

My Intervention to the SNP Spokesman during the SNP Opposition Debate on Scotland's Future

Rt Hon Sir John Redwood MP (Wokingham) (Con): As I understand it, the hon. Gentleman wants Scotland to pull out of the UK but join the European Union. How easy does he think that would be, given the EU's stubborn attitude towards the Catalan claims and its support of Spain resisting even a referendum?

Tommy Shepherd MP, SNP Spokesman: The difference, of course, between the EU and the United Kingdom is that Scotland can leave one but not the other. I can imagine how the right hon. Gentleman might have felt if he and his Brexit colleagues, who wished for Britain to leave the EU, had been told, "Well, you simply can't do that. You have no right to do that," because that is the situation that is being presented to Scotland with regard to the UK.

In my view, which I think is accepted, Scottish independence requires two things. First, it requires the majority consent of the people who live in Scotland, and they need to express a wish for that to happen. Secondly, it concerns a negotiated settlement with this place and it will eventually require an Act of this Parliament. Those two things were fused together in the 2012 Edinburgh agreement, but because of the UK Government's reticence, we will have to decouple them and take them separately.

Our ambition now is to find some means to allow people in Scotland to express their view. It does not sit well for the UK Government to take a stance of actively trying to frustrate and deny that happening. This motion, if they were to vote for it today, fixes the problem, because it gives the Scottish Parliament the power to organise the first of those things—to determine the view of the people. We are asking for the Scottish Parliament to have the power not to legislate on the Union or on becoming an independent country, but merely to consult the people and to articulate on behalf of those who elected the Holyrood chamber. That is the opportunity that is offered by the motion's proposed Bill, and I hope that hon. Members will take it.

The more that we tell people that they cannot have something, the more they want it. We have seen that in recent opinion polls with the surge in support for independence. Most significantly, in last week's opinion poll, we saw a clear majority of people saying that there should be another referendum on this question before the end of the Scottish Parliament's term in 2026—that is the first time that there has been a clear majority on the timing of the referendum.

All that is happening as a result of the UK's obstinance, insistence and denial of the democratic mandate in Scotland is that the case for independence is being fuelled. If it comes to a situation where there is a conflict between the British constitution and the claim of right of the

Scottish people, it is our responsibility, which we will not shirk, to make sure that the latter triumphs over the former.