ACTION, NOT APATHY: THE REACTION OF THE NON-PARTY YES SIDE TO THE RESULT OF THE SCOTTISH INDEPENDENCE REFERENDUM

SEAN SWAN

Lecturer: Gonzaga University: Department of Political Science

The great truth of contemporary Scottish politics is the increasing support for the SNP in Scottish Parliament elections, from 27% in 1999, to 45% in 2011, while the party’s vote in UK general elections has oscillated between 17.7 (2010) and 21.1 (2001). The road to the Scottish independence referendum began when the Scots gave the SNP a majority in the 2011 Scottish Parliament elections. The SNP manifesto included the promise to hold an independence referendum:

We think the people of Scotland should decide our nation’s future in a democratic referendum and opinion polls suggest that most Scots agree. We will, therefore, bring forward our Referendum Bill in this next Parliament.

A Yes vote will mean Scotland becomes an independent nation (Scottish National Party manifesto 2011, p. 28)

After much toing and froing between London and Edinburgh, it was eventually agreed that a referendum on the question ‘Should Scotland be an independent country?’ with a two option Yes or No answer, would be held on 18 September 2014. The official Yes side comprised of the SNP, the Scottish Green Party and the Scottish Socialist Party. Outside of this were other pro-independence groups such as the Radical Independence Group, National Collective and online
media such as Wings Over Scotland, Bella Caledonia and Newsnet Scotland. The No side – ‘Better Together’ – comprised of the Conservatives, Labour, the Lib Dems and de facto most of the mainstream media.

When the 18th September 2014 finally arrived, only 44.7% of Scots voted Yes. The referendum had been lost.

Vernon Bogdanor once observed that a Yes vote in a Scottish independence referendum would really mark the first, not last, step in separation. (Bogdanor, p. 96) But it now seems that Bogdanor could be paraphrased to read that a No vote would mark the first, not last, step in separation. Anybody expecting that the drive to independence would die with the referendum defeat was to be mistaken. Scottish independence is a process, not an event. The referendum of 18 September 2014 was a defeat for the movement towards independence only in a superficial and momentary sense. Scotland’s SNP First Minister, Alex Salmond, resigned the day after the Referendum, and this resignation can be seen as archetypal of the Yes side’s reaction to the referendum. It was not so much an acknowledgement of defeat as a tactical repositioning in order to carry on the campaign for independence on a new front – Westminster.

**Reaction**

Kevin McKenna, writing in the *Guardian* on 7 March, highlights the extent to which the Yes side have ceased to trust the traditional media and have instead turned to alternative media, such as *Wings Over Scotland*. The initial response by the non-party Yes side to the referendum
defeat can be tracked through the 2465 comments of contributors to the final Wings Over Scotland article published on the day of the referendum (‘Us, now, or never’)

As early as 7.31 am the morning after the vote, an increasingly consistent reaction began to emerge amongst commentators. Cuilean at 7.31 am argued for taking ‘the fight right to the heart of the Beast’. S/he advocated an alliance between the various Yes parties for the 2015 General Election with the intention of getting 51 Yes MP’s elected. ‘then in a hung UK parliament Scotland could have them by the short & curlies’. Another poster, bunter, argued along the same lines that Yes supporters should “energise” themselves again in time for the 2015 general election. “Let them not think we have gone away or forgotten”. (8:47 am). Cadogan Enright’s advice was “Join the SNP, the Greens, the smaller left wing groups, continue to push for change” (8:59 am).

Conan_the_Librarian defined the ‘next target’ as being ‘Thirty plus SNP MPs in 2015’ (9:01 am). For “Footsoldier “ the best hope was for the SNP to try “oust Westminster Labour MP’s” in the general election “and if it is a hung parliament at Westminster, we may be able to extract some goodies for Scotland if we were to hold the balance of power”. ( 9:45 am).

This was not the totality of the Yes side’s reaction to the referendum result. There were calls for people to stop paying the BBC licence fee, based on a perception that the BBC had been biased in its coverage of the Referendum campaign (‘Enough is enough’, Wings Over Scotland, 20 September) and for the creation of a pro-independence newspaper (which became a reality with the launch of The National on 24 November 2014). However the political strategy of the Yes side had emerged in more or less final form by 10 am on 19 September. In essence the new mobilization would be party political. Independence supports would join pro-independence
parties such as the SNP and the Greens. The aim would be to win the bulk of Scottish Westminster seats and hopefully hold the balance of power in a hung parliament. This was the strategy, spontaneous and hive minded as it was, which began to be immediately implemented. The foot soldiers of the Yes campaign were planning to transform themselves into party politicians. The call made by Cadogan Enright at 8:59 am on 19 September to join the SNP, the Greens and other left wing groups, long preempted Yes Scotland’s final message to its supporters on 19 December calling on them to join these same parties. (‘Yes Scotland signs off with message to supporters’, The Scotsman, 19 December 2014). The entirety of what has become the post-referendum strategy of independence supports was laid out in a comment on that same article on Wings Over Scotland at 9.53 on that morning of defeat, by Marian:

Newsnet Scotland, Wings over Scotland, Bella Caledonia, and all the other websites that have fought so well to provide balanced reporting in the referendum campaign should now join forces in a tactical voting campaign that will capitalise on the now evident disillusionment with Westminster in Glasgow, the West of Scotland, and elsewhere with the purpose of electing as many independence seeking MP’s to Westminster as we can at the UK General Election in May 2015.

For it may very well be that Scotland’s MP’s can hold the balance of power and not only use that to hold the Westminster parties to account for their “Vows” and prevent Westminster attempts to enforce more neo-liberal policies on
Scotland but also use their numbers to force very substantial further devolution concessions from whoever is the largest party hoping to form a UK government.

**Action**

By Monday 22 September SNP membership had jumped by 70%. Over 18,000 people had joined the party since the referendum, bringing its overall membership to a record level of 43,644. The Scottish Green party also experienced a post-referendum surge in membership, with 3,000 supporters joining in the same period. (The Guardian, 22 September). For the sake of comparison, Labour were “struggling to get beyond around 13,000 – despite being on the winning side” (The Daily Record, 27 September). Six months later SNP membership had hit the 100,000 mark, making the SNP the third largest party by membership in the UK. (The Herald 22 March 2015)

The target for a resurgent independence movement was always going to be Labour. Not only were Labour the party to beat in Scotland, having taken 41 seats out of Scotland’s 59 in the 2010 General Election, but Labour had committed something close to treachery in the eyes of Yes voters. It was former Labour Prime Minister Gordon Brown who had led the pro-union Better Together campaign in its final phase, thus getting into bed with the Tories. The Lib Dems had joined a Conservative led coalition government following the 2010 UK general election. In the 2011 Holyrood elections they paid the price, losing 12 of their 17 seats as Scotland punished them for it. It may be the case that Scottish Toryphobia is not simply about Conservative policy, it may be that dislike of the Conservatives is now becoming almost a marker of Scottish national identity. The referendum result itself had been a warning to Labour.
The No side had won in Scotland, but Scottish Labour heartlands like Glasgow and West Dunbartonshire had voted Yes.

The crisis in Scottish Labour soon became clear. If Alex Salmond’s resignation could be seen as simply a tactical repositioning in advance of a new attack, the same could hardly be said for the resignation of Scottish Labour leader Johann Lamont on 24 October 2014. Lamont explained her resignation in terms of a failure on the part of the UK Labour leadership to give Scottish Labour more autonomy, adding that Labour circles in Westminster “do not understand the politics they are facing”. (*The Daily Record*, 24 October 2014). A former Labour First Minister, Henry McLeish, told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme that Lamont’s resignation had been the result of a “suffocating atmosphere of control that Westminster have been trying to put on Scotland. […]. Labour in Westminster, Labour in London, has not a clue about the realities of Scottish politics”. ([http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/johann-lamont-resigns-party-has-no-clue-on-scotland-says-former-labour-first-minister-9818656.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/johann-lamont-resigns-party-has-no-clue-on-scotland-says-former-labour-first-minister-9818656.html)).

What is remarkable about these Scottish Labour politicians’ criticisms of London domination and lack of concern for Scotland is how closely they echoed those of Yes voters.

**44.7%**

The Yes side had achieved 44.7% in the referendum. This was almost identical to the SNP vote in the 2011 Scottish Parliament elections in which the SNP won 45.4% of the constituency vote and 44% of the regional vote. It was, however, significantly higher than the SNP’s 19.9% obtained in the 2010 UK General Election in Scotland in which Labour won 41 seats on 42% of
the vote. Looking at the results of recent Scottish Parliament and UK general elections, it would appear that a pattern had been emerging in which Scotland voted SNP for Holyrood but voted Labour for Westminster. That pattern no longer appears to hold true. The SNP had managed to win a majority of the seats in Holyrood on a vote which was virtually identical to the referendum Yes vote; but the electoral system used to elect the Scottish parliament is the Additional Member System, which is semi-proportionate. Elections to Westminster are First Past the Post, with only a plurality of the vote in a constituency required to win a seat.

In order to put 44.7% in a FPTP election into perspective, it should be pointed out that no party has polled more that 44.7% of the total vote in a UK general election since the Conservatives under Ted Heath won 46.4% in 1970. Even this does not tell the full story because in the 1970 election Britain was still largely a two party system. The combined Tory and Labour vote in that election was 89.5%; in 2010 it was only 65.1%. In short, 44.7% is a losing hand in a referendum but is trumps in the context of a FPTP multiparty election against a fragmented opposition.

Seat predictions on electionforecast.co.uk for the forthcoming UK general election in Great Britain, (as of 25 March) predict a hung Parliament with no coalition or confidence and supply deal possible without the participation of the SNP.
May2015.com (as of 25 March) also forecast a hung parliament, with the Conservatives on 273, Labour on 271 and the SNP on 55. Once again no coalition or confidence and supply deal is possible without the SNP. It seems inevitable, based on current polling, that the SNP will be the kingmakers come the May general election.

Former Conservative prime minister Sir John Major, writing in The Daily Telegraph of 5 March 2015 argued that not only had the referendum not put the question of Scottish independence to bed, but the SNP’s strong showing in the polls “has created a new opportunity for them to cause a breach”. Major asserted that it was ‘shameful’ that Labour had not ruled out a post election pact with the SNP, as such a deal would allow the SNP to “slowly, but surely” attempt “to prise the UK apart”. Conservative self interest may have contributed to Major’s attempts to poison the well of any future pact involving the SNP, because, as Max Hastings points out in the Daily Mail of the same date, it is highly unlikely that the SNP would ever do a deal to facilitate the creation of a Conservative led government “even if the Tories win more seats than Labour”.

There is also the fact, as Vernon Bogdanor pointed out in The Guardian, on 24 September, that the Conservatives rather think of Scotland as a different country with which ‘they need not concern themselves’.

Neither Major nor Hastings state exactly how a Labour/SNP coalition would destroy the Union, but a clue is to be found in the title of Hasting’s article - “The terrifying prospect of the Scots ruling England is now all too real”. This is hyperbole. Scotland returns a mere 59 MPs out of a total of 650; England returns 533. The ‘terrifying prospect’ is that the Conservatives might win a plurality of the seats, including possibly a majority in England, but the resulting government
might still be a minority Labour government supported by the SNP. This would tend to encourage English nationalism and give a new urgency to the West Lothian Question. The day after the referendum, UKIP leader Nigel Farage announced that he would be writing to all 59 Scottish MPs insisting that they give up their right to vote on ‘English’ matters. (*The Daily Express*, 19 September 2015). It is the ‘English Question’ that concerns UKIP - and UKIP that concerns the Conservatives. And it is because of the English Question that Cameron’s statements the day after the referendum turned so quickly to England and ‘English Votes for English Laws’ (EVEL). There are few votes in Scotland for the Conservatives. On the other hand, a rise in English nationalism would likely lead to an increase in support for UKIP (and possibly the English Democrats) at the Conservatives’ expense. More fundamentally the union may survive Scottish nationalism but it cannot survive English nationalism. Dan Hodges might assert in *The Telegraph* that, “England won’t put up with Scotland's behaviour for long” (6 December 2014) but, if his gripe is with Yes voters, it’s hardly a threat that will do anything other than bring a smile to their faces.

Fraser Nelson writing in *The Spectator* 4 February 2015 makes the point that if the SNP supplant Labour in Scotland, it will be “harder than ever to talk about ‘British politics’”. He is correct. It would essentially mean the end of a shared British party political life. One alternative to SNP domination of Scottish Westminster politics would be the emergence from amongst the currently divided pro-Union parties - Labour, Conservative and Lib Dem parties – of a single unionist party. Such a development is unlikely, but were it to occur it would simply put Scotland in a position similar to that of Northern Ireland and would still leave Scottish politics outside ‘British’ party political life.
The Drivers of Scottish Separatism

Any inquiry into what is driving Scottish separatism should start with Tom Nairn, the original prophet of the break-up of the UK. In the introduction to the 25\textsuperscript{th} anniversary edition of the *Break-up of Britain*, Nairn retreats somewhat from the more materialist Marxist analysis offered in the original work, saying he had

misread ‘uneven development’ in over economic terms, when in fact it has always been a deeply human and social phenomenon [...] outside of economic textbooks, people have never wanted to live merely to reproduce themselves in less awful circumstances. Once change is imaginable, they want to mean something, or to ‘stand’ for something (Nairn, xxiii)

He offers an explanation for what is going on in terms of neoliberal globalization and British ‘self-colonisation’ and subordination to the US. For Nairn neoliberal globalisation’s ‘one worldism’ is fundamentally the ‘expression of an extensive suppression of political nationalism’ (xxii). There is, Nairn argues, a strong linkage between neoliberalism and ‘self-colonisation’:

The apotheosis of homo economicus after 1989 was at that time imagined as leaving ideological space only for individuals on the one hand, and a nebulous universal order - or ‘borderless world’ – on the other. Being both ill-defined and inchoately contested, this fog tended in practice to coalesce around either acceptance or refusal of United States domination (xxi)
Such a reading also offers an insight into the drivers of another, profoundly different, form of nationalism. Both UKIP and, earlier, the BNP, can be understood as revolts against certain aspects of this form of US dominated ‘borderless world’ globalization. While the opposition to the ‘borderlessness’ of mass immigration is obvious, the opposition to US led wars is there just as clearly. See for example Farage’s condemnation of Blair’s defence of the invasion of Iraq and calls for intervention in Syria, in which he states that “In almost every country in which the West has intervened or even implied support for regime change, the situation has been made worse and not better”. (*Daily Express*, 15 June 2014). Similarly the BNP’s then leader Nick Griffin opposed the invasion of Iraq and advocated a ‘truce’ with Islam on BBC *Question Time* (*Question Time*, BBC1, 22 October 2009). It is unlikely that these statements by Mr Farage or Mr Griffin were driven either by pacifist convictions or fears of being labelled Islamophobes.

However, despite some deliberate attempts to conflate the two (see, for example Nigel vs Nicola: their five most outrageous comments ever, *The Daily Telegraph*, 24 January 2015) the nationalism of UKIP and of the SNP are entirely different phenomena. The nationalism of the SNP is leftwing, democratic and civic; UKIP’s nationalism is rightwing, populist and ethnic. Nonetheless, it is possible to understand both as forming the twin poles of opposition to neoliberal globalization. Scottish separatism can be understood in terms of opposition to both neoliberalism and British subservience to the US in terms of foreign relations – particularly wars.

Kevin Makenna, a keen observer of the Scottish political scene, wrote in *The Guardian* on 7 March that Scottish Labour “doesn’t understand that it is being punished for campaigning with the Tories every inch of the way to defeat independence”. This is true, Labour is now paying the
same price for having sided with the Conservatives during the referendum as the Lib Dems paid in the 2011 Scottish Parliament election for having gone into coalition with the Conservatives. But this is not the whole truth. In reality, the referendum was only the final straw. The Yes side had always featured opposition to Blair’s invasion of Iraq (and the SNP opposed Kosovo, Iraq and intervention in Syria), to Trident and to the fact that New Labour were a neoliberal party. The Tories were the real enemy, but Labour - the ‘Red’ Tories - had increasingly come to be seen as effectively indistinguishable from the Conservatives in the eyes of many Scots. Nairn goes so far as to say that during the Blair era “the Westminster two-party order had become a de facto one party system” (p. xx) The triumph of neoliberalism and the ending of distinct class-based economic policy differences between Labour and Conservative meant the ending of cleavages which could cross cut nationality. This is not something which either the Conservatives or Labour can rationally address owing to the ‘heroic’ standing within their respective parties of the two individuals most responsible for this state of affairs – Thatcher and Blair.

In the US the lack of fundamental differences in economic policy between the parties is compensated for by the existence of various cultural issues such as gun ownership, abortion and sexual morality. The very fact that it was a Conservative government in the UK which introduced equal marriage demonstrates the extent to which such ‘liberal’/’conservative’ cleavages are lacking with relation to Labour and the Conservatives (and the Lib Dems, for that matter). There does exist a genuine cleavage on the question of immigration, but there is little difference here between Tory and Labour. The immigration issue has been colonised by a
genuine anti-immigration party – UKIP. In many ways the real political difference in Scotland is between ‘old’ and ‘new’ Labour.

Nationality was always a potential focal point for resistance to neoliberalism. There may be as much potential for such opposition in the north of England as in Scotland. The main difference between Scotland and the north of England is the fact that Scotland comprises a historically recognized political unit which can seek escape from neoliberalism in separatism based on national self-determination, and the north of England cannot. The problem is political, the fundamentally ‘apolitical’ nature of UK party politics, not constitutional. Constitutional ‘fixes’ such as a written constitution and/or federalism are not the answer. They might, in fact tend even to make matters worse by further delegitimising the UK state by marring what Bagehott termed the ‘dignified’ elements of the existing constitution. And while such changes would certainly make the UK more ‘liberal’ they would to the same extent make it less democratic.

On the other hand it would be inaccurate to overstate the economic left-wingedness of the SNP. The economic policy of the SNP has – albeit from a leftwing perspective - been described as ‘Neo-liberalism with a heart’ (Cuthbert, J & Cuthbert M ‘SNP Economic Strategy: Neo-Liberalism with a Heart’ in Hassan, G., ‘The Modern SNP: from protest to power (Edinburgh, 2009). The SNP seems prepared to accommodate itself to (economic) neoliberalism in much the same way as Ireland did, by using a low corporate tax rate and lax regulation to attract TNCs (Cuthbert & Cuthbert, p. 107). This is not radically different from New Labour’s Faustian bargain with the City. As Gerry Hasan points out, both the SNP and Labour have “compromised and diluted” social democracy “by colluding with neo-liberalism” (Hasan, G., ‘The Auld Enemies:
Scottish Nationalism and Scottish Labour’ in Hassan, G., ‘The Modern SNP: from protest to power (Edinburgh, 2009) p. 159. It is the Scottish Socialist Party and the Scottish Greens - not to mention the Radical Independence Campaign (RIC), Common Weal and National Collective, which really provide the anti-neoliberal edge on the Yes side.

The reasons actual voters gave when asked to list the two or three issues which had decided their referendum vote in Lord Ashcroft’s post referendum poll as reported in the Guardian of 20 September, were, for Yes voters: Disaffection with Westminster politics 75%, The NHS 54%, Tax and public spending 33%, oil 20%, jobs 18%, Defence and Security 16%, Benefits 13% and Pensions 10%. The main issues for No voters were: the pound 57%, Pensions 37%, and the NHS 36%. Unfortunately these categories are rather broad. “Disaffection with Westminster” could, and probably does, cover a multitude of sins. When offered a list of reasons often given for voting Yes, and asked to list their importance, Yes voters listed them as follows: the principle that all decisions on matters affecting Scotland should be taken in Scotland 70%, that on balance Scotland’s future looks brighter as an independent country 20%, and that independence would mean no more Conservative governments 10%. For No voters the responses were: independence looked too risky in terms of currency, EU membership, the economy, jobs and prices 47%, a strong attachment to the UK and its shared history, culture and traditions 27%, and a No vote would mean extra powers for the Scottish parliament while still remaining in the UK giving the best of both worlds 25%.

It is seems from this that Yes voters were motivated by the desire for democratic self-determination and the protection of the NHS and Welfare State.
But how important is national identity? On the whole, there is a generational difference in the Yes vote, it declines with increasing age of cohort – and, inversely, the number of people professing a shared British and Scottish identity increases with increasing age of cohort (see table on p. 17). But, while there is a correlation between a ‘Scottish only’ national identity and a Yes vote, all those professing a ‘Scots only’ national identity did not vote Yes.

Higher feelings of Britishness amongst older cohorts can possibly be attributed to the more ‘British’ post war era in which they grew up. This may well be true, but it is hard to detect a sharp distinction between those aged 65 and above and younger cohorts in terms of nationality. The increase in the ‘British and Scottish’ identity by age is relatively smooth, showing an increase of approximately 2% per decade increase in age of cohort. The Yes vote, on the other hand, shows a sharp drop amongst cohorts over 65. It would seem that the age of the voter, in the sense of the era in which they grew up, is a factor, but the distinction between being a pensioner or not, is a larger one. It is concerns about state pensions and the NHS, not identity, which best explains the difference.
### Scots National Self-identification in Scotland's Census 2011 & percentage Yes vote in Referendum by country of birth, sex and age.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Scottish only %</th>
<th>British only %</th>
<th>Both %</th>
<th>Yes vote %</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scots born</td>
<td>72.34</td>
<td>5.21</td>
<td>20.96</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>62.43</td>
<td>8.37</td>
<td>18.29</td>
<td>44.70</td>
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<tr>
<td>(of which, Scots born</td>
<td>83.32%</td>
<td>Other UK born 9.70%</td>
<td>62.43</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>62.21</td>
<td>8.85</td>
<td>17.86</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>62.64</td>
<td>7.92</td>
<td>18.71</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All 20-24</td>
<td>60.30</td>
<td>7.10</td>
<td>14.05</td>
<td>48*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All 30-34</td>
<td>56.73</td>
<td>8.78</td>
<td>16.07</td>
<td>59*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All 40-44</td>
<td>62.62</td>
<td>9.44</td>
<td>17.26</td>
<td>53*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All 50-54</td>
<td>62.27</td>
<td>9.69</td>
<td>19.38</td>
<td>52*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All 60-64</td>
<td>58.85</td>
<td>10.05</td>
<td>23.00</td>
<td>43*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All 70-74</td>
<td>59.44</td>
<td>8.21</td>
<td>24.97</td>
<td>27*</td>
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</tbody>
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Table compiled from the following: Scotland's Census 2011 - National Records of Scotland Table DC2102SC - National identity by sex by age, Table DC2212SC - Country of birth by national identity, Table DC2102SC - National identity by sex by age and Lord Ashcroft’s Post-Referendum Scotland poll 18-19 September 2014 as reported in the Guardian, 20 September 2014

Two things emerge from this 1) in identity terms, most Scots consider themselves Scottish not British; 2) the significant jump in the No vote amongst older people probably reflects more fear of losing their state pensions or access to the NHS than love of the Union. Should it be the perception that the FUD (‘Fear, Uncertainty, Doubt’) that arose during the referendum in relation to an independent Scotland lose some of its credibility or should some of the promises made during the referendum (the ‘Vow’) be perceived as not having been met, and there was a further government of austerity and/or another major US led foreign war then voters might be inclined to vote more in line with self-chosen national identity.
**The Election**

If, as the polls indicate, the forthcoming General Election results in a hung parliament with the SNP taking the bulk of the seats in Scotland, what are the possible outcomes?

Scenario one – it being possible for Labour and the SNP combined to command a majority. This would be an ideal outcome for the SNP. The question of whether such cooperation would take the form of a coalition or a confidence and supply agreement is not of tremendous significance. More important would be what the SNP could extract from such an arrangement. Perhaps the SNP could push Labour in a more leftward direction in terms of economics. Perhaps they could force the scrapping of Trident. Unilateral nuclear disarmament was once a Labour policy in the days before New Labour. Perhaps, in short, the SNP could push Labour back towards a more ‘old’ Labour position. Such changes would be UK wide, were they to prove impossible to achieve, changes at the purely Scottish level might be attainable – more powers for the Scottish Parliament or the removal of the nuclear subs from Scotland. At the very least, such a government would entrench the SNP’s position as the natural party of Scotland at the Westminster level and would give the lie to Labour’s claims that a vote for the SNP is a vote for a Conservative government. Such an outcome would also tend to fan the flames of English nationalism, particularly if, as would be highly likely, the number of Labour MPs returned in England is lower than the number of Tory MPs.
The Daily Telegraph has been having an editorial attack of the vapours over this possibility, accusing the SNP of being “fully aware of the resentment such a pact would cause in England” and only seeking an alliance with Labour in order to cause as “much constitutional chaos as possible”. (23 Mar 2015). They are possibly correct. Increasing English nationalism is not something that would trouble pro-independence Scots. Scotland is not the only country that can end the Union.

Scenario two – it being possible for the Conservatives and the SNP combined to command a majority. At first glance this would appear to be a poisoned chalice for the SNP. But much would depend on what the Tories would be willing to concede to Scotland in exchange for office. Were the Tories to effectively see Scotland as a lost cause, it might make sense for them to offer Devo Max (control over everything except defence and foreign relations) in exchange for some deal effectively excluding Scottish MPs from voting on issues concerning England and, perhaps, even a reduction in the number of MPs returned from Scotland – call it EVEL max. But surely the Conservative and Unionist party would never countenance this? Perhaps not, but it was a Conservative PM who brought down the final curtain on the British Empire with a speech to the South African parliament about the ‘wind of change’. But were no such deal forthcoming from the Conservatives and the SNP instead be offered some very limited concessions, it might suit the SNP to decline such thin gruel and instead sit back and invite the Tories and Labour to form a grand coalition. The Social Democrats and Christian Democrats did it in Germany and there is no good reason why such a ‘national government’ could not be formed in the UK. Alex Salmond is shrewd enough, and bloody minded enough, to do exactly this. Of course a
Conservative/Labour grand coalition would make the SNP the official opposition – a thoroughly fascinating prospect.

Scenario three – it being possible for either the Tories or Labour to command a majority with other parties but without needing the SNP. This would depend entirely on the make up of the majority on which the resulting government was based. Were it to be along the lines of a Labour/Lib Dem coalition, it would at least invalidate the claim that a vote for the SNP was a vote for a Tory government. Further, should such a coalition continue along a broadly similar neoliberal economic path to recent governments, it would tend to further reduce Scottish hopes that salvation is to be found in Labour.

There is a certain danger in this scenario for the SNP if what emerged was a Conservative led government, as this would give (spurious) credence to the ‘vote SNP get Tory’ claim. Nor would such a government, particularly if it were Conservative/DUP, be inclined to do Scotland any favours.

A fourth scenario – though one unlikely based on current polling – would be either Labour or the Conservatives scraping a bare majority on something like 33% of the vote. Such a scenario is imaginable were UKIP to perform better than the polls currently indicate, and to do so at the expense of the Conservatives. This outcome would raise questions about the legitimacy of the resulting government and likely give rise to clamorous demands for a change in electoral system from FTPT to some form of PR.

A change in the electoral system would not only increase the legitimacy of the entire system of government, but would also be likely to have a positive effect on the Union. In a FPTP election,
45% of the votes could conceivably turn into 100% of the representation; this is not possible under PR. It would lead to the re-emergence of ‘British’ politics and Conservative MPs in Scotland would once more outnumber the pandas there. In fact, a change in electoral system would have the potential to transform the British political system. It would make Britain something close to a consensus model parliamentary system. It would rule out there ever again being a one party Conservative or Labour government, and would facilitate the emergence of new parties. But an independent Scotland might seem more attractive to the two main parties given PR as the alternative. The Conservatives have little to lose in Scotland, and, if the SNP supplants them there, the same may soon hold true for Labour.

**Conclusion**

Nairn offered a ‘provisional conclusion’ on the future of the UK state. It is, like this paper, a snapshot in time

> [A]s Tony Blair sends off his ships and troops to assist America’s assault on the Middle East, and millions demonstrate their passionate opposition in London, Glasgow and Cardiff […] [i]n the altered world [ahead], it is surely unlikely the United Kingdom will survive in anything like its historical form (xxx)

Over a decade later, neoliberal globalization has failed militarily and politically in the Middle East. The crusade to spread neoliberalism to that part of the world has simply succeeded in provoking a uniquely barbaric and obscurantist reaction against globalization. Economically neoliberalism has also proved less than infallible. Claims of having ended ‘boom and bust’ turned to doom and dust as the Great Recession unfolded. These failings can only reinforce the drive towards
separatism as an escape mechanism from an increasingly unequal neoliberal UK state dominated by the financial sector and the City of London. The fact that the UK state is perceived as ‘so cravenly supine’ in its relationship with the US (Nairn, xxiv) hardly helps matters. Nobody really wants to be a mere satellite of a satellite.

The No victory in the referendum was largely the product of fear rather than love. It was the Yes side which was – and remains – the dynamic in Scottish politics. The defeated Yes voters have not been defeated in spirit, they have turned party political and seem set to give the SNP a landslide victory in Scotland. The election UK-wide will probably result in a hung parliament in which the SNP will be kingmakers. The very unpredictability and strangeness of the forthcoming election is itself an indication of how deep is the crisis. Labour or the Conservatives are likely to find that the price of power is some reform of the UK state – or, in the case of Labour – possibly of themselves.

The referendum campaign helped energise, politicise and educate much of the Scottish population. As Yes Scotland’s Elaine C Smith informed Labour’s Kezia Dugdale live on STV (STV ‘town hall’ debate in Edinburgh, 2 September 2014), the Scots were traditionally expected “to vote Labour, get to the back of the bus and shut up and deliver a Labour government – No more! No more!”.

( STV ‘town hall’ debate in Edinburgh, 2 September 2014 http://www.theguardian.com/politics/scottish-independence-blog/live/2014/sep/02/scottish-independence-referendum-campaign-live#block-5406209ee4b0b23834312988 )
And what is to be made of the fact that according to a YouGov/Times opinion poll conducted just six weeks after the referendum, Scots would then have voted 52/48 in favour of independence (The Guardian, 1 November 2014)? If the SNP – infused with all this new blood from the non-party Yes voters – succeed even in overtaking Labour in the number of MPs sent to Westminster, it will indicate that the tide is with the pro-independence side and the indyref in 2014 will have exactly the same historic significance as the Devolution referendum of 1979. Can a 1998 be far off?
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