

THE IRISH TIMES



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Scotland's Moment

The story of the
referendum



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Foreword

Scotland's independence referendum campaign energised that country's citizens like no other political event, generating an often fiery debate on everything from social justice and the role of the state in the economy to national identity and the place of small states in a globalised, interdependent world. The issues debated in the campaign resonated far beyond Scotland's borders and although the referendum rejected independence, it has set the United Kingdom on a path towards profound constitutional change. This collection of articles from The Irish Times tells the story of Scotland's referendum campaign as it unfolded and explores the questions it raised for Scotland, the United Kingdom and Ireland and its consequences for the future of these islands.

Denis Staunton

Deputy Editor

The Irish Times

Scottish Referendum Countdown Begins

Mark Hennessy, June 18th, 2014

A real threat to Scotland's place in Union would boost anti-independence side

Better Together, the campaign bidding to defeat Alex Salmond's call for Scottish independence in September's referendum, is getting better as Scots edge closer to voting. Last week, they held a vibrant gathering in Maryhill, Glasgow; even managing to find a new voice – 18-year-old Shona Munro – able to articulate attractively a pro-union message.

In truth, Better Together has had plenty of room for improvement, since it has struggled up to now to create a language that is appealing, not off putting for Scots.

The challenge it has faced – compared with the far simpler, more idealistic platform available to pro-independence campaigners – has, however, been difficult. “What do we want? More of the same!” was never going to set pulses racing – though pro-union parties are now closer to an agreed offer of extra devolution if Scots vote No in September.

Left without a William Wallace-like call for freedom, “Better Together”, instead, has issued warnings about currency, welfare and other issues. Though negative, often doom-laden, the warnings have worked with a majority of Scots up to now if the polls are to be believed.

Last week, dozens of people, mostly against independence – or “separation”, as Better Together terms it – gathered in a Stirling museum to hear Labour's John Reid. Strikingly, most have come by their own route to a decision that the referendum should be defeated and they should stay in the United Kingdom.

However, they were less confident that they had the language to justify that choice in conversation with neighbours, or with friends of a different persuasion.

Former Labour Prime Minister Gordon Brown – whose reach is best within the Scottish Labour clan – last week said London's refusal to consider a sterling currency union with Scotland had rebounded. Equally though, it is true that however much the pro-union campaign has lacked poetry its warnings on bread-and-butter issues have seeped into the consciousness.

The voting starting line is far nearer than September 18th. Postal votes will issue in just seven weeks' time.

The source of September's votes is as important as their number, since the Yes campaign – or parts of it, anyway – is seeking votes in working class communities where voting has fallen in recent decades. If this plan works, the social make-up of the result will differ from everyday elections.

Illustrating the difficulties of winning referendums, Ireland has shown that the side making the case for change needs to be well ahead and must then fend off challenges in the final straight.

In Scotland, there was clear evidence last autumn – some of it anecdotal, some from opinion polls – that the Yes side had the wind in its sails, but was still behind. Today, the Yes side has not fallen back, but neither has it continued to make ground – apart from the findings of a panel-based poll (which has consistently given higher figures for the Yes vote) earlier this week.

The latest TNS/MRBI monthly poll, meanwhile, reports 30 per cent questioned say they will vote Yes, 42 per cent say No, and 28 per cent – still an extraordinarily high figure – are undecided.

In reality, the latter number is probably smaller, since there is reluctance in some parts of Scottish society to declare opinions – mostly, but not entirely, on the No side. The reluctance is understandable. Like Ireland, Scotland is a small country. Neighbours have little desire to fall out with each other, for reasons of politeness, or caution.

Equally, however, some on the No side, particularly those involved in business, note that Alex Salmond will still be Scottish first minister on September 19th whatever happens.

If the don't knows are excluded, and if the TNS/MRBI opinion poll is right, then 41 per cent of Scots will say Yes and 59 per cent will say No – a highly significant rebuff for Salmond if it happened.

However, three months is an age. The Better Together campaign is promising “a 100-day pledge” campaign.

Ironically, the anti-independence side needs the existence of a real threat to Scotland's place in the union if it is to be sure of getting its support out to the polling stations.

Time after time, research has shown that Yes voters are more likely to turn out, while they are also more likely to have been involved closely with the referendum.

Three months out, some in Labour, though they will deny it, have begun to look forward to the political landscape that will exist if the independence referendum is beaten.

If it is, then Labour in Scotland – once dominant, now in sorry shape – fears voters will compensate the SNP for losing one cherished dream with an even bigger majority in Holyrood in 2016.

For now, both sides insist that they can win, that they will win; but the Church of Scotland is not alone in worrying about the divisions that are being created in society.

Three days after the referendum, it will hold a reconciliation service. Most Scots, however – regardless of opinions – do not want poison left behind, although they worry that it will be.

‘I’m voting “Aye”, notionally, reservations notwithstanding’

Patrick Smyth, June 28th, 2014

Opinion: What Westminster can give it can also take away, delay, prevaricate on

‘Something pretty big is happening in Scotland’ Lesley Riddoch warns. Such is her confidence that the *Scotsman* columnist and Yes campaigner was taking bets from her audience in Belfast that the turnout in its independence referendum will not fall below a stonking 80 per cent. And just over 80 days to go.

Like the beer that supposedly reaches places that no other beer can, the debate is having an electrifying effect, she says, in communities up and down Scotland, from small rural villages to the country’s most depressed inner city estates.

Riddoch recalls former Labour leader John Smith’s words about its traditionally low turnout: “The day the missing million vote, Scotland will change.” They are coming out, she says. Hundreds, at nightly meetings, many of them previously disengaged, many being registered to vote for the first time by young activists from the likes of the Radical Independence Campaign who are reinventing mass street campaigning.

If she is right, the narrow, albeit longstanding, poll leads for the No vote mean little, as they are largely predicated on turnouts around 50 per cent. Anything is possible . . .

Riddoch was speaking at a seminar on Wednesday in Queen’s, *Scotland’s Choice: Reshaping Relationships*, which also heard from one of the leading No campaigners, Tory MSP Murdo Fraser, one of the party’s few federalists. His recipe for saving Scotland for the UK: a radical federalist alternative of regional English, Scottish, Northern Ireland and Welsh parliaments to give expression to the country’s growing anti-Londoncentrism.

Personally, I’ve been agonising about my vote, the notional one my Ulster Scots forebears would have handed down to me if we’d never left.

I’ve been firmly in the agnostic “don’t know” camp, deeply wary of those traditional “blood nationalist” arguments about ethnic identity, the pandering to Anglophobia, the obsessing about historic wrongs, the intellectually disingenuous abstractions about sovereignty in an interdependent world, and the inevitable insinuations that the border is at the root of every single problem.

I’ve also some sympathy – however tough on the Scots it might appear – with the fear that Scottish independence and the loss of its many Labour seats would condemn the rest of the UK to live under a permanent Tory majority.

Now, however, I’ve plumped. I’m voting “Aye”, notionally – reservations notwithstanding – persuaded, I have to admit, by the Riddoch redefinition of the question.

“What’s it for?” she asks. That’s the crucial issue. Independence, not for its own sake, not for the flag and all its trappings, but independence to make possible particular things. Independence, because a nation permanently out of step with the political culture of its bigger

neighbour is trapped in the latter's stifling ambit and has no possibility of shaping its own sense of self.

So Yes campaigners like her have taken such issues as affordable childcare, the reform of Scotland's deeply inequitable land ownership – 432 people owning half the private land – or the transformation of its unwieldy local government with councils representing on average as many as 165,000 citizens . . . and made them the stuff of the independence campaign, collectively an expression of what they see as distinct Scottish political culture, a sort of Nordic egalitarian, grass-rootsist, social democratic vision that is profoundly at odds with the post-Thatcherite neo-liberal vision that prevails in London, even in the ranks of Labour.

Voting Aye would not guarantee such a “bottom-up-democracy” of popular empowerment in Scotland. There would then be the not insignificant challenge of electing a majority government committed to such a vision. An Aye would, however, make it a possibility where none exists under the status quo.

Not so, you can have all that now, responds Fraser, without the trauma and difficulties (wildly exaggerated by the No campaign) of independence and the establishment of a new state. Not least because all of the unionist parties – Tories, Labour and Lib Dems – have, under the pressure of the referendum campaign, now belatedly committed themselves to the devolution to a Scottish Assembly of significant further powers. The sort of powers, Fraser argues, that would allow it to do any of the above. Most dramatically, the Tories have promised the Scots the right to raise and vary income tax. That's up to 50 per cent of the local budget spend.

True, some of the above might well be possible under a “devo-max” new dispensation, but then, what Westminster can give it can also take away, delay, prevaricate on. And it has form . . .

So I'm voting Aye, even notionally, though the unionist ancestors may spin in their graves.

Scottish fight for independence stretches back seven centuries in Bannockburn

Mark Hennessy, June 30th, 2014

Victory for Robert the Bruce re-enacted as Armed Forces Day celebrated nearby

The rain fell heavily, the campfires threw off acrid plumes of smoke, camp travellers edged forward carefully on slippery ground. The camp at Bannockburn in Stirlingshire, Scotland, was not happy on Saturday.

Seven hundred years after Robert the Bruce's victory over Edward II, thousands had come to commemorate the battle and watch it re-enacted, not by soldiers but by actors. Standing under sailcloth tents, a few actors dressed in period clothes that included chain mail, complained about the lack of food.

"I'm not happy," said a corpulent man there to play a role in Bruce's army. "I'm not happy at all. This is absolutely ridiculous. I'm not eating vegetable curry, I'm not. I'm starting to feel dizzy."

Backed by £500,000 of Scottish government funding, Bannockburn Live was intended to attract 45,000 over two days, but ticket sales disappointed the organisers. About 10,000 attended on Saturday but grumbles filled the air when those with the £20 tickets found they had to queue alongside others had yet to collect theirs.

Once inside they had to queue again to get to the viewing stands for the battle – not everybody made it, which led to more bickering, prompting apologies from organisers.

The battle scenes were humorously delivered: "Give it up for Robert the Bruce, hero of Scotland," said the announcer.

"That's pathetic," he said after a feeble response. "This is a king we are talking about. Again!"

This time the crowd, enjoying a brief break in the rain, responded enthusiastically. The actors cantered through their scenes, which included Bruce's early killing of Sir Henry de Bohun, his head cleaved with "my good axe", and the arrival of an informer from the English camp. In the end the Scottish schiltrons – tightly packed groups of men armed with 3.5m spears – moved forward, breaking the English ranks to loud cheers. By now the rain had returned and was coming down more heavily.

"Thank you for witnessing this," said the announcer as the crowds headed quickly for the gates. "Will the dead now rise," he said to the actor soldiers.

Independence supporters, wearing the light blue badges of the Yes referendum campaign, were there in numbers, but doubters such as 60-year-old Stuart Thomson, who lives in Ayrshire, were there, too. "The heart says Yes, because of Bannockburn and things like it, but the head says No. I'd rather be a little fish in a big pond."

Just one of the group with him, unwilling to be named, expressed an intention to vote Yes, and had little confidence of victory: “It won’t happen. I wish it would but it won’t.”

The re-enactors’ efforts to recreate the events of June 23rd and 24th, 1314, were disturbed intermittently by RAF Typhoon and Tornado fighter jets and Apache helicopters flying just a few miles away.

There, up to 35,000 people had attended Armed Forces Day. The event, in its sixth year, was brought to Scotland this year to heighten pro-Union sympathies.

British prime minister David Cameron stood in line on a country road, along with Labour leader Ed Miliband and Scottish first minister Alex Salmond to review the military parade. Each found something to illustrate their message about independence. For Cameron, the armed forces represented how Scotland and the rest of the UK were “better together”.

For Salmond it was 92-year- old D-Day veteran Peter McCall, who joined the Scottish National Party in 1948 and “who is living” for Independence Day.

The dislike between the principals was evident. Cameron and Salmond had a cursory handshake. Defence secretary Philip Hammond ignored Miliband. Scottish Labour leader Johann Lamont, who has been overshadowed in the referendum campaign debate, stood at the end of the line, mostly ignored.

The dignitaries had to stand chatting for some time as they waited for the military parade from Stirling Castle to arrive. Sometimes attention waned. Miliband, lost in his thoughts, stared either into the middle distance, or, occasionally and with extraordinary concentration, at an officer’s gold-braided cap.

One veteran, Milton Reilly, told Salmond, Princess Anne and Cameron of his hopes that the UK would stay as one. Salmond quickly escaped. Cameron chatted but looked over Reilly’s shoulder for rescue. Leaving, later, the dignitaries attracted attention, though to varying degrees: Cameron some and Miliband very little, while Salmond received most – positive and negative but mostly the former.

In the crowd, three neighbours from Stirling, Alice Barber, Janis Clasn and Susan McKerchar, were united in their dislike of the idea of independence. “If this debate took place 300 years ago, fine,” said Clasn, “but we’re hundreds of years too late. Alex Salmond has not given enough clarity.”

For McKerchar, Ireland provided a salutary experience: “Look at what has happened there. It could happen to us. Look at the pay cuts. Here people complain if they get [a pay increase of] 1 per cent a year.” Tomorrow: the shipbuilding unions and their attitude towards independence.

‘This is our last and only chance of creating something better’

Mark Hennessy, July 2nd, 2014

Public meetings, once seen as out of date, are enjoying a renaissance in Scotland

Robbie Gallacher lives in Blairhall, a former mining village whose fortunes have waned since its colliery closed in the late 1960s. When he left the public meeting in Dunfermline his mind was unchanged by almost two hours of debate.

Gallacher, a Labour Party supporter, voted against Scottish devolution in 1979, but will support independence on September 18th: “I’m a socialist. This is our last chance, our only chance of creating something better,” he tells *The Irish Times*.

On a bright summer’s evening, Gallacher and about 100 others had gathered in Dunfermline’s Carnegie conference centre to hear representatives from the pro-independence “Yes Scotland” and the pro-Union “Better Together” campaigns.

The referendum has brought about a renaissance in political public meetings – a phenomenon that had waned in British society since the 1960s, or later, replaced by television debates, direct mail and, more recently, social media.

Up to now, Yes Scotland has been significantly more skilled than Better Together in putting boots on the ground, listing for example more than 350 events that will take place within 50 miles of Edinburgh between now and polling day.

By contrast, Better Together lists about 175 events, though a significant percentage of those are phone-canvassing sessions held in supporters’ homes, rather than anything that is open to the public at large.

In Dunfermline last week the *Courier* newspaper held the last of its referendum meetings, bringing together former Labour MP Dennis Canavan and Dunfermline and Fife West MP Thomas Docherty, along with academic John Curtice.

The gathering was, at times, revealing. “Yes Scotland” is happy to have Canavan representing it, since it helps to rebut the perception that the campaign is little more than a front for Alex Salmond’s Scottish National Party.

However, Canavan – who was expelled from Labour after the party leadership rejected him in 1999 as a Scottish Parliament candidate, though he went on to win a seat with the highest number of votes – is a man of strong views.

Some of those views – including his support for a Scottish currency, rather than seeking an arrangement with London about the continued use of sterling – are too strong for the middle-ground opinion the SNP so desperately wants to sway.

For now, Canavan is happy to go along with the idea of sterling, believing that although an independent Scotland’s borrowing would be constrained, there “would still be an amazing amount of freedom to decide taxes and benefits”.

Docherty was quick to pick up on the reaction of some of the audience to the risk of losing sterling. The loss of the currency is something Conservatives, Labour and the Liberal Democrats have warned will be an inevitable consequence of a Yes vote.

Academic John Curtice highlights the debate's contradictions: "Why is the No side telling the Yes that they should have their own currency? Is it because some voters will be so frightened that they will shy away?"

"The SNP has made a deliberate calculation: you can keep the same currency; you can watch Eastenders, and everything else."

"The No side is advocating a more radical vision of independence than many on the Yes side," he tells the audience.

For many in Dunfermline, the future of the Rosyth Naval Dockyard weighs heavily as they decide their vote, which leads Canavan onto a long, rather rambling story about his father's war-time career working as a shipbuilder.

"Rosyth does have a future, a brighter, different future," he declares, pointing to the fishery protection vessels and oil and gas rigs that will be needed. "Look at all the redeployment that took place after the war; millions of people were redeployed."

Here, a significant share of the audience – many of whom clearly agree with him on much else – palpably groaned: "You're living in cloud cuckoo land if you believe that," one member of the audience told an unapologetic Canavan.

Canavan, however, quickly points to a weakness in the Labour Party's flank that has been insufficiently exploited: what will be the future of their House of Commons MPs if Scotland votes to split from the Union?

"Supposing there is a Yes vote," Canavan tells Docherty, "you will still be an MP. Would you be arguing against the wishes of the majority of the people of Scotland, or would you change your tune and say that in the interests of Scotland there must be an agreement about sterling?"

Docherty stops momentarily before replying with a chuckle: "Frankly, Dennis, I would not envisage standing as a candidate in the general election [in May 2015], though I would have to talk to my wife about this."

Leaving quickly, many in the audience are shy about expressing their views under their own name, though it seems clear that few, if any, had heard anything that had changed their minds, regardless of which way they are leaning.

For one couple – middle-aged, comfortably-off farmers – the referendum has illustrated divisions in Scottish society: "If you have a stake in society you'll vote against; if not, you'll vote for it."

"Ten years ago I wasn't that bothered, but look at the way that things have gone since," says the husband.

Ireland can adapt to either referendum result

Martin Mansergh, July 16th, 2014

Opinion: What Scottish nationalism is looking for is effectively dominion status

There are not many countries where a referendum on the independence of a large part of the home territory could be held peacefully and by agreement between the main protagonists.

It is greatly to the credit of British and Scottish democracy that the Scottish electorate is being given the opportunity to decide whether to maintain or end the 300-year-old union.

A Yes vote would be followed by intensive negotiation between Edinburgh and London on the practical consequences of a new relationship, with parallel discussions on Scotland's admission to the EU, UN and other international bodies, to be concluded prior to independence. A No vote would presumably prompt improvements to devolution promised by the Westminster parties.

What is less admirable about the debate has been the intrusion of world leaders, weighing in behind the No side. The most egregious example was that of European Commission president José Manuel Barroso, whose own country, Portugal, recovered its independence from Spain in 1640. He warned that Scotland's admission to the EU could be extremely difficult, because it required unanimity among member states, even though there is no precedent for excluding any EU territory.

Scotland is not Kosovo, though: when EU member states facilitated the break-up of the former Yugoslavia, most did not worry too much about the prospect of five or six countries at the table. While Spain might hold up negotiations for a while, because of its concerns on Catalonia, a prolonged veto would be politically untenable.

Ireland's experience reflects both sides of the argument. Unionists naturally support continuation of the union with Scotland, though sending Orange marchers across a few days before the vote is probably not a good idea.

First Minister Peter Robinson has made it clear that if Scotland voted Yes, Northern Ireland would remain in the UK with England and Wales. While it might lead to some rethinking of Ulster-Scots as a pillar of unionist identity, it is unlikely republicanism would gain new traction, despite any initial flurry of excitement.

Nationalist Ireland has until now maintained strict neutrality across the political spectrum, surprising though this might seem. Official Ireland has little enthusiasm for Scottish independence, attaching much more importance to the cordiality of British-Irish relations and the stability of the peace process; it also perhaps fears increased investment competition. In the light of our history, though, it would be incongruous to openly favour the status quo. To advocate publicly Scottish independence, on the other hand, could quite possibly damage that cause and create serious distrust in relations. In any case, the principled position is that it is for the Scottish people to decide.

A few years ago, in the heyday of the Celtic Tiger, Ireland was central to the Scottish independence debate. Since the crash, the SNP does not mention Ireland any more, preferring

to point to Nordic models. That has the advantage of sparing us the disobliging and sometimes ill-informed ripostes of pro-union spokesmen.

Happily, Ireland is no longer relevant to the argument. In this decade of centenaries, leading British figures can safely express respect for the achievements of Irish independence, without fearing a read-across to Scotland.

In truth, despite significant similarities, there are also important differences between Ireland and Scotland, in geographical situation, in historical experience, and between the world of 100 years ago and today. While Scottish history has many sad, traumatic and heroic episodes, on balance it benefited from the union and from empire, as the Scottish diaspora spread. Scotland was better integrated than Ireland ever was.

There was not the same centrality to religion, after Scotland did not quite succeed in imposing Presbyterianism as the State religion across these islands in the mid-17th century. Today's push for independence is not propelled either by cultural nationalism or unrealistic aspirations for economic self-sufficiency.

What Scottish nationalism is looking for, by retaining Queen Elizabeth as head of state, is dominion status, very different from militant Irish republican separatism. That ought to lead to an amicable relationship between Edinburgh and London from the start.

The potential damage to Britain's standing from Scottish independence is exaggerated. The UK would still be a country of 50 million people and a nuclear power, and it is not easy to see how it could be ejected from an expanded permanent membership of the UN Security Council.

The core of the debate is economic, though such an important decision should concern more than marginal changes in living standards, whichever way the vote goes. The union of 1707 between elites was accompanied by a bailout, following disastrous speculation in the Darien project that promised untold riches.

What has to be weighed up today is an independent Scotland's greater vulnerability to global economic storms versus its desire to run a more communitarian economic policy in reaction to the destructive effects of Thatcherism on its industrial base.

Opinion polls suggest that Scotland's voters will play for safety rather than opt for a more challenging future, though, as Zbigniew Brzezinski, former US president Jimmy Carter's national security adviser, has noted, "the historically proven fact is that national statehood, once attained, is infectious and almost impossible to undo". Ireland can surely work with either result. Martin Mansergh is a former Fianna Fáil TD and minister of state, and was centrally involved in negotiating the Northern peace process.

Political architecture of UK set to change whatever vote may bring

Arthur Aughey, July 17th, 2014

Opinion: Yes campaign has fallen to earth because of gulf between vision and practicality

In the film *Miss Congeniality* Sandra Bullock stars as an undercover FBI agent at a Miss America beauty pageant. When contestants are asked: “What is the one most important thing our society needs?” each replies: “World peace”. When it is Sandra Bullock’s turn she answers: “Harsher punishment for parole violators. And world peace.” If the joke is the disconnection between vision and practicality, a similar disconnect faces the case for Scottish independence.

Tom Nairn, author of *The Break-up of Britain*, veteran of the cause, put succinctly Scotland’s independence moment at the Edinburgh Lecture of 2008, hosted by first minister Alex Salmond. The old question: “Are you big enough to survive and develop in an industrialising world?” has been replaced with: “Are you small and smart enough to survive, and claim a positive part in the common global culture?” How can you achieve that without independence, Nairn asked? Scotland must take its place as one of “the nations of a new and deeply different age”. This is a soaring dove argument, proof of the “vision thing” which nationalists claim unionists don’t have. Released from the United Kingdom’s confinement, Scotland will fly onwards and upwards.

For sceptics this dove was Kant’s in *The Critique of Pure Reason*: “The light dove, cleaving the air in her free flight, and feeling its resistance, might imagine that its flight would be still easier in empty space.” And the course of the referendum campaign has witnessed such a falling to earth because of the space between vision and practice.

A nation, like an army, marches on its stomach. On the practical “stomach” issues, the SNP proposed unions if not Union. Currency union, social union – even keeping the university research funding system – were intended to make independence risk free. Once it became clear currency union had no wings, independence policy options have struggled to fly. Peter Kellner of YouGov put it starkly. Barring catastrophe for the No campaign “Scotland will vote to remain in the United Kingdom, and by a decisive enough margin to settle the matter for many years to come”.

Here is one delicious irony. A No vote in September will represent a positive expression of Scotland’s place in the UK, unparalleled since 1707. Moreover, it has breathed new life into thinking about the Union, reflection on what the historian Colin Kidd has called “the vast and variegated middle ground” between centralisation and independence. An excellent example of this is the report published last May by the Scottish Conservatives’ Commission on the Future governance of Scotland and endorsed by British prime minister David Cameron. That report argues that the Scottish parliament should become responsible for setting rates and bands of income tax as well as supplementing welfare benefits. In general outline, these proposals are close to the “devo-more” strategy of the Labour-linked think tank, the Institute for Public Policy Research. They are rapidly becoming the settled view of all UK parties of government. It just happens to correspond with the public centre of gravity according to Scottish Social Attitudes Surveys: further devolution but not independence. A YouGovpoll in

June shows the majority of Scots think that is exactly what they will get if they vote “No”. Chairman of the Conservative Commission Lord Strathclyde also identifies another emerging political consensus. He notes that after 15 years of ad hoc constitutional change, there is a need for clear divisions of responsibility and accountability between institutions across the UK. The recommendation is to establish a “Committee of all the Parliaments and Assemblies of the United Kingdom” to complement devolution with stronger Union. Similarly, a “constitutional convention” has been proposed by Welsh first minister Carwyn Jones and former Scottish first minister Lord McConnell has called for a “conference on the Union”. After the vote on September 18th there will also be an imperative to address the English question and to recognise England’s distinctive voice in the UK. The McKay Commission report last year proposed English MPs should have greatest influence over England-only laws. Though its recommendations have been parked by the coalition pending the outcome of the Scottish referendum the issue will not go away. Northern Ireland’s political parties will also need to engage in this process. None of them can afford to ignore the debates about the changing architecture of the UK. Indeed in language familiar to politicians in Northern Ireland, but of value now throughout the Union, it is obvious that multinational institutions are sustained on the basis of consent. Of course, there is still much work ahead to reconcile the policy choices of enhanced devolution with the common interests of Union. And there is no certainty politicians are up to the task.

It was once said of the damnable task of making Irish Home Rule work that it would need the brains of a Gladstone and the balls of a Munster fusilier. That formula, if not personnel, applies still.

Nevertheless, if the precise shape of the post-referendum Union is unclear, one paradoxical term best describes it. That term is elective affinity: “elective” which suggests deliberate choice; “affinity” which implies that individuals and systems are related by something other than choice. What the Scottish referendum will show is that component nationalities can elect to stay in constitutional relationship; and that relationship exhibits affinities which give continued substance to British identity.

Irish seem lost for words on Scottish independence

Patrick Smyth, July 18th, 2014

Analysis: There is a politically unmentionable calculation that Ireland is best served by the preservation of the Union

Official Ireland, in the form of governments North or South, is not in proselytising mode. At least, when it comes to Scottish independence. Nor, it appears, are our parties, even those most identified with the cause of independence/unionism.

Yet, in the Republic at least, the reality is that Scottish aspirations to run their own affairs would seem to chime strongly with our own national narrative of successful independence.

At the very least one might expect a chorus from sympathetic politicians of “been there, done that”, an expression of solidarity for the legitimacy of a nationalist aspiration, and an articulation the core national value of the right of nations to self-determination.

At least, perhaps, a reassuring response and assurance out of our historical experience to the prognoses of catastrophe, of economic disaster and political isolation that have emanated from Westminster? We shared a stable currency union with sterling for 50 years, after all, and could at least argue that it was not the impossibility for Scotland that London is suggesting.

And, after all, international support has been manifest for the No camp, as Martin Mansergh has pointed out in his contribution to this series, from the likes of EU Commission president José Manuel Barroso and US president Barack Obama. But, no. Silence. Even on the part of Sinn Féin, whose past support for the Basque cause and active collaboration with Eta, would suggest the party is not averse to international solidarity activity.

In part that official silence – a public benign neutrality on the issue that masks an unstated hope that the issue will simply go away– might be excused as deference to the idea that “self-determination” is a private matter for the “self”, without outside help. Historical parallels, as Mansergh points out can be exaggerated, and there is also an important, politically unmentionable, calculation that Ireland is better served by the preservation of the Union.

The political fallout from the breakup of the UK is of as much concern to Dublin as the prospect that an independent Scotland could become a poll of attraction for foreign direct investment. Already nervous about the possibility of a British break from the EU, there is a strong sense that a Scottish go-it-alone would accelerate the process first by changing the Westminster political maths, making an anti-referendum Labour government less likely. And then, by eroding what has been seen until recent times as a pro-EU majority in the UK.

And “official Ireland”, Mansergh observes, attaches “much more importance to the cordiality of British-Irish relations and the stability of the peace process”. Although a Yes vote might provide a brief fillip to Sinn Féin by again raising the salience of the idea of a united Ireland, few imagine it would win any Northern unionists to the idea. On the contrary it might well make them feel less secure about their position in a United Kingdom.

The more likely outcome of the referendum, as Arthur Aughey argued here yesterday, is a No vote and “one delicious irony” the reconsolidation of the political legitimacy of the United

Kingdom as a state. The Irish national interest lies, it could be argued, in neither a Yes nor a No vote, but no vote or campaign at all.

In the North a collective official view would clearly be impossible. The Executive is deeply divided on desirability of independence.

Sinn Féin and the DUP might welcome/abhor in equal measure either result but neither side in the debate in Scotland would particularly welcome public support from either quarter.

There are reports that Orange members and bands from the North will join their Scottish counterparts' September pre-referendum march in Glasgow, but the Order's contribution has been dismissed by the mainstream unionist Better Together campaign.

A leading unionist campaigner, Jim Murphy MP, former Labour Scottish secretary, describes them as "unsavoury" insisting that "not for a moment would they be part of the Better Together campaign. They'd be unwelcome".

Yet if the Yes/No debate is producing little resonance in the North's politics, the reshaping of Scotland's devolution deal with Westminster in the wake of a likely No will certainly prompt agonising in Belfast. With all the Scottish unionist parties offering forms of enhanced devolution as their alternative to a Yes vote, as Aughey argues, the most important effect of the referendum is to stimulate a serious "reflection on what the historian Colin Kidd has called 'the vast and variegated middle ground' between centralisation and independence". And not least, inevitably, in Belfast.

The Tories have suggested that Scotland's parliament should become responsible for setting rates and bands of income tax as well as supplementing welfare benefits. Intuitively one might expect Northern Ireland's devolved administration to say "we'll have some of that too, please". But, as Northern politicians have discovered with the suggested devolution of the right to vary rates of corporation tax to compete with the Republic, Westminster is unlikely to accede without insisting that the local administration must also arrange to meet any resulting local revenue shortfall from their own resources. By cuts to services, or increased local taxes, politically toxic choices.

That reality puts a different, difficult complexion on the calculation of the benefits of greater local autonomy. Scotland's referendum, it seems is raising more than a few challenging, and counterintuitive, conundrums for this island's political class.

As Scotland's decision day nears 'undecideds' hold key

Mark Hennessy, July 26th 2014

The SNP is hoping that those who traditionally don't vote will come out in numbers on September 18th

For more than two years the debate on Scottish independence has raged: often bitter, frequently contradictory and sometimes confusing.

Over the last couple of weeks, it has, however, ebbed a little – partly because of the summer holidays usually prompted by the arrival of the Glasgow Fair holiday in late July. It has marked a moment of relative calm before forces are marshalled for the final weeks of campaigning running up to September 18th, when voters will be faced with a straight Yes/No.

Just one of the nearly 70 opinion polls – some of them frankly questionable – of the last couple of years has put the “Yes” side ahead, but the gap between the sides varies widely.

One of the most recent, a TNS BMRB poll published last week, highlights the key group to be targeted in the final weeks: the undecided.

According to the pollsters, a quarter still do not know how they will vote - an extraordinarily high figure, if accurate, so late in the campaign.

Some of these voted in the past for Scottish Labour but switched allegiance in the 2011 Holyrood elections when the Scottish National Party made significant gains. However, the most important group of all are those who have never voted. In 2011, just four in 10 voted across Glasgow with just 35 per cent doing so in Glasgow Provan.

On September 18th, however, the turn-out is expected by both sides – Yes Scotland on the pro-independence side, “Better Together” for “No” – to be twice that number. If so, polling companies will struggle.

Much of the elusive cohort live in “the schemes”, the council estates in Scotland's central belt, Glasgow and Edinburgh and the places in between, that have often stood as a byword for poverty. Ignored by Labour for decades, which was guaranteed victory without them, the group lies at the centre of the Scottish National Party's belief that “Yes” can win.

The argument is that they have nothing in the Scotland that now exists so they have nothing to lose.

On Thursday, Scottish First Minister Alex Salmond made a Braveheart-style call to such voters, declaring Glasgow – once the Second City of Empire – as “Freedom City”.

Labour remains the largest party in Glasgow local government, holding double the number of council seats of the SNP. It should give Labour a reach that the latter does not have, but in this campaign it may not.

Divisions with Labour in London have not helped, partly the dispute over how much extra devolution should be offered if Scotland does reject independence. Scottish Labour leader, Johann Lamont wanted to offer more than Labour in London. Labour headquarters is fearful of the consequences more devolution could have on English opinion.

Equally, Labour leader, Ed Miliband's decision not to distance himself from the British Government's caps on welfare benefits has not gone down well in such districts.

The referendum is not simply a question about social class, or wealth, if both do partly explain the voting intentions of many. Support for independence, according to the British Election Study, is highest among supervisors, small business owners, assembly lines workers, along with waiters and cleaners.

By contrast, the No vote is strongest among so-called intermediate workers, secretaries or computer operators; while senior managers are the most opposed of all. "Voters. . . are divided by class, (but) they aren't falling along the same working/middle class division that has traditionally structured party competition in the UK," says Jon Mellon of Oxford's Nuffield College.

The battle to get voters on the register, one that is being best fought by the SNP and others on the "Yes" side, is not over. People can sign up to vote until September 2nd. The deadline for postal voting – increasingly popular in British elections – runs out the following day; though such ballot papers will be sent out to those already registered from August 26th.

However, there is no guarantee that the SNP's judgment is right. It believed that voters aged between 16 and 18 would form a phalanx behind the Yes vote. So far, the evidence suggests that they have not been persuaded; perhaps believing, as 18-year-old Shona Munro put it, that nationalism is "as outdated as dial-up Internet or cassette tapes".

By contrast, their slightly older peers in their 20s and 30s are strongly on the Yes side; though support for independence trails off significantly among the older the voter questioned.

Following a successful opening to the Commonwealth Games, Scotland is feeling good about itself – which is not something a country that often lacks self-confidence tends to feel very often. Salmond believed that the games, the 700th anniversary of the Battle of Bannockburn, and the Ryder Cup in September will all contribute to national bonhomie from which the Yes campaign can benefit.

His self-denying ordinance not to trumpet the independence case during the Commonwealth Games – broken by his "Freedom City" remark – is one that few believed he ever intended to honour. If he is guilty, however, of some cheap flag-waving, Prime Minister David Cameron's presence in Scotland this week highlights flaws on the other side.

He visited the Shetlands, the first prime minister to do so in 34 years. Margaret Thatcher came once in 1989. Ted Heath did so once in the early seventies.

Given the importance of North Sea oil to the British Exchequer over the years, the Shetlands could reasonably have expected greater attention. It is not the only place in Scotland that could say that.

Berwick-upon-Tweed keeping an eye on the border

Mark Hennessy, July 30th 2014

Scottish independence referendum weighs on residents in northern English town

Berwick Rangers played their final pre-season friendly last Saturday week, a 2-1 defeat to Dunfermline Athletic, before a decent crowd.

Last season, Berwick missed out on a play-off place in League Two in Scotland when they finished fifth, behind Clyde, losing to league champions Peterhead in the final game of the season.

Like other clubs, Berwick Rangers have faced the threat of extinction a couple of times. However, the team are unusual because they are based in Berwick-upon-Tweed, a border town three miles inside England that swapped hands frequently during centuries of border wars.

The decision to play in Scottish leagues was made by necessity rather than choice a century ago, when clubs in northeast England refused to travel so far north on poor roads.

Berwick is used to being on the edge. Today, the town of 15,000 looks on with interest, perhaps even with a degree of concern, at the Scottish independence referendum debate, and the implications that a Yes vote could have for it.

Roderick Henriques, who runs Berrydin Books, is clear about his views. "I hope it never happens," he says passionately.

Henriques, who came to Northumberland from London 30 years ago, believes "borders divide people, they create divisions", even if the intentions of those who want them are more benign.

In a street near the docks that once brought prosperity to Berwick when it exported salmon from the Tweed to the tables of the rich in London, Christine MacDonald stands behind the counter of her recently opened shop, Scottish Kelpie.

Scottish-born MacDonald, who came to live in Berwick six months ago to open her business selling jewellery, soaps and aromatherapies, knows how she would vote if she was back in Scotland.

"I know a lot of people here who would like Berwick to be part of Scotland, as it was so often in the past," she says. "Years ago, I thought Scotland couldn't do it, but I have changed my mind."

The border town has come on to the radar of Westminster in the past year following the decision of long-serving Liberal Democrat MP Alan Beith to stand down.

The Conservatives have ambitions to replace him, which explains the rush to visit by senior figures such as British home secretary Theresa May and justice secretary Chris Grayling in recent months. Last week, it was chancellor George Osborne's turn, though the primary

purpose of his visit was to stand with Conservative candidate Anne-Marie Trevelyan on the side of the A1 road.

The road – the main artery from Newcastle to Scotland – must be turned into a dual carriageway, Northumberland council has told Osborne, promising a £380 million (€480 million) payback if the work is done.

Since 1999, northeast England has looked on with growing concern at Scotland's use of the limited economic levers it enjoys under devolution.

However, it was not, perhaps, until 2011 that concern changed to alarm. Partly on the back of Scottish grants, Amazon decided to establish a distribution hub in Dunfermline, employing 800 staff, along with 500 more in an operations centre in Edinburgh. Both operations have grown since.

Tyneside in northeast England had been in the running for the jobs. That defeat, coupled with the Conservatives' decision to scrap regional development agencies, increased local fears that the northeast was losing out.

Today, the North East Chamber of Commerce in Newcastle warns that one in eight firms based in the region are holding off on investment plans until the uncertainty created by the referendum is resolved, one way or the other.

Yet a demand for local "home rule" in the northeast is still slow to grow. Ten years ago, voters there overwhelmingly rejected a Labour plan for regional assemblies, believing they were being offered yet another talking shop.

The effects of Scottish home rule are already visible daily to Berwick, as illustrated by local newspaper editor Phil Johnson, who publishes the *Berwick Advertiser* for his readers in England and the *Berwickshire News* for those in Scotland.

Like many others working in Berwick, Johnson lives in Scotland, in Coldstream. Recently, he forgot to drop into a chemist near his home to pick up a prescription, where it would have cost him nothing because the Scottish NHS does not charge for them.

Instead, he went to a chemist near his office in Berwick during his lunch break. There, it cost £8.05 for each item, because the NHS in England does charge for them. "People in Berwick don't resent Scots having free prescriptions," he says, "but they are aware of it."

Let the Games conclude

Mark Hennessy, August 2nd, 2014

Many predicted Glasgow's Commonwealth Games would be hijacked by political campaigners in the run-up to Scotland's independence referendum. It appears they were wrong

For a city that prides itself often on its tough, mean-streets reputation, Glasgow has thrived over the past 10 days, as it has played host to the Commonwealth Games.

For many the Games are a throwback to a forgotten era: “the pretendy Olympics”, in the benign words of the local comedian Billy Connolly. They have come with a bill of almost £600 million – a fraction of the cost of the London Olympics two years ago, even if Glasgow, too, went over budget.

During the opening ceremony, at Celtic Park, the sparkling pictures the Games' organisers had hoped for went a little flat when rows of seats were clearly empty. In general, however, audiences have been healthy – 45,000 people, for example, went to Rangers' home ground, Ibrox, to watch seven-player rugby.

Before the Games began, both sides in the independence-referendum campaign, particularly the pro-union one, claimed that the event would be exploited for political ends.

Under the rules of the organising committee, flags that advocate a political cause – saltires emblazoned with Yes, for example – were barred from all venues, as they always have been.

On Wednesday a woman was escorted from the swimming competition after she unfurled such a flag. Given that the independence referendum is just weeks away – it is being held on September 18th – all sides are sensitive to every slight, and the action prompted a flutter of social-media chatter.

Such matters have, however, been sideshows. On Wednesday hundreds gathered in Scotstoun to watch squash doubles – hardly a big-ticket sport – and filled perhaps a third of the seats in the stadium. The event gave the lie to the argument that the Scots would indulge in cheap nationalism during the Games.

Instead the spectators cheered the English pair of Adrian Grant and Nick Matthew when they walked out to play Moreaina Wei and Schubert Maketu, of Papua New Guinea. Understandably, the volume of support increased substantially when the Scots pairing of Stuart Crawford and Greg Lobban appeared.

Glasgow, even the element that was begrudging beforehand, has revelled in the Games, particularly enjoying the praise the city has received for its friendliness.

“Mostly we'll take away the warmth of Glasgow people. I have to say, this is a city full of friends,” says Bert Le Clos, whose son Chad is a member of the South African swimming team.

On Wednesday the image took a brief knock when the sprinter Usain Bolt was quoted by the London *Times* as saying that the Games were “a bit shit” and that he was “not really” enjoying himself.

The Jamaican star’s presence in Glasgow has been half-hearted from the off: he signed up for the 4x100 metres relay but not for the other two events in which he is Olympic champion, the 100 and 200 metres.

Bolt issued a swift denial, saying that journalists were telling lies. His manager, Ricky Simms, later condemned the story as “utter rubbish”, although the *Times* insists that it quoted him accurately and has refused to back down.

“The atmosphere in and around the stadiums has been absolutely fantastic. I have no idea where these quotes have come from,” Bolt’s manager said.

The controversy led to complaints that “an English paper” had tried “to knock the Games”.

Glasgow has invested much in believing that the Commonwealth Games can burnish its global image. For decades the city struggled in the wake of the collapse of shipbuilding and other traditional industries.

But Glasgow believes in rebranding. In the early 1980s it launched the Glasgow’s Miles Better campaign, which morphed over the years into Glasgow Smiles Better. It is still regarded as one of the world’s best efforts to change a city’s image, a significant contribution to the city’s tourism success.

Glasgow fretted about hosting the Games, particularly in the wake of chaos that damaged Delhi’s reputation four years ago. But barring some traffic problems, and an unpleasant novovirus that made its presence felt in the athletes’ village, matters have proceeded well.

So far the leaders of both sides in the independence campaign have been on their best behaviour, lest they be accused of trying to take political advantage – apart from First Minister Alex Salmond’s pre-Games declaration that Glasgow will be Scotland’s “freedom city” on September 18th.

For now Salmond has felt little need to repeat such calls: the Scots, broadly, are happy with how the Games have gone, and their athletes have won medals by the score.

The referendum will be fought on September 18th in the ballot boxes, not at Ibrox or Parkhead.

Dreams of generations to face test of reality in Scottish independence vote

Mark Hennessy, August 4th, 2014

For many Yes campaigners dream of independence has been lifelong

For David McEwen-Hill (72) the cause of Scottish independence is not a passing fancy but rather has been a lifelong dream, its chances of being realised having ebbed and flowed throughout his life.

In 1967 he was living in Hamilton, then one of the Labour Party's safest seats, when Winnie Ewing won a by election there for the Scottish National Party (SNP). Three years later he was her election agent in a failed bid to retain the seat in a general election, an experience he remembers proudly as he sits in Yes Scotland's spartan offices in Dunoon.

The office in the Argyll town opened in October 2012, "the first in Scotland", says colleague Colin Stevenson (70) proudly. His surname, he points out, is spelled with a v. "The 'ph' spelling is the southern variety."

With coffee made, the two men speak about a shared ambition. McEwen-Hill joined the SNP at 17 on the day he enrolled in Glasgow's School of Art.

His grandfather, who escaped grinding poverty in Glasgow when he was sent to stay with relatives in Armagh, was a seminarian in Dublin during the War of Independence, the retired teacher says.

Nationalist sympathies in the 1960s hindered careers: "I was warned by the local authority that my SNP membership wasn't appropriate, even though my headmaster was a Labour candidate," he says.

In the end he went to Nigeria: "There was no promotion here, so I left. I had been asked to be a Labour candidate – but that was because I was a Catholic teacher in a Catholic school, no more."

Stevenson imbibed nationalism from his father, who had fought with the Eighth Army in North Africa during the second World War but held nationalist sympathies all his life.

"By the time I was 12 I knew all about William Wallace, Robert the Bruce: it was real to me," he says, adding that his political sympathies did not help later when he had a brewery job. "I was a figure of fun."

Today, both men campaign daily in Argyll – McEwen-Hill is confident the referendum will be passed, Stevenson is less so but desires it just as much: "I'll be devastated if we don't," he says, eyes cast to the floor.

Stevenson dissects the opinion polls, all of which except one over the past two years have reported that the independence campaign will be defeated when voters go to the polls on September 18th.

Like others, he and McEwen-Hill argue the polls failed to pick up on the tide of support that delivered an overall majority to the Scottish National Party in the 2011 Holyrood election.

“The polls are based on landline calls, so they are weighted in favour of the elderly and women – where the Yes campaign is not at its strongest,” Stevenson says.

“People like us have been at this for years, but what is really incredible is the number of people now involved who have never taken part in politics before,” he adds.

Even the English, who make up a third of the population on Mull – nicknamed revealingly as “the officers’ mess” by some Scottish nationalists – favour independence, they say.

“They can buy a nice place there from what they can get for selling a tiny shed down south,” says McEwen-Hill, “and who can blame them? But they still favour Yes, so this isn’t about anti-Englishness.”

For both men, their opponents are capable of all dastardly deeds imaginable – a reported £400,000 bet on a No result is fictitious, designed solely to take the wind out of the Yes side’s sails, they say.

If Scotland votes No it will never again get the chance to vote Yes, McEwen Hill says. “They’ll make sure of that, the London crowd.”

For Stevenson, the British government “is the most experienced, the most capable in the world at dividing and ruling by every underhand action that you can imagine”.

“They do not want to keep us in the union so that they can go on subsidising us. They want us in the union because it is their interests that we should be in the union.”

Today’s commemoration in Glasgow Cathedral, attended by Queen Elizabeth, to mark the beginning of the first World War riles both men, who are quick to point to Scotland’s heavier losses.

Stevenson illustrates the passions that have been fired, ones that may take time to subside afterwards: “In Ireland you had the empire Irish who laughed at those in the GPO. Well, we have empire Scots who want to stay in the union because it is in their personal interests to do so. Well, I am not going to sacrifice my country for a few shillings.”

‘Culturally’ Labour voters will decide Scottish referendum

Mark Hennessy, August 5th, 2014

Labour Scotland is not the party it once was, as it struggles to regain credibility

Former Labour minister Jim Murphy stood on a couple of red bottle-crates on a street in Argyll to campaign for a No vote in next month’s Scottish independence referendum. “We are trying to make a patriotic argument for Scotland to remain as part of the United Kingdom,” he said. “This is the most important decision that we will make in our lives.”

The Labour group had first set up at the bandstand, then moved in search of people to a spot in the shade near a bookshop, before finally walking the length of George Street in Dunoon. By the end, however, the number of mildly curious pedestrians who had interrupted their shopping on a sunny afternoon to listen was small, tiny, in fact.

“Has anyone got any questions? No hecklers? Really? This is the softest audience that I have had,” the MP, who is on a “100 Towns in 100 Days” tour to drum up opposition, said.

In popular myth, Scotland was always Labour. In fact, the Conservatives won a majority of Scotland’s House of Commons seats in the 1955 general election. It still held a third of the vote in 1979. Indeed, Labour has never won a majority of the vote there, although first-past-the-post voting rules guaranteed local Soviet-like majorities on local authorities for decades.

Labour’s power base in Scotland weakened with the waning of the unions and traditional industries, along with the fading, if not the disappearance, of the sectarianism that led Catholics to see Labour as their protector.

Meanwhile, local elections there have been decided twice since 2007 by the single transferable vote, consigning “first past the post” to history.

“Voter choice more than doubled, uncontested seats became a thing of the past and the rotten boroughs that once plagued Scotland were undone,” says election expert John Curtice

On September 18th, it is the Labour vote, or those who are “culturally” Labour, who will decide the referendum, particularly in Glasgow and elsewhere in the west of Scotland.

In March, Labour delegates gathered in Perth, barely managing to half-fill the city’s convention centre that had been thronged by the Scottish National Party just a few months before.

Talk of the SNP quickly produced raw emotions from delegates: in their eyes, “the Nats”, once the subject of ridicule, are upstarts who have stolen a proud inheritance. Next to “the Nats” in terms of dislike stood Labour for Independence, a grouping of Labour members, led by Alan Grogan, which campaigns for a Yes vote.

During a fractious fringe meeting, Labour delegates rounded on Grogan, questioning the reality of his links with the party as much, if not more than they questioned his arguments.

In all, Perth revealed an organisation – one that now has fewer than 6,000 members, if some unofficial figures are correct – that has yet to rebuild from the ashes of the May 2011 election. Beginning that campaign, Labour was confident. Then it began to panic, leading Scottish Labour leader Iain Gray to relaunch his stumbling bid for power half way through. Gray's confidence was shot by then. Canvassing in Glasgow's Central Station, he was confronted by anti-austerity protesters who chased him into a fast-food shop. The TV pictures broadcast later made him a figure of ridicule. In the election, Labour lost seven seats in the Holyrood parliament – one that it had created in 1999.

Under Holyrood's rules, single-party rule was supposed to have been an near-impossibility – if not for Labour then certainly for its main despised SNP rivals. Three years on, Labour in Scotland is now led by Johann Lamont, who fails to match Salmond in the personality stakes even if she has managed, for now, to quieten dissent in her own ranks.

Scottish Labour however has struggled to regain credibility. Salmond won a majority on the back of a competently run minority administration from 2007. Some of Labour's problems are caused by the very existence of the union, since its most ambitious have always seen glory in Westminster rather than Edinburgh.

In the 1990s, Donald Dewar came back to become Scotland's first First Minister before an early death claimed him, but since then no other Scottish-born heavyweight has followed. Equally, Scottish Labour under Lamont and Labour in London divide on strategy, with Lamont believing that more devolution must be offered to satisfy the evident demand of Scots for it.

The tribal nature of Scottish politics complicates life for Labour, since the pro-union Better Together campaign, brings it into reluctant alliance with the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats.

For Labour leader Ed Miliband, Scotland's 41 Labour MPs are crucial to his hopes of winning power in the House of Commons in the May 2015 general election. Again, there is a popular myth that Labour in London has always needed Scottish MPs. It has not. Tony Blair would have had majorities without them, although they bolstered his lead.

Next year is different, however. The vote jointly won by Labour and the Conservatives across Britain is fracturing in the face of gains by smaller parties, particularly Ukip.

In March, Labour proposed that the Scottish government should be able to raise 40 per cent of its budget, including the power to raise the top rate of income tax. Housing benefit rules would be decided by Edinburgh, not London – which would see the end of the Conservatives-Liberal Democrats' bedroom tax, which penalises council tenants for having too big a house.

Some other minor welfare decisions would fall to Edinburgh, but control over pensions and bigger benefits would stay in Westminster. Equally, Holyrood would not determine corporation tax – a key SNP ambition. Lamont had wanted to go further, but she was overruled by Miliband and his shadow chancellor Ed Balls, both of whom are fearful of the messages such devolution would send to the rest of the UK.

If Scotland decides to stay in the union, then the right of Scottish MPs to vote on legislation that affects only England, and to a lesser extent, Wales, will inevitably be questioned further.

Known as “the West Lothian question”, it increasingly rankles with some opinion in England. More devolution after a No vote will make that problem visible to those who never noticed it before.

For now, Labour must head off a Yes result. “We are better together and weaker apart. Vote to stay in the UK. Stand up for what you know is best,” Murphy told his Argyll audience, few as they were.

Salmond pushed to guarantee currency Scotland would use

Mark Hennessy, August 6th, 2014

Key debate on Scottish independence between first minister and Alistair Darling

Scottish first minister Alex Salmond faced repeated demands during a key TV independence referendum debate last night to guarantee the currency an independent Scotland would use.

The currency issue has been one of the most important subjects during the campaign, which will end when millions of Scottish voters go to the polls in September.

During two hours of TV debate, Mr Salmond was repeatedly put on the ropes on the issue by Alistair Darling, former Labour chancellor of the exchequer and chairman of Better Together.

An eight-year-old, said Mr Darling, is able to identify “the flag, the capital and the currency” that is used by a country, but Mr Salmond is unable to offer guarantees.

The first minister rejected declarations by the Conservatives, Labour and Liberal Democrats in London that they would rule out a currency union if Scotland said Yes.

Mr Salmond, having been pressed by a member of the 350-strong audience, said vetoing a currency union was “not a serious prospect” and was “a campaign tactic designed to scare people”.

However, Mr Darling said sterling “belongs to the United Kingdom, not to England, Scotland, Wales, or Northern Ireland”, adding that Mr Salmond had failed to answer legitimate questions.

An opinion poll published minutes before the debate began reported that 40 per cent of Scots who say they will definitely vote will vote Yes, 54 per cent will say No, while the rest say they are undecided.

Last night, the Better Together campaign was jubilant over Mr Darling’s performance, though Mr Salmond’s debate tactics provoked more than a degree of surprise.

Mr Darling, not noted for his debating skills and expected to lose the debate by a large margin, pressed the Scottish National Party leader throughout.

Opening his 12-minutes of questions, Mr Salmond demanded that the former Labour chancellor dissociate himself from a series of declarations made by Better Together figures.

During the course of the campaign, one Labour MP said jocosely that Scottish drivers would have to drive on the right side of the road, while one Tory minister warned of threats from outer space.

Mr Darling, surprised by Mr Salmond’s tactics, said he had “expected a grown-up debate” – a view that appeared to have been shared by many in the audience and by social media.

Late in the debate, both men faced a series of questions from members of the audience about the safety of pensions if Scotland decided to become independent. Mr Darling appeared to score points by saying that it surprised people who have paid national insurance all their lives that their money had not gone into a pension fund.

“The pensions that will be delivered will be paid by those people who are working at that time,” he said, adding that Edinburgh and London would have to reach a deal about past contribution rights.

Opening the debate, Mr Salmond said “few people, now very few people, dispute the fact that Scotland could be a successful independent country”.

Later, he caused Mr Darling problems when he repeatedly asked the Labour MP to say if he accepted – as British prime minister David Cameron had – that Scotland could be independent and successful.

Saying that Mr Darling clearly did not want to say that Scotland could be independently successful, Mr Salmond said he “felt like Jeremy Paxman questioning Michael Howard”.

Replying, Mr Darling, rarely known for public flashes of humour, said: “You’re more like Michael Howard [the former leader of the Conservative Party] rather than Jeremy Paxman.”

Mr Salmond, referring to the success of the Commonwealth Games, said: “No fewer than 49 of the 71 competing countries and territories in the Commonwealth Games are either the same size or smaller than Scotland.

“In the European Union, no fewer than 12 of the 28 member countries are the same size or smaller than Scotland, and few if any of these countries possess the natural and human resources that Scotland is blessed with.”

Artists tour Scotland looking for a Yes to independence

Mark Hennessy, August 8th, 2014

Musicians, actors, artists and writers embark on a concert tour under the banner 'Yestival'

Mairi McFadyen shelters from the rain in a tent in the yard of Stirling's old jail, watching artists on a small stage urge a Yes vote in September's Scottish independence referendum.

For the past six weeks, McFadyen and a small group of colleagues from National Collective – which describes itself as “artists and creatives for Scottish independence” – have been on a concert tour of Scotland under the banner “Yestival”.

The Stirling crowd is small, perhaps 100 or so, but the August night is foul. “On the Shetlands we got a bigger crowd than David Cameron managed to get on the same day,” she said.

On stage Lady Alba, based on Lady Gaga and the creation of PhD scientist Dr Zara Gladman (27), wears Irn-Bru cans knitted into her platinum wig.

She sings a version of the Beatles' *Yellow Submarine*, mocking former Labour MP and Nato secretary general George Robertson's warnings about a Yes vote.

A vote for independence, the often controversial Robertson told a Washington audience earlier this year, would be a victory “for the forces of darkness”.

“We all live in a yellow nuclear submarine going down the Clyde while one in four children live in poverty,” sings Lady Alba, who has become a minor hit on Facebook.

Up to now, the majority of artists of all hues who have spoken out about independence have declared for Yes, although a minority have not, while many have stayed silent. “A positive clamjamfry of writers, artists, actors and musicians are actively supporting the Yes campaign and who can blame them?” said Scottish-born, London-based actor, Bill Paterson recently.

“To paraphrase the poet, ‘Yes is a great wee word’. It sounds kinder. It's just nicer to say. It's progressive. It's the very definition of positive.

“It makes you feel that you have the reins in your hand to change society, and that's the way people in the arts want to feel,” he said, in a gently mocking piece he wrote for the *Scottish Review*.

Writer JK Rowling's thoughtful, measured critique of the independence offering – she is voting No – was influential when it came, but the effect of such contributions fade with time.

Ross Colquhoun, the graphic artist who conjured up National Collective in his bedroom, insists the artists' group has touched a nerve with strands of Scottish society.

Soon after its December 2012 foundation, it began to attract 40,000 hits a month to its website.

Today, he says it has 3,000 full members and plans for life after the referendum.

“Artists are used to taking risks, they are used to imagining something new. Change is not seen as a threat,” he says, dripping with rain.

Even the devil has been drawn into the referendum battle, featuring in a play at the Edinburgh Fringe as Black Donald where he describes manufacturing the 1707 Union with England as “my greatest hit”.

Like many others in Scotland’s artistic community, actress/model Eunice Olumide (27) was drawn to the Yes side “because of the aggressive negativity of those on the other side, who never have anything positive to say”.

Raised by Nigerian parents in Glasgow, she says: “I never learned anything good about Scottish until I went to study in the University of Pennsylvania in America.

“Britain is not as good as people think, the *Trainspotting* culture is real,” she declares.

For now, such artists have a voice, but it is not clear if they have an audience, even though many Scots are looking for guidance from non-political quarters, since they despair of getting clarity from politicians.

Groups such as National Collective and the left-wing Radical Independence Campaign illustrate the different voices on the Yes side, even if the Scottish National Party is the one most often heard.

Interestingly, much of what the SNP has done in office – its desire for lower corporation taxes, for example, or Alex Salmond’s cautious independence – is disliked intensely.

By now, the rain in Stirling has got heavier, leading organiser Zara Kitson to take up the microphone to offer plastic ponchos hurriedly bought from the tourist office.

“They are all emblazoned with the logo of the monument to William Wallace, but take no notice. It is not because we are nationalists, but because we are internationalists,” she declares, to cheers.

“People are voting No for selfish reasons, because they are scared,” says recently married Ms McFadyen (29), who works in Edinburgh University.

“I don’t care if we are economically poorer, as long as we have control over our own country and have to take responsibility for our own mistakes.”

Many in Scotland’s cultural world would agree. Even if they are inspired by such attitudes, it is as yet far from clear whether the rest of Scotland is ready to follow their lead.

Scottish Conservatives hope to end siege mentality

Mark Hennessy, August 9th, 2014

Party is banking on promises of greater devolution to halt a 40-year decline

A few hundred Conservatives met in the Edinburgh International Conference Centre in March, surrounded by crowd barriers manned by police.

Such security is, unfortunately, the norm for many political conferences in Britain today, particularly one where the prime minister of the day is due to attend.

However, the Edinburgh gathering was striking in one respect: there was not a single sign outside to tell passers-by who was meeting within.

The sense of siege is justified. The Conservatives hold just one of Scotland's 59 seats in the House of Commons, along with 15 Scottish parliament seats and one Scottish seat in the European Parliament.

Dreadful though the figures are, they mark an improvement in the Conservatives' fortunes: in 1997 they won not one of the 72 Commons seats then allocated to Scotland.

Now, however, the Conservatives hope a newfound belief in additional devolution for Scotland offers the prospect that a decline that began 40 years ago can be reversed.

In June, the Conservatives proposed that the Scottish parliament – it is now 15 years since its return after a near- 300-year gap – should get the power to set all of Scotland's income tax rates and bands.

Currently, the Holyrood parliament can vary the basic income tax rate by 3 per cent up or down, though it has never done so. New powers already agreed would give it more powers next year.

The Conservatives' new proposals, drafted by House of Lords leader Lord Strathclyde, were met with "incredible" scepticism by colleagues in London but they got through, said Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson.

"Having a parliament with the power to spend money but little or no power to raise it and therefore no proper accountability is an inherently unConservative thing to do," said Tory Murdo Fraser, who represents Perth in the Scottish parliament.

"It makes it a difficult political environment for us. If all you are doing is spending money then you end up in a bidding war with others about how much you are going to spend and you never have to worry about the other side of the equation," he said.

Three years ago Fraser, during a contest for the leadership of the Scottish Conservatives, argued that the Conservative brand had become so toxic that it needed to be abandoned.

Instead, he said then, a new Radical Party should rise, offering a home to all those Scots who are conservative but who would never vote Conservative.

History in Scotland indicates that branding is important. The Scottish Unionist Party, nicknamed “the Church of Scotland at prayer” by some, which was Scotland’s most successful party during the 20th century, was formed by a merger of Tories and Liberal Unionists who had opposed Gladstone’s Irish home rule Bills.

In 1955 the Unionists – whose MPs always took the Conservative whip when they took their seats in the Commons – won 50.1 per cent of the vote and 36 of the 71 seats at Westminster.

By 1965, however, the Unionist Party’s fortunes had begun to fade. In an effort to refresh its identity, the party decided to rename itself the Scottish Conservatives – a disastrous choice.

During the 1980s the party’s fortunes declined further during the years in power of Margaret Thatcher, who was blamed for creating an artificial recession that laid waste to much of Scotland’s industrial heartland.

Sectarian, conservative Unionists were not just Conservative clones. In the 1920s, for example, they backed building 200,000 council houses; though the tenants who got them matched the profile of those who were likely then to vote Conservative.

If voters reject independence, the Conservatives’ plans will allow “us for the first time to get on the right side of the devolution debate, not to be seen as the people who are somehow against Scotland,” Fraser told *The Irish Times*.

Tightening opinion polls in May had “a galvanising effect” on those who oppose independence, he said.

“Many up to that point were fairly relaxed: they really didn’t feel that they had anything to worry about.

“Then there were headlines saying there is a prospect that the Yes side might win. We found that the numbers volunteering to come out canvassing with us shot up. That kind of wobble had a major impact.”

Some Scots believe promises of more devolution will wither if they vote No in the September 18th referendum on independence, arguing that they will have thrown away their bargaining power, but Fraser rejects the notion.

“What would be the consequences if that happened? There would be a huge backlash against the Unionist parties. There would be a resurgence of support for the SNP and another referendum within a few years, sooner rather than later,” he said.

There is anecdotal evidence that the referendum has opened up significant divisions in small, rural communities where Yes supporters are vocal and those in favour of the union stay silent, he said.

“I haven’t experienced that but I can see why it would happen,” he added.

“If it is a narrow win [for the No side] you can see how that bitterness will get worse. If it a comprehensive victory for No then it will be less.”

Doubts raised about Scottish post-separation currency

Patrick Smyth, August 10th, 2014

Opinion: Debates on Scotland's independence and UK's relationship with Europe show contradictions

There's a peculiar, contradictory symmetry to the arguments about politically reshaping the United Kingdom, both about Scottish independence and the UK's relationship with Europe. With, on key issues, the same people, unionist on Scotland and Eurosceptic, asserting simultaneously diametrically opposed positions in each debate. But then, this is politics, and we are perhaps unreasonable to expect consistency.

Central to both arguments for independence are hotly disputed questions about what attitude the deserted state/entity will take to the deserter about things the latter might wish to maintain in the relationship once apart, the terms of divorce and alimony. In the Scottish case, the currency and EU membership. In the UK/EU case, unfettered continued access to the single market.

When the great charmer and political street fighter, First Minister Alex Salmond took on Britain's mildest, to the point of utter dullness, ex-Labour chancellor Alistair Darling on Tuesday in the first TV leaders' debate on Scotland's referendum, the expected rout of the latter did not materialise. Darling unsettled his opponent, commentators seemed to agree, most effectively by repeatedly injecting doubt into the debate about Scotland's post-separation currency.

Salmond argues that, whatever London may say now to the contrary, Scotland will be able to preserve its link with sterling and, once the smoke of political battle has passed, negotiate a role for itself within the Bank of England in the currency's management. He quoted a Tory minister who appeared recently to suggest London's firm No is a negotiating ploy.

'Plan B' Not so, insist all the unionist parties and Darling, currency union is out of the question technically and politically as, like a petulant small boy, they threaten to march off the playing field with their ball should the Scottish people's decision go the wrong way.

"What's your Plan B if you don't get currency union, this is a most important question," Darling asked repeatedly. There is no Plan B, of course. For Salmond to admit that there is one, would be tantamount to making it instantly Plan A. And uncertainty and fear are the key elements of the unionist armoury.

The truth is that currency union may be a complex project, would be of mutual benefit to traders on both sides of a new border, may require lengthy negotiation, may require a Bank of England input into Scottish fiscal policy that some would see as undermining "pure" independence. But – remember we were in a union with sterling for 50 years – impossible it is not, given goodwill on London's part.

It is a goodwill that unionists of all shades insist will not be forthcoming – a strange posture for those also arguing with such passion that the basis of the union that should be maintained is a warm, unbreakable relationship between two peoples, infused above all with a mutual goodwill.

Break the bond, they seem to be saying, and it's all gone. Forget solidarity, working together on mutually interesting projects, forget the ties that bind. Break the bond, and it's obstruction all the way. Almost vindictive, and just like the divorce courts. But it's a strange way to encourage the maintenance of a voluntary union.

And yet it is bewildering how the same people can also insist that when it comes to parting company with the EU, the same logic does not apply.

Take Boris Johnson, lord mayor of London and PM in waiting. Johnson has been positioning himself as one of his party's leading Eurosceptics and this week suggested that Britain, if it failed to renegotiate its position in the union, could see a "glorious future" outside it, "as an outward-looking trading economy that has great trading relations with Europe".

The presumption, shared by many Eurosceptics, is that Britain can leave the EU and all its "onerous" obligations, while preserving, apparently at no cost, access to the single market. Why EU member states should willingly accept new unfettered competition from businesses operating under laxer social and environmental rules is unclear. Goodwill? Of course they wouldn't.

Here the presumption of goodwill on the part of the normally-maligned EU partners is unstated, but it is a crucial if bizarre assumption for the Eurosceptics. To concede that Britain outside the EU would have to negotiate its way back into the markets, and in doing so pay a cash price as well as a commitment to enforce product regulations set in Brussels (and in whose formulation the UK no longer played a part) would be fatally to undermine the Johnson free lunch thesis.

In business "goodwill" has a specific meaning – it can be bought and sold with a company. In politics, not.

Yes and No campaigns got it wrong, say pro-independence Greens in Scotland

Mark Hennessy, August 12th, 2014

Greens favour separate currency pegged to sterling that gradually breaks free

Patrick Harvie, the public face of Scotland's Green Party, hurries out of the lift at his office in St Enoch Square, Glasgow, holding a bicycle saddle.

Harvie, who as co-convenor "but not the leader" of the Scottish Greens, is part of the Yes campaign dominated by the Scottish National Party.

By general consent he has performed well – partly because he has been able to speak to a relatively narrow strand of public opinion compared to the SNP's broad church.

Nevertheless, he believes the SNP's Alex Salmond has been too cautious: "He has certainly emphasised the so-called reassurance strategy to a far greater extent than I would have liked.

"He has emphasised at every turn the things that will stay the same after independence, rather than emphasising the things that will change," Harvie says.

Last week's TV debate between Salmond and former Labour chancellor of the exchequer Alistair Darling was a bad moment for the Yes campaign, Harvie accepts. "The currency question should not be a difficult question to answer," he says while accepting that Salmond sought to reassure voters fearful of the unknown.

Harvie favours Ireland's post-Independence model: a separate currency pegged to sterling that gradually – "when conditions are right" – breaks free of London.

The referendum has given the Scottish Greens a wider audience, even if their relationship with the SNP inside the Yes campaign has been fractious at times.

Like the SNP, it believes the Trident nuclear missiles at Faslane on the Clyde should go but disagrees with it on the subject of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, believing an independent Scotland should be free of it.

The Greens also want higher taxes: "Labour is right, saying that you can't have Scandinavian levels of services and US levels of tax. We're for the Scandinavian option in both," he says.

Life after the referendum, particularly if it is defeated, will pose challenges for the SNP, which has been the majority party in the Scottish parliament since 2011. "The SNP is a very broad church. There are people on the left and the right; people who are passionate environmentalists, people who are climate sceptics.

"There are people who are socially conservative and those who are not: all brought together by one over-riding principle – independence. It'll make things interesting for them," he says.

While the SNP's "cautious" campaign has frustrated Harvie, the pro-union group Better Together's campaign has depressed him. "I am convinced that I could make a better case for the union if we all swapped places for a day," he says, adding that the Greens have never portrayed independence "as the land of milk and honey".

Salmond's failings last week during the TV debate helped to mask weaknesses in the No side's argument, since Scotland is not being promised the authority to set its own economic policy if it votes No, says Harvie.

"They are talking, sure, about transferring the responsibility to manage the effects of Westminster policy making, but only so that Scotland can administer cuts decided by others," he says.

The campaign will be won on the ground, not in TV debates: "The undecided clearly see the attraction of independence; if they didn't they would have ruled it out already.

"Something is holding them back. Maybe it is confidence: the confidence they feel in their politicians, in their communities, in Scotland, in themselves," he says.

Harvie can imagine a victory for either side: "My least preferred outcome is an incredibly narrow win for Yes because the other side will not accept the legitimacy of it.

"Scottish negotiators would be playing off an incredibly weak hand in the transition negotiations that would have to happen if it is a 50.1 per cent result.

"A very narrow loss will still be seen as a dramatic step forward for the cause," he goes on.

The people who would agree with that most of all are Scottish Greens.

Sterling centre stage in debate on Scotland independence vote

Mark Hennessy, August 13th, 2014

Ireland's handling of currency matters after Independence in 1928 could offer a path for Scotland

The Clydesdale Bank's purple-hued £20 note bears the image of Robert the Bruce on its front and New Lanark, a 18th century village built by philanthropists for mill workers on its reverse.

It is one of two £20 notes the Clydesdale produces. Both are backed by the Bank of England and both are legal tender in the UK, although it is not always easy to spend them outside Scotland. They always attract second glances and often their production prompts refusal. There are few things that annoy Scots more, particularly when it happens in London.

Recently, the Mayor of London Boris Johnson issued a diktat to Transport for London that Scottish notes had to be accepted on the buses, following a series of refusals.

Currency touches nerves, as can be seen with Scotland's increasingly bad-tempered debate about the currency it will use if voters support independence on September 18th.

Over the past 25 years, the Scottish National Party (SNP) has favoured the full gamut of options that are theoretically possible: an independent currency, the euro, or sterling.

Today, Scottish first minister Alex Salmond insists that an independent Scotland will "keep the pound" in a full currency union with the remaining parts of the UK.

His opponents among the Conservatives, Labour and Liberal Democrats say that Scotland will not be able to do this because the rest of the UK cannot, and will not, agree.

Last week, the Scottish National Party leader suffered a serious blow when he refused/was unable to declare a plan B in a debate with former Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer Alistair Darling.

The SNP leader had once condemned sterling as "a millstone" around Scotland's neck that was responsible for much of its woes.

Then, he backed Scotland's membership of the euro, but that dream faded in much the same way as did his ambition that Scotland would become part of Ireland and Iceland's "arc of prosperity".

Many in his party look to Scandinavia for inspiration on currency as they do on many other things, believing that Scotland should have its own currency. Salmond, however, is a gradualist about independence, knowing that that idea is too much of a leap into the unknown for many voters, which is why he favours a currency union.

The policy is not new. In fact, it is a decade old, but was little noticed then. However, Scots are facing the referendum on September 18th, so what was once theoretical is now real.

Scotland's SNP finance minister, John Swinney, says that a formal monetary union with the rest of the UK, with the Bank of England operating as the central bank, is "the core proposition for us".

The Bank of England is, he said then, "the Bank of the whole United Kingdom", adding that the Scottish government wanted it to continue as the lender of last resort to [Scottish] financial institutions.

Salmond's difficulty is clear, if hard to resolve. An independent Scotland can use sterling, if it chooses, but it cannot do so as part of a currency union unless the rest of the UK agrees.

The SNP leader has always had an à la carte attitude to currency union, believing that the Bank of England would not have oversight of a Scottish budget, for example.

"They don't seem to understand that if you have a currency union, there are terms and conditions about your taxation, about your spending," said Darling.

Last February, Conservative chancellor of the exchequer George Osborne went to Edinburgh to make clear that Salmond could talk about currency union but he was not going to get it.

Evoking the memory of troubled RBS, he told his audience that such a union would not be in the interests of the rest of the UK since Scottish banking assets were worth 12 times Scotland's GDP.

His intervention provoked fury and declarations that Scots would rebel in the face of a diktat from London – particularly one from a Conservative politician.

Furious though they may have been, there is little doubt that Scottish people want to keep sterling. Osborne's warnings have gnawed at wavering Scottish opinion, leading many, it seems, to decide to vote precisely because of concerns about the currency that will be in their pocket.

Today, the Conservatives, Labour and the Liberal Democrats are all preparing to make manifesto pledges in next year's general election ruling out a currency union with an independent Scotland.

Scotland cannot be blocked from using sterling as its currency since it is freely traded and convertible, but it can be denied any role in the making of the monetary policy behind it.

In addition, it would not have the Bank of England standing behind it as "the banker of last resort", which was needed when RBS and HBOS ran into trouble in 2008.

For example, the Bank of England then provided £61.6 billion of secret emergency liquidity assistance (ELA) to RBS and HBOS, but the bank was indemnified for the loss by the British taxpayer.

In all, the ELA given to the Scottish banks came to slightly more than half of Scotland's GDP that year, while the total state support given equalled 211 per cent of Scotland's GDP.

Using sterling without a currency union – so-called “sterlingisation” – would mean that Scotland’s fortunes would ebb and flow with its balance of payments, backed by North Sea oil revenues, whisky exports, and so on. Today, financial services account for 15 per cent of total Scottish exports, or almost 9 per cent of its GDP. The rest of the UK is the biggest consumer of these services.

Without currency union, the fear is that the Bank of England would require Scottish financial institutions to relocate south of the border if they wished to depend on it in bad times.

“Part of the solution to Scotland’s lender of last resort problem may be to have its own currency and a functioning central bank,” said the National Institute of Economic and Social Research.

Some in the Yes camp increasingly look to Ireland’s example after Independence, where a new currency was created after 1928 but it was pegged to sterling.

Six of Ireland’s nine banks had rights to issue notes dating back to the 1840s, as long as they were backed up by gold, or foreign exchange reserves held by the Bank of England in London .

The role of the Currency Commission set up in Dublin in 1927 was aided by a number of factors, including the fact that nearly all of Ireland’s foreign trade was to Britain.

In addition, it did not act as the banker of last resort. First, Irish banks were deeply conservative, so there was little need. Second, the banks had more foreign reserves than the State up to 1963.

The role of financial services in the Irish economy at the time was a fraction of the Scottish equivalent today, while a globalised world has changed much of the rules in finance.

The Currency Commission was replaced in 1943 by the Central Bank of Ireland, although it did not loan money to the banks or, indeed, even to the Government.

The new body did not have the power to limit credit, but it could encourage its expansion – although it preferred to rail against the rise in State spending each year.

The link with sterling was not questioned, even after the declaration of the Republic in 1948 and sterling’s devaluation in 1949 and again in 1967.

However, there were difficulties. In January and February 1955 the London bank rate rose by 1.5 percentage points to 4.5 per cent. Normally, the Irish banking system would quietly have followed suit.

However, Fine Gael’s minister for finance Gerald Sweetman persuaded the banks not to do so.

Capital fled. Bank credit to companies with credit lines in Britain jumped substantially. Prompted by the low real interest rates, imports increased and meat exports fell. Early the following year, the Government imposed heavy import duties. Imports quickly collapsed but

so did much of the domestic economy. Emigration surged. In 1957, 1.8 per cent of the population left.

The Irish experience differs from anything on offer in the Scottish debate since even if Ireland's model fell short of a currency union, everything was done with the agreement of British ministers and with daily co-operation from the Bank of England.

In the past, Salmond has spoken of how monetary policy is now a card of reduced value in today's globalised world, where countries are rarely able to control events. Instead, he places weight on fiscal policy.

However, Prof Gavin McCrone, former chief economic adviser to the Scottish Office, reminded the House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee last year that Ireland's fiscal freedom was limited by the need to maintain the currency link.

Sterlingisation is rejected as a nonsense by the pro-Union campaign, who argue that Scotland's financial services industry accounts for an eighth of the Scottish economy. Nevertheless, supporters of the idea – even if it is not their first option – point to Panama, which uses the dollar. It has a thriving banking industry although one that relies on s secretive habits for some of its success.

Banking assets there equal 215 per cent of GDP, yet it avoided recession after the global banking crisis in 2008. Since mid-2010, according to the International Monetary Fund, the overall loan-to-deposit ratio has exceeded 100 per cent.

For now, however, many Scottish voters recoil at the mention of Panama, seeing images of Latin American instability rather than the type of dour Scottish rectitude of old that would soothe their fears.

Arbroath edict latest episode in Scottish autonomy row

Mark Hennessy, August 18th, 2014

Latest debate another rerun of what it means to be a patriotic Scot

Nearly 700 years ago, Scottish nobles went to Arbroath to sign a letter in Latin that declared Scotland's right to be an independent kingdom, rather than feudal lands controlled by the English.

“For, as long as but a hundred of us remain alive, never will we on any conditions be brought under English rule,” the Declaration of Arbroath declares in words that most Scottish schoolchildren once knew.

“It is in truth not for glory, nor riches, nor honours that we are fighting, but for freedom – for that alone, which no honest man gives up but with life itself,” it went on. Today, Scottish first minister Alex Salmond, in the latest act of symbolism in a summer of symbolism, makes his own journey to Arbroath to pledge “a Declaration of Opportunity”.

Playing on the theme of a document seen as Scotland's Magna Carta, the Scottish first minister will say that the referendum offers the chance “to take power out of the hands of Westminster elite”.

His decision to evoke memories of the Declaration of Arbroath – said by some to be the model for the US Declaration of Independence, though this is questioned – provoked mockery from opponents.

Exciting passions The temperature of the debate is ratcheting up significantly, with opinion poll numbers indicating that the margin between the sides is narrowing

– if the No side is still ahead.

Last year, the Scottish National Party derided critics when they said that the Yes side would seek to draw on William Wallace *Braveheart* imagery to excite passions.

However, the Yes side – and today's event in Arbroath is but the latest – is ready to use every tool to connect with voters with just a month to go before the September 18th referendum.

Tonight, the first of a series of television advertisements by both sides in the campaign will be broadcast – with opposing sides, in different ways, emphasising the patriotic nature of their cause.

The *Yes, Scotland* three-minute advert is optimistic and confident about Scotland's future, with one participant saying: “Someone once said that no one is perfect, but being Scottish is close enough.”

The Better Together campaign that is seeking a No vote, has felt the need to emphasise that casting a ballot against independence is patriotic – following accusations by some on the Yes side that it is not.

‘No way back’ “I can be patriotic and I can vote No and I can walk about with a Saltire flag,”

says one, while other participants point to the friends, neighbours and family south of the border. Equally, the Better Together advert will drive home the message to Scots “that there is no way back” if a majority decide to vote for independence a month from now.

Meanwhile Mr Salmond remains furious about the intervention of Australian prime minister Tony Abbott, who said it was “hard to see how the world would be helped by an independent Scotland”.

Fully accepting the Scots’ right to decide, Mr Abbott said the enemies of peace and freedom elsewhere in the world would cheer to see the United Kingdom break-up.

In Response, Mr Salmond said the Australian prime minister’s remarks were “foolish, hypocritical and offensive”, though in truth such interventions are useful to him since they help to fuel resentment among Yes voters.

Interestingly, the latest series of opinion polls indicate that voters are worried that Salmond cannot guarantee his pledge that an independent Scotland would be part of a sterling currency union.

Equally, however, a majority do not believe – despite repeated public warnings from the Conservatives, Labour and the Liberal Democrats – that London would go ahead with its threat to bar them from such a union.

Offering more powers to Scotland may cause resentment

Mark Hennessy, August 20th, 2014

Analysis: wavering Scots must be persuaded more devolution will occur if they vote No to independence

Some Scots want independence and nothing less. Before the referendum campaign started, however, the majority would have settled for running more of their own affairs.

In the negotiations that led up to the decision to hold next month's referendum on Scottish independence, Scotland's first minister Alex Salmond said he wanted such an option – known as “devolution max” – on the ballot paper.

Prime minister David Cameron ruled it out; indeed, Salmond probably knew Cameron would never agree, and that asking for it made him look reasonable in the eyes of middle-ground Scotland.

The irony is that during the campaign, the Conservatives, Labour and the Liberal Democrats have now all made pledges offering extra powers in a bid to persuade the Scots to vote No to independence.

The offers on the table are not identical, however.

The Conservatives and Liberal Democrats would, they say, let Scotland decide its own tax rates and bands. Labour does not go that far. Instead, tax bands would be decided in London. Scotland could increase tax rates, but not cut them – to block “a race to the bottom”, it says.

Under the rules that set Holyrood up in 1999, Scotland could have varied the basic tax rate up or down by 3p in the pound, but none of the three administrations that have held office in Edinburgh tried.

Legislation already passed by Westminster, that will come into force next April if Scotland votes No, will see a Scottish tax rate – one that will give Holyrood responsibility for up to 10p in the pound of tax.

Such a move would transfer control of over nearly £6 billion of taxes and help to rectify Holyrood's central flaw: that it sets policies without having the responsibility for raising the money to pay for them.

The offers of extra powers if there is a No vote are being led by Scots in the Conservatives, the Liberal Democrats and Labour: even if Labour's pro-devolution Scottish voices are the weakest of the three. The question, however, is what will be the ability of those same Scottish voices to dominate the landscape after a No vote, if that happens, given tempers elsewhere in the UK.

Already, there are signs that the post-referendum landscape will be complicated, even if there is a widespread recognition amongst senior figures in London that promises made would have to be kept.

Happy to soothe the troubled breasts of Conservative hardliners, Boris Johnson – who is burnishing his own leadership ambitions – has already declared that the Scots should get nothing.

Former Conservative Welsh secretary John Redwood points to the Scottish, the Welsh and the Northern Irish having “first ministers and devolved parliaments and assemblies. England has nothing”. Scots, he says, should be barred from being education or health secretary in the British Cabinet because these powers are among those devolved to Edinburgh.

Others argue that Scottish MPs should not vote in the House of Commons – nor Scottish peers in the House of Lords – on legislation that covers only England or Wales. The number of cases where English-only legislation has been influenced by Scottish MPs is tiny, according to a House of Commons review, but this has not stopped demands.

Extra devolution, though, would inevitably see fewer Scottish MPs: in 1997, there were 72. After the return of the Scottish parliament at Holyrood in 1999, that number fell to 59 for the 2005 election. Today, Labour and the Conservatives have promised greater powers to major English cities – but that is power over the spending of money, not the ability to pass legislation.

There is murmuring dissent in England about what others have; but, equally, there is little clarity about what England wants. Ten years ago, the northeast of the country rejected Labour’s offer of a regional assembly.

In often-forgotten Wales, there is resentment at the persistent focus on Scotland, particularly about the share of funds it gets from the treasury.

The treasury share-out, the so-called Barnett formula, discriminates against Wales. If it got an equal share to Scotland, Cardiff would have £1.4 billion extra annually.

Faced with concerns from doubtful Scots, London politicians – with varying degrees of certainty – have pledged that Barnett will not be interfered with to Scotland’s disadvantage.

Such promises institutionalise unfairness, argues Prof Richard Wyn Jones of Cardiff University. “Now it is the Welsh, not the Scots, who are too wee, too poor, too stupid to matter. Nobody has considered that this means that Wales is regarded as collateral damage, or that such promises ride roughshod over legitimate English interests,” he said last week.

The outcome on September 18th is still to be written, but it is already clear that the centre cannot hold if the Scots decide to stay, but only on their terms.

Socialist believes Scots want change beyond SNP's vision

Mark Hennessy, August 21st, 2014

Scottish Socialist Party chief believes voter registration is key to winning referendum

Colin Fox of the Scottish Socialist Party walks into Buchanan Street bus station in Glasgow with a “Yes Scotland” satchel over his shoulder, wearing a broad grin. A month out, Fox is bullish that he is on the winning side, despite opinion polls.

Fox is a member of the board of “Yes Scotland”, the pro-independence campaigning group, which is dominated by the Scottish National Party and its leader, first minister Alex Salmond, who emphasises the role of the smaller parties when it suits him.

For now, Fox, the national convenor of the SSP, tolerates the SNP’s dominance, but nurses the belief that everything will change if Scots vote for independence when they go to the polls on September 18th.

In the 1980s, Fox worked for Militant in London when the Trotskyite group was influential within Labour. Ten years ago, he became the Scottish Socialist Party’s national convenor after his charismatic predecessor, Tommy Sheridan, was jailed for perjury.

By then, he was a member of the Scottish parliament at Holyrood – one of six SSP deputies – but the 2007 election saw the loss of all six of its seats, when the party felt the ire of voters over Sheridan’s conduct.

Salmond is miscalculating, Fox believes. Firstly, he seeks to argue independence will make everything possible, but also change nothing: the pound will remain the currency, the queen will stay on the throne, Scotland will remain in Nato.

Fox argues Scots want change, but change on a level that far exceeds Salmond’s desires or ambitions. “He is trying to appeal to a conservative audience, to people that he believes have to be won over.”

However, nearly half of the SNP’s own support base opposes independence: “If we win then, yes, a large proportion of the vote will have come from the SNP, sure, but a very large proportion will not be SNP voters, and they’ll not be ignored.”

Too many in Scotland are talking up the dangers of post-referendum division, he believes. “Yes, there are differences of opinion. But this isn’t a Celtic-Rangers match; this is more like Celtic-Partick Thistle,” he says, with a roar of laughter, before quickly growing serious again to dismiss Salmond’s idea that Conservatives, Labour or Liberal Democrats will get a say afterwards.

In a speech in March, Salmond proposed that “Team Scotland” negotiators would be appointed to represent Scotland’s interests in the 16 months of negotiations that are laid down if voters do say Yes.

“Salmond’s view is that Team Scotland would operate as some sort of government of national unity, with Tories, Labour and Liberal Democrats,” Fox says. “Well, we think if Yes wins then Yes is democratically entitled to have its mandate implemented.

“And that does not mean offering the Tories, Labour or the Liberal Democrats – who are even more hated than the Conservatives ever were – a second bite at the cherry so that they can undermine independence.”

Questioned about the pledges that the SNP has made to win votes, he emphasises that September 18th is about the principle of independence: “The next 16 months of negotiations are about the kind of independence that we want.

The SNP’s desire to cut corporation taxes “so we can get a few more Amazons and Starbucks and join into a race to the bottom in competition with Ireland” is not supported by a large percentage of Scots, he says.

Just one of the 60-odd opinion polls says Yes can win, but the margin is narrowing. In the council estates, a majority are ready to vote Yes, but often they are not registered to vote. “There has been a major campaign to get people to sign up,” Fox points out.

Often, the campaign must overcome an unwillingness to be registered that dates back more than 30 years when tens of thousands fell off the electoral roll in a bid to escape Margaret Thatcher’s poll tax.

“Now, the challenge is not to persuade somebody to vote: it is to persuade them to register. There are two egg-timers at work here: one is for the margin between Yes and No; the other is for the clock. The question is which of them runs out first.”

Scottish Yes flags hang in former Labour stronghold of Dundee

Mark Hennessy, August 22nd, 2014

SNP looks to independent future to arrest city's slow decline

Stewart Hosie, the local Scottish National Party House of Commons MP, points delightedly to Saltire flags marked with a “Yes” that hang in the windows of houses in Pitkerro Drive in Dundee. “It’s fantastic,” he says.

His wife, Shona Robison, a member of the Scottish Holyrood parliament and a minister in the Scottish government, who is driving the car, nods in agreement.

“People are coming in and paying £5 [€6.25] for those flags. We are trying to order some more. We ran out of badges a few days ago, we are trying to get some of them, too,” she says.

Dundee was once a Labour stronghold. However, during the city’s post-industrial decline, poor habits formed during years of single-party rule and a few scandals brought the party down.

Labour does not deny the difficulties it faces. Last week, its deputy leader in Scotland, Anas Sarwar, acknowledged that his party faces “a challenge” to head-off a majority Yes vote in the city.

“I have always campaigned on the premise that you could lose by one vote and that makes sure that you are not complacent and that you put everything you can into it,” he said.

For a hundred years, Dundee was the city of “jute, jam and journalism”, a place of often grinding poverty where the women worked in the jute factories and the men stayed at home to mind the children. Famed for its jam, it was known, too, for publishing firm, DC Thomson, which still runs a stable of newspapers but became internationally famous for *The Beano* and *The Dandy* comics.

The decline lasted for decades, scarring the city’s soul. But it has begun to be reversed, with Dundee developing a reputation in life sciences.

By 2017, the new Victoria and Albert Museum will “rise like a spaceship out of the water” on the waterfront, says Hosie. Dundee hopes to benefit in the same way that the northern Spanish city of Bilbao, also crippled by industrial decline, did with the opening of the Guggenheim Museum.

Dundonians, however, are a hard audience. “They’ve seen hard times. They believe things when they see them, not promises,” says Robison, as she is approached by a constituent outside a betting-shop.

Visitors are usually taken to meet local businessman Mohammed Issa, who started working in the family shop 40 years ago aged 12 and has since won a series of national awards.

Now a legend in the community, and a former “Citizen of the Year” in Dundee, Issa greets the political couple warmly.

“People should give Scotland a chance to be a success,” he says.

However, his British identity is clearly important to him. His business card proudly declares that he has been awarded an MBE by the Queen for services to the community.

“Everyone has the right to their opinion. I feel that there has been a lot of scaremongering – about the pound, about the NHS. That’s what the public doesn’t like.”

Standing outside Issa’s shop, Hosie says he believes that many of those who oppose independence will not come out to vote on September 18th because of “the negativity” of the No side.

A strong voice for Yes in “the schemes” – the name given to council-owned, or housing association-owned properties in Scotland – is crucial if the Yes campaign is to have a chance of winning on September 18th.

Together, a third of Pitkerro, Kirkton and Hilltown on the eastern side of Dundee are among some of Scotland’s poorest districts, with high unemployment, poor health and short lives.

In the local elections three years ago, a third of locals voted, but the Yes campaign insists, as it does elsewhere in Scotland, that the turnout next month will exceed 70 per cent. “People are registering,” says Robison, “People have a hierarchy, they don’t come out much for Westminster, or local elections, but they vote in the Holyrood – “their election”, as they call it.

“But they’ll come out this time. Just look at the flags that you see. Some of them even went to polling stations for the European Parliament elections in May. Not to vote, mind you, but to make sure that they are on the register for the referendum. They are calling it their ‘big day’,” insists Robison.

Scottish independence: the debate in books

Gerry Hassan, August 23rd, 2014

Yes and No campaigners in next month's referendum, which will decide whether the country remains part of the UK, are fighting their corners in books as well as on the hustings. Their arguments go to the heart of what kind of society people want to live in

For some people the question of Scottish independence has crept up unannounced. It has taken not only the UK government by surprise but also significant parts of international opinion, from the US administration to the pope and Vladimir Putin. Yet the questions and dynamics that gave rise to this debate have been a long time in gestation. They reach beyond the appeal of Scottish nationalism, the Scottish National Party or First Minister Alex Salmond. They touch on the nature of Scotland and its historic autonomy after its union with England in 1707, the character of the British state, and the economic, social, democratic and geopolitical crises it currently faces. Four of the books for and against independence help to show the state of the debate ahead of next month's referendum.

My Scotland, Our Britain

Gordon Brown has been a brooding presence in Scottish politics for more than 30 years; he has written and edited numerous books and collections, and he was architect with Tony Blair of the New Labour project, which produced three consecutive UK election victories and legislated for a Scottish parliament. His latest book, *My Scotland, Our Britain: A Future Worth Sharing* (Simon & Schuster, £20), looks and feels like a serious intervention – perhaps the most considered pro-union contribution so far.

A powerful personal strand runs through the book. The MP, who succeeded Blair as UK prime minister from 2007 to 2010, reflects on his childhood and growing up, and interprets his recollections and memories, from the death of Winston Churchill to soccer highs and lows. This gives the book in many places a unique set of insights, but underneath the references is a tangible sense of elegy, hurt and a disappointment that it has all come to this.

The Scotland that Brown constructs is distinct, has autonomy and manifests a notion of “Scottish values”, but it is curiously old fashioned. It is a Scotland informed by the time-honoured tropes of “the democratic intellect” of education and the “mutual obligations” of civil society. This is the language of 19th-century bourgeois Scotland transplanted into the present.

There is little understanding that these are contested, problematic ideas of Scotland, normalising stories that have entered mythology and jar with much of the evidence of contemporary Scotland (such as its education and health inequalities or generational low turnout in national elections). Britain is seen as a force for good and progressive politics, Scottish independence as reactionary and a throwback to a wish to stop the forward march of progress and enlightenment.

“Inequality could be higher than in England if Scotland were to go independent,” Brown warns, backing up this seemingly open statement with no evidence beyond faith in a UK that

represents a politics and mindset of redistribution and pooling resources – “the sharing union” that Brown continually eulogises.

What Brown does not engage with is the reality of the UK as a society disfigured by inequality, widespread insecurity and poverty in a world of plenty, with grotesque concentrations of wealth and power, and with the state and politics acting as advocates and apologists for this. After all, this is the new commonsense consensus of the western world, the apolitical political sentiment that has swept through Westminster and across wider society, and infected what once were proud public institutions, such as the BBC and, in England, the NHS.

For Brown to reflect on this would entail some element of self-criticism and introspection about New Labour’s 13 years in office, and his own part in this, as coarchitect, chancellor and, finally, prime minister. Instead he offers a vision of Britain far removed from present-day conditions. This is an abstraction of Britain cut off from what society has become, an idea of progressive politics offering a selective, partial history of Britain as a force for good (standing up to tyranny and the Nazis in particular), missing the many bad bits (the harsh realities of empire, colonialism and imperialism).

Brown’s Britain is not a world where a crisis of authority and traditional manifestations of power is endemic, and where new forms of the market fundamentalist revolution have proven even more self-serving and asocial. Public services in Brown’s version are still selfless, divorced from the long revolution of the past 30 years undermining public goods and their values.

Brown offers in his conclusions a 10-point plan for constitutional renewal and attempts to rebuff the logic of Scottish independence with the observation that “a brilliant actor doesn’t try to find a stage on which he can stand alone”. Yet this evocative remark is an apt summary of Brown’s idiosyncratic and lonely version of collectivism. Missing from this book are Blair, long-time Brown ally and collaborator before they fell out, and Alistair Darling, the official leader of the Better Together anti-independence campaign.

The Scottish Question

James Mitchell’s *The Scottish Question* (Oxford University Press, £25) draws on the author’s 25 years of academic study, research and writing on the subject of Scottish and wider territorial politics. The “Scottish question”, he says, comes from the 19th-century tendency to make questions out of issues, the Irish, Schleswig-Holstein and eastern questions being three of the highest profile. Mitchell, who is professor of public policy at the University of Edinburgh, argues that they tap into dynamics that have long been present but become defined as questions only when they approach crisis point.

Mitchell’s work presents the context and complex detail that Brown’s work by necessity and temperament cannot address: the qualified, always contingent nature of nations, states and unions. Mitchell gives a subtle reading of the continually evolving sense of what Scotland and the UK have been, are and may become.

The important role of the expansion of the state is given its proper place, as is the widening of the electorate, along with the development of welfare and social rights, and the critical terrain of the emergence of council housing after the second World War; this became a pivotal part

of Labour's electoral dominance in Scotland, where such housing made up more than half of all pre-Thatcher households.

Mitchell contends that the Scottish question by its nature will remain unanswered. Yet, if we take the Irish or Schleswig-Holstein questions as examples, they no longer exist in name and the same form. Maybe it is possible that a maturity in the Scottish debate will allow at some point for the removal of the Scottish question as a form of address – and even allow for progress on the substance underneath.

Small Nations in a Big World

Michael Keating has contributed richly to Scottish and comparative politics for several decades, writing on the politics of plurinational democracies (of which Britain is one) and stateless nations. His latest book, written with Malcolm Harvey, *Small Nations in a Big World: What Scotland Can Learn* (Luath Press, £9.99), surveys the room for manoeuvre offered by formal independence in the age of globalisation and interdependence.

Its vista covers, in an accessible way, the power of big states and the age of small states in recent times. It addresses the experience of small nations after independence, from the Nordics to the Baltics and Ireland. The different routes of each are investigated: the Nordic social-democratic model and its accommodation with the 21st-century global order, the Baltic breakout from communist dictatorship and enthusiastic embrace of liberal market capitalism, and the Irish hybrid combining elements of both.

The financial crash of 2007-08 has had a big role in the independence debate. Before the crash the Scottish National Party had invoked “the arc of prosperity” to give a coherence to the prosperous independent countries surrounding Scotland; after the crash, opponents of the SNP called it “the arc of insolvency”. Both approaches contained simplicities.

The SNP drew together a disparate range of countries, from the Nordic states to Ireland, with nothing in common but geography and independence. The SNP's opponents chose to concentrate solely on the bitter postcrash examples of Ireland and Iceland, conveniently ignoring the benign postcrash experience of four of the five Nordic states.

Keating and Harvey postulate from this that the Scottish government's prospectus for independence adopts a pick-and-mix approach, trying to dodge the inherent tensions. It invokes in many places a social-democratic sentiment while combining this with a market-liberal sentiment on corporation tax, wider tax logic (such as invoking the Laffer curve) and general business ethos.

This is big-tent SNP politics, similar to what passes for progressive politics across the West. It is redolent of New Labour at its peak, before it was brought down by its multiple wars and scandals. It isn't enough of a radical centre-left vision to keep postindependence politics anchored in that place; witness already the SNP's embracing of Rupert Murdoch and Donald Trump (and subsequent falling out with the latter).

This study throws up all sorts of illuminating questions about the character of government, state and social partners in an independent or more self-governing Scotland. It also throws up challenging observations about not just the scale of autonomy but also its purpose, and how

public policy and policy communities can best work in a context far removed from absolute and high sovereignty.

Britain Rebooted

David Torrance has had a prolific output in recent years, writing a revisionist account of the Thatcher years in Scotland and a biography of Alex Salmond. In *Britain Rebooted* (Luath Press, £7.99) he argues that the UK is in a state of constitutional transformation that is undermining old Westminster assumptions and practices.

That is all fine and well. Torrance then goes on to make the case that the demise of the previous order of parliamentary sovereignty has put the UK on a track towards a much more decentralist system, where power is divided and held at different levels. This, he says, makes it possible to imagine it morphing into an overarching federalism that could reform the UK, answer the English and West Lothian questions (those questions again) and address the demands for Scottish self-government.

Federal makeovers (a sort of Grand Designs Britain for the modern age) have had many proponents. It is no surprise that some advocates should emerge now considering the Scottish independence referendum; the experience of devolution in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, along with London; and the challenges facing the British state.

The historian Linda Colley's recent book *Acts of Union and Disunion* posed a comprehensive British constitutional settlement that bore no relation to actual politics and pressures. The same is true of Torrance. There is no interest in an English parliament or English regionalism. It could even be argued that there is still, despite 15 years of devolution, no such thing as a democratic English politics or political space, a precursor to popular pressure for an English parliament.

The same absence could be noted in most of the English regions (minus London). Without such pressure all such plans, whether from Colley and Torrance or various think tanks, are merely liberal-elite wish fulfilment. They are a symptom of the malaise of British government and its inability to make an economy and society for the benefit of most people. But they are sadly not, for the moment, a viable answer.

The Scottish debate, then, is one with many influences – Scottish, British, European and global – and one that represents a Scottish response and engagement with all of these. But for many in Scotland and the UK this debate is about the claims (or obsessions) of Scottish nationalism for good or bad. To large parts of the British political and media elite the question of why Scotland and the wider UK have arrived at this point is met with a sense of incomprehension that can be answered only by caricature.

This Londoncentric view ignores the wider canvas of the Scottish debate: the multiple crises of Britain, its doubts about its European credentials, and the trade-offs inherent in globalisation in advanced capitalist societies. Instead, this historic moment is “explained” by wrapping up Scottish sentiments in the rhetoric of *Braveheart* and *Bannockburn*. This is part of a long-standing British tradition of presenting the Scots as romantic, restless natives hopelessly imprisoned by their past. The irony is that it is the UK which is increasingly defined by a mythical backstory.

Such commentary reveals much. In a recent *New Statesman* interview with Alistair Darling, the magazine's editor, Jason Cowley, used the phrase "blood-and-soil nationalism". Darling responded by denying that the SNP were "civic nationalist". His logic was that "if you ask any nationalist, 'Are there any circumstances in which you would not vote to be independent?' they would say the answer has got to be no."

Darling was oblivious that, by his own logic, he, Brown and many others on the anti-independence side are not only British nationalists but also not of the "civic nationalist" persuasion. Two nationalisms exist in Scotland's debate. One is Scottish: "out" and understood as a nationalism. The other is British: not "out" but in denial that it is a nationalism. Such is the relationship the world over between minority and majority nationalisms.

Other voices are emerging north of the border, impatient with this narrow prism, wanting to pose independence as a means to an end, not an end itself. This politics of self-government and self-determination has become increasingly visible in the long road since 2011 to next month's referendum, and presents a challenge not only to the Brown-Darling apology for progressive politics but also, critically, to the SNP's big-tent politics, which poses a globalisation for all seasons.

Whatever the result of the independence referendum, on September 18th, Scotland and the UK are on the move geopolitically, in the political space, networks and alliances they inhabit, both domestically and globally. Majority Scottish opinion aspires to live in a progressive, modern, democratic, European nation. These are hardly revolutionary aspirations, but they are increasingly qualities that British politics and its state have turned their backs on.

The direction of British politics – increasingly right-wing populist, xenophobic and reactionary, punitive on welfare and immigration, and slowly detaching itself from the European project – shows a United Kingdom inching towards somewhere dark, unappealing and foreboding. This is a political world as far removed as it is possible to be from Brown's and Darling's portrayals of the UK.

After the referendum, many of the challenges that Scotland and the UK (in whatever shape) face will be the same, irrespective of their formal constitutional status. They will include how a small Scottish state and polity navigate choppy global waters, and how they raise economic prosperity and address the social divisions of a society that likes to think of itself as egalitarian and compassionate.

Then there are the huge challenges facing the UK, which the likes of Brown and Darling seem to wish would just go away: the atrophied nature of democracy; the corporate capture of politics, much of the state and large parts of public services; and how the huge concentrations of wealth and power synonymous with crony capitalism can be challenged and broken up.

These fundamental questions go to the heart of what politics is and what kind of society people wish to live in, and although the Scottish independence referendum has been uncomfortable for some and a diversion for others, it has proven to be a catalyst, bringing these issues into the political domain.

In that sense it has remade the boundaries of what is political and what constitutes Scotland's political community. It has shown that a different kind of politics and society is possible. One

that is about not a narrow nationalism but something richer and more rewarding that has already changed Scotland for the better.

Scotland's Yes campaign nudges ahead in the polls

Mark Hennessy, August 26th, 2014

Analysis: Often the debate descended into a shouting match, particularly over the NHS

Alex Salmond lost the first TV debate earlier this month by a country mile, yet the Yes side in Scotland's independence referendum campaign nudged a little forward in later opinion polls.

Last night, he decisively beat former Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer Alistair Darling in a snap poll conducted by The Guardian gave it to the Scottish National Party leader by 71 points to 29.

The question is what, if any difference it will make with little more than three weeks out has Mr Salmond done enough to turn around two years of polling figures.

He was loudly cheered by many in the specially-selected audience for the BBC-hosted debate in Glasgow, though in truth it often sounded distinctly weighted in favour of the Yes side.

Mr Salmond has unashamedly played the Scottish card, saying that he would win a currency union with the rest of the UK because he would enter such talks "carrying the sovereign mandate of the Scottish people".

The rhetoric sounds good- certainly a thousand times better than he performed in the first TV debate- but it makes no allowance for the fact that that deal has been repeatedly rejected.

The Conservatives have said it cannot happen, Labour has said that it would not happen, so too have the Liberal Democrats, yet a majority of Scots believe that they are bluffing.

Questioned, the three British-wide parties - who are reluctant partners in the Better Together campaign, which are seeking to defeat the September 18th referendum- insisted that there will be no change of heart.

In the first debate, Mr Salmond refused to offer Darling "a Plan B" if an independent Scotland's demand for a currency union was rejected by the outstanding parts of the UK.

Last night, he was generous with his offer, saying he had "three Plan Bs" that included a flexible currency, a currency fixed to the pound and unilateral use of the pound.

Scotland could not be stopped using the pound, he said, which is true though Mr Darling pointed out that that meant life without a central bank behind the Scottish economy.

Frequently, the debate descended into a shouting match, leading to fears the undecided voters both sides need to win over in the remaining weeks had switched off.

The two particularly clashed over the NHS. It was mentioned once in the first debate, but Yes Scotland has raised fears since then that it faces imminent threat from London.

The Yes campaign has thrown Better Together off-balance, who have pointed out that the Scottish parliament has been in charge of the NHS for 15 years, but this is not fully understood by Scottish voters.

Charges that it is under threat are a lie, insisted Mr Darling, who added charges operations had been cancelled in an English hospital because of privatisation has also been shown to be a lie.

Mr Salmond will increasingly play on Scots emotions in coming weeks, judging by the language he used in his opening and closing remarks in the 90-minute debate.

“Twice before in Scotland’s recent history we’ve stood at the crossroads,” the SNP leader said, as he began his opening statement in the famous Kelvingrove Art Gallery.

“In 1979, we didn’t get the Parliament we voted for but instead got 18 years of Tory government - Margaret Thatcher, the deindustrialisation of Scotland, the poll tax,” he said.

“In 1997, we took our opportunity and since the Parliament came to Scotland life has got better. We introduced free personal care for the elderly, we removed tuition fees.

“But there is much, far too much, that is still controlled by Westminster. We couldn’t stop the bedroom tax, we can’t stop illegal wars, we can’t stop the poor and disabled bearing the brunt of welfare cuts, we can’t stop the spread of foodbanks in this prosperous country, we can’t stop countless billions being wasted on a new generation of weapons of mass destruction.”

Mr Darling frequently struggled to cope with the aggressive style of Mr Salmond, who had adopted a more emollient style in the first TV debate saying it was the way to win over undecided voters.

Last night, he abandoned that practice, preferring the more confrontational display that Scottish voters have become used to over the last decade.

The question is whether they liked it.

Salmond bounces back in final debate with earnest Darling

Mark Hennessy, August 28th, 2014

Three weeks out from Scotland's referendum on independence on September 18th, the No side is still ahead in every poll but it is the Yes campaign that has a spring in its step. After a poor performance in the first televised debate, First Minister Alex Salmond came roaring back in this week's duel with Alistair Darling, the former chancellor of the exchequer and leader of the pro-union Better Together campaign. Mr Salmond was not only the better performer, more agile and quick-witted than the earnest Mr Darling, but the First Minister also appeared to have the better arguments and a surer grasp of which issues resonate with voters.

During the first debate, Mr Salmond was wrong-footed by questions about what currency an independent Scotland would use if the rest of the United Kingdom refused to share sterling in a currency union, repeatedly refusing to say which alternative option he favoured. This time, he cheerfully rattled off a series of alternatives, emboldened perhaps by polling evidence that uncertainty about the currency is not proving to be the knock-out issue the No campaign had hoped it would be. The same is true for North Sea oil revenues, which No campaigners predict will be too small and volatile to sustain the economic model envisaged by campaigners for an independent Scotland.

The Yes campaign has given up trying to persuade better-off undecided voters to back independence and those voters who might be swayed by romantic, nationalist rhetoric are already in the pro-independence camp. So in the final stage of the campaign, Mr Salmond and his allies are focusing on lower and middle income voters, arguing that independence is the only way to safeguard elements of British life that are important to them, such as the National Health Service and social welfare benefits. The betting must still be on Scotland rejecting independence next month but a buoyant Yes campaign could yet ensure that it will be a close run thing.

Brown emphasises ‘love for Scotland’ in call for No vote

Mark Hennessy, September 3rd, 2014

Britain greater than sum of its parts, former prime minister argues

Gordon Brown's latest book, *My Scotland, Our Britain: a Future Worth Sharing*, was piled high at the back of the hall in Coatbridge High School ready for sale.

The former British prime minister argues in the book that Scottish and English values have blended over the centuries to make the UK better than the sum of its parts.

In the minutes before Brown arrived on stage, rumours spread among Scottish Labour Party officials of a new poll showing that the existence of the UK is under threat in this month's referendum.

Brows furrowed: the Labour Party understands momentum in an election campaign, where the perception of reality can create that reality. For now, the pro-union side is struggling to generate such momentum.

The sale of Brown's book in Coatbridge jars slightly, as it fails to record Irish Catholics' contribution to the building of Scotland.

For a century and more, Coatbridge in North Lanarkshire, 10 miles from Glasgow, was one of the places that newly arrived Irish immigrants, destitute and often hungry, went to seek shelter.

In time, its relations with the largely Protestant nearby Airdrie became a byword for the sectarianism that plagued Scotland for generations, but which has begun to fade, if not disappear, in recent years.

Today, Coatbridge retains its Irish heritage, hosting the largest St Patrick's Day event in Scotland, while many of the Irish-Scots families still have deep familial links with Ireland, particularly Donegal.

Sectarianism went both ways. In the early 1990s, all 17 of the Labour councillors sitting on Monklands council were Catholic. The three Scottish National Party (SNP) councillors from Airdrie were Protestant.

The council faced allegations that Catholic Coatbridge had received a disproportionate share of the budget, the majority of council jobs and an unequal share of promotions.

An opinion poll taken two days before the byelection held after Labour leader John Smith's untimely death in 1994 found that 80 per cent of Catholics supported Labour, while two-thirds of Protestants backed the SNP.

Relations between Labour and the SNP are no better today, particularly since the former has not yet come to terms with no longer automatically being top dog in Scottish politics.

Everyone in Coatbridge High School had registered in advance of the event, a security measure taken following recent disruptions of Labour events by independence supporters. “We could not just open the doors and invite everyone in because there have been some nasty events on the streets,” said Coatbridge’s member of the Scottish parliament, Elaine Smith.

House of Commons MP Tom Clarke has represented Coatbridge for 32 years. “They call me Tom in Coatbridge,” he told the audience.

Responding to the pitch for independence by “the nationalists”, he said a woman had told him that “it was like buying a Hoover and being told when I ask how it works to wait until I have paid for it”.

Clarke said Scottish first minister Alex Salmond was offering Scots “a menu without a price” and had been unable to answer questions over the currency Scotland would use if it votes Yes.

“Three main words have emerged during the referendum: patriotism, the pound and pensions,” said Clarke, adding that he was “proud to call himself a member of the British Labour Party”.

Introducing Brown, Clarke said his fellow Scot had done “a great deal for the people of Scotland and a great deal for the people of Britain”.

Brown has a practised routine for such gatherings, which usually begins – as it did here – with a story of one of his first meetings as a young politician in Kirkcaldy. Brown recalled that he thought he was meant to speak for 45 minutes, so he gave every detail about pensions known to man.

Afterwards, the chairman of the event apologised that there would be no time for other speakers. There was no time for the band either, and the food was gone. “But I thought you said to speak for 45 minutes,” said the youthful Brown, despairingly.

“Four to five minutes,” the chairman replied.

Following this anecdote, Brown went on to tell the almost 300-strong audience: “I yield to no one in my patriotism. We yield to no one in our patriotism, in our love of Scotland.”

He urged voters to reject the independence call, adding: “We are not being asked to decide if Scotland is a nation – it will still be a nation on September 19th. We are not being asked if we want a Scottish parliament. We have one and it will be maintained.”

At the end of the event, Brown embraced supporters, stood for photographs and signed copies of his book.

Looking on, the chairman of Labour’s constituency party, Tom Nolan, said people in Coatbridge would once have voted 80/20 against independence. Today, the margin is 60/40. “That’s good enough,” he said.

Potential for unintended consequences if Scots choose independence

Chris Johns, September 5th, 2014

Opinion: few investors have mulled what Scottish independence might mean

One of the many peculiarities of the Scottish independence debate is the potential upside for English Conservatives should the vote for secession succeed: it would then be highly likely that Labour will be out of government, in whatever is left of the UK, for at least a generation. The Labour vote in Scotland returns 40 seats to the Westminster parliament; in crude terms, their removal would, if voting patterns elsewhere remain the same, (very unlikely, given the rise of UKIP), give the Tories an absolute majority.

The reason why the opinion polls on independence are narrowing is that the Labour vote seems to be shifting towards the anti-unionist camp. David Cameron is no doubt sincere in his desire for a No vote but should Alex Salmond's nationalist party succeed, the changed electoral map will be just one of many consequences.

A suggested reason for the Labour desertion of the No campaign is because of a desire to express, again, a Scottish anti-Conservative vote.

Financial markets have reacted to all of this, most obviously with a small fall in the value of sterling and a marginal rise in the cost of financial protection for various assets. Shares with exposure to Scotland have slightly underperformed but it has hardly been a mad rush for the exit.

Bookmakers are still offering odds-on for a No vote, but those odds are lengthening. The threats issued by politicians and some prominent businesspeople appear to have backfired: the loss of sterling and the potential movement to London of well-known Scottish-based companies, particularly in the financial sector, appears to have not frightened the electorate at all.

A view is probably being taken that it is all bluster and that a negotiated settlement will reach a conclusion that will not involve anything too apocalyptic.

The Westminster government has continued to assert that there is no plan B, that no contingencies have been laid in the case of a vote for independence.

Speculation about what might happen next now runs from an immediate resignation (firmly denied) by David Cameron to the first postponement of a UK general election since the second World War.

Next year's scheduled poll, it is argued, could hardly be fair, or sensible, if, as seems likely, it returns a Labour government that will immediately collapse once those 40 MPs decamp to Edinburgh. Better to get the independence negotiations out of the way and then hold the election in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

For financial markets the politics will be inextricably linked with economics: how much of the UK's national debt will Scotland take? What are the implications for the balance of payments and sterling? There is a long list of questions with few obvious answers.

The truth is that few investors have given much thought to what Scottish independence might mean. That's partly because the polls until this week suggested there was no need to think about it. But it's also because many of the consequences are unforeseeable.

Would what's left of the UK be stable, either economically or politically? Scotland would find out what it is like to live without fiscal transfers from London. Wales and Northern Ireland might find themselves in an uncomfortable spotlight, one that reveals just how much cash is shovelled their way from the English.

Unlike the euro, the currency union that is the UK works only because so much money finds its way from the south-east of England to the rest of the Union. Questions might well be raised in England, suggesting that if the Scots can do without London's money, so could one or two other troublesome and ungrateful neighbours.

It is said that the Scottish independence referendum is but one aspect of a broader loss of British identity felt throughout the union. London's remarkable transformation into a quasi city-state might well be accelerated by Scotland's forthcoming decision.

And how would Europe react? Amidst all of the recent economic and financial turmoil inflicted upon the continent's citizens, it has been easy to lose sight of the fundamental, almost visceral, force underlying the European project. The euro still exists despite many forecasts to the contrary, because of Europe's detestation and fear of petty nationalism.

There is absolutely nothing about Scottish nationalists that endears them to Europe's elites. They should expect a very cold welcome in Brussels and Frankfurt.

Dublin silence will no longer be an option if Scotland votes for independence

Arthur Beesley, September 7th, 2014

Opinion: Ministers warned to say nothing on Scottish referendum

They're tearing their hair out in Britain over Scotland. Separatists are making headway on the referendum trail, unionists are jittery and so too are financial markets. Over here, however, there's nothing but the sound of silence.

The vote on Scottish secession takes place in 12 days. It's clear that the creation of a new independent state in the neighbouring island would make big waves in Ireland. But the Government has gone to extraordinary lengths to say as little as it can about the matter.

This flows from Dublin's understandable reluctance to be seen to take sides in the Scottish discussion. Scottish nationalists fired brickbats at Australian premier Tony Abbott when he said an independent Scotland would do nothing for the international community.

Abbott could always scurry home to the other end of the world and duly did. It's not quite the same for leaders in neighbouring states.

Still, mere discussion in the Irish context of issues relevant to Irish people would not constitute an entreaty to Scots to vote either way. The questions raised for Ireland are highly sensitive, particularly in relation to Northern Ireland. Questions arise too as to whether an independent Scotland tackles Ireland on the corporate tax front. Also at issue is the matter of a Scottish state's entry into the EU and objections arising in member states such as Spain, which would fear an emboldening of separatist sentiment in the Basque region.

In short, uncertainties abound. You might well think it would be better for the Government to debate all of this – and more – quite openly, as happens all the time. But that's not how they see it in Merrion Street and Iveagh House.

On the contrary, all we have seen to date are glancing references to work quietly under way to examine the implications of the United Kingdom breaking up after 307 years. That will hardly change before polling day.

Minister for Foreign Affairs Charlie Flanagan shows no evident appetite for public discussion of the matter. According to his department, there has been no Cabinet memorandum on the Scottish question since Flanagan took office. It was the same during Eamon Gilmore's time.

Indeed, internal department records released under the Freedom of Information Act to Carl O'Brien of this newspaper say the Government should be "very careful to avoid expressing views" on Scottish independence. "The question of membership of the EU for an independent Scotland is a hypothetical one at the present time. Discussion of it raises complex issues of considerable sensitivity and so the Government must be careful to avoid expressing views prematurely."

It's hardly a surprise, therefore, that the same goes for material prepared for public consumption. In a statutory assessment last April of risks facing the State, Scotland was disposed of in a single sentence. This document cast the referendum in the context of a promise by British Prime Minister David Cameron to hold a referendum on European Union membership in 2017 if he secures re-election next year. "If the so-called Brexit option is taken, it could introduce profound uncertainty into Anglo-Irish relations. Similarly, the outcome of the Scottish referendum on independence could introduce an element of instability into Northern Ireland."

That's as much as it said. Instability is nothing new in the North, of course. Yet any discursive assessment of the issues in play – including the prickly question of whether Scottish independence prompts pressure for Irish unity and a countervailing backlash – is reserved for the private domain.

The Government's basic position, set out in a response to a parliamentary question submitted by Labour TD Robert Dowds last February, is this: "Ireland is entirely neutral in the debate, on the basis that the question is one for the people of Scotland to decide.

"That being said, the issues arising in the Scottish debate are of major importance, and have potentially significant direct and indirect implications for Ireland. Our silence, therefore, should not be mistaken for indifference. Our Embassy in London and consulate general in Edinburgh, in communication with the relevant stakeholders across the whole of Government, are monitoring the debate very closely and assessing the issues arising on an ongoing basis."

In other words: this stuff is deeply serious, it's so serious we won't go there publicly but it's all hypothetical anyway so we have the luxury of saying next to nothing at this point.

There is another reason, of course, for the prevailing sense of calm in Dublin: the general expectation in the body politic that Scots will reject independence. It's fair to say the debate here would be a good deal livelier if Scotland's exit from the UK looked like it would actually happen.

To those who would think nothing of the Scottish debate came news this week of an opinion poll that showed support for the secessionists is on the rise. The bookies still reckon on defeat for the independence camp, but the result may be a whole lot closer than forecast at the outset. This is one to watch. Silence will not be an option in Dublin if Scotland breaks away.

Defence central to changes if Scots go independent

Dorcha Lee, September 8th, 2014

Scotland becoming independent would be disaster for Britain's national defence

As the Scottish Referendum campaign enters its final days, defence remains the third most debated area, after economic and political issues.

The stakes are high. For the UK's national defence, Scotland becoming independent would be an unmitigated disaster. The loss of sovereignty over the northern third of Great Britain's land mass and territorial waters would have enormous implications for the remaining United Kingdom's national defence.

That this might happen when the strategic defence priority is shifting northwards is a huge cause for UK concern. In the medium to long term, climate change will open up the Arctic to shipping, with access to adjoining seas for oil and gas exploitation. This will greatly increase the strategic importance of Scotland and its 800 islands.

In addition, the UK's nuclear submarine fleet at Faslane in Scotland, with its Trident missiles, would have to be relocated, as the Yes campaign is committed to a Scotland free of nuclear weapons.

' The UK government refuses to be drawn on a plan B for defence if there is a Yes vote on September 18th. Instead, the No side is going flat out to discredit Scottish defence proposals. More recently, even Queen Elizabeth played a cameo role on behalf of the No campaign. Her launching of the aircraft carrier HMS Queen Elizabeth, using a bottle of Scotch instead of the usual bottle of champagne, got widespread attention.

If a bottle of Scotch is an unofficial symbol of Scotland, the symbolism of its destruction by the monarch on the hull of a warship was not lost on Scottish nationalists. The ship was built on the Clyde, providing 10,000 jobs during its construction, and the timing of the launching was perfect in relation to the independence referendum. UK officials have hinted strongly that the building of its sister ship in Scotland will be conditional on a No vote.

Only two years ago Scottish nationalists were divided on defence policy. The overwhelming majority wanted the UK to withdraw its nuclear weapons from Scotland. A smaller majority favoured neutrality over joining Nato.

This commentator suggested a 10-year delay in withdrawing the nuclear deterrent, and membership of Nato instead of an Irish- style or Swedish-style neutrality.

A compromise was reached: Scotland would opt for Nato but UK's nuclear weapons would be removed from Scotland "in the lifetime of its first parliament".

The general outline of the future Scottish defence forces was revealed in the Scottish government's document *The Future of Scotland*. The Scots would have a robust conventional deterrent capability to fight on land, sea and in the air, built up over a 10-year period. Priority would be given to the Scottish navy, with about 18 warships, including four frigates.

Its main army units would be in Scotland, and not in Germany where Scottish units are currently based. The old Scottish regiment names would be resurrected. It would be a two-brigade army, one regular and one reserve. The air force would ultimately have 16 Typhoon fighters, six Hercules transport aircraft, a helicopter squadron and possibly up to four maritime patrol aircraft. An independent Scotland (population 5.2 million) would, after 10 years, have 15,000 regular personnel and 5,000 reservists. (By contrast Ireland – population 4.6 million – has an establishment of 9,500 regulars and 4,000 reservists). The Scots are aiming at a defence budget of about 1.7 per cent of GDP, more than three times the size of Ireland's (0.5 per cent). Moreover, Irish citizens would be welcome to join the Scottish defence forces.

Should there be a Yes vote, comprehensive discussions would be necessary between the UK and Scottish governments to implement the transition. Defence issues will be at the heart of these.

Should the Scots vote No, the UK would be well advised to note the Canadian government's response after Quebec's (close-call) independence referendum in 1995. The government delivered on all its promises to Quebec, to such an extent that Quebec separatists' aspirations towards independence have been buried for at least a generation.

The UK government has made many defence-related promises to the Scots, such as lucrative defence orders, repatriation of Scottish units from Germany and retention of air bases in Scotland. If they fail to deliver on these and other promises the Scots could well call for a repeat referendum, Irish-style.

Should the Scots turn down the opportunity for independence the flame of Scottish nationalism is unlikely to fade away. The original Spiderman, Robert the Bruce, may well reach out from the grave and call on the Scots to try again.

Pro-union campaign offers Scots new powers

Mark Hennessy, September 8th, 2014

Yes side speaks of panicked response to poll showing majority for independence

Scottish voters will be given guarantees of new powers over tax, welfare and spending for the Scottish parliament if they reject the independence referendum on September 18th.

The Conservatives, Labour and the Liberal Democrats have each put forward proposed changes in recent months but were not prepared to agree a pre-referendum pact before now.

That is likely to change this week in the face of an opinion poll which put the Yes side ahead for the first time. The YouGov poll reported that support for Yes now stands at 51 percentage points, with 49 per cent for No – excluding seven per cent who have yet to make up their minds.

Rejecting the three-party guaranteed offer as involving no new, previously unannounced powers, the Yes, Scotland campaign said it indicated the panic in the No campaign.

The polling numbers were released as British prime minister David Cameron arrived at Balmoral Castle, the royal family's Scottish retreat, for his summer audience with Queen Elizabeth.

Meanwhile, the Sunday Times reported, in words that have not been questioned by Buckingham Palace, that the queen now feels "a great deal of concern" about the referendum result. Saying a timetable for extra devolution would be announced within days, chancellor George Osborne warned that Scotland would not be part of sterling if it quit the union.

"No ifs, no buts, we will not share the pound if Scotland separates from the UK. [People] should be in no doubt about the consequences of this decision. "Scotland will not be sharing the pound as an independent country with the rest of the UK if the separatists win the vote," he told the BBC's Andrew Marr Show.

Scotland's deputy first minister, Nicola Sturgeon, argued that the London-based parties had refused to agree new powers for Scotland until they were "engulfed in alarm" by the YouGov poll. "I think the No campaign is missing the fact that this campaign in Scotland has moved beyond any place where people can have the wool pulled over their eyes.

"If the No campaign parties had any serious intention of delivering substantial new powers for Scotland, then why has it taken until 10 days before polling day?" she asked. Worryingly for the No side, the YouGov poll shows that a majority of Scots are prepared to vote Yes even though they believe they will be financially worse off.

Meanwhile, leading business executives are privately alarmed at the latest turn in the campaign and furious with both David Cameron and Labour for the way in which it has been fought. "We stayed out of the campaign, largely because people told us it would be all right, but it has been a mess from start to finish," one said.

Hurried discussions took place between many of them over the weekend to discuss how they can strengthen the warning that many – but far from all – business leaders have issued about the risks of independence.

If Scotland says Yes, what will Ulster say?

Peter Geoghegan, September 9th, 2014

Opinion: Whatever the referendum result there are repercussions for Northern Ireland

Unsurprisingly, Northern Ireland's unionists have never exactly welcomed the prospect of Scottish independence. In 2012, then Ulster Unionist leader Tom Elliott described the Scottish National Party as "a greater threat to the union than the violence of the IRA".

Earlier this year, DUP dauphin Ian Paisley jnr said that independence on the other side of the Sea of Moyle would give succour to dissident republicans in Belfast. Such shrill prognostications are all too common among unionist voices but they are worth returning to in the wake of the Yes campaign's slender lead in polls published last weekend.

Support for the pro-UK side has slipped an eye-watering 24 points in just one month. Unionists in Ulster have talked tough in public about Scotland leaving the union, but the reality is that in private few, if any, has actually considered this a realistic possibility.

David Trimble told me earlier this year that Scotland would vote "two to one" to stay in the UK. There been little or no scenario-planning in Stormont about what Scottish independence might mean for Northern Ireland. This will have to change – and fast.

Whatever happens when Scots go to the polls on September 18th, it is becoming increasingly apparent that the UK's constitutional arrangement is changing, with potential significant repercussions in Northern Ireland.

Protestants in Ulster have long celebrated their links with Scotland. Orange Order leaders in the North recently renewed their calls for Scots to reject independence: this Saturday, thousands of Northern Irish Orangemen are expected to descend on Edinburgh for a massive Orange parade. (The march is causing consternation among some pro-UK campaigners who worry it could alienate Scots of Catholic Irish descent.)

While Northern Orangemen are busy parading alongside their brethren across the North Channel, unionists leaders in Ireland would do well to consider the impact of the Scottish debate on their political settlement.

In an attempt to stave off the threat of independence, a united front of Westminster leaders is due to offer Edinburgh enhanced devolution – the so-called "devo max" option left off the referendum ballot paper – in the coming days. What this devolution package will look like is unclear, but Welsh first minister Carwyn Jones has already declared that any new powers for Scotland should also be offered to Wales and Northern Ireland.

More levers, including a measure of fiscal autonomy, would almost certainly result in a reduction in Stormont's block grant. The capacity for budget wrangling to paralyse a chronically weak Northern Ireland assembly has been in evidence this summer. Proposed cuts to the health service have caused more political problems between Sinn Féin and the DUP than any number of flags or parades.

Less cash to spread around the various orange and green fiefdoms in future could create very real difficulties for this power-sharing government in Belfast. This, more than republican dreams of a Border poll, could lead to serious destabilisation – a point not lost on Sinn Féin, who cannily have kept a stony silence on the Scottish question. Independence for Scotland would be no windfall for anti-Belfast Agreement republicans – the SNP has shown what can be achieved by exclusively peaceful means

But Scotland's departure would leave the North even more unmoored from a Westminster dominated by right-wing metropolitan Tories, such as David Cameron and George Osborne, who came of age in the 1980s and have little time for and even less interest in “the dreary steeples of Fermanagh and Tyrone”.

Of course such fears can be overplayed. The No side, Better Together, is still odds-on favourite to crawl across the finish line next week. For almost two years, pro-UK voices have argued fiercely against Scottish independence, issuing increasingly doom-laden warnings about everything from currency and jobs to European Union membership.

While “Project Fear” has scared sections of the body politic rigid, an emotional case for the union – a reason why Britain really is “Better Together” – has been conspicuous by its absence.

The referendum campaign in Scotland has reduced the benefits of union down to pounds, shillings and pence. Such instrumental unionism (“vote No or you'll be worse off”) could well win the day next week, but it bodes ill for a harmonious “United Kingdom” – and even worse for the kind of non-sectarian, Danny Boyle-inspired “21st century unionism” that the more enlightened in the North have long talked of developing.

Unionism in Britain has long meant different things in different places. In Scotland it always had a transactional core. The 1707 union between England and Scotland was a compromise. Scotland retained its own systems of law and local government, its own parish schools and universities, its own forms of church government.

Scotland held on to a sense of itself as a separate country within a union that it had willingly joined and which it measured the success of almost singularly in material gain. Without this distinctiveness there would, almost certainly, be no referendum. The situation in Ireland was very different. Most Catholics felt minimal attachment to the British state and, as the Famine illustrated, the British state felt minimal attachment to them.

Those who felt most buttressed in the newly coined United Kingdom after the 1801 union were Protestants, particularly in Ulster. For them, the union was an existential as well as a material boon.

Whatever the result, the referendum will have a real impact on what the United Kingdom is and how it operates. For unionist leaders in Belfast, the fear must be that even if the relentlessly negative pro-UK campaign is successful in Scotland it might end up curing the nationalist disease but killing the unionist patient.

Peter Geoghegan is an Irish writer and journalist based in Glasgow

Scotland's right to self determination

Editorial, September 9th, 2014

Sometime in the early hours of Friday week the tallies from Scotland's 32 electoral areas will be aggregated in Edinburgh, and a result will emerge. With a weekend poll showing a narrow majority for independence there is now a strong possibility Scotland will vote to break up the union in the most dramatic constitutional earthquake in the United Kingdom since our 26 counties went their own way in 1922. An upheaval that would shake up not only Scottish politics, but those of the rest of the UK: from the internal dynamics of the divided Tories, threatening the prime minister's own position, to the galvanising of demands for radical regional devolution, to an unsettling of the Westminster-Stormont and London-Dublin relationships.

It is to be hoped that, at First Minister Alex Salmond's side on Friday week in Edinburgh, if the Yes materialises, will be our Minister for Foreign Affairs, Charlie Flanagan, first to shake his hand and congratulate him. First to promise fullest diplomatic recognition and political support for the new state from its first international ally, one that has been down this road, which understands the enormity of the challenge, but which can say with confidence "been there, done that . . . and it's not by any means impossible, whatever they say" .

Ireland has been reluctant, despite its history and what one might suppose to be an instinctive sense of shared experience and vocation, openly to support that Yes campaign. In part that reluctance is driven by an understandable and perhaps justifiable wish not to be accused of meddling in the UK's internal affairs. In part it is the product of an unstated calculation that our interests would not be best served by independence: concern about a new competitor for inward investment and the increased likelihood that the rest of the UK would leave the EU, concern that the now-comfortable Dublin-London relationship would be upset . . .

Despite such reservations on our part, Dublin should be prepared at least to say, based on our experience – not least 50 years of currency union with the UK – that independence can indeed be good for Scotland. We should applaud enthusiastically the reach of the extraordinary debate that has touched every corner of the country, and support an independent Scotland's right to be part of the EU. To that end we can promise to work to forge the same political will among EU states that enabled German reunification against countless technical and political objections.

It may not be easy. It may be costly in terms of a new administration, duplication of institutions, and over-optimistic assessments of economic resources. And sovereignty in this interconnected globalised world can never be absolute. But Scotland's desire to forge its own direction should be supported.

Scottish referendum: ‘We have to emphasise the identity and connections’

Mark Hennessy, September 10th, 2014

Liberal Democrat Michael Moore believes the referendum on Scottish independence vote will be the most vital of his life

Michael Moore sits in his Galashiels office in the Scottish Borders. He is calm, but all too aware of the storm engulfing Scotland’s independence referendum.

“It has ebbed and flowed. I concede, I don’t think anyone anticipated the voting coming as close as it has, or even flipping around. But we will win this on the arguments or not at all,” he says.

The Liberal Democrats MP is the man who, as secretary of state for Scotland before he was demoted this year, agreed the rules for next week’s referendum.

Moore is the most unionist of men. He was born in Belfast to Northern Irish parents of Scottish ancestry, was raised in Scotland, and married a Manchester woman. His father was a British army chaplain.

“I was born in Ireland, I am proudly Scottish but I am proudly British and I don’t want, or feel the need to choose between them, or want to have to be made to choose,” he says.

The No side’s arguments needs a better mix of emotions, he accepts, and giving leading roles to Labour’s Gordon Brown and the Liberal Democrats’ Charles Kennedy in the final days could help.

“I was an accountant before I was a politician so I am not necessarily the obvious person to deliver that kind of message,” he says.

“We can’t look at the polls and pretend that we can go as before. We mustn’t lose sight of the hard questions, but we have to emphasise the identity and connections that exist, too.”

Opinion in the Borders is solidly No, though nerves have started to fray in the wake of a series of opinion polls that put the race at neck-and-neck.

People in the borderlands have meshed over centuries, by blood and business – ties that many locals fear will be damaged if they are out-voted on September 18th.

“There was a woman in the Better Together offices this morning, in tears. I had a number of folk coming up to me today saying, ‘Why is it so close? You have to do more.’

“Well, we all have to do more. Many people thought that voting was all they had to do. Now they know that they need to do more. This is the most important vote of our lives,” he says.

Moore agreed the terms of the Edinburgh Agreement in 2012 with the Scottish National Party's Nicola Sturgeon. The agreement was for a binding referendum on September 18th that asked one question: "Should Scotland be an independent country?"

This week, No campaigners offered guaranteed extra Home Rule powers to Scotland for their votes, raising questions about the British government's refusal to offer devolution on the ballot paper.

The Yes side has made great play of the last-minute guarantees, saying the pro-union side is panicking in the face of a substantial drift in opinion.

Moore doubts that the SNP never really wanted a two-question referendum, but he accepts that it can argue that it sought it during negotiations, if half-heartedly.

The referendum has to be decisive, he says: "We have to know waking up on September 19th what we voted for."

Scottish National Party's finance secretary John Swinney was asked what would happen if 54 per cent of voters opted for independence but 80 per cent of them said they wanted more powers.

"That's easy, he said, it would be independence because it is the superior constitutional form. Right, good luck mate, we'd see how many people would see him in court on that one."

Unlike some in the No camp, the former secretary of state does not doubt that Scotland will be part of the European Union, but the price of membership is another question.

"The nationalists argument is that we will get membership and a better deal on the Common Agriculture Policy, a better deal on fisheries, on structural funds.

"They say we won't have to commit to the euro.

"We won't have to join Schengen and we won't have to have our own independent financial regulator because we can borrow the UK's. That's spectacular."

Come September 19th, Scotland awakes to a new world, whichever way the results go, says Moore, who draws on the words of former Canadian prime minister Jean Chretien.

"I heard him speak in London about 18 months. He said, 'Whatever the result, you will have trampled on somebody's dreams.'

"Wise words. There will be a responsibility on all political leaders.

"I think it will be highly charged, very emotional. How we live with each other afterwards will be hugely important. Together, we must say, 'Let's make this a better Scotland.'"

How do you unravel a 300-year-old state?

Alex Massie, September 11th, 2014

Opinion: Scottish independence will be portrayed as the rebirth of a nation – but it's also the death of something else

On the morning of May 1st, 1707, the Edinburgh air was alive with the sound of bells ringing out the news that the act of parliamentary union between Scotland and England had, at last, been signed. At St Giles's cathedral on the city's High Street, the choice of music was significant. The bells at St Giles's asked *How Can I Be Sad on My Wedding Day?*

From the beginning, the union was marked by ambivalence. The earl of Stair, signing the treaty, observed that it marked "the end of an auld song". Next week another old song, that of the United Kingdom itself, may be ended too. The latest opinion polls suggest the referendum result is impossible to call or predict. Anyone who says they know what's going to happen is a fool or a charlatan.

What is certain is that the nationalists are enjoying themselves and unionists are downcast. How, they ask, did it ever come to this? How was a 20 point advantage in the polls frittered away? What's more, can anything be done to halt the Yes campaign's march towards history now?

In many respects this is an accidental referendum. It wasn't supposed to happen. The SNP won the 2007 Scottish parliamentary election but, governing as a minority, made only a token effort to hold a referendum on independence. For a moment Labour pondered calling for a referendum to settle the matter at a time when the nationalists looked likely to lose. The idea was nixed by Gordon Brown and the chance was lost.

The electoral system at Holyrood was designed to thwart Labour, not the SNP. It was supposed to prevent any party winning an overall majority. Nevertheless Alex Salmond won just that in 2011. At a stroke, he had the votes to pass a referendum bill. The Union would be tested in the court of public opinion for, really, the first time ever.

Salmond won his victory, at least in part, because the Liberal Democrat vote collapsed. The unpopularity of the Tory-Lib Dem coalition at Westminster allowed Salmond to boast that, in a time of austerity, he would "stand up for Scotland". The SNP would shield Scotland from the worst effects of public spending cuts imposed by a government that, Salmond argued, lacked legitimacy in Scotland.

Imagine, he has asked, what Scotland could do if only it were freed from the shackles imposed upon it by an unrepresentative and out-of-touch Westminster "elite". Salmond could scarcely have designed better opponents – from his perspective – than David Cameron and George Osborne. Add a dollop of Nigel Farage and it became easy, if meretricious, to claim that Scotland and England (in particular) were now on such diverging political paths that they could no longer sensibly be part of the same state.

All the Yes campaign needed to do, in the estimation of senior strategists, was reassure Scots that independence would not cast the country into the wilderness. Like the Trinity, the Yes campaign has three parts: we can do this, we should do this, we must do this. Even unionists

agree on the first part of that. To insist otherwise would be a dismal reflection on 300 years of union. That agreement, however sensible, comes at a cost, however. It has ensured that the campaign has been dominated by questions of process. What currency would Scotland use? What, precisely, would be the terms (and timetable) of its EU membership? What would happen to pensions? How, actually, do you unravel a 300-year-old state? This is not Czechoslovakia, after all. It is much bigger and much more complicated than that. For a while it looked as though these detail-oriented objections might prove persuasive. Perhaps they still will, at the last minute and with the country on the brink of something remarkable, persuade Scots to opt for the relative certainty of the union. Perhaps there is, as the Better Together campaign have always insisted, just too much risk and uncertainty with independence.

There is something dispiriting about all this. Is the fate of the United Kingdom really to be determined by a battle of accountancy? Is it just a question of rival spreadsheets and duelling projections of future economic growth? Can a country's voters really still each be bought or sold for half an ounce of gold? Perhaps they can.

Then again, the idea of Scottish independence has always tugged on Caledonian hearts even when there was no practical political constituency for the idea. The benefits of trade, security and opportunity once guaranteed by union are now, in the 21st century, available in other forums. Scottish independence is, in some senses, a reaction to globalisation. As the playwright Peter Arnott says, "Scotland has always been a nation; it is past time we became a democracy as well."

That is the essence of the Yes campaign's emotional pitch for independence. Perhaps you didn't thirst to be asked the question but now you have been are you really going to turn down the invitation to build a new country from scratch?

In response the Better Together campaign has offered little more than more of the same. The same questions about risk. The same queries about uncertainty. The same suggestion the Scottish government's independence prospectus is too good to be true.

It may be, but it is at least a prospectus for the future. Better Together has generally declined to make an argument for the United Kingdom. It is against independence, but not for anything. This, more than anything else, has been its gravest blunder. For all that independence will be portrayed as the rebirth of a nation it's also the death of something else. The gains – and there must be some – accrued by independence must be offset, at least to some extent, by the losses that inevitably accompany divorce. This is a liberation – if it be considered such – that's tinged with sadness; a deliverance that reeks of a kind of failure. An old song ending with a whimper.

No wonder that on September 19th we may awake to a country, and even a world, in which all is changed, changed utterly.

‘We’re great at celebrating defeats around here’

Mark Hennessy, September 11th, 2014

A Conservative ex-policeman has a stoic attitude to Scottish referendum poll’s outcome

The Conservative Association in the Scottish Borders town of Selkirk boasts 600 members. Almost all of them are Conservatives, jokes the association’s chairman, Jim Terras, who says some have baulked at the idea of having to vote for the party, rather than just enjoy the bar in their headquarters on Etterick Terrace.

Terras is an unusual man. A retired police sergeant, he works in child protection services for the local council, while representing Unison union members.

During his days in uniform, first in Hawick and latterly in Melrose, he was a member of the central committee of the Scottish police federation – “the politburo”, he says, erupting in laughter.

Today, he can be often found in the association’s headquarters, sometimes helping out behind the bar. “It’s not a bad place to get an understanding of what people are thinking about the referendum,” he says. “There are those who are definitely No; there are those who are being cagey about their intentions; and there are one or two who are saying that they will vote Yes.”

Terras has yet to make up his mind about how he will vote, but he is scathing about the last-minute offer of extra powers made by former Labour prime minister Gordon Brown.

“The same arguments that Better Together have been using against Alex Salmond – that he has lacked detail in his plans – could be said now of what is being offered by them,” he says.

Terras holds opinions that go against the party grain: the Conservatives, he says, have failed, or refused to comprehend the damage caused to their reputation in Scotland by Margaret Thatcher. “Now I had a lot of time for her. I am right-of-centre in my political views, but that doesn’t mean that I thought, or think that her policies for Scotland were correct.

Selling council houses was a popular move, but “spending the money on other things or paying off debt means that there is a shortage of houses today, so that wasn’t very smart”. And present-day Tory policies are questionable, too: “I don’t fully agree with a lot of the welfare reforms, or all the talk about the unemployed being scroungers. I find that offensive. I’m sorry, but that’s the way that it is. Here in Scotland, the Conservatives are still giving out free prescription charges. There are times politicians just need to stop.”

He admires Scottish National Party leader and first minister Alex Salmond in the way a sports fan would have regard for a great heavyweight boxing champion. “There was a degree of disappointment around – even here – that he didn’t perform in the first debate, that it hadn’t lived up to expectation.”

However, he is less of a fan of some of the things that Salmond has done in power: the deeply unpopular merger of Scotland’s police forces and the centralisation of power to Edinburgh. His list begins to add up: the merger of fire and ambulance services, for example: “I suppose when you put it like that, there are quite a few things that I don’t like.”

Terras's excitement is building as the referendum edges closer. "It's getting interesting, isn't it? It will be a fascinating few days, it sure will.

"On September 19th, if there is a Yes vote, I will have no problem with it. It will be a democratic decision and I will do everything I can to make it a success.

"The thing that disappoints me is that I don't think the No campaign have given a good explanation of why we should stay in the UK. They have been negative and they have driven a lot of people to Yes.

Terras rejects notions that Scotland will be divided. "Most folk are taking it calmly, accepting that people have a right to their opinions. One or two are getting short about it. Some people are taking it very hard," he says. "A few might think about moving away, but most are really just stoic."

Terras, however, is an optimist. "It depends on how you live. Do you relish challenge? Do you like something different? Can you see a way of making things better?"

In June, he spoke at the annual Selkirk Common Riding dinner, which each year remembers the 80 men of Selkirk who left to fight at Flodden in 1513 with James IV of Scotland.

Just one, a man called Fletcher, returned from battle, wearing an English flag around his head to show that none of the others would be coming back.

"We're great at celebrating defeats around here. I raised a glass and told the room 90 people, mostly men – that win, lose or draw in the referendum – we would be back next year and that life would go on. Everyone applauded."

If the North voted to leave the Union, would Westminster leaders care?

Eamonn McCann, September 11th, 2014

Opinion: Miliband's madcap flags proposal has been but one sign of panic in the No camp

Has Ed Miliband ever gone for a dander in Drumahoe? I doubt it.

On Monday night, the Labour leader produced another in the sudden series of wizard wheezes that major party leaders across the water have come up with to lure the Scots into staying united with the rest of the kingdom: "Over the next few days we want cities, towns and villages across the UK to send a message to Scotland: stay with us. We want to see the Saltire flying above buildings all across our country."

Last time I went through Drumahoe, there was half a dozen Saltires fluttering from the lamp-posts, and that was only at the first cross-roads. And the Drumahoe display is on the discrete side compared with more exuberant areas of Ulster-Scots exhibitionism.

The reason Mr Miliband didn't factor this in is that the distinctiveness of Northern Ireland is something of which he knows little, which in turn reflects the fact that he doesn't really think of the North as a part of "our country". And neither do the other Westminster leaders.

If there were a border poll next week as envisaged in the Belfast Agreement, would they be stumbling over one another to offer Northern Ireland voters bribes and blandishments to persuade them to not to leave? If told by the North that the union wasn't working, it was time to call it a day, would Westminster politicians they break down and beg, plead for another chance?

Would one among them urge English cities, towns and villages to drape themselves in the Ulster Banner, aka St Patrick's Saltire, to send the message – "Stay"?

Or would they shrug, "Probably for the best, so," and, as soon as the North was out of earshot, start partying like there was no tomorrow?

We don't have to wait for the votes to be counted, or even cast, to conclude that the political establishment in London couldn't care less about the North. Maybe we knew this already. But it's clarifying to have it confirmed.

Miliband's madcap flags proposal has been but one sign of panic in the No camp. Gordon Brown last week lurched back onto the field of battle, to cheers from commentators who just a few weeks ago were presenting him as a figure of pity and fun. Now they are holding him up as the hero who might save the day.

Brown is one few British politicians to have taken a serious interest in the meaning of Britishness. Addressing the Fabian Society's annual conference in 2006, he asked: "What is the British equivalent of the US Fourth of July, or even the French 14th of July? ...Perhaps Armistice Day and Remembrance Sunday are the nearest we have to a day that is. . . commemorative, unifying and an expression of British ideas."

It didn't occur to a man with an abiding interest in the Union that there is an obvious candidate for an annual "British Day" – May 1st, the date in 1707 when the Treaty of Union came into effect with the inaugural meeting of the British parliament. It seems not to have occurred to anyone last May that, given the approaching referendum, the anniversary might be marked by celebration, lamentation or debate as to which might be more appropriate.

The 2007 tricentenary appears to have passed unremarked.

May 1st 1707 wasn't a day of liberation for either party. The English might have celebrated it as the day they'd finally subdued their rebellious neighbours. But that wasn't quite it. Their welcome for the incorporation of Scotland was matched by the contentment of the Scottish ruling class, its own imperial ambitions having come to naught, at the prospect of joining in the Empire's plunder of the world while keeping its "own" lower orders in check.

Thus it is that the independence campaign – perhaps to an extent unappreciated outside Scotland – has not been fought on the basis of national pride and liberation but mainly on the proposition that Scotland would be a more just and decent society freed from entanglement with England.

This hope may prove futile in an independent Scotland. The notion of Alex Salmond and his party as radical crusaders for a more equal society is fanciful. And the same pressure from global capitalism will press in on independent Scotland as on Scotland as part of the Union.

The difference might be that the referendum campaign has mobilised more people in grass-roots political action than any other issue in a long, long time, while creating an excited expectation of social and economic change for the better.

The leaders of an independent Scotland will have to try from the outset to finesse this fraught contradiction. They will have their work cut out. One way or another, whatever the result of the referendum, there'll be ructions the morning after.

Identity crisis at heart of Scottish referendum

Mark Hennessy, September 12th, 2014

Too often, the English are a contradiction: mixing reserve and a degree of condescending superiority with a lack of pride in their core identity

Leaving the Nato summit in Newport in south Wales last week, an English colleague looked out of a taxi window as it made its way through land that once was home to a thriving steelworks.

“You know, I have always considered myself to be British. I have never considered myself as English. For me, that evokes football hooligans, racists and St George’s flags,” he said.

In a week’s time, he and millions of others could – could, one stresses – be faced with an identity crisis that could have the deepest, most troubling consequences.

Too often, the English are a contradiction: mixing reserve and a degree of condescending superiority with a lack of pride in their core identity that can be baffling to observe.

That contradiction has been on stage again. For months, the powers that be in London looked on the Scottish referendum debate with a degree of bemused, detached interest.

The polls showed that the campaign was serious, but not serious enough to threaten existence of a 300-year-old union: the degree of interest shown reflected the belief that a No result would emerge.

In the last week, however, this has changed, prompting panic. David Cameron travelled to Edinburgh and, on the point of tears, came as close to begging Scots to vote No as a prime minister could do.

Cameron is no fool, whatever else he is. He knows that a majority of Scots will have laughed watching him on evening news bulletins. But his target was not them.

Rather, it was the 4 or 5 per cent who could be swayed by an emotional tug late in the campaign, perhaps one that surprises them by its very existence.

Too often, it has been lacking in the No campaign, which has instead told Scots “to fumble in the greasy till” and cast their vote according to their base interests.

Even if base interests motivate much of voters’ actions, it is rarely a good idea for a politician to give them reason to think that he or she believes them capable of nothing more.

However, it says much that no one has been able to give the great oration in words that would live into the future, declaring why a union that changed the face of the globe should continue to exist.

The Yes side, meanwhile, has fought to the heart, telling Scots that life can be better, fairer under independence – even if the package is utterly free of any of the measures that would bring it about.

Not all of it is rhetoric: the bedroom tax, which penalises council tenants if they are deemed to have too many rooms, is an obscenity, even for Scots who have never passed the threshold of a council house.

Equally, it suits many Scots to believe that they have been endlessly downtrodden by the English: the figures, often, tell a different story. For much of the time, Scotland is the UK's Mr Average.

In fact, it is better off – even with grim Glasgow poverty – than all but two of the nine regions that make up England, a fact that was acutely expressed by Newcastle City Council leader Nick Forbes.

The UK's principal difficulty is not that Scotland has been uniquely abused, but rather that the UK has become ludicrously tilted towards London.

Increasingly linked to the world, but increasingly divorced from its own hinterland, London has become a separate world, believing that it can control regions it does not even understand.

If Scots decide to stay, they will get significantly more powers – even if the fine print of the deal would not be agreed for months after the ink has dried on ballot papers.

If the United Kingdom begins its path next week to become yet another vanished kingdom in the mists of history, then relations could become deeply strained.

Cameron pledged on Wednesday to do everything possible to help make an independent Scotland work, but there is no guarantee he would be left in his post by his own people.

If, on the other hand, it survives, then it will have been the closest of shaves, but one that will prompt demands for genuine constitutional reform throughout the UK – not just in Scotland.

However, the atmosphere could be toxic. Hundreds of thousands – perhaps millions – of Scots believe that they are on the threshold of a new dawn. If they lose now, they will forever believe it has been snatched away.

What kind of new state could Scotland be?

Fintan O'Toole, September 13th, 2014

Opinion: 'National freedom isn't another word for nothing left to lose. It's another word for no one left to blame – no one, that is, except yourself'

What does it mean to be a free country? No one is naive enough to believe that it means acquiring the capacity to do whatever you want. For governments, of big countries or small ones, room to manoeuvre is scarce. An independent Scotland would face the same limits on its freedom of action as it does now. The power of oligarchies and markets and inequalities to restrict democratic choice would not disappear. Freedom does not arrive just because you declare it. And if it ever does arrive, it is complicated, constrained and contested. Scots, coming late to the business of national independence, also come to it with few illusions. Too much has happened to too many dreams of national liberation for any sensible citizen to believe in a great moment of transformation after which everything will be simpler, purer, better.

But national freedom isn't meaningless either. Room to manoeuvre can be expanded. Democratic spaces can be opened up. The terms of the struggle between public and private interests can be renegotiated. Citizens can become more confident of their power to insist on decency and dignity. A place can be defined as a society and a culture as well as an economy. And the greater the constraints, the more naked the power of unaccountable elites, the more vital it is that whatever collective freedom remains is grasped.

Like everything else, though, even this qualified freedom has a price. Some of that price is literal – the financial losses that have to be set against financial gains. But there's another kind of reckoning to be done, one that is more abstract but perhaps in the long term more important. National freedom isn't another word for nothing left to lose. It's another word for no one left to blame – no one, that is, except yourself. If you make your own choices, you become responsible for their consequences.

This is, especially for small nations that have long been part of a larger imperial whole, a severe loss. There's a deep and abiding satisfaction in imagining how wonderful you would be if only those foreign bastards would let you. Being free means having to live with the dawning realisation that you might not be so wonderful after all. Freedom in this sense is not an illusion – it's an act of deliberate disillusion.

What has to be broken free of is not just the big bad Them. It is also the warm, fuzzy Us of the nationalist imagination — the Us that is nicer, holier, more caring.

What a free country quickly discovers is that the better Us of its imagination is not already there, fully formed, just waiting to blossom in the sun of liberation. It has to be created and in order to create it you have to genuinely decide you want it.

WB Yeats described this kind of freedom very well in the early years of the Irish Free State in the mid-1920s. He and his artistic collaborators were under attack for daring to put on stage ugly images of an Irish reality. Yeats drew attention to a crucial distinction between national pride and national vanity: "The moment a nation reaches intellectual maturity, it

becomes exceedingly proud and ceases to be vain and when it becomes exceedingly proud it does not disguise its faults.”

What Yeats meant is that before a nation becomes free, it has to wallow in national vanity, creating an idealised picture of a special place and of a people with a unique destiny. When it acquires freedom, it has to replace this vanity with a national pride that consists in having the self-confidence to tell the truth about yourself. Nationalism is a form of myth-making; independence demands a lot of myth-breaking. It has to replace the distorting mirror of fantasy with the sharp reflection of a real self.

This kind of national pride is hard work. You have to decide what are the things your nation should be proud of and how it is going to achieve them in reality. In Scotland’s case, this might mean moving away from claiming a special culture of egalitarianism and towards an honest appraisal of the huge structural inequalities that call that comforting self-image into question. It might mean, as Gerry Hassan has argued so cogently in *Caledonian Dreaming*, abandoning the notion of Scotland as a wonderfully democratic society and getting to grips with the realities of social division and exclusion.

Without this hard work, political independence lacks its necessary foundation of psychological independence. The country remains in thrall to a mythic version of itself.

It is much easier to send an external government packing than it is to cut yourself off from the cosy and comforting self-image that dependent cultures create for themselves. But when you’re on your own, those self-images cease to be warm and fuzzy and turn toxic. This is largely what happened to Ireland. It gradually disengaged from London rule. But it has struggled to disengage from the exaggerated notions of Irish specialness that were built up through that conflict.

National vanity continued to hold sway: Ireland didn’t have to deal with its deeply problematic realities because it was uniquely blessed. It was holier, happier, more cultured, more Gaelic, more spiritual, than anywhere else.

In more recent times, this archaic sense of a unique destiny was replaced with another set of equally delusional exaggerations: Ireland as the richest, most successful, most globalised economy in the world, where banks would grow forever and property bubbles would inflate to infinity. These delusions can be seen as compensation for centuries of repression, but they have made it hard for Ireland to deal with its own, humdrum, non-exceptional realities in everything from poverty and mass emigration to the victimisation of children and women.

Scotland’s situation at the point of potential independence is infinitely better than Ireland’s was in the 1920s. It does not risk the violence that stained Ireland’s sense of its better self. However divisive the referendum campaign has been, it will not lead to the kind of traumatic civil war whose legacy deformed Irish politics for decades.

Whatever happens, Scotland will not suffer the consequences of partition which, in Ireland’s case, meant that ideals of a pluralist democracy were lost in the creation of two mutually exclusive sectarian states. And Scotland has, as Ireland did not have at independence, the context of a European Union, which, for all its faults, gives small nations a set of international institutions within which they can make themselves heard.

These advantages give Scottish independence, by historical standards, a remarkably fair wind. If it happens, it will also create its own energy of euphoria. But fair winds and moments of ecstasy don't last long in a harsh environment of long-term global instabilities. Patriotism is a rocket fuel that can get you out of the orbit of an old order but it burns up quickly and leaves you dependent on much more complex and subtle systems of guidance to get you through the lonely expanses of historic space. Those guidance systems will have to be calibrated to Scotland as it is and the world as it is, not to any nostalgic belief that the conditions of an idealised older Britain can simply be recreated in 21st-century circumstances.

For an outsider like me, this is what is most interesting about the possibility of Scottish independence. It is not that Scotland might become a new state but that it might become a new kind of state. For independence to be meaningful, Scotland would have to start with an acknowledgement that many of the things to which it appeals – the power of government, the legitimacy of democratic institutions, the equality of citizens – are in crisis. They cannot be assumed – they have to be radically reinvented. A new Scotland is as good a place as any to start that work. To begin it, Scotland needs to own not just its country but its own reality.

Referendum is a step towards a ‘post-sovereign’ Scotland

Paul Gillespie, September 13th, 2014

Opinion: Scottish political scientist Michael Keating uses term ‘post-sovereign’ to describe the emergent political and social condition of life beyond the traditional nation-state

Scotland is on a journey towards post-sovereign interdependence with the United Kingdom, Ireland and the European Union. The main question at issue in next Thursday’s referendum on independence is whether voters decide that statehood is a necessary step towards that condition or whether it can be achieved by radically reconfiguring the UK after a No vote.

It should be recalled that the Scottish National Party wanted a third option – “devo-max” (full fiscal autonomy) – on the ballot paper but that this was vetoed by David Cameron. SNP leader Alex Salmond is a gradualist fond of quoting Parnell on the achievement of independence and willing to get there by stages. If it is a No he will use the deeper devolution now on offer at the last minute from the three main Westminster parties to argue the case for subsequent independence.

That case would be bolstered by the highly dynamic elements playing out in British politics as a general election is held next year and a likely referendum on EU membership in 2017. Since Scotland has a more positive orientation towards the EU than England, a majority vote against EU membership determined by an English majority would reopen the Scottish independence issue. In this scenario it is likely that Scotland will decide on independent statehood either now or within the next five years.

The only convincing way to head that off, if the No side wins, would be to entrench Scotland’s rights in a new federal constitutional settlement for the UK which shared sovereignty in its political system. That would resolve the systematic resentment and suspicion of London rule displayed across the Scottish political spectrum in this remarkable campaign.

“Power devolved is power retained”: this pithy phrase of Enoch Powell’s expresses perfectly the unitary and absolutist parliamentary sovereignty that stops well short of such federal entrenchment, whether in the administratively devolved union state model of Britain or the most extended home rule variety.

This can readily be seen in the Labour Party’s agonised debate about how much devolution to offer, divided between those who want to deepen devolution and the party’s London elite who concentrate on securing a UK election victory to address the social democratic values widely shared in Scotland, but increasingly less so in Conservative-dominated England. Labour has most to lose from a Scottish Yes, which would deprive it of its strongest electoral base. The SNP has deftly captured the welfare state discourse from Labour there by spinning it in national rather than class terms.

Labour’s complacency about the increasingly dysfunctional structure of the UK also makes the party vulnerable to being outflanked in debates about federalism. These need to be imaginative – about the existing UK or a diminished one – because of England’s huge predominance, the growing inequalities between the richer London and the southeast and

other regions and the potential role of city-regions like Birmingham, Manchester and Newcastle in a reorganised UK.

Such a federal structure may be beyond the will or capacity of its political elites to deliver, in which case a breakup of the UK is the most likely outcome. The bonds of empire, war, Protestantism and welfare that held it together in the 20th century have eroded and not been replaced by a convincing alternative narrative.

“Post-sovereign” is a term used by the Scottish political scientist Michael Keating to describe the emergent political and social condition of life beyond the traditional nation-state.

It is a better notion than “post-national”, which is empirically and politically challenged by current Scottish and English nationalist revivals.

Keating argues that most ordinary citizens of Scotland and the rest of the UK are aware of, and want, its relatively open borders, mobility and multicultural opportunities, but that their political leaders remain stuck with absolute sovereignty. Devo-max morphing into some sort of federalism would meet these realities; but it may not be attainable, he said in a brilliant lecture this week at the Royal Irish Academy.

If that is so, other Scottish thinkers, such as the veteran analyst Tom Nairn, argue plausibly it is better to vote for statehood now to reach this post-sovereign condition. As he puts it in the current *London Review of Books*: “*Reculer pour mieux sauter*: the Scots should take a step back into statehood in order to leap forward and embrace the new age, a globality where there are certain to be many more self-governing units. A Yes vote isn’t for some outdated or renovated form of self-government, but for a necessarily new form of self-rule, a polity framed partly by the new circumstances themselves.”

Remote chance of more power for Scotland's islands

Mark Hennessy, September 14th, 2014

Independence referendum offers islands chance to press for devolution

Place names on the Isle of Lewis in Outer Hebrides reflect a shared past over centuries between Gaelic-speaking Scots, Norse and latecomers from the south. Each evokes weather forecasts of old on crackling Radio 4 signals: Arnol, Ballantrushal, Barvas, Shawbost, Dalbeg and Branahuie, Newmarket, and Plasterfield.

Today, much of the conversation on Lewis is filled with talk of independence. Last week, 250 neighbours gathered in Stornoway, the capital, for a debate hosted by the local *Gazette* newspaper. "Ninety-nine voted Yes; ninety-nine voted No. Five were undecided, and the rest did not bother to vote," says one local.

For many in Lewis and the other islands in the Western Isles, along with Orkney and Shetland, the referendum has offered the chance to press for devolution not just from London but from Edinburgh.

But the trend has, if anything, gone the other way under the Scottish National Party. European Union funds are now distributed by Edinburgh rather than Inverness. Fire brigades and ambulance services have merged. And the merger of Scotland's police forces has been deeply unpopular in the Highlands and Islands – particularly the decision by Chief Constable Stephen House to routinely have armed police on the streets.

Last year, Scotland's islands – which are all remote, although Shetland is blessed with oil riches – produced a report, *Our Islands, Our Future*, which pressed for extra powers.

In June, the Scottish government offered the islands control of all income from leasing the seabed for wind farms, piers, etc – money that currently goes to the crown estate.

The Edinburgh government has pledged that control of planning out to 12 nautical miles would be devolved to local partnerships, "with the island councils playing a role".

The referendum has offered a welcome opportunity to push for concessions but it has also caused disquiet. "People are careful who they talk with," says another local. "It has caused problems. You need to be a bit careful."

Local Free Church of Scotland minister Iver Martin, who intends to vote No on September 18th, would prefer a clear, decisive verdict.

"If it's a 52/48 split, or something like that, then there will be residual bitterness if Yes is beaten. For some people it has become quite an obsession. There will be an agitation for some time to come."

Martin is equally fearful of a narrow win by the No side. When inevitable problems occur, he says, "The 49 per cent will say, 'I told you so – don't blame me, I voted No.'"

“If there was 80 or 90 per cent of people behind this, then I would feel a lot more comfortable about it all,” he says, adding: “Whatever happens, I will do my bit to make it work.”

Half-an-hour away in Shawbost, former Labour minister Brian Wilson sits surrounded by Harris tweed – the symbol of the Outer Hebrides, which is enjoying something of a renaissance.

“It is the only product in the world with its own Act of Parliament,” says Wilson, who was one of three to take over the struggling mill seven years ago.

The tweed must, by law, be handwoven by the islanders of Lewis, Harris, Uist and Barra in their own homes using pure virgin wool that has been dyed and spun in the Outer Hebrides.

The wool is sold globally, finding its way not only into clothing, as it has done for centuries, but, increasingly, into furniture, shoes – even slippers.

Wilson, who lives on Lewis but writes a political column for the *Scotsman*, is no fan of Scottish first minister and Scottish National Party leader Alex Salmond.

“He has traded on an avuncular image for years and got away with it. His main characteristic, however, is that he is a bully,” says Wilson, who was a minister in one of Tony Blair’s governments.

Salmond was never a significant figure in the House of Commons during his two sessions in Westminster: “He was a small fish in a big pond,” says Wilson. “That’s why he came back.” Scotland under the Scottish National Party, he says, is a place “where the state and party are meshed, where resistance and dissent are unwelcome and are methodically closed down”.

Back in Stornoway, the Yes, Scotland campaign office, near the Criterion pub, has a steady stream of callers: some offering to help on voting day, others asking for brochures to take away.

Scottish MP Alistair Allan and local councillor John McKeever have campaigned for independence for decades. “I think we feel that we have put our lives into this,” says Allan. “It would be fantastic if it happened, I couldn’t put it into words,” says McKeever, who joined Labour in the 1970s but left because “we were told what to do all the time”.

If Scots reject independence, McKeever says, “The Saltire’s appearance over Downing Street this week will be the only time that it will happen for the next 30 years.”

“If we turn it down, it will be quite embarrassing. We will be the first country in the world to turn down the chance of our own independence,” he says.

What about Quebec?

“Quebec isn’t a country,” he says.

Alex Salmond's greatest gamble: Scottish independence

Mark Hennessy, September 13th, 2014

Next week's referendum will show if first minister and Scottish National Party leader Alex Salmond has played his cards right

Nearly 25 years ago, Alex Salmond sat one night with allies as he prepared to challenge for the leadership of the Scottish National Party, a race that had come before he was ready.

Pressed if he was sure that the gamble was worth the risk, Salmond, by then just 35, turned to some of his favourite lines of poetry from James Graham, the 1st Earl of Montrose.

“He either fears his fate too much,

Or his deserts are small

That puts it not unto the touch

To win or lose it all.”

He won that gamble. Next Friday, Alex Salmond will know if his latest one has succeeded, when the results of Scotland's independence referendum are announced in the Edinburgh dawn.

Over two years ago, the Scottish first minister and Scottish National Party leader began the referendum campaign after finally reaching agreements on its terms with British Prime Minister David Cameron.

Traditionally, a third of Scots have wanted independence; a third have not; and a third have not been persuaded either way, or were not interested in the subject. Following two years of campaigning, the gap has narrowed: the number of people voting in Scotland's poorest district – the local authority/housing association – will decide Thursday's result.

Throughout, Salmond has done everything to make independence as unthreatening as possible to Scots, who have been told that everything will change, but nothing will be different.

Scotland, he says, will continue to use sterling; the Queen will remain as head of state; Scotland will remain a member of the EU and Nato, he pledges.

On the monarchy, there is no problem. On everything else, assumptions are being made that everybody else outside Scotland will fall in with its wishes. Throughout, Salmond has appealed to Scots' optimism and hope, offering a vision of a more equal Scotland – though the details of how that could be brought about is lacking.

It has been a long road for the man born on Hogmanay 1954 in Linlithgow in West Lothian, a birthday he shares with Bonnie Prince Charlie. Born within hearing of the bells of St Michael's, Salmond qualifies to call himself “a black bitch”, and he does – a title locals bear in honour of a black greyhound who died helping her starving master.

Within months, his father, Robert, and mother, Mary, voted in the 1955 British general election – with the Conservatives winning a majority of Scotland’s seats and a majority of its vote. In that election, the Scottish National Party contested just two seats, losing its deposit in one and taking just 0.5 per cent of the national vote – one bad election in a long series of such results in its history.

Growing up in Linlithgow, Salmond enjoyed, in his own words, a near-idyllic childhood, secure in the love of his parents, if cursed with asthma. His frequent bouts of ill-health brought long periods in his parents’ bedroom at the front of the family’s council-owned home “with a fantastic view of the swing-park”.

“I used to lie there, read and ponder. My passion was DC comics: I had the whole range: Batman, Superman, Captain Marvel, that sort of stuff,” he later recalled.

Perhaps rare for someone of his background in the 1950s, he emerged a self-confident man, “if self-righteous and contemptuous of criticism”, in the words of academic, Tom Gallagher.

Unlike many in the Scottish National Party then and some still today, Salmond has never hated the English, eschewing, too, the symbols of cultural nationalism.

“I learned to play the bagpipes when I was at university, but he hated the sound of them,” a university friend told his biographer, David Torrance.

If Salmond’s tactics have changed frequently, his core philosophy has remained steadfast: a belief that Scotland’s primary ill is constitutional, not economic, or social. “Scotland’s fundamental economic problem is not distance from markets but distance from government,” he wrote, shortly after the collapse of James Callaghan’s Labour government in 1979.

But his opinions have changed, dramatically. In his earlier years he was against European Community membership, but argued later that Scotland could “be independent in Europe”. Equally, he was against Nato membership, but he brought his party to abandon that long-time pledge two years ago, believing that it would hurt the Yes vote.

For years, Ireland was the example: “I am very, very influenced by Ireland. Scottish families know at first hand how well Ireland is doing,” he said in 1997.

The year before, he told readers of his *Glasgow Herald* column: “Ireland has only one striking different from Scotland: it is no longer ruled from London.”

He went on: “With the advantage of full independent membership of the EU it has used that membership to attract resources and invest in the future,”

A decade later, Ireland had, in Salmond’s eyes, become part of “the arc of prosperity”, along with Iceland, that came to grief in the 2008 economic collapse.

Curiously, the pro-Union “Better Together” – which has run an abysmally limp campaign for the most part – has failed to, or chosen not to, bring Ireland’s banking crisis front and centre into the debate.

Salmond worked for Royal Bank of Scotland during the 1980s, before he became an MP and before RBS began its worldwide forays that ended in disaster. Indeed, he became one of its public faces, delivering TV opinions on the price of oil and gas with practised and colourful ease – training that was to stand him in good stead later.

During his time there, he and a colleague set up a price index that tracked oil prices month-by-month and forecast the impact they would have on revenues. In 1984, the index had its biggest success when it accurately found that the British government was underestimating North Sea oil revenues by £1 billion.

Later, he ran into difficulties when it became known inside and outside the bank that he wanted to become an SNP MP for Banff and Buchan in Aberdeenshire. Illustrating the poisonous nature of Scottish politics, some Conservatives struck up a letter-writing campaign warning that they would close their accounts if the bank did not bring him to heel. Wanting to defend Salmond, the bank's chief executive, Charles Winter, contacted "a respectable Tory" who warned others off, saying that "the Royal should not bow to underhand tactics".

A banking cheerleader Such history may have played a role later when he was RBS's biggest cheerleader under chief executive Fred Goodwin as the latter tried to buy ABN/Amro – the deal that broke the bank.

In one enthusiastic letter sent to Goodwin's office in RBS's gargantuan Gogarburn headquarters shortly after he became first minister, Salmond offered "any assistance possible" with the deal.

The SNP leader was far from alone, either in the UK or anywhere else, in failing to see the banking crisis coming; but he was slow, too, to see that it had already arrived. Even after RBS had reported the second-largest loss in banking history, Salmond remained hopeful that RBS would recover, if occasionally tongue-tied on TV.

He was certain, he said optimistically, that it would "overcome current challenges to become both highly profitable and highly successful once again".

Before the crash, he pledged that an independent Scotland would offer "light-touch regulation", proper for an industry "with an outstanding reputation for probity".

His banking experience has left Salmond with a belief in low business taxes – which may prove increasingly at odds with the social justice banners displayed during the Yes campaign.

In 2007, Salmond became first minister of Scotland for the first time by offering an optimistic agenda to Scots; but playing, too, on a belief that Labour had had things their own way for too long. He ran a minority government, and he ran it well, believing that Scots had to be convinced first that the SNP could run Holyrood competently before they could be faced with the question of independence.

The Salmond factor Not for the first time, he was helped by his enemies. The Liberal Democrats rejected an early but unrepeated offer of coalition; while the Opposition blinked on the occasions when matters came to the brink in the Holyrood parliament.

Four years later, the SNP prepared for further gains, but even they were surprised by the scale of majority victory – a result that was said to have been impossible under the rules that set Holyrood up in 1999.

“We have simply not got to grips with the Salmond factor in this election. Some people in our campaign believe that if they hate [him] then everyone else should hate him,” one Labour candidate complained during the campaign.

However, there are contradictions aplenty. The SNP demands more powers from London, but it has centralised power in Edinburgh wherever it has been possible. Council taxes have been frozen, though this has benefitted the middle-classes and the rich most of all, while prescription charges – which had already been abolished for many – were ended for all.

Former Labour minister Brian Wilson – no friend of Salmond, it has to be said – says “the most remarkable fact” about the SNP’s time in power is the lack of a social imperative.

“The SNP is Scotland’s Fianna Fáil: Big tent, non-ideological, populist, everything to be resolved through constitutional change, unembarrassed by where the money comes from since Scottish millionaires are, by definition, part of the same, big happy family as the rest of us,” he says.

Equally, there are signs of an authoritarian streak that dislikes opposition: Holyrood’s already weak committee structure has been neutered beyond all recovery; while debate is discouraged, not encouraged.

If Salmond’s judgment about Fred Goodwin and RBS was wrong, it did display Salmond’s tendency to remain loyal, one that is rare, perhaps, in the upper reaches of politics.

“Personally, his strength is loyalty towards individuals,” says John Swinney, who replaced Salmond for four years as head of the SNP before the latter’s “king o’er the water return” from London.

But he is not an easy man to work for. In fact, the experience has left many scarred and has seen Salmond having to deny charges of bullying. Nevertheless, the young and ambitious still want to work for him: “He’s really one of the most amazing people I’ve ever worked for and will ever meet,” one staffer says.

Intensely private, Salmond remains an enigma for most, if not all of those who have worked alongside him during his political career, some of them for decades. His 34-year-long marriage to Moira, who was once his boss during a period as a civil servant in the Scottish Office and who is 17 years older than him, is the most private chapter of all.

Today, she remains his strongest, if nearly always silent, ally, but one whose importance in Salmond’s life is never underestimated by those who have dealings with one, or both.

“I don’t use my family as a prop in politics. I’ve never done it, I don’t approve of it and I am not going to start it,” he once said, while he has been deeply angered on the occasions when she has become the story.

Such anger is not to be relished, because Salmond has a cruel tongue. Michael Forsyth, a St Andrew's University contemporary of Salmond, was a particular subject of loathing. Like Salmond, Forsyth was born into the lower-middle classes. Unlike Salmond, he joined the Young Conservatives when he arrived at the historic Fife institution.

"He arrived at St Andrew's drinking pints of heavy and left drinking gin-and-tonic. People change their minds, of course, but he changed his drinking habits, his politics and his accents," Salmond said later.

However, there is kindness, too. One Scottish journalist remembers Salmond, then a House of Commons MP, coming to him after he had heard that the journalist had been sacked.

"He said, 'If there is anything I can do, if you need a reference, if I can help in any way, let me know and I will'," the reporter recalls, satisfied that the promise made would have been kept.

On occasions, he goes to extremes. During his first visit to Washington as first minister he was told that an American woman who had helped the party for years was bed-bound, ill with cancer. "He left his advisers, jumped into a cab, bought flowers, arrived at her door on the outskirts of DC, walked in (he knew she left the door open) and sang an old Burns lullaby until she came down," says a former aide, Colin Pyle. "She was startled to say the least, but it gave her energy for months." Another former aide says that "he's always a bit embarrassed if you catch him being nice".

President for a day Salmond loves the big gesture, as he showed during the World Cup in France in 1998 when he was one of thousands of Scottish fans who travelled to support "The Tartan Army".

Some 10,000 Scots without tickets for Scotland versus Morocco had gathered in the main square in St Etienne to watch it on an outdoor screen, but French TV channel Canal Plus was not showing it. Salmond rang the office of Canal Plus's chief executive, introducing himself as Alex Salmond, leader of the Scottish Nationalist Party. The secretary was unimpressed, and he got nowhere.

"Then I said I was Alex Salmond, the president of the Republic of Scotland, and that I wanted to speak to him right now. He came out of his board meeting and I managed to save the game.

"For three hours I was President of Scotland," he recalled a few years later, still chuckling at his own chutzpah, but not averse either to the political title.

Sometimes, the dramatic act can be for more serious affairs. In 1997, a Peterhead trawler, the *Sapphire*, sank with the loss of four lives a few days after leaving port. The boat lay in 270 ft of water, but the British government refused to hire a floating crane that could have raised it to the surface and brought the dead home for burial.

A local campaign began. Salmond played a leading role, cajoling cash. In just four days, £380,000 was raised. By mid-December, the *Sapphire* was brought back into Peterhead. Hundreds of people, all of them in tears, including Salmond, stood at the dock while the

bodies of Bruce Cameron, Victor Podlesny, Adam Stephen and Robert Stephen were recovered.

The coming week will lay the ground for the next series of dramatic acts in the life of Alexander Elliott Anderson Salmond, the man who has brought Scotland its “date with destiny”.

The journey has been a difficult one, filled with compromises, promises and half-truths that may threaten the future of an independent Scotland should it come about. However, Scotland’s referendum – even if it is one that Scots never believed they would face – is one that would not have happened without him, at least not now. For now, the fundamentalists in the SNP are silent in advance of the result, but many remain unhappy about the compromises that had to be made to get them to this point. Following the first TV debate against Alistair Darling – which he lost – Salmond felt the first cold winds of rebellion from within his own ranks, but they were quickly silenced.

If Thursday’s vote brings victory, Salmond will be vindicated. If not, then he will face questions about his future – immediately, or in the months ahead.

Superbly well-read, Salmond may have occasion in the days ahead to reflect once more on the words of James Graham, a man known to Scottish history simply as “The Great Montrose”. In his heyday, Montrose was feted for his tactical brilliance; helped by imported Irish infantry, he won victory after victory by surprising his enemy. In the end, however, Montrose, who had defected to the side of King Charles I, was hanged in 1650 in Edinburgh by the Covenanters, the men with whom he had once fought.

However, Salmond may think also of another Scottish figure, Robert The Bruce, whose victory at Bannockburn over the English was celebrated this year, its 700th anniversary. Before there was victory for Bruce, according to the account, there were years of defeat, near-despair. In one fabled tale, Bruce hid in a cave, watching a spider trying to weave a web. Again and again, it failed. Finally, a strand stuck to the wall. Success followed.

The story is an invention, but myths are made of such tales.

Salmond wants to create his own myth.

Recalibration of union anticipated in North ahead of Scottish referendum

Gerry Moriarty, September 15th, 2014

Northern politicians weigh potential impact of Thursday's vote on independence

Whatever the people of Scotland decide in the knife-edge independence referendum on Thursday, there is a quiet recognition in Northern Ireland that at political, economic and emotional levels life never will be quite the same again.

In this very tense countdown to voting, unionists naturally, as their name implies, are hoping for a No vote so that the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland will be maintained.

Most nationalists in their gut would want the opposite result but some, too, would entertain reservations about what an independent Scotland might trigger on this side of the North Channel.

The front page of the *Belfast Telegraph* earlier this month carried a picture of what Britain and Ireland would look like constitutionally if Scotland voted Yes – the red, white and blue of the British union flag over England, Wales and Northern Ireland; Scotland and the Republic independent and separate.

It's the type of image that can generate anxiety and, indeed, there is concern within unionism. Democratic Unionist Party MP Ian Paisley jnr, in comments weeks before the death of his father, said in his North Antrim constituency he was closer to Campbeltown in Scotland, 17 miles across the sea, than to Belfast. So, what happens on referendum day matters dearly to him: "You must remember this is about kinship as well. My father's mother was Scottish, my grandparents were from Scotland. This is about affinity and proximity."

He fears a Yes vote would be a big encouragement for dissident republicans. "My huge concern is, if there is a change in the status of the constitution, that there are those who have resorted to violence to 'smash the union' who will see this as an opportunity to further dismember the United Kingdom and pick Northern Ireland off.

"If the dissidents were to see a major change in the status and structure of the union they would get their tails up and say: 'Well, now this is our chance; let's have another go at it'."

Mr Paisley also said Scottish independence would lead to Sinn Féin clarion calls for a "destabilising" Border poll on a united Ireland. "If one side of the community pumps up one feeling, then there is automatic anti-feeling on the opposite side. I think it would all be very debilitating and that is the last thing we need in our politics at the moment."

It's a fair assumption that the popular hope among republicans and nationalists is that Scotland will opt for independence. That's reflected in a large *Braveheart* billboard in west Belfast urging a Yes vote in Scotland which, interestingly, is sponsored by the Rock Bar on the Falls Road rather than by Sinn Féin. A big "Yes Scotland" on Black Mountain overlooking west Belfast also tells of the prevailing nationalist view.

But a significant body of nationalists, too, would fear that a Yes vote might undermine a Stormont power-sharing administration that is shaky enough already.

Scotland opting for independence would certainly bolster the Sinn Féin president Gerry Adams's arguments that a Border poll on a united Ireland should be held, as is permitted under the terms of the Belfast Agreement.

Northern Ireland secretary Theresa Villiers has ruled out such a referendum for the foreseeable future, but there is no doubt a Yes vote would bring renewed Sinn Féin pressure for such a poll.

Mr Adams said the referendum was solely a matter for the people of Scotland, but he wasn't above lobbing a small grenade into the debate. In February he told the BBC that the UK as a union of four countries was "held together by a thread and that thread can be unravelled either as a result of referenda in Scotland or elsewhere or indeed, Ireland".

But otherwise Sinn Féin has been careful not to interfere. An *Irish Times* request to the party's press office for a Sinn Féin politician to comment on the referendum was met by a polite but firm refusal.

"That's a matter for the people of Scotland," said a spokesman. "It's for them to self-determine their future."

In the Assembly last week Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness also kept out of the debate, while offering that he was encouraged that Scottish first minister and Scottish National Party leader Alex Salmond had said that whatever the outcome he would remain a "true friend" of Northern Ireland.

SDLP leader Dr Alasdair McDonnell carefully trod the same line: "The Scottish people are entitled to their own decisions without interference from us. We would be confident in their wisdom that they will make a good decision."

And what would a good decision be? "A good decision is whatever decision they wish to take.

"I don't think the result of the Scottish referendum would have any immediate or destabilising effects here," he added. "I think the effects will be longer-term. The referendum will bring inevitable change to Scotland and, in turn, some of those changes may have an impact on Northern Ireland."

Ulster Unionist Party leader Mike Nesbitt said that regardless of whether the vote was to stay or go "there will have to be some form of recalibration of the union". A No vote would not mean no change, he said: If a No result led to greater powers for the Scottish parliament, then Stormont, too, must gain from devo-max, possibly with one benefit the ability to bring corporation tax in the North in line with the Republic.

"No, absolutely not," he said when asked whether a vote for independence could threaten Northern Ireland's link to what would remain of the UK. "Our constitutional position is nailed down in the 1998 Belfast Agreement. I see no appetite based on the evidence –

including the last census when only 25 per cent wanted to be described as Irish – that there is anything like a majority that would be in favour of change.”

Drew Nelson, grand secretary of the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland, said a Yes vote would be “incredibly destabilising” for Northern Ireland. Which explains why several hundred Orangemen plus some loyalist bands travelled to Edinburgh on Saturday for a Scottish Orange parade urging a No vote. Among the speakers was the Orange grandmaster of Ireland, Edward Stevenson.

David Hume, a 50-year-old member of the Orange Order who is also on the board that advises the Sinn Féin culture Minister Carál Ní Chuilín on Ulster Scots issues, is a native of Larne in Co Antrim. He traces his family back to the 17th century to the border region of Scotland.

Whatever the outcome, he doesn't believe it will hasten the arrival of a united Ireland: “If they did vote Yes I don't think it would change things here; it would not lead to a majority of people here saying that they want to be part of a united Ireland. The lines are clearly drawn in terms of that issue: the majority of people want to be part of the United Kingdom because they see that is to their benefit. I don't think that any decision in Scotland is going to impact on that in a big way.”

But he doesn't want another degree of separation from his Scottish cousins across the water.

Echoing Ian Paisley jnr's remark about kinship he considered what a Yes vote would mean: “It would be akin to a divorce within the family, really. It would create a gap in the psyche of Ulster Scots people certainly.

“Our relationship [with] our friends in Scotland would not change but obviously the structure of our relationships would change and we would be the poorer for that.”

Posh Edinburgh cricket types spell out a resounding No

Mark Hennessy, September 15th, 2014

Supporters of a No vote gathered yesterday on a cricket pitch

Founded in 1832, the Grange cricket club in Edinburgh's leafy Stockbridge district is a place where on a Sunday afternoon one can hope for the comforting twack of a cricket bat.

Yesterday, it was home to several thousand people hoping for a No vote in Thursday's independence referendum, but increasingly worried that one will not come about.

"I think the No campaign was too complacent, until they saw the opinion poll showing that the Yes side had built up steam," Kirsteen Steel told *The Irish Times*.

"I think I have been too complacent, too," she said, saying she travelled from Annan in Dumfriesshire to show her support for a No vote at yesterday's event.

"But it is rather posh, isn't it," she said. And she was right, even to the point where the event became a gentle caricature of itself, with Sophias saying "Hello, dahling," to Henrys and Freddie.

However, there is no doubt about the genuineness of the concern now being displayed by people who regard themselves as Scottish, but British, too.

Felicity Kane, "a single mum of two and not political", said she had organised yesterday's event because not enough has been done to mobilise No voters. She had planned to have the crowd atop Arthur's Seat, one of the hills at the back of Holyrood, but Historic Scotland [the agency charged with safeguarding historic monuments] had, she said, vetoed her plans at the last minute. And she was not happy about it.

Dutch-born Oscar Van Nieuwenhuizen, an antiques dealer, had travelled into Edinburgh, too for the event, recognising some of those present as his neighbours in Dumfriesshire.

Some of them were major landowners, certainly, but it was their work which had made Scotland "so beautiful and so perfect", something that would disappear without them.

Liberal Democrats MP, Menzies Campbell said "we've five days to save the United Kingdom", before saying, "even if that is not what you would like in Dublin".

Welcoming the event, Campbell said No supporters have too often found it difficult to state their preferences openly in "the face of a robust Yes campaign".

For Kirsteen Steel, the week ahead will be difficult. "I think Thursday is going to be like watching a horror film from behind a sofa, scared about what happen next.

"I know you have to take risks in life, but this is just too much, too humongous. I intend to be with some friends that night, and try and distract myself," she said.

Scottish referendum: Musings of a reluctant nationalist

Fintan O'Toole, September 16th, 2014

The electorate has already sent a message: the current political settlement of strong oligarchies and weak democracies cannot stand

I never thought I'd find myself defending nationalism. As a political ideology, the proposition that an Irish crook should be closer to me than an English saint holds little attraction. But if I had to choose between the civil and civic movement for independence in Scotland and the British and international elites who sneer at it as mere atavism, I know which side I prefer. There's a very good case to be made against nationalism, but the technocratic elite dominating Europe is in no position to make it.

What's the most extreme version of nationalism we've seen in the European Union in the last six years? It is the version promulgated by the European Central Bank. Faced with a Europe-wide banking crisis, at least partly created by EU policies (the poorly designed euro; the free movement of capital), European elites were quick to rediscover the centrality of the nationalism they had long derided.

Suddenly, the consequences of European policies were the responsibilities of nation states and their citizens. Anglo Irish Bank or Allied Irish Bank were no longer, as they had effectively become, European banks – they were 100 per cent guaranteed Irish. If – and this really happened – a British property company went bust having borrowed money from Anglo Irish, which in turn borrowed it from a Germany landesbank, who had to pay? Irish citizens who had no role in the transaction whatsoever. Why? Because Anglo was an Irish bank and Irishness was the central principle that trumped all others.

This has been the experience of a lot of European citizens in the last six years. We discovered in the most painful way that we were accountable for institutions that were not in any way accountable to us. We were found guilty on the basis of our nationality and punished accordingly. The hypocrisy is gross: nationalism is a silly and irrational anachronism except when it suits the elites for nationalism to be a fundamental and unalterable principle.

If those elites wanted to establish a powerful supra-national European identity they had a great opportunity to do so by making the banking crisis a shared European responsibility. Instead they were utterly determined to define it as a series of strictly national disasters, created – it was implied – by weaknesses in the national characters of the Greeks, the Irish, the Portuguese and the Spanish.

But surely nationalism is irrational? Indeed it is – and the current orthodox ideology is what? A paragon of evidence-based rationality? Or a brainless zombie politics that keeps going long after it has died? Neo-liberalism and its cult of free-flowing capital revealed its nakedness in the banking crash, but it lives on.

The outsized, overweening global finance industry is back in business. Europe-wide austerity has failed spectacularly – but it continues. Evidence is irrelevant – these beliefs are sacred scripture.

There's another layer of hypocrisy in this. So-called ordinary people are told they have disgraced themselves when they don't vote. They're called apathetic. But one of the interesting things about the Scottish referendum campaign is that apathy has been a big loser. The level of engagement has shown that people are not apathetic – they're just sick of their votes making no difference to their lives.

Give them a chance to make a decision that just might make their future choices more meaningful and they grasp it. There are worse things than apathy – hateful and dangerous passions. But there are also better things than apathy and one of them may be people getting involved in peaceful and constructive arguments about who they are to call “we”, about what form of polity might give them the best chance of being able to affect the decisions that affect them.

That debate has already achieved something startling: it has killed the United Kingdom as we know it. If the Scots vote Yes on Thursday, the death will be sudden and shocking. But even if they vote No, it will be on the basis of the promise of greatly enhanced powers for a Scottish parliament – in effect the beginning of a radically altered federalised UK. A federal state will force huge changes in Britain – a written constitution, for example, and a federal second chamber at Westminster to replace the House of Lords. The political architecture of “these islands” is about to change radically and it will be Scots, by their engagement in the debate, who will have set that change in motion.

The Scots have already sent a message: the current political settlement of strong oligarchies and weak democracies cannot stand. People all over Europe will have to involve themselves in big fights – about equality, about accountability, about how to balance public needs and private demands. Nationalism may be one of the languages they speak but what matters is what they are using it to say.

Shetland divided, and not just between Yes and No

Colm Keena, September 16th, 2014

With rich revenues from oil and fishing, at least one resident is for full independence for the remote islands

Jack and Ruby Pottinger, both natives of Lerwick, the capital of the Shetland Islands, have a small “No thanks” poster in a window of their home, which is on a narrow, wall-lined lane up a hill over the ancient harbour.

Both lived away from the sub-Arctic islands for a long time, Ruby in England, with her late first husband, who was in the RAF, and Jack in Wales, with his late first wife. It was when they were both back in Shetland, after the deaths of their first spouses, that they met and married and set up home on their native island, 110 miles north of the Scottish coastline.

Ruby has grandchildren who live in Manchester, but says it is not just that that makes her opposed to Scottish independence. “A lot of it is based on a sort of envy of the English,” she says. “Alex Salmond [leader of the Scottish National Party] is very clever. Every time he opens his mouth, he speaks about Westminster. But all the English people don’t live in the south east.”

Jack says he was born British and would like to die British. Also, Shetland is closer culturally to Norway and Denmark than it is to Scotland. “When we were young, we didn’t think of ourselves as Scottish at all,” says Ruby, who feels no emotional tug towards voting for independence. Anyway, they both say, what would it mean, with membership of the EU and a currency controlled by the Bank of England?

In their view, a lot of the support for Scottish independence comes from traditional Labour supporters who don’t want to live under permanent Tory rule. “They’re voting yes because they hate the Tories so much,” says Ruby.

Both feel that it would be wrong to take such a huge step as independence on the basis of what is likely to be a very tight voting margin.

The Shetland economy, with its huge fishing sector and its association with North Sea oil and gas, is booming. The population is a healthy 23,000, and there is de facto full employment. A new oil and gas facility being built on the islands has led to large ferries and cruisers being semi-permanently berthed in Lerwick harbour to house the 2,000 construction workers who work three weeks on, one week off shifts on the site.

Brian Nicolson, musician and partner in the High Level Music centre in Lerwick, says the referendum has prompted a lot of debate within the community, with some for, some against, and some who are just “totally sick with the whole thing”. He himself, he says, is “still dithering.”

“As far as we are concerned, Edinburgh and London are both quite a long way away,” he says, expressing a commonly expressed view among Shetlanders, especially older ones.

When the annual island festival takes place each year, says Nicolson, people dress up in Viking costumes, not kilts.

There is a £300 million per annum, mostly locally-owned fisheries sector on the islands. Lerwick is the second largest fishing port in Scotland, and the first, Peterhead, gets a lot of its fish from around Shetland. More fish is landed in Shetland than in England and Wales combined.

According to Simon Collins, chief executive of the Shetland Fishermen's Association, many in the sector feel that Edinburgh has not done any better at representing their interests than has the London government. When Alex Salmond speaks of Scottish oil, or the Scottish fishing industry, says Collins, really what he's talking about is Shetland oil, and Shetland fish.

Shetland gets a cut from the oil from its waters and has a £200 million-plus type of sovereign wealth fund, controlled by its local council. The roads are top-class and every community has excellent schools and recreation centres.

Fish processor Kevin Llewellyn, coming out of the Royal British Legion Scotland, Lerwick Branch club, says he would support independence for Shetland, not Scotland. "We have all the oil and the fish. Why give the money to anybody else?"

Shopkeeper M. Kahn, in JJ Taylor's newsagents across the road, has been in Shetland for the past five years, having been in Glasgow for his first 28 years after leaving Pakistan. He would prefer Scotland to stay in Britain. "I think they are better together, with the Queen. She is a very respectable woman. And there would be a lot of difficulties, not just with the economy and finance, but also with defence. Great Britain is strong."

Island native Louise Thomason (31), a member of the women for independence group, is in favour of a yes vote not for nationalistic reasons but because she thinks it will allow people get free of the "neo-liberal" policies that come from London. An independent Scotland would have a proportional representation electoral system, as against the first-past-the-post one that operates for UK elections.

Brian Nugent, chair of the Shetland yes campaign, who has Irish parents, was raised near Glasgow, and has lived and reared a family in Shetland.

"I am in favour of independence for Scotland. I think we are a different country, and it is time for voters to prove it."

He says younger people on the island are more open to the yes argument, and older people more resistant. "The inbetween, that's where it will be won or lost, as far as Shetland is concerned," he says.

Could Europe's only working monetary union be about to split?

Chris Johns, September 16th, 2014

It's impossible to quantify, but some economists think that investment in Scotland has already been damaged

It has only been a week-and-a-half since the Scottish independence debate exploded into life - or at least into our consciousness. Saturation media coverage since the first intimations of a Yes vote has focused attention on the possible break-up of the only contemporary example of a successful European monetary union. A remarkable aspect of the outpouring of commentary, analysis and debate has been the monolithic view of the British: in love letters, begging letters, poems, songs, threats and promises it has been almost impossible to find anyone willing to say a happy goodbye to Scotland. Foreign commentary, including plenty emanating from this island, has found it hard to resist the temptation to stick one on the English.

Parallels with Canada have been obvious. A process that culminated in a narrow decision by Quebec to stay within the Federation had its own long-lasting economic consequences, not least in the orderly evacuation of Montreal by Canada's financial industry. The banks' move to Toronto was not reversed, or even really slowed down, when it became apparent that Quebec would stay part of Canada. Once that decision had been taken, things went (relatively) quiet; there was no political earthquake but key businesses found that not worrying about Quebec nationalism is a very congenial state of affairs. It's impossible to quantify, but some economists think that investment in Scotland has already been damaged.

Just about everybody has joined the debate; politicians across the spectrum have displayed a rare degree of unity, one usually only seen during war time. There isn't really a hard left or right in British politics any more, just centre-left to centre-right. Uniquely, that soggy middle is of one unionist voice.

Prominent public figures who are supposed to stay neutral have nonetheless issued dire warnings about the consequences of independence. Leader of this particular pack is Mark Carney, Governor of the Bank of England, who has echoed the words of every political leader at Westminster and stated in bold terms that a currency union is out of the question. Scotland can use sterling if it likes, but it won't get a lender of last resort or any of the other perks usually associated with having your own currency. A bit like the euro then.

Although officials hastened to 'clarify' his remarks, the new president of the European Commission has joined the fray, suggesting that the EU won't be admitting any new members for at least the next five years. That's a reminder that keeping the lid on Europe's multiple nationalist nasties is really the point of the EU. It has been suggested that nationalists from Russia to Catalonia are salivating over what comes next. Membership of the EU is not a gimme for Scotland. So, whether they vote Yes or No to independence, they might well be an ex-EU member by 2017, given the other referendum, on UK EU membership, that could be taking place around then.

The constitution-writers in Brussels mention 'ever closer union' at every available opportunity: Yes or no, the UK is either a fast or slowly disintegrating union. It will either be independence or 'Devo-max' for Scotland. The English (and Welsh and Northern Irish) will

be left, either way, with next to zero say in affairs north of the border, but Scottish (mostly Labour) MPs in Westminster will retain a disproportionate level of control over English taxes. That is usually a recipe for revolution of one kind or another.

Threats and counter-threats have been flying around. And with each salvo comes a realisation that things are more complicated than first realised. Alex Salmond blusters about not taking his share of UK debts if he doesn't get his way, but has to contend with the fact that the UK will have a veto over whether or not Scotland is admitted into the EU. Scotland can't keep sterling and join the EU: the sterling opt-out applies to the UK only. Scotland would have to adopt the euro in any attempt to re-join the EU. One of the few things that unites Scottish nationalists and every other citizen of the UK is a detestation of the euro, a steadfast belief that the euro experiment has been an unmitigated disaster.

Welsh politicians of every hue would be well advised to tout for inward investment with a single promise: we won't be having our own referendum, ever. Simple, but, I suspect, very effective marketing. And it's a trick that can be used over and over again, whichever way Scotland decides.

Just how much the Union costs the English taxpayer is now out in the open - and will be recalculated year after year, particularly as North Sea oil output continues its inexorable decline. The super rich inhabitants of London now know that Labour's 'Mansion Tax' simply can't happen without Scottish Labour MPs in Westminster. Everything now gets seen through a new prism.

Show of loyalty to royal family by No supporters in shadow of Balmoral

Colm Keena, September 17th, 2014

Scottish referendum: Ballater businesses proud of their status as suppliers to 'her majesty the Queen'

No voters outnumber those intending to vote for Scottish independence in the small Highland town of Ballater, eight miles from the British royal family's Balmoral Estate, in Aberdeenshire, according to locals.

The winding road towards the town runs alongside the River Dee and the area is called Royal Deeside in recognition of the family's long association with the area. Stand-alone signs urging people to vote against independence are a common sight in the fields that sometimes create a break in the forest that lines the A93, though a blue Yes sign adorns the window of the occasional cottage.

In Ballater itself, shops such as Countrywear, which sells hunting and fishing equipment as well as tartans and tweeds, the Deeside Deli, Cassie's hardware and appliance store, George Strachen grocers and Chalmers bakery, have plaques on their outside walls advertising the fact that they are suppliers to "her royal majesty the Queen".

Norman Clements, owner of Countrywear, is from Devon but moved to Ballater 23 years ago. The referendum "is the stupidest thing ever, and it's all due to [Scottish National Party leader] Alex Salmond's ego," he says from behind the counter. "It's causing a lot of friction among people that normally get along fine."

Alastair Cassie, owner of the hardware shop, has a Union Jack flying outside "because I think we should be united. United we stand, divided we fall. That's how I see it."

He says the lack of support locally for Scottish independence has more to do with common sense and concerns about the economy, than anything to do with the queen.

But college student Alistair Vincent (22) does not entirely agree. He is going to vote Yes in the hope that it will change the political situation, which he says is "stagnant". His vote is for a change to how politics works, rather than independence in itself.

Most of his friends are voting No, he says, probably because the economic difficulties that have hit other parts of Scotland, haven't really been felt around Ballater. The way the royal family has supported local businesses could also be a factor, he says, pointing out that the shops with the plaques supplying the Balmoral estate.

Amy Muir (26), who has a photography shop in the town, is going to vote Yes. "It seems like the right thing to do. I want an independent Scotland." She has friends in Glasgow and they are all voting Yes. Her friends in Ballater are voting No.

Campbell Parker (26), who is from Edinburgh but works and lives in Ballater, is also going to vote Yes. He wants to see a government that is more representative of the political views of

the Scottish people. “Ninety-five per cent of my friends in Edinburgh are going to vote Yes,” he says. But that view is “definitely a minority one around here”.

When Yes campaigners put a stall up on the green on Sunday, some of the shops put up the Union Jack, he says.

He doesn't think independence will weaken the role of the queen as head of state for the Scottish people, nor does he think her reported comments up the road, when attending service in the small church beside her estate on Sunday, were aimed at encouraging people to vote No. Urging people to think very seriously about their vote, “seems a sensible statement to make”.*

Susanna Peterson, a mental health nurse who is just about to retire, is from Tarland, about 10 miles from Ballater. She will vote yes “because I don't like the capitalist system and the only way I can see to change it is to have a completely different government”.

She is hopeful that, with time, the government of an independent Scotland would be more representative of egalitarian, centre-left politics. The Scottish used to be strong supporters of the Labour Party “and maybe in time people can be persuaded to go back to that way of thinking”.

She doesn't think the link with the royal family is why so many people around Ballater appear to be against independence.

“In general, the people around here are very well-off, and so they are voting for the status quo.”

What would a Yes vote in Scotland mean for North's economy?

Gerry Moriarty, September 17th, 2014

Northern Ireland businesspeople have mixed views on what impact of Scottish independence would be

What would happen economically in Northern Ireland if the Scots vote Yes tomorrow creates more questions than answers, while the prospect of a fairly marginal No vote raises the possibility of an economic bounce for the North.

Economic unpredictability can breed anxiety, but there is the occasional businessperson who sees opportunity whether the outcome is Yes or No. Still, the prevailing economic mood in Northern Ireland over the referendum is one of uncertainty.

Unanswered questions include whether a Yes vote would restrict the ability of the British government to underwrite the Northern Ireland economy.

This relates to the Barnett formula, the system whereby Westminster decides the level of block grant that annually goes to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to allow the devolved administrations run their budgets.

In net terms Northern Ireland receives an annual subvention of about £10 billion (€12.5 billion) from the British government. Should Scottish independence put extra pressures on the London treasury, there is the danger that a new formula could be devised that reduces the block grant.

Then there is the question of how the British government would deal with the loss of oil revenue and the possible expense of relocating nuclear bases from Scotland to the south of England.

And economic costs could lead to political consequences. One of the reasons relations between First Minister Peter Robinson and Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness are so bad is because of Sinn Féin opposition to welfare reform. The question here is whether the British government, under financial pressure, might impose further welfare cuts.

More positively there is the longstanding prospect of the Northern Executive being devolved extra powers to impose its own rate of corporation tax.

British prime minister David Cameron has held off on making a decision until after the referendum. The main rate of corporation tax in the North is 21 per cent, and it is estimated that bringing it in line with the Republic's 12.5 per cent would result in a reduction in block grant of £300 million annually.

There is an obvious element of risk-taking in creating corporation tax parity on the island but the majority economic view is that it would significantly benefit Northern Ireland, and that the possible £300 million loss in subvention would be more than recouped. The previous DUP finance minister Sammy Wilson had reservations about such a move but current minister Simon Hamilton is in favour, believing it could create 50,000 jobs. "I think our economy would be revolutionised," he has told *The Irish Times*.

There is an expectation that, regardless of the referendum result, Cameron will make the corporation tax concession. But Ann McGregor, chief executive of the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce and Industry, wonders when will this happen. She has a worry Scotland could steal a march by lowering its corporation tax ahead of the North.

“That would leave Northern Ireland surrounded by countries with lower corporation tax rates which could cause potentially substantial damage to business in the province,” she says.

“Those working in businesses with cross-border interests would also find themselves dealing with two separate regulatory regimes, two different tax systems and possibly even an exchange rate – none of which would make business any easier,” adds McGregor.

Again in the territory of questions rather than answers, she wonders what currency Scotland would use should it vote Yes. “The euro is the only logical fallback position if Scotland is barred from using the pound after independence,” she feels. “That would leave Northern Ireland with a euro zone country to the south and another to the east.”

Furthermore, there is the concern that an independent Scotland would maximise all opportunities to create greater international investment and more jobs. As well as corporation tax, it could become more competitive through lower income tax and VAT rates which could be to the detriment of Northern Ireland.

It’s all a bit of an economic no man’s land, and matters won’t become clearer until after tomorrow’s vote.

But it’s in the nature of businesspeople to see opportunity whether in uncertainty or adversity, which is the position taken by Paul Henry, chairman of the Chartered Accountants Ulster Society.

He says Northern Ireland does business with the Republic, which is not part of the UK, so why should there be any great difficulty if Scotland opts out of the union? “The Republic of Ireland is one of our major export markets . . . There is no reason why Scotland, even outside of the UK, could not be just as important a partner for the Northern Ireland economy,” he says.

Henry proposes that a “Northern Ireland office” should be established close to the Scottish parliament in Edinburgh followed by a “massive trade fair” showcasing “what we make, and why we want their business”.

People shouldn’t be perturbed by what happens on referendum day, Henry advises. “Whether it’s a yes or a no vote, or devo-max, or perhaps the dreaded ‘neverendum’, Northern Ireland must be ready and willing to catch the tide.”

Waiting and watching Scotland's vote

Paddy Woodworth, September 17th, 2014

London agreement to vote and to independence in principle hugely significant

It's natural that most of us should be focused on the significance of the outcome as the polling day for Scotland's referendum on independence approaches. However, for many groups in continental Europe involved in "separatism" and "unionism" the most significant thing has already happened. London has permitted this referendum and has agreed to accept an independent Scotland.

True, other European multinational states have sundered recently without bloodshed and with relatively little drama – for example, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. But the bloody break-up of Yugoslavia is an abiding reminder of how violent such processes can be.

So the spectacle of the venerable and still very powerful United Kingdom accepting self-determination and secession seems pregnant with precedent to many European observers – though the principle was perhaps already prefigured by the Downing Street declaration.

The issue of self-determination is a notoriously unstable political missile, and stands on the slippery ground of concepts of nation, state and ethnic and cultural identity. Historians and political scientists grapple endlessly with these terms but their conclusions can be summarised in this way: a nation is a group of people that believes itself to be a nation; a nation becomes a state when it can persuade or force other peoples to accept its statehood.

Europe – not to venture further afield – is a patchwork of such groups, some of whom believe, with varying degrees of conviction, that they are wrongfully trapped within alien nation states. The encompassing nation state often treats such claims as bogus. They insist these groups are simply regional variants of the national prototype, and dismiss distinct languages, for example, as dialects or obsolete vestiges of the distant past.

That is the traditional Spanish nationalist stance towards the Catalans, Basques and Galicians, and was brutally enforced under Gen Franco's 40-year dictatorship. It remains the unitary French state's position in relation to Bretons, Basques and Corsicans. It is noteworthy that this view was never dominant in the UK, which always gave at least formal recognition to the distinctive national characteristics of Scotland, Ireland, Wales and England.

'Spain's 1978 democratic constitution reluctantly admitted that the term "nationality" could be applied to Basques, Catalans and Galicians but the idea that these peoples are "nations" remains distinctly toxic in Madrid. Moreover, this constitution insists, in the same sentence, that the "Spanish nation" is "indissolubly united", the "common fatherland" and, in case you still haven't got the message, "indivisible".

The notion of self-determination, therefore, is anathema today to both major Spanish political parties. The decision of Catalan nationalists to hold a referendum on independence in November is regarded as virtually seditious, and has been ruled illegal by the Spanish constitutional court. Basque nationalists have already found that this road to nationhood can be blocked.

Catalan nationalism, however, is a more powerful and more united, if less militant force than its Basque counterpart, and some form of referendum may well go ahead, with unpredictable consequences.

Small wonder, then, that the Catalans have brandished the Scottish process as an exemplary exercise in democracy, one that Madrid should be obliged to follow. And since the Catalans have also been threatened with loss of European Union membership should they manage to secede, they are scrutinising how Brussels is responding to the prospect of an independent Scotland.

The Scottish nationalists are, however, very mindful of the influence Madrid will have over the EU's attitude to Scottish membership. They have not expressed unequivocal solidarity with Catalonia.

When a Spanish journalist asked Scottish first minister Alex Salmond recently whether he supported the Catalan right to a referendum, he pointed out that the two situations are different: Scotland is voting with the UK's blessing.

Mainstream Basque nationalists, meanwhile, are being careful not to pin any particular hopes on the Scottish outcome. "We will not accelerate [our campaign] if there is a Yes vote, nor will we put on the brakes if there is a No vote," a leader of the Basque Nationalist Party said last week. But he continued: "Whatever the result, it will give impetus to a similar process here." It's an eminently pragmatic and perceptive position: the fact that a major EU country has conceded self-determination is itself a game-changer in the eternally contentious debate about the future shape of Spain.

Might it change the picture elsewhere in the EU? That's hardly likely in France, where the ideology of the 1789 revolution forged a much more successful centralist nation state than has ever existed south of the Pyrenees. The French Basques do not even have a regional department, while the Basques in Spain have carved out very extensive powers of self-government since 1978.

In Belgium, however, the powerful right-wing Flemish nationalists have certainly been encouraged by the UK precedent, and this may exacerbate fissiparous tendencies at the heart of the EU's administration. The Scottish referendum has also raised flagging spirits in the often rather contrived nationalist parties in the north (and far south) of Italy, but is less likely to have lasting impact there.

Just outside the EU, the pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine have also used Scottish analogies in their propaganda. And this reveals again the double edge of the self-determination weapon – Scotland could be used just as accurately (indeed rather more so) to justify Kiev's independence from Moscow.

Literary Scotland on the independence vote

Sarah Gilmartin, September 17th, 2014

Salmond says Burns would vote Yes, but living writers are not all on the same page

Scotland's best known literary icon, the poet Robert Burns, would vote for independence in this week's referendum, according to Alex Salmond, the nation's First Minister. As the leader of the Yes campaign, Salmond is hardly impartial but he may well be right. Burns's famous line that Scotland "was bought and sold for English gold" comes from his song about the union of the parliaments in 1707, with its suggestive title *Such a Parcel of Rogues in a Nation*.

Dead literary greats don't get a vote in the upcoming referendum, however, unlike the country's living authors who have vocalised their support for either side at various stages throughout the campaign. Never one to shrink from an opinion, Irvine Welsh has used his Twitter profile to announce his support for the Yes side. Urging his followers to find information from websites as opposed to traditional media, the *Trainspotting* author tells younger fans to talk to their friends and ignore advice from anyone over the age of 25, which presumably includes himself.

The novelist and playwright Alan Bissett has also used Twitter to get his views across, tweeting that he thinks the Yes side deserves to win but "if we lose, we lose proudly and with no shame".

Writing in the *Guardian*, the crime author Val McDermid says she was a "mibbe" for a long time, uncertain about issues such as currency, devo max and the Trident nuclear weapons programme. McDermid eventually based her Yes decision on the improvements Scotland has made for its people since receiving limited powers: "I prefer what we've done north of the border – free prescriptions, no student tuition fees, social care for elderly people. So, with a degree of trepidation, I'm going to nail my colours to the mast of aspiration and vote 'Yes'."

The No side counts high-profile literary figures such as JK Rowling among its supporters. The author donated £1 million in June to its Better Together campaign, fronted by her neighbour Alistair Darling. Rowling was recently attacked online following a blog posting where she compared extreme nationalists to Death Eaters, supporters of the evil Voldemort in her *Harry Potter* series.

Other writers have changed their mind as the referendum date draws closer. Having joined the Yes camp four months ago, the author Ewan Morrison recently switched sides because he felt the pro-independence campaign lacked a "revolutionary and inclusive debate". In a posting on the Wake Up Scotland blog, the acclaimed author sets out his reasons: "I realised there was absolutely no debate within the Yes camp. The focus was instead on attacking the enemy and creating an impenetrable shell to protect the unquestionable entity."

Morrison won the Scottish Book of the Year Fiction Prize for his novel *Close Your Eyes* last year. The author of six books, he is also an award-winning screenwriter who has been nominated for three Baftas. According to the Scotsman news site, reaction to his posting has been largely positive.

Born and living in London, the British author James Meek isn't eligible to vote in the referendum but if he could, he would be pro-independence. Meek grew up in Dundee and says that self-determination as opposed to nationalism is at the root of his decision. In a recent article in the *London Review of Books*, he writes: "In the context of England's hostility towards Europe, Scottish independence seems, like Ireland's now, a choice to continue a Europe-wide struggle between social democrats and tax-dodging global capital from within a community of half a billion people."

The broadcaster and writer Richard Holloway, a former bishop of Edinburgh, is also backing the Yes campaign, noting in the *Guardian* that he agrees with the priest in TS Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* who saw "nothing quite conclusive in the art of temporal government".

The acclaimed poet John Burnside and the novelist Alan Warner are both in favour of a Yes vote. The novelist and short story writer AL Kennedy regards the electorate's enthusiasm for potential change as both "inspiring and depressing". Harnessing that potential is what counts, according to Kennedy. Her compatriot Janice Galloway laments the "scaremongering" tactics of the No campaign: "Telling me I am doomed is not a case for union, it is a case against aspiration."

With the majority of the Scottish literary elite backing the Yes campaign, the journalist and author Allan Massie advises caution on the *Guardian*'s website over the "general impression" that independence will benefit the arts.

Using Ireland as an unfortunate example, he says: "It's possible that the achievement of independence might prove stimulating. Many believe it would. But it might not. We might mirror Ireland's experience, where the exuberant creativity of the years of struggle for independence died away soon after the creation of the free state. Of course, an independent Scotland would not resemble De Valera's Ireland; there would be no clerical dominance, no church-inspired censorship. Nevertheless, the battle won, it might prove a duller place."

Glasgow's poorest have big say in fate of union

Mark Hennessy, September 18th, 2014

Most deprived areas of city are referendum battlegrounds that Yes side targeted

For perhaps a few hours early into tomorrow morning, Shettleston, Castlemilk, Drumchapel and Easterhouse – some of Glasgow's poorest districts – will become famous.

Usually, only three or four out of every 10 voters in such districts bother to vote; in parts of Castlemilk just 11 per cent went to a polling station in one recent election.

However, the turnout from socially deprived districts – not just in Glasgow, but all across the heavily populated central belt to Edinburgh, and places further north such as Dundee – may determine Scotland's future.

Early last month, houses in the Glasgow district and elsewhere received a free newspaper from the pro-independence Yes Scotland group, which mixed Panglossian views of independence with a competition to win an Apple iPad.

Under the headline, "Bright Future: Boost for Families", it told voters: "Families across Scotland are set to be nearly £5,000-a-year better-off after a Yes vote in September's referendum."

It went on: "Plans for a dramatic increase in childcare after independence, along with free school-meals, will make a massive difference to household budgets."

Inside, Scotland's first minister, Alex Salmond, told readers that the *Financial Times*, no less, had confirmed that an independent Scotland would be one of the world's top 20 economies.

For the past two years, the Yes campaign has had strong ground operations, beginning slowly, but working up to full pitch since the beginning of 2014.

Janice West, a retired academic, has staffed the Yes Scotland office on the Cathcart Road, the campaign HQ for the Glasgow Cathcart House of Commons constituency. "In March and April I was here on my own," she told *The Irish Times*, as dozens of volunteers milled around the office readying for a final canvass of undecided voters.

Since 2012, over 250,000 pieces of pro-independence literature have been delivered in Cathcart – which includes poor districts such as Castlemilk, but also comfortably off places such as Muirend.

"People have told me that this is the first vote that they have ever bothered with: this is the first time that they have felt connected," says Neal Stewart, who has campaigned full-time for the past month.

Yes Scotland started off with an advantage since the Scottish National Party has for years asked voters on doorsteps for their views on independence, and carefully recorded the answers.

“We started off with a huge amount of data,” says Stewart McDonald, “which allowed us to target our resources on people who could be persuaded to vote Yes.”

If Yes Scotland’s campaign has been active, the one run by Better Together in the constituency – effectively meaning by the Labour Party – has been poor.

Earlier this month, former home secretary Jack Straw came to Cathcart as one of the 100 Labour MPs sent up by Ed Miliband in the wake of a poll showing a Yes lead. Following a late start in Glasgow, however, Labour has begun to appeal to its one-time solid support in the constituency, arguing that people on low incomes need to be cautious, not risk-takers.

Places such as Castlemilk, which stands on a hill overlooking Glasgow, were populated from the 1950s when the city’s slums were cleared. However, social problems – created on the back of no shops, no transport and broken community links – proliferated in the years following.

Easterhouse became a byword for unremittingly grim poverty, exacerbated by the loss of tens of thousands of jobs from the closure of Scotland’s heavy industries during the Thatcher era.

Poverty was reduced and lives improved in Glasgow during the Labour years, particularly after Gordon Brown took £1 billion (€1.26 billion) of the local authority’s housing debt on to the exchequer’s books.

However, poverty remains grim in places. Half of the city’s population – 286,000 people – live in the top fifth most deprived areas in Scotland. A third of all children in the city live in poverty, according to 2012 figures, but the numbers are unequally spread: more than half of children living in some districts are in poverty, compared to a 10th in others.

Having a job does not guarantee an escape from poverty, since half of all adults classified as living in poverty do so in homes where one adult does work – a problem exacerbated by the lack of wage rises since 2008, falling working hours, or the impact of zero-hours contracts.

Pointing to “real progress” having been made, the Child Poverty Action Group said the numbers of children living in poverty across Scotland had fallen by nearly half between 1996/97 and 2010/11. Today, however, one million Scots – just under one-in-five of the population – live in poverty, including 220,000 children, according to the group.

The despondency, disaffection and disconnection have offered fertile ground for the Yes campaign, as it seeks to blame Scotland’s ills on London and the existence of the union.

In Easterhouse, Ian Montague from the charity Fare points the finger at the work and pensions secretary Iain Duncan Smith for much of the difficulties since 2010.

Following his sacking as Conservative leader, Duncan Smith came to Easterhouse to gain an understanding of the district’s issues and “to learn why they didn’t vote Tory”, says the Labour-supporting Montague.

The Conservative “is a decent fellow”, says Montague, but he took the wrong messages from Easterhouse that because some people said they knew others who were abusing welfare rules

that everybody was doing it. In time, Duncan Smith thought up the so-called bedroom tax, which penalises local authority tenants if they are thought to have too many rooms.

Few actions by a Conservative have been so hated in Scotland, even by people who are not affected by it. Indeed, the reaction bears comparison with Scots' reactions in the 1980s to the poll tax.

In Easterhouse, the hard cases are everywhere: the man who lost his disabled daughter and who then faced immediate penalty for the bedroom she no longer used. "He had a triple-whammy at a time of great trial. He was told he could take in two lodgers, or downsize. But lodgers in a council estate can be in chaotic lifestyles," says Montague.

The number of food banks offered by the Trussell Trust is mushrooming: Easterhouse got its first six weeks ago, he told *The Irish Times*.

Ewen Gurr, the trust's Scotland manager, says its network fed 5,726 people in 2011/12; 14,318 a year later, while over the last year it has fed 71,248 people. "Food poverty wasn't on the radar in Scotland until 2011," says Gurr, sitting in his office in Dundee, "I used the service myself when I ran into trouble at one point."

The unfairness of some of the welfare rules rankles, particularly the sanctions that are applied – too quickly, he argues – against those who fail to turn up for meetings with Job Centre officials. "We had one case in Thurso where a man battled to get through snow and turned up 15 minutes late. He was sanctioned and he went back to a house with no food, no light and no heat," he says.

The appeals system leaves people in limbo for months, he argues: "Two thirds of the appeals win, so that should tell people that there is a problem with the rules and the way that they are being applied."

In March, a survey of more than 2,000 families in Scotland jointly published by the Trussell Trust and the parenting website Netmums found that one in five families have had to choose between paying a bill or putting food on the table in the past year. Four out of five have cut spending; over half are buying cheaper food, while more than four out of 10 admitted that they were "just about coping".

Back in Glasgow Cathcart, the Yes canvassers divided up a list of names of undecided voters: "Don't tell them that you know that they are undecided," said Stewart, "give them a chance to talk." In some streets, just one or two names remained to be canvassed. Nevertheless, the lists were painstakingly followed, with names crossed off, one by one.

For some, however, the concentration on Muirend – the better-off part of Cathcart – was questionable so late in the campaign, when the poorer districts appeared to offer better territory.

"In Kennishead, we found just two Nos in two blocks of flats. There are 21 floors in each and six flats on each floor. All right, people were out, but it was still a hell of a result," said Denis Donoghue. "People in places like that are not worried about banks withdrawing their operations. They haven't got much and they have less to lose."

“We should be in the poorer districts rather than here. Here, we are chasing after voters in their ones and twos: this is not where it is going to be won, if it is to be won.”

On Coynton Road, curtains were drawn. Some houses did not respond to a bell-ringing. In another, a woman answered, wearily sighing at the sight of yet another canvasser.

Neal Stewart offered more information, gently probing for some insight into her voting intentions: “I haven’t decided, I’ll talk it over with my husband. It’s on TV *all* the time,” she said, irritatedly. “Well, that’s a Better Together voter, anyway,” said Stewart, ticking her name off his list as he backed on to the street. “It’s understandable that some people are getting weary.”

The Yes team met up with an opposing team from the Better Together campaign. Both were embarrassed, before politely separating quickly into different streets.

Following a full evening’s canvassing, as darkness fell, the Yes team stood at a street corner totting up the figures from their notes: 12 Yes, 11 No, 11 still undecided. Cars passed by. From one, a group of youths aggressively shouted “Better Together!” with one putting a finger out the window – the only sign of tension all evening.

Across the road from where they were gathered stands the White Elephant on Merrylee Road, the location for a Yes party on Saturday night, win or lose.

Scottish independence referendum has deep implications for EU

Suzanne Lynch, September 18th, 2014

Europe Letter: implications of a Yes vote for EU law would be profound

The referendum on Scottish independence has deep implications not only for the future of the British union, but also for the union of 28 countries that has shaped European politics for more than 50 years.

Scotland's membership of the European Union has emerged as a key issue in the independence debate. In Brussels, officials have closed ranks on the issue. Despite repeated questioning from journalists last week, the European Commission refused to say what a Yes vote would mean for Scotland's EU membership, insisting it did not want to interfere in an internal matter.

This was evidently not the view of European Commission president José Manuel Barroso in February when he told BBC's *Andrew Marr Show* it would be "extremely difficult, if not impossible" for Scotland to join the EU, noting that the new state would have to reapply and secure the agreement of all other member states.

The issue is a highly political one. Barroso himself cited Spain's refusal to recognise Kosovo, a former province of Serbia, as an example of the resistance felt by some countries towards recognising breakaway states for fear of setting a precedent.

Venice in Italy and Flanders in Belgium are two regions where secessionist feeling is strong, but arguably Belgium has succeeded in containing Flemish nationalism by developing a sophisticated decentralised and federalist system of government that gives more power to the regions.

That Belgium, despite its strong internal divisions, has successfully avoided slipping into violence as a way of dealing with its social and political divides, is testimony to its successful model of federalism.

Catalonia is a different matter. The issue is a highly sensitive one for Madrid. Unlike Britain, Spain has refused to recognise a referendum scheduled in the prosperous northern region later this year, a decision that British prime minister David Cameron may now be quietly envying.

Spanish prime minister Mariano Rajoy intervened yesterday, on the eve of the referendum, asserting it would take Scotland eight years to renegotiate membership of the European Union.

In reality, the exact legal position of Scotland's relationship to the European Union, should it choose independence, is unclear.

The core issue is whether Scotland, as a new state, would have to apply for EU membership like any other would-be member as set out in Article 49 of the EU treaty, a view that is held by the British government and Spain. In contrast, Scotland argues that membership could be worked out via Article 48, which allows member states to make amendments. Alex Salmond

argues that this could be achieved by March 2016, the projected date for Scottish independence.

Pro-unionists point out that Article 48 would require unanimous agreement from all member states, including countries such as Spain and Greece, which is concerned about the implications for Cyprus. But equally, the suggestion that Scotland, which has been a member of the European Union for 41 years via its membership of the United Kingdom, be treated the same as other pre-accession states like Moldova, and even Ukraine, appears absurd.

As former European Parliament president Pat Cox argued earlier this month in an article in the Scotsman, the EU has previously accommodated change that was “democratically mandated but not foreseen by the treaties”. The relatively seamless incorporation of East Germany into the Union for example shows that, when it comes to the complexity of European Union politics, where there’s a political will, there’s a way.

Nonetheless, the idea that Scotland would automatically accede is equally unfeasible. The new state would be unlikely to keep some of the specific concessions previously accorded to Britain such as the British rebate negotiated by Margaret Thatcher. The question of whether Scotland, along with Britain and Ireland, can remain outside the Schengen free travel area is also a matter of contention, as EU rules oblige all new member states to sign up to Schengen.

Similarly, the EU’s accession criteria include an obligation for acceding states to join the euro currency, though Britain and Denmark previously negotiated an opt-out clause that allows them to remain outside the euro area.

With Scotland’s future currency one of the key battlegrounds in the independence debate, there is a critical question of whether Scotland would retain access to the British opt-out on euro membership should it manage to retain sterling as the national currency.

What is certain, however, among the mountain of information surrounding the Scottish referendum, is that a Yes vote for Scottish independence would immediately spark an unprecedented flurry of EU legal wrangling.

With a possible British referendum on EU membership looming on the horizon, the implications for EU law are profound.

Canvass blitz through Dundee, ‘Yes capital’ of Scotland

Colm Keena, September 18th, 2014

Yes campaign claims 80 per cent support in parts of city

Housing schemes in Dundee canvassed by Yes activists are indicating levels of support of up to 80 per cent in favour of independence, according to the man heading the campaign in Scotland’s fourth largest city.

The numbers registered to vote in Dundee has risen by 7.7 per cent since the campaigners began encouraging people to take part in the poll; that’s almost twice the average for Scotland generally.

Mark Strachan, who gave up his job to work full-time on the campaign, says it is “extremely apt” that Dundee has been described as the Yes capital of Scotland. “The whole city is alive with Yes.”

In the city centre yesterday campaigners for a No vote were a rarity while Yes stalls were busy, colourful and loud. A sizeable minority of passersby were wearing Yes badges, hats or T-shirts, or carrying Scottish flags, and the Yes posters and flags on buildings and in shop and office windows far outnumbered those advocating staying with the Union.

The atmosphere was something akin to the afternoon build-up to a very important important fixture for a home football team. At 5pm a large, good-humoured, flag-waving Yes parade walked through the city centre.

Fay Hartgroves was up from the West Midlands to campaign for No. “I don’t have a vote myself but I feel passionately that we should stay together,” she said. “It is a massive, historical union and there is so much uncertainty with the Yes vote.”

She said her impression from canvassing was that those who were against independence felt intimidated about declaring their stance by the wearing of T-shirts and badges.

Dundee Labour councillor Richard McCready was out urging people to stay with the UK. “In the 21 century I’m not convinced that you can be independent. I think it’s a bit of a dead end,” he said.

Scotland should stay in the UK “out of a sense of solidarity”, he said. “I think it’s for the people of Dundee to decide if it’s the Yes capital or not. My experience on the doorsteps and on the street today is that that isn’t necessarily the case.”

Random approaches by this reporter to passersby found that a good many said they were going to vote No, an experience that an English reporter doing the same thing also noted.

Trevor Gordon said he would be voting No. “Nationalism can be a quite corrosive thing and I’ve seen quite a lot of animosity and fracture in society that wasn’t there before” the referendum.

Michelle Montague said she was going to vote No because she thought Scotland would get better housing, pensions and a better health service within the union. However, she thought that most people in Dundee would vote Yes. “People in Dundee are really very passionate about Scotland.”

Lorna King said she will be voting Yes because it would be better for Scotland to be independent. “It doesn’t mean we don’t like English people. It just means that we want to be separate.”

Glen Miller, wearing a Yes T-shirt, Yes badges and carrying a Scottish flag, said he would be voting for independence. “Ever since I was able to think, I thought Scotland should be an independent country.”

Also, he said, the UK “has been messed up for decades” and there would be a greater opportunity for social justice in a Scotland that was in charge of its own affairs.

John Morrison, also said he was voting Yes for reasons of “social justice”. Tory governments in London had imposed socially unjust policies on Scotland over the years, such as the poll tax and the bedroom tax.

He said he personally had managed to convince half a dozen people to change to a Yes vote by arguing that there would be greater social justice in an independent Scotland.

Mr Strachan said it is the politics of the London government that has caused the push for Scottish independence. London doesn’t look after the people of northern England or Scotland, he said.

“It is the London government that is causing this . . . If there was a centre-left government in London, we wouldn’t be having this conversation.”

Yesterday the Yes campaign was targeting newly registered voters, going to their homes and delivering personalised literature urging them to vote for independence.

Mr Strachan said he has tried to impress on young people the importance of what is about to happen. “I tell them they are voting to change the geography of the world.”

Scotland goes to the polls to decide on future of the UK

Mark Hennessy, September 18th, 2014

Salmond declares today 'most exciting in democracy'; Brown warns of 'economic trapdoor'

The future of the 307-year-old United Kingdom today lies in the hands of 4.2 million people in Scotland as they vote on the independence referendum after two years of campaigning.

In a final last-minute pitch for votes, Scottish first minister Alex Salmond last night declared that Scots are “on the eve of the most exciting day in Scottish democracy”.

“We do so to catch our breath for the day ahead – a day which Scotland will never forget. Tomorrow is the opportunity of a lifetime. A precious chance to leave our mark in the pages of history,” he told an audience in Perth.

Meanwhile, former Labour prime minister Gordon Brown, who has played a key role in the No campaign in the final weeks, urged voters “with any doubts” to vote No. “Let us tell those people who have still got doubts and are wavering, who are thinking of voting Yes yesterday but could be persuaded today, let us tell them about the real risks. This is not the fear of the unknown.

“This is now the risks of the known. An economic minefield where problems could implode at any time.

“An economic trapdoor down which we go, from which we might never escape,” he told a final rally in Glasgow.

More than 5,000 polling stations opened at 7am today to receive the first of the 4.2 million people living in Scotland who are entitled to vote.

Though it urged people to vote early, the electoral commission made clear that anyone who joins the voting queue before 10pm will be able to vote.

The first results from each local authority are expected in the early hours, with key places such as Glasgow expected at 5am tomorrow.

A final declaration is expected between 6am and 9am tomorrow, though matters will be delayed if there are demands for recounts.

Recounts are possible, since final polls yesterday all said it remains too close to call – though 10 per cent or so are still struggling with their decision.

Bookmakers expect No to win, laying No at 11/2 on and Yes at 19/5 – but, interestingly, the majority of the money laid in Scotland has gone on a Yes result.

Close attention will be paid to the turnout in Scotland’s poorest districts in Glasgow and elsewhere, which have been strongly targeted by the Yes Scotland campaign.

Last night, the organisation's chairman, former MP Dennis Canavan, said half of those who have previously supported Labour will vote Yes – a number that would guarantee victory.

Labour concedes some support has haemorrhaged, but insists the majority will reject the independence offer from Mr Salmond.

The Scottish Police Federation rejected fears of disorder if the referendum narrowly wins or loses. Heightened tensions were inevitable, it said, but dismissed the “exaggerated rhetoric” from some quarters in recent days.

Leading the call for calm, writer JK Rowling said “My head says no and my heart shouts it – but whatever happens, I hope we're all friends by Saturday.”

Last night US president Barack Obama tweeted his support for the No campaign: “The UK is an extraordinary partner for America and a force for good in an unstable world. I hope it remains strong, robust and united,” he wrote.

Taoiseach Enda Kenny told the Cabinet yesterday Government officials have been working on scenarios that would apply in the case of either a Yes or No vote in the referendum.

Scotland looks to a new life within the Union

Mark Hennessy, September 19th, 2014

ANALYSIS: Onus on Cameron to now deliver the new powers that Scotland has been promised

A photograph of Alex Salmond sitting in the back of an ordinary saloon car taken in the early hours as he headed for a flight from Aberdeen to Edinburgh told its own story.

Morose, Salmond knew even then that his dream of independence for Scotland - one that had burned brightly even into the final days of the campaign - was over.

By then, the post mortems had already begun, but the 307-year-old United Kingdom survives to live another day - even though it is clear that much, if not everything, must change.

Media baron, Rupert Murdoch had decided it, according to some quarters - but accidentally so, since The London Times' YouGov poll last Saturday week had terrified the No campaign finally into life.

The poll destroyed the Yes campaign's carefully-built image as the insurgent: "A week later, it would have been fine, because No would not have had time to fight back," said one campaigner.

Faced with imminent catastrophe, the poll figures instilled life into a No campaign that deserved, frankly, to lose - given its organisational weaknesses and internal divisions, fuelled by deep personal hatreds.

Even before dawn broke in Scotland, however, the focus of politicians had already begun to move onto the next horizon - the new powers that Scotland has been promised it will get.

Scotland's Deputy First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, exhausted, dark-eyed, said Scots had "emphatically" not given "an endorsement for the status quo".

"It is absolutely clear that there has been a real demand for change and that change has to be delivered now," she said, adding that Scots will now "have to move forward together".

The question now is how much of the pledge made by David Cameron, Ed Miliband and Nick Clegg - one largely orchestrated by Gordon Brown - can be delivered.

Despairing of the result, Yes campaigners believe that the promises will disappear like snow off a ditch in the face of a refusal by English Conservatives to concede more ground to Scotland.

Indeed, there is little doubt that Cameron - who would have faced questions about his own future if the result had gone the other way - may now quickly rue the offer.

It helped to get him over an immediate crisis, but he has promised to keep Treasury funding rules that benefit Scotland, but also concede it greater powers over taxation.

Many English Conservative MPs hate the idea, believing that England is already left out in the devolution regime that has brought benefits to Belfast, Cardiff and Edinburgh.

However, Scotland in 2014 is not the Scotland of 1979, when it failed to back an offer of an assembly with little powers in sufficient numbers, partly on the back of a promise of a better deal.

That better deal never emerged during the Thatcher era. Instead, it saw the destruction of its heavy industries, along with being used as a laboratory for a trial of the poll tax.

The same will happen now, say cynics, but Scots have a Westminster election next year, a Holyrood election the year after, plus, possibly, an EU referendum the year after where they will have leverage.

In the eyes of some, Salmond lost a referendum that he never believed he would fight, since the SNP majority at Holyrood needed to bring it about was never supposed to be a reality.

But it did become a reality. Salmond and the SNP must try to bury their gloom about the referendum result, and, instead, portray the SNP as the only party that can deliver the best deal for Scotland.

Scots are minded to accept the argument. The referendum campaign has driven a further wedge between Labour and part of its traditional base.

However, Salmond will hate every minute, particularly the taunting he will now have to endure at weekly First Minister's Questions in the Holyrood parliament.

But he has a role, too, in binding together a society that has endured deep clefs because of the referendum and where wounds could take a long time to heal in places.

Shortly after 6am today, he insisted that Scots would "go forward together" as "one Scotland", emphasising that all Scots will expect the pledges of extra powers to be honoured, in full.

"As we bring Scotland together, let's not dwell on the distance we have fallen short..but the distance we have travelled," he told an audience of party supporters in Edinburgh, but he stayed away from the national count centre in Ingliston, near the airport.

However, there will be attention later today and into the future in Salmond's remark that a majority of Scots had decided to reject independence "at this stage".

For now, it is far from clear that the majority of his fellow countrymen and women have the appetite for a repeat.

In Glasgow, the Yes campaign won by seven points - not enough to swing the result, but more than enough to threaten significant SNP gains from Labour in elections to come.

So whither Labour now? The party's organisational weaknesses have been badly exposed during the campaign, despite the revisionism that is now already underway.

Most Labour MSPs were invisible during the campaign, or so little known that profile made little impact with the public that approves of devolution, but has little respect for the parliament itself.

Meanwhile, the party's leader in Scotland, Johann Lamont has struggled to escape London's grip. She had wanted to go earlier this year on a devolution offer.

In London, Ed Miliband rejected her draft document, partly on the basis of opposition to it from Scottish Labour MPs who have never warmed to devolution.

Politicians quickly learn to fight the next election, not the last.

Even before the result was declared this morning the SNP had unveiled its latest campaign against Labour, dubbing them as "Red Tories".

Scotland vote may lessen likelihood of UK leaving EU

Suzanne Lynch, September 19th, 2014

ANALYSIS: Referendum opens up profound questions about EU policy on regionalism

The decision by the Scottish electorate to remain as part of the United Kingdom will be received with relief in Brussels and many European capitals.

The Pandora's Box of Scottish independence remains closed, but it has opened up serious legislative and political questions for the European Union.

The quiet panic that spread through metropolitan England during the last ten days of the campaign was also discernible in Brussels and the European Union as EU officials and member states confronted the very real possibility of Scottish secession.

On the eve of the referendum, Spanish prime minister Mariano Rajoy intervened directly in the debate, telling the Spanish parliament it would take Scotland eight years to renegotiate membership, and describing the independence movement as "enormously negative".

The spirit of the EU was "to integrate states, not break them up," he said, "integration, not division. We need strong countries and unions to face the global challenges worldwide."

French president Francois Hollande, in a scheduled news conference following a no-confidence vote in the government on Monday, said yesterday that the Scottish issue was decisive not only for Britain, but also for Europe. "After half a century of building Europe, we risk entering a period of deconstruction," he said.

Both leaders reflect fears of secessionism in their own countries.

Rajoy in particular is battling an increasingly serious nationalist movement in Catalonia, while in France, nationalist feeling in Corsica, the Basque Country and Brittany continues to fester.

According to EU officials, the strength of Spanish opposition to Scottish claims for membership is fierce. Spain, along with four EU member states, does not recognise Kosovo as an independent country, despite the region declaring its independence from Serbia.

The Scottish route to EU membership was likely to have taken one of two paths - an application for EU membership under Article 49 of the EU treaty which deals with the accession of would-be member states, or an application under Article 48 which allows existing members to amend the rules, effectively allowing Scotland to renegotiate membership from within.

Either route would need unanimity from all 28 member states, including Spain and Britain.

This morning, the EU has narrowly avoided confronting this hugely complex legal quagmire.

But the Scottish referendum nonetheless opens up profound questions about the EU's policy on regionalism. The notion that Scotland would have been treated like any other pre-

accession state such as Albania or Moldova was highly questionable, considering Scotland has been a member of the European Union for more than 40 years through its relationship with the United Kingdom. The question of if and how the EU - a union of member states - can accommodate regional identities is one that will preoccupy academics and lawyers in the coming years.

Ironically, however, the Scottish independence debate may have given a boost to the European Union at a time when public trust in EU has been ebbing, as evidenced in May's European elections.

As Fiona Hill and James Shapiro have recently argued in an essay for Foreign Affairs, in many ways the Scottish independence movement would not have been possible without the EU. As countries like Ireland and Denmark know too well, membership of the EU gives small states a viability they might lack on their own. Scotland's position in the European Union poured cold water on the argument that Scotland was too small to go it alone.

As the British political establishment comes to terms today with the commitment towards further federalism and devolution for Scotland, another focus will be the possible British referendum on EU membership which is scheduled to take place within the next three years.

Ironically, Scotland's position in the EU may have been more secure if they'd voted for independence, given the Conservative Party's commitment to hold a referendum on EU membership in the next three years.

However, in terms of numbers, the defeat of the 'yes' vote makes it more likely that Britain will stay within the Union, given the higher proportion of pro-Europeans in Scotland. While some commentators have predicted a surge in English nationalism following the independence debate which could galvanise euro-scepticism, the experience of the Scottish referendum is likely to make a 'Brexit' less likely. The complacency which characterised the British government's response to the Scottish referendum over the last year is unlikely to be repeated in the event of an EU referendum.

On everything from the substance of the ballot question, to the negotiations with Brussels over the next two years as London seeks to renegotiate its relationship with the European Union, Britain may have just woken up.

Scottish ‘No’ does not mean as you were for Ireland

Mary Minihan, September 19th, 2014

Flanagan to observe developments as talks proceed on enhanced devolution for Scotland

So, from official Ireland’s perspective, the United Kingdom appears “the same only different” today.

Uncertainty over the extent of the additional devolved powers promised to the Scots means the No vote does not quite represent an “as you were” result, however, because the status quo will not be preserved.

Taoiseach Enda Kenny has confirmed this morning that Irish attention will now turn to the changes likely to take place following the referendum, “particularly in terms of devolution of powers”.

Minister for Foreign Affairs Charlie Flanagan this morning described as “electrifying” the campaign which took the British establishment by surprise.

He pledged to remain in close contact with London, Edinburgh and other administrative centres as discussions proceed on enhanced devolution for Scotland “and on the political changes across the UK” as outlined by British prime minister David Cameron.

Ireland’s neutrality extended to declining to engage publicly with one of the western world’s greatest talking points, as the Government remained mute on its preferred outcome in the Scottish independence referendum.

The Irish establishment’s silence should not have been mistaken for indifference, however, and behind the scenes Iveagh House officials were busy teasing out the potential implications for this State of both a Yes and No vote on the neighbouring island.

This analysis was presented to Cabinet this week, with the possible impact on Ireland’s low corporation tax rate and the constitutional position of Northern Ireland the key themes.

Officials advised Government Ministers they could remain confident about the attractiveness of Ireland’s corporate tax offering even if Scotland was allowed to implement changes in that area.

Ireland’s location and the skills of its workforce were emphasised in the synopsis of material prepared, although how this differed from what Scotland has to offer was not made clear.

There was an attempt to put a positive gloss on the economic fallout for Ireland of fresh devolved powers for Scotland, with a claim that this could be mutually advantageous when it came to trading opportunities.

As Mr Flanagan put it under questioning on Morning Ireland today: “I think these threats can be seen also as opportunities.”

But Mr Flanagan also flagged what he described as “the next big national debate in the UK”, prompted by Mr Cameron’s promise to hold a referendum on European Union membership in 2017 if he secures re-election next year.

If the so-called “Brexit option” is taken, Irish officials fear it could introduce profound uncertainty into Anglo-Irish relations.

Early joy turns to crushing defeat as reality dawns

Colm Keena, September 20th, 2014

Yes supporters in Dundee had been so buoyed up that their loss was hard to take in

Dundee was the first of Scotland's 32 count centres to announce a win for those wanting Scottish independence and the outcome was greeted with loud cheers in the hall of the Dundee International Sports Centre.

It was just before 4am and the result was the sixth to be announced in the historic poll. Turnout was 78.8 per cent and 53,620 votes, or 57.3 per cent of those cast, were in favour of a break with the union.

"Yes! Yes! Yes!" chanted the pro-independence activists gathered in the hall. But the fact was that since the first result had come in, at just after 1.30am, from tiny Clackmannanshire, a kind of gloom had settled over the activists who had been so ebullient all through Thursday.

The Dundee win was clearcut, but it wasn't as big as campaigners in the city dubbed the Yes Capital of Scotland had been hoping for. Labour MP for Dundee West Jim McGovern told *The Irish Times* just after the city's result was announced, that even "the separatists" would concede that the margin wasn't good enough.

"They needed 65 per cent to 35 per cent to achieve their aspirations for separation throughout Scotland, and they haven't achieved that. Their aspirations are dashed."

Early on Thursday Scottish National Party MP for Dundee East Stewart Hosie had given an interview to this newspaper in the Yes Dundee headquarters and his sense of excitement and anticipation was palpable. After the result, speaking to journalists at the centre, he appeared exhausted, and tetchy.

Asked if he accepted that the result was not what he had been hoping for, he said it was a "resounding success" in the face of an onslaught from the entire British establishment. The Yes supporters in Dundee had been so buoyed up that their defeat in the referendum was hard to take in.

In the city centre yesterday morning, chartered surveyor John Dixon made no effort to hide his upset. "It's like someone has died and you'll never see them again," he said.

"I don't think I'll see [an opportunity for Scottish independence] again in my lifetime. It just seems a bit ridiculous. I feel I'm not even interested in the Scottish football team, or the rugby team, any more. Because what's the point in saying, 'Oh rise and be a nation once again, oh flower of Scotland'? It's just an utter joke."

A man stormed out of a small newsagent's on Reform Street after he mistakenly took the shopkeeper to have said he had supported the No campaign. Throwing his unpurchased newspapers back on to the shelves, he said every No was "a betrayal of Scotland".

Up the street he agreed to talk but would not give his name. "At my age it was probably my last chance to be part of an independent country, and I am very disappointed."

He complained bitterly that 400,000 English people resident in Scotland had been able to vote, while 800,000 Scottish people resident in England, had not been able to. "I think it was a lack of backbone," he said of the result.

In Perth, some 20 miles from Dundee, it was easier to find people who were happy with the outcome. The electorate in Perth and Kinross voted 60/40 in favour of retention of the union.

"Jubilant" was the word used by one woman asked about her feelings. She didn't want to give her name. "If you want my honest opinion I, personally, am disappointed that we are going to get more devolved powers."

She felt that there had already been cutbacks in health, and that more cutbacks in essential services were likely as power shifted to Edinburgh.

Asked if she did not feel an emotional tug towards the notion of independence, she said she used to when she was much younger. "I think that's a young person's thing."

Events manager Elaine Bannerman was also happy with the result. "I am not really interested in Scotland being independent. I don't really think we could sustain our economy ourselves."

Amy Fenton, out for a walk with her mother Leslie, had voted No because she was "quite happy with Westminster" and didn't really like the Scottish National Party leadership. Leslie didn't want to say how she'd voted, but believed that the Yes camp had received so many votes that the London government would now have to do something about more devolution.

Miquel Gonzales, from Catalonia, who has been working as a cleaner and hotel worker in Scotland for the past two years, voted Yes. "Scotland needs to govern itself," he said with patchy English. Scotland was more than 18 years old, and when you are more than 18 years old, he said, you leave your parents' home. "It is hard, you have to pay your bills, but it is better to be independent."

A pot half full – SNP looks to gains that can still be made

Mark Hennessy, September 20th, 2014

Poll post mortems cast around for culprits

David Cameron failed to look at the wall the day he signed the Edinburgh Agreement with Alex Salmond in October 2012. It set out the rules for the Scottish independence referendum.

On it, there was a map showing where dominance lay in Scottish politics – the largest swathes of it filled in the yellow colours of Salmond’s Scottish National Party. Today, Cameron will prefer another map: the one showing Scotland’s 32 local authorities and how they decided on Thursday’s referendum – with just four going Salmond’s way.

So far, the SNP, the dominant element in the Yes Scotland campaign that included a disparate group of “others”, has maintained internal unity – as it has done for nearly all of a two-year battle. Remembering that politics is always about the future, not the past, the SNP is concentrating on the gains made and throwing its eyes ahead to gains that can now be made.

Minus the leadership of Alex Salmond, the SNP is transmogrifying into the party that will be the best to secure the best home rule deal for Scotland – or benefit most if the offer falls short.

The analysis of the campaign started even before the ink dried on the final declaration: what changed? Was it the dire warnings from the No side? Or something else? Rupert Murdoch’s name emerged quickly, not least because of the impact of polls for two of his titles that showed, first, that the gap had fallen to three points, and then that No had gone ahead by one.

The polls electrified the poorly performing, disunited No camp, propelling former Labour prime minister Gordon Brown to the centre stage. The poll destroyed the Yes campaign’s carefully crafted image as the insurgent: “A week later, it would have been fine, because No would not have had time to fight back,” said one campaigner.

Today, Brown will for many hold the mantle “as the man who saved the union”; but, in reality, he must share blame for not being prepared to co-operate on a common front much, much earlier.

Most importantly, however, the polls brought to life those who wanted the union to continue, but who were not prepared to fight for it, or did not think that it was so threatened that they had to vote.

The Yes campaign made mistakes too, however: the loud protests outside BBC Glasgow’s headquarters turned off some; Salmond’s talk that there were no No voters, just “deferred yeses” was presumptuous.

Meanwhile, there was former SNP deputy leader Jim Sillars’s warning that No-supporting businesses would face “a day of reckoning” after independence. Even if he could no more influence SNP policy than Tony Benn did in Labour during the Tony Blair years, Sillars’s word rattled windows in comfortable middle-class Scotland.

Following an often bitter campaign, the referendum marked an extraordinary engagement by the Scottish public, so much so that a 75 per cent turnout in Glasgow was regarded as a disappointment.

However, Glasgow's figures were exactly that: the Yes campaign needed a tsunami of support from the city's poorest districts and had invested much to bring it about. In the end, it got a flood, but not a tsunami.

The belief that a high poll would favour Yes was turned on its head because the existential threat faced by the union forced No-leaning bystanders to come off the fence.

Nevertheless, the numbers in Scotland's biggest city hold dire warnings there for Labour – which has been damaged catastrophically by its temporary association with the Conservatives.

The opening salvos of that were visible in the city yesterday, with rosette-wearing Labour supporters attracting irritated glances from passersby, not just from those long committed to Yes.

The divisions caused in communities and families across Scottish society by the referendum – and they have been many and deep – will take time to heal.

Illustrating the feelings shared by some, Rev Stuart Campbell, who runs the Wings Over Scotland website, tweeted in the early hours: “We gave it a shot, folks. Our countrymen and women bottled it and failed us all.”

Shortly after 6am, Salmond pointedly emphasised the 1.6 million who had voted for independence, rather than the 2.1 million that had voted against, saying that Scots “at this stage” had said No. His phraseology raised eyebrows, as he had insisted at the tail-end of the campaign that it would settle matters for a generation, though he muddied the waters quickly afterwards.

Minutes later, Cameron was clear: “The debate has been settled for a generation or, as Alex Salmond, has said, perhaps for a lifetime. So there can be no disputes, no re-runs – we have heard the settled will of the Scottish people.”

For now, Cameron is more in tune with Scottish opinion, exhausted as it is by constitutional arguments since 2012, though the appetite will return if more home rule proves a mirage, or weaker than promised, or if a UK exit from the European Union looms.

For now, the focus will turn to the question of more powers for Scotland and all of the complications that that will bring for Cameron. Within minutes, the SNP subtly changed the emphasis of its story of the campaign.

No longer had Scots been terrified most into voting No by an avalanche of business-led threats. Instead, they had voted on the back of promises to offer Scotland more powers over tax, welfare and guarantees of continued treasury funding, and that they should get them by next May.

Here, the SNP already has much fuel to sustain itself, given the differing emphasis and outright opposition to the plans that are already evident south of the border.

The referendum's aftermath is filled with rhetoric that Scottish public life has changed forever; that a populace that in part had disconnected from politics is no longer so.

Perhaps so, but the reality could be different: "The poor were told that they could change the world by voting Yes. Now they find that it hasn't," says Peter Lynch of the University of Stirling.

Despite defeat Salmond deserves credit on campaign

Diarmaid Ferriter, September 20th, 2014

Scottish nationalists performed better than most had predicted until recently

While the proponents of Scottish independence could not persuade enough Scots to take a leap of faith into the unknown, the outgoing SNP leader deserves credit for his leadership of an independence campaign that generated engagement from so many quarters.

Until relatively recently, Alex Salmond's declarations about Scottish independence were caustically dismissed, including in 2008 by the Scotland office minister David Cairns, who described as "complete balderdash" Salmond's claim at a speech in Dublin that year that the Scots wanted independence. The Tories accused Salmond after the same speech of "arrogance that knows no national boundaries".

That last put-down was a play on Salmond's invoking of the words of 19th century Irish home rule leader Charles Stewart Parnell. Salmond, perhaps inevitably given that he was in Dublin, cited words from Parnell's famous speech delivered in Cork in January 1885, from which the most quoted line is "no man has the right to fix the boundary to the march of a nation".

It is worth looking more closely, however, at what followed that line in Parnell's speech: "No man has a right to say to his country: 'Thus far shalt thou go, and no further'; and we have never attempted to fix the ne plus ultra [ultimate point] to the progress of Ireland's nationhood, and we never shall. But gentlemen, while we leave those things to time, circumstances and the future, we must each one of us resolve in our own hearts that we shall at all times do everything which within us lies to obtain for Ireland the fullest measure of her rights.

"In this way we shall avoid difficulties and contentions amongst each other. In this way we shall not give up anything which the future may put in favour of our country, and while we struggle today for that which may seem possible for us with our combination, we must struggle for it with the proud consciousness, and that we shall not do anything to hinder or prevent better men who may come after us from gaining better things than those for which we now contend."

It is hardly surprising Salmond picked out the Parnell phrase that seems to lend itself gloriously to the framing of timeless nationalist aspirations. As historians have recognised, however, while Parnell's words may have appeared admirably idealistic, they were also deliberately vague to fit the politics of his time and the balancing act he was engaged in; "the march of a nation" was not defined, nor was "fullest measure of her rights", or "better things than those for which we now contend".

Parnell, however, was seeking home rule in the late 19th century, not the full independence in the 21st century Salmond had sought, and, most importantly, the Scots on Thursday had the right to fix the boundary of their nation. But the nationalists also performed better than most predicted up to very recently because they did a good job in modernising the debate and defining the possibilities.

The debate was tailored to move beyond the confines of a parliamentary elite and did not rest on the idea that, in Parnell's words, "better men" would finish what contemporary nationalists had started. In that sense, Gordon Brown's contention that the independence proposed by Scottish nationalists "is a 19th century answer to a 21st century problem" was inaccurate.

The nationalists' campaign generally eschewed the sort of rhetoric and ambiguities associated with Parnellism, and references to "a nation again" were avoided in favour of Salmond's declaration that "we don't need to be a nation once again".

The debate, while heated, passionate and occasionally aggressive towards its end, was a largely civil and civic one that extended beyond narrow definitions of independence to encompass a focus on social justice and the nature of British and Scottish society and identity, and raised legitimate questions about the long-term viability of the United Kingdom and the quality and fairness of its governance. The debate also nobly involved young people, with a reduction of the voting age from 18 to 16.

Although the context is radically different, the SNP after Salmond faces a similar dilemma to that faced by Parnell and his party after the defeat of the first Irish Home Rule Bill in 1886: how to keep the momentum going after defeat? How will Scottish nationalist claims evolve now and what do "time, circumstances and the future", to quote Parnell, hold?

The talk of the advocates of a compromise, advanced Scottish home rule, is that of "interdependence" and "partnership". But how can such terms be defined to the satisfaction of those in all parts of the UK, and will their definition be further complicated if there is a British referendum on European Union membership in 2017?

It might be contended that with the concession of "devo max", Salmond had achieved a victory, but an ill-defined home rule solution, as demonstrated by Irish history, is not going to provide a neat solution to a complex problem for either Scottish nationalists or unionists.

Scotland stirred and UK shaken

Editorial, September 20th, 2014

It had been coming for some time throughout the course of the campaign. Speculated about, leaked, openly declared, even ridiculed. But the formal announcement by the Tories, Labour, and the LibDems, last weekend of a solemn pledge substantially to enhance the powers of the Scottish devolved assembly and government in the event of a No was a tipping point. It was prompted by a poll which suggested for the first time that the slow surge of the Yes campaign had just produced a lead for the first time, lifting spirits on the one hand, injecting a note of desperation on the other. And desperate times require desperate measures.

The pledge, however, transformed the nature of the question being asked – no longer “independence or Westminster rule”, the question was now “independence or home rule” or, as many would see it, “how would you like your independence? Full-blooded or light?” “With risk, or without” “With all the trappings and dangers of statehood, out in the cold, alone, or in the warm, safe embrace of the Union”.

In this age of globalisation and interdependence, when states share their sovereignty willingly with organisations like the EU, ECB, Nato, the UN ... is there anyway, in reality, any such thing as pure independence? Only degrees of independence.

The question was transmogrified into that third option the SNP leader Alex Salmond wanted on the ballot but was denied by Prime Minister David Cameron, a choice of so-called “devomax”.

In the circumstances what was remarkable, along with the wonderful 84 per cent turnout and the debate and sense of civic empowerment that touched every corner of Scotland, was how many still opted for the full-blooded version. One and a half million voices-plus to which Westminster should pay close attention, voices which will not be easily placated when backsliding on the promises emerges or the promised rapid time span for change begins to slip. The political legitimacy of Scotland’s institutions depends on it.

Scotland’s Yes voters, however, must not view the vote as a defeat. It is certainly no more disastrous for Scotland than the disasters being conjured up by the No campaign as the “inevitable” consequence of a Yes vote. Far from it. In truth Alex Salmond has leveraged out of the demand for independence a new political dispensation which will allow Scots substantially more power than ever before to shape their own fate and determine the nature of the politics that governs their country.

That radically enhanced devolution was not on offer from a complacent London at the beginning of the campaign. It was wrung from them by a brilliant campaign and its leader Salmond who deserves enormous credit. And he deserves enormous credit, though unlikely to get it, from the people of the rest of the UK whose own centralised political culture and institutions have at last been shaken from top to bottom by Scotland’s peaceful revolution.

Scotland votes No, England gets the revolution

Patrick Smyth, September 21st, 2014

Opinion: Cameron, deeply concerned by likely English backlash, promises fast reforms

In promising a new way of doing politics in the United Kingdom, David Cameron early yesterday morning pitched his response to the Scottish vote primarily at one audience, the English. Yes, he congratulated the Scottish unionists, and promised a rapid negotiation of new powers for Edinburgh.

But the meat and novelty of his speech was in his reaching out to England's voters. The reforms that Scotland's Yes campaign have won – let there be no doubt, they were not on offer before the campaign – will have to be mirrored in democratic change in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, he promised . . . but particularly England.

The No vote may have saved the prime minister's skin politically, but the Tory English back benches are in uproar over the last-minute concessions he has promised the Scots. Both the enhanced powers and the promise of maintaining the generous terms of the Scottish financial settlement have added fuel to the raging fire fuelled by Ukip over Europe – the issues of Scotland and the UK's future in the EU are intimately intertwined. Cameron's Yes victory by no means gets him out of the woods.

And such is his concern at an English backlash that the prime minister promised twice in his short speech that English reform must take place “in tandem with, and at the same pace as” the settlement for Scotland.

That is no mean challenge, given that the Scots have been promised legislation by the spring, and it also raises the prospect of the issues becoming fodder in next year's general election campaign – Ukip will revel in Tory and Labour embarrassment over the nature of the concessions to the Scots and Labour's reluctance to give up its Scottish MPs' voting rights.

Scotland's vote. England's revolution. In truth, though the Scots will gain significant new powers to add to those Edinburgh already enjoys, it is south of the border that the real political earthquake will happen, potentially the most profound and qualitative changes to the constitutional order since Ireland broke from the union.

Cameron yesterday was not specific about how he proposes to address the “West Lothian question” – the blatant unfairness of Scottish MPs voting on legislation affecting only England, made yet more unfair by the new proposed devolution of powers, while English MPs are denied that right on Scottish legislation. But any way he does address it will mean radical changes in the way the UK organises politics.

If the reform is confined to Westminster, will it mean two types of votes, and for governments, particularly Labour ones, the possibility of being both in a majority and a minority on key questions? Or will it perhaps mean an English chamber within the Commons?

Or does it mean the creation of devolved assemblies in the regions with powers to match one or other of the different devolution regimes in Edinburgh, Cardiff or Belfast? In other words,

moving towards that taboo notion of British politics, a federal UK? It's worth noting in passing that in Cameron's carefully drafted speech all he suggests for Northern Ireland is getting the present arrangements to work, while in Wales merely implementing a few changes already in the pipeline. The North's parties will hardly be satisfied with such a minimalist position.

Meanwhile, with the Scottish vote out of the way, UK politics can now resume its European war of words, with the mainstream parties also perhaps doing well to learn the lessons of a campaign not unlike that in prospect in an EU referendum, in a sense a dress rehearsal.

We are likely again to see – particularly if the Tories are re-elected and Cameron, as seems likely, endorses a renegotiated settlement for Britain with the backing of Labour and the Liberals – the Westminster establishment parties pitched up against an outsider alliance led next time by Ukip, backbenchers from those same parties, and a motley collection of left and nationalist groups.

As Irish voters will recall from the first Lisbon and Nice referendums, such a match may initially look an easy win for the establishment. And in agreeing to a referendum, London politicians clearly thought the same of Scotland.

But such campaigns can be deflected by a strong prevailing anti-politics sentiment and emotional messages about sovereignty that are countered only ineffectively by complex, largely negative, unsexy arguments – however true – about interdependence and the benefits of working together. Oh, and warnings of dangerous economic consequences.

In Ireland such arguments prevailed only the second time. Twice. In Scotland they won out. But just. In an EU referendum, only one thing is certain, it will be a bloody and difficult campaign.