

UNIONISTS AND THE UNION

Peter Robinson has suggested a united unionist study group on how to defend and promote the Union. But what is the Union?

In 1707, the First UK came into being from the amalgamation of the Kingdoms of Scotland and England (with the principality of Wales attached to the latter). In 1800, the Second UK, combining Britain and the Kingdom of Ireland, was brought about by the Acts of Union of that year. In 1922, the Irish Free State Agreement Act in effect allowed for the creation of the Third UK consisting of just Scotland, England (plus Wales) and a satrapy of 'Northern Ireland'. The official title of the Third UK is the 'United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland'.

If Scotland secedes from the Third UK, perhaps within the next five years or so, what will be left? There will be a polity comprised of the kingdom of England, the principality of Wales, and the satrapy of Northern Ireland. What this could be called, involving as it would only one kingdom, is a matter for conjecture.

A consideration which unionists will surely also have to address is that researched popular attitudes as well as leaks from the establishments on the island of Britain indicate that the peoples and powers-that-be

there are no longer genuinely committed to a union with Northern Ireland. In fact, Patrick Mayhew, in his day, let it slip in an interview with a German newspaper, which perhaps he did not expect to be translated into English and printed in the anglophone press, that Britain would be only too glad to see the departure of Northern Ireland from the UK.

If unionists thus came to consider an arrangement on the island of Ireland outside of a residual Union, nationalists have made it clear that this need only be on the basis of civic fellowship and continued devolution, and not requiring any changes of loyalty or identity. The latter dimension is, anyway, complicated (as noted in the preceding article). Unionists seem to variously classify themselves as Irish,



Northern Irish, Ulster, Ulster-Scots, and British. Of course, these identities, or some of them, need not be mutually exclusive. Indeed, northern nationalists often classify themselves as both Irish and Ulster, albeit with the latter being always a subcategory of the former.

Interesting times lie ahead.

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