

Lord Howell explains emotional roots of Scottish independence will only be addressed by 'A Better Union' and not by admin changes'.

5.05pm

Lord Howell of Guildford

(Con)

My Lords, in the miserably short time allotted for debate on this Motion that the noble Earl, Lord Kinnoull, has so wisely brought before us, I will make just two points.

First, the Dunlop review is an excellent piece of work and an excellent contribution to the reformed machinery of government for a better union that we must build and must be on offer if the United Kingdom is to remain intact. Unfortunately, the Scottish independence movement is about a lot more than machinery and governance. It has to be realised that that is primarily an emotional cause, driven by a proud people in an ancient and exceptionally talented kingdom. That means that the movement is ready to sweep aside all rational, economic and administrative argument as scaremongering and project fear. It is emotions that have to be responded to. The separatist arguments can be met only by asking and answering the question as to why we need and how we gain consent for a good and friendly union in these islands, where we are all mixed together, in this utterly transformed age of new conditions. On that, frankly, we have hardly started.

Secondly, the key to the whole Scottish independence trajectory lies not in the hands of the hard-line one-third of Scottish republicans, who always wanted breakaway at any costs, but with the broad swathe across the middle—the moderate unionists who are now extremely inclined to independence of some kind, especially after Brexit. Given the emotional content, most practical proposals for more devolution will make little impact. This is about sovereignty, not just devolution—a different, although overlapping, concept.

So the question boils down to what can be done via tone, respect, language of partnership and a proper say in national and world policies for Scotland which is short of severing the link of sovereignty, yet gives Scotland a real feeling of place in the scheme of things and the comity of nations, large and small. It is time—well past time—to pin down the loudest voices in Edinburgh about what they really want and what independence actually means to them. Once that is done, we can start the steps towards a better kind of union and the full value of the Dunlop reforms can come into play. Let us hope that it is not too late.

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