

Labour isn't just failing Scotland with its deni...

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I am an instinctive nationalist. I strongly suspect that my Irish roots have much to do with this. I have known where my instincts on that issue have lain since I was a teenager, albeit (and I stress this) always on the side of peace as well.

I am convinced that if there are clear cultural reasons why a majority of people within a domain self-identify as a nation then it is appropriate that they be recognised as such. Hence my support for Scottish nationalism, and some other causes as well, come to that.

The same instinct also very strongly supports my belief that those in a minority in any domain who share a culture must also have their rights respected, and be allowed to live in peace and without harassment within that community, with respect being given for the value that their differences in perspective add to that community.

I do not, then, see nationalism as being exclusive, jingoistic or in any sense racist, although there are undoubtedly some nationalists who do. If, as I think, nationalism is about collective determination within very clear environments of mutually respected difference, it is about everything but the oppressiveness of racism. It is instead about mutual self-determination. That would be my hope for Scotland as it moves towards independence, as it is surely doing.

But if that is what I now see to be Scotland's near certain, and imminent, future, that leaves the most almighty questions hanging over what I will appropriately call English politics. I do so because I know Wales and Northern Ireland to be very different places from England that might also seek their own independence in due course. For those who have bothered to visit them (and the vast majority of the English have, I suspect, never visited any one of the three other countries within the Union) the differences in culture will be readily apparent. I can then, rightly, talk about the issue for English politics.

The existential crisis that the seemingly inevitable departure of Scotland from the Union will create is, it would seem, something that all the major English parties (I refer to

Conservatives, Labour and LibDems, but not the Greens who already have a quite separate Scottish party) have failed to address, having said which I will henceforth ignore the LibDems as a seemingly spent force, and focus solely on the other two.

The Tories are a Unionist party, albeit one that only really emerged under its own name as a Scottish political party from the 1950s onwards. But, as was the case in Ireland, the forfeiture of territory within the domain that they think their own is deeply personal in the case of the Conservatives. That is because I have no doubt that the Tory view of the Union is legal, almost entirely about the ownership of assets, which is an issue that can be very largely related to the title to land, and is almost feudal in outlook, based on a respect for ancient regimes of hierarchy that have no place at all in modern society. Political nuance, in the form of self-determination does not, in that case, feature in their view on this issue. This is, quite literally, about the maintenance of the fiefdom by a power elite. And that is a view that has transferred into some English thinking in which Scotland is simply seen as one of the old enemies that must be continually reminded of its place in the world. Political dialogues, [like GERS](#), simply reinforce this view, suggesting that the down-beaten populace of the territory should be eternally grateful for the support that they receive, and not be troublesome in response. This was, after all, a Tory creation with the entire purpose of delivering that message.

There is no point spending a great deal of time engaging with this view: it is embedded; profoundly patronising; illogical; disrespectful of people and their opinions and never likely to change. It is the Conservative view, north and south of the border, and most especially it seems in the Border region.

But there is a twist to this. We do not actually have a Conservative government at present. The last Conservatives were expelled by Johnson from his party in the summer of 2019. What remains is a party with a quite different political philosophy that is far removed from that of the Conservatives. Indeed, it can be best summarised by the single word 'destruction'. Its logic is that old edifices must be destroyed in pursuit of a new rentier capitalism, which also alienates old money. It is very likely that neither Johnson or Cummings will last long. It is also entirely possible that their philosophy will fail, and in the not too distant future as the debacle of Brexit becomes all too apparent. But that will not prevent their philosophy from having a legacy. And that legacy may well be best seen in Scotland becoming independent as a people unite in rejecting the entire ethos of English exceptionalism that will reach its apotheosis in the arrogance of Johnson and Cummings, and deliver the nadir of English influence all at the same time.

It is doubtful that the Tories can avoid this outcome. It is also doubtful that Scotland will now re-embrace a Union now so very clearly contrary to its ethos and best interests. The game of separation just needs to be played out. With it the end of an era of Tory rule might follow, its influence having been subject to a policy of self-destruction, which is all that Cummings and Johnson can now deliver. The Tories might, just, get away with Brexit, but letting the country be torn apart? I doubt their supporters will forgive that.

But where does that leave Labour?

First, and it must be said, between a rock and a hard place in Scotland. Labour's day was over in Scotland before the Tories reached that point. For more than 50 years Labour dominated the Scottish political landscape, but that ended in 2015, and only the wildest optimist thinks that there is any chance of that changing any time soon in Scotland, most especially with the hopelessly incompetent Richard Leonard in charge. And, almost half of the remaining Labour supporters in Scotland support independence anyway: Labour cannot convince its own supporters in Scotland of the merit of its Unionist cause. Why the party in England remains so wedded to the Union is, in that case, hard to explain, barring all the usual old tribalist instincts that still dominate so much Labour politics.

The consequence is, however, dire for it. If any issue is likely to give Labour a majority in 2024 it is not Brexit, or Covid-19, but the end of the Union. And yet Labour has never given any hint, as far as I can recall, as to how it might deal with the now entirely foreseeable situation of having to manage the remainder of the UK when it will literally be a country without a name, an identity, a flag, its nuclear submarine bases, its hope of being net-zero carbon compliant and so much more besides.

Even more important, whilst Scotland securing independence will release the most massive energy within Scotland that will drive it forward in the necessary process of transition, almost every element of English pride will be crushed by Scotland's departure and it can be expected that the usual, and in this case likely to be prolonged, stages of grieving will be gone through as a result. The hurt to national pride - and there is no point pretending that the sense of rejection will not be real, and give rise to a real sense of questioning of purpose - will be intense.

This might, of course, be a good thing. England, most especially, needs to realise just where it is on the world right now. That the answer will be that it is an isolated island off north-west Europe of little remaining strategic or economic consequence might be hard to accept for a country that still thinks itself a world power, long after anyone else really does. But that does not mean that adjustment without prior preparation will be easy, and of all the parties likely to have to manage that transition Labour is at present the most likely.

That need might arise soon: Labour will be in all senses a victim of circumstances on this issue. And yet it shows no signs of any form of preparedness for the biggest existential crisis in English politics for maybe 400 years. I find that quite shocking, and even deeply irresponsible, most especially as it is now apparent that this is an issue that will not be going away.

There is much that Labour needs to do if it is to have a chance of governing. Knowing how it will manage this situation is very high on that list. It had better begin to get its act together. If it's fair to say that the English Liberals under Lloyd George were never

forgiven for signing the Treaty with Ireland in 1921, and never governed again, it's also possible to think that the same fate might befall the Tories if, as I think likely, Scotland will resolve to leave before late 2024. But Labour without any real plan for government thereafter might not fill the vacuum left in UK politics at that point unless its thinking begins now. I just hope someone is doing it in that case. Or else we really do need to be thinking about alternatives, rather urgently.