

Monday 26 August 2019

**“The tragedy of Scotland at the moment is that there are two extreme positions,
and we’re trapped between them,” according to Gordon Brown**

Former Prime Minister Gordon Brown spoke today about nationalism, Brexit, and Scottish Independence at the Edinburgh International Book Festival with writer Alastair Moffat. Brown argued that the vision of Scottish independence proposed by the SNP has changed radically from the referendum in 2014, and that it would spark political conflict between Scotland and England.

“I agree with Nicola Sturgeon when she says a no deal Brexit is damaging to the Scottish economy,” he said. “So we lose, she says, potentially 100,000 jobs. But if it’s damaging for Scotland to leave the European Union, how much damage is done by Scotland leaving Britain? There is £14 billion of trade between Scotland and the EU, but there is £50 billion of trade between Scotland and the rest of the UK.

“The tragedy of Scotland at the moment is that there are two extreme positions, and we’re trapped between them. One is Boris Johnson’s anti-European conservatism which commands very little support in Scotland... I think he’s an elitist and out of touch with ordinary people in Scotland.

“The alternative is this extreme nationalism. I have to tell you that since 2014 and the referendum, we’ve moved from what we might call a soft version of independence to a hard version of independence. Because now independence means leaving the currency union and having a separate Scottish pound. That was not what was proposed in 2014.

“And equally at the same time we’re leaving the customs union and the single market of the UK, and that again is a major disruption that was not proposed in 2014. Does one nationalism that we object to, which is this form of British nationalism that is taking us to Brexit - is it compounded or corrected by a Scottish nationalism that is now about a separate pound, a separate customs union and a separate single market? Is there not a better way of avoiding what could be decades, decades in my view, of conflict that would be never-ending and would destroy empathy between England and Scotland?

“I think the SNP misunderstand the Scottish people and assume that we’re all for breaking every connection with the rest of the UK.”

The former Labour Prime Minister also outlined his views on Brexit, and the divisive politics he sees.

“I think what we’re seeing is two view of Britain competing against each other. There is a familiar view of Britain, you might call it the patriotic view, where Britain is seen by ourselves as a country that is best when it’s tolerant, outward looking, when it’s decent minded and fair and pragmatic.

“But there is another view of Britain which has become ever more powerful, a nationalist view of Britain, and that is that Britain is at its best when it stands on its own, aloof, detached, it’s suspicious of foreign entanglements, and of course the central feature of that is that it’s anti-European.

“Neither has managed to achieve domination amongst the British people in recent years.”

Brown argued for some form of people’s deliberative democracy concerning the UK’s relationship with the EU, perhaps using citizen’s assemblies. But in the short term, he warned against a no deal Brexit and called on MPs to block it.

“I’m against Brexit and I’ve made no secret of that.” He said. “I don’t think the government know there will be no damage done.

“The obvious thing to do is to agree to take over business in the House of Commons for a day, pass a law that says that the government cannot go ahead with a no deal Brexit until a report has been prepared on the consequences of no deal, you could get a majority in the House of Commons for that and I believe that would stop it deal in its tracks.

“If you’re a Member of Parliament at the moment, and faced with the knowledge that some of your constituents may not be able to get life-saving drugs, or alternatively your constituents own businesses that will inevitably lose jobs, whether you were a pro-Brexit or anti-Brexit voter in the referendum, and are identified with one side or the other, you have a duty to weigh up the balance of evidence and use your judgement and consult your conscience as to whether decide whether you can allow this crashing out to happen when you know there are major consequences ahead.”