

King Charles the Last of the United Kingdom?

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The King begins a tour of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland today, accompanied by Liz Truss, whatever the reason given by Number 10 for her happening to be visiting the exact same places and locations within them as him this week.

Why is this of such importance to the new King? I would venture to suggest that he is as aware as anyone of the weakness of the hold of the monarchy on the affections of people now that the Queen has died. After a few days where almost no questions were asked about the virtues of monarchy, the media is now beginning to note that questions as to its continuing relevance are being asked in at least some of the fourteen places that recognise the Crown as head of state (excluding from that number the overseas territories and Crown Dependencies).

Whatever the official representations, the Crown would, I am sure, wish to hang on to as many of these as possible: the remaining impression of empire matters enormously to the monarchy.

The biggest threat to this comes, however, not from the Caribbean, as is being projected by the media, although the threat from there is real. Instead, it comes from the people of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland already has a Catholic majority and a Sinn Fein first minister if only the Unionists let Stormont sit. The UK government has cast it adrift under the terms of the Brexit Agreement, and that semi-detached status will not change now, whatever the Tories might say. The departure of Northern Ireland from the Union now seems like a matter of when, and not if.

In Scotland, I strongly suspect the death of the Queen will make support for the independence movement easier for some, and it already hovers at around half the population.

The situation is different in Wales: only around 30% are keen on independence there. It certainly won't be leaving the Union as soon as the other two, but given the contempt

for it continually emanating from Westminster, it is only a matter of time.

So, of course, the King wishes to do a tour of these locations in his first week on the Throne. The greatest threat to his status as King of the United Kingdom comes from the collapse of the federation of countries he claims to govern, which looks increasingly politically likely.

And no wonder in that case that Truss is keen to coat-tail him. She is a Unionist (for as long as it is convenient to her). Of course, she will want to make sure he says the right things, in the right way. For all the claims that the Tories make that the devolved nations are a burden on England, London is desperate to keep them, firstly likely proving the claims as to dependency at least in part wrong, and second suggesting the old spirit of empire remains very strong in Westminster.

The reality is that King Charles III could easily be King Charles the Last of the United Kingdom. He is on tour this week, trying to keep the job he has just got. He may be too late to do so. The changes are in progress, and I suspect inevitable now.