

The arguments over the Union.

I am in favour of the Union of the UK. I also believe Unions only work well when the main parts of them accept the Union's authority and feel at home in it. That is why I supported the idea of having a referendum in Scotland to see how strong the feelings for independence were. Had a majority wanted to leave I would have accepted that verdict and been in favour of as fast and smooth a divorce as possible. I was given assurances from the SNP at Westminster that such a vote would be a once in a generation event. As more than half the Scottish people wished to stay in the Union just a few years ago we owe it to them to offer stability around their victory. I understand how the SNP voters feel, as I voted to leave the EEC in 1975 and had to wait until 2016 to get another chance to vote. That was too long, but I never thought we should have a second ballot for the first 25 years after the 1975 referendum. It was the acceptance of the Maastricht Treaty followed by Amsterdam, Nice and Lisbon along with the long period of time elapsed which confirmed the need for a new vote.

The Scottish Parliamentary elections will be dominated by arguments about a second referendum if many of the politicians fighting it have their way. This seems to be a pity. Now Scotland has a Parliament and government with considerable powers to go their own way on everything from pandemics to agriculture and from spending priorities to law and order the elections might mainly be about how well the current government has done and who of the competing parties offers the best prospect of governing well and meeting most of the aspirations of voters. There should be a lively debate on what is and is not working in education, health, economic development and the rest. Instead much of the media accepts the diversion to the arguments over independence in place of scrutiny of how all the new powers and money are being used. If that is what most Scottish people want to debate then so be it.

Many in the SNP do not seem to want proper independence anyway. Muddles over what they did want made the 2014 referendum campaign difficult for them. Many seemed to want to stay with sterling. The first thing I would want for my country is its own currency, to have the full range of options for economic policy. Most of them wanted to rejoin the EU, limiting their ability to legislate and administer Scotland in the way of their choice. The wish to join the EU implied a wish to join the Euro which was in conflict with the wish to keep the pound. They seemed to want to keep the monarchy, a symbol of the union of England and Scotland which started as a union of crowns before progressing to a union of Parliament and government some hundred years later.

Today we still await a definitive SNP view on what currency they want, how they might rejoin the EU, if they will accept the Euro as part of the price of EU membership, how much of the joint state debt of the UK they would assume on leaving, what if any they would like by way of defence assistance and what a Scottish budget would look like without the links into Union finances and taxes. If we are to have a debate again on independence instead

of a decent election debate on the successes and failures of the SNP government, these are some of the questions the media should be asking them.