

# Letter from Scotland

**“Sovereignty” is as fluid a concept as water and explosive as a gas. We’ve become obsessed with it, in Scotland and in the rest of Charles’ kingdoms. Brexit was all about it. Scottish independence is all about it.**

On Wednesday, the Sovereign himself had to step carefully around it as he went through his Scottish “coronation.” We’re not supposed to call it that, of course, for fear of chipping away at his big “United Kingdom coronation” in London in May.

He was simply presented with the old Scottish crown and a mighty new sword at a shorter and less elaborate service in St Giles’ Cathedral. This time, the anti-monarchists were allowed a special place of honour, on the pavement outside the cathedral, where they chanted “Not our King”, the slogan printed on their large yellow banners.



All the King's horses and all the King's men, can they put the monarchy together again?



Scenes on The Royal Mile ahead of King Charles III and Queen Camilla receiving the Honours of Scotland 5 July 2023 PHOTO ©2023 The Edinburgh Reporter

Their protests were all but drowned out by the military bands, marching soldiers and the 100 strong "people's procession" of community volunteers. It was a day of pageant, symbolism and power. And I suppose that is what monarchy is all about.

Scotland is in two minds about all of this. The latest opinion poll, for ITV, found that support for the monarchy was only 37 per cent in Scotland, compared to 54 per cent in England, 56 per cent in Wales and 47 per cent in Northern Ireland. Among those who support independence for Scotland, King Charles has even fewer admirers. He will have to work hard to maintain his role as sovereign, and the symbol of "the people" of Britain.

Indeed, the whole idea of "sovereignty" is open to question.

We give away our personal sovereignty all the time, to the rest of our family, to our peer group, to the community we live in, to the government of the day. And we get quite a lot back in exchange – peace, the rule of law, employment, culture, support. Nations also give away parts of their sovereignty – to international organisations like the UK, the UN, NATO, and, if Scotland had its way, to the European Union. When all that's done, there's not much left of it. So why we get so worked up about “losing” our sovereignty is a bit of mystery.

This week we've also been celebrating another symbol of Britain, the National Health Service. Alas, on its 75<sup>th</sup> birthday, it's not in good health. A survey for the Institute for Public Policy Research found that 35 per cent of people struggled to get the service they need from the NHS. Around 17 per cent had gone private. And only 45 per cent said they were willing to pay more in taxes to maintain the service as it is at present. In Scotland, we have record waiting times. Hospitals and GP services are under chronic stress. And are we are facing a strike by junior doctors next week, unless the government comes up with more than the 14.5 per cent pay offer it's made so far (spread over two years.) The doctors say they've suffered a real-terms pay cut of 28 per cent since 2008.

The Scottish Government says its financial hands are tied by “Westminster austerity”, so it simply doesn't have the money to fund public services properly, like the NHS or local councils. This week, it's emerged that the councils have a plan to increase taxes on the most expensive homes to raise more money for local services. But it's only a gesture, which might raise £170 million towards the £1 billion they say they need just to stand still. Councillors in the Orkney islands are even contemplating becoming a self-governing province of Norway, they are so disillusioned with both the Scottish and Westminster Governments.

The Scottish Government is even having difficulty holding itself together, never mind the nation. The tension with their Green Party partners was highlighted this week by the Greens refusal to join the congregation in St Giles' for the "coronation." Meanwhile, the SNP group at Westminster is in some turmoil, with one of its star turns Mhairi Black announcing she's quitting as an MP because of the "poisonous culture" in the House of Commons, despite leading the SNP response to Oliver Dowden at the Despatch Box with more than a little humour.

On Thursday, our newly installed King was taken to Galashiels in the Borders to see the Great Tapestry of Scotland. An extra panel was added to the 160 scenes from Scottish history to commemorate his coronation. Queen Camilla, as patron of the Royal School of Needlework, was invited to insert the last stitch.

A stitch in the great tapestry of time, but will it be enough to save the monarchy?



Mhairi Black Deputy Leader of the SNP has them rolling in the aisles at Prime Minister's Questions on 5 July 2023 PHOTO UK Parliament/Jessica Taylor