



The Referendum on Scotland's Future

Saturday 31st May

Town House, Aberdeen

“Women need to have their voices heard as part of the debate around Scotland's future. They are the cornerstone of communities – both socially and economically. The campaigns need to engage with women and listen to their concerns and emerging issues. This event has ensured that those attending are able to raise and seek answers to the issues which are important to them.”

Agnes Tolmie
Chair, SWC

Introduction

The SWC organised this event in recognition that women from different backgrounds throughout Scotland have significant questions and issues around the forthcoming referendum. Women want to know how this historic decision will impact on them, their families and communities as a whole.

This is the fifth in a series of conferences held by the SWC. Previous events have been held in Glasgow (x2), Dundee and Livingston. Throughout the summer the organisation will visit Greenock, Inverness and Orkney to discuss the referendum with women in these areas. Specific events for young women will also be held in Inverness and Glasgow.

The events are chaired by Agnes Tolmie, Chair of the SWC. Our organisation works with Yes Scotland and Better Together to source speakers and panel members.



Gillian Martin

Gillian is the Executive member for Women for Independence in Aberdeen. She is a further education lecturer and media professional and writer of the blog The Missy M Misssives. She is also the co-organiser of and one of the artists in Aye Inspired, an exhibition of independence inspired art which is taking place in the Summer of 2014. She is a mother of two and lives in Aberdeenshire.

“I am not a political party member and it was only 3 months ago that I joined in this debate. I have never done anything political in my life. I’m 45 and this is the first thing I’ve ever done because I feel so strongly about it. I’ve overcome my issues about speaking in public, standing at the Women for Independence stall in Aberdeen and speaking to people about something I’ve felt strongly about for most of my adult life.

What I’ve found from Women for Independence is there’s a lot of women like me. They tend not to be party members. If they are, they have found they would prefer to come under the women’s voice rather than being part of the campaigns on both sides, which seem to have quite a lot of men speaking for them. We are just women who want independence, speaking to women all over Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire and finding that they are fed up of the political rhetoric and party politics.

I think that independence is going to be the best thing for us as a country. I also think it's going to be the best thing for women and their families. The issues that affect me are family issues – the issues of having a family and maintaining a career if that's what women want to do.

I'm not one of these people who have had a 'journey to yes'. I have always wanted an independent Scotland. I have always thought that we could and should make our own decisions about what we do as a people and how we conduct ourselves on the world stage. I have always thought that we have the resources and the talent to do that. I've always thought that we have a slightly different political agenda to the rest of the UK. Scotland tends to be more centre-left leaning, yet we are ending up with governments that are evermore to the right. I don't have to mention what happened with the results in the EU elections where there was quite a substantial lurch to UKIP. It also frightened the life out of me that Scotland has elected a UKIP MEP.

If I had, however, been one of those people who had a journey to yes, in the last six months the reading that I have done would have been giving me eureka moments all over the place. One of the things for me that would have been a massive eureka moment was the childcare issue. I read that part of the White Paper and worked out that the provisions being put forward in an independent Scotland would have saved my family, at our peak childcare, about £5000 a year. We wanted to have three children and we only have two because we couldn't afford a third. The thought of more childcare costs stopped us.

The Scottish Parliament has been more of a woman's place than Westminster. There have been more women's voices in Scotland and part of that has been to do with the provisions they've made for working women. I've heard a lot of complaints from women MPs who have said it's very tough in Westminster in terms of the hours that they keep. If we take a lead from the women who are coming into Scottish politics we will start to hear more women's voices.

Taking that with the childcare proposals, we might not have to be in the situation where a woman has to choose whether to have a few children or give up work. We can go back into the workplace knowing that childcare is covered. We've got the opportunity to move Scotland away from the male dominated Westminster model to a more equal country in terms of gender. We've got a long way to go and it's not going to happen overnight, but it has already started in a devolved Scotland. I would like to see it continue and evolve in an independent Scotland.

I'm not going to make much in the way of economic arguments because those are set out by the politicians. They are policy issues, and this whole debate seems mired in economic policy decisions. People are making promises that we have no way of knowing if they'll keep, or whether they'll be in government post 2016.

People are pressing the SNP to make economic promises but they might not be in charge in an independent Scotland. Independence is not voting for a political party, it's voting for a break from a political system that is doing Scotland no favours and is doing women no favours. It is certainly doing left of centre voters no favours.



I think that we can build a Scotland that will build on the strengths of the devolved parliament. A Scotland that will continue the free university education we've enjoyed under devolution as we move forward, and that will protect our NHS and schools from the privatisation that the rest of the UK agenda seems to be leaning towards.

I don't like scaremongering and I know that a lot of women have been turned off by the scaremongering tactics that have been used over this campaign. I believe that we've got a chance to protect the things about Scotland that have been making us more progressive than the rest of the UK. Things like free university places, free prescriptions and the possibility of free childcare.

However, we might lose all of these, because our block grant is going to be cut. At the moment we give 9.5% of tax revenue to the UK and we get 9.3% back. That doesn't seem like much in percentage terms but our block grant is going to be cut by £4.5bn. I suspect that something's going to have to give. What's that going to be? Nobody will touch the NHS, it's the most important thing in our society. However, free university places and free prescriptions, would be likely to go.

Let's protect what we have and build on the progressive nature of the Scottish Parliament, which has shown that in most areas we can run our own country. All we're asking for is the chance to be a nation state with its own sovereignty. A country with its own revenue from the taxpayers that live here coming to its own government for them, whatever colour they end up being, to do what they see fit.

Let's start from the start and have an independent Scotland where your vote will count more than it does at the moment. I always vote, and when I stand in the polling booth and put my cross against whoever, I know that my vote in Scotland doesn't really matter because it's about who the south east of England votes for. I would like to go into a polling booth after independence and put a cross and know that the centre left agenda that most of us have is going to be represented in our parliament."

Dame Anne Begg MP

Dame Anne was elected as the Labour MP for Aberdeen South in May 1997 and she was the first full-time wheelchair user to be elected to Parliament. In 2010 she was elected Chair of the Commons Work and Pensions Select Committee having served on the Committee since 2001. Her political interests are wide but include welfare reform, pensions, equality and broadcasting as well as issues which affect her constituency.

Before she was elected, Dame Anne was a secondary school teacher of English for 19 years and in 1988 she was Disabled Scot of the Year. She was awarded a DBE in the 2011 New Year Honours list for services to disabled people and equal opportunities.

Dame Anne is a long term supporter of devolution and during her maiden speech she spoke in support of the creation of a Scottish Parliament. She is a supporter of Better Together, the organisation representing the parties, organisations, and individuals campaigning for a No vote in the referendum, and United with Labour, the Scottish Labour Party's campaign for a No vote.

“The thing that brought me into politics, even before I joined the Labour Party, was a desire for Scottish devolution. One of the great hopes of the devolved Scottish Parliament was that it would break down those old tribal loyalties to parties because people would have to work in coalition. The electoral system was designed to ensure that there wasn't ever going to be an overall majority government. All credit to the SNP, because they've managed to overcome that and have a majority government.

Devolution has worked. I voted for it in 1979 when it didn't happen, and again in 1999. The idea of a Scottish Parliament in charge of our social policies, making decisions in an education system that was always distinct in Scotland and making decisions around the law and justice, were all the things we hoped the Scottish parliament would do and these are the things it has done.

There are other reasons why devolution has worked. It has meant while we may take decisions over many of our domestic matters, we are part of a UK, a country that is very involved around the world in foreign affairs. Scotland is a player on the international stage because we are part of the UK. We are a confident country, secure in our identity, in fact that security in our identity has increased since devolution.

We have seen Scotland flourishing. We are doing really well and we've got the best of both worlds. It's ironic that this success has led some to believe we should scrap devolution, because that's what independence would mean, and replace it with separation. Becoming a separate country, losing all of that extra we get from Scotland being part of the UK.

I think there's a problem on the Yes side. When they see Scotland's success, they say that's despite being part of the UK. I say it's because we're part of the UK and have devolution, because we can share and pool resources across a much bigger country with a bigger population. That's not the reason to vote for independence, that's a reason to vote for devolution, and a no vote is a positive vote for devolution.

So, what is it that Scotland has got because we're part of the UK, not despite it? We've got more employment than the rest of the UK, a higher GDP per person than the rest of the UK and a stable currency. We must be the only oppressed country in the world, as the Yes campaign would have it, that are better off than the country who are meant to be oppressing us. I've never felt oppressed in any way being Scottish and it's a shame that some of the debate has reached that low level.

The nearest analogy I have with independence is that of Torvill and Dean. We watched them skate to Bolero and win gold medals. But someone from the Yes campaign would say while it's wonderful they're winning gold medals, if we could split them up and make them skate separately then we could have two gold medals. If you did that and made them skate independently of one another, you wouldn't get two gold medals. You would get no gold medals because they are better together. They are part of a pair that actually complements each other.

That's one of the fears I have for independence – not only would we lose all the advantages of being part of the UK but we're actually diminished as a country ourselves. We're not big enough and are not part of the bigger unit that allows us to share things.

Scotland has its challenges. We've got poorer health outcomes than the rest of the UK, as well as lower life expectancy. The difference between a man in a poor community in Glasgow and an affluent community can be 20 years. That's a shame on us that it's something we haven't yet been able to tackle but independence won't change that, as health is devolved. Similarly, independence won't necessarily change the high levels of poverty or the sectarianism that exists in Scotland.

It's because of those challenges we find that spending per head of population is much higher than it is in the rest of the UK. At the moment there is a £12 billion deficit between what Scotland pays into the union in terms of tax and what it gets back in terms of the spend. We have £12 billion more as a result of being part of the UK.

We currently benefit from an economy of scale. We don't have to have our own welfare or pensions system or DVLA because we're part of the UK. These economies of scale will all be lost. It will cost the same amount to set up an ICT system for a population of 5 million as it does for a population of 65 million, and it can equally go wrong for a population of 5 million.

I've been through the White Paper and have tried very hard to find out what's in it for women. I could only find one policy which could be considered a 'woman's policy' and it was a vague promise they might possibly legislate for 40% of women on boards.

There is quite a lot about childcare in the White Paper. I think that's wonderful, because one of women's biggest barriers to participation in the Labour Market is the lack of affordable, wraparound childcare. However, there's nothing stopping the Scottish Parliament from putting these measures in place at the moment. The reason it can't be done just now is that Scotland won't get the economic reward for getting women into work. Most women already work and are already paying for childcare, therefore there is no consequential benefit to the Scottish economy for these women.

I couldn't find anything in the White Paper about how we're going to have a more diverse Parliament or any other elected position. There's nothing about women's representation and I couldn't find anything about reforming the Chamber, or how they're going to improve the scrutiny of the Parliament. Unfortunately after a high in 1999 the number of women in the Scottish Parliament has gone backwards. At the moment there are only 35% women MSPs, down from 48% in 1999. Women are getting 'squeezed out'. Unless you get that participation up, you'll just have the same men in grey suits doing the same things, regardless of whether we're independent or not.



I couldn't find anything in the White Paper on the gender pay gap. Here in Aberdeen we have the highest gender pay gap of anywhere in the country. There was also nothing about domestic violence or human trafficking. The hard fought equality legislation we have in this country wasn't just won by the women in Scotland, but by women all over. The trade unions don't just campaign in Scotland for Scottish workers, but for those all over the UK.

A vote for independence is a step into the unknown. Someone said to me the other day that it must be an exciting experiment to be part of. I don't want to be an experiment. I know when experiments go wrong it's the poor, the disaffected and the dispossessed that suffer the most. We simply don't know what will happen and we can't know. The assertion that everything will be fine is simply not good enough for me.

Being British is part of being Scottish. Why should I be forced to choose? This is my country, whether I am in Aberdeen or London. I don't see why I have to choose a nationality when I feel very comfortable being Scottish but I also want to remain British and have a British passport. That's why I'll be voting no in September."

Question and Answer Session

The main focus of this event was the 'Question Time' style Q&A session. This gave local women the opportunity to ask a panel of representatives from Yes Scotland and Better Together questions around a number of issues.

BETTER TOGETHER

Born in Africa, brought up in Aberdeen, **Sandra Macdonald** speaks for *Better Together*, campaigning to back the sharing union between Scotland and the rest of Britain. She works as a data analyst in the oil industry, and is married with two daughters. A life-long campaigner for women's and workers' rights, Sandra is also chair of Langstane, a leading North East social housing provider; chair of Aberdeen Women's Alliance; treasurer of Hazlehead Academy Parent Council; and on the board of transport partnership NESTRANS.

YES SCOTLAND

Jackie Thain moved to Aberdeen in the 1970's for university . Since then she has been involved in the women's movement and the labour movement including women against the pit closures and poll tax. Jackie works in local government. She is married with three children and has one grandchild.

"What steps are being taken to ensure Scotland will have a secure currency if the Referendum comes back with a Yes vote?"

Dame Anne Begg MP (AB)

The only way to have a secure currency is to vote no. We have a currency and it's secure, so vote no to keep it.

Sandra MacDonald (SM)

There has been a lot in the press about the pound. It is absolutely true that an independent Scotland could use the pound, any country in the world could if they wanted to. However it wouldn't be the pound as we know it and the value of the pound as we know it.

One of the main concerns that my co-workers in the oil industry have is their mortgage. What will the value of the pound and consequently their mortgage be if Scotland became independent? It is one of those big unknowns and one of those events that we saw in the press where the answers really weren't given. There is no plan B.

Gillian Martin (GM)

I think that sharing Sterling would be the safest thing not only for Scotland but for the rest of the UK. Scotland and England are each other's best trading partners. If we had a separate currency then there would be transaction and exchange costs so keeping a Sterling zone is the best way to go in that respect. We will probably find that quite quickly after independence Sterling will be on the table.

Jackie Thain (JT)

In terms of 'there is no Plan B' – if you look at the White Paper you will find that the Scottish Government has a Plan B – if you're buying a house and negotiating a price you don't go in and say I would like to buy it for this, but if you don't accept that I'll take it for this price, and if you don't accept that I'll take it for this price instead – you stick to what you want until it is very clear. At the moment it's all to play for. I don't think we need a Plan B/C - go and have a look in the White Paper as it's all there.

Will an Independent Scotland look to legislate for real gender equality?

GM

I would like to see a women's party in Scotland like they have in Sweden and they had in Northern Ireland. There are lots of women who would also like that.

One of the things that would also probably happen in an independent Scotland is that we wouldn't have a two party system any more. We would see more of a spread of parties and there would be more coalitions, which is a bit of a dirty word at the moment, but in Scotland we would have a range of parties.

There is a hunger for representation from lots of different groups who haven't really perhaps had a voice. I think that strong female voices in all political parties and perhaps the pressure of a women's party nipping at the heels of the ruling parties could be really interesting for women and gender equality.

JT

Legislation depends on the makeup, to a degree, of the parties if we become independent in the next Parliament. I would like to see some sort of commitment to equalities, tied into legislation. One of the main things that needs to be discussed is the Scandinavian models of equality.

SM

We have laws in place at the moment that quite frankly we don't monitor or enact enough, such as the Equal Pay Act. Independence isn't going to make a difference to that.

I work in the oil industry and it is shocking how many managers are men. It is also shocking that most of the head teachers in schools are men. We've got laws there, we just have to make sure that they're monitored, implemented and still push for that as women.

In terms of representation of women in public and political life, I'm not sure that legislation will help. We need a culture change so that our voices can be heard, and I don't think that they have been heard enough in the debate up until now. I don't see how independence is going to move that agenda forward. We have a job of work to do and we should do that job of work right across Britain. I also think we should name and shame companies who do not promote equalities in their workforce.

I think as women we should look at what the parties have done in terms of representation. It was very much the 50/50 campaign which drew me into the build up to the Scottish Parliament. I was energised by that. The more I got involved in politics, I realised that although women make a huge difference in communities. We need to work together with our brothers and sisters not just across Britain but the world in order to make a difference.

AB

The structures and the way that an electoral system on its own is designed does not necessarily give you gender equality. If all the candidates you put up are men, or white men, it doesn't matter what the electoral system looks like because that's all you will get elected.

Political parties have a responsibility. I was Vice Chair of the Speaker's Conference during the last Parliament. We came to the conclusion that unless parties put their own houses in order and have mechanisms that ensure at least 50% of candidates in winnable seats are women, then you do not get gender equality. It's as simple as that.

I never thought I would be a politician. I am here because of a policy decision to get more women in Parliament, and because of the people of Aberdeen South who had the foresight to volunteer to be one of the constituencies that had an all women shortlist. If it hadn't been for the encouragement of women in the party I wouldn't be here.

Once you get more women into Parliament, you'll get more legislation on the issues that women think are important. We have to be part of that bigger movement so it's not just the women who are talking about these things, it's about changing the men too.

Very often some of the more dynamic changes that have happened have come about through women pushing men to make decisions. It's women, along with persuadable men, that make the big difference but you have to be brave. You can't have the best person for the job if they haven't even applied for the job.

Questioner

While we have the beginnings of legislation that promote gender equality, I'm not sure if it's enough because it's not happened in my lifetime. I'm not just talking about economic equality but also equality of opportunity and in families, which is still considered to be wholly the women's role. Why can't it be a man's role as well? It should be a mutual responsibility – why is it up to us once again to change the men?

“Will there still be 2 tiers of government in Scotland? What will local government look like in the future?”

JT

At the moment, as far as I'm aware, it's still a single Chamber Parliament if and when we became independent. That does not exclude the potential for creating a second chamber. I think in some ways it could be quite exciting looking at the development of the second chamber and how we do it. At the moment, the UK as a whole is the most centrally governed least federalist political system in the whole of Europe. If you look at any other country, the small ones as well as the large ones, most of them are federal states.

I would hope that if we got independence we would also get some sort of federal system. That may be through looking at the old regional council areas but it's up for negotiation. We have to be very clear that it will depend on the make-up of the government after independence.

AB

If it's a federal system, it's not independence for Scotland; otherwise Texas would be an independent country. I do think the devolution settlement is unfinished, not so much in Scotland's terms but what happens in the rest of the UK. There is a Parliament in London, Wales, NI and Scotland but there are whole swathes of England that don't have their own Parliament. I can't tell you what government will look like after independence because I don't know. There is no information about the number of Chambers.

However if there is a no vote I think there is a need for more devolution, particularly to Local Government. Scotland is the most centralised country, not Britain.

There are a lot of things that should be devolved to Local Authorities, some from the Scottish Government and some from the UK Government. For example I think that the work programme should be devolved to Local Authorities, because different areas have a different economy and labour markets. Decisions about how you get people into work should be made at a local level.

GM

Centralisation of Government in London is a problem not just for Scotland but for the whole of the UK and a real shake up is required. The other thing I'm happy to see go is the House of Lords. If we're talking about a second Chamber, anything up here would have to be different to what's down in Westminster.

SM

It is true that we have seen a centralisation of powers. The council tax freeze, for example, has meant that the taxes generated to deliver services locally have been cut back. When I was a Councillor it was about 20/80 – 20% funding locally and 80% from Edinburgh. That has been squeezed down because of the cap on council tax. We have also seen fire and police centralised to one central belt force which hasn't been good for us. Also one of what seems to be the biggest best kept secrets is that the Calman Commission will bring more powers to Holyrood next year.

“What will the both parties do to support voluntary action and the voluntary sector – do they envisage the public, private or the voluntary sector delivering public services?”

Questioner

I work with women's aid. Refuge funding has been cut back, and we are struggling in terms of resources. It's important that these sectors can challenge the system. Where that funding would come from is a different question.

SM

I worry that voluntary sector organisations are not being able to say what they really think. Too often they believe, because their funding comes from the Scottish Government, that if they are heard saying they're struggling or they make comments then their funding might get pulled.

That's a real worry in that sector as to what will happen after 18th September. They have the right to have their voices heard and stand up and say what they think. All choices about funding come down to politics and power at the end of the day. I haven't heard anything that indicates more is going to be put into the voluntary sector here in Scotland with independence.

AB

In terms of the voluntary sector, it has absolutely been squeezed mercilessly over the last 7 years. For all that the Yes campaign says about Scotland being a left of centre nation, there's no evidence that the Scottish people will vote for a political party that says it's going to put taxes up. Why else have we seen a freeze on the council tax for the last 7 years?

There's only one taxation promise in the White Paper, which is to reduce corporation tax, i.e. reduce the money that we get from big business. With that, you get a race to the bottom. You don't get more businesses coming to Scotland because of lower tax because then everyone is paying lower tax. Going down the independence route doesn't make this more likely, because we'll be too busy spending the money setting up a new state and we've lost the economy of scale.

JT

There is a strong tradition of voluntary services in Scotland and I would hope that the voluntary organisations would be included in those discussions and that dialogue.

“How we can protect women from perpetrators of violence against women (VAW), who often escape to other parts of the UK? Is there going to be more red tape and bureaucracy in trying to find out where the perpetrators have gone? What will a border mean?”

GM

I don't think that's necessarily going to be a problem. Police Scotland already work very closely with police forces across the British Isles and we will hope to be a member of the European Union, therefore I don't see much of a change of sovereignty with regards to law enforcement.

AB

At the moment, not everything is that easy because there's often issues with jurisdiction, i.e. what police force accepts it is to investigate cases. I know there's been a lot of work done north and south of the border to ensure that flow of information goes back and forward and that someone can't 'hide' in another local authority elsewhere in the UK. If Scotland becomes a foreign country, we can't give an answer – we don't know what's going to be negotiated. There will be another false border, of course it won't be physical, but at the moment police forces speak to each other and there are still problems. I can't see how it can be any easier if we were to be independent.



“What will happen with our pensions? Where is all the money going to come from?”

GM

There was a lot of press when people in the No campaign were suggesting our pensions might not be safe, with billboard ads in most towns for Better Together. Shortly after they went up, a Labour MP asked the question of a civil servant of the Treasury about what will happen to Scotland's pensions. The answer coming from Treasury was that pensions paid for up until this point would be safe. As for pensions in the future, I will ask those questions of the parties after independence.

AB

Gillian's story is not quite right. It wasn't a Treasury spokesperson it was the Pensions Minister (Steve Webb) when he was appearing in front of the Scottish Affairs Select Committee. He was asked what would happen to the state pension and he said it would be outrageous, if not impossible, for it not to be paid to those pensioners who are already in payment. However, most people's pensions are not just state – they are occupational, they might have service pensions, private pensions etc.

Scotland would still have to set up the mechanism to administer the state pension. This will include a regulator and a pensions advisory service which will cost money. The pension service is one of the success stories in the welfare state of the UK – for a start it has a computer system that works. Pensions are secure as we are.

The UK Government is bringing in a flat rate for those who reach state pension age as of April 2016, which the SNP would keep in an independent Scotland. In order to work out the new flat rate, people will have a calculation called the foundation level, based on national insurance contributions. If you have not yet reached state pension age they will just look at your national insurance contributions, which are all kept centrally, and that will work out whether you get a state pension or not. However, post independence, it will matter whether it's north or south of the border or a mixture of both. There are huge numbers of people who live in Scotland but have worked in England and vice versa. That will be difficult and will take more IT.

When Better Together said about pensions not being safe, we were talking about occupational pensions. Under EU law, a final salary scheme has to be fully funded if it crosses borders. That's not a problem if we remain part of the UK but if we become independent that fund will not be able to function cross border if it has a deficit. Large numbers of these final salary schemes have deficits, that's why they're closing by the minute and why the Labour Government set up the Pension Protection Fund (PPF). Scotland would have to replicate that again.

One example is Waterford Crystal in Ireland who amalgamated with Wedgwood Pottery. When that company went down, the British pensioners who worked for Wedgwood got 90% of their pension because of the PPF. The Irish pensioners got 10%. That won't happen in every case, but it is possible. BAE have a huge deficit and they're worried. Royal Mail has a £9bn deficit and we don't know if an independent Scotland would take on their share of that. It has been said that Scotland can afford to pay higher pensions because we die young. I thought that was a joke but it has been used as a reason.

Instead of having an aspiration in Scotland to do something about the health inequalities and using money for that, they're going to use it to pay a higher pension. That's great if you're getting a higher pension now but it's not very good for the people coming up behind. The Scottish population is ageing more quickly than the UK as a whole so there are issues. It's something that I think shouldn't be party political and bounced back and forward. It's too important, because it is about how people have saved for their retirement and we want them to be safe and not have that uncertainty. By remaining part of the UK we don't have that uncertainty and that's important.



CLOSING STATEMENTS

Sandra Macdonald, Better Together

“All of us in this room have a long proud tradition of radical action by women. From suffragettes campaigning for the vote, whose behaviour we aspire to, to women in the Highlands resisting clearances, to rent strikes in Glasgow and campaigning for access to training as doctors here in Aberdeen. For more than a hundred years women have stepped forward and demanded equal rights with men and by doing that have made the world a better place.

In my lifetime as a feminist I've campaigned for equal rights at work, for a woman's right to choose and for safer streets. I've campaigned against apartheid in South Africa and against the politics of racism and fascism here at home too. As we know, all of these issues in one form or another are still around us. People on the other side of this debate often share the same objectives, we've found that today. However none of these things are taken forward, in my view, by breaking up Britain and seeking progressive change on a smaller stage rather than a larger one.

I want to be able to stand up at a women's gathering in a year's time and celebrate the scenario of sisters from Aberdeen to Aberystwyth, from Glasgow to Glastonbury, joining hands and rejecting the politics of division, having elected a government for the whole of the UK that will deliver the progressive politics that people want to see. We will not do that if Scotland votes to walk away.

Borders and flags have always been more interesting to men than women. It seems to me self evident in the 21st century that we should be taking down borders, not putting them up.

Those who argue for Scotland to pull out of Britain are giving up on our friends and neighbours and that's not something I want us to do. I also campaigned against the poll tax, marched as a member of women for peace and fundraised for miners wives. None of those campaigns stopped at the border, because they mattered every bit as much to women throughout this island, wherever they lived. I want my daughters and their daughters to see the country in that same way.

So whether in healthcare or in education, in the energy industry or in political campaigning, Scottish women enjoy more opportunity, more influence, more say as part of a larger country. I do not want us to shrink our horizons and just live in one end of this island. We've always supported devolution and the creation of a Scottish Parliament. I believe that power and decisions should be made as near as possible to the people in communities in which they live.

In September we choose whether to continue devolution within Britain and Scotland as part of that by voting No, or whether to end devolution and break our union with the rest of Britain by voting Yes. That's the choice we have to make. For me the positive, ambitious, forward looking, outward looking choice is making a stronger Scotland and a better Britain. That's why I'll be voting no."

Gillian Martin, Women for Independence

'Dinnae Believe Project Fear'

"George Osborne says we cannae have the pound, It must be true, he told us from high up on the Mound.

The media say it's all about Alex Salmond, and aliens could attack us, claims the Tory Philip Hammond.

Of the forces of darkness, Lord George Robertson warns, but we've had nukes in a river since my kids were born.

They winnae let us in to the EU says he - but we've played an active role there since 1973.

Danny Alexander claims it'd cost us too much to set it up, but the LSE professor whose figures he's massaged says we've been sold a pup.

'No Borders' tell us we wont be able to use Great Ormond Street, but when the hospital complains they make a hasty retreat.

David Cameron wont give Eck the chance to debate, but all we want is a Nation State.

We'll still love our family who live in Walsall.
We'll be crossing an invisible border with no trouble at all.

There are those who think it will all end in a fight, but year by year England moves more to the right.

Scotland's voted left for my whole life by and large, and it's made no difference to the Government in charge/

Stay with us Scotland says Ziggy Stardust!
We cannae, I say, we don't like being bust.

It's all very well for a rich guy like him to chime in, but there's families at food banks in Aberdeen right now waiting to get in.

The BBC warn us ye might nae get yer pension, but when civil service debunks that, they dinnae give it a mention.

When European experts give Yes Scotland their support, you'll find no mention of it in an ITN report.

But don't let all that give you a scare - we could be looking at free childcare!

We'll definitely be getting rid of the bedroom tax and the political scaremongering, well that will relax.

Our future is up for grabs on the 18th of September.
It's for us not the SNP, you'd do well to remember.

What we'll do with that future we can only guess, but I know we'll make it a better one, so that's why I'm voting yes."



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