

Brexit, Breakup and the Future of Scotland

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Many thanks for the invitation to talk again to the Globale Seniorer! I am no expert; analysing the UK has not for a long time been part of my professional engagement. But I like playing the journalist and story teller, and also look at the broad picture. I can promise you farce and fantasy, nostalgia and horror! I shall not repeat much of what I talked about last year. Events move fast; I continue to be a news junkie - this sends me on-line, into You Tube, late at night. I really welcome having an audience to help me again make better sense of what is going on - and raise new questions and perspectives.

First, a bit of repetition: who am I - why should I feel so emotionally involved? My passport states: European Union: United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland - in short, I come from the UK. Unfortunately, my country where I have citizenship rights does not really exist in the Danish language; *Det forenede kongerige* makes sense in German and Dutch - but not in Danish. The United Kingdom is also referred to as the Union - this underlining the constitutional bonds that bring together 4 nations: England (pop 66.5 million), Scotland (pop 5.3 million), Wales (pop 3 million) and Northern Ireland (pop 1.8 million). This Union is an old invention; it dates from 1707. The Act of Union brought the nations of England and Scotland together under both a single monarch and a single parliament. Being an early political construction, it was never fully codified; its constitution was not written down in one place. Instead, some national autonomy was retained, allowing the persistence of overlapping sovereignties. Thus, it is different from the nationalism and state-building that would characterise Europe in the 19th century, where the aim was unification.

I am a UK citizen and identify myself as British. I was born in Great Britain, and that made me, by right of birth, British. This is an inclusive identity - you can be Black British, Asian British; I would never willingly give up my British nationality. In contrast, I do not identify myself as being either English or Scottish. This derives from a political choice. Politically, I am opposed to exclusive nationalisms, that is of being **either English or Scots or Welsh or Northern Irish**, for these competing nationalisms now threaten to break up the Union. My vision for the future is one where shared communities can be fostered, based on shared rights and duties, where we find out how to

live in shared spaces. I reject the current retreat into exclusivity, with its emphasis on ethnicity and parentage, blood and 'race'.

Three separate tropics are given in the title and I shall address each of them in turn. I start with **Brexit**; it's happening! No more indeterminacy; no more frustration and delay due to wrangles in a deeply divided parliament. I'll begin by summing up where we are now. Then, I'll turn to **break up**: The worry for PM Boris Johnson and the Tories is that although they have won Brexit - Johnson 'got Brexit done' - this may tear the Union apart. This would spell political disaster for the government. The risk of break-up is now greater than it was last year. Finally, in the third section I focus on **Scotland**, the country where my family comes from, but where I have never lived, and whose sentiments for independence I do not share. What kind of nation is it; what's its past and present? What about its future?

Brexit: where are we now?

- at the UK General Election held on 12 December, 2019, the Tory party won an unexpectedly large majority. The House of Commons, also called Westminster, has 650 elected members, who are elected by constituencies roughly equal in population size. We have a 'first past the post' system, that is a straight majority; there is no proportional representation. For a party to win a majority requires having 326 MPs. In the December election, the Tories won 365 seats, while Labour won only 203 seats. Social Democrats were wiped out, and no candidate standing for a new moderate/centrist party was elected. Immediately afterwards, Boris Johnson presented again his draft Withdrawal Agreement, negotiated with EU bureaucrats and also, significantly, with Leo Varadkar, Taoiseach of Ireland. This was now passed. Finally, the UK could Get Brexit Done!
- For the Labour party, the scale of the Tory victory was unexpected. The Tories won many seats in old Labour heartlands in the north and northwest; the so-called Red Wall collapsed. The Labour Party is in crisis; commentators believe that the scale of its defeat has not yet sunk in. A prime reason was Labour's failure to give a clear message about Brexit. But there are deeper reasons: the party appears stuck in the past - in the 1970s. Its visions concern an old working class that no longer exists; it's deeply divided internally; Corbyn, in particular, is blamed for being unpatriotic and having led the party to disaster. Now underway is a leadership contest to replace him; there are 4 candidates: 3 women and 1 man (Keir Starmer), who is the current favourite.

- Thanks to the Tory's landslide victory and final passing of the Withdrawal Agreement, the UK officially leaves EU at 23.00 UK time (midnight in mainland Europe) on 31 January. There will be dancing in the streets. But Big Ben will not sound!

So what happens now?

- UK can no longer revoke Article 50. We cannot change our mind and decide not to leave. We are out - and the transition period, set for a year, will begin on February 1. Optimistically, this is set for a year. But many feel it is a fantasy political scenario, rather than a realistic time table. It is Johnson's aim to keep up momentum, to prove to a frustrated population that at last there is movement. In the EU, the Withdrawal Agreement must now be approved by the 27 members - who are expected to do this in late February.
- During the transition period, the UK will no longer have voting rights in Brussels; British MEPs have withdrawn. But, the UK still has to make the same financial contributions to EU until March, 2021. And EU law will still apply until the end of the transition period.
- By November 2020, Johnson promises to have some kind of Trade Deal negotiated, checked, translated and ready for presentation to the EU Parliament. Exactly what this will look like is unclear. But comments made in mid January confirm that the UK expects to leave both the Single Market and Customs Union, by choice. Chancellor Sajid Javid has affirmed there will be no alignment with EU regulations; UK will not be a rule-taker. Inevitably, this will bring great difficulties for some industries - especially car manufacture, whose just-in-time assembly process uses parts imported from large numbers of firms. Food industries are also likely to be hit hard. The talk is one of 'frictions', a term implying the costs and impediments of installing border checks and doing paperwork when goods cross the border between the UK and EU. Inevitably, this brings up the tricky question of the Irish border (that I talked about last year). Where will this border lie? This is not now envisaged as a land border, but will be in the Irish Sea. On December 31, if a Trade Deal with the EU is not in place, the country falls back on the basic WTO terms of trading.
- While the Trade Deal with the EU is the most pressing, negotiations also need to take place regarding security and data sharing, aviation, electricity supplies, regulation of medicines, and many other issues. Questions are now being raised again about the status of EU citizens living in the UK. Will they have to apply for a residency permit; do they risk being thrown out by a certain date?
- 25,000 civil servants have been working on Brexit plans. Johnson announced in mid January that all Ministers must work hard on getting the transition done; they must not waste time talking to

the media, or supporters. If they do, they risk forfeiting their Ministerial jobs at the next Cabinet reshuffle that will take place after Brexit.

- The PM has delegated the reform of Whitehall, that is the civil service, to Dominic Cummings - a controversial, maverick, non-establishment figure. Recently he announced 'officially' that misfits and weirdos should now apply for posts with the Govt. He is the adviser credited with the 2016 Referendum success, through targeting by social media. (There is a Channel 4 film on this, where Cummings is played by Benedict Cumberbatch.) He is credited with formulating the two winning slogans: first, 'Take Back Control' ; then, Get Brexit Done.
- The Tories are actively struggling to reward their new supporters in the north of the country, announcing their commitment to big infrastructure projects and its plan to shift the House of Lords to the northern city of York.

New proposals for post-Brexit Britain are currently being announced by different Ministries in the press. The public is being cajoled into believing that the government is working hard. Two recent examples:

- Ministry of Agriculture. Envisaged is the biggest shake-up of the farming sector for 40 years. Re-alignment is needed as 1/4 Britain's food currently comes from EU. Freed from EU regulation, the ministry promises to move environmental concerns to the forefront. First, this means preventing food imports from countries with lower environmental standards than British farmers must adhere to: i.e. no cheap imports from US or Asia. Second, UK agricultural policy will shift away from the Common Agricultural Policy, the infamous CAP. Through this, EU farmers receive a subsidy based on the amount of land they farm; more progressive change is resisted by the strong lobby of French farmers. Post Brexit, subsidies will reward British farmers according to the public goods they provide: clean water, clean air, healthy soil and sustainable habitats. A 7 year transition is envisaged to move from the CAP to environmental land management contracts. (State subsidy remain the same: £3 bn.) As an agricultural economist earlier in my career, who campaigned against the CAP - this is very good news! But is it fantasy??
- Britain's aims to protect its leading position as a global financial centre and development aid will be teamed up with global finance. UK has joined the World Bank to organise an investment summit with African countries, where the aim is to boost investment in Africa by channeling part of the £14 billion aid budget through the financial services sector of the City of London. The UK/World Bank partnership sets out to compete with Chinese investment into Africa. It is also

linked with development goals of improving financial systems and regulation in African countries and finding new sources of investment for identified projects.

BUT big questions remain:

- Johnson's and Tory party's policy thinking is still unclear, and often contradictory. Within his party, Johnson positions himself as mainstream and centrist; i.e. he supports improving the National Health Service, strengthening the police, supporting industries based on science and technology, redistributing economic benefits to the North. BUT he is also appealing to right wing voters - e.g. through supporting much longer prison sentences for convicted criminals. Still unknown is whether the government will retain or replace workers' and environmental rights as enshrined in EU legislation; once freed from this obligation, will the UK become Singapore-on-Thames?
- It is a mistake to under-estimate Johnson or see him as a clown. He plays the clown, but is a skilled politician. Yet there is an elusive quality about him: he wants to appear a 'great man' of politics, but is absent when it matters. He is selling a dream but falls short in proposing a feasible, consistent policy.
- At a more abstract political level, over the last year, the Brexit vote is now recognised as having opened up key political questions: why did so many people, especially in England (53.4%), vote in favour of Brexit, as well as in Wales (52.5%)? Why did the majority of Scots and Northern Irish voter choose remain; 62% and 55.6% respectively? Where is the United Kingdom now going? What does the emergence of competing nationalisms - England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland - mean for the Union? Will it survive?

Break-up of the Union?

To introduce the second topic, I start with the results of the General Election of December 12, 2019. For here one sees the fault lines and fractures appearing in the Union.

Scotland:

The other big winner (apart from the Tories) in the last election was the victory of the Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP) which won 48 seats out of Scotland's 59 Westminster seats. SNP increased its vote share by 45%. In contrast, the Scottish Labour Party, that used to dominate the old working class industrial heartlands, lost 6 seats to SNP; it now has only 1 MP in Westminster. The other 10 seats went to the Tories.

The SNP is the political party, founded back in 1935, to fight for Scottish Independence from the Union. After years of negotiating, in 2014, the SNP got Westminster to agree that Scotland could hold a Referendum - to take Scotland out of the United Kingdom. The remainers won: with 55% of the votes; those voting for independence polled 45% of the vote. This had been hailed as a 'once in a generation' chance to become Independent. However, Brexit changes the playing field, so the SNP claims. Following the SNP's success in the December election. Nicola Sturgeon, First Minister of Scotland, leader of the SNP, immediately sent a formal request to Boris Johnson: that the Scottish parliament be given the constitutional power to call a new Referendum if and when it so chooses. (At present, only Westminster can do this). Johnson replied a few weeks later refusing to transfer these powers, reminding Scots that the 2014 Referendum had been hailed as 'a once in a generation' choice. Sturgeon and her party have not given up; with Scotland voting to remain in the EU, they claim the democratic right to hold a new Referendum.

Northern Ireland:

The December 2019 election also revealed a changing situation in Northern Ireland. For the first time ever, more nationalist MPs were elected to the Westminster parliament than unionist MPs. What does that mean? (i) The majority of MPs elected belong to parties supporting the unification of Ireland - that Northern Ireland joins the Republic of Ireland and thereby remain in the EU. (ii) Among the unionist parties, no longer is the Democratic Unionist Party, DUP, of political importance to the Tory party in Westminster. In the previous government, their 10 MPs had given the Tories the majority; they used this to influence government policy regarding the Irish border and the UK's commitment that Northern Ireland remain fully within the Union. Now, their political influence has gone. (iii) The traditional 'sectarian' parties, Sinn Fein and DUP, are losing their appeal. They both polled fewer votes, than new moderate parties which attracted younger voters who want to move forward and improve the social and economic life of Ulster.

In this context, it is important to go back to the Belfast or Good Friday Agreement of 1998. This is path-breaking, enlightened international treaty that brought an end to the 30 year civil war between Northern Ireland unionists and the Republic of Ireland. After a tortuous peace process, old enemies were eventually brought to the negotiating table. Through the Good Friday Agreement, a Northern Ireland Assembly was set up where power would be shared between the Catholic Sinn Fein and protestant unionist parties. Where the agreement really broke new ground was in its insistence in moving away from monolithic, exclusive, thinking about identity. The Agreement accepted that the people of Northern Ireland could be Irish, or British or both. Everybody born in Northern Ireland is

entitled to double citizenship. The Agreement accepted that for the time being, in 1998, the majority of people in Northern Ireland wanted to remain in the UK, but recognised there was a substantial number of Northern Irish, as well as Republican Irish, who wanted a united Ireland in future. Both views were considered legitimate. So while Northern Ireland would remain for the time being in the UK, future sovereignty was left open-ended, i.e. UNTIL the majority of people in Northern Ireland wished otherwise. The island of Ireland would never again be partitioned or divided by an international border. The Northern Irish Assembly, known at Stormont, was given the constitutional power to hold a referendum on the unification of Ireland when it wants. Westminster does not have to give its consent (as it does in the case of Scotland)

But devolved government in Northern Ireland soon fell apart. Stormont ceased to function for 3 years. Despite the peace treaty, confrontations continued between nationalist and unionist parties, enflamed especially over cultural and language issues. Without a functioning regional government using its devolved powers to support social services, there was a catastrophic decline. Northern Ireland slipped to being by far the poorest, and worst served of the nations. In protest to the chaos in the NHS, the nurses went out on strike. Finally, following the December election results, a political deal was brokered between the 5 main parties in Northern Ireland to re-open Stormont, and a large amount of cash handed over by Westminster. The re-opening of Stormont increases the likelihood that Northern Ireland will decide to hold its own Referendum, and that Northern Ireland votes to leave the UK to become part of the Republic of Ireland. What we do know is that in 2019, the passport office in Dublin issued more than 1 million new Irish passports to people claiming Irish ancestry; many presumably coming from Northern Ireland.

And England?

Political debates in 2019 raised the argument that underlying and explaining the result of the Brexit Referendum was the rise of English nationalism. This is appearing as a subterranean, previously unrecognised, local movement in the homelands and heartlands of England, i.e. that is outside of London and the South-east. Here the slogan, 'take back control', found greatest resonance. Opinion polls suggest that more people in England now see their primary identity as being English rather than British. This change was not forecast by political analysts - partly because few troubled to find out what was going on. Here I want to summarise the points made by two very different political commentators who have thought hard about why so many people in England voted for Brexit.

My first witness is *Claire Fox*, former member of the Communist Party, later MEP for the Brexit Party. For her, the vote to leave was an expression of ordinary people's demand for popular sovereignty, agency and voice. People voted against elitist parliamentary politics, and rejected traditional party loyalties. Yet after the Leave vote, the political class refused to acknowledge what had happened; voters were blamed for being duped, tricked, taken in by a slogan painted on a bus and fake news. But, insists Fox, the vote expressed how ordinary people demand a reckoning with power; they felt neglected and suffered great harm on account of the politics of austerity. They were opposing the increasingly technocratic government, identity-kit politics, being told what to do by a government that put greater value on expertise than political vision. The EU referendum unleashed a massive popular debate that had been absent for many years. It led to a new mobilisation. Brexit was a popular vote - our English voice matters; the British establishment must listen. The ruling class at home had outsourced politics to the EU; it claimed that nation states were problematic and reactionary. BUT the nation state is still the geographical unit where ordinary working people can have a political say, exercise their vote and hold the powerful to account.

Other commentators, too, remark on the democratic flowering around the Referendum. The UK's parliamentary 'democracy' was shown to be in deep trouble: the old, confrontation 2 party system does not work, and the system is non-democratic. The UK is said to be the most centralised country in Europe; local councils have been starved of funds - despite the policy of devolution. The vote was not so much against the EU as against the British establishment that hid behind the non democratic EU structures. The message of the Referendum and its aftermath: it matters what you do, not what is done to you!

My second witness is *Finton O'Toole*, Irish journalist and political commentator. He has focused his argument on the emergence of English nationalism; where the English increasingly identify with England, not Britain. There is an ethnic reasoning at work here; for English-ness is less inclusive an identity than British-ness. English-ness is an old, much celebrated, identity. England became a functioning nation state, a political community, from 14th century, having centralised government, single language, and united territory. But later, Englishness got folded into and mixed up with another construction of identity, Britishness. This was promoted by the creation and administration of the British Empire. O'Toole argues that with the end of Empire, and also retreat from myths surrounding the second World War, the idea of a common British project began to crumble. Nobody paid much attention. Later, there was the important issue of devolution. Unlike in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, Englishness has not been promoted by any political party, though it did find an outlet in football. And in England, no devolution of governing powers took place:

there is no specifically English Parliament or Assembly; their interests are dealt with at Westminster.

Over the last 10 years, the English have been withdrawing their consent of the Union. They withdraw mentally and quietly; this has not been picked up in the media, or in art, or in public debate. This is now raising fundamental questions about political relationships: who governs England? Who makes its laws? (According to an opinion poll in 2012: 21% of people in England did not want to be governed by laws made in Britain.) Should England have its own parliament? How long can one expect English taxpayers to continue subsidising the nations of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland which have their own governing bodies?

The Brexit Referendum was accompanied by belligerent arguments: that 'we have been oppressed by EU' for far too long. But who is the 'we'? In the debates leading up to the Referendum, a correlation emerged between being English and being anti-European. Of course, there were great regional/geographical/social differences in the size of the leave vote. Away from London and the South East, other regions of England had been less in contact with cosmopolitanism. Old immigrant communities, Asian and Caribbean, have been more accepted than recent EU immigrants especially from Eastern Europe. The depth of feelings being expressed through English nationalism, especially in poor and deprived parts of the country, were ignored and this is turning destructive.

Scotland: past and future

Scotland, the northern part of the island of Great Britain, never came under Roman rule; Hadrian's wall marked the boundary between Caledonia and the Roman colony of Britain. Back in time, the Scottish population became influenced by Celtic culture; probably this included some settlement from central Europe, though perhaps not as much as people thought in the past, and was maintained through strong trading links and exchange. The Celtic influence survived in the north western fringes of Europe, in France, Ireland and Western Britain, Celts having their own language (Gaelic), forms of organisation and culture. During the 'Dark Ages', the Celtic population was pushed back further to the fringes of the British Isles, while that part of the country that is now England was settled by successive waves of north Europeans from the German plains, these were Anglo Saxons and also Danes, who brought a new language: English. But, in Scotland, as in Ireland, Wales, Cornwall, the Gaelic language and old Celtic cultural traditions endured. These were resurrected and reinvented in the late 19th century, becoming a symbol of a resistant and resisting Celtic fringe.

The actual early history is barely known, given the paucity of written records. This was a clan-based society, clan chiefs claimed areas of land which were distributed to and farmed by clan members, who owed their lords produce and also military service. The feudal form of organisation and culture dominated Scotland, especially the Highlands and Islands, for longer than in England. It was resilient, given the clans' military might; it was hard for a centralising monarch or government to gain authority over powerful chiefs who could rally strong fighting men of their clan. (Think Braveheart!)

The first step in the union between Scotland and England came in 1603. At that date, England had run out of heirs to the throne (Elizabeth 1 having died childless), so an invitation was sent to James VI of Scotland that he also become king of England, as James 1. He would reign over both countries until his death 1625. Then, in 1707, the Act of Union was signed uniting the governments of Scotland and England. Scotland was represented in the English, now British, parliament. This did not bring peace - a series of Jacobin uprisings followed, when Highland Scots fought to bring back their own Stuart monarchy. The most famous, and the stuff of folklore and legend, was Bonnie Prince Charlie, the Young Pretender, grandson of James VI and I, who sailed from France to try get his Scottish kingdom back. But he failed in 1745, repulsed not only by English forces but also by Protestant Scots of the lowlands.

The Act of Union of 1707, that gave birth to Great Britain permitted Scotland to retain certain 'national' powers: it had its own separate legal system, its own Church of Scotland (Calvinist, with no ties to Anglican Church of England), and its own education system, promoting especially its ancient universities where the 'Scottish Enlightenment' would flourish. Later, with the rise of the British Empire, Scottish regional identities were maintained through the independent regiments that composed the British Army, each with its own regional/national traditions. Scots would come to occupy particular positions within the British Empire: given the superior education available to non-elite Scots, they became, above all engineers, and local administrators in colonial enterprises throughout the Empire. The Empire also provided an important market for the industrial goods that Scotland now manufactured - above all the shipbuilding industry of the Clyde.

But there is another story, the opposite of the triumphalist narrative of Empire. In the 18th and 19th centuries, the rural people of Scotland, especially those living in the Western Highlands and Islands, were suffering increasing hardship. This would engender and deepen a strong sense of grievance. The clan system was now under pressure and breaking down. Before 1750, historians believe that most Scots had some stake in the land - even though land in Scotland is generally of poor quality.

The population was slowly increasing and trying to survive through mixed farming; most of the land was still forested and on the coast, people fished. The clan system broke down partly because clan chiefs tried to modernise and make some money; to do this, they pushed out their tenants and relieved themselves of their old feudal obligations to them. Chiefs became interested in new ideas of agricultural improvement and enclosure; common sense and science now said they should stop leasing land out to tenants and raise sheep instead. Grazing sheep destroyed the forests; and only a small workforce was needed to look after them. In a wave moving from the Southern Uplands to the north, sheep were introduced, and tenants were thrown off the lands their ancestors had farmed for generations. In the south, many of those displaced moved to become an industrial proletariat in the mines and mills of the central valley, around Glasgow, where coal mining and new heavy industries developed. Others moved to Northern Ireland, and would become the Ulster Scots. It was the transformation in the north that brought the greatest suffering. People were evicted from the land; many villages abandoned. This was the infamous Clearances. The situation worsened when potato blight spread from Ireland in the mid 1800s. Some more benevolent landowners paid their tenants to leave on ships bound for the New World, especially to Canada; but most had to find their own way. In sum, some 150,000 Highlanders and Islanders were deprived of their ancestral land from 1750 to 1850 and left Scotland. Among the later emigrants was my great grandfather. A tenant farmer in the north east, he was forced off his land in 1873, when he sailed to New Zealand. His wife having died in childbirth, he abandoned his four surviving children, my grandfather being 3 years old at the time, who were settled on different relatives.

But sheep did not earn sufficient profits for long; landowners again faced bankruptcy. This time, they sold off their estates to a stratum of new rich from England, tycoons of the Victorian era, who had no familial ties to Scotland. It became fashionable for this English nouveau riche, as well as some surviving Scottish aristocratic families, to transform their properties into sporting estates: clear them of sheep and people, so that for a few weeks in the year their guests could shoot red deer and grouse and fish for salmon. More rural depopulation followed, this spelling the loss of an entire rural social class, as one historian describes it; the majority emigrated to Canada.

The fight for Scottish Independence

Back in 1885, a Scottish Office had been created, established in Edinburgh, which was responsible for Scottish affairs: farming and fisheries, law, and health. But the intelligentsia and growing professional classes wanted more say and greater independence from London. This was the time of

Celtic revival, a nostalgia for an ancient, rich, native culture, as well as a mounting sense of grievance as to all the wrongs that had been done.

The Scottish National Party was first established by the Scottish Conservative Party; later, it included Labour members. After slow beginnings, in 1945 the first SNP member was elected to parliament in Westminster. But in the late 1960s, interest increased and membership surged in the 1970s following the discovery of oil off the coast of east Scotland. Now one heard the rallying cry: 'It's Scotland's oil'! Partly as a ploy to weaken the Scottish independence movement, in 1997 the UK government proposed a new policy for the Union: the greater devolution of governing powers to regional parliaments or assemblies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. In Scotland, a pre-legislative referendum was held in 1979 to find out whether there was indeed support for a Scottish parliament and also what powers it might have. Then in 1998, with Tony Blair as PM, the UK Parliament passed the Scotland Act. This devolved powers and responsibilities over agriculture, education, environment, health, housing, lands, law and order, local govt, sports and culture, some forms of taxation, many aspects of transport. NOT devolved were the big issues: foreign policy, macro economic planning, the Constitution, defence, employment and equal opportunities, broadcasting, immigration, trade and industry. Over the years, new powers have also been devolved, including income tax and more public services. However, the powers devolved differ between Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland - the same rules do not apply for all. None are financially independent: all receive additional funding from London/Westminster. The Scottish parliament holds elections every 4 years, and support for the SNP has gone up and down. But contrary to Labour thinking in the late 1990s, devolution has not succeeded in weakening the demand for full Independence.

In 2009, the SNP championed a new call for Scottish Independence, but this failed to gain sufficient support in the Scottish parliament. In 2011, the SNP, now holding the majority of seats, brought the Independence Bill to the fore again. This time it led to the Edinburgh Agreement through which Scotland was given the right to hold a referendum on Scottish Independence. However, at the same time, leaders of all UK political parties made 'the vow', publicly pledging to devolve 'extensive new powers to the Scottish parliament' if Independence was rejected in the Referendum. In 2014, 18 September, Scotland went to the polls and decided to remain in the Union: 45% voting to leave and 55% to stay. Afterwards, Westminster kept its pledge to devolve new powers to Scotland, including in taxation and control of North Sea oil.

There is still a division among Scots, as well as in the UK, to Scotland leaving the Union. One argument is the basic economic one: Scotland relies heavily on the 'Union dividend' through which substantial funds are channeled from the UK to Scotland. Secondly, one hears arguments about the shortcomings of the SNP. The nationalist party, it is said, could have done much more through the devolved powers to improve peoples' wellbeing. 'Braveheart' remains triumphant, rather than solid economic management. The Scottish economy faces major problems, not least with respect to the ownership of its resources and national economy. So, I shall finish with a short account as to 'who owns Scotland'!

In the Scottish central lowlands, that is between Glasgow in the west and Edinburgh in the east, there has been significant industrial change: the move from heavy industry to new sectors based on technology and services. The 1980s saw the rise of Scotland's Silicon Glen! But what did not change was the country's pattern of land ownership and rural structure. Only a small proportion of Scottish land is classified as suitable for arable farming. Partly a result of extensive de-forestation in the past, and depletion of highland soil, this may be only 10%. Land ownership in Scotland is regarded as being the most highly concentrated in the developed world, and certainly in Europe. The Scottish parliament passed a Land Reform Act in 2016, that empowered tenant farmers and rural communities to purchase land, even when landlords were against selling, and insisted on sustainable agriculture. Earlier, the Scottish parliament had supported the compilation of a full, detailed, land register of rural land ownership. This began in 2014 and aims to be completed in 2024. However, arguably, the SNP could have been more engaged and pro-active in the country's extreme concentration of ownership.

The broad picture appears as follows:

- Less than half of Scottish rural land (43%) is under some form of public ownership (large holdings are owned by the Crown Estates, Scottish Forestry department, National Trust of Scotland, Church of England, and Local Councils). Most of this land is used for commercial forestry, but not used in an environmentally sound way.
- More than half of rural land, 57%, is in private hands. Ownership is highly concentrated, there being only 432 landowners. This figure has not changed in recent years, still a quarter are classed as 'sporting estates' like in the Victorian era. Who are the current owners? A few are aristocratic families with old claims, but predominating now are transnational capitalists. This is raising important questions as to the future: how will they be taxed; should estates be inheritable; should owners be allowed to do as they please; how can the rights of local communities and remaining

tenants be more effectively protected by law? The common concern voiced is that this pattern of ownership leads to ‘significant and long-term damage to rural communities’.

Who are the largest landowners? In order of size of property held: the top owners are the following:

- Anders Holch Poulsen, described as a Danish billionaire clothing tycoon. He and his wife own more than 200,000 acres, that is 81,000 hectares, spread over 12 highland estates, most in the far North. His interest is in re-wilding; but he does support some local communities.
- Duke of Buccleuch, who was largest landowner until last year. This is an old Scots family with ancestral links to the land, now living mostly in London.
- Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum, of Dubai, with 63,000 acres.
- Kjeld Brink Christiansen (lego)
- there is strong evidence that Scottish estates are being purchased through money laundering activities; this comes through in the Panama papers.

Who owns Scotland businesses? Two noteworthy Scottish sectors

North Sea Oil: Production has been reduced. There is pressure to limit the production of fossil fuels for environmental reasons. BP and others are not investing; but there is new Chinese interest in buying into the industry. What would an SNP led independent Scottish government do?

Whisky: in 2018, there were 133 Scotch whisky distilleries. About a quarter of them are owned by Scottish companies. But two big ‘foreign’ concerns now produce more than half the whisky sold: Diago (Guinness and Grand Metropolitan, which started with vodka and beer, and now own brands including Johnnie Walker) and Pernot Ricard (French), owner of Glenlivet. The largest Scottish owner is William Grant and Sons with Glenfiddich, but this represents only 8% of market. Active newcomers include Japanese and US companies; however, Scottish owners still prevail in luxury market, single malt, whiskies, despite Japanese competition.

Thanks!