

David Cameron: Stronger Together

Speaking on the importance of the Union at Dynamic Earth in Edinburgh today, David Cameron said:

(Check against delivery)

On May 1st, our countries marked the three hundredth anniversary of the Act of Union.

Two days later, the SNP, who want to break apart that Union, took office in the Scottish Parliament.

I passionately believe in the Union and the future of the whole United Kingdom. It may have started out of convenience...

England, at war with France, needed a secure northern border.

Scotland, financially unstable after the failure of the Darien scheme in Panama, needed economic respite.

But what should inspire us – and continues to inspire me – is what came after. Together, we turned a small, off-shore European island into the one of the most powerful countries known to the world.

In the 18th century, the Union helped create the sense of possibility that inspired the titans of the Enlightenment.

In the 19th century, what was Europe's first common market brought unparalleled prosperity to both our countries.

And in the 20th century, we not only remained stable in the face of...the totalitarianisms that were the scourge of mainland Europe...but we confronted them side by side.

STATE OF THE UNION TODAY

But so much for the past. It is my desire and duty to help shape the future.

And the future of our Union is looking more fragile - more threatened - than at any

time in recent history.

The SNP now promises to deliver independence within ten years.

At the same times there are those in England who want the SNP to succeed, who would like to see the Union fracture.

They seek to use grievances to foster a narrow English nationalism.

We must not allow the legitimate and affectionate doubling up of patriotic pride...

...English and British...

...Scottish and British...

...British and proud of it...

...to be pushed aside by a coarse and casual nationalism.

We must confront and defeat the ugly stain of separatism seeping through the Union flag.

BETTER AN IMPERFECT UNION THAN A BROKEN ONE

This is where I stand, here in this great and beautiful capital, an English politician in a Scottish city saying clearly today and for all time that Britain comes first.

For I believe that we are stronger together.

Stronger together: Scotland and England.....more, much more than the sum of our parts.

And in every part of these islands I want people to hear me when I say this.

That if it should ever come to a choice between constitutional perfection and the preservation of our nation, I choose our United Kingdom.

Better an imperfect union than a broken one.

Better an imperfect union than a perfect divorce.

One part of the challenge to our Union is the need the people feel today for a clear identity. You see it all over Europe, all over the world.

But in this search for identity, here in Great Britain we have the best possible start. Not just English; not just Scottish; not just Welsh; not just any regional or religious identity.

But British.

That is because being British is one of the most successful examples of inclusive civic nationalism in the world. We are a shining example of what a multi-ethnic, multi-faith and multi-national society can and should be.

And the challenge now is to renew that sense of belonging by creating a positive vision of a British society that really stands for something and makes people want to be part of it.

A society in which we are held together by a strong sense of shared history and common values and institutions we cherish.

A society which encourages active citizenship, not a passive standing on the sidelines.

A society which people are not bullied to join, but are actively inspired to join.

STRONGER, SAFER, RICHER, FAIRER...TOGETHER

That means saying loudly and proudly: together, we are stronger.
Britain is one of only five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council.

We have a seat at the top table and are listened to in a way that other countries can only dream of.
So yes, together we are stronger.

It means saying loudly and proudly: together, we are safer.
Scotland and Wales punch above their weight in Britain's armed forces....and
Britain punches above its weight in the world because of the expertise and bravery of those armed forces.

So, yes, together we are safer.
It means saying loudly and proudly: together, we are richer.

The City of London overtaking New York as a global powerhouse.....Edinburgh's role as a great financial centre.

So yes, we are richer.

And it means saying loudly and proudly: together, we are fairer.

The NHS is the best of British.....created by a Welshman and benefiting from the skills of doctors trained in the great medical schools of Scotland.

Stronger. Safer. Richer. Fairer...together.

TRUE BRITISHNESS

It's vital we get this right.

And, so often, Gordon Brown gets it wrong.

He approaches the question of national identity like a brand manager trying to launch a new product on the market,...or a spin doctor seeking to revive the reputation of a failing government department.

So we have citizen's juries – focus groups – to decide what it means to be British.

We have a competition to come up with a motto for Britain.

We have the attempt to replace the National Anthem.

And in one of the Prime Minister's earliest, most embarrassing, misplaced and trivialising forays into this territory, we see the poverty of imagination that instructs British people to put a flag on their lawn.

He talks about values but Britishness isn't just about values - liberty, fair play, openness - are general, unspecific, almost universal.

They are virtues which could be as easily associated with Denmark, say, or Holland.

Britishness is also about institutions, attachment to our monarchy, admiration for our armed forces, understanding of our history, recognising that our liberty is rooted in the rule of law and respect for parliament.

OPPORTUNITY

Just as people seek identity in this new world of freedom, so they seek opportunity.

We are on the brink of a new, post-bureaucratic age

But when you look at our Government, they're stuck in the bureaucratic age: still top-down, still old-world, still centralised.

No wonder so many people both north and south of the border are frustrated.
Frustrated at not being able to afford a new home or get a mortgage.
Frustrated at the state of their public services.
Frustrated about a gridlocked transport system.
Frustrated about paying so much tax but seeming to get so little in return.

And that's the thing about frustration is: it's easy to blame your neighbours.
But what we should be doing is blaming Labour.

So, to those in England who are angry about rising council tax, angry about the rising cost of living, and angry when they look across the border and hear about no prescription charges and free social care, I say this.

Don't blame the Scots.
Don't blame the Union.

It's not because of the Union that your aspirations are not being met.
It's not because Scotland is taking and not giving.
It's because your Government is failing and not delivering.

The same goes for Scotland.
I know you have great aspirations for your country.
To become a model for success based on a competitive economy and the skills and talents of your people.
To follow the examples of Ireland and Scandinavia and deliver prosperity and high living standards for all.

But again, it's not because of the Union that you're being held back...it's because of the Labour Government.

That's why I believe you voted in the SNP earlier this year.
It wasn't a vote for independence – recent polls show that.
It was a vote against Labour, a vote for change.
But real change will only come when we change the Government of the United Kingdom

And today, it is the Conservative Party that is offering a message of change, optimism and hope.

CONSTITUTIONAL AND ECONOMIC ANOMALIES

Of course, when it comes to the rise of separatist sentiment, some would seek to blame constitutional and economic arrangements.

I do not believe this represents an adequate explanation: after all, issues like the West Lothian question and the Barnett formula have been debated in one form or another for decades.

But that does not mean for one second that we can afford to ignore them today.

It is essential that we seek answers to any unfairness in the Union, and to questions of accountability, justice and democracy.

It is a sign of Labour's weakness and irresponsibility that they prefer to sweep these questions under the carpet, pretend they don't exist, simply because they are difficult.

I want my Party to be better than that.

So yes we will take part enthusiastically in the Constitutional Commission, and I applaud Annabel Goldie for her courage and determination to do that.

And we will, after due consideration, bring forward our proposals on these matters.

But we will address them in a calm and considered way.

We have not leapt on the Barnett formula bandwagon.

We have not sought to exploit these matters to foster a sense of English nationalism.

And we never will, because we believe in the Union and we will never do anything to put it at risk.

And that applies to the Conservative party's whole attitude to Scottish affairs..

I recognise the impression that was left by my Party in Scotland after the 1980s.

You will not be surprised to hear that I reject the view that overall Conservative rule was bad for Scotland.

Look at how financial services are thriving in Edinburgh.
Look at the cultural renaissance of Glasgow.
And look what oil revenues have brought to Aberdeen.

But I know there is still a reluctance to openly support the Conservative Party in Scotland.

So let me say this.

Consider all our Party's history, not just the recent past.
It was a Conservative Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, who set up the Scottish Office.
It was a Conservative Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, who elevated the Scottish Secretary to full Cabinet rank.

And it was the Conservative Party after the war that stood up for Scotland's identity, and the life of Scottish businesses, against the attempts at nationalisation and centralisation by Labour.

We are a party of the Union and as long as I lead it that is how it will stay.
And to the people of Scotland, I make this guarantee.

I will carry out my duty to nurture and support the Union whatever my Party's political standing in any of the Union's constituent parts.

I will fight for every seat in Scotland just as I will throughout the United Kingdom.

But whatever the outcome of the next General Election in Scotland, a Conservative Government at Westminster will govern the United Kingdom, including Scotland, with respect.

Whoever is Scotland's First Minister, I will be a Prime Minister that respects and listens to the voice of the Scottish people.

And I will work tirelessly for consent and consensus so we strengthen the union and stop separatism.

So I say to Alex Salmond, if you think you can succeed in your separatist agenda because there's a Conservative government at Westminster, think again.

We will not play your game to break up our United Kingdom.
And we will not stop fighting to meet Scotland's needs.

I want a Scotland where young people can fulfil their ambition of buying their first home.

I want a Scotland where businesses can innovate and create the jobs, wealth and opportunities that are so vital to local communities.

I want a Scotland where first-class health-care is the right of all, and not just a few.

I want a Scotland of opportunity, responsibility and security.

But I don't just want this for Scotland.

But for all of the United Kingdom.

So let us scrub out the stain of separatism that is starting to disfigure our land.

Let us search for practical and reasonable solutions to our constitutional challenges.

But let us do so in a spirit of unity and purpose that will see Scotland, England, Wales, and Northern Ireland move forward together into the twenty-first century with confidence and pride.

Stronger together; weaker apart.

Stronger together: let us keep that precious idea forever in our hearts.