

Wylin Scotland's Future
A National Conversation
(Independence & Responsibility in the Modren Warld)

Forewird

The Richt Honourable Alex Salmond MSP MP
First Meinister o Scotland

In the Scots Government, we'r ambitious for the future o Scotland. Forby thon, we threap that sovereignty in oor kintrie belangs wi its fowk. As a sovereign fowk, the fowk o Scotland - an us oor lane - his the richt tae decide the wey we'r govern't.

Thonys whit wey oor manifesto for the Scots Paurliament elections promise't tae gie the fowk the chance tae think on the idea o Scots independence, in a referendum tae be haudit in this term o the Paurliament.

In thon election, it wis clear that fowk votit tae haud forrit wi the wey we govern wirsels in Scotland. In the Government, we threap that independence wad be the best thing for the kintrie. Ither fowk is for mair devolution, or for mair responsibility for taxes an spendin, or for federalism. Whitivver the differ atween the political pairties, the message fae the election wis patent: Scotland's constitutional position his tae be taen forrit.

Latelie, there's been ither historic constitutional developments in Northren Ireland and Wales as weel, wi new pairties comin tae government, an new responsibilities bein devolved. Nou the UK Government itsel his publish't a discussion paper, on the governance o Britain.

As First Meinister o Scotland, it's my responsibility tae explore an tae lead discussion on the choices for constitutional cheenge. A'm leadin the first SNP Government that's been electit in a devolved Scotland, sae A'm gaun tae pit the case for independence, its benefits an opportunities. Still an on, A can see there's a reenge o ither views in the kintrie, an representit in the Paurliament.

Scotland's lang-staundin union wi the ither nations o the UK is foondit on the Union o the Crouns o 1603, an the Acts o Union o 1707 and 1801. The 1801 Union wi Ireland his awreadie gaen throu a guid measure o cheenge. The political debate in Scotland nou is regards the 1707 political Union, that the amendment or repeal o 't wad aye leave the Union o the Crouns the wey it is.

On that grund, A'm wantin us tae haud a national conversation on oor future, sae's tae allou the fowk o Scotland tae debate, reflect, an syne decide about the kin o government that gies us the best fit-haud for the future. This paper is meant tae be the stairtin pynt an inspiration for thon conversation. It luiks intae areas whaur Scotland nicht tak on mair responsibilities - the like o employment, national finances, or law-makkin an public safety, the like o firearms - as weel as the idea o independence, an braider constitutional developments in Britain.

It's ten year nou fae the referendum tae foond the Scots Paurliament. We've seen whit potential it his, tae answer tae the wants an the needs o the fowk o this kintrie. Bit forby, we've seen whit limits its responsibilities his. I wad threap it's time for us, the fowk o Scotland, nou tae think on an tae wyle wir ain future in the modren world.

Summary

The foondin o the Scots Paurliament inalow the Scotland Act 1998 gied the fowk o Scotland a democratic vyce straucht intae decisions ootower a braid reenge o government activities that wis admeinstert in Scotland awready. The devolution settlement recognised, open-like, that the responsibilities gien tae the Scots Paurliament and Scots Government in 1999 nicht be cheenged; an important mechanisms wis brocht inby the Act tae allou for mair devolution.

Monie important pouers is aye hained yet tae the UK Paurliament an the UK Government. Mair devolution on thir important maitters wad allou the Scots Paurliament an Scots Government tae tak their ain decisions on thir maitters for the guid o Scotland, foondit on the views o the fowk o Scotland. In some maitters, mair devolution nicht haud separate decisions tae the same feerin, an gie mair democratic accoontabilitie for delivery o policy.

Tae gang ayont mair an better devolution, on tae independence, wad mean bringin tae an end the UK Paurliament's pouers tae mak law for Scotland, an the richt o UK Meinisters tae wield executive pouers wi regaird tae Scotland. The lave o the reservations in the Scotland Act wad hae nae mair effect, an the Scots Paurliament an Scots Government wad tak on responsibility for aw hameland and owerseas policy, gey like the responsibilities o independent states aw-wey, subject tae the provisions o the EU Treaties an ither treaty obligations haundit down.

The nature o the UK constitution is cheengin. There's been historic developments in Wales an Northren Ireland, an the UK Government his brocht oot proposals tae caw forrit the governance o the UK Scotland, whuther we'r in the UK or independent, shid cairry on takkin a leadin role thegither wi oor neibours, takkin this chance tae better the mechanisms for governments tae wirk thegither, ower aw the current UK and wi the Republic o Ireland.

Mair an better devolution, or independence, wad need new laws, likelie baith at Westminster an Holyrood. Muckle mair devolution wad likelie - an independence wad certainlie - need the consent o Scots fowk throu a referendum. Sicna vote nichtna be constitutionalie bindin, bit for aw that, it's been acceptit as the richt wey tae decide Scotland's constitutional future. On that grund there maun be fair consideration o the richt an fittin forms o legislation for sicna vote, an o the question o hou the Scots Paurliament nicht set a referendum gaun.

In the Scots Government's view there's three realistic choices. First, tae keep the devolution scheme laid down in the Scotland Act 1998, wi the possibility o mair evolution in pouers, braidenin thir pouers individual-like whan there's a need for 't.

Saicant, tae design devolution ower agane by takkin on a set reenge o extensions tae the pouers o the Scots Paurliament and Scots Government aenou, aiblins bringin in fiscal autonomy, bit stoppin short o haudin forrit tae richt independence. Third, an the Scots Government likes this ane best, tae braiden oot the pouers o the Scots Paurliament and Scots Government tae the pynt o independence. Thir possibilities is described mair in this paper.

This paper is the first step in a braid-reengin national conversation aboot the future o Scotland. This conversation wull allow the fowk o Scotland tae consider aw the options for the future o the kintrie, an tae mak informed decisions. This paper bids the fowk o Scotland sign up for the national conversation, an suggests whit wey the conversation shid be designed, tae mak shuir as monie fowk as can, is gaun tae tak pairt.