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**Campaign for an English Parliament**

# **Think of England Number 108: October 2020**



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Number 108: October 2020

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## Campaign for an English Parliament Aims, Principles and Policies.

We campaign for an English Parliament, meaning a parliament for the people of England, for whom England is their chosen or inherited home and who are legally entitled to vote.

We campaign for an English Parliament with powers at least as great as those of Scotland's, i.e. a Parliament and Executive (Government) that can make Acts (primary legislation) on the same domestic issues (e.g. health, welfare & education) that are devolved to the Scottish Parliament.

The CEP works with academics, business groups, trades unions, think tanks and the media to create the conditions whereby UK MPs see that there is no alternative to the re-establishment of the English Parliament.

The CEP is a pressure group. It is not a political party. It does not contest elections.

The CEP is not and will not be affiliated to or formally linked with any political party

**Editorial:** We have heard a lot about devolution (decentralization) to be closer to the people. This was one of the reasons given for the national devolution afforded by the UK government to the rest of the UK.



However the plans for England appear to be on a par with Orwell's 'doublethink'. Powers are to be sucked up from local councils into Unitary Authorities, which may or may not be County Councils. Nothing is said about powers to be devolved from central government, if any. County Councils that are too big, it is proposed, should be arbitrarily divided into smaller divisions. Tinkering with the local government of England is only sowing division and does not deal with the lack of recognition of England as having any constitutional significance. What is certain that England will not be recognized as a constitutional entity. My view is that attempts to destroy the ancient unity of England (Council of Eamont, King Athelstan 927 AD) are an act of aggression.

The content under the title 'English Politics' in this journal seems never to refer to England. Perhaps the longer title 'rUK politics which affect England but from which we are excluded' would be more appropriate. For instance the Scottish interference in negotiations with the EU on fishing rights. Nothing said about rights for English fishermen. They do not have a national government to lobby for them in such negotiations.

Fraser Raleigh, a Scottish Tory, is beginning to panic about Scots not feeling British. Perhaps he should advise his colleagues in Westminster that they could start by not calling England, Britain.

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## Campaigning for England:

The Daily Telegraph 7/8/20: Mark Wallace, chief executive of ConservativeHome  
**In the struggle for the future of the Union, who speaks for England? For that matter, when will England be allowed to speak at all?**



The implicit assumption on both sides of the political aisle has long been that the role of the English in all this is simple: pay up, shut up, and put up with whatever divisive bile the SNP might choose to sling your way. For the most part, occupants of Westminster have obliged – feeling both fearful of the fury of the Scottish nationalists and underinformed about the complexities of Scottish politics.

If Westminster is cowed, then the Barnett Formula will continue undisturbed, pumping money to Holyrood decades after the temporary arrangement was meant to expire. In 2018/19, public spending per capita in Scotland was 21 per cent higher than in England; several English regions suffer higher levels of poverty than Scotland, but none receives as much public spending.

England's politicians might opt to absorb such an imbalanced settlement indefinitely, but it would be a mistake to assume that English taxpayers and voters will necessarily do so.

The goal is a win-win scenario: while England keeps schtum, the unhappy status quo continues, and when the English finally get fed up with being taken for granted, snubbed and insulted, the Union will be brought closer to dissolution. When ahistorical theories are touted portraying Scotland as a victim of the “English Empire”, or nationalists put up offensive banners next to the border, the aim is to inflame English resentment at least as much as it is to rally the nationalist base.

Failing to find a productive, positive, active voice for England does harm to the Union, and it lets down English voters. People are not stupid; they noticed that while devolution was swiftly embraced for Wales and Scotland, England was expected to swallow John Prescott's farcical and arbitrary regionalism. They hear the apologetic or even suspicious tone that is still used to discuss Englishness, and Englishness alone. They wonder why nobody seems to stand up and set the record straight. The silence can't last forever. Someone must speak for England – in the right way, and soon – before it is too late.

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## Current English Affairs: Local government

### More elected mayors and fewer councils to break Labour's red wall strongholds

Chris Smyth, Whitehall Editor: Monday September 07 2020, 12.01am, The Times

Dozens more elected mayors and the abolition of many councils are being planned under a shake-up of local government due to be unveiled next month. Ministers want to devolve more power to areas that agree to new elected mayors, who they argue are more accountable and better at boosting local economies. Conservatives have also proved more successful in winning mayoralities in “red wall” areas than they have in winning Labour-controlled councils. However, a fight looms over plans to abolish significant numbers of district councils, many of them Tory-controlled, as part of plans for a slimmed-down local government system.

Downing Street denied that they wanted to abolish two thirds of authorities by replacing district councils with unitary authorities, and insisted change would happen only with local consent. However, ministers do want to move towards more single-tier council areas, which the County Councils Network estimates would save £3 billion a year. District councils oppose the move, saying it would create unwieldy mega-authorities responsible for more than a million people each, far larger than local government units in other countries.

A cap of about 600,000 people in any unitary authority is being considered as one way of avoiding this.

A spokesman for the local government ministry said: “We want to devolve and decentralise to give more power to local communities, providing opportunities for all areas to enjoy devolution. But there will be no blanket abolition of district councils and no top-down restructuring of local government.”

Robert Jenrick, the communities secretary, will publish a white paper on devolution next month, which the spokesman said “will set out our detailed plans and we continue to work closely with local areas to establish solutions to local government reform”.

About four in ten residents in England will be represented by city mayors once West Yorkshire elects its first next year and ministers say directly elected leaders “stimulate job creation, build homes, improve transport and reduce local carbon emissions”.

Government sources say that “now is the time to finish what we've started” by allowing more mayors.

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### **New mayors are price of power grab in local government reform**

Chris Smyth, Whitehall Editor: Wednesday September 09 2020, The Times

Conservative shires have said they would accept directly elected mayors in exchange for seizing powers from local rivals. Boosting ministers' plans to reform local government, county councils have abandoned their opposition to mayors as the price of getting rid of some district councils and gaining more powers in areas ranging from planning to bin collection.

Councillors' opposition to being usurped by elected mayors has been the obstacle to efforts to devolve more power, with county councils saying mayors were unsuited to rural areas and that residents did not want extra bureaucracy.

However, ministers' desire to abolish numerous district councils, the tier below county councils, has made shires think again after years of bickering over local responsibilities. Next month ministers are to publish a devolution white paper aiming at a slimmed-down local government system with clearer lines of accountability including more single-tier council areas. No 10 also wants more areas to have elected mayors, saying that figureheads are more efficient. Tories have also proved better at winning mayoralties in the north and Midlands than taking control of traditionally Labour councils. Ministers' desire for reform is a "golden opportunity" for a better local government system, he says. "Unlike previous Conservative governments, this administration recognises that for the local state to be empowered, it must also be streamlined and strengthened by creating new unitary authorities in shire counties."

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government did not comment but has previously said that there will be no blanket abolishment of district councils".

While almost all county councils are Tory-run, Conservative district councillors are expected to put up a fierce fight against abolition and have argued that unitary councils covering upwards of a million people will be remote and unwieldy.

To allay such concerns, ministers have been discussing capping councils at 600,000 people but Mr Williams warns that doing so will split up historic areas and delay reforms.



### **We need fewer, more effective councils**

David Williams, chairman of the County Councils Network: September 09 2020, 12.01am, The Times  
About two-thirds of councils in England are in just 25 county areas, with 188 district councils, a county council for each, and several health bodies and local enterprise partnerships.

Little wonder that attempts in recent years to install another layer of local government through elected mayors has not gone down well in shire counties.

While communities have been casting envious glances at the powers and platforms provided to mayors in city areas, adding further bureaucracy to a crowded field made little sense, despite the funding on offer. But unlike previous Conservative governments, this administration recognises that for the local state to be empowered, it must also be streamlined and strengthened by new unitary authorities in shire counties.

This is expected to be at the heart of the forthcoming devolution white paper.

With local economies scarred by the coronavirus pandemic, many council leaders in the shires are willing to embrace this agenda, and with it county or regional mayors.

However, the government must ensure that its white paper encourages the creation of unitary councils covering whole counties, to provide the best chance of maximising these benefits of local government re-organisation and devolution.

The County Councils Network's recent independent report, with analysis from PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), showed that abolishing county and district councils in an area and replacing them with a single unitary council would be the most effective way to remove inefficiency and complexity for residents.

With the coronavirus further stretching council budgets, it would be remiss to ignore the £3 billion in savings that PwC estimates could be delivered over the next five years through county unitaries.

But the benefits go much further than the bottom line. Unitary councils would provide a platform to deliver better services, enhance local democracy and drive forward the levelling-up agenda during the post-pandemic economic recovery.

Reform could provide unitary counties with a strong and coherent voice with which to argue for a fairer share of government funding and to attract inward investment to county towns, cities and villages, while maximising the delivery of affordable housing and infrastructure.

Unitary counties, rather than being remote mega-councils, could breathe life into local democracy.

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County councils are responsible for 90 per cent of local expenditure. Unitary counties, including Durham, Cornwall and Wiltshire, have shown that they can retain and improve existing responsibilities while bringing services closer to residents, providing new powers and budgets for thousands of town and parish councils.

Importantly, new unitary counties could get on with delivering devolution to England's shire heartlands quickly and effectively.

With the right reforms to streamline councils, packaged with ambitious devolved powers, many councillors will be willing to embrace elected mayors, but specific arrangements will be decided on by local areas.

But suggestions that the government is under pressure to consider a limit of 600,000 people for any new council put these benefits at risk. With only six county areas below this level, such a limit would create multiple new councils for an area, splitting historic counties and drawing new boundaries within them, resulting in unnecessary cost, complexity and delays to devolution.

This model could create and exacerbate economic disparities within counties, pitting high-growth areas against low-growth areas. Far from levelling-up, this could level down some areas.

Creating multiple councils would split care services delivered by county councils, and, as PwC's report shows, reduce savings by two-thirds and potentially affect the availability of care packages and care home placements.

With government getting bogged down redrawing council boundaries, and with seemingly endless negotiations with multiple new unitary councils, the brakes could be put on delivering devolution to county areas. The UK has a golden opportunity to bring devolution and reform to county areas, creating councils fit for the 21st century.

But during the wait for the white paper, the government has a choice: move forward quickly with unitary counties that can deliver economic recovery from the get-go, or see the reform and levelling-up agenda stall in county areas.



*Manchester Town Hall*

### **District councils must not be swallowed by faceless monoliths**

John Fuller, chairman of the District Councils Network: Thursday September 10 2020, The Times

In June 2016 voters delivered a message to us all. They want to shape their own destiny and take back control. They don't want power and influence hoovered up by large, remote, inaccessible bureaucracies miles away from their homes and aspirations.

Councils in England are already the largest in the western world. Proposals from county councils to concentrate local accountability in only 25 councils outside London would make them even bigger.

Further centralisation of power and influence is not the answer to delivering on the doorstep in market towns, cathedral cities and coastal communities. Further amplifying the democratic deficit in the countryside compared with the cities does not provide a compelling case for change.

Rather than push residents further away, we must put them at the centre of our plans to recover from the coronavirus pandemic, to spread growth and opportunity in every corner of our country.

Covid-19 has shown that bigger local government is not better local government. While national command and control sometimes stumbled, it was district councils which ensured that individuals, families and businesses could keep calm and carry on with nobody left behind. In streets up and down our country, it was the local district council that ensured every fridge was filled, every bin collected, every evicted sofa-surfer had a roof placed over their head and every small business had the financial help and regulatory forbearance to adapt to a new normal. In the last few weeks, a small group of people, including a contributor to Red Box yesterday, have been clamouring to put all of this at risk.

County councils are making the case for turning their backs on learning the lessons of what worked best throughout the coronavirus crisis. They are proposing to dismantle the final mile that delivers bespoke solutions for residents in every corner of our country and served us so well.

With a devolution and recovery plan ahead, it is nothing less than putting their own survival ahead of the best interests of residents and business. Such an identikit approach would hamper our ability to grow the national economy one local economy at a time.

Now is the time for us to focus on recovery not reorganisation. So I reject the argument for centralised cheapness that fails to inspire anyone. It is an argument that takes power away from local people and concentrates it in the hands of rich or retired motorists in the shires, the only people able to navigate across our rural shires to meet at the County Hall miles away.

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I prefer to stand up for aspiration and quality, efficient services that councils can deliver and shape locally, not cheap ones they can't.

I stand against centralisation rather than devolution. I stand for recovery, not yet more reorganisation. Let's have a pattern of local government that looks forward to the needs of 2066.

### Decaying bridge fiasco turns poor old Britain (*England. Ed.*) into a laughing stock

Lucy Bannerman: Saturday September 12 2020, 12.01am, The Times

Hammersmith Bridge stands closed, disrupting daily life; Muriel Seaman says it is a national embarrassment. In 92 years Muriel Seaman cannot remember ever feeling this embarrassed for Britain.

Causing the shame is a cast-iron suspension bridge over the Thames at Hammersmith, once a monument to Victorian engineering and which until recently carried 22,000 vehicles and 17,000 pedestrians a day. It now stands closed, empty and unsafe, cracking and corroding as officials squabble over who should pay to fix it.

"This says to the world we're in trouble, we've gone to pot," Mrs Seaman, from Barnes, southwest London, says. She lives in the heart of one of the world's great capital cities and yet can no longer visit her GP, the hospital or her bank without spending half a day on the bus or £50 on a taxi in gridlocked traffic. "I don't want my country to be like this. I want to be proud. I want people to look up to us. I feel a bit sad that my country is in the state it is in." She laughs at her doctor's gentle suggestion that she temporarily register at a different surgery on her side of the river, just until the bridge reopens. "That could be another four or five years," Mrs Seaman, whose husband is 96, says. "I could be dead by then." Besides, she adds, "I want to get to Hammersmith for my shopping at M&S."

It was the symbolic decay of bridges in the capital that prompted a report in *The New York Times* this week with the inevitable headline: "London's Bridges really are falling down." Vauxhall Bridge and London Bridge are closed to general traffic. A mechanical fault struck Tower Bridge last month, briefly freezing its famous "bascules" awkwardly in mid-air.

Also last month, after a 16-month closure to motorists, the handsome green and gold structure of Hammersmith Bridge was deemed so unsafe that not even boats can cross beneath.

Parents complain that the 4,000 schoolchildren who would normally cross the bridge daily are having to make detours of 90 minutes or more around unlit towpaths and unsafe cycle lanes. Quick commutes once done on foot now involve hours in traffic or on sclerotic, Covid-restricted bus services. Cancer patients visiting the nearby Charing Cross hospital for chemotherapy must add hours of travelling to already distressing days.

Fully repairing the 133-year-old bridge would cost an estimated £141 million. Hammersmith and Fulham council, the Labour-controlled body that owns it, says its plans are "shovel-ready" but that it cannot even afford the £46 million required for a partial restoration in the meantime.

Compare that with the cost of the fabled Garden Bridge, much championed by Boris Johnson, which achieved the twin feats of costing £43 million of public money and not even existing.

Critics of Sadiq Khan, the Labour mayor of London, have accused him of inaction but he insists that Transport for London cannot carry out repairs unless the government stumps up the money.

Enter Grant Shapps, the transport secretary, who announced a new task force after the bad publicity this week and then accused everyone else of a "lack of leadership".

"It's farcical," says Michelle Morton, 47, a Barnes resident. She believes that "finger-pointing and procrastination" has "crippled" a vast part of west London. "That *New York Times* article was the best thing because it shamed Grant Shapps into breaking his silence."

She adds: "Transport For London has a slogan: 'Every journey matters.' But not our journey. The mayor says he wants everyone to walk and cycle. But we can't." She has had to hire a car. Instead of the usual 18-minute walk to school in Hammersmith, it takes Ms Morton and her 11-year-old son William an hour to drive there in the morning, and two hours for him to return on the restricted bus service in the afternoon. "We all know someone worse off than us," she says, explaining how the school run disruption frequently makes her neighbour late for work. "Her boss is just not having it and she's going to end up losing her job. All these livelihoods are at risk."

The fiasco is about much more than local disruption, Ms Morton says; it's about the UK's perceived ability to get things done as it prepares to strike out on its own.



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Her mother had called from New Zealand, having seen the “London’s Bridges really are falling down” headline in the local newspaper. “She said, your bridge is on the news! I thought, wonderful. Maybe this will shame them into doing something.”

Veronica Burns, 66, a palliative care chaplain at Charing Cross hospital, says that patients whose cancers have advanced during the pandemic are now experiencing further distress by having one or two hours added to their journey for chemotherapy. “They are very scared at having to have the treatment and then they are having to do this long journey, whereas before they could just walk across the bridge.”

Many of her neighbours are NHS staff who are struggling to get to work. “In our block there is a paediatrician, a couple of nurses and a brain surgeon around the corner. All of them are snookered, trying to get to the hospital.”

Residents are furious at what they see as a petty, buck-passing blame game. “They’re all behaving like petulant children,” says Becky Shammas, 43, a mother of two from Barnes. “We’re expecting to be taken seriously in trade talks. It doesn’t bode well if we can’t even fix a bridge. It’s a shocking embarrassment.” The communities of leafy southwest London have had enough, she says. “Maybe we’ve been polite and patient for too long.”

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### Local planning decisions must not be handed over to an algorithm

Joe Harris, leader of Cotswold district council: Wednesday September 16 2020, 12.01am, The Times

If you have ever sat in on a local planning committee meeting you will know that they represent democracy red in tooth and claw. They are a great illustration of how local government should work. Planning officers will present their informed evidence and give a recommendation to the committee; members are not whipped by their party so you usually have no idea how they will vote and, because residents care deeply about their local environment, they hold and share opinions very strongly indeed with committee members. This means that these meetings actually matter and opinions can change during the course of a meeting in response to community lobbying. It’s far from the perfect system but the views of the people are, by and large, heard.



So who could possibly object to well-informed local experts giving their view to locally elected representatives who will be responsive to local opinion? Step forward Robert Jenrick, the housing secretary, whose planning white paper severely limits the ability of local communities to influence planning decisions. In essence, the public will have one chance to give their views on a new development and, ludicrously, this will be at the local planning stage, when new developments are purely theoretical with no actual proposal from a developer to consider. By the time a genuine development comes forward, up to a decade later, there is no more opportunity for a local resident to influence the development of their environment.

As so often happens with this government, there is a command and control libertarian model that runs through this legislation — a belief that Whitehall and the market knows best. And how will Whitehall work out what should be in a local plan? An algorithm, of course. Unsurprisingly, as the leader of the council responsible for one of the most beautiful parts of the country, I object to this. Not because we are all Nimby’s (our administration was elected on a platform to build more social rented homes and we have over-delivered in recent years) but because I believe local people are better placed to plan the future of their communities than remote ministers and civil servants. Our reward for over-delivery? According to the planning lawyers Lichfield, the target for new homes in Cotswold district is set to go up from 420 a year to 1,209 a year. This is why planning policy shouldn’t be dropped down on neighbourhoods from on high: because we are one of the most beautiful parts of the UK, you can’t actually build in most of the district. About 80 per cent of my district is an area of outstanding natural beauty, with limits on new development. Many of our towns, such as Cirencester, are already set to grow dramatically over the next few years so other sites will need to be found. Centuries-old small market towns such as Moreton-in-Marsh, Lechlade-upon-Thames and Fairford could double in size almost overnight.

And we have to worry about the quality and long-term impact of these new homes. We are revising our local plan to reflect the priority of limiting the environmental impact of new homes. Anyone who thinks that a local ambition for zero energy new homes will last through Whitehall lobbying and a costly legal challenge from a national housebuilder, has no awareness of the contrast between the perilous state of council finances or the deep pockets of those developers.

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Mr Jenrick is officially the secretary of state for housing, communities and local government. The legislation as proposed will lead to poorer housing, ignored communities and neutered local government.

### ~~~~~ **Winemaker sparkles with bumper harvest ahead**

Dominic Walsh Monday September 21 2020, 12.01am, The Times

One of England's top producers of sparkling wine is preparing to begin a bumper grape harvest next week. Nyetimber will be harvesting grapes from 640 acres in West Sussex, Hampshire and Kent — the biggest area of harvested vines of any of England's expanding list of sparkling wine producers, which now includes Taittinger, the French champagne house.

The industry as a whole has seen no sign of slowing demand. In terms of sales, 5.5 million bottles were sold in 2019, an increase of 70 per cent over the previous year, with international sales accounting for 10 per cent. The total area under vine in the UK now stands at 3,579 hectares, up 83 per cent since 2015.

Nyetimber is owned by Eric Heerema, 59, a Dutchman from a wealthy shipping family who moved to Britain in 2003, buying a farmhouse in West Sussex. He planted his first 16 acres of grapes two years later on grazing land, then in 2006 sped up his growth ambitions by acquiring Nyetimber, founded in 1988, for £7.4 million and investing “much much more than envisaged” and creating a state-of-the-art winery.

Nyetimber, which has seen a big rise in online sales during lockdown, expects to produce about 1 million bottles from this year's harvest.

Its grape pickers will spend two weeks picking bunches of chardonnay, pinot noir and pinot meunier grapes. Cherie Spriggs, 43, the head winemaker, said: “Having embraced the required social distancing measures, we are looking forward to a bumper harvest as we have benefited from good growing conditions this year, in particular the warm and dry summer weather which got us off to a great start.”



### ~~~~~ **Times Letters 24/9/20: STARMER, THE SNP AND THE KEYS TO NO 10**

Sir, Rachel Sylvester (Sep 22, and letter, Sep 23) reminds us of the strong probability that Sir Keir Starmer would be unable to form a government “without the support of the SNP” and that this could encourage Labour into supporting a second independence referendum. It is not only the Labour Party that faces this challenge, however. The “West Lothian question” is still unanswered, and a minority government supported by nationalists retaining an obstructive presence in a parliament whose authority it rejects is unacceptable to England.

Nobody has yet explained how it is legitimate for Scotland to pursue different policies from England while Scottish MPs in Westminster continue to influence those same English policies for which they have no authority within their constituencies, and in a parliament for which they have no respect. Yet that seems the only way back to power for Labour. If so, it is a reminder to Tories that allowing Scotland a second referendum and accepting the prospect of independence might be preferable to obstructing the same, and ignoring the inevitable crisis correctly predicted by Tam Dalyell, who posed the West Lothian question in 1977. It is a question that will not disappear, cannot be ducked and is only exacerbated by offers of further devolution.

Richard Ritchie, London SW18

### ~~~~~ **English politics:**

#### **Whitehall furious at SNP for EU fishing talks intervention**

Kieran Andrews, Scottish Political Editor: September 08 2020, The Times

SNP ministers told the EU that Britain must soften its position on fishing rights in a move which trade officials claim undermined Brexit negotiations.

Regular discussions have taken place between senior figures in the Scottish government and the European Commission, including Nicola Sturgeon, the first minister, and Michel Barnier, the EU's chief Brexit negotiator. These are separate to the trade talks under way between Brussels and Whitehall. It is understood that the deadlock over fisheries was discussed during a meeting in February, with the Scottish government expressing the view that “both sides need to move a bit”. Several rounds of negotiations and informal talks between the UK and EU's lead negotiators had failed to lead to a breakthrough in the most contentious areas, including fishing, where the UK is demanding a doubling of current quotas. The intervention by SNP ministers caused consternation in Whitehall after it was mentioned to the UK

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government's negotiating team by their European counterparts. It was raised in a terse official "catch up" between the Scottish and UK governments where sources at Westminster said they "called out" their Holyrood counterparts.

Ms Sturgeon and Mr Barnier last spoke about a fortnight ago. The Scottish government has no powers over foreign affairs so cannot carry out any of its own negotiations but Conservative ministers felt that the intervention made an already difficult process tougher by presenting a divided Britain. "This behaviour does not just undermine the UK government, it undermines Scotland and its fishermen by stopping the UK from speaking as one voice to say that we want to be an independent coastal state once again," said a source. The Scottish government's comments had created "an unrealistic landing zone of expectations from the EU side" about how much the UK is willing to concede on fishing, the source added.

Quotas, which are based on the 1973 deal to join the EEC, are a totemic issue for British fishing communities and the SNP has already come in for criticism over its policy to rejoin the EU if Scotland was to become independent. This would include rejoining the Common Fisheries Policy, which gives the lion's share in UK waters to European boats. In the North Sea British boats take only 4 per cent of sole.

The Scottish Fishermen's Federation wants the UK to negotiate with the authorities, including the EU, as a fully independent coastal state and has said that anything else would be seen as a "colossal betrayal".

A spokesman for Mike Russell, the Scottish constitutional relations secretary, said that the Scottish government has sought to protect every sector "including our coastal communities" since the 2016 vote to leave the EU — 62 per cent of Scottish voters backed remain.

**Behind the story:** Why is the Scottish government speaking to figures in the European Commission when it has no powers over foreign affairs and has had its hands full dealing with a pandemic and the economic crisis? The answer is simple. The SNP has been playing a long game to get close to the movers and shakers in Brussels so if Scotland becomes independent its ministers are already seen as trustworthy. European leaders will not openly back separation but the EU's shoulder would be less icy than it was in 2014 when the UK was a member state.

The same thinking is behind Nicola Sturgeon's refusal to countenance a "Catalonia-style" wildcat independence referendum after watching European leaders back Madrid.

Brexit has been a boost for Scottish nationalism on the Continent. Alyn Smith's speech to the European parliament before he became the MP for Stirling asking MEPs to "leave a light on so we can find our way home" was warmly received.

Will SNP ministers care that they have "undermined" Brexit negotiations? No. They are concerned with impressing the union they want to be a part of rather than the one they are fighting to leave.

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### **Britishness is normal and unionists should say so**

Fraser Raleigh, former Conservative special adviser in the Cabinet Office: September 18 2020, The Times  
Westminster always wakes up late when it comes to the Union. The alarm is ringing on a constitutional nightmare if the SNP win a majority at next May's elections to the Scottish parliament.

In 2014 it took a surprising 51-49 poll in favour of Yes just before the independence referendum to stop it sleepwalking into the breakup of the United Kingdom. In 2015 Scotland sent 56 separatist MPs to Westminster. But with nine months to go before the election in Scotland, Westminster has finally wiped the sleep from its eyes. Just as well, because it will catapult the Union back to the fore of British politics. The fightback starts with ministerial visits and lots of them. Boris Johnson, Rishi Sunak and Michael Gove have all been north of the border in recent weeks.

The SNP's greatest strategic achievement has been using devolution to cast Scotland as inherently separate to the rest of the UK, making independence not just a logical step but crucially a less daunting prospect for uncertain No voters. While Labour, the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats are pro-devolution, the SNP are not. Devolution has always been a stepping stone towards independence.

The Scottish government has projected itself as autonomous, developing its own foreign policy through ministerial visits to Brussels, cutting across reserved responsibilities and cultivating its own relationships with allies. For too long UK-wide institutions have played into that narrative: politicians, the civil service and the media. If Westminster is serious about ensuring the United Kingdom is a coherent, relevant and tangible concept for Scottish voters it must grasp the scale of the challenge ahead of it and change the way it talks about the Union.

Ministers with remits spanning the UK have been too reluctant to project themselves equally across all four nations. The rest have outsourced issues with the "devolved nations" to the overstretched Scotland,

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Wales and Northern Ireland offices. If ministers are to suddenly rediscover their interest in each nation, they need not just to normalise their visits but to normalise the way they talk about the UK. Clunky, transactional rhetoric about the value of the “precious Union” should be junked for matter-of-fact language that normalises Britishness. The civil service in London has also been too timid about treading on toes, prioritising good working relationships with colleagues in Cardiff and Edinburgh above the central policy objective of preserving the Union, something our impartial civil service should never be indifferent about. Our cultural institutions have become balkanised, shunting Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish stories to the regional editions while leading UK-wide bulletins with English-only stories that mean little to voters in the rest of the UK.



The United Kingdom has almost unrivalled cultural, political and diplomatic tools at its disposal to prevent the disintegration of its own state. It is time it woke up to the value of those tools. Nationalists won't be shy about using their own.

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### **'No seat for devolved nations' at trade deal talks**

Greig Cameron: Thursday September 24 2020, 12.01am, The Times

A UK government minister has told MSPs that devolved nations should not be “at the table” when trade deals are being negotiated.

Greg Hands, the minister of state for trade policy, also said that it was important the administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland did not have a veto on international trade agreements. He said he wanted deals that worked for the whole of the UK

It emerged recently that Whitehall was furious with SNP ministers for suggesting to the EU that Britain should soften its stance on fishing rights. Conservative politicians felt the move undermined Brexit negotiations and indicated that the UK was not united.

Mr Hands told Holyrood's finance and constitution committee yesterday that there was strong engagement between trade officials and the devolved nations.

He was pressed by Angela Constance, from the SNP, about Westminster's own constitution committee which has recommended an effective role for devolved administrations in the negotiation and scrutiny of new trade agreements. She said that must amount to more than Mr Hands and Ivan McKee, the Scottish government's trade minister, “having a wee chat on the phone”.

Mr Hands said: “I don't agree with the devolved nations being at the table when the negotiations are happening. I do agree with the regular interaction and regular briefing of Scottish government officials and ministers of what is going on in the negotiation.

“We allow significant access to the Scottish government and other devolved administrations throughout the process. I think that is the appropriate level whilst respecting that international trade is a reserved matter.”

Mr Hands, 54, told the committee that he regularly asked the Scottish government what their main desires from trade talks would be and was confident deals would work for all the nations and regions (*he means England. Ed.*) of the UK.

He did not think a trade agreement would be reached “that is wildly unpopular in one of the four nations in the UK. Our objective is to have a trade policy that works for the whole of the UK”.

The committee was also told that the UK government's Internal Market Bill could discourage devolved nations from putting new regulations in place. The bill aims to maintain free trade across the UK but devolved nations have raised concerns.

It includes a provision that would see mutual recognition on trade, meaning certain goods allowed to be sold in one part of the UK would have to be allowed to be sold in others.

Michael Dougan, European law professor at Liverpool University, said the provision meant if the devolved administrations increased their standards, it would only affect their own producers and would not increase the standards of goods sold.

He said this would “effectively penalise domestic producers or traders” as they would not be able to enforce the same standards against imported goods or service providers

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**England's hero: Sir Joseph Wilson Swan FRS** (31 October 1828 – 27 May 1914) was an English physicist, chemist, and inventor. He is known as an independent early developer of a successful incandescent light bulb, and is the person responsible for developing and supplying the first incandescent

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cent lights used to illuminate homes and public buildings, including the Savoy Theatre, London, in 1881.

In 1850, Swan began working on a light bulb using carbonised paper filaments in an evacuated glass bulb. By 1860, he was able to demonstrate a working device, but the lack of a good vacuum, and an adequate electric source, resulted in an inefficient light bulb with a short lifetime. In August 1863 he presented his own design for a vacuum pump to a meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science.

He solved the problem of incandescent electric lighting by means of a vacuum lamp. On 3 February 1879, he publicly demonstrated a working lamp to an audience of over seven hundred people in the lecture theatre of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle upon Tyne. Swan turned his attention to producing a better carbon filament, and the means of attaching its ends. He devised a method of treating cotton to produce "parchmentised thread", and obtained British Patent 4933 on 27 November 1880. From that time he began installing light bulbs in homes and landmarks in England.

In 1904, Swan was knighted by King Edward VII, awarded the Royal Society's Hughes Medal, and was made an honorary member of the Pharmaceutical Society. He had received the highest decoration in France, the Legion of Honour, when he visited the 1881 International Exposition of Electricity, Paris. The exhibition included displays of his inventions, and the city was lit with his electric lighting.



**England's history: Sir Walter Raleigh** was beheaded in the Old Palace Yard at the Palace of Westminster on 29 October 1618. He was an English landed gentleman, writer, poet, soldier, politician, courtier, spy and explorer. He is also well known for popularising tobacco in England. Raleigh was one of the most notable figures of the Elizabethan era.

He rose rapidly in the favour of Queen Elizabeth I and was knighted in 1585. Raleigh was instrumental in the English colonisation of North America and was granted a royal patent to explore Virginia, paving the way for future English settlements. In 1591, he secretly married Elizabeth Throckmorton, one of the Queen's ladies-in-waiting, without the Queen's permission, for which he and his wife were sent to the Tower of London.

In 1594, Raleigh heard of a "City of Gold" in South America and sailed to find it, publishing an exaggerated account of his experiences in a book that contributed to the legend of "El Dorado".

After Queen Elizabeth died in 1603, Raleigh was again imprisoned in the Tower, this time for being involved in the Main Plot, an alleged conspiracy of July 1603 by English courtiers to remove King James I from the English throne and to replace him with his cousin Lady Arabella Stuart. In 1616, he was released to lead a second expedition in search of El Dorado. During the expedition, men led by his top commander ransacked a Spanish outpost, in violation of both the terms of his pardon and the 1604 peace treaty with Spain. Raleigh returned to England and, to appease the Spanish, he was arrested and executed in 1618.



**English culture: Punkie Night** is a Westcountry custom related to Halloween practised in Somerset on the last Thursday of October. Children will march around with a jack o'lantern, singing a song which goes :

It's Punkie Night tonight  
It's Punkie Night tonight  
Adam and Eve would not believe  
It's Punkie Night tonight

There are some variants of this old rhyme which also include these lines:

"Give me a candle, give me a light If you don't, you'll get a fright"

or alternatively:

"Give me a candle give me light If you haven't a candle, a penny's all right"

This relates to the tradition where children would beg for candles on this night, and threaten people who refused to give them anything. A Punkie King and a Punkie Queen would typically lead the proceedings. No one knows how the custom originated, although it is almost certainly linked with Hallowe'en and similar traditions can be found across the Westcountry. The word "Punkie" is an old English name for a lantern, and jack o'lanterns for Punkie Night may be made of swedes or mangel-wurzels rather than pumpkins. An alternative explanation of the term is that it is derived from pumpkin or punk, meaning tinder. The custom's origin is attributed to a fair which was at one time held at Chiselborough in late October.



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Men who would come back late from the fair would often need candles as lights to guide them home, which would lead either to women making a jack o'lantern for their husbands, or men making the jack o'lantern, according to different versions of story.

In earlier times, farmers would put a traditional "Punkie" on their gates to ward off evil spirits at this time of year.

The festival has been celebrated at various sites including Castle Neroche in the Blackdown Hills, Long Sutton and, more commonly, at Hinton St George and the neighbouring village of Lopen.

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**Promotion:** October is the month for collecting wild mushrooms. There are roughly 15,000 types of wild fungi in the UK. Never rely on one source for mushroom identification, and never eat anything unless you are 100% sure it is edible.

Put simply, all plants, animals and fungi on private land belong to the landowner. However, because most Britons distrust and ignore mushrooms, owners are often happy to allow picking, so always ask first.

Mushrooms are grown commercially throughout England:

Bungalow Farm Mushrooms, Lancashire

Fiddleford Mushrooms Ltd., Dorset.

G's, Cambridgeshire

Laver Mills Ltd., Essex

M A P Mushrooms, North Yorkshire

Oakfield Farm Products, Worcestershire

Tas Valley Mushrooms, Norfolk

Thornton Meadow Mushrooms Ltd., Lancashire

Woodlands Mushroom Farm, Essex



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### Recipe: Mushroom and spinach pearl barley risotto

This vegetarian risotto recipe is made with pearl barley as opposed to rice. The fibre keeps you feeling fuller for longer and there is no compromise in taste.

#### Ingredients:

1 tbsp olive oil

1 garlic clove, crushed

300g mushrooms, thickly sliced

200ml dry white wine

200g spinach

2 shallots, finely chopped

1 tbsp fresh thyme leaves, finely chopped

300g pearl barley

1 litre hot vegetable stock (we like Knorr)

40g parmesan or vegetarian alternative, finely grated, plus extra to serve



**Method:** Heat the oil in a heavy-based pan, then fry the shallots for 6-7 minutes until soft. Add the garlic, thyme and mushrooms, then fry for 5 minutes more. Add the pearl barley and stir for a minute. Pour in the wine and bubble for 5 minutes or until mostly reduced.

Add the hot stock and bubble gently for 45-50 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the stock has been absorbed. Add the spinach and parmesan, stirring until the spinach has wilted (about 5 minutes). Season, then serve with extra parmesan grated over the top.

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**Twitter Poll September 2020:** Do you support an English Parliament? 246 votes, 64% yes, 30.5% no

**OUR PRECIOUS UNION! Theresa May June 2017**

*(Sucking England dry)*

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