rebarbative weapon of the south, Margaret Thatcher, destroyed the industrial, and consequently, Tory base. (In thanks, the north sports only one conservative member.) University education is free for the Scots, a feature that seems positively alien in public school mad England. While the state is still seen as an instrument of social responsibility, down south, it is an evil in need of winding back.

The nationalists claim that Scots will be richer to the tune of £1,000 a year if they leave. This figure is not necessarily reliable – like all such projections, they are subject to debt obligations, productivity and the natural resource issue. North Sea oil is certainly touted as the great patch up, but it can only ever be temporary.

For all of this, the leader of the Scottish National Party (SNP), Alex Salmond, might finish strongly, even if he won't get the vote he wants. Salmond caught Alistair Darling, leader of the Better Together group, napping in their second television debate. No nonchalance there. Just a roar for the independence cause. In the last leg of this campaign, the pro-union campaigners are starting to sweat at the social media barrage and street canvassing on the part of the Yes campaigners.

This is perhaps best shown in the rushed efforts on the part of the Chancellor, George Osborne, who suddenly finds himself promising greater powers to the Scottish parliament over monetary matters, such as levying taxes and spending. His problem is that this was on the cards in any case.

Tory minister Iain Duncan Smith has chided those who have not been sufficiently “emotional” on the subject of the union. The arguments for and against Scotland remaining in the UK, argues Duncan Smith, are those of the economic sort. What of the blood and commitment? One would not think, reading *The Economist*, that emotion was in short supply. For the editors at the paper, the UK union “once ruled a third of the humanity and still serves as a role model to many” (Jun 12).

The acerbic Charlie Booker, writing for the *Guardian* (Sep 9), dug into his well of emotions. He wanted Scotland to remain in the union, if only “for entirely selfish and superficial reasons.” One was the not so superficial reason of being left with an immovable Tory presence “now until the day the moon crashes into the Thames.” The other was simple: as

he liked the Scottish, would a yes vote signify rejection?

Boris Johnson, unintentional comic of the Tories, and accidental London Mayor, is all for keeping the Scots on board for the identity business. A Yes vote will change Britain into a nation of “zombies, walking dead, because a fundamental part of our identity will have been killed” (*The Telegraph*, Sep 8). Unconvincingly, Johnson makes the pitch that Britain will “have lost a way of thinking about ourselves, a way of explaining ourselves to the world.”

The language of the No campaign has had to duck and weave through a series of historical interpretations. They can't come up as subservient in this, but it must also show a sense of solidarity with Union principles. One way of doing so is to promote Scotland as the builder of the union, a creation of good governance. This is branding, and not convincing branding at that.

Take the joint statement from Better Together, issued by Old Firm managers such as Billy McNeill and Walter Smith, along with 16 football players from the 1960s to the 2000s. “We are proud that Scotland has always stood on its own two feet but we also believe that Scotland stands taller because we are part of the United Kingdom. The United Kingdom is a country Scotland helped to build” (*Daily Mail*, Sep 9).

The No campaigners also throw the bank balance, and hospital bed, at the Scottish case, arguing that Scotland is an ailing, self-entitled state which would be incapable of keeping its fund managers and entrepreneurs in clover. The argument of health is used to say that Scots cost more than the average Briton. Stay in the union, if you want to live longer.

Authors such as J.K. Rowling, who resides in Scotland, prefer, “People before flags, answers not slogans, reason not ranting, unity not enmity.” Much in her purse has gone to the Better Together Campaign, though she has found the debate “a little Death Easterish for my taste.”^[1] She wishes, instead, for what has been termed the Devo Max option – something short of absolute devolution. Her concern, as any secession will always draw out, are the “fringe of nationalists who like to demonise anyone who is not blindly and unquestionably pro-independence” (*Telegraph*, Jun 11).

Scottish Yes campaigners have taken square aim at some advocates of continued union, such as sporting personalities Alan Hansen and Peddy Crerand, largely on the grounds that they are no longer resident in Scotland, while Ally McCoist is being taken to task for what is seemingly a contradictory position. As it stands, the Yes campaign have the Nos on the run.

This week will be critical in terms of how the campaign shapes. It may be the last act of the British empire, a farewell to a long, often forced relationship. Westminster and the pound are getting wobbly. The economists are doing the sums. Both sides want a convincing ballot – a close vote, however, will do wonders for deflating morale and continuing the debate. The deflation, however, will be most felt for the No campaigners. They, after all, always thought it was a formality.

Notes

[1] <http://time.com/3305015/j-k-rowling-twitter-scotland-independence/>

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