

Scotland, nationalism and the left

A conversation between Douglas
Alexander and Gerry Hassan

Can there be a politics that embraces both equality
and identity?

Douglas to Gerry

Before we get to where we're going, I think it makes sense to be clear where we come from ...

My mother worked as a doctor in the NHS. My father was a Minister in the Church of Scotland. Both of them were inspired by their Christian beliefs to engage in the common life of the community. My first home was 'Community House' in Clyde Street, Glasgow: the mainland base of the Iona Community. We lived above a café for the homeless and a meeting room in which UCS Shop Stewards gathered and the Scottish Branch of Anti Apartheid was formed. I was delivering Christian Aid envelopes even before I was delivering Labour Party leaflets. In the kitchen of my father's manse was a poster that read 'Live more simply so others can simply live'.

Tony Blair famously said he chose the Labour Party. I didn't - I was born into it. My father and mother are both lifelong Labour members. My dad joined Glasgow University Labour Club in the late 1950s alongside his friends John Smith and Donald Dewar. My mother is active in the local Labour Party in Renfrewshire to this day. I joined the Labour Party in 1982, motivated to do so by the unemployment and loss of hope I witnessed following the closure of the Linwood Car Plant.

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My earliest and formative experiences of politics were not of repeated success but of bitter defeats - in 1983, 1987 and 1992. Part of my response to those defeats was a growing consciousness of the Scottish dimension of my politics. I was there protesting outside New College when Margaret Thatcher came to deliver her infamous 'Sermon on the Mound' in 1988, and in George Square in support of the Scottish Parliament, and in the Meadows in 1992, when we were gathered to reflect what John Smith described so well as 'the settled will of the Scottish people'.

I was there because I reacted to and rejected Thatcher's intolerance towards and ignorance of much of what we in Scotland held dear. At that time it felt like a struggle for Scotland's soul. And for me, and a lot of other Scots, it was Labour politicians of that generation, like Dewar, Smith, Brown and Cook, who gave voice not only to our concerns but also to our hopes. They held out the possibility of a better Scottish nation - by their commitment to constitutional change certainly, but even more by their shared commitment to social and economic change and solidarity with the poor, even when that was not an easy path. As democratic socialists, they never saw a contradiction in working for a better Scotland and a better Britain.

I am forever proud that one of the first acts of the incoming Labour government in 1997 was to set out the Scotland Act, giving birth to Scotland's first democratic Parliament. But nationalism has never held any appeal for me. I believe that our Scottish Parliament could and should be not simply an instrument of greater democratic accountability but also a workshop in which a fairer more socially just Scotland could be forged.

As a democratic socialist myself, ideals have shaped my sense of politics more than identity. I am proud of my Scottishness - certainly. But defined only by my Scottishness - certainly not. I am, and always have been, much more interested in abolishing poverty than abolishing Britain.

That's where I come to this conversation from. What about you?

Gerry to Douglas

It is good to hear your story - behind every political position and philosophy there is a personal story. My parents were born and grew up in Dundee. We lived in a

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council estate where neighbours popped in all the time for advice or just a blether. My father, Eddie, worked for NCR while I was growing up, while my mother, Jean, managed a chemist shop pharmacy. My dad was in the Communist Party, not unusual for a Dundee shop steward. My mum was a community activist who for several years in my childhood ran the local paper, *Ardler News*.

My parents believed in two powerful things. One was that in the future, things would get better and the world fairer, and that for working-class children like myself there would be more opportunity and possibilities. It was a world filled with optimism and hope. As importantly, they also believed in Britain. Both of them voted against Europe in 1975 - 'a capitalist club' as they saw it - and a Scottish Assembly in 1979, because they wanted to believe in a socialist Britain.

Post-1979 they parted in politics. My father made the short journey from Stalinism to Scottish nationalism. My mum stopped being an activist while continuing to believe in Britain, but shorn of that earlier hope.

Growing up in Dundee in the 1980s I joined the Labour Party, and never found it a satisfying political experience. I came to Glasgow in the late 1980s, and always remember when I first went canvassing for Labour in local elections and then a general election. I would go to these huge, soulless estates filled with poorly maintained, badly designed tower blocks and ask people to vote Labour, and feel ashamed doing so.

There seemed to me a profound absence of responsibility, as many Labour members closed their eyes to the mediocre services the party offered. Everything that was wrong with the world was the fault of the 'wicked Tories' and their 'cuts'. After twenty-four years I eventually left the Labour Party, long after I had detached myself from it as an active member, but still keeping a sense of belonging and a backstory.

There is a pronounced Scottish Labour entitlement culture, which has been part of the political establishment of the last fifty years. There are also parts of Scottish nationalism, with their romanticising of our history, which seem to have a similar denial of the problems our society faces. Neither of these traditions to my mind has been good at addressing what a social justice Scotland would look like, and the reasons we have fallen so short.

The more generous, pluralist elements of Scottish nationalism and the self-government movement, in which I would include the mainstream of the SNP, as

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well as parts of Scottish Labour when it has been at its best, have been about a profound maturing of us as a society, and of our politics. I don't see this maturity as being about a choice between talking or not talking about independence. I want to be passionate about economic and social justice, and about political power and constitutional change. It shouldn't be either/or, because that's restricting and too black and white.

Despite the powerful storm clouds gathering and the crisis of mainstream politics, which I don't for a minute underestimate, I feel enormously positive about Scotland's future. In this I am still, while different in many other ways, the child of my parents Eddie and Jean, and their belief in the future. What's your take about where we are?

Douglas to Gerry

Thanks for sharing your own story - it helps all of us understand each other if we have a sense of where we're coming from. I joined the party at about the same time as you, in Renfrewshire, and if it's any consolation it wasn't always very satisfying for me either! More profoundly, it was dissatisfying because of the impotence of opposition. Politics for me has always involved not simply the holding of ideals but the pursuit of power in order to give expression to those ideals. You talked of feeling shame in the 1980s when asking people to vote Labour because of their housing conditions. I felt that we were letting people down badly in those years by failing to confront the changes we needed to make, both to win and to govern.

It was also in those years that I came to believe passionately in the cause of Scottish devolution. The 1980s and early 1990s were a time when many in our generation became more conscious of our Scottishness. Was it that I was reading James Kelman or Alistair Gray? Was it that as well as reading *Marxism Today* I was reading *Radical Scotland*? Was it listening to Hue and Cry, Deacon Blue or the Proclaimers? Or was it simply that Thatcherism threw into more stark relief what I believed about my politics and about Scotland?

You criticise many Labour members for lacking responsibility and blaming everything on the 'wicked Tories and their cuts'. Of course the cuts were real (and so too were the debts), but the undoubtedly poor record of too many local authorities as providers of social housing led me to support local stock transfers to allow

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housing associations, in order to pioneer new approaches to social housing. But let me make a broader point. One of the main reasons I so passionately supported Scottish devolution was my belief that it would allow us to leave behind the sense of disempowerment and grievance that many felt in the 1990s.

Scotland today is a more self-confident nation - I would argue in no small measure due to the policies and prosperity Labour delivered in the years after 1997. Yet, I continue to see in the character of Scottish Nationalism a determination to cultivate a sense of disempowerment and grievance. Think of Alex Salmond's observation that independence would see England 'lose a surly lodger and gain a good neighbour'. In truth, the United Kingdom is a house we've built together ... and you can't be a lodger in your own house.

The Nationalists are of course entitled to hold their beliefs. But I believe that the way they seek to advance their case at times detracts and distracts from the possibility of Scottish politics being able to move beyond precisely the kind of 'avoidance of responsibility' you describe. Another difficulty I have with nationalism is that it is an unfortunate and inevitable consequence of their political aim - of separate statehood - that the Scottish Nationalists focus so heavily on the apparatus and trappings of the state.

My politics is not about empowering the apparatus of the state. It is about empowering people and, in particular, those who have never had power, personal or collective, in their communities. And in the years ahead I believe my party must aim to establish, nurture and sustain the relationships and common life that are forged through common action for the common good. Government action is necessary but is not sufficient on its own to build the good society here in Scotland. We need to reclaim and re-enact our commitments to community, to forge a society in which people hold the market, the state and each other to account.

You ended your response by recollecting your parents and their beliefs about the future. That spoke to me. Part of Labour's task, I believe, is to remind people that the greatest hope we have is each other, and that this is not incompatible with hope for ourselves and our families. It is also to remind people that wanting a better future for Scotland is not incompatible with wanting to remain part of a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-national United Kingdom.

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Gerry to Douglas

I would like to begin by asking in what way is Scotland this social democratic nation that we all refer to? I have slowly come to the conclusion that not only is Scotland not as social democratic as it likes to think itself - which is fairly uncontroversial - but also that something more is at work.

Scotland is a social democracy for its middle-class professional interest groups. The systems of government and public spending work best for those most entrenched in the system; it has always been like this since the expansion of the Scottish state in late Victorian times. But devolution and the establishment of the Scottish Parliament have exaggerated this effect; a culture of scrutiny, transparency and accountability has actually worked for the insider groups in the system. And the policy choices have worked for the middle classes. For example free care for the elderly and abolition of tuition fees have been implemented without any due care or interest for their distributional consequences.

Scotland has the worst health inequalities and male life expectancy in all Western Europe, yet we still talk blithely of our nation as this great social democracy. Scottish social democracy, not just in Labour, but in the SNP and wider society, has been a pretty threadbare phenomenon in post-war times. It has produced no great thinkers, ideas or philosophy. The last person we could talk about in these terms would be J.P. Mackintosh. The nationalist tradition has at least had Neil MacCormick and Tom Nairn.

What we characterise as Scottish social democracy is in fact communitarianism. It is true that the Scottish public realm doesn't exhibit the marketised, outsourced, corporate capture which we see in England, but how do we begin to challenge the innate assumption across Scottish public life that we are on the right track to a better, fairer Scotland? Shouldn't we begin to show a little bit of constructive self-criticism?

And this begs the critical question: what difference will independence make to Scotland as a society? The SNP strategy seems to be to present independence as risk-free, by removing as much uncertainty and rupture as is possible. This is the logic of retaining the sterling currency and the monarch as head of state in an independent Scotland. And the pro-union parties - Labour, Lib Dems and Tories - seem equally lacking in substance, and have shown themselves unwilling or unable to make the

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positive case for the union. This situation is shaped by a politics of bitter division and a general lack of respect and empathy for differing opinions.

Two brief points. First, debating unionism versus nationalism doesn't help us. Most Scots don't see themselves reflected in either camp. And yet each of these sides, because they have loud voices and a sense of self-importance, tend to think they speak for a large part of Scotland. And in so doing they exclude most of us. Second, this is indicative of much wider tendencies. Scotland has a strand of black and white thinking - the saved and the damned - which disfigures parts of our public and private life. I don't think it is unrelated to this that we have the problem with Celtic and Rangers football clubs, the issues of sectarianism and violence, or that in Glasgow and the West of Scotland we have some of the highest rates of violence per head anywhere in the world. And of course this is gendered and about Scottish men and masculinities.

Douglas to Gerry

Where to begin in response? I spent time last week with a Credit Union in Paisley, to better understand the rise of 'Pay Day lending' and the unsustainable debts that are crippling the finances of local people. That visit came just a couple of days after the latest unemployment figures confirmed that locally there are twenty-three JSA Claimants chasing every local vacancy. So I hardly need to be convinced that Scottish society is still today scarred by poverty and inequality.

You're right to question the complacency implicit in too much of the commentary on Scotland's self image as being 'social democratic' or 'progressive'. But I would argue that the poverty that afflicts communities in Renfrewshire and across Scotland also reveals the limitations of seeing politics through the lens of national identity.

You make the point about intellectuals. Neil MacCormick taught me law at Edinburgh University. He was a brilliant legal scholar and a patient teacher. He was also a warm and engaging man. Yet, with the greatest respect to his memory, does the impact of Neil's thinking on Scotland over recent decades really compare with that of William Beveridge or John Maynard Keynes, neither of whom wrote specifically about Scotland? Impact not origin is surely the relevant test of ideas.

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That makes my broader point. While constitutional structures matter, what also matters is surely the political philosophy of those who exercise power, and the sustained commitment of individuals to effect change. Assertions that Scotland has become a 'beacon of progressive politics' beg more questions than they answer. A broader point has been made by your fellow *Scotsman* writer Brian Wilson: 'The forces of reaction existed in Scotland, every bit as much as in other parts of the UK. It was the votes of Yorkshire miners and Lancashire mill workers which helped deliver a National Health Service and a welfare state, not Edinburgh consultants and Fife colliery owners.'

One of my regrets is the extent to which so much intellectual and political energy in Scotland has been in recent years and will be in the coming years focused on 'the border issue'. Where are the radical policies being delivered to give hope to the young people I met last week in Paisley? The Nationalists' primary economic response to rising unemployment seems to be to demand massive corporation tax cuts. A kind of Reganomics with a kilt on.

Where are these young people going to get the skills they need? The Nationalists talk at length of free education, but announce cuts of £54 million to FE colleges, like Reid Kerr, while at the same announcing a rise in support to Scotland's universities by £140 million. Why in this year's Scottish government budget did Renfrewshire - with far higher levels of unemployment and deprivation - see its budget cut, while the more prosperous East Renfrewshire next door saw its budget rise?

The SNP's engagement with the politics of social justice has been and remains secondary to its pursuit of Scotland's separation from the rest of the United Kingdom. In part because it seems to believe the United Kingdom causes poverty, all else is secondary - including tackling poverty itself - to ending the United Kingdom. That's just not my politics. I would rather advocate a politics that upholds the common weal and gives expression to the feelings of care, concern, and commitment which we seek in others and seek to uphold in ourselves - rather than constantly seek to assert and reinforce difference.

The real challenge facing social-democratic politicians in the years ahead is how to advance social justice and build a good society when there is not much money around. The progressive path identified in mid-1990s Britain was utilising market based growth to support public investment without burdening the populace with higher taxes. Post-crisis, for some on the centre left the answer is higher taxes on the

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banks and a more overt confrontation with wealth and privilege, with the funds gained used to improve public services. Others gathered under the 'Blue Labour' banner suggest we should abandon our commitment to the post-1945 state and focus on social and cultural issues to rebuild the good society around a new conception of community.

That seems to me exactly the kind of debate that - despite all the boasts about being a 'beacon of progressive politics' - now risks being squeezed out by debate on the constitutional settlement.

Gerry to Douglas

I think we should acknowledge our common areas of agreement: the limits of large parts of what passes for Scottish social democracy; the inherent weaknesses and long retreat of the British version (and indeed across most of the globe); and the centrality of talking about power, inequality and exclusion and what we do about them. Just talking about the national question or national identity is a cul-de-sac.

We know that poverty levels fell across the UK over the New Labour decade of growth from 1998-99 to 2008-9, with Scots rates falling more. By the latter date, 17 per cent of people living in Scotland were living in poverty, but this was a decent Scottish story of progress; part of a wider British advance. We now know that poverty levels are increasing, and that it is more than likely that they will go on increasing for the next decade in Scotland and the UK.

The UK is the fourth most unequal country in the developed world; it is the second most unequal country in Western Europe, only beaten by Portugal. This came about for a number of reasons. One is the power of 'the Conservative nation', the institutions of power and privilege located around the City and its related activities and public schools. Another contributory factor is the limits of the British Labour Party and its lack of radicalism historically in taking on this entrenched order.

We have to address the disfigurement of British society and the failure of progressive politics to fundamentally alter this. The configuration of forces in the UK, in the British state, economy and culture, aid this situation of endemic inequality. The challenging of that state and the status quo by a variety of means,

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including Scottish self-government and hopefully the beginning of an English democratic voice, is one serious way of undermining the old imperial centre.

The Scottish debate has to put social justice at its centre. This is a challenge to all the parties to address the issues of the working poor, to support childcare, to connect anti-poverty work and schools, and to focus skills work not on high skills, which public agencies have done, but those with low skills.

We need to stop the claim and counter-claim of people arguing that we should debate social policy or the constitution. We need to debate content and structure, social policy and the constitution, while also developing a distinct debate on political economy. The Labour-SNP dysfunctional relationship has hindered this. Language matters. The word 'devolution' is a meaningless term outside the political classes. The offensive term 'separatism' inaccurately describes a whole political tradition in Scotland. And the abuse and negativity of the cybernats does them no credit. The SNP are not your enemy. Your enemy, my enemy, is inequality, poverty, limited life chances and the grotesque concentrations of power in this land.

Labour under its new leader, Johann Lamont, the party's sixth in twelve years, has responded to its rejection in the recent Scottish Parliament elections, and the election of a majority SNP government by setting up - wait for it - a Devolution Commission. Yet again political class talking to political class. Instead, you should be shouting from the rooftops an authentic Labour message of social justice. For people to listen you have to rediscover the party's soul and speak from it.

Your interventions in the last few months have been the most interesting things to come out of Scottish Labour. They have hinted that part of you grasps the mess Labour are in north (and maybe, relatedly south) of the border. And that the party needs to change to reflect a more grown-up, mature Scotland, which is relaxed about the prospect of independence or self-government. Yet part of you clearly wants to cling to the old assumptions. The language of 'the border issue' hurts Labour, it diminishes Labour's tale of the world and stops many people listening. Similarly, the language of 'separatism' is a glimpse into a Labour unionist mindset which can't come to terms with independence as the new mainstream. Most of the SNP leadership are implicitly post-nationalist.

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Douglas to Gerry

You're right about poverty levels falling under Labour and the enduring inequality that still scars our country, yet I simply don't follow the argument when you suggest that this inequality is somehow reflective of Britain as 'the old imperial centre'. That telling phrase seems to me to reveal a much broader confusion between issues of identity and issues of inequality. And here I find myself reflecting on the point made recently by John Lloyd: 'The central hypocrisy of Scots Nationalism is that it insists that Britain is a foreign or English construction that has distorted the Scots experience for 300 years. But we made it too: it's now ours.' All too often Scottish Nationalists - in the service of their own determination to secure separation - attribute fault to others (in the form of the rest of the UK), both to cultivate a sense of grievance and to absolve themselves of any responsibility for the problems - including poverty - that still afflict Scotland five years after they came to power.

You go on to tell me that 'the SNP are not my enemy'. Forgive me if I state the obvious: being opponents is not and should not be the same as being enemies. That's why in past speeches I urged Labour to understand that 'if the Scottish people believe we hate the SNP more than we love Scotland we will continue to lose'. But let's acknowledge some other truths. The antipathy that marks the relationship between the SNP and Labour is not new. In my first campaign for elected office in Perth, in 1995, I well remember being spat upon by Nationalist supporters.

My good friend the late Philip Gould wrote the following words before he died: 'If you are blind to the merits of those you oppose or the arguments you disagree with, then you start to die intellectually, and if you are a political party you begin the long - or sometimes not so long - slide to electoral defeat. You only win power if you face up to the reality which has kept you from it, and you only sustain power if you renew. And renewal involves honesty, curiosity and courage.'

That seems to me the approach Scottish Labour must take. We need to be a party of thinkers rather than tribalists. But that thinking should involve a clear critique of the SNP. You assert that 'most of the SNP leadership are implicitly post-nationalist'. You could have fooled me! You seem to be suggesting that either they're not telling the public their true ambition, or they're not telling their party their true ambition. Which is it? The central truth you don't seem to recognise when you cite

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independence as the 'new mainstream' (without offering any evidence to support the claim) is that the SNP's political advance has coincided with their intellectual retreat.

Support for independence is lower today than it was when Salmond became First Minister five years ago. Independence remains the choice of the minority of Scots, as it has been since the advent of modern Scottish nationalism. The arguments for a separate Scottish state are as unconvincing today to many of us as they have been over the past four decades. Despite party popularity and governmental power, the most basic questions on currency, monetary policy, the BBC, the Armed Forces, NATO, and, yes, the border, remain unanswered.

My real problem with your broader argument is that it's conducted as if the nationalists have had their great 'Bad Godesberg' moment - an intellectual reckoning with modernity in which they accept the limitations of their previous prescription, and instead embrace the modern progressive view of interdependence as the hallmark of our age. They haven't.

If Alex Salmond believes in post-nationalism (which I don't myself accept), then he hasn't had the courage to tell anyone, least of all his party. In Catalonia, Jordi Pujol accepted sovereignty was not the issue. In Scotland, Alex Salmond has not. And that means that we now face both a referendum and a politics in Scotland where the constitutional issue will continue to dominate public debate in the months ahead.

I believe that we will choose to stay within the UK, and thereafter I hope we can move forward to a politics that is defined more by ideals than by issues of identity. And that seems to me to capture the enduring and essential difference between the nationalists' politics and my own. Their politics, at root, is defined by identity. A fundamental belief in human equality is the core of my politics, more than a fundamental belief in national difference.

I believe what deserves to be at the centre of our political conversation is a radical claim on the future. One that says the test is not how much more power a Parliament has, or how much more autonomy can be achieved. Instead, what counts - in employment, in housing, in health and in education - are our combined actions tackling the barriers and inequality that still hold back too many people in communities like Paisley. Are we, by our will and by our work, building a fairer nation?

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Gerry to Douglas

One of the fundamental differences between the two of us, I would argue, is the prism of party. Some of this is understandable, but I also found it depressing that in your last set of thoughts at crucial points you rigidly stick to the strange Hesperus that is Scottish Labour. I do wonder if people at the heart of Labour have any idea of the damage done to our politics and progressive ideas by New Labour. There is a complex story there, with many undoubted advances and achievements, but it has all been part of a wider terrain of retreat and defeat.

I think you make a revealing point when you question my observation about the inter-connections between inequality and 'the old imperial centre'. The City and Empire were interwoven with imperial trade, networks and investment to make London the first truly 'world city', overshadowing, distorting and crowding out much of the rest of the economy, and in particular, manufacturing. Labour has always been mostly blinded by these issues. In its golden era it believed that you could build socialism on top of the Empire State that was Britain. Then under New Labour it became that you could, in the decade of growth, undertake a Faustian pact with globalisation and the forces of power and privilege. Apart from the Attlee government, Labour has never altered the political weather.

Throughout our exchanges you have criticised Scottish nationalism, and by implication the entire politics and mindset of nationalism, without, it seems, an understanding that the tradition that you represent has its own nationalism. Unionism, in the broadest sense, has been the majority nationalism of these isles. British Labour is, for all its talk of internationalism, a British nationalist party, and one which has consistently failed to advocate a counter-story to the Tory account of 'the Conservative nation'.

Of course the SNP leadership and party talk a language of 'nationalism' in public. But anyone who wants to can observe the subtleties and nuance underneath. It is there in the Scottish government's various white papers on independence, which are clearly informed by a post-nationalism, and a sense that any kind of Scottish independence would also be informed by a sharing of sovereignties and multiple unions; in this the influence of Neil MacCormick's thinking is all over these documents.

The SNP are as much 'nationalists' as Labour is a 'socialist' party. Douglas,

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you still use the term 'socialist' to describe yourself, but clearly you are a post-socialist, interested in the messy realities you face and compromises you have to embrace. Transformational politics this isn't, in the sense we used to understand the term 'socialist'.

A few concluding thoughts. The word 'separatism' should be dropped by everyone. The only 'separatists' left are the Eurosceptic fantasists in the Tory Party, and right-wing currents who obsess about the UK leaving the EU. Words such as 'sovereignty', 'a sovereign Scotland', 'a sovereign UK', 'popular sovereignty' or 'parliamentary sovereignty' belong to another age and are myths. The UK hasn't been a parliamentary sovereignty at least since EEC membership in 1973. I am beginning to think even the term 'independence' itself is inaccurate as a way of describing the direction of travel of Scottish self-government and self-determination.

A more popular way of describing where we are might be the following. The union between Scotland and England which created the UK has been 'a marriage'. It gave much to both countries down through the ages. Scotland contributed disproportionately to the civil servants, buccaneers and soldiers of Empire. Together there was a progressive people's story of these isles which inspired many and did much good - although we should note its omissions, silences and weaknesses, its never successfully challenging the Tory story. It now seems that this marriage has become one of convenience, where both parties still have some common interests and areas, but where a large part of the emotional glue and affection which held the union together has weakened; and that, increasingly, a shared language of values and priorities is becoming increasingly difficult to articulate.

What Scottish self-government is about, I think, is a renegotiation of the terms of this relationship, not necessarily a full or traditional divorce or separation, but a new relationship of equals. That could lead to a thoroughly modern arrangement: from a marriage which has had much to be proud of, to a new - if not open relationship then era of cohabitation, an era of talking things through based on a more genuine partnership.

This would be something fitting to the shared experiences of the peoples and nations of these isles, recognising all those common interests, traditions and history. I don't see what is to be gained in defending the current UK, which doesn't work for a majority of working people. Rather than cling to the illusions and threadbare returns from Labour, far better to reconfigure the relationships of these isles, and, as

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far as Scotland is concerned, saying, with all our limitations and conservatisms, that we want to live in a modern, democratic, European nation. I happen to want the same for my English, Welsh and Northern Irish friends. I have given up in believing in the Fabian myth of the British state as the deliverer of Enlightenment. Maybe ultimately that's the biggest difference between us.

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