

# Nationalism is a distraction, says Brian, calling for social change and less inequality

Report by Katie Macleod

Monday June 9th marked the official starting line of Scotland's referendum campaign, signalling exactly 100 days until the country goes to the polls.

It saw the Better Together campaign step up its show across Scotland, particularly in Stornoway, where Alistair Darling, former Chancellor and head of the 'No' camp, joined colleagues and students on stage in the Town Hall to make the case for Scotland staying in the U.K.

The panel of five – Alistair Darling, former MP Brian Wilson, Professor Donald Macleod, and local students Annabel Macleannan and Donald Mackinnon – was chaired by local accountant Roddy Cunningham and was welcomed with applause from the 200-strong crowd, who had been given badges proclaiming 'No Thanks' as well as leaflets offering reasons why the UK is 'better together.'

Talk on stage – and off – during the night was of the benefits of the United Kingdom, the holes in the Nationalist arguments, and the passion felt for centuries of shared culture and history. First to put forward his thoughts was Brian Wilson, currently Chairman of Harris Tweed Hebrides.

Divisions present in the UK today are not ones of identity, but of social and economic inequalities, declares Brian – the very divisions which brought him into politics in the beginning. "Politics is like a pendulum that swings one way and sometimes another. That's democracy," he says, referring to the variety of governments that have been in power over the decades. Brian adds that its "parochial" to say that benefits to society were contributed by only one side of the political spectrum: "bit by bit the benefits of all are advanced."

Comprehensive education, the NHS, improved living conditions – these are just some of the societal benefits that have been gained within the framework of the Union, from communities in Shetland to Stornoway, Devon to London. While there



The panel in action in the Town Hall



Former Chancellor, Alistair Darling

is still work to be done, Brian believes that the Scottish Government can use the powers that already exist, and that if progress is to be made, there is a need to move away from debating the constitution.

"Social and economic issues are no longer treated as an end in themselves, but as pawns in an endless constitutional game," Brian says, pointing out that the powers to change these issues are not being used by the current Scottish Government because the SNP have a "vested interest in showing what can't be done unless there is independence."

When it comes to the Nationalist arguments, he says that "none of them rests on probability, far less proven fact." Brian wants to get back to the politics that delivers a better society, and urges those who agree with him to "Vote No in a positive way on September 18th."

Next up were two local students, both of whom are currently at the University of Glasgow. Donald detailed the benefits and successes of devolution, and his concerns, as a "keen crofter" and university student, for the continued strength of crofting and education if Scotland were to go independent.

Annabel speech's followed, one that shone with enthusiasm as she argued for what she believed in and explained her inclusive world view. "How can we improve our lot by turning our backs on people who share our values and interests?" she asks, arguing that we should be "broadening rather than narrowing our perspectives" and working together to improve the country as a whole.

She is clearly proud of her Gaelic roots and language, but Annabel does not "buy the theory" that a separate Scottish state would automatically embrace it, pointing

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## Harbour Highlights



### STORNOWAY MARINA – FILLS UP THREE YEARS AHEAD OF SCHEDULE

The new extended marina in Stornoway has proved to be a great success having been filled to capacity for the first time in June. According to predictions when planning the project this wasn't due to happen until its third year of operation. The number of visiting yachts in June 2014 is more than double that of June 2013 (and at the time of writing the month is not yet ended). Resident yacht numbers are three times those of previous years.

According to customers' feedback collected between February and June 2014 most yachts sailing to Stornoway for the first time have been very satisfied with all the facilities available around the harbour and the very professional and warm welcome from all Stornoway Port representatives. Returning visitors also expressed their pleasure at all the improvements and upgrades carried out in Stornoway and say they are more likely to come back again. Overall experience from all our visitors so far this year has been hugely positive and supportive.



### INNOVATION IN ARNISH

Heavy-lift jack-up, self-propelled vessel "Innovation" was recently lifting up parts for the off shore wind farm on 1st of June 2014 in Arnish. German-owned and Polish-built, the vessel was designed by HGO InfraSea in collaboration with two major

partners – HOCHTIEF Solutions and GeoSea N.V in response to an insufficient number of adequate installation vessels and booming offshore market. Innovation enables safe loading and installation of 6MW + wind turbines with overall heights of more than 120 metres as well as heavy foundations in water depths of up to 50 metres. In order to complete its project in Arnish fabrication yard, Innovation (147.50m long) sailed from Teesside on the West Coast of Scotland, loaded a huge weather station structure and sailed towards its destination, which is the West of Dutton Sands wind farm, 14 km off Cumbria. The weather station installed in Arnish will monitor wind speed around the 108 turbines at the Scottish Renewables and Dong Energy joint renewable 389 megawatt project which is predicted to generate green electricity for over 300,000 UK households.



### MONACO'S DAYS NUMBERED

The last parts of the vessel Monaco, which became an infamous part of the town's maritime history, were due to be removed from Stornoway Harbour by the end of June 2014. The Monaco, berthed in the harbour since late 2002, went through a long and complex process of dismantling. The elements making up the vessel haven't been wasted. Oak wood from the Monaco has been saved and will be used to make casks to age Hebridean whisky. Almost 60% of the material from the vessel has been recycled. The timber from the vessel was sent to Speyside Cooperage in Craigellachie in order to be made into barrels, the first of which should be shortly ready for the distillery. The resulting whisky is expected to be unique. Not only will it have been aged in casks made from the infamous boat, but it is also expected to be made out of barley grown locally.

### NEW SPA STAFF MEMBERS

The Port Authority welcomed new staff members, Steven Macqueen and John Dunne who joined Stornoway Port Authority team at the beginning of June 2014 and took up positions as Port Operatives and Larah Macleod who is spending the summer with the Port Authority on placement working with the Authority's archives.

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Stornoway Port Authority is a Public Independent Statutory Body holding Trust Port Status and is governed by local and national legislation. The Port Authority is controlled by an independent appointed board. There are no shareholders or owners, and any surplus is reinvested in the port and facilities for the benefit of all users and stakeholders. There are over 100 ports in the UK holding Trust Port Status.

# Brian calls for social change

*Continued from B1*

out that most hostility towards Gaelic comes from within Scotland itself.

It's a topic Professor Donald Macleod also touches on when he takes to the stage. "Will it be a more listening parliament?" he asks the audience about the political make-up of the country after a Yes vote. There is, he says in answer, "no guarantee in simple proximity"; the physical proximity of a government does not necessarily mean it will be a more favourable one.

Professor Macleod's voice is ministerial, the cadence of his speech rising and falling, persuading his listeners as if preaching from the pulpit. "Shall we partition our small island? It's a very, very momentous and very challenging question. With all my heart and all my passion I want to say no."

He wants to say 'no' for various reasons, reasons which he explains to the crowd in an almost lyrical manner. They include the uncertainty that would follow a 'Yes' vote; the fact that domestic policy is already within the Scottish government's control; and his strong belief that Scotland has not been suppressed, but "has flourished under the Union."

Professor MacLeod believes the concept of "freedom", so frequently cited as a reason for independence, is an illusory one. "We are living in an interdependent world... I'm not sure I want to be free from the rest of the world, because we live in a global village."

"Is it not the case that a yes vote is a step backwards, a step into the past?" he asks in conclusion. "It's portrayed as a progressive leap forward. In reality it takes us back to 1706, to a pre-union world. How can we move forward backwards? Let's move forward. Come what may, we will not be small-minded, we will not be isolationist. Not backwards, but forwards. No, not yes."

Last to speak was Alistair Darling, who just that morning had launched the latest stage of the campaign at a national event in Glasgow. Pleased to be back in Stornoway, the former Chancellor tells the crowd that "in just 100 days we will be taking a more important decision than any of us have ever taken in the past."

Alistair indirectly mentions political mud-slinging; a topic that later makes the national headlines. "I don't doubt one moment the sincerity of their opinions, but those of us on the other side are equally sincere and are entitled to stand up and have an opinion." He adds that regardless of which side of the referendum debate you stand on, "we are all patriotic."

Echoing sentiments expressed earlier, Alistair Darling declares that "the idea that [greater] democracy can be achieved by moving power from one capital to another is ridiculous." He mentions the economic and security benefits Scotland enjoys within the U.K., and the value in sharing economic risk across a larger population, using the economic pressures that come when a majority of the population are elderly, as is the case in Scotland, as an example of a potential pitfall.

Like the rest of the panel, he refers to the common bonds and culture that have grown out of a union of 300 years, as well as the shared endeavours in times of both war and peace that make him opposed to separation. "When I look at the risks, I say no thanks. When I look at the disruption that would come from disentangling the Union, I simply say no thanks to that as well. The opportunities as part of the UK are immense. We can have the best of both worlds."

Following a round of questions from the audience at the end of the meeting, Alistair Darling tells EVENTS he was feeling confident, but not complacent, about the last 100 days of the campaign. When asked what residents of Lewis and Harris could do to help achieve a 'No' vote in the referendum, Alistair Darling was clear on what needs to be done.

"The thing I would emphasis is, this is a once in a lifetime vote – if the Nationalists win by one vote, that's it. We have to win with a majority to put things to bed for a generation. What I would say to anybody who believes that we are better together as part of the UK, is do whatever you can, whether it's talking to your friends, social media, telephone, leafleting, whatever – don't wake up on the 19th and say 'I wish I'd done something.'"



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