

Interview broadcast on BBC Radio 4 on 10th September 2014 following the publication of an article in The Times newspaper written by Sir John Major.

JOHN HUMPHRYS

Good morning.

SIR JOHN MAJOR

Good morning John.

JOHN HUMPHRYS

In your article you blame Labour, in pretty strong language, for letting the devolution genie out of the bottle. What supporters of independence would say is that they see it as a natural progression of what they regard, devolution, as having been a successful policy and not an aberration as you suggest.

SIR JOHN MAJOR

I mentioned that in the start of a long article in which I dealt predominantly with the problems that will arise were Scotland to leave the United Kingdom. What happened in the past is what we should deal with after Thursday of next week. This country is within a few days perhaps of splitting up a union which has existed for three times as long as the oldest person alive today. The impact on everyone in the United Kingdom, not just Scotland, would be absolutely profound. In Scotland, but also in the rest of the United Kingdom. From observing the debate that has gone on, I am not at all convinced that people have fully understood what all the implications of this are, and that is what matters this morning.

JOHN HUMPHRYS

The reason it's not a waste of time is because it is your proposition that devolution was a serious mistake.

SIR JOHN MAJOR

No, that wasn't my proposition. What I said was is that it was a mistake to enter into the sort of devolution that was entered into without making the consequential changes that should have been made across the rest of the United Kingdom. It's not a question of saying that Scotland couldn't govern herself, of course she could. The question is that the devolution which was provided in 1998 was a devolution that took no account, other than for a minor change in the number of MPs at Westminster from Scotland, on the impact of the rest of the United Kingdom.

Further devolution, which is certainly going to happen – and it is ludicrous for the SNP to suggest the three party leaders won't deliver as they will – will have further implications, I support that to keep the United Kingdom together. It does mean that we will have to look at the constitutional implications for the rest of the United Kingdom. That comes after the vote, but the point we need to focus on between now and next Thursday is what the implications are for the UK, and for Scotland were Scotland to vote to leave the union.

JOHN HUMPHRYS

But if you were a Scot, you might say, "we've had devolution, we've had our own Parliament, I rather like the way things have been going, I would rather like to have more of it, I would rather like to have independence" and that will strike many as a perfectly natural progression.

SIR JOHN MAJOR

Let me deal with precisely that point as it's a perfectly fair point for you to make. They are being offered further substantial devolution, but the step beyond that of becoming a separate nation opens up a whole series of particular problems for Scotland that the SNP have glossed over and that the people in Scotland need to know. This isn't a temporary change, this isn't something that you can reverse at the next General Election, this is forever. The young people in Scotland who are listening to this will live in a very different country over the next twenty, thirty, forty or fifty years if they vote for separation.

There is the easy assumption that Scotland will be waved into the European Union, and maybe after a period of years it's possible, but it's not certain. Spain for example wouldn't welcome a separatist nation. There is a belief that Scotland is going to be able to get into NATO, but why would NATO let them in when the SNP propose to wreck the Trident independent nuclear

weapon? It's an extraordinary thing really when you think that's what the SNP propose to do. If Britain lost Trident it would have lost what has shielded it and protected it for a long time. To have that done by an enemy would be a disaster, to have it done by friends is almost unbelievable.

What is the SNP suggesting? To leave the most successful union in history in order to join the European Union, perhaps in some years, which is currently facing difficulties. They have representation in the UK Government, representation amongst UK Ministers, they have a large number of seats in the House of Commons and they'd have none of that in the European Union. They'd be five million people amongst five hundred million people and in a much weaker position to influence the interests of Scotland than they are now. That needs to be understood by Scots before next Thursday.

JOHN HUMPHRYS

Is it your contention that the 'no campaign' has failed to make those arguments sufficiently convincingly? The Scots aren't stupid, they're highly intelligent, as we know, they've made a massive contribution to the United Kingdom and they would surely understand this if it had been made to them in a way which you say it should have been made?

SIR JOHN MAJOR

John, there you go again, trying to produce a political point with an air of criticism. I'm not in that game, I'm pointing out what's going to happen and I've pointed out what the loss would be to Scotland.

JOHN HUMPHRYS

Don't the people of Scotland know all of that?

SIR JOHN MAJOR

I can report something that I heard from a Labour MP recently. Someone on the doorstep said to him: " I'm going to vote yes but don't worry, I'll be there to vote for you when General Elections come". But he won't be will he if they vote for independence? I doubt that this is the only person. Of course they're a highly intelligent nation but there are some people who haven't focused and

realised all of the implications. What's going to be the position of Scotland in an unknown number of years, I don't know how many, when the oil runs out or becomes a trickle. It's going to happen, it will affect young people who are going to be voting and they need to consider that.

Can they join a currency union? I think by now they should realise that they can't.

It's one week away from the vote and the people of Scotland do not know what currency they would have. I've never known such incompetence, for someone to propose something as big as independence and not have the faintest idea what currency they're going to use. It's absolutely extraordinary.

JOHN HUMPHRYS

People tend to vote on the broad picture, what they will say is "are you seriously suggesting, you who are patronising us", because that's how many feel, and they would say that "there are plenty of highly successful countries in the world just as small as us without our huge achievements, without our massively developed education system and health system. We have proved moreover that we can govern ourselves and why shouldn't we be able to do it?", it's a broader picture, and as for the European Union and monetary union, they may say "we don't want to be part of that anyway, plenty of people in England don't."

SIR JOHN MAJOR

It's hardly the position of the SNP if I may say so. As far as small countries are concerned, of course the Scots could govern themselves. I said that in the article and I said that twenty years ago when I first warned that devolution would be a high road to separation. That's not the point. The point is, will it improve the prospects of Scotland in the future or diminish them? The uncertainties of voting to leave the United Kingdom without knowing what your currency is going to be is quite extraordinary.

If Scotland voted to leave it would be disastrous for the whole of the UK. As Trident and submarine pens are in Scotland our defence would be imminently weakened and there are a lot of Scots in the British Army. We would lose Trident which has been our protection for a long time. If we were to lose Trident not to an enemy but to the actions of a neighbour then that would be extraordinary. Our role of NATO would be reduced and our relations consequently with the United States would be damaged. The United Kingdom would be weaker in every international

body it attends and it would certainly be weaker in the European Union in the forthcoming negotiations. We would lose our seat in the top table in the United Nations and we would almost certainly find increased demand for independence for Wales.

JOHN HUMPHRYS

Will it feed an appetite for more devolution within England, Wales and Northern Ireland?

SIR JOHN MAJOR

I'm assuming that there will be a demand for more devolution whether Scotland leaves the United Kingdom – which I profoundly hope and pray that they do not – or whether they are handed, as agreed by all the major parties which they will honour, a good deal more devolution. Both of those are going to feed a demand for more devolution to the English and Welsh regions, the north-east, the north-west, Birmingham, Wales, they're all going to demand more devolution. That is going to have quite a lot of constitutional implications and we're going to have to deal with them. We won't of course have dealt with those by St. Andrew's Day but we're moving inexorably towards a quasi-federalist system as a result of the extent of devolution.

JOHN HUMPHRYS

Given the potential break-up of the United Kingdom, wouldn't it be perfectly proper for The Queen to get involved to the extent that she might say "I want to hold this country together", after all, she took an oath to that effect didn't she, that she is the defender of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland? So why does the Palace get so indignant at the idea that she should say such a thing? That's her role isn't it?

SIR JOHN MAJOR

This transcends politics and that is why she mustn't step into it. This is a political matter between the SNP and the other parties. The Queen is the Head of State and she is above politics and it would not be a good idea for the Queen to intervene and I know of no Prime Minister who would encourage her to do so.

JOHN HUMPHRYS

Are you going to get your soap-box out again, you've got seven or eight days to do it? Tramp the streets with your soap-box, you did it before.

SIR JOHN MAJOR

I think my view is well known and I don't think it would be specially helpful for me to do that.

I'm desperately concerned at what is happening. We would be immensely weaker as a nation in every respect, morally, politically, in every material aspect were Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom to part company. It seems to me almost incredible that suddenly Scots, who work next to us, live next to us, are our friends, our neighbours and work-mates, they would suddenly become foreigners. Is that not an extraordinary proposition for a nation that has marched together? This year is the one hundredth anniversary of the First World War, as we honour the people who fought together then would it not be extraordinary if the SNP broke up the most successful union and partnership in all history in any part of the world? How extraordinary would that be?