GORDON BROWN
'BARD OF BRITISHNESS'

Tom Nairn

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Foreword

When I heard that Tom Nairn would be speaking at the Fabian Society's conference *Who Do We Want To Be? The Future of Britishness* in London in January 2006, I asked him if he would contribute an article to the IWA's journal *Agenda*, giving his reflections on the event. Some months went by until in May a first draft of the lead essay in this volume arrived on my desk.

My first impression was that it was far too long to be included as an article in *Agenda*. My second was that it was an important intervention, highly polemical of course, but taking forward arguments that Tom Nairn has developed over three decades since the early 1970s. Its starting point is the 1975 *Red Paper on Scotland*, edited by Gordon Brown and to which Tom himself contributed a notable chapter.

Discussing the essay with colleagues at the IWA we agreed that we should publish it. At the same time we came up with the notion of stimulating a debate by asking a range of people from different parts of Britain as well as Wales and from across the political spectrum to respond to the arguments made in the essay. We are grateful to all those who have participated.

When we were planning this volume we did not anticipate how rapidly the questions it addresses would come to occupy the high ground of political debate, as in short order they did in September 2006. At this point Tom Nairn took the opportunity to add the final section to his essay, in an effort to catch up as it were with the debate he had foreseen some months earlier.

It seems likely that discussions around the future of Britain and the relationships between its component entities that are addressed in this publication can only intensify over the next few years.

John Osmond
Director, IWA

Notes on Contributors

Tom Nairn is Research Professor in Nationalism and Cultural Diversity with the Globalism Institute, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia. He is widely known for developing in the early 1960s what would later be named the Nairn-Anderson thesis on British decline, which has had a definitive influence upon studies of nationalism and politics in Britain and beyond. He is one of the four most widely cited authorities on nationalism, along with Benedict Anderson, Anthony Smith and the late Ernest Gellner. His book *The Break-up of Britain* (1977) has been a central reference for the growing field of nationalism studies and is used in hundreds of university courses across the world. Where the *Break-up of Britain* refocused studies of nationalism and uneven development, *Faces of Nationalism: Janus Revisited* (1998) established the field of argument that civic and secular nationalism is a key feature of modernity and not an archaic reaction against it. It is part of his general contribution to fundamentally rethinking the place of 'nationalism from below'. His book *After Britain* (2000) continued the argument of *The Break-up of Britain*, concentrating especially on Scotland and devolutionary politics, along with the structural tensions within Blairism. Through his analytical and translating work, he is credited, together with Perry Anderson, with introducing Antonio Gramsci's work to Anglophone culture, especially the notion of 'hegemony', which has had a major influence on the field of political and cultural studies since.

Leighton Andrews is Labour AM for Rhondda, recapturing the seat from Plaid Cymru in the 2003 election. A former Lliberal he contested an election in Gillingham on their behalf in 1987 before switching to Labour in the mid-1990s. He was a co-founder of the Yes for Wales campaign in the 1997 referendum. Formerly head of public affairs for the BBC he is currently writing a book about the organisation.

David Melding is Conservative AM for South Wales Central. Prior to his election in 1999 he was Manager of the Carers National Association in Wales. He stepped down from the Conservative front bench after the 2003 elections in order to campaign for greater powers for the National Assembly, but rejoined the front bench in November 1974 as Business Manager. In 2005 he was re-appointed as Policy Director of the Conservative Group. He is a leading figure in Cymdeithas y Kymberiad, a pressure group within the party that advocates primary legislative powers for the Assembly and a reorganisation of the Conservative Party on a more autonomous basis in Wales.

Vernon Bogdanor is Professor of Government at Oxford University. His books include *Devolution in the United Kingdom*, published by Oxford University Press in 1999. He is editor of *The British Constitution in the 20th Century* published by Oxford University Press in 2003. His next book, *The New British Constitution* will be published by Allen Lane/Penguin in 2007.

Peter Stead is a Visiting Professor at the University of Glamorgan, having previously taught History at the Swansea University for many years since the 1960s. He has twice been a Fulbright Scholar in the United States and he is the author of books on film, television, opera and sport. He has authored critical studies of Denis Potter and Richard Burton and also a study of Welsh acting. he has jointly edited four volumes of essays on aspects of popular culture in Wales for the University of Wales Press. In the 1979 Westminster election he was the Labour candidate for the Barry constituency.

Charlotte Williams is a lecturer at the University of Keele, research and writing on issues of equal opportunity. She was formerly a lecturer with the University of Wales , Bangor, and is still based in north Wales close to her two adult daughters and sisters. In the preface to her biographical volume *Sugar and Slate* (Planet Books, 2002) she declared, "I grew up in a small Welsh town amongst people with pale faces, feeling that somehow to be half Welsh and half Afro-Caribbean was always to be half of something but never quite anything whole at all. I grew up in a world of mixed messages about belonging, about home and identity."

David Gow has been a journalist with The Guardian since 1984. Currently he is the paper's European Business Editor, based in Brussels. Between 1968 and 1984 he was a journalist with the Scotsman, except for the period between 1974-76 when he was a producer with London Weekend Television. In 1975 he was a contributor to the *Red Paper on Scotland*.

Neal Ascherson is a Scottish journalist, born in Edinburgh and educated at Eton and King's College, Cambridge, where he read History. After graduating with a triple starred First he took up journalism first at the Manchester Guardian and then at *The Scotsman* (1959-1960), *The Observer* (1960-1990) and the *Independent on Sunday* (1990-1998). In recent years, he has also been a regular contributor to the *London Review of Books*. He is an expert on Eastern Europe and especially Polish affairs. His most recent books are *The Black Sea* (1995) and *Stone Voices* (2002).

Kevin Morgan is Professor of European Regional Development in the School of City and Regional Planning at Cardiff University. He was Chair of the *Yes For Wales* referendum campaign in 1997 and among his many publications he is the co-author of *Redesigning Democracy: The Making of the Welsh Assembly* (Seren, 2000).

Gordon Brown: 'Bard of Britishness'

Tom Nairn

The 1st of May 2007 will be a significant date. Modern Britain dates from May 1st 1707, when the Treaty of Union between the English and Scottish parliaments came into effect. This created both the United Kingdom state and much of the British Empire to be. Three centuries later the latter has disappeared and the former is in some trouble, in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland as well as Iraq. One would have thought the Tercentenary an appropriate moment for both thought and reconsideration, whether celebratory, critical, or both together.

But as historian Tom Devine has commented, practically nothing is being planned by either Westminster or the recently resurrected Scottish parliament at Holyrood. There will be some academic events and publications, but nothing *public,* as if despairing officialdom had decided that the indifference of general opinion were best left undisturbed. Since the Millennium commemoration farce, has the cadaver grown wary of farther disappointments?

But another historian, Kevin Sinclair, has pointed to political motives:

> ...the timing of the anniversary — which falls just two days before next year's Scottish parliamentary elections — may have rendered any public programme of commemoration a 'political no-no'.[1]

Deeply unpopular in 1707, the Union has come to be challenged again in recent times, and is currently sustained by the rule of a single political party, New Labour — the party whose hold over both Scotland and Wales is likely to be broken, or mortally threatened, by these elections. Hence, the prevalent apathy about even signalling a great historical moment. New Labour rule was only just kept going by the previous devolved elections in 2003, and it would be worse than embarrassing for defeated parties to face a possibly defeated (or reconstructed) Union state.

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[1]: Paul Dalgarno, 'No Plans to Mark Acts of Union, *Sunday Herald ,* 23 April 2006, p.12.

There has been one exception, however. Early in 2006 New Labour's Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown, embarked upon a highly public and vocal campaign of Unionist rebirth and justification. The importance of this is of course amplified by Brown's position as heir-apparent to Leader Tony Blair, who has announced he will be standing down as Leader of the Labour Party and Prime Minister some time before the summer of 2007. Prediction becomes more hazardous than usual amid the crumbling structures of today's realm. It is possible (probable, some would argue) that the heir will never inherit, because over-attachment to vanishing imagined communities (like his own Party) caused him to wait too long.

On the other hand, whoever does succeed Blair will have to confront the issues raised in Brown's high-profile campaign: what he calls 'Britishness' is undoubtedly in trouble, and no Premier will be able to avoid rallying calls and identity antics of some sort. The London bombings in July 2005, the stalling of the Northern Ireland Peace Process, the aftermath of the Iraqi War, cynicism about the Special Relationship with America, dire uncertainties over the European Union, mounting restlessness over 1998's devolution of power to the Scots and the Welsh: all these will compel ideological, as well as economic, initiatives.

There's the rub: since the former Establishment failed for so long to reform the 1707 central state, no successor can avoid trying to half-reform *everything.* The UK's *ancien régime* prided itself on sensible, piecemeal evolution, to the point of disastrously over-playing this hand, in the circumstances that have followed the end of the Cold War. The new climatic environment of globalization demanded something less piecemeal, a revolution, rather than ad hoc adjustments to such an archaic polity and foreign policy. Brown does understand the need, and has set out a ghost response — a fantasy nation suitable to the New age, which at the same time won't upset the ancient one too much. He proposes the selective resurrection of a Gladstonian-liberal England, without Disraeli's British-imperial bullying.

Unfortunately he has had to do so in the middle of a Disraelian war. Unable to denounce the latter (following the lead of his compatriot, the late Robin Cook), for reasons of Party and State, he has had to support it. Renovation of the out-of-date, collapsing state will have to wait. In the meantime, what else can be undertaken except renovation of the nation itself: *a new people* braced for the future?

Possessed of more imagination than most of his colleagues, Brown has been capable of at least rising to the level of Bertold Brecht's 1953 anti-hero, that Writers Union Secretary who urged redoubled efforts on the East Germans in the name of Party and Socialism. The poet commented:

> Would it not be easier
> In that case for the government
> To dissolve the people
> And elect another?[2]

At the time of writing, nobody knows if Brown will be privileged to carry the election process forward from No. 10 Downing Street. However, no representative of ancient régime survival can now avoid something like it. Great Britain is conservable only through deeper cultural and ideological alteration, led from above by one or another Svengali. That is, some stage re-enchanter equipped with contemporary powers of suggestion and media influence.[3] Otherwise the centre is unlikely to hold. The key issue for the devolved elections and parliaments in 2007 lies here. Study of Brown's new crusade is a useful way of seeing what may be at stake.

From Keir Hardie to Svengali

Looking back over Gordon Brown's thirty-year political trajectory, it may be useful to recall some features of his initiation into politics, with the publication of the *Red Paper on Scotland*. The book came out in 1975, after the period of nationalist break-through in Scotland, the same year as Harold Wilson's referendum on taking Britain into the European Economic Community, and following on some notable working-class agitation (displayed on the front cover — the Upper Clyde shipyard occupation). Its editor was then the elected Student Rector of Edinburgh University; and both the man and his book seemed expressions of the restless, dissident spirit of the Sixties, persisting into the Seventies. It burst upon us after so many exciting indicators of change and new times.

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[2] 'The Solution', in *Bertold Brecht: Poems 1913-1956* , 'Last Poems, 1953-56', Methuen, 2000, p.440.
[3] A person who, with evil intent, tries to persuade another to do what is desired: "a crafty Svengali who lures talented people with grand promises yet gives them little lasting operational authority" (Chris Welles). ETYMOLOGY: After Svengali, the hypnotist villain in the novel *Trilby* by George du Maurier, *American Heritage Dictionary*, 2000.

So, naturally, its effect was great, and confirmatory: it seemed to unite the rediscovery of a long-interred nationalism with positive general ideas about the future, and suggested that the Scots might be a nation again, *and* equipped with a meaning capable of embracing the greater causes and visions of the times. That is, of a world still struggling out of the stale paralysis of the Cold War, and seeking new turnings. In 1975 it was naturally assumed that new kinds of Socialism were bound to find a voice there, as part of the rejuvenation. Such hopes informed the whole book, and notably Gordon Brown's 'Introduction'.

To this day, much of Brown's lingering Leftish aura rests upon a folk-memory of the *Red Paper.* This is why it may be important to recall that, whether behind the times or ahead of them, its left-wing and anti-nationalist assumptions were mistaken *at the time*. The entire *Red Paper* project was to be cruelly betrayed only four years later. In 1979, utterly different trends were to find a far louder voice, and a more decisive political will. With the Winter of Discontent, the failure of the first Home Rule referendum in 1979, and Mrs Thatcher's ascent to power, that will began to impose itself. It is ceasing to do so at present, but only after a 'generation' in the classical sense, an effective life-time of successful authority that has fostered assumptions and social instincts unimaginable to most in 1975. The prophetic fanfare turned almost at once into an elegy — indeed, almost an unintended funeral oration, the interment of impossible dreams.

Many commentators have drawn an analogy between Brown's idea of his Party, and some inherited traditions of the Scottish Presbyterian Kirk. He does often speak of the former in terms reminiscent of the latter: indestructibility, bedrock, ineffaceable spiritual drive, a popular core 'returned to' in times of trial — and so on. This may sound vaguely reassuring to non-Scottish audiences, but is in truth somewhat alien to the instincts of a movement founded on the much looser, disparate inheritance of English Nonconformity and Methodism. The *Red Paper* was 'national' in a sense quite distinct from the SNP's ideology of political separation, as well as more recent notions of ethnicity. And the Presbytery-based vision of 1975 was forced to confront an authentic time of trial — worse, a fundamental defeat of most of its assumptions and quasi-divine dreams. In that perspective, as 'Thatcherism' took charge of U.K. society and merged into the wider rising tide of U.S.-led globalization, little but ruins would soon be left. 'Success' lay elsewhere, on the other side of a Devil's terrain whose temptations would in any case alter its meaning.

Brown's own political success had been predicted from the days of his tenure as Student Rector in Edinburgh. But no-one then thought that such a career would be one of skillful ruin-management — that he would become the Jeeves of Great Britain's last days, a courtier of self-abasement, sleaze, insanely false pretences, failed reform and neo-imperial warfare. Unfortunately, this managerial fate couldn't help underwriting certain negative aspects of the Kirk inheritance. The latter combines both democratic and authoritarian elements. Individual souls had their say in the collective disposition, certainly; but the efficacy of such input lies in submission to the over-mastering will of God, and leadership's primary duty remains decipherment of His awesome power. He who reads the runes correctly takes on something of their authority — standing in for the Deity, an autocrat until some new prophet is elected.

Because *actual* election remains pretty difficult in the British system, Brown was effectively choosing to help that system down cemetery road. Because the runes of the Eighties were so calamitous for the Old Left, the great abilities and personal charisma of the former Student Rector were to be deployed in a prolonged holding operation against what his Presbyterian ancestors would have diagnosed as the enemy forces of materialism: a 'way of the world' that had defeated not only Communism, but many of the assumptions of the Keynesian and social-democratic ideology so prevalent until the mid-seventies.

Such straitened survival was capable only of feigned rebirth. So the Socialism of the 'Introduction' was to re-emerge in a practical form worse than castrated. Losing the baby was bad enough; but behind the 'Third Way' curtains of the labour ward, something far worse was happening. A monster was smuggled in to take its place: 'New Labour' may have been shown proudly to the cheering crowds; but the creature was to burgeon into the prematurely agèd infant of New *Britain*.

The Monster in the Manger

The *Red Paper* ideology had imagined a symbiosis of Socialism and Britishness. However, losing the former meant that the *British* ingredient was destined to grow ever more important.

In 1997 an effective over-arching belief system was urgently needed, above all by a movement by then unused to office, and with so much ground (and self-confidence) to recover. Party survival itself prompted this compensation, rather than popular belief. Over the same period most surveys have detected waning rather than reviving 'Britishness'. But still, a declining or contested *nationalism* offered (or seemed to offer) a far stronger chance of redemption than a socialism ailing unto death all round the globe.

That's surely why Brown, the 'Party man' who took flight as a left-wing prophet, was to end up as today's strident UK nationalist. The Scottish Icarus felt his wings melting away even as he assumed office, and understood how the ungrateful way of *this* world might grant him almost no terra firma to return to. None (that is) without the restored or reconstructed 'greatness' of Britain. Hence service of the imperial state-inheritance, and improvement of its estate with minor changes, was the sole way forward. Or so dour realism seemed to indicate. A specific combination of Party vanity and self-confidence made him feel he could take the monster over. Unfortunately, it worked the other way round. The antique inheritance took possession of him. The result was a chain of compromises that have transformed him into the fulsome bard of a 'Britishness' none of his 1975 supporters dreamed of.

In mid-January 2006 Brown launched the latest round of the Save Britain campaign at a specially convened day conference in London.[4] His keynote address to this sold-out event was warmly acclaimed, and widely noticed by the media. The British nation would be safe in his hands, he reassured the (mainly) Southern intelligentsia. However, it would be safer still if a different, more patriotic spirit could only be infused into politics — a spirit of more self-conscious and positive patriotism, in which citizens flew the flag in their front gardens, and were given an annual British National Day to enjoy. It was no longer enough for Britain to just be there, like the old Crown and habitual Constitution that had prevailed back in 1975. Nowadays, a positive worship of these things is required, as in the USA, and we must learn to impart their values in school classrooms and swearing-in ceremonies.

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[4] *'Who Do We Want To Be?' The Future of Britishness*, Imperial College, London, Jan. 14th 2006. Accounts of the event can be found at: www.fabian-society.org.uk/, documents including Brown's speech www.fabian-society.org.uk/press_office. Also in the *Fabian Review: the Britishness Issue*, January 2006.

Another way of analyzing the project is as a generalization of Northern Ireland Protestant attitudes. Of course, among the latter there has long been an exaggerated emphasis on 'Britishness', as a form of communal self-defence against the threat of Irish ethno-religious domination. The 1916 blood-sacrifice for Irish independence continues to be answered by a litany of Ulster-Protestant war losses, commemorations and ultra-loyalism. In the past, many main-island Brits were suspicious of such extremism, seeing it is another oddly Irish phenomenon.

In Brown's new patriot-country, Britons had better forget all that. The tail won't just occasionally wag the British do, it's destined to *become* the dog itself. Presbyterians, Catholics, Anglicans, Muslims, Buddhists and no-hope Atheists: today all find themselves solemnly summoned to behave more like Paisleyites — naturally without renouncing their previous *personae*. Many instinctively rebel at the prospect. But they're behind the Brownite times. Have they not understood that all such *personae* are tagged for rebirth within the New Patriotism, to be transported onwards by its multi-culturalist enthusiasm?

In this perspective, 'multi-culturalism' means something like: 'Be a whatever-you-like and welcome here... as long as you pass Sir Bernard Crick's British Citizenship test, fly the flag in the front garden, and go to war when requested'.[5] A theatre of transacting minorities and nationalist contestations, played out upon a contracting if not collapsing stage: such is the UK *société du spectacle* to which the Queen's subjects were being formally invited in January.

Like the formal Empire and Commonwealth before it, Socialism has been indecently given the last rites and had some concrete poured on top by Blair, leaving 'Britain' even more naked than previously. Yet this nudity calls its meaning into question more cruelly, if not terminally. Is that Little England knocking timidly on the back door? Set the dogs on him at once. Yet a new call is required to keep the wretch at bay: the glamour of backwardness must somehow be restored. Enter the Magus from West Fife.

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[5] Sir Bernard, an 'expert on British citizenship', was asked by Home Secretary David Blunkett (an earlier pupil) to think up a plausible 'compulsory test' for incomers seeking residence. It was at once labelled the 'Britishness test', and had the aim of making new Britons feel 'meaningful and celebratory' rather than just bureaucratically accepted. BBC World News, 10 September 2002.

Nothing was more revealing on this front than the almost total absence of monarchy from the Fabian January debates. Not so long ago, the Windsor Crown *was* most people's idea of uniting Britain: the actual family that held the metaphorical one together. This was particularly important for the English, whose narrower nationality had for so long been sublimated into a wider imperial view. For them, the concreteness of Royalty voiced many of the emotive aspects of nationalism, without posing awkward questions of identity and exclusion. Yet now it had vanished from the scene of renewed Britishness, as somehow *passé* and irrelevant — replaced by indifference, rather than an aggressive republicanism.[6]

Brown's ideological contraption is worse than no answer to the British dilemma: indeed it amounts to a cure via self-conscious exacerbation of the ailment itself. His weird mixture of sermon and US-style public relations hype may have been aimed initially at young British Muslims like the Leeds bombers of July 2005. But without reassuring the latter, it will end by annoying and disconcerting everybody else, including the vast English majority. The latter's acquiescent or puzzled silence remains vital to such an ideological venture. If they respond at all, it is likely to be with derision or hostility. The new Leader of the Conservative Party, David Cameron, put it rather well in the wake of Brown's recent outbursts of bad poetry: but, he objected... "we're not like that. *We don't do flags!"*

Pantomimes and Myths

Cameron was right, but irrelevant for the new show — other features of which he strongly backs, with his own rhetoric of novelty. Be a bit more *radical,* Cameron: enough of that dawdling in memory lane. Nothing the Conservative Party is currently advertising seems likely to save them from Neo-Patriotism.

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[6] Among the sessions I attended the subject only came up once, in a discussion of symbols and icons of the new-British identity, where a passing reference to 'getting rid of it' generated prolonged applause. The Queen's 80th birthday came along not long after, and Madeleine Bunting pointed out in *The Guardian* (April 21st) that the low-key festivities were preludes to something else — Elizabeth II's departure and: "...a constitutional crisis waiting to happen: the relationship between sovereign, church and state, which the Queen has managed to largely steer clear of public debate, would come under the bewildered glare of the global media, and who knows how it would fall apart under that kind of scrutiny?"

The point here was in part occluded by the stage management of the January event; yet it must have struck some observers. There was something 'foreign' about it all, in an ancient but recognizable Anglo-British sense, something obsessive and strident about such a newly-discovered passion for things previously ignored, or taken for granted. Nor was this apprehension mistaken, however the effective content of 'foreign' here was actually *Scottish.* Brown's new fake Britishry is at bottom as Scottish as the old *Red Paper* had been. For, of course, the Scots and the Welsh *do* 'do flags', like the Republicans and the Protestant Irish. Their histories have configured them that way, a way closer to ordinary international practice than that of the Anglo-British majority.

The latter now finds itself chided and told what's good for it by a minority of know-it-all Scots, *and* cheered on by other vexed immigrant groups in the name of multi-culturalism. The latter would naturally like to remodel Britishness, in order to lessen discrimination, and make principle replace racism. But as many know all too well, 'principle' is rather over-abstract for a *mentalité* so famously empirical and concrete. So can't it be clothed, and fortified, by new techniques of technicolour projection, by a British ideology made to healthier, more enlightened orders? What would be wrong with such a reconstructed identity, fit for the multicultural times?

All that's wrong is that it rests upon a mistaken notion. Individuals and (with more difficulty) groups or parties may of course reconsider outworn ideas and argue over new ones. But *identities* cannot be confected in this way — and least of all by clever dodges and new-baked rituals or conventions. Only New Labour's odd fusion of narcissism and despair could have manufactured such a phony answer to a real need. What Frankenstein-Brown has done is to exploit the semi-conscious, taken-for-granted nationalism of the English with a specious formula, a made-to-order patriotic uniform stitched together from bits of the Anglo-British (imperial) past and misunderstood fragments of the United States.

But an identity is a cultural body, not simply clothing and spectacle. It has been made — or more accurately, has made itself — through societal struggles and experienced repetitions, over quite long periods of time and via violent episodes like revolutions and warfare. It is the customs of living in common, dependent upon habits and 'unthinking' predispositions — the societal equivalent of 'instincts', built up over generations.

And of course such attitudes constitute every majority, even if the latter has emerged out of past or forgotten minorities and conflicts.[7] Within this contested sphere of discourse, 'minorities' has become a systematically misunderstood term. It tends to mean recent 'ethnic' or immigrant communities, groups in need of support or help, so they can 'fit in' better to the host culture, as well as succeed in their own terms.

Yet this myopic perspective does justice to neither the host nor the new additions. It disregards the majority story — as in the ceaseless platitudes about conflicts being the 'problem' of the host, rather than of immigrants. And it simultaneously neglects the creative force of the less-integrated cultures and (more important) their long-range persistence, and their organic effects upon both hosts and states. In such struggles, a new, changed or hybrid 'identity' is invariably making its way forward, entering the lists, as it were, for some future nationalism. But that only repeats the point, of course: neither side is likely to recompose itself according to Fabian Society or other blueprints.

It may be useful to remember some other examples: modern French identity is often regarded as an inherited majoritarian family of attitudes, combining the rigid universalism of some siblings with the racist comportment of others. Yet much of this contradictory identity itself has been the generational deposit of a Corsican family, who for two thirds of the 19th century imposed itself upon a highly variegated spectrum of ethnic and linguistic communities: the most, rather than the least, heterogeneous 'nation-state' in Europe. *Le chauvinisme* (1830s onwards) and then *le nationalisme* (from the 1870s) were progenies of Napoleonism, military conscription and incessant preparations for war, rather than simply of the Revolution itself. And in the course of this process, *La République* became fetishized into a secular (anti-clerical) nationalism, as part of such later struggles.

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[7] In this respect, much of Brown's mistake can be seen as derived from the popular misuse of Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's *Invented Traditions,* an attack on modern nationalism that systematically occluded all aspects *not* 'invented' by intellectuals and politicians. It ignored everything carried forward in other ways, and fostered a vogue for dismissal and self-conscious substitution. The issue has been recently examined by Eelco Runia in his essay 'Presence', in *History and Theory* No.45 (February 2006), where he points out that *most* of the past is borne forward through 'metonymy' — the 'transfer of presence' that then makes invention or re-invention possible, and effective. The past is a 'stowaway' rather than a self-conscious, ticket-paying passenger who may be summoned to the intellectual bridge, reprimanded, and instructed to attire himself differently or (occasionally) jump overboard. Were this not so, humans would never be able to 'spring surprises on themselves', or suffer discontinuities, lapses and existential uncertainty. In this sense, rather than a renaissance, New Britishness may turn out to be the fag-end of a 'nineties ideological fashion, maggot-ridden mutton posturing as the spring lamb of globalization.

Something analogous took place in the post-Civil War USA. Both the sanctification of what was (even then) an archaic polity, the Union's takeover of Southern militarism, and the extension of reborn Christianity were all to become pillars of an emergent great power: untouchable blessings of the state that had found itself compelled to incorporate the Southern Confederacy.[8] And the active function of one minority or other in exaltation of these ideologies has been a constant aspect of the process — nowhere more clearly than under the rule of President George W. Bush.

None of Brown's New-British national identitarians show the slightest awareness of just how bizarrely parochial and inimitable is the 'patriotism' they have selected for imitation. They have taken Neo-Conservatism at its own valuation, in fact, seeing little since 2000 but the manifestation of the timeless constitutional values of 1776 and after — now imagined as not only universal, but virtually one flesh with the Friedmanite capitalism of the Eighties and Nineties.

'Self-Colonisation'

The real point of the *Red Paper* was to choose the wrong nation. Its 'Introduction' was a conjuring trick, reassuring both nationalists and anti-nationalists by claiming *both* peoples and countries were equally chosen. But in fact its Editor was going with the mainstream — or rather, with what *seemed to be the mainstream* from the 1980s up to the year 2000 (I will come back to this point later on). 1975's Editorial 'Introduction' strove to project a noble synthesis between Socialism and Nationalism. Brown figured there as a synthesizer of ideas, rather than an originator. But, it must be recognized, a synthesizer of a very imaginative and generous sort. There was a potential for leadership even then implicit in his willingness to seek and stress positive elements.

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[8] The results are described in Daniel Lazare's *The Frozen Republic: How the Constitution is Paralyzing Democracy* (1996). More recently, Bertram Wyatt-Brown has analyzed other quaint aspects of American nationalism in 'The Ethic of Honor in National Crises: the Civil War, Vietnam, Iraq and the Southern Factor', *Journal of the Historical Society*, Vol V, No.4, 2005. None of these are ever referred to in Brown's pro-American sermons. He has either failed to read, or ignored, devastating accounts like Anatol Lieven's *America, Right or Wrong: the Anatomy of American Nationalism* (2005). What surfaces in such perorations is a kind of universal ghost, US Patriotism masquerading as universal model — on which of course an equally purged and New UK phantom must then dance attendance.

However, this was leadership of a special kind. Brown appears as an authoritarian 'moderator', in fact a strong-minded reconciler of ideas and initiatives in a sense more old-Presbyterian than New-Left. Naturally the synthesis had a strong emphasis upon ideas about 'democratic-popular' transformation and socialism. I use Gramsci's famous phrase deliberately, for he was one of the dominating background influences in the performance. The transformation was envisaged as 'workers' control', and a Scottish Assembly was required (he wrote) partly "to allow the framing of distinctly Scottish policies to meet social needs and requirements". But then, and much more importantly, as well as "reinvigorating the Labour Movement from the workplace and community outwards", it had to "force the pace towards socialism in Britain as a whole" (p.19). This would also "give Scottish socialists a chance to lead and influence other regions and other countries", presumably by showing them how, in this way, nationalism could be subsumed or transformed into social or communitarian terms.

None the less, the collection was noticeably, if somewhat chaotically, open to Scottish nationalist and even 'fringe' opinion. It was in that positive sense eclectic, informed by a positive spirit of inquiry rather than just by hopes of compromise or deal-making among the different encampments of the Left. And, of course, this is what has kept it alive at some deeper level, however much the influence has now been betrayed by Brown's great-nation strobe lights and delusions about America.

In Eelco Runia's terms (mentioned above) there is still a 'stowaway' there, whom one would like one day to welcome back on deck. But he will have to find a different crew, sailing in another latitude, who have in turn forgotten all about the rejuvenated yet stable United Kingdom of Blair-Brown, homeland of the Welfare State, Liberty and Model-T parliamentarism.

By the time Brown reached office, Britain was already something different: an ageing Sorcerer's apprentice, pedalling harder to keep abreast of a cleansed and corrected age — indeed, claiming loudly to be its standard-bearer, rather than a mere camp-follower. Brown found leadership power at last, but in this crazily upside-down universe, as the champion of deregulation and privatization, borne forward on a swelling tide of pro-American rhetoric. His first important step in 1997 was to abandon control of interest rates to the Bank of England — that is, to the City of London, formerly the deadly foe of all Labour governments.

The aim was of course, in the *argot* of that moment, to render London more fit and competitive, in the new world of 'globalised' capital and commerce. The corroded old iron of British Socialism emerged from Thor's new forge as alien steel — an unduly self-important side-kick of the Neo-conservatism reigning in Washington, D.C.[9]

Such captaincy brought with it novel forms of allegiance and subjection. The Blair-Brown government was stepping into a train already formed in this sense, the willing 'subjects' of Clinton, then of George W. Bush. Earlier empires had rested on invasion, colonisation, and crude forms of punishment and coercion. By contrast, the US post-1989 imperium relies on *self*-colonization. Typically, this rests upon some calculation of national interests normally aimed at 'fitting in', via the provision of credentials of commercial openness, entrepreneurial liberty and possible profitability. In the *huis clos* of American-led globalization, such servitude was to be generalized.

But no servitude is likely to compare with that of former masters. After all, the latter know servility from the inside, and are scheming not to set up a new country but to renovate an old one. In this way both shame and honour have been easily transcended, relegated by the imperative of survival. And this was, unfortunately, an existential enterprise in which the Scots were all too likely to distinguish themselves: who else had such a long history of self-colonisation, going back to the early 18th century, or even before?

It would be mistaken to single out Brown in this context, as if he had been particularly important or influential in the great climate change. His present-day eminence sometimes provokes this kind of accusation on the Left, voiced in sententious moral judgements about how he and Blair have 'betrayed' the principles of 1975, or even those of Keir Hardie and other founding fathers. Well perhaps they did. But then, so have most others, in most comparable countries, for good reasons as well as bad. Did he (and we) give up on Socialism; or was it not rather that Socialism betrayed us, because of certain inherent or incurable defects, or at least limitations?

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[9] Just how really important can be gauged from the index of Francis Fukuyama's most recent recantation of earlier views, *After the Neocons: America at the Crossroads*, Profile Books 2006. There are precisely three mentions of Britain in its 226 pages, one in a footnote, the other two in a single paragraph on pages 96-7 (and one of these is only a list of side-kicks). Having paid so little attention to London so far, there will of course be even less need to heed such a camp-follower 'at the crossroads'.

Both versions have some plausibility, but neither (it seems to me) should be used to condemn Gordon Brown particularly.[10] No: another tragedy in the Greek sense was unfolding in this turn of events. And it still has some way to run. This seems to me both much deeper and more intimate than anything related to the vicissitudes of Socialism alone. It was *national* in essence.

In the most convincing general panorama of post-'89 so far produced, Yergin and Stanislaw's *Commanding Heights* (1998), it is shown how extensive and immediately irresistible were the general economic shifts that carried away the *Red Paper* world. But both in the *Red Paper* and in the mind-set of its presiding spirit a crucial weakness, or limitation, was revealed by their response to the earthquake. *Their* commanding heights were both inherently treacherous, and taken too much for granted. And this was much more serious than correct political attitudes towards Labour's old 'Clause 4', or the general retreat from Keynesianism. Neal Ascherson put his finger neatly on it in an *Observer* article. "There were gaps in the Red Paper", he notes:

> There is almost nothing about Britain as such. This is striking, given the Labour Government's effort to package devolution as part of some wider programme to democratize British institutions (5 November 2000).

It certainly was. But I think the point can be taken even farther. What was being taken for granted was simply the British Constitution and State. It was assumed, notably by the Editor, that these *must* go on providing a perfectly reliable (and indeed the only possible) wider framework for any new Scottish democracy to function within. The passage of time has convinced Brown, belatedly, that the 'institutions' alone aren't sufficient. But instead of getting rid of them via reform, he thinks that the nation itself should be re-forged to fit.

In Brecht's famous sense, it's time to elect 'a new people': a more self-conscious nation worthy of the inherited robes. As Brown's current campaign for New Labour's leadership has illustrated, a reanimated British nationalism has become far more important than electoral reform. In fact, democratisation is becoming a threat to the American-style 'patriotism' now urgently needed to prevent farther decline and break-up.

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[10] I have tried to deal with the question in terms of the wider framework of Marxism's origins and development, in 'History's Postman', a review of Jacques Attali's *Karl Marx; ou, l'esprit du monde, London Review of Books*, vol 28 No 2 January 26 2006.

Instead, an up-dated all-British nationalism is needed, to keep self-respecting self-colonization going. The Sorcerer's Apprentice can't just tag along: he has some requirements of his own. And Scots like Brown know what they're talking about, in this sense. Looking back over the thirty-year period in which Scottish and Welsh nationalism resurfaced politically, and the Ulster-Protestant equivalent acquired sufficient force to arrest the Peace Process, there is no doubt what the dominant strain of nationality-politics has been. The periphery may have got its assorted acts together enough to influence UK development. But incomparably the most determined, ruthless, militarized and life-or-death form of nationalism has throughout been the *British* one.

New-immigrant intellectuals have often argued that 'British values' (cleaned up a bit) have to be OK, and that British support for the Iraq War, ant-Terrorist hysteria and creeping authoritarianism are passing aberrations. Old-immigrant culture tells a different story, and not in Ireland alone: Iraq *is* the deeper current. And unfortunately, 'aberrations' can be detected more easily in the glib postures of a half-hearted multiculturalism, striving to measure and dole out just enough loyalty to keep Westminster in business. Which implies *not* reforming the foundations of the State, or UK *ancien régime.*

1975's mistaken assumptions had another in tow, which has proved deadly for the Left. A basic meme of modern Britishness is the idea that constitutional politics and ideas are essentially secondary, or 'superstructural', for socialists, or even for democrats. That is, they may be 'a good thing' (etc.), which wise reform will eventually find time to take care of (and so on). But they are never urgent enough to be tackled *now*. They are not necessary conditions of successful social, economic and cultural or other policies — those things deemed the 'real stuff' of politics.

In other words, there is no tradition of popular or radical *constitutional* agitation active here at all, no conception of the existing constitutional order as a standing offence or a humiliation, a form of repression or obfuscation intolerable in any new or improved social order. After the defeat of Chartism in the 1840s, a general acceptance of the endlessly liberal and adaptable nature of the United Kingdom state came to inform left-wing parties and most other movements, except in Ireland. The Women's Suffrage Movement was another important exception, but one which proved containable.

In 1975 there was in the *Red Paper* very little indication that the new Scottish restlessness was going to be different in this sense. The only real opposition on that score was coming from the Nationalists. But their claims were conventional in another way: a demand for national recognition *as such*, regardless of the nature of Anglo-British hegemony. The Scottish National Party was an elderly political movement, not much younger than the British Labour Party. It had inevitably been moulded by an older era, that of anti-colonial agitation and achievement, widely successful following World War II. But of course, the ideology of that period provided a very ill-fitting uniform for a *non*-colonized society seeking statehood, in very different historical circumstances.

As for the various Red contingents, these also clung to the conventional idea of socio-cultural change as not just coming first, but being a sufficient condition of all farther changes. The 1975 Editor's sole critical allusion to matters constitutional was the admission that British identity was a bit 'demoralized'. The implication was plainly that morale would be boosted by the book's various suggestions (once a properly revitalized, new Labour government got itself elected). So the fate of *Red Paper*'s ideological venture was not determined solely by the misfortunes of Socialism after 1979, alarming as these were, but by what one can call the 'medium', or perhaps the vehicle, through which the Brownian synthesis was to come about. That is, the United Kingdom polity itself.

As a matter of fact, the United Kingdom state was at that time already launched upon an ever steeper downward slide into the present, where something far worse than 'demoralization' is now disclosed to British subjects every day. Disclosed, and grotesquely parodied, as in the recent speeches and projects of today's Chancellor (and tomorrow's likely Premier). In this sense 1979 was to mark a decisive turn of the screw in that process. It was not just about defeating the Left, or the post-war welfarist consensus.

The world of the *Red Paper* on Scotland was indeed carried away by the rapids from that date onwards. But the mushroom-growth of Thatcherism was also to be the final confirmation of what I think one can call 'redemption politics' — that is, the rooted, unshakeable idea that the vital goal is to redeem or save the United Kingdom inheritance. 'Britain' must be kept going, *and* kept Great, or as Great as possible, as the prerequisite — and in a sense the meaning — of all other social, economic or cultural aspirations.

Regrettably, such redemptionism has become a common creed of all minorities trying to negotiate (or re-negotiate) their own rights or position within the foundering state. New immigrants perceive its supposed non-ethnicity as a bulwark of their own new roles; old minorities like the Welsh, the Scots and the Ulster Protestants see it as conservation of existing stakes and privileges, especially for the Left.

In the new globalising order, British nationalism was by now subordinate, trusting pathetically in a 'special relationship' with the new hegemons of world order. Since everyone else was becoming subordinate as well, did this really matter? The new network of *dependencia* at once evolved its own hierarchy: Capo, sub-*capi* and simple soldiers of the line. Ex-greatness entitled Britons to claim a priority of place among these sub-lieutenants: the land of unswerving entrepreneurialism and competitiveness, loudly (and where required, militarily) devoted to the new order. As the biggest traditional minority, it was quite natural for the Scots to take the front line — all the way from Niall Ferguson's vibrant eulogies of the New US Order, to Brown's aspirations for satrapy leadership.[11]

There still appeared no alternative. And if there was no escape-route for British nationalism, there could be none for Scottish. The Scots were too profoundly inured to self-colonisation. How could they now question a British choice so similar to what their ancestors had opted for, in 1707? After three centuries of it, they understood the terrain better than the English majority. No nuance of creep, crawl and slither was unfamiliar to them: how to transform abasement into 'proud' assertion of National Identity devoted to the Greater Good of somebody else, in the imagined — if often postponable — long-term interests of all.

Such, alas, was the real content of 'preserving the Union', by the time the *Red Paper's* Editor at length arrived in office. Then it became the real substance of 'Devolution', conceived as a risk-free endorsement of the same old subordinate identity and 'partnership'.[12]

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[11]See Stephen Howe's incisive account of Ferguson's ravings in 'An Oxford Scot at King Dubya's Court', on www.opemocracy.net , 22 July 2004. I added some farther reflections on Ferguson's Scottishness in a review of Timothy Garton Ash on the same site: 'Free World's End', 1 December 2004.

[12] Put in another way, Brownism can also be seen as the ultimate (hopefully terminal) chapter of what Graeme Morton has described as *Unionist Nationalism* (Tuckwell Press, 1999) — the reaffirmation of the devolved 'low politics' of Scottish civil society as support for the persisting (if troubled) high politics of a world power on the skids.

In the past, an important delusion has obstructed our view of this process: the concept of 'decline', as the fate menacing what was left of the former British imperium. But 'decline' is rather like the 'demoralisation' referred to in Brown's 1975 'Introduction' — a gloomy yet potentially comforting idea that leaves open the possibility of things being 'turned round', or rendered more tolerable by appropriate policies. Declining out of grandeur implies there must be some of the stuff left. Hence, suitable measures — meaning strong, colourful and, of course, centrally-managed, measures — may still reprieve and even rebuild.

When *The Break-up of Britain* appeared in 1977, it was not understood (least of all by the author) that 'decline' and disintegration — or the 'collapse' of an historic state form — *primarily* manifests itself as desperate, convulsive and in the end hysterical efforts to put things right. Blairism has exemplified this desperation, carrying Britain back to Mesopotamia to prove the point. And as that adventure concludes — most probably with the formation of three independent states, a century overdue — despair has turned into the cacophonous brass band of reanimated 'Britishness'. Undeterred by the accumulation of follies, Great British identity will still not go quietly into the good night. Its farewell is more likely to be a drunken drum-roll than T.S. Eliot's whimper.

Politically speaking, the main symptom of its terminal malaise is not falling graph-lines or questionable economic figures, mounting debility and melancholic withdrawal. All these may be present too. But the centre stage is occupied by bright-eyed relentlessness, an increasingly ruthless, loquacious and regimented determination to make things right, to resolve problems by ingenious new formulae or crafty devices, imposed by irresistible fiat (huge majority in Parliament, best Civil Service in the world). As for people, the subjects or citizens of a society in decline, they must never be allowed to slumber or feel wimpishly sorry for their fate. Rather they must 'soldier on'. No escape is allowed from the parade ground: *redressement* alone can keep spirits up, with help from tabloids and TV, but also by regular brow-beatings, colourful annual Government Reports, and interactive web-sites.

I mentioned recent precedents, like the social-sciences deconstruction and invention mania of the 1990s. But with longer hindsight, origins can of course be traced back to long before the *Red Paper*. Like so many other phenomena of the recent *fin-de-siècle,* it returns us at least to the 1960s, and to what were in effect rehearsals of today's end-game.

Here, the trajectory from Harold Wilson's redeeming 'white heat of new technology' in 1964 up to the disappearance of motor manufacturing and the collapse of British Railtrack, can easily be traced. But equally, on the Right, an analogous pattern was established from Edward Heath's 'Selsdon Man' in 1969 up to the excesses of Thatcherism, the wonders of deregulation and the Poll Tax.

Blairism and Brownism are merely later instalments, expressed in an ever more unhinged radical rhetoric. The new sermons are exercises in public-relations 'Sergeant-Majorism'. Their precursors stretch from the white-heat moment up to frankly mountebank spectacles like the Greenwich Dome, the farce of replacing the old House of Lords with a new one, or pitiable hopes that Prince Charles may yet modernize his Monarchy.

The political mechanisms of terminal Britishry demand *enhanced* reliance upon elective dictatorship, and hence on 'first-past-the post'. Round the world, all Neo-Liberal trusty régimes have indulged in increased centralisation of power, to hold democracy in check. I argued in *Pariah* (2001) that in the UK example this is especially acute: no redemption regime here can fail to be aware of the huge task confronting it. Changes are inconceivable without the vast power bestowed (or apparently bestowed) through the old, disproportional electoral system.

Only the latter can even seem to bestow the Sovereignty believed inseparable from historical greatness and world influence. By contrast, a proportional system might be fairer, but would certainly be 'weaker', in the sense of resting upon agreements and compromises, a potentially alterable 'consensus' of parties and leaders. More democratic, naturally: but that's exactly what makes democracy look intolerable, under the constraints of collapsing 'Britishness'. They might as well invite Little England into the drawing-room and give him sausage-rolls.

This is why constitutional reform has to be walled off by a Union Jack in every front garden, by citizenship ceremonies, and the pumped-up self-confidence that comes from sticking with the right body-building club, alongside the Americans. The next British election looks like being contested by two parties and leaders agreed on one all-important thing: refusal of farther reform for the *central* Westminster state.

Both Brown and David Cameron naturally have surrogates to hand, usually involving steroids for 'local government' and abundant provision of fertilizer for grass roots, that is, administration too feeble and distant to interfere with the higher authority of the elective dictatorship.[13]

The real point of the 'revolutions' promised by the Blairites in 1998-99 (including devolution) was *to prevent* a political — that is, a constitutional — revolution on this deeper level. The fairly mild reforms suggested by Roy Jenkins's Commission on Electoral reform and long demanded by the Liberal-Democrats will not now be enacted, because these might threaten the very possibility of 'strong government' in Britain. They would obviously menace the saving of the British day, in the sense of 'clout', exceptionality, non-ordinariness among the nations. They would risk replacing dream-life with comparatively modest, realisable goals, and experiments with whatever forms of social engineering are appropriate in globalisation.

What Brownism calls for, by contrast, is Presbyterian 'realism': that is, teeth-gritted loyalty unto God's Will, as evidenced by Competitiveness, Market Forces, and Heaven's endorsement of an imaginary USA. What is the last ditch of this all-British nationalism? The alliance unto death of UK putrefaction and global Free Trade, represented by a government re-elected in 2005 by just over one fifth of the British electorate.

I mentioned earlier some features of the (stowaway) *Red Paper*, like its generosity and appetite for dialogue, its real openness to ideas, and the fertilizing effect of Gramscian ideas upon the Editor, as well as so many of the contributors. In spite of the descending winter of the later Seventies, it managed to convey an inchoate and yet unforgettable sense of a possible new Scotland. *That* is what really remains living about it: it was going in a different direction, unattainable in its time. And that direction was nothing like what's now happening. There was an abiding impulse and spirit about the enterprise, a stowaway not been left behind by history, however grievous the disappointments in other directions.

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[13]David Miliband, Minister for Local Government and the most junior member of Blair's Cabinet, has been awarded the task of combating the mounting sense of 'powerlessness' among voters. This has of course nothing to do with being victims of Westminster archaism and unelected Lordship: it must be solved by regeneration of local, decentralised administration. As the *Guardian* wryly commented, junior recruits will soon out-do Cabinet veterans with this kind of nonsense, which amounts to little more than already existing local councils being exhorted to show more responsibility, mainly by privatising services (Leading Article, 22 February, 2006).

The *Red Paper* staked out a claim, and somehow convinced many people that nationalism in Scotland could be more left-wing inclined, even if the Editorial blueprint for synthesis didn't work, and many of the particular formulae brought into play were mistaken. It sketched out the design of a Scotland (even an independent Scotland) that would be red, or reddish, in hue, and so quite distinct from older rural and conservative styles of nationalism.

Stowaways and Nationalists Beware

As for the coming period, no guesswork about the fate of stowaways is needed. The Chancellor himself has told us what's in store for them. In 1999 he published a brochure entitled *New Scotland, New Britain* with Douglas Alexander, another Presbyterian Minister's son, party member since the age of 14, and at the time of writing Minister of State for Europe. The argument was that devolved regional government had provided Scots with all they really needed or were entitled to; hence it was up to them to make the Scotland Act Parliament work, and, more important, to actively support the New Britain even then being commanded to arise from the ashes of Thatcherism.

The booklet consists largely of one morose cliché after another: "better off together, weaker and worse off apart"; "jobs at risk from separatism"; "social justice versus separatism"... and so on, and on. It reads like a glossy election pamphlet, because that is what it was. The objective was the first parliamentary election in Scotland after the Devolution Act, where the Labour case was to be made primarily by daily TV and newspaper images of a homely-looking framed picture of Great Britain being smashed to pieces by a maniac with a sledge-hammer.

It was quite a step from Antonio Gramsci to this style of venomous alarm and brutal denigration. The combination of the Kosovo war and tabloid hysteria was credited with some effects upon the 2003 election results, no doubt correctly. But from our point of view today it's surely the sheer contrast between it and the world of the *Red Paper* which counts. *New Scotland, New Britain* did contain an obligatory summary of the history of Scottish Home Rule, from Keir Hardie up to Donald Dewar. But this version of the tale skips straight from 1929 on to the 1980s and Thatcherism.

It manages therefore to mention neither the ardent Home-Rule British Socialist Ramsay Macdonald nor — disappointingly — *The Red Paper on Scotland*. There is a hard-edged, heedless, brazenly party-centred tone to its narrative, an enclosure at the farthest possible remove from the creative inquiring spirit of 1975.

This drastic shift in tone and attitude arose basically from fear. That is, the fear (but now actually, the knowledge) that the existing framework of British authority, belief and prestige is falling apart so alarmingly that nothing whatever can be allowed to damage it farther. Hence, it seemed quite intolerable that Wales should elect a leader (Rhodri Morgan) who effectively voiced Welsh opinion; or that a popular rebel-figure like Ken Livingstone should become Mayor of London; or (of course) that the new Scottish Parliament should be allowed to chafe openly at the limitations of the Scotland Act 1998, and seek more power. The shakier Britishness becomes, the more fiercely it has to be defended, at least, by those who have in this way over-committed themselves to its management and survival.

The matter can be put in another way, still with reference to 1975. When the very elements of a grand, projected synthesis cease to be viable (in this case, both Socialism and the traditional form of State), synthesis can turn into mere compromise. But once compromise assumes charge, as strategy rather than tactic, no limit can be set to its operation. The imaginative fusion of ideas then turns into bottom-lining, or cutting a deal. If the State now depends utterly on a Party, then the Party can hardly help assuming the ruthless and commandist features of the State. Yet notoriously, the defence of a State sanctions saying and doing practically anything to attain its end, all the more so when the State in question has come to be perceived as (in Blair's terms) 'pivotal' to the entire world of marketolatry and (after 2001) the War Against Terrorism.

We saw all these things evolving within 'Thatcherism', and Blair and Brown have merely carried them farther. There can be, unfortunately, very little doubt that the Scottish electorate will face another assault-course of this kind in 2007, nor that the one-time student radical will be out there directing anti-nationalist operations. All will be in the name of the superior and more effective nationalism of 'Britishness', which his recent theatrical performances have at least had the merit of exposing to plain view.

For Britain's Sake

In practical politics, the conclusion that would seem to impose itself is paradoxical, but I believe sustainable. The best, *and possibly the only*, way of saving many worthwhile features of the UK inheritance is for Scotland and Wales to become independent. One might, of course, say 'more independent', and deploy saving formulae like 'fiscal autonomy'.

Politics is about direction of march, as well as discreet policies. But whether its *de facto* or by-the-book independence, the main point is little changed. It is that whatever aspects of the UK past the electorates of its national components want to keep and continue *are no longer safe* in Westminster state hands. It has often been noticed how oddly 'British' and conservative peripheral nationalism has been in these islands (not excluding the Republic of Ireland). It has been (and still is) unlike the mainstream of 20th century anti-colonial liberation movements, for good reasons. 'Self-colonisation' then (like more recent specimens) had real advantages alongside its servility and shames. However, it has now run out of time.

Not having been colonised countries in the usual 18th-19th century sense, the Scots and Welsh do not enjoy — or suffer from — the usual compulsions to separate. 'Separatism' alarms them, quite reasonably in view of the widespread socio-cultural integration that has accompanied Anglo-British expansion. Nor is there any real incompatibility between such elements of assimilation and independent politics, except in the rhetoric of restricted élites over-committed to maintaining a unitary state (and their own authority) at all costs. Such sections of the Scoto- and Gallo-British communities would, of course, find themselves deprived: *they* would be shorn of their 'special relationship' to the overarching State. As independence, or separate membership of the European Union or the United Nations approached, they would inevitably find themselves displaced by normal representatives of the majority UK nationality, England.

Yet oddly enough, it looked for a year or so as if the Blair régime was at least half-thinking of such a direction, during the earlier reforming period, from 1997 to 2001, when it was partly carried away by devolutionary successes. After the legislation for Scotland and Wales, and the initial success of the Northern Irish Peace Process, a British Isles Council of elected governments was proposed. The idea was to co-ordinate policy formation and prevent clashes of interest arising from a more diverse United Kingdom.

The project was at once labelled 'the Council of the Isles', and it was claimed that the very different status of the participating units should make little difference. Two independent states, the UK and the Irish Republic, would be alongside a group of near-independent states, the Isle of Man, Jersey and Guernsey, as well as devolved parliaments with very different capacities, Wales and Scotland, and the new Northern Ireland assembly.

This Council marked the high point of New Labour's reformism and (almost at once) its fall into bathos and absurdity. Such a body was either signalling a profound redirection of political energies, leading on to some future confederation of Irish-British states; or else it was a *pretence* of liberal openness, to keep possible dissidence under control. New Labour's fog machines hinted at the former; but only to make sure the latter prevailed.

A *con*federation of Irishness and Britishness naturally entailed the equal self-government of all parties, or at least a process of movement in that direction: the possibility (at least) of devolution heading towards de facto independence — like, for example, the Isle of Man. Or (more to the point) like the status recently and quite successfully fought for by the *Generalitat* of Catalonia and (currently) by the Basque Parliament.

The Council of the Isles was an impasse. But that was because of its importance and its appeal, not its irrelevance. Irish President Mary McAleese liked the idea, and was naturally mocked for poetry and sentiment. But too many carapaced and vengeful identities were threatened by it, on the British side. In the longer run, 'Britain' will only survive as a confederation of independent states, probably seven or eight of them (including Man, Jersey and the other island dependencies); and that survival will indeed represent a 'new Britain', the things these governments and peoples have kept in common, and want to develop. However, this is wildly different from the Brown-Blair neo-American dreamland. And of course, it depends on actual self-governing progress around the periphery.

Things might be different if there were serious prospects of central reform, with a fairer PR system, outright replacement of the House of Lords, a written constitution, and so on. But since such prospects now appear non-existent in a Britain falling off its wall, the periphery has to come up with its own answers. *They* will never do it for us. Do it Yourself is the only way. And this is very far from a counsel of despair or utopia.

After all, *peoples have been doing it themselves,* since the Nineties. The stalemate at the British-Westminster summit has been steadily undermined by electorates going their own ways, both negatively through mounting abstention, and (given the limited opportunities of devolution) positively, wherever fairer systems have allowed novel aims and ideas a way into government. It is absurd to think that the little-English electorate won't continue down roughly the same road, given its own devolutionary powers (which is of course why it has to be stopped in its tracks).

All that the Blair-Brown Isles pantomime was really concerned with was reassurance of the Northern Ireland Protestants, persuading them that devolution would never endanger that version of ultra-Britishness. A pompous Council might help to keep devolution toothless, and harmless to Dublin, Westminster and Protestant Belfast. Amidst much think-tank rhetoric, the avoiding-trouble principle thus set the constitutional tone for the remainder of New Labour's time in office.[14] Avoiding trouble has in turn led to the weird underworld of Brown's drag-queen 'Britain' — the country whose inverted commas signify pretentious self-parody, has-been grandeur, and international mockery.

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[14] It was the author's fate to sit across the table from Sir Robert Armstrong at one of this Council's preparatory meetings. He constantly muttered remarks like "...needs something to pull all this together", but wasn't on that occasion being economical with the truth. From an Establishment angle, the project would indeed be held together — by a resolute will that no real difference whatever should be made to 'real power'. Unable even to propose anything significant, the Council of the Isles stood for little more than Cheshire Cat grin goodwill, and almost at once vanished from history. Whatever reassurance it provided to Ulster Protestantism no doubt helped them later, as they moved to support Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party, preserving Britannitude by stalling the Peace Process.

EPILOGUE: for Democracy's Sake

This, which flickers at night
in the skullcap of my thought,
mother-of-pearl snail's trace
or mica of crushed glass,
isn't light from church or factory
to nourish
red cleric or black.
All I can leave you is this rainbow in evidence
of a faith that was contested,
a faith that burned more slowly
than hardwood on the hearth...

> Eugenio Montale. 'Piccolo testamento', from *Collected Poems 1920-1954,* translated by Jonathan Galassi (New York 1998)

'Trouble' means *England*. All participants at January's Fabian Society event had to run a gauntlet, not of the *British* National Party, but of reasonable-sounding English protesters. They were complaining that the whole thing was an insult to Englishness, whether in the sense of all-English or of regional-English interests. The drag-queen was being artificially resurrected to prevent the majority national identity from winning any distinguishable or separate voice. The slogans suggested that a New Labour/Fabian conspiracy was under way to shut them up, and keep them out of any action. I was glad to see quite a number of them infiltrated the day's sessions, to make the same point over and over again.

The complaints were justified. In the latest Annual Report on *British Social Attitudes*, the question of self-consciously English identity is addressed, and their survey detects that

> … a still modest English backlash may be taking place. Though dual identities may still be common, more people express an adherence to Englishness now than two years ago.

Peter Riddell commented on it in *The Times* of 28 November 2005 under the heading 'The Unanswered English Question cannot be ignored', and this is surely right.

Whatever is causing the shift, Riddell points out, it isn't apprehension about Scotland becoming more independent, or even a separate state:

> More than half the English say they would be 'neither pleased nor sorry if Scotland were to become independent'.

They would accept it as a matter of fact, many probably puzzled by the screams of anguish emitted by Attorney General Lord Falconer, John Reid and other Scottish Westminster MPs.[15] Unionist fundamentalists claim that Welsh and Scottish independence would foist a polity upon the English 'rest of the UK', which they don't want. English *nationalist* movements have certainly been low key, as most voters there have understandably made little of the English-British distinction.

But it doesn't follow that the English electorate would not accomplish the matter-of-fact adjustment demanded of them perfectly well, probably without the histrionics predicted by minorities fearful of losing their own long-held niches, anchors, privileges and expectations. An English multi-cultural identity has in any case always represented around 85 per cent of what the unitary British one was, in reality as distinct from the new Brownite folklore.

Something of this has very recently been proposed in concrete institutional terms by the Liberal-Democrat Party, through their 'Steel Commission Report'.[16] This is a straightforward proposal for increased powers in Edinburgh, notably for tax-raising and the end of the 'Barnett Formula' that covers the costs of Scottish government out of UK Treasury revenues. Together with giving more normal legislative powers to the Welsh Assembly, as energetic ally advocated by the Richard Commission, a basis would then be laid for a Federal Britain.

This would be a great advance on the original devolution plans of 1998. And even before publication, the proposals won resounding endorsement from an important Westminster by-election in Scotland. On 9 February 2006, the formerly safe Labour seat of Dunfermline and West Fife was won by the Liberal Democrats with a 1,800 majority — a swing of 16.24 per cent from Labour, and their first by-election loss in Scotland since 1988.

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[15] An admirable overview of the subject can be found in Robert Hazell's *The English Question* , January 2006, Constitution Unit. Hazell's University College Constitution Unit has consistently published the most accurate and thorough material on all UK constitutional matters, including the likely effects of Scottish independence on the 'RUK', or 'rest of the UK'.

[16] *The Steel Commission: Moving to Federalism, a New Settlement for Scotland* (March 2006): Final Report to the Spring Conference of the Liberal Democrats, available from www.scotlibdems.org.uk

Cameron's New Conservatives did poorly, while the total vote for the purists of Britishness, the United Kingdom Independence Party, amounted to 0.6 per cent. It took little imagination to see the possibility of New Labour's grip on Scotland being broken at the coming round of Holyrood elections, on 3 May 2007. Over six months previously, George Kerevan of *The Scotsman* newspaper had envisaged the break-through as a 'Rainbow Coalition' founded on an alliance against Blair and Brown, and aiming at farther staged moves towards independence. The 'process' of devolution could then resume, linked to constitutional reform at the UK level.[17]

It's true that the new Lib-Dem recipe, which appears certain to do well in the 2007 elections, remains linked to their own fantasies of a reanimated Britain. Long in favour of reforming the over-centralised Westminster state and its preposterous election system, they continue to hope that light may dawn down there, as well as in Wales and Scotland. This is why quite substantial parts of the Steel *Report* give the impression of having been generated by a colony of voles, broadcasting out of some deep Thames-side sanctuary untouched by most recent events. There, they browse tranquilly upon the mouldering commonsense of past generations, and perceive independence as "increasingly meaningless in the age of globalization."

This truth has yet to impress itself upon East Timor, West Papua, Tibet, Chechnya, Taiwan, Kurdistan and a growing list of other above-ground populations. In vole country, however, 'Britain' remains in a different league: inherently modernisable, since (alongside the USA) it *is* modernity, in a sense something like that of the Zionist factions who maintain that Israel and Jewishness simply *are* religion and universality combined. The next step is stern reminders of "the significant benefits to Scotland of our ability to act on the international stage, as part of the United Kingdom". Thirty years ago this was merely ambiguous; today it is ridiculous.[18]

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[17] See 'Somewhere Over the Rainbow Coalition', 3 May 2006. By odd yet telling coincidence, Gordon Brown's home is within the constituency where the upheaval took place, and he had taken a prominent part in the election campaign. The SNP, which has registered mediocrely in recent contests, including Dunfermline and West Fife, was imagined as part of Kerevan's 'Rainbow' and is actually a member of the more recent 'Independence Alliance' set up to contest next year's election, alongside the Greens and the Scottish Socialists.

[18] As regards Brown's attitude to recent disgraces, he made it clear in an address to the Royal United Services Club on 14 February 2006 that he totally supports Blair's subservience to Bush, and the war in Iraq. As Channel 4's Jon Snow remarked on the same day: "When it comes to the issue of terrorism and global security, you couldn't put a Semtex wrapper between them...Those who thought that Brown's firebrand university days might have left an overhang of concern for civil liberties were in a for a rude awakening..." snowmail_daily@channel4.com

Most Scots (and most other Crown subjects) have since 2003 wanted to *stop* acting on the international stage in this way. Yet such ghostly moans are now presented by Steel's Commission in support of policies that will — in spite of them — effectively modernise Scotland and Wales. Ideology and political reform have parted company; is there really any need to pay overmuch attention to the former?

The philosophy of 'Federalism' is an historical hangover, resting upon historical misunderstanding of what federal states have in the main been like, over the period between the American War of Secession and the end of the Cold War. They sometimes figured as 'liberal' (or at least as preferable) by comparison with older autocracies and military dictatorships, or with the communist parties of East Europe, China and elsewhere. But in the main, modern federalism has been a way of building or reinforcing the unitary command-states of the New-Imperialist era. Power devolved was always power retained, long before Great Britain belatedly caught up with this idea in 1997-98. Decentralization and the encouragement of folk-dancing were techniques for the focusing and amplification of central authority, in the areas where power 'mattered' — and above all, for conducting warfare, the life-blood of modern international relations.[19]

Still hypnotized by the notion of federation as "the normal constitutional set-up in advanced political societies", Lib-Dem ideology is quite happy to lump together Switzerland with the United States in its appeal for modernity — confusing a *confederation* with the descendants of Lincoln's imposed post-1865 Union. It is conceded that England's problems are an obstacle to true Federalism, but this should not stop Scots from "developing plans for their own role and status within a modernized UK ...", if necessary by some kind of 'asymmetric federalism' allowing the majority time to mature and catch up. The key thing is to avoid 'simplistic, separatist notions of independence' — presumably by non-simplistic, anti-separatist procedures that move voters towards *de facto* independent self-government, but with as little publicity as possible. Independence minus the billboards, as it were. Volespeak appeals to the 65 per cent or so of Scottish opinion that wants more powers for Holyrood ... provided this doesn't mean being able to opt out of another UK war, for example over Iran.

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[19] The only real exception is post-war Federal Germany — where the decentralised apparatus was *not* granted by a central state power, benevolent or otherwise. It was imposed by the Allied powers from outside, after a total defeat of the previous government and society. Such exceptional conditions mean that the German system is very difficult to appeal to as any kind of model — least of all, one would have thought, by a United Kingdom élite afflicted by success-complex rather than downfall.

However, it seems at the moment probable that voters will be supporting the independence-minded, rather than the voles. So will most Green and non-Labour socialists, and many ex-New Labourites reacting against the long agony of the Mesopotamian conflict. The way seems open for a watershed alliance or coalition, a 'rainbow' in Kerevan's sense devoted to movement in the direction of independence, even without definition of what exactly this will mean, or bring in some later wake.

"In a green constitution," points out Robyn Eckersley, "...at the broad level of constitutional purpose, the green democratic state would be outward looking rather than parochial or nationalistic" — but it must of course be independent, in order to do so.[20] Her point is that globalisation has undermined Sovereignty, not sovereignties in the somewhat humbler but more durable meaning of diverse, recognised self-government and independent activity.

It is the capital 'S' that has been dissolved, not the real anthropological foundations of plurality or diversity. And the effacement of the former is in fact most likely to promote an enhancement of the latter. The morbid litanies of the 1990s about the vanishing nation-state were actually about the real or fancied humiliations of the Great, the once-Great and the would-be-Great-once-more — conceived and relayed, naturally, by intellectuals of one metropolis or another.

In 2007 Scotland, more concerted rainbow politics will have another advantage: they are, after all, simply a continuation of what was promisingly launched — against the odds — at the last Holyrood election in 2003. In a paper delivered to the Humboldt University in Berlin just afterwards, Eberhard Bort and Christopher Harvie summed it up as 'A Small Earthquake in Scotland'. The result turned out disconcerting to both main parties', they pointed out, and the aftermath was to involve a constitutional aftershock whose consequences were unfathomable then — and still continuing today.

"The People Bite Back" was how Iain Macwhirter, Scotland's premier political columnist, summed up the same result. "Holyrood will soon swear in the most democratic legislature Britain has ever seen." he continued,

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[20] See *The Green State: Rethinking Democracy and Sovereignty* (MIT Press, 2004) pp. 242-3.

> ...Scots had been offered more of the same brain-dead municipal mediocrity. They chose life instead. The Scottish people repossessed their parliament (and) a new democratic space has opened up in which the people can really begin to imagine a different future to the one presented by the monolithic party blocs (*Sunday Herald*, 4 May 2003).

Joyce Macmillan, the only rational voice at that time surviving on Andrew Neil's *Scotsman*, echoed the sentiment:

> I could almost sense, on the damp morning air, the feel of Scottish voters ... beginning to experiment and play around with the new system of politics that has fallen into our hands.

By the time of the next election in 2007, the three hundredth anniversary of the old Scottish Parliament's decision to join the Union, she speculated on

> … the likelihood of a harder-edged determination to vote tactically for the parties most likely to break Labour's long Scottish hegemony at last, and to usher in an era of major change *(Scotsman*, 3 May2003).

She was anticipating the watershed now clearly possible, and rendered that much more likely by the whole train of events following 2003, and culminating in Gordon Brown's campaign of salvation for the Union I have described. Labour's 'long Scottish hegemony' was also the hegemony of the Union, and of the ailing Great-Britishness that has been latterly propped up, by war and heedless rhetoric.

In 2003 the foundations of a broad alliance for moving towards independence were spontaneously laid by a deeply dissatisfied electorate, aware more clearly than party politicians that there could be no going back. Next time — surely — a more conscious, planned coalition of forces and opinion can surely build upon that, in both Scotland and Wales, and bring us into the era of major change so long needed?

New Britain or Easter Island?

But as for Britain, the prospect is more like a 21st century Easter Island. The inhabitants of that unfortunate place proved unable to change their ancestral customs, and continued the stone-quarrying, gross head-carving, log-rolling transportation and spirit-invocation that had held them back for centuries. The last trees were felled in the name of sacred tradition, because an inherited identity assured the people there was simply no other way. Divine intervention was the sole hope — hence as things got worse it was all the *more* important to remain themselves, and propitiate the far-off deities who had brought them over the Pacific in the first place.[21]

The British successor tale has recently been brought up to date by Ross McKibbin in some comments on the Blair régime's terminal decline. Some months after Gordon Brown's resurrectionist spasm, as things passed from bad to unspeakable in Iraq and the ground war escalated in Afghanistan, Blair's popularity fell badly enough to provoke revolt in New Labour's parliamentary ranks. He was forced to concede the approaching end of his 2005 government. 'Something has plainly gone badly wrong', notes McKibbin:

> The gap between what (the government) has not done and what it should have done is huge — in almost every sphere, but most conspicuously in reforming the country's decrepit constitutional structure...The present regime is slowly destroying the Labour Party, and it will not be rescued by a reasonable competence at day-to-day management — any more than the Conservative Party could be rescued by Major's government in its last couple of years.[22]

It will be remembered that Blair's predecessor, the once untouchable Mrs Thatcher, was brought down by her own party in the wake of the Poll Tax disaster. It dawned even on loyal supporters that they would never be re-elected as long as she persisted in office with this deeply unpopular measure, and hence a more moderate leadership was needed. The consequence was unforgiving feuds among Conservatives, and the five years of decline up to the defeat of 1997. Even after that, it would take the movement years to recover even partially. Nine years later, most commentators have perceived David Cameron's leadership as not only untried but in some respects equivocal (as well as quite ineffective in both Wales and Scotland).

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[21] Jared Diamond has recently recounted the story again in his comparative study *Collapse*.

[22] 'Sleazy, Humiliated, Despised', in *The London Review of Books*, vol.28, No.17, 7 September, 2006

Once might have been an accident, twice in such a short time frame surely suggests something else. For *both* ruling parties to succumb to Humpty-Dumptyism within a decade and a half surely points to system-failure, rather than leadership idiosyncracy and policy errors. Breakage and wilful fragmentation on such a large and persistent scale questions the United Kingdom's historical identity — its indwelling self-image of exemplary stability and democracy. Here, indeed, the New Labour collapse may be more significant than Thatcher's.

After all, it has come to rest much more completely upon the revival of British *nationalism.* Early in her period, Thatcher won a minor war against the Galtieri dictatorship in Argentina, a success that equipped her to win two further general elections, in 1983 and 1987. Though that did depend on some American support, few then saw such reliance as craven or unqualified. Many perceived the South Atlantic War as, if anything, a recovery of initiative after the hidebound conformity following the humiliation of Suez back in 1956.

Blair was never capable of anything similar: his (and Brown's) conviction was that their world role now depended on total support for US policies: a relationship 'special' only in fantasy terms, where influence might be obtainable as a reward for courtier flattery and exaggeration.

As I indicated earlier, this was also a chosen Americanness based on delusions about the latter's universality, and hence its exportability. Brown has become the fulsome Bard of this ideology. His passionate wish to serve the dregs of Britishness has forced him to mistake everything about it: he occludes its imperial background, and its unavoidably English core, while clinging to the vulgar self-importance of Scottishness as essential to civilization. This latter trait naturally entails his own personal suitability for Sovereign authority — indeed, the conviction that both Party and People should bestow leadership upon him. Inherent righteousness has blinded him, not only to the ridiculous archaism of the UK polity, but to the curious parochialism and limitations of United States identity as well.

During the crazed disputes following Blair's concession of political mortality in September 2006, many of Brown's opponents were to reproach him with plotting, conspiring and back-stabbing from behind the arras. Of course these accusations are justified. But such 'loyalists' omitted to point out the obvious (and in this case the phrase deserves to be used) — *there was no alternative.*

A democratic constitution of both Party and State might have made a difference; but then, that's what both the Party and broader National procedures are all about — *avoiding open democracy*, by all means possible.

Why else is the UK electorate forced to contemplate another election in 2008 or 2009, with both great Parties of the realm in complete agreement on one thing: no serious reform of either constitution or the electoral system? Both these Parties have become splintered ruins of their former selves, and the failure of the antique see-saw has been registered by mass withdrawal from the voting process itself. Yet this makes no difference to either Brown or Cameron. What they stand for is 'carrying on': the sacrosanct national vocations of huge-head quarrying, and terminal tree-felling to set up the effigies in proper positions — emblems visible from afar, and representing greatness, faith and (since 2001) War Against Terrorism.

It goes without saying that both have 'reasonably competent managerial proposals' for growing some more trees, slightly better imported tools, and the boosting of morale. But this isn't just managing capitalism. The point is to sustain traditional Greatness and status without risking overmuch change, or any return to political boat-building that might let people escape, or cease being 'British'.

It is sometimes thought that the British, American and other *anciens régimes* are embracing, or even guiding, 'globalization' in such ways. Nothing could be farther from the truth. They are in fact ways of resisting, distorting and holding back a greater process which, *because* it is unifying so much, so quickly, will only be tolerable via an accelerated democratic reformation — 'democratic warming' (as it were) that in turn demands reconfigured civil societies, and new communities and nations.

Nor should it be thought that Anglo-American 'Neo-conservatism' is just a farther emanation of capitalism. Here, orthodox historical materialism is capable of mistakes as gross as those of its spiritualist and fundamentalist opponents. North-Atlantic Neo-imperialism is less a by-product of industry, trade and high finance than a desperate effort to keep (or revive) popular support for a decaying — indeed thoroughly anachronistic — ideal and political control of these economic forces.

What armies have been mobilized *for* is not (or not only) petroleum resources, or against fantasized Terrorism and ultra-Islamicism, but the preservation of the élite norms of the long counter-revolution that, in the 1960s and 1970s, had suppressed a previous revolt. That was the political reaction which was to benefit from the renewed and more transnational economic expansion leading to the end of the Cold War — quite naturally forming the quasi-religious orthodoxy of 'Neo-liberalism'. Its successor, Neo-conservatism, is merely the latter in arms — defending itself against failure, at first ideological but then, after 2001, directly military.

Gordon Brown is already a Centurion in this army, and now aspires to be a General. But he knows such a role demands above all maintaining the unity of his all-British basis. In the Nineties he believed that Devolution was the way to accomplish this. Now (fortunately) he isn't so sure. In the end-phase of the Mesopotamian debacle, the task will become still harder. But it's important to note this won't be only due to more frightful events and losses, or (one must hope) to continuing anti-war protests and demonstrations. Something more fundamental has shifted, probably enough to disable British histrionics permanently.[23]

The *glamour* of Britishness has disappeared. I pointed out above how the monarchy has subsided from intellectual view, and was scarcely referred to in the Fabian Society's ideology exercise of January 2006. British Royalty once played a crucial role in Anglo-Britain's curious surrogate for modern nationalism: secular yet manifestly 'worshipped', it stood in for the nation-state's mutation of transcendence — a personalized focus for many of the typical emotions of post-18th century nationality-politics. The Austro-Hungarian throne once had a similar function, and for analogous reasons. Such a focus reconciled both the dominant nationalities and the smaller or marginal *ethnies* of the imperium to a supposedly common ground. An actual family helped to control the more abstract and metaphorical 'imagined communities' of the romantic-nationalist era.

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[23] In an earlier essay (*Pariah*, Verso Books, 2001) this author argued that 1997 New Labour was at bottom not identifiable with Blair's strange mixture of Third Way policies: it was, rather, a 'second round' of Greatness-restoration (after Thatcher) designed to restore a supposed world-role. The motor was always British nationalism, not social democracy. Of course I didn't at that time imagine Blair (supported by Brown) would plunge the UK into a reoccupation of Iraq, and three years of futile warfare in Afghanistan, in order to fulfill this goal. The US special relationship was seen as a prop — not a way of making foreign policy all-important, and in the end fatal to British destiny itself.

This 'symbolism' thrived by being the opposite of remote or emotively distant: a nationalism *not* concocted by intellectual malcontents in big cities. In the British case, 'the Crown' imparted a personal colouration and meaning — a 'glamour' of more than backwardness, which infused state authority and implied allegiance beyond the political and the narrowly personal or communitarian.

That was of course this mainstay that has made the great English majority 'silent'. Their over-identification with Britishness was not only imperial, in the overseas or colonial sense. It was also rooted in a popular royalism instinctively alien to 'all that' — to the kind of flag-waving David Cameron is worried about. The evaporation of such allegiance has become inescapable, and Brown's crazed pseudo-Britishness is an attempt to replace it. He wants to put a contrived civic virtue in its place — *without even reforming Westminster and the constitution of central power.*

The Devolution Brown supported so strongly from *Red Paper* times onwards was intended to give more latitude to folk-dancing in a discontented periphery. It 'worked' for a time in a country where there were already national institutions (Scotland); or where such institutions could quite rapidly built up around a common culture (Wales). It failed in the country where deeply discordant versions of folk-dancing prevailed (Northern Ireland). Now however, such times are past: the dancers must come round to Brownite sense and accept a suitably purged all-British identity.

The deepest impulse is at all costs *to avoid English Devolution*. Any serious tendency in that direction is likely to have an anti-Scottish and anti-Welsh side to it. Indeed, it already does. Writing in *Scotland on Sunday* on 10 September 2006, Political Editor Eddie Barnes observed:

> Across the shires...the anger is growing. In the blogosphere English voters rail against the coming man. 'He seems to be a dour Scots bully... OK as Chancellor, but may well be unacceptable, in England at least, as PM.

More acceptable English candidates will not be lacking, he concludes, and all Brown can do is "thump the drum on his passion for the UK... There can be little doubt that his bid to emphasize his British credentials will gather pace over the coming months."

'Passion' isn't too strong a word. It points straight at the most surprising recent mutation in UK attitudes. This has obviously crept up on British subjects themselves over quite a period of time, as a lack or blind spot. In truth, however, it is a novelty, instantly evident to anyone who has been long enough away from daily British culture. De-glamorization has diminished a crucial 'passion' that used to be ever-present in all debates about devolution, particularly in Scotland — a high-tension charge that sparked whenever 'separation' was mentioned.

The theme represented something 'unthinkable' to a majority of partisans habituated to the Union: in effect, a desacralisation fraught with familial disasters as well as political and economic problems. That was the logic of making 'divorce' the key to the anti-nationalist assaults, notably during the 2003 Scottish and Welsh elections. The menace of a profane universe was conjured up, a crass and unreasoning hostility to 'being together', to marital stability and kinship. As I indicated earlier, this emotive pressure was essentially British: a majoritarian response to what has now been generalized as heedless and selfish 'terrorism'.

However, over 2005 and 2006, nobody revisiting these arguments (in my own case, from Australia) can fail to detect a certain lowering of tension. A tone of what one only call 'matter-of-factness' has somehow taken over: as if people were no longer so galvanized by existential threats. This effect is all the more striking because it departs from a general climate of aggravated fearfulness and alarm, the staples of post-2001 public opinion.

It is, of course, another reason why Brown now has to pedal even harder than before with his ultra-British visions. Loss of glamour has had its consequences: the symbols counted because of their intimate, often semi-conscious bond with mass feelings, and their loss of meaning has dulled (or even drained) the latter. As Barnes points out, Brown "called earlier this year for Remembrance Sunday to be transformed into a national day of patriotism, the equivalent of America's 4th of July." What counted here was the sheer conceit of imagining that nationalism can be 'invented' in this way, for the convenience of a government and state — invented *against* the tide of a population that, in all the British nations, had demonstrated its opposition to the style of patriotism being propagated by New Labour.

By contrast, the political nationalisms at work in Scotland and Wales will now surely benefit from 'matter-of-factness'. Where once the United Kingdom monopolised common sense in contrast to the crazy sectarian passions of the periphery, today something like the contrary prevails. The Centre has gone mad, while 'out there' voters shrug their shoulders and rather calmly look for ways out. The latter represent deeper processes of democratic warming that have withstood and denounced the US and Blairite Great-Power hysteria of post-2001, and will in turn defeat Gordon Brown's attempts to prolong and intensify the fever. Bush and Blair have demonstrated just how different nationalisms can be: and the elections of May 2007 look likely to provide a useful way of choosing between them.

RESPONSES

1. The Breakdown of Tom Nairn

Leighton Andrews AM

I first came across Tom Nairn's writings when as a sixth-former, albeit too young to vote, I was campaigning for the pro-European side in the 1975 referendum. Against the strain of most left thinking at the time, Nairn co-wrote a piece for a Sunday newspaper advocating a yes-vote, which, if I remember rightly, praised the position taken by our current Secretary of State. Subsequently, I became familiar with his wider writings, which provided a left-wing engagement with the constitutional issues only then really making it to political debate.[24] Aside from his almost unique interest in issues of nation-building, Nairn had a highly personal, elliptical style combining caustic satire and polemic.

In recent years, however, Nairn has gone into a long decline, typified by the chapter which heads this volume. All that remains is polemic, convinced of its own rectitude, scathingly unforgiving of alternatives, certain that Britain remains doomed to break up, and that independence, particularly Scottish independence, is inevitable. In the words of Francis Mulhern, "Nairn's strategy is a conclusion in search of its own sufficient condition, which is an array of popular demands converging in the perception that independence is a practical necessity."[25] The break-up of Britain is inevitable because Nairn wants it to be: everything else is shoe-horned into that analysis. Advocacy has become answer. The saddest example of Nairn's decline was an article he wrote shortly after the terrorist bombings of the London transport system, when he reduced the bombings which devastated so many lives – 52 killed and hundreds injured – to mere "underground bangs".[26] I found that repugnant then and still do today.

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[24] For example, 'The Left against Europe?', New Left Review special issue I/75, September-October 1927, available from http://www.newleftreview.net/?page=article&view=1062 ; *The Break-up of Britain*, NLB/Verso, London, 1977; 'The British Political Elite', New Left Review,I/23, January-February 1964; 'The Nature of the Labour Party', in *Towards Socialism*, Fontana, London, 1965; *The Enchanted Glass*, Radius, 1988;

[25] Francis Mulhern, 'Britain after Nairn', New Left Review 5, September-October 2000, p62. For Nairn's more recent books, see *Faces of Nationalism,* Verso, 1998; *After Britain*, Granta, 2001; *Pariah*, Verso 2002.

[26] Tom Nairn, 'After the G8 and 7/7: an age of 'democratic warming', Open Democracy, July 2005, available at http://www.opendemocracy.net/debates/article.jsp?id=2&debateId=124&articleId=2663 : I have a brief commentary at:
http://leightonandrews.typepad.com/leighton_andrews_am/2005/07/the_breakup_of_.html#more

In the latest chapter, Nairn takes aim at Gordon Brown's focus on Britishness, holding out the hope that the 'union state' will be defeated or reconstructed as a result of 2007's Scottish Parliament and National Assembly elections. According to Nairn, Brown's "fake Britishry" cannot hold: it involves creating a "confected" identity. On the other hand, real identities are formed "through societal struggles and experienced revolutions" over long periods of time "and via violent episodes like revolutions and warfare."

Brown's agenda will upset the English as well as the Scots and Welsh. It is founded on a neo-liberal globalising prospectus, in a world in which British nationalism is in decline, although at home it has been the most enduring nationalism in the UK in the past 30 years. Brown's confection can only be underpinned by elective dictatorship and 'first-past the post'. For Nairn, the only way of saving the best of the UK is to have independence for Scotland and Wales, though a confederation of independent states. The problem in this may be England, disproportionate in size to the others, more dependent on the monarchy than Wales and Scotland. The "narrower nationalism" of the English had for a long time "been sublimated into a wider imperial view."

Nairn particularly picks on Gordon Brown's January 2006 Fabian Conference speech, for its supposed call for flag-waving and for a national day. For Nairn, Brown is calling on everyone to behave like 'Paisleyites', for only amongst Northern Ireland Protestants does a flag-waving culture of Britishness exist. In this world, says Nairn, multiculturalism can only exist if you pass a Britishness test.

Certainly the flag-waving issue appeared the weakest part of Gordon Brown's Fabian speech, designed to get warm headlines in the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph*, which it duly did.[27] Currently the Union Flag is rarely waved outside major civic or ceremonial occasions, and the Last Night of the Proms. In Wales the Draig Goch flies; in Scotland the Saltire, in England, particularly since the 1996 European football tournament, the Cross of St George, also ubiquitous during the 2006 World Cup, when over 10 million were sold.

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[27] Benedict Brogan, 'Gordon's flag day: as premier of patriotism, Brown will encourage us to celebrate our great nation', *Daily Mail*, and Toby Helm and Rachel Sylvester, 'Fly the flag in every garden: Brown calls for British day to celebrate patriotism', *Daily Telegraph*, both 14 January 2006; polls later in the year suggested some wanted Magna Carta Day (June 15) as a day to emphasise Britishness: Lee Glendinning, 'Magna Carta date tops poll as best choice for a national day', Guardian, 30 May 2006.

The Union Flag was adopted by the National Front in the 1970s and the BNP in the 1990s. (I still remember driving into central London after joining in attempts to block a National Front demonstration in Lewisham, in 1977, where the fascists had been carrying the Union flag, then rounding the corner into Parliament Square and seeing it on ceremonial display). Brown calls for the reclaiming of the Union Flag from the far-right. However, he did not, in fact, call for everyone to parade the flag at the bottom of their gardens, if they have gardens. Instead, he asked "what is our equivalent of the national symbolism of a flag in every garden?" Nor did he call for a British day as such: he asked "what is the British equivalent of the US 4th July, or even the French 14th July for that matter?" Nairn focuses on flag-waving to avoid the real agenda which Gordon Brown announced that day:

> For decades, for fear of losing our British identity, Britain did not face up to some of the great constitutional questions, whether it be the second chamber, the relationship of the legislature to the executive or the future of local government.

> Take also the unity of the United Kingdom and its component parts … we have always been a country of different nations and thus of plural identities – a Welshman can be Welsh and British, just as a Cornishman or woman is Cornish, English and British – and may be Muslim, Pakistani or Afro-Caribbean, Cornish, English and British…..

> I believe that out of a debate, hopefully leading to a broad consensus about what Britishness means, flows a rich agenda for change: a new constitutional settlement, an explicit definition of citizenship, a renewal of civic society, a rebuilding of our local government and a better balance between diversity and integration …

> So I believe it is imperative that we re-invigorate the constitutional reform agenda we began in 1997…

> So a modern view of Britishness founded on responsibility, liberty and fairness requires us to:
> * Demand a new constitutional settlement
> * Take citizenship seriously
> * Rebuild civic society
> * Renew local government
> * Work for integration of minorities into a modern Britain
> * Be internationalist at all times.[28]

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[28] Speech by Rt Hon Gordon Brown MP, Chancellor of the Exchequer at the Fabian New Year Conference, 14 January 2006, available from http://www.fabian-society.org.uk/press_office/news_latest_all.asp?pressid=474

In fact, far from running away from the need to take the constitutional agenda forward, Brown was explicitly saying that it must move ahead: that the 1997 arrangements, including House of Lords reform, are not settled. The debate Brown has launched will, in my view, be an important part of the left's agenda in the decade ahead. I suspect Nairn knows this, and fears it, because it will demonstrate a coherent alternative to his self-fulfilling break-up strategy.

The contours of the new debate on Britishness can only be sketched at here. Tom Nairn is not really interested in this debate: but the Institute of Welsh Affairs should be. There are many unanswered questions in the relations between the National Assembly and the UK state, which cannot be addressed by simple endorsement of a continuing land-grab by Cardiff for more powers over everything.

There are good reasons why certain issues should be addressed at a UK level, rather than a devolved level: examining the rationale for these is a key part of the next phase of devolution. I argued myself at the same Fabian conference that there needs to be a better understanding in Whitehall of the implications of devolution. It needs to be more clearly understood when UK Ministers are acting on a UK basis, and England and Wales basis, or an England-only basis.

The London-based media needs to be clearer in the way it reports policy developments that only effect England: and should also show more interest in reporting new initiatives in Wales and Scotland. There needs to be clearer evidence of UK coordination where appropriate: there is a UK and devolved structure for sports, for example, but in the Arts world no Arts UK to sit alongside the devolved arts councils. There needs to be more clarity about the process of input from the Assembly on non-devolved issues like the police and broadcasting, and scope for dual scrutiny. Concordats between the Assembly and Whitehall need more regular review.[29] Failing to engage in the new debate on Britishness would be to leave the terrain free for the Conservative Party in England to whip up and then ride a wave of anti-Scottish and anti-Welsh feeling to redraw the union in its own favour. We have seen some examples of that recently, with calls for only English MPs to vote on certain subjects in Parliament.[30]

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[29] On broadcasting as an example, see Leighton Andrews, 'Wales and the UK's Communications Legislation, 2002-3', *Cyfrwng*, 2005, pp32-48 and 'The National Assembly for Wales and broadcasting policy, 1999-2003', *Media, Culture and Society*, Vol. 28 (2): 191-210.
[30] See, for example, Jonathan Freedland, 'We must not give Cameron the chance to tear our country apart', *Guardian* 5 July 2006, available at
http://politics.guardian.co.uk/conservatives/comment/0,,1812792,00.html

While it is clear that reaction to the London bombings of July 2005, carried out by British citizens, has underpinned the new debate on what it means to be British, Gordon Brown has been engaged in the debate for some time, though we don't have to go all the way back to the Scottish Red Paper for that. His emphasis on organisations like the NHS and the BBC as bodies representing the best of Britishness can be traced to the pamphlet he co-wrote with Douglas Alexander, *New Britain, New Scotland* in 1999. He has mounted a series of speeches about Britishness, in which he has been rather more generous about Nairn than Nairn is about him. 'Britishness' is a subject that engages Brown profoundly.[31]

It is hard, sometimes, engaging in that argument outside Wales and Scotland now. Like Tom Nairn, I was a platform speaker at the January 2006 Fabian conference where Gordon Brown made his speech. I also attended Nairn's session and spoke from the floor. Nairn had little to say, other than telling us he fundamentally disagreed with Brown and that the size of England within the UK made a balanced constitutional settlement difficult.

Fabian events are largely metropolitan (why do all conferences on Britishness have to be in London?) and sometimes one had the sense of speaking to an audience that still had not got its head round its own metropolitan limitations: the metropolitan provincialism which Raymond Williams and Kenneth Morgan separately identified.[32]

You get a sense that for English metropolitan liberals constitutional change is there to let the Welsh and Scots be a little different, while they can carry on their own agendas without having to confront what it means. Wary of offending us, confident in their liberal tolerance, they are all too easily hurt when we suggest that they need to get to grips with what constitutional change means for the English.

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[31] Gordon Brown and Douglas Alexander, *New Scotland, New Britain*, John Smith Institute, 1999, p29, available at http://www.smith-institute.org.uk/pdfs/new-scotland-new-britain.pdf ; Gordon Brown, British Council speech, 7 July 2004, available at http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/newsroom_and_speeches/press/2004/press_63_04.cfm ; Martha Kearney, 'Brown seeks out 'British values' http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/newsnight/4347369.stm; for the engagement of others pre 7/7 see, for example, the *Prospect* Roundtable, http://www.prospect-magazine.co.uk/article_details.php?id=6832

[32] Kenneth O. Morgan, *Wales in British Politics,* UWP, 1963; For Raymond Williams see *'Decentralism and the Politics of Place'* in *Resources of Hope,* Verso, London, 1989.

In Nairn's session, chaired by one of the best of the metropolitan liberals, Martin Kettle, fortunately there were politicians more confident of their Englishness, like John Denham MP and Michael Wills MP. They explicitly recognised the unsettled elements of the English question, although the confusion of terms like national identity, when the supranational identity of Britishness was under discussion, proliferated.[33]

As democrats, we can shape what Britishness is seen to be for, and how, through democratic means, it can be changed. Our sense of Britishness as civic identity is separate from but complementary to, identities based on nationality, religion or race. We can be British and Welsh or Scottish or English, British and Muslim or Christian, British and black or white. However, Brown is right to say Britishness cannot be "so loose, so nebulous that it is simply defined as the toleration of difference."

In the discussion group in which I joined, as Yasmin Alibhai-Brown recalled later, some argued for:

> …a minimalist approach to Britishness. That is a civic identity based on laws and no more.

Yasmin argues that we need something with "more soul". I would agree with that. I think that Britishness is experienced as both a civic and a cultural identity – different from the national as well cultural identity that we experience as Welshness. There are shared cultural experiences – seen at their simplest through, for example, common television viewing – which engage people beyond their civic identities and beyond their immediate national, religious or ethnic identities as well. One of the strengths of Britishness, writes Timothy Garton Ash,

> …is the way if exemplifies, indeed necessarily requires, multiple identities. Every Brit is always something else as well.[34]

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[33] For the session report, 'New Britishness must resolve the English question', see http://www.fabian-society.org.uk/press_office/display.asp?id=525&type=news&cat=43; for the full conference reports, see http://www.fabian-society.org.uk/press_office/display.asp?id=474&type=news&cat=43 ; see also the essays in the Fabian Review, volume 117, Winter 2005, 'The Britishness issue'; personally, I am all for the English coming to terms with their own identity, and have been for some time: see my essay 'New Labour, new England?' in Mark Perryman Ed., *The Blair Agenda*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1996; Michael Wills MP, 'Being British is different now', *Sunday Times*, 15 January 2006.

[34] Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, 'Britain as seen through the eyes of others', Independent, 16 January 2006; Timothy Garton Ash, 'In our search for Britishness, we should put out more flags – or none', Guardian, 19 January 2006.

Britishness must be based on a recognition of our plural identities, and we should recognise that we can ourselves, democratically, shape what Britishness is seen to be.

Historians such as Linda Colley and Tristram Hunt have rightly warned against a simple espousal of so-called 'British' values, stressing the need for clear constitutional and citizenship strategies, not least the teaching of British history in its fullest sense.[35] Commentaries on Gordon Brown's speech may have given the impression that he sees these values as somehow timeless. In fact, his emphasis has been that there are certain British values – not handed down from on high but won through historical struggle – that are widely shared today. Commonly expressed, they are 'liberty for all, responsibility by all and fairness to all'. Whether one sees them as exclusively British or not – I don't – they are certainly values we would probably like to be judged as holding.

Why does this debate matter? John Denham, in an article for the Fabian conference, got it right I think:

> The left has only slowly accepted that the broader question of British identity is enormously important for progressives. The field cannot be conceded to the right. Uncertainty about who we are and what sort of country we want to be is now creating an obstacle to successful progressive politics.

Denham argues that 'the progressive consensus' which Gordon Brown seeks needs a society with a greater sense of community and common purpose. [36] Yasmin Alibhai-Brown also argues:

> It is vital for us all to buy into a new British identity, a collective that can connect us and, in time, deepen our cultural and emotional bonds.[37]

I believe that if we ignore this debate, it will be set for us, in Wales as in the rest of the UK, by shrieking headlines in the tabloids. We like to kid ourselves sometimes, that in Wales we are a 'tolerant nation': that the debates on immigration, asylum, and race are conducted in a different tone here.

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[35] Linda Colley, 'British values, whatever they are, won't hold us together', *Guardian*, 18 May 2006; Tristram Hunt, 'History lessons we should learn', *Observer*, 15 January 2006.
[36] John Denham, 'Who do you want to be?', Fabian Review, op. cit.
[37] Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, op. cit.

Sometimes I think people forget that the tabloids are well-read here too. A democratic citizenship requires a sense of communal understanding as a base for equality.[38] Others, such as Sunder Katwala, have examined what policy issues might contribute to a new sense of British identity. If the Institute of Welsh Affairs is serious about debating Britishness, perhaps these should be the starting point.[39]

As for Tom Nairn, sadly he has nothing to offer us in this debate. It is clearly passing him by. Reading Nairn today is like eating lettuce doused in vinegar: void of nutritional value, and indigestible, at the end all that remains is the acid.

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[38] On the comfortable myth of Wales as a 'tolerant nation', see Neil Evans, Paul O'Leary, Charlotte Williams, *A Tolerant Nation?: Exploring Ethnic Diversity in Wales,* UWP, 2003.
[39] See, for example, Sunder Katwala, 'What must be done?', Fabian Review, op. cit.

2. Britannia: As Dead as Queen Anne?

David Melding

Will Britain survive as a state? Can Britain reinvent itself as a nation? These two important questions linger in the mind after examining the actions of Gordon Brown and the thoughts of Professor Nairn.

As a Tory – of the Oakeshottian type rather than the Burkean school – I feel it best not to dwell on the personal antipathy Professor Nairn feels towards Mr. Brown:

> … the Jeeves of Great Britain's last days, a courtier of self-abasement, sleaze, insanely false pretences, failed reform and neo-imperial warfare.

I can hardly say that I did not enjoy the rich, garlicky vituperation with which Professor Nairn dresses his prose. Indeed it appears at times something of a pastiche of Burke – perhaps inspired by one of the less restrained passages from *Reflections on the Revolution in France.* Yet, like Burke, Nairn makes some prescient observations, even though he fails to convert them into sound judgements. If I can paraphrase Neal Ascherson paraphrasing Willie McIlvanney, we Brits don't like to see clever ideas wandering around unchaperoned by experience.

Let us first deal with the hyperbole. According to Nairn, the Britain created in 1707 (and expanded in 1801) was a pretty mean city. Not that all was bad, damaged vessels can hold wine, but in essence it was a fake sustained by imperial ambition. Moreover, it bred a false nationalism that compromised the true multinational identity of Britain. A successful if brutal Empire and a highly centralised state – symbolised by the late 19th century in a Gilbert and Sullivan style monarchy – kept the enterprise together. In the period, say between the Seven Years War and World War II, this false nationalism became the received identity of most British citizens. With the collapse of the Empire, an archaic monarchy, the emergence of a European polity, only the centralised state holds this fragile vessel together. No wonder politicians like Gordon Brown are reluctant to celebrate the tercentenary of the Union. He can do little more than:

> … set out a ghost response – a fantasy nation suitable to the New Age, which at the same time won't upset the ancient one too much. He proposes the selective resurrection of a Gladstonian-liberal England, without Disraeli's British-imperial bullying.

Like a bad cook elaborately dressing lobster, Nairn cannot resist going even further and he dismisses the Brown project "as a generalisation of Northern Ireland Protestant attitudes."

I agree that Gordon Brown's actions to reinvent a sense of Britishness are shaky and lacking in coherence. This does not mean that Nairn's thought is convincing. To use an Oakeshottian concept, while I concede that Britain is an invention, it is not *merely* an invention. What was created in 1707 was a coherent treatment of the *Matter of Britain* (the 1801 extension much less so). That it has survived 300 years is testimony to this fact.

True, a 300 year old practice does not itself justify the continuation of the current Union, but it makes it highly likely. There is simply too much experience packed into those 300 years to permit an abstract dismissal of Britain as fake and brutal. While Britain – state and nation – was created, invented if you like, in 1707 it was not *merely* invented. The *Matter of Britain* already existed: it has been handled, treated, by successive generations and different peoples, Celt, Saxon, Norse, Norman.

What is therefore key is not *whether* Britain will survive but in what *form* will it continue? There are two obvious possibilities, one major one minor. The major outcome requires the acceptance of dual (even multiple) national identities. In Wales can we project ourselves as Welsh and British or if need be, to take one possible triad, Asian-Welsh-British? If we can, the British state will survive. The minor outcome will prevail if this projection cuts out and leaves us Welsh men and women living in a wider geographical entity of great significance. Here Britishness would at least resemble the shared identity of the nations of Scandinavia (itself a much weaker geographical entity than Britain).

Nairn is on firmer ground when he criticises Gordon Brown for focusing solely on re-inventing Britishness while ignoring the need to renovate an out-of-date British state. Brown would no doubt argue that the ramifications of the devolution settlement will take quite some time to work themselves out.

However, Nairn is correct in saying that federalism would have been "a great advance on the original plans of 1998." Where I differ is my belief that a federal Britain would constitute a durable state. But again when preparing his banquet, Nairn cannot resist copious quantities of garlic, cream and butter. And so "The philosophy of Federalism is an historical hangover" and "in the main, modern federalism has been a way of building or reinforcing the unitary command-states of the New-Imperialist era". And if this is not enough,

> Decentralisation and the encouragement of folk-dancing were techniques for the focusing and amplification of central authority, in areas where power mattered – and above all, for conducting warfare, the life-blood of modern international relations.

Phew! After digesting that lot I yearn for a diet of bread and water. Experience of federalism in the English-speaking world cannot be treated so casually, however disapproving critics may be of the foreign policy of the respective states. The USA, Canada and Australia have survived testing times and their federal constitutions appear robust. Given that parliamentary federalism is as much a British invention as the unitary state – although federalism was always exported – a more serious examination of federalism within Britain seems warranted. I agree that devolution is not a robust form of governance, but to classify federalism as equally half-baked is to advance an idea unchaperoned by experience. Of course the people of Wales, Scotland and England might in the end prefer independence and then a loose Britannic confederation. This outcome is possible, although in my judgement far from probable. Perhaps the very intemperance of Nairn's arguments indicates that deep down he also suspects this to be true.

The Labour Party's programme of constitutional change launched in 1997 has certainly been muddled but it is hard to conclude with Nairn that at heart it is malevolent. Tony Blair's dalliance with PR is more accurately attributed to his desire to unite the forces of the left after the so-called 'Conservative-century'. But for Nairn the "political mechanisms of terminal Britishry demand *enhanced* reliance upon elective dictatorship, and hence on first-past-the-post."

One can counter this fanciful assertion by simply noting that PR would resolve the West Lothian question by making coalitions necessary and removing the possibility that England could get a government it did not vote for. (In terms of votes, but not MPs, England favoured the Conservative Party in 2005.)

The union of 1707 was a product of many forces, none more salient than the prospect of a Jacobite restoration – in Scotland and perhaps even England – after the death of Queen Anne. The phrase 'As dead as Queen Anne' contained real menace. In the world according to Professor Nairn devolution is the last but forlorn hope of Unionists intent on saving Britain. But over the horizon I see the Hanoverians in the form of a federal Britain. Advance Britannia!

3. Apocalyptic Visions

Vernon Bogdanor

The maddening thing about Tom Nairn is that he is sometimes right. He is certainly right to say that the new ideology of Britishness has little substance. For, as he says, "an identity is a cultural body, not simply clothing and spectacle." He is right also when he says that the *Red Paper on Scotland* of 1975 and indeed the Left in general took the view that there was nothing much wrong with the British central state, and that, after devolution, little further reform was needed. He correctly locates this misperception in the Left's standpoint that, until recently at least:

> ...'constitutional politics and ideas' have been `essentially secondary, or `superstructural'. That is, they may be `a good thing' which wise reform will eventually find time to take care of. But they are never urgent enough to be tackled *now*. They are not necessary conditions of successful social, economic and cultural or other policies. Those things deemed the `real stuff' of politics. In other words, there is no tradition of popular or radical *constitutional* agitation active here at all.

Yet, as with so many on the Left, Nairn cannot escape from the implication that there is, even in England, a subterranean radicalism which the political leaders are betraying. The people are Ironsides, but their leaders are flunkeys. However, all the evidence we have is that the Labour government has been more, not less radical, than the British people on constitutional matters.

For constitutional reform has signally failed to ignite popular passions. Indeed, it lies low in the list of voters' priorities. Shortly before the 2001 general election, MORI, conducted a survey to discover which issues were important to voters. The constitution, along with Northern Ireland, was the issue which concerned voters least of all, with only 5 per cent indicating that the issue was important when they came to vote.[40]

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[40] Robert Worcester and Roger Mortimore, *Explaining Labour's Second Landslide*, 2001, p. 29. There was, moreover, little difference in the response in different parts of the United Kingdom. See Worcester and Mortimore, ibid, p. 228. The result had been very similar in 1997. See Worcester and Mortimore, *Explaining Labour's Landslide*, 1999, p. 152.

In 1997, shortly before Labour came to office I proposed to write a short guide to the various reforms, a book eventually published by Gollancz under the title, *Power and the People*. However, my publishers declared that they would accept it only if two conditions were met. The first was that the word `constitution' should not appear in the title. The second was that I should add a chapter on the monarchy, the only constitutional issue which, in their view, would interest the general public.

Nairn is not very interested in empirical explanations – for they would endanger the sweep of his rhetoric. He is indeed a man of apocalyptic visions. Britain, he says is in its "last days" and Gordon Brown is in danger of becoming "a courtier of self-abasement, sleaze, insanely false pretences, failed reform and neo-imperial warfare". Later he says that "the existing framework of British authority, belief and prestige was now falling apart so alarmingly, that nothing whatever could be allowed to damage it farther", and we are now in a state of "terminal Britishry."

Yet, irritatingly, the British stubbornly resist such apocalyptic visions, except perhaps in Northern Ireland, whether the visions come from the Right or from the New Left (is it still new?). The British people seem to be happy as ostriches rather than lions, inhabitants of a peaceable if somewhat run-down kingdom.

Against Tom Nairn's apocalyptic visions, one can put the brute facts of electoral behaviour. A great deal of ink is spilt on the notion of Britishness and what it is. Philosophical questions of course cannot be answered, and that is a major part of their charm for a certain kind of mind, but there is a clear empirical criterion for Britishness. It is the willingness to continue to be represented at Westminster.

Many hard things have been said, particularly in England about the Scottish and Welsh nationalist parties. But they do at least provide a clear indication of the extent to which the Scots and Welsh wish to remain British. Judged by the statistics, the Scots are more British now than they were thirty years ago. In October 1974, the SNP reached its high water mark, gaining 30 per cent of the Scottish vote. In 2005, they won around 18 per cent of the vote, two per cent lower than in 2001. The SNP has lost, therefore, over two-fifths of its support over the past thirty years. In 2005 Plaid Cymru won nearly 13 per cent of the vote, just over one per lower than in 2001, but around two per cent higher than in October 1974.

It is hardly a sign of an impending apocalypse when 80 per cent of Scottish voters, and 87 per cent of Welsh voters regularly vote in Westminster elections for unionist parties. Indeed, what is remarkable is not the existence of nationalist parties, but that they made so little headway during the later 1970s and 1980s, years of great economic difficulty and social strain.

Nairn is mistaken also in thinking that the English are coming to favour Scottish or Welsh independence. The survey evidence analysed by John Curtice in his contribution to the volume from the Constitution Unit at University College, London, entitled *The English Question*, a book to which Nairn refers, shows just the opposite. Curtice shows that only 17 per cent of the English favour Scottish independence, up from 14 per cent in 1997, but down from 24 per cent in 1999. Moreover, just 16 per cent of the English favour Welsh independence, up from 13 per cent in 1997, but down from 20 per cent in 1999.[41]

It is significant, surely, that no politician of any consequence in England has campaigned for the break-up of the United Kingdom. The majority in England now favour devolution for Scotland and Wales, but do not want it for themselves. The late Donald Dewar used to say that devolution was the `settled will' of the Scottish people. The settled will of the English people seems to be: no devolution for us, whether in the form of an English Parliament or English regional assemblies. For most of the English the regions are ghosts.

Like so many radical commentators, Tom Nairn under-estimates the massive stability of the British system of government. He explains what has not happened, and what he hopes might happen – the end of Britain – yet fails to explain what has actually happened.

Perhaps there has been too much emphasis upon the factors tending towards the break-up of the United Kingdom, too much on the United Kingdom as an artificial construct, an `invented nation', and too little analysis of the factors which hold the United Kingdom together. In his sadly underestimated book, *Understanding the United Kingdom*, published in 1982, Richard Rose suggested that Britain was united by functional issues and by common economic and social concerns.

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[41] John Curtice, `What the people say – if anything', in Robert Hazell (Ed), *The English Question*, Manchester University Press, 2006, p. 130.

Paradoxically, the referendum in Scotland in 1997 which showed massive support for devolution, confirmed rather than refuted Rose's argument. The motivation for the `yes' voter seems to have been an instrumental `yes', not a nationalist `yes'. Rightly or wrongly, voters believed that a Scottish Parliament would improve the quality of public welfare, especially health and education. They regarded constitutional reform as a means rather than an end in itself. In the words of two psephologists who analysed the referendum:

> Most have expectations that it will make a difference to their lives in terms of the services they want it to provide. Those are the grounds on which its effectiveness is likely to be judged, rather than as an affective expression of nationhood.[42]

I have some sympathy with Nairn's conclusion that a confederation of `these islands' may be the best way forward to resolve the British/Irish relationship. I wondered, though, at one point whether he knows what a confederation actually is. He refers to Switzerland as a confederation. Switzerland is of course *called* a confederation, but it is in fact a *federal* system of government, and the Liberal Democrats are quite right to lump it together with the United States, contrary to what Nairn says.

In any case, Nairn does not seem to appreciate that confederation means sacrifices of sovereignty by the Irish government, as well as the British. The idea of confederation, therefore, sits ill with Nairn's advocacy of separatism. The British-Irish Council and the confederal relationship to which it points is a striking reaffirmation, not of separatism, but of the Gladstonian ideal of Home Rule in the changed conditions of the 21st century. For separation is no more the answer to the Irish problem than unthinking Unionism.

In 1918 Sinn Fein MPs, the vast majority of those elected in Ireland, took Nairn's advice by refusing to take their seats at Westminster. The first important measure affecting Ireland's interests in the 1918-1922 parliament was the fourth Home Rule Bill, the Government of Ireland Bill of 1920. This partitioned Ireland, and sanctioned arrangements in the north which severely disadvantaged the minority, Catholic, population. Was it really to Ireland's advantage that her MPs were not at Westminster?

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[42] Paula Surridge and David McCrone, `The 1997 Scottish referendum vote' in Bridget Taylor and Katarina Thomson (Eds.), *Scotland and Wales: Nations Again*? University of Wales Press, 1999, p. 52.

The truth is that Ireland continued to be deeply affected by everything that happened at Westminster but no longer had a voice there to defend her interests. The same would be true for the Scots and Welsh were they foolish enough to take Nairn's advice.

In the old days of the New Left, many of its adherents used to dismiss a respect for the empirical as `positivism', mere fact grubbing, unworthy of attention from serious thinkers. This made it easier for them to present their own fantasies as securely grounded It was a form of wish-fulfillment which could not survive cold contact with reality. Sadly, Tom Nairn stands four-square in this tradition. Why cannot intellectuals on the Left have a bit more respect for what people actually think and do rather than for what they wish people would think and do? Only a fuller understanding of popular attitudes can provide a genuine basis for social and constitutional change.

Tom Nairn always provokes and is often wild, but he is sometimes right. Perhaps one should not ask for more.

4. Blaming It All On Brown and Britain

Peter Stead

It has often been suggested that it was the World Cup that did for Harold Wilson in the General Election of 1970. Historians are attracted to the theory not least by the satisfying notion that politicians who set out to exploit popular culture can sometimes be hoisted by their own petard. There are already signs that the World Cup of 2006 will demand even closer inspection by historians.

When Scotland's First Minister, anxious to be a spokesman for his people, explained that he would be supporting England's opponents, he triggered off a debate that was kept on the boil by every tabloid journalist and every radio phone-in. At that very moment the prime ministerial heir-apparent, Gordon Brown, entirely caught up in his programme of establishing himself as a truly British figure, was en route for Germany to support England.

Meanwhile polls were indicating that his journey was in vain for it seems that English voters are increasingly unhappy at the thought of a Scot, especially one representing a Scottish seat, taking up residence in No. 10. Suddenly everybody, not least the Tories, was raising the West Lothian Question. Could it be that with his cheap populist jibe Jack McConnell had severely weakened the Union of which he is supposed to be a supporter and at the same time, however indirectly, jettisoned any chance of Gordon Brown being Prime Minister of the United Kingdom?

There was one Scot, as it happens another prime ministerial hopeful, who was too busy to watch the football. Home Secretary John Reid was frantically attempting to sort out the country's criminal justice system and his eagerness prompted one chief constable to suggest that the Government was "making policy on the hoof." If Terry Grange's comment was valid in the field of law and order it was even more pertinent as far as both constitutional issues and questions of national identity are concerned. Tom Nairn is absolutely right in stressing the extent to which constitutional issues have never been taken seriously by British politicians, and this is particularly the case with politicians on the left.

Those of us who supported devolution in 1997 must never forget that Scotland and Wales were given their new status by a prime minister operating 'on the hoof' and who was more concerned with image than actuality. That approach has continued to be the hallmark of Tony Blair's Government with regard to every aspect of the constitution, whether it is Northern Ireland, Europe, the House of Lords, The Office of Lord Chancellor, the Supreme Court or the judiciary.

Tony Blair's bequest to the nation will be a constitutional shambles, the product of a vain narcissistic prime minister who wanted to transform a nation but who lacked any real sense of it beyond that offered by focus groups and in the tabloids. And, of course as the Home Office illustrates, things are just as bad as far as administrative structures are concerned. Initially those of us who had wanted Brown to take over thought that he had the integrity and intellectual ability to cut through the spin and to confront reality. By September 2006 all the indications suggested that for Gordon Brown the desire to move into No. 10 had eclipsed all matters regarding both policy and, more fundamentally, identity.

Tom Nairn does well to remind us that by far the greatest priority in British politics is the necessity of launching and sustaining a realistic debate on how the role of the state can best guarantee the quality of life of all its citizens. Politics has to be reclaimed from the office of the prime minister and from attendant personal advisors and press officers. At the national level there has to be a revival of Party doctrine and research and this has then to feed into a real debate and expression of views at conferences, in Parliament and, most crucially, in the Cabinet. Away from Westminster, the most urgent necessity is for the revival of true local government so that people have some sense of control over their own lives.

I share Tom Nairn's sense of amused disappointment at the way in which Gordon Brown has rather heavy-handedly tried to meet the requirements of the image-makers by supporting both Raith Rovers and England, revering Keir Hardie and Winston Churchill and feeling spiritually a citizen of both Fife and Cape Cod. For ten years Brown has been able to have it all ways and even now we are no nearer to knowing whether he is truly Old Labour or New, or whether economically he is more at home on Wall Street or in the public-sector dominated economies of Scotland and Wales that he has assiduously buttressed.

At the defining moment of the Blair era all of Brown's body language suggested that the war in Iraq was nothing to do with him. At that time his old rival Robin Cook rebelled and cemented his reputation in Labour's pantheon. For Brown, that was the moment when everything he had valued in his childhood home, the kirk, university and at party conferences was left behind.

Certainly there has been much that is embarrassing about Brown's playing of the British card. As it happens, his instincts are right: it is just that his belated conversion and naked opportunism have made him the wrong man for the task. The buck must surely pass now to a younger politician, one who will be able to argue that it is the enterprise economy and the multi-cultured popular culture of the United Kingdom as a whole that best guarantees the well-being of future generations. In the United Kingdom of today there is an urgent need for some serious constitutional thinking, not least with regard to the English regions and the House of Lords (which must now be given a federal dimension). Meanwhile, even more radical policies are needed on health service, housing and educational issues. All these are matters that can only be decided within a British context.

From the perspective of the 1990s Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland all needed and deserved fuller constitutional and administrative powers and identity. Ten years on there are major questions to be resolved but what has become patently obvious is that full independence for Wales and Scotland would condemn those countries to the status of European Socialist backwaters. For all parts of the United Kingdom the trick must be that of maximising the value added dimensions that distinct identities allow whist operating within the traditional strengths of our unique state. It is only by embracing the British dimension that we will attract young and able men and women into party politics. We need to ensure that we are represented in decision making at the British level during the next decade when absolutely vital issues have to be decided in terms of health, education, energy, Europe and international relations. To opt out of that pan-British level of decision-making would be politically stupid, cowardly and utterly stultifying in cultural terms.

One has to feel a little sorry for Gordon Brown. It may be true that it was only Tony Blair's electoral appeal that gave Brown his opportunity of being in government, but clearly it is the subsequent failure of the Blair project that has made it highly likely that if it comes the Brown premiership will be both problematic and brief.

But Scotland must never forget the kind of political culture that once allowed brilliant young Scots like Brown and Cook to believe that they were good enough to run the country and indeed the Western world. What we need now is for the three major British parties to think again about how they best serve the people at three distinct levels of government. That is not as difficult as rocket science, but it will require clear thinking and forthright speaking at a time when every phone-in programme and tabloid journalist is meddling in cod constitutional thinking.

What is especially worrying about academics and politicians attempting at this time to undermine the notion of Britishness is that there are so many other people who are unable to put anything in its place. At times during the recent World Cup there were moments when hostility to the various national groups within Britain seemed to some to border on racism. There is undoubtedly an unattractive anti-Englishness lurking in underprivileged areas in Wales and Scotland, whilst there are educated people in all the British nations who think it clever to make derogatory remarks about fellow British citizens with different accents to theirs.

Those who wish to abandon Britishness need to be very clear what it is that they will offer young people as an alternative. During the Blaenau Gwent by-election inn mid-2006 reporters came across youngsters who had never been to England. When politicians talk to such people I would suggest that it would be best not to put constitutional reform at the top of the agenda.

All three of the major political parties are essentially British. That has sometimes been a weakness but, more usually, it has been their greatest strength. More than any other time in their history they now need to think about what Britain means and they need to convey that to voters clearly, honestly and without cynical references to popular culture. It is not easy to explain and communicate the roles of pluralism, diversity and multi-cultural identity in a democracy but if our politicians are unable to do it there is trouble ahead.

5. From 'Melting Pot' to Melt-down: That Britishness Project Again

Charlotte Williams

The troubled relationship between cultural diversity and the defining requisites of nation has without doubt been amplified following the events of the 7 July 2005. The spectre of the enemy within took on a whole new dimension when it became possible that the boy next door who went to the local school might just be capable of demonstrating an allegiance to something much more than national deference. Despite other unsettling processes, the anxiety surrounding the 'war on terror' has provided the fuel to drive forward New Labour's heavy-handed machinery for the policing of national identity. As the paranoia mounts the answer to all the nation's woes has become to reconstruct the monolith, Great Britain. But there is little new here for Britain's black and ethnic minorities. In the absence of a sophisticated, potent and embedded political response to cultural diversity and plurality many are inured to the flag-waving politicking and assimilationist mandate that has characterised British race relations for too long. This formula flies in the face of the emergent and spontaneous nature of the formation of identities and of a vibrant history of a variegated UK. More to the point, it confirms the extent to which the leadership has become unhinged from the world most of us occupy.

Tom Nairn correctly identifies several of the features that contribute to the latest misfeasance and to the folly of Gordon Brown's attempts to revive an ailing Britishness by talking it up. Minorities '*old*' and '*new*' will inevitably be wary of this state orchestrated manipulation of the national consciousness, not least because it finds little resonance with their everyday lived experiences.

Where I depart from Nairn is in his solution to the conundrum; that is, in his optimism for an independent Wales or Scotland. Whilst it is true to say we do '*do flags in Wales',* why would sitting in the garden on St. David's day under the softly billowing Welsh flag be any the different to Brown's proposals, albeit rendered small, for reconciling the tensions between cultural diversity and nation? Unless, that is, Nairn wishes to suggest Wales as in some way homogeneous or perhaps alternatively that Wales is capable of constructing its own wholly different version of the national collective that is somehow more progressive, fluid, open and inclusive of the '*new minorities'*.

From the threat to 'our jobs and houses' in the post war period, to the threat to 'our culture' in the 80s, to the asylum/terrorist threat of the 2000s, the response to the so-called alien wedge has been a twin strategy of structured assimilationism coupled with rigorous immigration control. In its latest manifestation the melting-pot assumptions of post-war Britain, which demanded the slow relinquishing of the most obvious aspects of difference, have been reformulated towards the idea that you can be as different as you like – dress, eat, talk, walk your difference, more a salad than a soup - as long as you subscribe to 'shared values'. This permissive, '*half hearted*' as Nairn calls it, multiculturalism, means that the pot is still the pot with little reworking of the idea of Britain itself.

As assimilationism can only hold a very tenuous grip so a plethora of conditionalities and probationary tests have been formulated to ensure compliance: Tebbit's cricket test, Blunkett's citizenship test and now Brown's morality test bolstered by the panoply of citizenship ceremonies, flag waving, national respect days and the teaching of British values, note "in *English* schools."

And so the anxieties build. They are fuelled regularly by the appearance of open resistance and dissent from the ranks of the new minorities, as those very norms and values are subject to question. In the process the 'something for nothing' nature of the contract is exposed as inequalities get more entrenched. However, this interrogation and engagement in public debate is not seen as a product of a vibrant, diverse and healthy democratic culture but as an infringement or a subversion of the very core of Western values – its freedom of speech.

In this climate community solidarity itself has become suspect. David Goodhart, the editor of *Prospect*, in a much quoted essay on multiculturalism raised fears about 'too much diversity'[43], prominent commentators such as Yasmin Alibhai Brown have called for the 'death of multiculturalism'[44] and Trevor Phillips, Chair of the Commission for Racial Equality has warned that Britain is 'sleepwalking into segregation'.[45]

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[43] Goodhart, D, (2004) *Too Diverse?* Prospect February 2004
[44] Alibhai-Brown, Y. (2001) *Imagining the New Britain,* New York: Routledge
[45] Phillips T. (2005) *After 7/7: Sleepwalking to Segregation*. Speech to the Manchester Council for Community Relations

This contemporary suspicion of a multi-culturalism built on discrete groups, silo-thinking and community-standpoint politics, effectively blames minorities for the contemporary malaise of Britishness, ignoring other obvious facets of a wider and longstanding disenchantment.

Assimilationism of such proportions and with very few visible benefits has long been regarded as a sham, repeatedly demonstrating that state-sponsored patriotism is no substitute for robust state-sponsored equality strategies or for that sense of trust and investment won through genuine participation in governance. Nairn is right in drawing some parallels between the 'old minorities' and the 'new minorities' in this respect, if indeed he stops short of considering *their* inter-relationship. The hegemony of the British state is unsettled by both constituencies and these debates need to be counterpoised.

At the close of the millennium an eminent team of academics came together to consider the *Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain.*[46] Perhaps most controversially, they suggested that the term British was smudged with the stain of racism. The *Parekh Report*, as it has become known, argued that in the context of devolution, globalisation and the new cultural diversity, Britishness needed to be reinvented. It called for a re-imagining of the national story. What is often missed about this document is that its conception of multi-ethnic Britain was curiously inclusive. Its starting point was the notion of multi-culturalism within a multi-national Britain, provocatively asking,

> What do the separate countries stand for? And what does Britain stand for?

In addition to the well trodden issue of the new multiculturalism it identified devolution as one of factors calling for a reworking of Britishness. A more complex relationship between majorities and minorities was being uncovered for inspection. For too long identity debates whether they are about post-war immigration, contemporary multiculturalism, Britain's four nations or Britain's ambivalent Europeanism, have run along separate tracks. The mainstream intellectual multiculturalists have been reluctant or loathe to consider the interplay between Welshness, Scottishness, Irishness and the issues facing new Commonwealth immigrants.

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[46] Parekh, B. (2000) T*he Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain: The Parekh Report.* London. Profile Books.

Similarly, until very recently, debates about Welsh/Scottish/Irish identity were conducted in isolation from the multicultural question. Britain's broad pattern of allegiances within, across and between was lost in the homogenising tendency of nation building. As the idea of Britain now careers towards terminal meltdown it is clear a new discourse of multiculturalism is required.

If Brown's map still has a pinkish hue then Nairn suggests we need independence, a stronger version of the reinvented 'new Scotland' and 'Better Wales.com' than we inherited under devolution. My disagreement with Nairn is that in his freeing us up of the burden of Britain he implies a confidence in the nation state communities, He assumes that not only can they shrug off their traditional ethnic variant towards more civic interpretations of the national banner, but that liberal civic nationalism will somehow produce the answer to the solidarity/diversity question.

In particular, Wales is unproblematic in Nairn's account, somehow homogeneous, somehow worked through in terms of its own diversity and indeed its inter-relationship with England and with British imperialism. This language of nation is troublesome perhaps because of the inevitability with which it leans towards the world of sheep and the goats.

Ethnic absolutism and essentialism are the nation's traditional badges and its default setting an appeal to cultural homogeneity. I am not sure that Nairn's polemic frees us from this trajectory in his appeal to the '*Scoto and Gallo'* communities to grasp the metal of independence. His construction of Welshness/Scottishness implicitly relies on a retreat at least to the organising principle of a cultural homogeneity, albeit in a new configuration.

The trouble with the 'sheep and the goats' theory of human civilisation is its antipathy to hybridity and multiple identifications as an emergent factor of rapidly changing societies and in its antipathy to searching out points of commonality and solidarity between communities. The impulse to protect exclusive identities or geo-political entities disregards the transformations forged by hybridity from below – a hybridity of institutions and processes as well as identities. By its nature this hybridity promises a two-way process in which both majorities and minorities shift and adjust and what emerges is spontaneous, unplanned and eclectic.

This is not assimilationism or its woolly correlate cosmopolitanism, but what Paul Gilroy has fruitfully calls the product of a *'convivial'* culture. Nairn hints at the significance of this as *"entering the lists for some future nationalism"*. However, he does not accommodate it as today's reality (in this essay at least), or note it as the starting point for the contemporary discourse of multiculturalism.

Neither am I sure that Nairn's portrayal of the nature of the disenchantment of old and new minorities is accurately represented. That historically Britishness means different things within these constituencies is one point, but another is that the constituencies are not necessarily mutually exclusive or as internally unified and coherently orchestrated as he implies.

Nairn suggests the traditional multiculturalists may be more of less duped by the idea that *"this terrorist hysteria and creeping authoritarianism are passing aberrations"* (page 19) and that a cleaned-up Britishness is the answer. This he argues is a politics of redemption in which a renegotiated, non-ethnicised, secular Britain becomes the *"bulwark of their own new roles"* (page 21). He suggests the focus of their remodelling is to lessen discrimination and racism (page 11). Against this he pitches the old minorities who are wised up to the unified state's 'crafty devices' and see the failure to reconstruct Britain as the longstanding *"conservation of existing stakes and privileges"*.

This is perhaps to misread the contemporary positioning of that 'boy next door' who stepped onto the London underground on July 7th. Indeed, it is also to misread the dominant representations of the aspirant multiculturalists who too are well versed in the 'crafty devices' of neocolonialism and the limits of neo-liberal multiculturalism.

Both, I suggest, are looking for more complex and sophisticated patterns of identity building and of ways of accommodating the shifts in the patterning of allegiances in a globalising world. Both point to conflicts *within* nation states and not simply to lines of conflict between them.

Both, I would argue, are wary of the de-ethnicised, soulnessness of this neo-patriotism and the supposed neutrality of its imposed secularism. Both, I posit, represent a challenge to the ordering of stakes and privileges that echoes imperial and colonial power.

If renationalisation - Welsh or Scottish style - is Nairn's answer then it is an inadequate one in the face of contemporary realities. This is not a radical agenda at all. It is not for example an appeal to the broad based equality strategy of socialism or feminism. It is not a call to revolution or a call for a sophisticated anti-race philosophy but to a reawakening of the clans. Nairn's solution of an independent Wales suggests a homogeneity that is no less suspicious than that he is questioning. In addition there is nothing to suggest Welshness as the co-ordinating badge of nation will be any more comforting or comfortable for ethnic or any other minorities within. White Welshness and white Scottishness, for want of better terms, with all its ethnically exclusive referents all too readily form a powerful allegiance with all things British when it comes to managing the alien wedge.

In the renewed settlement between community and the state, some forms of diversity may be heralded as an essential good but immigration is still pilloried and in concert Muslims, asylum seekers and now Eastern European migrant workers become the new outcasts. The white world finds its own level in these things. The sheep and the goats are herded in particular ways right across a reconfigured Europe.

Part of the need to proffer a solution to the ill-fated Britishness is the acceptance of the construction of the threat itself that does not explore the deeper meaning as to why this construction holds sway over other possible explanations for what Gilroy has aptly called the contemporary 'melancholia'.[47] Are not technological advance, environmental catastrophe, consumerist culture, de-industrialisation, violent crime, the fragmentation of communities, isolation, demographic change and even EasyJet implicated in transformations to the national as much, if not more than, the issue of cultural diversity?

And what is the evidence to suggest that spontaneous solidarity, cohesion and stability don't exist in the absence of a common national sentiment? It is not so much that Britishness is or is not a hollowed-out-to-the-core or a defunct project, or that we may wish to halt or push for meltdown. What is at issue is the suggestion that it can be manipulated by government intervention, using crass techniques and all the recognisable command and control armoury of neo-liberal warfare.

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[47] Gilroy, P. (2004) After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture? London, Routledge.

Why re-invent Britain in this way? Breaking Britain up into its constituent pieces may do no more than replicate the problem as we spin off in search of an all embracing Welshness or Scottishness without considering the new and novel ways in which identities converge, coalesce and emerge. The current disentangling of Englishness from Britishness which is underway following devolution holds more potential as it releases the appropriation of the term British from state to nation. Britain as a state is responsible for citizenship not identity, for the redistribution of rewards and privileges, ensuring rights and access to welfare and security of all. The rest is for us to work out between us.

I place my bets in the vibrancy, chanciness and spontaneity of an emergent multiculturalism built on an autonomous civil society, on open institutions and political forums where local and national communities can debate, argue, struggle over and negotiate outcomes. Maybe the durability of Britain is ensured by all this contestation, such that it becomes relevant as a point of reference rather than something that accurately reflects how we live our lives.

6. Brown Has a Radical Alternative to Pink-Tinged Blairism

David Gow

The summer of 2006 saw, in a prolonged heat wave and joyful street parties, a remarkable event: millions of Germans celebrated the four-week World Cup on their home turf by throwing off the self-lacerating depression of post-unification and (perceived) economic stagnation. The glass, always half-empty, became half-full for one glorious month of playfulness and bonhomie.

And, critically, for the first time in the 57-year-old history of the Bundesrepublik Deutschland, they sported the red-gold-black flag – from car antennae, from apartment balconies, from garden-poles – and waved it frenetically from the terraces and the 'fan-miles' set up in each major city staging a game. "Stand up, stand up, if you're German," they (including the third-generation Turkish immigrants) sang to the Pet Shop Boys' *Go West* and embraced their Trinidadian, Brazilian and Ukrainian neighbour in the same movement.

In England, besotted with the false promises proffered by Sven, the ice-cold Swedish manager, and the prospect of victory for the first time in 40 years since the 1966 defeat of West Germany at Wembley, the cross of St George flag, red on white, flew from thousands of run-down council flats and cars. Fuelled with Pils and schnapps, tens of thousands of English fans took to the streets of Dortmund, Munich and Gelsenkirchen. Some were wearing Tommy helmets and drunkenly singing "ten German bombers" or "two world wars and one world cup" in a strange mixture of self-mockery and self-bravado as if it were 1946, let alone 1966. Their German hosts laughed them out of court (as did most of their compatriots).

Briefly, as is his wont, Gordon Brown stopped off in Brussels during the festivities for an ecofin (EU finance ministers) meeting and chats with MEPs, en route to the England match in Cologne. And, lo, Tony Blair's long-standing and increasingly grumpy and paranoid dauphin ostentatiously wore ... an England shirt! The man who spent hours drinking beer and dispiritedly watching Scotland with his 'hotel gang' mates (Charlie Whelan, Ed Balls et. al.) in Geoff Robinson's Park Lane suite was proving his fitness for office as British prime minister.

Not for him the refrain "We support Scotland and any team playing England" voiced by Jack McConnell, Scotland's First Minister, to a chorus of enraged venom from Fleet Street's finest and sundry Tory sound-bite politicians. There is little of this colourful clamour in Tom Nairn's polemic on Brown who is lampooned as "a strident UK nationalist", "the Jeeves of Great Britain's last days" and, again, a Presbyterian, Paisleyite campaigner for "Unionist rebirth and justification."

Writing in faraway Melbourne (admittedly before the World Cup), Tom appears to have misperceived the regional-national currents bursting out in much of Europe as it struggles to manage its economic and political decline. Pressures include globalisation and the emergence of the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, China) powers, as well as the aggressive putrefaction of US neo-imperialism and its satrap, Israel, dressed up as the 'war on terror'.

'Englishness' and not just the flag-waving version of soccer fans is back on the British political agenda with a vengeance. Part of Brown's purpose in 'speaking up for Britain' - as he did in the Fabian lecture Tom refers to, but first adumbrated in around 2003 - is has tactical need as a Scot to address the emergence of English consciousness. He is, after all, the primus Scotus inter pares in a Blair cabinet still dominated by Scots even with the untimely death of Robin Cook. And the English - Asian and Afro-Caribbean, Muslim and Christian - are demanding more power and railing against both the over-preponderance and the 'grasping greediness' of Scots (and, to a lesser degree, the Welsh) enshrined in the Barnett formula for redistributing exchequer money.

Thirty years after Tam Dalyell first raised it, the West Lothian question is being readdressed. Why, it is said, should Brown, John Reid, Alastair Darling, Douglas Alexander and all those Scottish (and Welsh) Labour MPs vote on and decide questions of education, health and other policies affecting England when English MPs are barred from even debating those affecting Scotland?

The spectre is raised by some commentators of a 2009 general election producing not only a hung parliament but a Tory majority in England rendered as nought by Labour victories in Scotland and Wales. (Unless, as Tom suggests, the 2007 parliament/assembly elections in Scotland and Wales wipe out Labour's hegemony for good.)

Tom is right: the near-decade of Blairism has timidly eschewed fundamental, radical reform of Britain's polity and constitution despite the early granting of devolution. The latest half-baked proposals by Jack Straw for Lords reform would still leave half the chamber appointed. But there is a growing sense that a more deep-seated reform cannot be put off much longer and will certainly have to be addressed post-2007 and post-2009: the logical solution to the West Lothian question is the creation of an English parliament and a federal United Kingdom (though Malcolm Rifkind, the Tory grandee and ex-Scottish Secretary under Thatcher, now favours an English Grand Committee modelled on the former Scottish and Welsh models).

Ironically, this federal concept was a core Liberal idea in Scotland in the late 1960s when I first joined the Scotsman, its most fervent supporter in the Press in those pre-Barclay Brothers/Andrew Neil days, and met Gordon Brown. Though Tom now seems to view it as, well, a half-palatable alternative to the much tastier and more wholesome break-up of Britain and green/rainbow independence.

He says the Red Paper "had imagined a symbiosis of socialism and Britishness" but that's not how I remember it. Brown, extraordinarily dishevelled personally but razor-sharp politically and intellectually, commissioned the essays in 1974, around the time the miners had seen off Ted Heath's Tories and when the aftermath of Vietnam still reverberated. It prompted many of us 'Labourites' to opt for Gramscian Marxism or even Trotskyism. We were attracted by the notion of socio-economic change from below and political revolution (however loosely defined) from above.

The genesis of the Red Paper was, of course, infused by Labour's project to "ditch the Nats". More profoundly, it was also motivated by a wish to promulgate a socialism that had nothing to do with deformed state socialism of the Soviet variety, stamping out reformist movements in East Germany, then Hungary and, finally, Czechoslovakia. It was informed, too, by the 'events' of Paris 1968 which saw alternative models of social and economic activity put into praxis.

The 'British' aspect underlined by Tom only makes sense if it means that Brown and many of his contributors actively opposed Scottish independence à la SNP. At least for me, in no sense did it mean the continuance of an unreformed British state. Au contraire: it was a profound, angry dissatisfaction with that state, as well as the society it presided over, that suffused much of the Red Paper thinking.

And, for myself, already steeped in the culture and politics of post-war France and Germany, this dissatisfaction and desire for change was buttressed, nay inspired, by the emergence of what we then called the European Economic Community (which Britain had joined only in 1973). A decade before the single market was signed into being, the attractions of European integration counter-balanced by devolution to regional or national bodies ('subsidiarity') were already strong.

This is even more the case now though not, at first sight, for Brown, the eternal absentee from Brussels and scourge of euro-sclerosis and the continental socio-economic model. This is not the place to rehearse Brown's shift from Red Gordon to pink-tinged Blairism, as Tom has done along with the biographers (semi-official Paul Routledge, official Robert Preston and totally unofficial and hostile Tom Bower).

Nor the incandescent resentment he nurtures towards Blair and his acolytes, including the "real traitor", Peter Mandelson, and the paranoid obsession with enemies/opponents. Nor the way Brown interpreted the 'Granita' accord with Blair as giving him carte blanche to assert and extend the Treasury's sway over virtually the whole of Whitehall and the British state - even now, as we have seen, with his pre-emptive move to update/replace Trident submarines/warheads ("retaining our nuclear deterrent"), foreign and defence policy.

What matters is what Brown will or may do assuming he replaces Blair, presumably some time in 2007. Tom, in common with most commentators of the left, charts a 'betrayal of socialism' on the part of Brown as he has endorsed or embraced the neo-Thatcherite model of deregulation, privatisation, liberal supply side economics, welfare reform (making the poor and unemployed pay and/or work for benefits) and, what's more, support (by coughing up the taxpayers' money) for the disastrous military adventures in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere.

This is coupled with his apparent commitment to retaining the British state as such at all costs. That is one, perfectly plausible reading and Brown, though much more rooted in the labour and trade union movement than Blair, has no time for it in practice despite his full-throated appeals to "our values" in a "modern setting". Another might be that Brown, after drinking at the well of Clintonian economics, has carried out a ruthless reform of British economic policy.

This last included giving the Bank of England independence to set interest rates, the previous preserve of Chancellors, in order to drag the country out of decline, the government out of managing that decline, and making it fit for globalisation. That's his version! Yet another (Polly Toynbee et. al.) is that he has done so while genuinely trying to lift the poorly educated and left-behind out of poverty and denied access to the digital age/knowledge society. Either way, he's no neo-con.

Without the shadow of Blair, Brown in No 10 is likely to pursue those economic and social policies he pushed through in No 11, but also to undertake a series of shifts in the road. First, he may well prove to be more 'pro-European' than Blair in the sense that, with the Euro off the British agenda for the foreseeable future, he could link up with Germany's Angela Merkel and a new French president - Sarko (Nicholas Sarkozy on the right) or Ségo (Ségolène Royal on the left). The objective would be to promote the EU's "soft power" against US aggression and both institutional and economic reforms. The death-knell votes in France and Germany in 2005 against the new EU constitution have left a political vacuum that won't be filled at least until Chirac quits the Elysée. As it expands eastwards, Europe will inevitably become more inter-governmental, shedding definitively the federalist dream. And this, as have seen in the recent vote in Catalonia, for example, will be accompanied by pushes from below for more devolved power.

Second, Brown could revive constitutional reform at home by forcing through an all elected House of Lords and giving up 'regal' powers to appoint bishops and bestow honours. The compelling logic of local government financing could even see plans for tax-raising powers and not just in Scotland and Wales, as in much of the EU. A 'messy' outcome to the general election of 2009, with no overall control, could bring renewed vigour to the case for proportional representation.

All these hardly herald radical constitutional revolution but they do underline a dynamic process at work that, because it is too narrowly-focused, Tom's polemical essay neglects. The German flag-waving at the World Cup was unthinkable and invisible for the most part at the unification ceremonies of 1990 when the EU flag was raised to dampen fears of a Prussian revival. Today, however, it testifies to a society 'en marche' from a guilt-ridden past to a 'more normal' present. Modern Germany is coming of age. France, too, will soon have to reinvent its republican identity in the face of convulsive social dislocation that prompted the riots in the banlieues and may well do so again.

Brown's Britain also has far-reaching reforms to undertake to match its polity and identity to the influx of youthful immigrants. His sporting of the England soccer shirt was simply a (mis-conceived) tactical move to persuade Middle England he's no raving Scot red in tooth and claw. His 'Britishness' cannot simply be dismissed, as Tom does, as Unionist. It's an inevitable response to the forces of globalisation, climate change, ageing and the demographic and ethnic changes sweeping Europe. Freed of Blair at last, Brown will not recapture the youthful optimism (changing the world) that lay behind the Red Paper. That world has disappeared. But he may well chart a different, perhaps even more radical, course.

7. The Last Druid of Ancient Britain

Neal Ascherson

One Prince of Wales, it could be ruefully assumed, would be quite enough. But now, in effect, Britain has two. Incredibly, New Labour has added the post of Heir Apparent to the supposedly secular and democratic list of those in charge of Her Majesty's government.

Just as the Prince must wait and grow older, conscious of whatever natural vigour and enthusiasm he may possess ebbing away with the years as the unknown date of his succession flickers in the darkness ahead of him, so Gordon Brown - institutionalised in the locked ward of the Treasury - must wonder what energy he will have left on that ever-postponed day when he staggers blinking out into the glare of prime ministerial power.

Princes in this undignified position become targets for cruel, often unfair mockery. Tom Nairn shrewdly notices that Brown's continuing campaign to redefine 'Britishness' has consistently omitted reference to the Monarchy as an inspiration for unity or a symbol of 'British values'. There are many possible and intriguing reasons for this. But one might be a wish to avoid a painful comparison.

Within the next six months, surely, Brown's long wait must either be fulfilled, be overtaken, or become entirely embarrassing and absurd. And as the suspense mounts, he has indeed become a target in a way unique in British party politics: not for anything he has done, but for what he might do or be if he ever attains the leadership of government.

The attacks come from both flanks, Right and Left. With relish, Tom Nairn assails Brown as

> "the Jeeves of Britain's last days, a courtier of self-abasement, sleaze, insanely false pretences, failed reform and neo-imperial warfare."

Retaining affection for the bold young Gordon I once knew, I prefer to read this as a Nairnian trumpet-blast against the monstrosity of what he's chosen to inherit, rather than as a summary of what the poor guy has so far done on his own account.

The Labour Left, which used to seize on every intonation which suggested that Brown might not put on the whole mantle of Blairism, is now truly alienated by his well-publicised support for renewing and upgrading Britain's less-than-independent nuclear deterrent, the very dog-lead of American poodledom. So much for the rumours, fondly hugged on the back benches, that Gordon Brown privately regarded Blair's decision to go with George W. Bush into Iraq as a blunder never to be repeated.

But it's the offensive against Brown from the Right which is the most spectacular development in the months since Tom Nairn composed this essay. Under David Cameron's guidance, the Tories have opened a deafening bombardment designed to waste their future adversary before he can scramble to the relative safety of Number 10. It's fascinating that most of these missiles are directed against Scottishness, against Brown's own, or against Scottishness in general, or against those damned Scots who everywhere act as fragments of grit in the otherwise creamy perfection of Britain's constitutional arrangements.

It is a very long time since such a wind of Scotophobia blew through Westminster and the London media. The Daily Telegraph, after referring to Scots as "trapped in the squalor of dependency", asserted that

> …until recently, an English voter, hearing Gordon Brown's Fifeshire (sic) accent, would simply have said to himself 'Labour'; now, he says 'Scottish'. The lopsided devolution settlement has created a sense that the Scots are having their cake and yet guzzling away at it.

This ran in parallel with a Tory onslaught against the Barnett Formula, the basis on which the Scottish Parliament's block grant is calculated. A Telegraph opinion poll revealed that 70 per cent of the English thought that the Scots were unfairly subsidised (annual public spending per capita, worked out by an eccentric criterion which mixes relative population with assessments of 'need' , is about £1,406 higher in Scotland than in England). With the 'guzzling' charge came a renewed outcry against the right of Scottish MPs to vote on purely English measures. Out of Westminster's stagnant canal, where it had lain among the discarded bicycles and bedframes of other forgotten Parliamentary wheezes, the West Lothian Question was hauled rusty and dripping to the surface.

Most people had no idea what this dismal contraption was. But they did not like the look of it. An Observer poll found that 26 per cent were in favour of a separate English Parliament. But when the West Lothian 'anomaly' was explained to them, the figure rose to 41 per cent. The Tories raised this fuss with the short-range purpose of damaging Gordon Brown and creating public doubts whether an MP for a Scottish constituency could be acceptable as a prime minister. But, as the poll figures show, they are thereby doing something much more dangerous: kicking a dog which is not sleeping but gradually awakening.

England is unmistakably stirring, and asking questions whose implications are profound, constitutional and devastating to the myth of a 'British nation'. Tom Nairn quotes the latest *Annual Report On British Social Attitudes*, with its perception that "a still modest English backlash may be taking place." The sea of St George's flags in English streets during the World Cup revealed more than team loyalties and - because that flag has been gradually and surreptitiously replacing the Union Jack at 'civil' and non-official gatherings for over ten years - was about more than football.

Much of Tom Nairn's essay is about the contrast: between Gordon Brown's attempt to reconcile socialism and nationalism within a British framework, as expressed in the 1975 *Red Paper on Scotland*, and his current efforts to construct a new self-conscious British nationalism. I think Tom is right to perceive that redefining 'Britishness' in this way and at this time is going to undermine the ideology of British statehood rather than repair it. As he puts it, ventriloquising the anxieties of English protestors at the Fabian 'Future of Britishness' conference in January,

> …the drag-queen was being artificially resurrected to prevent the majority national identity from winning any distinguishable or separate voice.

This ploy will eventually backfire. One problem, as Tom notes, is that a 'New Britishness' is being assembled round 'values', identity markers and a frantic preoccupation with 'unity'. In other words, it is deliberately steering *away* from the three increasingly obvious weaknesses in the British polity: its lack of a supreme constitutional law (the archaism of parliamentary sovereignty), the yawning democratic deficit of its electoral system, and the unreformed mess of Westminster procedures.

But the second weakness of the Brown programme is that it runs against two political flows which are gathering way. One of these is that slow and so far rather formless 'revival of England'. The other is the future political course of Scotland. Devolution in Scotland has started with an unreal seven-year calm, during which a Labour government at Westminster has cohabited with a relatively biddable Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition at Holyrood. This period is bound to end some day, and it may possibly end at the Holyrood elections in May next year (almost to the day, on the 300th anniversary of the Treaty of Union).

Scottish Labour is visibly weakening. Tom may be too optimistic in hoping for the triumph of a 'rainbow coalition' which is "devoted to movement in the direction of independence." But Labour's defeat is very possible. The SNP may not do particularly well, but could find itself in a position to negotiate an 'independence-minded coalition' with the Greens and the Scottish Socialists. The times of comfortable cohabitation between London and Edinburgh would end with a jolt.

Even if a Labour minority at Holyrood were to be rescued by the Scottish Liberal Democrats, still pathologically unwilling to consider any alliance with the SNP, Labour at Westminster is now rapidly running out of credibility and must eventually be ejected by the voters. When a Tory-led regime in London faces an independence coalition - or even a weak Labour-led coalition - at Holyrood, it will be Englishness rather than Britishness which will demand to be defined. Tom Nairn devotes most of his 'epilogue' here to the Scottish Liberal Democrats and their plan (the Steel Commission Report) for 'fiscal federalism'. He is scathing:

> Quite substantial parts of the Steel Report give the impression of having been generated by a colony of voles, broadcasting out of some deep Thames-side sanctuary untouched by most recent events. There, they browse tranquilly upon the mouldering commonsense of past generations, and perceive independence as 'increasingly meaningless in the age of globalisation'.

I have to confess it. I was one of those Commission voles. But Tom should reflect that voles and Lib Dems come in several species, and diverge sharply in their diets. Not much mouldering commonsense was consumed in the sessions I attended, and when it came to discussions of making a more formidable constitutional reality of Scotland's self-government, I became aware of several carnivores around me - more shrew than vole.

The point for my sort of vole was not to waste energy in this particular arena by challenging the formal unionism of a party, or its commitment to 'federal' solutions. Personally, I agree with Tom that to talk of British federation - as opposed to the more plausible notion of a Britannic confederation - is to lose precious time on a scheme whose chances of realisation are zero and which has become the party's favourite excuse for ignoring the politically obvious.

However, the opportunity given by the Commission, as it seemed to me, was to push forward the democratic case for Scotland's fiscal responsibility - no representation without taxation, perhaps - beyond the point of no return. Attempts to play down what may happen beyond that point are tactical fan-dancing. The Spanish state can survive the granting of greater taxing powers to the Catalan government with no more than a few angry demonstrations in Madrid. In the British state, with its backbone of fiscal centralism and Treasury control, the situation set up by differential tax levels within the UK would be quite unpredictable.

In a startling speech to the Hansard Society the other day, Jack Straw remarked that Westminster had only delegated - not ceded - powers to the Scottish Parliament. The Scottish Executive, he went on, only used its powers, 'week by week' by courtesy of the crucial power retained by Westminster over money and the block grant. Such shattering candour about devolution is rare. Even Enoch Powell's "power devolved is power retained" did not put the real situation more clearly. But a state which considers fiscal autonomy as tantamount to political independence deserves what it will almost certainly get.

Implicit and sometimes explicit in this essay is a who-whom question. We know, with near-certainty, that the great majority of English people have no passionate objection to Scottish or Welsh independence, 'in Europe' or within some Confederation of the Isles, or both or neither.

Where, then, is this 'Britishness' clamour coming from? A closer look suggests that the campaign for a new British identity is not primarily aimed at the Scots or the Welsh or even at the 'multicultural' ethnic minorities in England, but at the 'home side' - at the increasingly resentful English component of 'Ukania'. That gives a strong clue. We come back again to Tom's resounding sentence:

The drag-queen was being artificially resurrected to prevent the majority national identity from winning any distinguishable or separate voice.

Who wants to prevent that, and who is doing the resurrecting? The answer is wonderfully paradoxical and yet logical. It is, above all, the non-English elites ascending the British pyramid who are making the fuss. As Tom writes,

'Britain' must be kept going, *and* kept great … such redemptionism has become a common creed of all minorities trying to negotiate (or renegotiate) their own rights or position within the foundering state. New immigrants perceive its supposed non-ethnicity as a bulwark of their own new roles; old minorities like the Welsh, the Scots and the Ulster Protestants see it as conservation of existing stakes and privileges, especially for the Left.

Seen like that, it becomes clear why the last Druid of Ancient Britain had to be Gordon Brown, a Scot. It was Henry VIII, a Welshman, who said that "this realm of England is an Empire". It was his daughter, egged on by the Welsh wizard John Dee, who raised that Empire into Arthur's inherited dominion over the British archipelago and beyond the oceans, 'Great Britain'. That Britain soon became a gigantic ambition-ladder for outsiders, crowded with Celts and foreigners elbowing their way up to Heaven. But, then as now, the only people who can knock the ladder down are the English.

8. Breaking-Up or Making-Up? Territorial Futures of the UK

Kevin Morgan

The longevity of the UK as a territorial entity is more remarkable than we think. On the face of it the UK doesn't look like a particularly durable political proposition, composed as it is of three and half nations, multiple religions, countless languages, two separate legal systems, a significant prosperity gap between north and south, with the whole thing ruled from a global city in the far south of the largest nation. That the UK - or the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to give it its full name - has preserved its territorial integrity since the Irish Free State was established in 1921 is actually a major achievement.

It could easily have been so different, especially as many multi-national states around the world have imploded in internecine conflict. However, in the course of the twentieth century this idiosyncratic multi-national state survived a whole series of potentially fatal crises, including two world wars, the inter-war depression, relative economic decline, and the accelerated closure of coal mines and steel mills, industries that were synonymous with Scotland and Wales. With the luxury of hindsight we can say that some things clearly work better in practice than in theory.

Having preserved its territorial integrity - thanks largely to Labourism, the only party of the periphery committed to Britishness - one would have thought that the UK state would have honed its territorial statecraft skills into a fine art. But nothing could be further from the truth. The UK state has been strangely disconcerted whenever territorial questions, especially national questions, made the political agenda. In part this was due to the 'modern' Weltanschauung which avowed that territorial attachments were cultural residues of a pre-modern and pre-capitalist era, primordial features which would be dissolved by the gastric juices of modernization. In the 'first industrial nation' of all places it was assumed that modern political activity would be organised around functional issues like class rather than territorial issues like regions and stateless nations.

No one has done more to explore the baroque character of the UK polity than Tom Nairn. For more than three decades he has argued - with intellectual panache and political passion - that Britain is a sinking ship and, unless the Celtic nations launch their dingies as a matter of urgency, they will be dragged down by their fatal attachment to Britishness. Melding the roles of analyst and advocate, Nairn's writing has acquired an ever more millenarian character, animated as it increasingly is by one Big Idea - national independence for Scotland.

This is the prism through which all his analysis is pressed, coloured and framed. And the fact that the Big Idea has not yet been realised perhaps helps to explain a polemical style of writing that, whilst always engaging, is not a little jaundiced. There is no better illustration of this polemical style than his description of Gordon Brown as

> …the Jeeves of Great Britain's last days, a courtier of self-abasement, sleaze, insanely false pretences, failed reform and neo-imperial warfare.

Serious questions can indeed be raised about Brown's tenure as chancellor, and about his capacity to become an enabling Prime Minister, but this is far too jaundiced a portrait of a man who is arguably the greatest politician of his generation.

The metamorphosis of Gordon Brown, from the socialist editor of the Red Paper to the bard of Britishness, speaks volumes for an individual career for sure, but it also reflects the trials and tribulations of progressive politics in this country. Scores of Labour politicians will recognise Brown's tortured transition because most of them are fellow travellers. What Nairn finds most shocking, however, is what Brown actually did when he finally assumed power at the Treasury:

> Brown found leadership power at last but in this crazily upside-down universe, as the champion of deregulation and privatization, borne forward on a swelling tide of pro-American rhetoric. His first important step in 1997 was to abandon control of interest rates to the Bank of England - that is, to the City of London, formerly the deadly foe of all Labour governments.

Does this critique stand up to scrutiny? Brown's trusted economic adviser, Ed Balls, seems to have persuaded the Chancellor of the merits of devolving power to the Bank of England as part of a campaign to build a reputation for economic competence.

It's easy to forget that Blair and Brown served their apprenticeships during the dark days of Thatcherism, when the Labour Party seemed unelectable for a whole series of reasons, not least because it was deemed to be an incompetent economic steward. Far from simply capitulating to 'the deadly foe' then, Brown's decision is defensible under the circumstances.

However, Nairn is on firmer ground when he queries Brown's role as an ambassador for deregulation and American-style enterprise. Personally, I was never sure as to whether Brown actually believed in these policies or whether this was calculated to secure the support of Rupert Murdoch, who has a strong predilection for strong defence, law and order, low taxes, deregulation and Euro-scepticism. According to Lance Price, a former director of communications at Downing Street and author of *The Spin Doctor's Diary*, Blair and Brown were hyper-sensitive to Murdoch's predilections and the *Sun's* headlines.

Aside from the Murdoch factor, Blair and Brown are obsessed with the US for different reasons. For Blair it is because he is in thrall to US *political* power. In Brown's case it is because he is in awe of US *economic* dynamism. But the US link has already proved fatal because it has effectively cost Blair his political career.

It also raises questions about Brown's judgement since, in extolling the US economy, he is endorsing an economic model that has generated the most grotesque social inequalities in the OECD and wrought unprecedented ecological damage as a result of the deregulation policies of the Bush White House. This catalogue of vandalism has been fully exposed in *Crimes Against Nature* by Robert Kennedy Jnr.

Only time will tell if Brown will be tarred with Blair's legacy. Having spent so much time pondering what this legacy would be, Blair will largely be remembered for his messianic role in prosecuting the wars in Iraq and Lebanon, besmirching the name of the UK throughout the international community. No ordinary member of the 'alliance of the willing', Blair was the most assiduous cheerleader of the Bush-Cheney-Rumsfeld regime, the most rabid and reckless right-wing regime in living memory. It was hardly surprising, therefore, that when Blair arrived in the Middle East, on a personal 'peace mission' in September 2006, he was greeted by an extraordinary advertisement in the Palestinian *al-Ayyam* newspaper which included the following message:

> He is coming here in order to wash his hands, that are dripping with Lebanese blood, with Palestinian water. We the signatories...notables, intellectuals and political figures declare that Tony Blair is persona non grata in our country.

Such visceral hostility to Blair is perfectly understandable, as is Nairn's charge that Brown, too, is complicit in the 'neo-imperial warfare' of the White House. Whatever his real motives, and the Labour crown may be one of them, Brown has publicly supported Blair's position on 'the war against terror' and we await to see what a Brownite foreign policy will look like should he assume the Labour crown. If they stood shoulder to shoulder on foreign policy, Blair and Brown have increasingly diverged on domestic policy. Nairn pays too little or no attention to this aspect of the Chancellor's politics. On the domestic front two of the most intractable disagreements concern the empire-building tactics of the Treasury and the reform of public services.

At the Treasury Brown can lay claim to two distinctive achievements. He is the longest serving Labour Chancellor ever, having been in office for nine unbroken years, and he is the most powerful Chancellor of all time. Despite ceding power to the Bank of England, Brown has sought to extend his writ throughout Whitehall, triggering angry charges of empire-building from Labour colleagues as well as Whitehall mandarins.

Emperor Brown has extended his power in many ways, the most important of which is the Public Service Agreement (PSA). The Comprehensive Spending Review, a rolling three year review of public spending, is the most centralised system of financial control ever practiced in this country in peacetime, and the PSA is the mechanism through which the Treasury secures the agreement of other departments to 'value for money' targets in exchange for extra cash. Through the PSA system the Treasury has insinuated itself into every nook and cranny in Whitehall. Along with many Cabinet ministers, Blair takes a dim view of the empire-building antics of Emperor Brown.

Centrally-inspired targets are also part of the problem of public service reform, the other domestic issue on which Blair and Brown disagree. Putting it simply the biggest point of divergence here is between the Blairites, who believe that more choice, diversity and pluralism ought to be injected into public services, and the Brownites, who believe that equity requires more centrally-managed uniformity because more diversity implies more inequality between one area and another.

Far from being a petty dispute between rival political tribes, this dispute actually reflects the age-old tensions between democracy and equality, subsidiarity and solidarity, tensions which have to be managed through deliberation rather than suppressed through dictat. Aside from the wars in Iraq and Lebanon, public service reform is the deepest fault-line running through the Labour Party and, for better or worse, Brown has taken a traditional Old Labour position on the issue.

Surprisingly, bread and butter issues like public service reform don't register on Nairn's political radar, which is a serious omission because one wants constitutional change not for its own sake, but in order to fashion new spaces of development and engagement. In actual fact Tom's radar seems to be attuned to just one signal, which brings us back to the Big Idea - the need for an independent Scottish state because of the lamentable failure of Blair's constitutional reforms.

Nairn developed this critique in a book called *Pariah* in 2002, and before that in a web-debate hosted by *openDemocracy*, which promotes democratic debate on a global scale. Then, as now, his argument was twofold: firstly, that Blair was perpetuating a 'non-revolution from above' since the constitutional reforms were too modest to amount to anything significant; and, secondly, that the silence of Britain's 'dominant nationality', the English, was the biggest barrier to progressive constitutional change.[48]

Having been invited to respond I argued that Nairn may have under-estimated the potential for change. With respect to the first point I argued that he had exaggerated the extent to which 'the centre' - be it Number 10, the Cabinet or Whitehall - can successfully manage the country from above. No matter how modest the constitutional reforms have been to date, and they are very modest indeed, they have nevertheless created new political spaces in which alternative voices are beginning to be heard in Scotland, Wales and London.

As regards the second point I suggested that Nairn had, once again, under-estimated the potential for changing the status quo because of the terms in which he had framed 'the English question'. The problem of the 'dominant nationality' need not be an incubus on progressive constitutional change if we frame the issue in terms of English *regionalism* rather than English *nationalism.*

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[48] Nairn, T., *Pariah: The Misfortunes of the British Kingdom*, Verso, London, 2002.

The former, being a more civic-minded political phenomenon, is far more compatible with the spirit of a devolved and pluralist British polity than an English parliament sporting the banner of St George.[49]

Admittedly, English regionalism suffered a set back in 2004, when the North East region voted against a regional assembly. Yet the government's alternative ideas of devolving power to City-Regions and revamped Local Authorities are poor substitutes which in no way challenge the power of the Whitehall state system. In other words, the death of English regionalism is much exaggerated.

But Nairn was absolutely right to raise questions about New Labour's commitment to democratic renewal through constitutional change. Time and again the Blair governments have shown themselves to be Janus-faced on this issue. Committed to devolving power in principle, they were profoundly circumspect about doing so in practice.

This might seem a harsh judgement on governments which have been the mid-wife to four devolved administrations. However, alongside these very real achievements, one has to set the shameful attempts to derail Ken Livingstone and Rhodri Morgan as candidates in the leadership elections in London and Wales, the gutting of the Freedom of Information Bill, the effective sacking of Elizabeth Filkin, the independent parliamentary standards commissioner, and a proposal to 'reform' the Lords which favoured patronage over democracy, a stance which saw the government being outflanked in the democratic stakes by the Tories. Had the Lords been reformed in a truly democratic fashion, as Robin Cook wanted, the government would have avoided the cash-for-honours scandal which rendered it as sleaze-ridden as the Major government in its death-throes. At least that's how it looked to everyone outside the self-referential New Labour elite.

Nairn may be at his coruscating best when he lampoons the UK *ancien regime* for its antediluvian features, or when he pours his vituperative scorn on Blair and Brown for spawning such modest constitutional reforms. But when we are sated with the satire we are left with two troubling questions. Does his colourful advocacy get the better of his analysis and is there anything necessarily 'progressive' about the break-up of Britain? The short, and painfully condensed, answers are Yes and No.

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[49] Morgan, K., 'The English Question: Regional Perspectives on a Fractured Nation', *Regional Studies*, Volume 37 (7), 2002.

The keepers of the New Labour flame will no doubt dismiss Nairn's arguments as the product of a fevered and frustrated imagination. That would be a mistake because he continues to raise one of the fundamental questions of our time - how to craft more meaningful spaces of democratic deliberation? The *Red Paper on Scotland* remains an iconic moment for Nairn, not because he is nostalgic for a less complex past but, on the contrary, because a progressive future could benefit from an infusion of some of its 'stowaway' spirit. Brown, says Nairn, strove to effect "a noble synthesis between Socialism and Nationalism", a heady amalgam that continues to lie at the heart of the Big Idea. The 'stowaway' spirit that continues to resonate today is its "generosity and appetite for dialogue, its real openness to ideas, and the fertilizing effect of Gramscian ideas."

Equally important, for Nairn at least, is the fact that the *Red Paper* also conveyed an "unforgettable sense of a possible new Scotland". It suggested that "nationalism in Scotland could be more left-wing inclined." Nairn is not alone in canvassing this Big Idea because there are many adherents on the left in the SNP today and in the left-wing of Plaid Cymru, the Party of Wales. However, these Celtic nations will never know the practical meaning of nationalism, whether progressive and cosmopolitan or mean and parochial, unless they take the separatist step which Nairn has been recommending (and predicting) for thirty years.

The newly empowered electorates of Scotland and Wales may one day vote to secede from the UK, as distinct from merely using the SNP and Plaid Cymru to register a protest vote. But that seems a very distant prospect. If the moment never actually arrives it will be due to one thing above all others, that instead of breaking-up the UK succeeded in re-fashioning itself into a more pluralist and polycentric polity than Tom Nairn ever imagined possible.

Crafting this progressive future will require some radical re-thinking for sure, but it is certainly not beyond us. It means treating constitutional reform as a serious political exercise, in the English regions as well as in the Celtic nations. It means that 'Britishness' should be understood first and foremost as an expression of multiple identities within a common sense of citizenship, rather than the desiccated, mono-cultural conception of identity which populates Anglocentric narratives of 'Britishness'. It means breaking with the fatal conceit of traditional party politics, which invites us to believe that professional politicians are the principal agents of change, when in truth they are only as powerful as their allies in civil society.

If the Labour Party wants to be a part of this future it will have to shed its self-referential culture, a culture which compels it to shun what it cannot control. It will also have to learn to live in a new political ecology, where it is one among many and where public value stems from one's worth in the network not one's status in the hierarchy. If Gordon Brown wins the Labour crown, will he have the wherewithal to be part of this transition? In other words, can he transform himself from an empire-building Chancellor into a devolving and empowering Premier?