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An independent mind...

Schrödinger's Scotland

(n.) A paradox in which they are too poor to survive as a country and simultaneously too rich to let go.

This month, we're thinking about Schrödinger's Scotland and UK hypocrisy...

MY SENSE OF prescience was clearly working well in last month's issue when I referred to Rishi Sunak's irrational comments equating Scottish independistas to extremists, describing him as the "most extreme (so far!) right-wing nonentity currently occupying Downing Street – who knows how that will pan out before this issue is published!" – well, now we all know how that panned out! I've written before how the old adage of a week being a long time in politics is being increasingly replaced by almost an hourly reappraisal of the situation, and that's certainly the case this month as we hurtle towards an unforeseen Westminster election that offers little hope of real change for us in Scotland. So, this month's scribbles are aimed generally, not specifically, at where we find ourselves during this period of uncertainty and are inspired by the regular discussions (or rants!) that take place between your humble correspondent and his esteemed Editor – that'll be me and Ken! Next month we'll see how that prescience is working out again...

In much recent political discourse, the principles of national sovereignty and the right to self-determination have been fiercely debated – not just in Scotland, but also in Ukraine, Palestine, and Taiwan, to name just three examples. As the United Kingdom grapples with its post-Brexit

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reality, it is worth examining the glaring inconsistency of the Westminster parliament in denying Scotland, an ancient and sovereign nation that voluntarily entered into a union with England, the right to hold an independence referendum. Prominent British politicians have made strong statements emphasising the principles of national sovereignty and the right to self-determination, yet their application seems selectively convenient:

- Mark Francois MP, Deputy Chairman of the Conservative European Research Group: "In the 21st century, you cannot hold a nation captive against its will."
- David Davis MP, former Conservative Brexit Minister: "I am not aware of any other treaty in the world where a sovereign nation commits to joining and can only leave when the other party agrees."
- Kate Hoey, former Labour MP (to the Attorney General): "Why would a sovereign nation agree to a deal with a union that prevents it from leaving whenever it chooses?"
- Geoffrey Cox MP, Conservative Attorney General: "Every sovereign state has the right to withdraw from a treaty if it no longer aligns with its interests."

These statements appear to reflect a robust understanding within the UK Government of the principles of both sovereignty and democratic self-determination. Yet the UK Government's stance on Scotland's right to hold a second independence referendum stands in stark contrast to these expressed beliefs. Indeed, it is the usual cry of *except for viewers in Scotland!*

One democratic mandate that should not be in question is surely that of the current Scottish Government, indeed of every Scottish Government since 2007. The SNP won yet another decisive victory in the last Scottish parliamentary elections, and included a commitment to hold another referendum on independence in its manifesto. This



democratic mandate, duly granted by the Scottish electorate, underscores the will of the people – a will that the UK Government appears determined to ignore, as it has done repeatedly since 2014.

Yet the quotes above from Francois, Davis, Hoey, and Cox, highlight the fundamental hypocrisy in this position. When it came to Brexit, the UK Government's emphasis was on the UK's right to leave the European Union – a decision apparently justified by the same principles now being denied to Scotland. The argument that a nation should not be held captive against its will was a rallying cry for Brexit supporters, yet when Scotland seeks to exercise this same right, it is met with resistance, ridicule, and scorn.

The people of Scotland decisively voted 62% to remain in the EU, yet the UK, which voted 52% overall to leave – a result overwhelmingly affected by the greater population size of England – trumped Scottish wishes. Before our 2014 referendum, unionists argued that Scots would lose EU citizenship if they did not remain in the UK. Therefore, the EU referendum outcome constituted a material change in the circumstances of that proposition, warranting a re-run of the Scottish independence referendum. Yet Westminster insulted Scots by refusing a second vote

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– now is not the time – something that Eurosceptics were given in 2016 having previously lost in 1975. So, two votes in 40 years for the Brexiteers while, in over 300 years, we Scots have only had the opportunity to vote once on independence, in 2014.

Westminster's refusal to permit the democratically elected Scottish Government to hold an independence referendum without Westminster's consent only serves to reinforce the argument that Scotland was never considered at any time to be an equal partner in this union. Although Scotland is a co-signatory of the Treaty of Union, the current stance of the UK Government suggests it is being treated more like a colony. Of course, this argument is arrogantly dismissed by unionists but, in a true union of equals, each party would have the right to re-evaluate and, if necessary, end the partnership unilaterally. However, by denying Scotland a democratic route to securing independence, Westminster insists on its superiority, undermining the very notion of an equal union.



The New Labour project – as designed by Tony Blair, Gordon Brown, Peter Mandelson, et al. – saw Labour, the party ostensibly of the left, move ever closer to the increasingly right-wing Conservatism introduced by Margaret Thatcher and her acolytes. With that background very firmly in mind, Keir Starmer's recent charm offensive in Scotland should be seen for exactly what it is, a cynical ploy to bring Scots outside to help secure Labour's dominance in the forthcoming election. His promises and overtures are simply aimed at winning the votes of left-of-centre voters sickened and disenfranchised by 14 years of increasingly aggressive Tory policies.

To this end both Starmer and his Scottish branch manager, Anas Sarwar, are deliberately conflating reserved and devolved responsibilities, blaming the Scottish Government for things it has no control over while claiming credit for things the UK Government has played no part in. But be under no illusions here – if Labour do form the next UK Government – as seems highly likely – there will be no second independence referendum for Scotland, and no extension of devolved powers either, simply an acceleration of the recent Tory policy of riding roughshod over the devolution settlement. The colonial status quo will be reconvened, perpetuating the cycle of political and democratic subjugation.

The truth is that the unionists are afraid, very afraid. They understand only too well the economic reality of Scotland retaining its revenues from its natural resources. And, by halting payments of its "club UK" membership costs, Scotland's chosen currency would emerge as one of the hardest in Europe, as fully laid out by the undemocratically suppressed McCrone report from 1974 – 1974! What would be left of the UK would face significant challenges dealing with the lack of Scottish income support, further highlighting the economic imbalance and dependency that Westminster seeks to maintain. Herein lies the principle of Schrödinger's Scotland – being allegedly dependent on English subsidies while simultaneously being too valuable to be allowed to leave the Union. Go figure!

So, this reluctance to permit a referendum likely stems from the understanding – not publicly admitted, for obvious reasons – that Scottish independence is not in England's interests. And this is where the crux



of their hypocrisy lies. The principles of sovereignty and self-determination are championed only when they align with the interests of the UK Government. When they threaten to disrupt the status quo or diminish England's influence, then these principles are conveniently sidelined. This is Marxism in action, not Karl but Groucho – *those are my principles, and if you don't like them... well, I have others!*

Given the current political climate and the growing sentiment in support for independence in Scotland, it is highly

plausible that a future referendum would lead to the revocation of the Treaty of Union and result in Scottish independence. The UK Government must reconcile its stance with the democratic mandate of the Scottish people, and continuing to deny Scotland the right to decide its own future not only undermines the principles of democracy but also risks further alienating Scottish citizens. Is this yet another example of Schrödinger's Scotland – that having, apparently, 50% of the population in favour of independence isn't sufficient to even ask the question, yet, paradoxically, having only 50% in favour of the Union also validates not asking the question! Given that the major polling companies are owned and controlled by unionists, does anyone believe it's 50:50 anyway? And why did sleekit Michael Gove go to such lengths, and expense, to keep the UK Government's secret poll secret? If you believe it was because the numbers supported the Union, then...

The refusal to support a democratically elected Scottish Government in executing its manifesto promises is a stark example of political hypocrisy. The right to self-determination and sovereignty should be universally upheld, not selectively applied. If the UK is to maintain any credibility in its advocacy for democratic principles, it must respect Scotland's right to choose its own path, even if that path leads to Scotland re-establishing its independence.

Scotland's future should be determined by the will of the Scottish people, free from the constraints of political expediency. Anything less is a betrayal of the very principles that the UK Government claims to hold dear. Their ongoing refusal to even engage in the debate not only highlights a double standard but also cements the perception that Scotland is effectively a colony rather than an equal partner in the Union. This realisation may ultimately strengthen the resolve for Scottish independence, demonstrating that true partnership and equality cannot exist under such imbalanced power dynamics.

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First, they will ignore you, then they will laugh at you, then they will fight you, then you will win.

(Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948), Father of the Nation, who led India to independence from British rule)

