

Introduction

Independence for Scotland - Why?

This pamphlet attempts to explain the advantages of Scottish independence and it does so at a time of impending change in the Scottish political scene. In the space of a decade we have seen the establishment of a devolved parliament and the invigoration of the independence cause. Far from “killing nationalism stone dead” as some predicted, the experience of limited power has led to the demand for more power for Scotland. As this pamphlet is published the independence cause is flourishing and this reflects impatience with the limitations of the Union with England.

Many strands of Scotland’s political life support independence. It is the preferred option of the Scottish National Party and of the Greens, the Scottish Socialist Party and of Solidarity. It is also supported by many groups, organisations and individuals. All have come together and found a collective voice in the Scottish Independence Convention, the umbrella group formed on St. Andrew’s Day 2005. The Convention is open to all individuals and parties who support independence and satisfy the requirements of our constitution. It is a common platform for those who want a referendum on independence and for parties who can bring that about by passing legislation in the Scottish Parliament.

There is no doubt that a referendum would be constitutionally valid. Donald Dewar, the late First minister, made it clear that any vote for independence must be respected by Westminster and this pledge was confirmed in public by the Secretary of State for Scotland, Douglas Alexander, who said Westminster would accept such a decision by the people.

The Independence Convention does not involve itself in arguments such as the future of the British monarchy or Scotland’s place in the European Union. These are issues for another day. For the time being the Convention is giving voice only to the arguments for independence and for a referendum although there is broad agreement among the membership that Scotland should be rid of nuclear weapons and that Britain should withdraw from Iraq. If the independence referendum succeeds then the Convention would offer parties and civic and cultural groups a space to discuss and draw up a constitution for Scotland. It is the people of Scotland together who will shape the nation as it returns to full sovereignty.

Murray Ritchie

Convener

FOR INDEPENDENCE

“Scots sleepwalked through the twentieth century.....blaming all and sundry for their woes. I’ve been all over the place looking because I was a twentieth century Scot. I came to the conclusion Scotland is an absolutely brilliant place to work and put your energies into. If you love Scotland, it gives you love back. Scotland’s creativity and confidence have been enhanced by devolution. Independence? It would skyrocket.”

John Wallace Principal of Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama (The Herald 21.2.07)

SCOTLAND - A NATION

A people sharing a common geographical space, history and culture is a common definition of what we now think of as a nation. In these respects Scotland clearly qualifies with its long-established boundaries and a shared history stretching back over 1000 years. But these objective factors would have little contemporary significance if not underpinned by a shared sense of identity. All the research work over the past thirty years has confirmed that a substantial majority of Scots see themselves as Scottish not British or more Scottish than British. Although 12% of people in Scotland were not born here, less than that proportion thought of themselves as not Scottish.

So by the objective and subjective standards normally used to confirm national status, Scotland is a nation. Does this matter? Being accepted as a nation implies the right to autonomy in the context of the structure of global divisions widely accepted over the past two centuries. It does not mean that people will choose to have a distinct state but it does establish the right to make that choice, a right recognised by the United Nations.

The idea of nation offers an over-arching identity within which many other kinds of identity exist and offers a structure through which we can relate institutionally to the rest of the world. The reason why the idea of nation has

been so successful is that it offers a form of identity that can hold societies together when so many other competing interests and values can pull them apart. This is part of the explanation not only for the continuation of nations but for the increasing number of reconstituted nations in the modern fast-changing world.

A broad and integrating national identity provides a stable base for a political state and a structure through which a society can express its values in the services it offers, the laws it chooses and the international action in which it engages.

Nations are not static or closed. Change is constantly happening. Flows of people come and go. New entrants influence the existing society and are influenced by it. This has certainly been true of Scotland and in-migrants generally adopt a Scottish identity although with varying ethnic strands.

Every nation has aspects of its past and present which should be a source of shame because of injustice, inequality or cruelty. That is true of Scotland. But there is also much in which to take pride. Scotland, for its size, has an outstanding record of intellectual achievement in the sciences and the humanities and an outstanding record in applied engineering and other manufacturing skills. We have a history of democratic participation in government and in civil institutions and deep egalitarian strands in our culture. Our international links are strong and we have recognised the value of new Scots.

Our struggle for the first stage of self-government, the establishment of the Scottish Parliament, was carried out entirely without violence.

Scotland would start on the independence journey as a society with well-established institutional structures, an extensive, if imperfect, regard for justice and social equality, and an open and co-operative outlook to the rest of the world.

Scotland's Right to Choose?

A nation may choose not to have its own state as some sections of Scottish society did in 1707. But most do and many have struggled against great odds to do so, often against powerful empires.

People have different reasons for making this choice in Scotland. They may think that the priorities and values of the British state often fail to reflect Scotland's values or interests.

They may think that a much smaller nation state can be made more responsive to its citizens and can adapt more effectively to economic and social change.

They may think that a small nation would be less inclined to engage in offensive wars or to possess nuclear weapons.

They may think that Scotland has great unrealised potential in its environment and in the skills of its people.

They may think that independence will stimulate initiative and responsibility.

They may think that independence will strengthen Scotland's cultural identity.

Whatever the reasons, they have the right to choose and in the contemporary European context, if that choice is for an independent Scottish state, it will not be seen as extreme or unusual. Many smaller and/or less prosperous states have emerged in the past two decades. Because of its historical, cultural and sporting identity, Scotland at present is often thought of as a distinct state.

We have established that by any standard definition Scotland is a nation and that there is a UN recognised right to self-determination. There are so many recent examples (in more problematic situations than that of Scotland) of countries gaining independence that this is a well-established process. What we outline below are more of the arguments for making the choice of independence and an outline of the route map towards that goal.

A New International Role

Scottish opinion has noted that its influence on UK foreign policy, whether Iraq, Trident, rendition flights or European fishing policy, is negligible. Meanwhile Scotland's own European backyard offers plentiful examples of small independent democracies contributing to global development out of all proportion to their size. Eleven of the EU member states are the same size or smaller than Scotland and they were able to make a choice about sending their troops into the Iraq war or having nuclear bases on their territory.

Following their example, an independent Scotland would be a strong supporter of international law and of the network of intergovernmental institutions, from the United Nations to the World Trade Organisation, from the International Telecommunications Union to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. We would be directly represented on the many organisations that contribute to the effective management of global interdependence.

Within this framework Scotland would need to decide on three key relationships – with the rest of the UK, with Europe and with collective military alliances.

The rest of the UK would continue in the near future to be Scotland's largest economic partner as well as providing the framework for a dense network of social and cultural interaction. While global and regional agreements combined with modern communication technologies would underpin open markets and free movement of people between Scotland and her neighbours, a Council of the British Isles, modelled on the Nordic Council, could promote cooperation and manage any policy differences that might arise in contentious areas such as immigration. The Council could also provide a forum for the discussion of budgetary impacts on sterling if Scotland were to adopt sterling as its currency.

As a successor state to a member of the European Union, Scotland would inherit a right to membership along with the 'rest of the UK'. Any future decision on continued membership or Norwegian status outside of the EU would be one for the Scottish people.

The key defence decisions facing Scotland would be on nuclear bases and NATO membership. Under the most likely political scenarios, Scotland would end British nuclear military bases. A Scottish government would

have the choice between either the neutrality of Sweden, Ireland, Finland, Austria, Switzerland who are not NATO members or non-nuclear membership of NATO like Norway.

As an independent country, Scotland would be free to act on her professed internationalist convictions. The achievement by the Scandinavian welfare democracies of the 1% GDP target for development aid would be a challenging standard to aim for as would the record of Norway, Austria, Ireland, Sweden and Switzerland in international efforts at conflict resolution and support of human rights. Scotland, with her expertise in medicine, education and alternative energy, would be well equipped to contribute to global development efforts.

Scotland's Economic Potential

Scotland is an economically advanced society, rich in resources and human capital. We have the material resources of land, sea, oil (90% of UK sources are legally in Scottish waters), gas, substantial fresh-water supplies, and a handsome natural and built environment. Eamonn Gallagher, former EU ambassador to the United Nations has commented on Scotland's significance:

“As one of Europe's most energy-rich nations, with a significant proportion of its wind, wave and tidal power, not to mention industrial expertise, Scotland is already a strategic asset....Scotland also has the EU's most important oil and gas reserves.”

But it is in our human resources that one of our great strengths lies. Scotland has one of the highest rates of participation in higher education in the world. With 50 per cent of young people now studying in universities and colleges, we have the potential to develop one of the world's most highly-skilled workforces. The quality of Scottish employees is regularly cited as a major reason why high-tech, high-value industries establish themselves in Scotland. Current economic theory on the factors that produce successful advanced economies puts much of the emphasis on the importance of high-skill human capital, an area in which Scotland is strong and has the potential to become stronger.

Scotland has a higher education sector which is well regarded internationally. Many Scottish employers are headquartered elsewhere and tend to spend research and development money close to their headquarters. For this reason Scotland has a very poor record in private sector investment in research and development. However, this is made up for by universities. Scottish universities produce more research papers and gain more peer-reviewed citations per dollar spent on research and per head of the population than any other country in the world. Our advanced research is attracting international interest and it is because of this profile that international bioscience companies are establishing in Scotland, forming high-value clusters of important emerging industry.

Scotland is already a global leader in financial services and luxury goods. We have all the potential to become leaders in major sunrise industries like life sciences, alternative energy systems and digital communication, and in fields such as nanotechnology which may form the next wave of emerging industry. In advanced economies it is human capital and innovation and creativity which stimulate prosperity, things Scotland does particularly well.

At present Scotland has been made over-reliant on the relatively small UK market in a period in which there was substantial European expansion. Finland, Ireland, Norway, Sweden, Iceland all have succeeded in developing a much broader export base.

Scotland (according to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury) would have had an accumulated surplus of £27.6 billion between 1978-95. Even if Scotland was running a deficit, this would be no different from most other countries, not least the UK. The British deficit in 2005-6 was £34.8 billion. Does that make the UK unviable?

Scotland's economic management has been secondary to UK interests. Time and again Scotland's best opportunities for economic development have been subordinated to UK interests or simply neglected by London governments. Think of the failure to diversify the electronics industry in the 1960s and 70s, the rushed exploitation of North Sea oil in the 70s and 80s to meet UK balance of payments and budgetary needs, the acceptance by the Treasury of high unemployment as the "acceptable price" for fighting inflation in the English economy through the 1970s, 80s and 90s, the sacrifice of the Scottish fishing industry to other EU priorities, the failure so far to establish Scotland as a major European production site of alternative

energy technologies. It is no surprise that between 1997 and 2004, Scottish economic growth was around 1% lower than the UK as a whole and that this has been the pattern since the 1970s despite our greater resource and skill advantages. In contrast European countries equivalent in size have achieved greater economic success. Over the past 10 years small European countries have had an average growth rate of about 4%.

Scotland's future position within the UK is likely to become increasingly disadvantaged as will that of Wales and Northern England. An extra 600,000 jobs are predicted for London over the next decade. London public expenditure per head was £9,250 in 2004-5 compared to the UK average of £7,900 and there is a strong drive to increase this share. (Financial Times 17.2.07). Future prospects are of a drift of public expenditure to the South East from the rest of the UK.

People in other countries must find the scare stories about an impoverished independent Scotland incomprehensible since clearly we have much greater intrinsic advantages than many of them. Most Scots also see the attempt to keep Scotland in a permanent position of second-class dependency as a reflection not of reality but of the short-term political expediency of those opposed to independence.

Scotland's Social Challenge

Scotland's social record has been a source of shame. Together with the rest of the UK, we are at the bottom of the UNICEF research study of the quality of children's lives in the developed countries. It is true that we are now similar to the UK average in the incidence of poverty but that poverty record is poor by Western European standards. We are a much more unequal country than Western Europe as a whole and in particular we compare very badly in this respect with the best performers, the Nordic democracies.

Today one in five of all Scots and nearly one in four of all Scottish children live below the official poverty definition of 60% of median household income. Scotland's performance against other key social indicators is even worse. On a range of health indicators such as premature death and longstanding illness, we are significantly below the UK average and at the bottom of European comparisons. Other indicators of social health such as

the very high prison population, addiction rates, violent crime, confirm Scotland's status as a chronic social underperformer.

What explains this dismal record? Other countries have overcome mass poverty and social and economic dislocation over the last century to emerge as the most advanced social democracies in the world. Other countries have had the institutions and powers of independent states for a long period and have used them to pursue national development strategies that combined economic growth with social development.

The British welfare system is now at a low subsistence level policed by means testing rather than based on a vision of welfare integral to citizenship. Independence would equip the Scottish people with the powers for an improved social strategy but the policies will be a matter of political choice.

A Sustainable Environment

Scotland has both outstanding environmental advantages and a great opportunity to be a sustainable society model. While there will have to be policy choices by voters and parties in order to benefit from this, we have an intrinsic potential that many would envy.

Because of our migration losses in the past, we have one of the lowest population densities in Europe giving us a large ratio of space per head and less of the pollution pressures that high density areas have. We are rich in water, which we may not always appreciate, but this is an increasingly valuable commodity. We are exceptionally well-placed to develop renewable energy – wind, wave and tidal power and even solar. We have good potential for carbon capture.

In this context what is the significance of independence? Environmental issues need to be addressed at both the global and the local level. Having our own state would give us a direct voice in international forums so we can engage directly with the global dimension, representing Scotland's opinions and interests.

Having our own state would also give us a major extension of those powers that can be used to promote sustainability. All the major taxation and monetary powers, the trade and industry powers and some of the transport

powers remain at Westminster. To make a serious impact on our carbon footprint and other aspects of environmental responsibility, we need to use the fullest range of powers to change lifestyles, business practice and develop new technology.

While Scotland at present could pursue a much more integrated and sustainable policy programme, the extension of powers would greatly expand the potential to do this.

Environmental campaigners over the past forty years have stressed the importance of developing a closer link between the decisions that affect the environment and those communities that experience the outcomes of these decisions. Bringing power closer to Scotland encourages greater responsibility; we know that we and our children will have to live with the choices that are made.

The Personal Level

An independent Scotland would have a written constitution guaranteeing democratic government and personal civil liberties. This would define rights of citizenship. Of course the details of a constitution would be open for debate but some aspects have already been established with the incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights in our domestic law. People who had citizenship rights would become Scottish citizens unless they wished to maintain their citizenship status with another state in which case they would have all the rights of residency.

In daily lives at the personal level people would find little difference in their relationships with those living in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. As members of the EU, there would be free movement for individuals to live or work as at present. Nor would there be any need for passports at the border. Citizens of the Irish republic have never needed passports to travel to the UK even before EU membership.

People have different views on the future of the monarchy. It would be the choice of the Scottish electorate in a democratic vote to decide if the monarch would remain head of state.

We would be familiar with the money we would use since an independent Scotland would be likely to continue to use the pound (the most pragmatic choice in the first years). Or it could eventually adopt the Euro as most of the rest of Europe has. Or there could be a new Scottish currency. This would be a choice for the Scottish electorate.

Most of us are already familiar with the entitlement to medical services when we travel or work in Europe and the same would apply to the Scots and the English in each others' country. The same applies to education services.

On independence a Scottish Government would take over responsibility for pensions and other benefits. Many of Scotland's other services are already the responsibility of the present Scottish Parliament.

Scotland would either negotiate a modified relationship with the current British broadcasting authorities or, more likely, a Scottish Broadcasting Corporation would be established to which viewers in Scotland would pay their licence fees and the SBC would then buy into BBC and other programmes as well as making more of its own.

In employment, so many people throughout the UK already work for non-UK companies that the old scare stories no longer have credibility. Taxes would be paid to the Scottish Government and there would be transitional arrangements for civil servants where there are current integrated services whereby the two governments would pay each other on an agency basis for services where there was still integrated administration.

The Next Steps

If the electors of Scotland vote for parties (there are currently four as well as some independents) who support giving the Scottish people the right to choose, there will at some stage be a referendum to decide the issue on principle. If the outcome is 'yes', the Scottish Government will enter negotiations with the UK Government and with the EU on the practical arrangements and the timetable for change. If Scotland makes a clear democratic choice, Westminster would have no viable option but to accept. If it tried to do other, it would be discredited in the context of the UN and

the EU and the Council of Europe and, importantly, in the eyes of the English public.

Before the establishment of the present Scottish Parliament we had scare stories about companies leaving and continual crisis. They proved to be completely unfounded. The prospect of full independence will also be attacked on the same basis and these attacks will be equally without foundation. Ten years after independence, Scotland will be playing a constructive part in regional and global affairs alongside many other small nations and people will wonder what the opposition was all about.

This is a route to new opportunities and challenges that will give a major stimulus to Scottish talent, vision and ethical values.