Baird-McAlpine Debate, The National, November 2026

Laura Webster: Hello everybody. Welcome back to another edition of the National's new debate series. My name is Laura Webster. I'm the editor of the newspaper. Today we are going to be talking about a very key talking point in the Scottish independence movement, which is: is the path to independence legal or is it political? In other words, how do we secure Scottish independence when Westminster keeps saying no? What is the best path forward? So today I'm joined by Professor Alf Baird, author and academic representing the position of Liberation Scotland. This is a group that's working towards having Scotland decolonized by the UN. And Professor Baird argues that the union is quote "one of the largest political, longest political hoaxes in history." We're also joined by Robin McAlpine, head of strategic development of the pro-independence Common Weal think tank. He's also a political strategist, researcher, and commentator. And his argument boils down to needing to get the people of Scotland on board with the independence cause and building sustained political pressure on Westminster. And I hope you guys think I've summarized your arguments well enough there. So thank you both for joining me and coming on today. I'm going to give you both around three minutes to open your arguments and I'm going to be timing you as well. So pressure's on. Professor Alf, I'm going to go to you first.

Alf Baird: Righty ho. Thanks very much. First of all, I would say that I come at this from a different angle from yourselves as journalists and or lawyers looking at the law and precedent. And I come at things as an academic. So I look at applications of theory. So applying theory and then developing theory, which is what I did in the book Dun Add. And I've brought copies of it for you because the findings there are — basically I didn't come with a particular view on independence when we had the referendum in 2014. But I was interested to study it because I wasn't sure we were being told what independence actually meant. And what I found from the research was by theory — on independence, imperialism, cultural imperialism, linguistic imperialism, the demographic manipulation, colonialism, all its features, constitutional aspects, national ideologies, and the self-determination process. It was clear to me that independence was about decolonization. And this is what the UN tell us independence is about: decolonization. And for all the countries that have decolonized and became independent through self-determination, that is the process they've used. So it's a universal factor. This was not an issue in the Scottish independence debate because no one had ever undertaken a reasoned study of colonial society as Frantz Fanon would put it. You have to do that. The National Party tends not to do that. So it's left to intellectuals in the movement to put that together. So that's where I come from and that's where it's pushed — also the movement, the momentum in Liberation Scotland, looking at the failure of the political process because the political process in colonial societies always fails. It's always designed to fail. It will never allow the people to liberate from their oppression. And that's why what Dun Add means actually is "oppressed" in the Scots language. And I have used a lot of the Scots language here because fundamentally as the post-referendum study of Edinburgh University found after the independence referendum, it was largely an argument between people with identities of pro-British identity or English identities and Scottish identities. How are identities formed in post-colonial theory? They're formed through language and culture. Language and culture gives you national consciousness. And that means independence is a cultural emotion. It's not so much to do with political policies, strategies, implications of this, that, policies and so on. It's about a cultural emotion. And when you take it down to that level, most of the pro-independence people in Scotland are actually Scots

speakers, Scots language speakers. We're not taught our language, but that's a colonial procedure. We should be taught our languages in Scotland. We have indigenous languages, but we're not taught them. And we're prevented from learning them, and that is a typical colonial procedure that Scotland is still — and as we talked about, MacDiarmid would be one of the big advocates of a Scots language renaissance because that is what fundamentally gives the Scots their identity. And that's an important point. So there we are. That's pretty much it. The research that I did focused on all the imperial research I could find, the research, the theories on colonialism, imperialism and so on pointed in this direction. So that was the findings which I think is logical and it points also to the self-determination process at the United Nations.

Laura Webster: Very good. We kept that to three and a half minutes, so I'll give you the same to open your arguments there, Robin.

Robin McAlpine: And then I definitely won't need it. So: Scotland will become independent via the power of its people choosing that Scotland's future is as an independent nation state. Everything else is just noise.

Laura Webster: That was very short indeed.

Robin McAlpine: I've no — there's nothing else to add.

Laura Webster: I didn't believe that you were going to keep it that short.

Robin McAlpine: A democratic nation makes changes through the will of its people, full stop.

Laura Webster: Okay, so there's tons in there from both of you that I think we can get stuck on. First, the first thing I'd like to ask Alf is about your position on the union being a hoax. And that seems to be quite a big starting position for a lot of the arguments that you make around decolonization and whatnot. So is it possible that you can explain that a little bit more for people who aren't familiar with that idea?

Alf Baird: Absolutely. Most colonized peoples were handed treaties, usually worthless, always violated. So Scotland was no different in that sense. We know the history of the treaty and the research done by Salvo and Liberation Scotland unveiled quite a lot of that research about the coercion at the time of the treaty and the equivalent that was paid out to the members of the parliament at the time. So it was under coercion and it was an annexation as we know from Professor Robert Black's findings. It was an annexation, a takeover, and pretty much most of the European countries at the time considered it an unlawful annexation for decades after the treaty. France, Spain, Sweden, also the Vatican too all had their opinions in that regard and reports that the treaty was a violation and an annexation. What it comes under in terms of international law it draws us towards the territorial alienation law, the law of territorial alienation. So it's about reframing what independence means in that sense. Territorial alienation is also regarded as an annexation, is regarded as colonialism. It's extraction of your territory. It's about exploiting your wealth, your resources are exploited. But colonialism as we also know is about other factors. It's — colonialism is based on psychology. So people like Fanon and others, psychologists, explained it in that sense. It enables a people who are colonized to believe — some of them, some groups of them that crave dependency according to Césaire, it's Fanon's teacher — was that these people deny colonialism exists. They deny it exists. That's more the assimilated groups within colonialism, the middle class, the bourgeoisie, the more privileged elements of the people who become part of the system, part of the racket. Whereas we've got the rest of the people and Scotland lives in a — we have a country

today with half the people living in or close to poverty. We have an underdeveloped economy, zero growth. We have a lack of capacity for shipping, for exports and so on. We have a GDP half the level of other north European countries. We have a government spending in Hollywood which is one third that of Denmark or Norway or other countries. Even if you include some aspects of reserved spend which is very difficult to figure out — reserved spend in Scotland apart from nuclear submarines, which nobody in Scotland wants. So there is what we found in our research in Liberation Scotland and Salvo was that the markers of colonialism are quite clear and these markers included occupation, military occupation, especially after the war in 1745–46 which was a war of independence but narrated differently. And then we have cultural erasure. Cultural erasure in cultural imperialism comes into a colonized people. So we have the culture of the dominant anglophone culture, which is — cultures come in linguistically. That's why all peoples in self-determination conflict are linguistically divided. Scots are no different. First it was the Gaelic speaking people who were cleared out. Then the Scots have never had their language taught to them, so they don't know they have a broad Scots language in their head. And it comes from the soul as well, as Billy Kay would say. Language comes from the soul, but it's the basis of your identity. Without the Scots language, there is no Scots identity as such. There's no national identity without indigenous language, and that's true for all peoples around the world. So we have the displacement as well. 4 million people exited Scotland, a lot by transportation, a lot as political prisoners in the 18th century, then clearances, then organized transportation, indentured labor, and then also Empire Resettlement Acts funded by the London government to clear Scotland. At the same time, we have a meritocracy coming in that's anglophone and an elite that's largely anglophone and made anglophone through the schooling and the education system. So you have an elite education, an elite and a bourgeoisie then, middle class that is fundamentally culturally and linguistically different from the mass of the people. But that displacement is part of — is part of what they call in colonialism the banishment of the natives. That comes with all colonial societies that are gradually replaced by another culture, another people, especially at the meritocratic elite level. And all of that is happening at the same time as economic extraction goes on. So the wealth of Scotland is sucked out, has always been sucked out. A hundred years ago in the stated figures of government spending for London for Scotland showed that Scotland only retained about 25% of its revenue. 75% were retained by London for what they called imperial services, which if you factor that in today, that demonstrates where our GDP is lagging compared to other North European nations. Our GDP is lagging about 50% of most of the top performing nations. So the question is: how does that happen? Is that the cost of colonialism? If that is the cost of colonialism, it's well over 100 billion pounds a year, that GDP gap.

Laura Webster: Well, Robin, I've heard you make similar arguments around wealth extraction and Scottish culture. So would you agree that Scotland is a colony on that basis?

Robin McAlpine: Don't care. Doesn't help us get anywhere. That's all the past. So I'm — I mean I'm agree with much of what was said there. I studied colonialism at university. I get it. It doesn't give us a route map. Doesn't take us forward. It's just talking about the past. And for me, the crucial thing is — and I'm really brutal about these things — my friends all support independence. They're all soft independence supporters. None of them have a university degree. They all hated colonialism. So I can only keep saying this: it doesn't matter what the history was. We won't go forward without the support of the people of Scotland. And I am a long way from being convinced that the colonialism frame is the thing that gets the people of Scotland supporting independence. I think some of the arguments do. I think the wealth extraction from Scotland — but we're doing that

to ourselves. And it's 20 years of SNP policy to sell all Scotland's assets and call it foreign direct investment. But this is still not the point. The point is we need to make it about Scotland's future, not what was Scotland, what can Scotland be? And if we don't persuade people that that's the Scotland they want and the one that they need to get into, we won't get there. And until we do that, everything else is just noise. It's just wasting time.

Laura Webster: Alf, how do you respond to that? Obviously, you're putting a lot of effort and resource into the decolonization argument, particularly the work that you guys are doing at the UN. How would you defend yourself against that?

Alf Baird: Yeah, I think post-colonial theory, which is different from classical colonial theory, it tells us what happens in a colonial society is when you have a dominant national party. You have a dominant national party that then becomes part of the system. The dominant national party elite are brought under the wing of colonialism, according to Fanon and others. And they build up their pensions. They feather their nests. They behave like a gang, essentially, according to Fanon. But they're essentially — they introduce laws that mystify the people, that make them look busy, but don't necessarily do anything. Ultimately, they can't do anything with the economy because territorial alienation means the economy is controlled outside Scotland. Its resources are extracted by entities that are outside Scotland largely. Everything is pretty much anything that can be sold is sold, whether it's grouse estates or seaports like the Clyde or the Forth or airports. Everything is sold and all the resources taken out at low cost. Because this is what colonialism is really about. The fundamental objective is economic extraction. And that means that the economy, it can't really grow at all. It can't function effectively. It's underdeveloped. Just look at — I mean, I'm in transport for 40 years and in shipping globally and I was studying countries all over the world, their ports. And I look at Scotland, we are a less developed country compared to many of them. We don't have — we've not had any major investment in our major ports in my lifetime. And China was building a new port every year during its economic growth spurts and growing at 8% a year and its ports were growing at 20% volumes of containers a year. We were just sitting with absolutely nothing. So there's no initiative to develop the economy. The economy is about serving the mother country. So a colonial colony is about serving the mother country. Everything is sucked out cheap — oil, gas, electricity, anything you can, agriculture, seafood, everything sucked out relatively cheap and everything comes in at very high cost because we only have one supply chain and that's through England, England's supply chain. So that's the mother country and this is the position Canada, New Zealand, Australia found themselves in 30, 40 years ago, even Ireland. And what's happened since then is with independence they reorient their trade away from the mother country. The mother country London no longer dominates the trade. So your trade — what we should be doing if we were avoiding the territorial alienation trap is we would be having cables across the North Sea for electricity, for oil and gas as well. We would have shipping connections, ferry connections wouldn't be a problem. And I worked on that project and could see that the civil servants were not keen on it. They wanted everything to go down. So everything has to go down via London. It's the Galeano thing about the open veins of Latin America. Everything has to go through the colonial center. And that's what limits our GDP, our economic growth, our entrepreneurialism and the whole economy is just left in a derelict state.

Laura Webster: I think Robin would agree with most of that. And I think the place where there's maybe some disagreement between yourselves but also the wider independence movement is that that's all true but then how do we communicate that to voters and then how do you build upon that

as an actual strategy, right? Because you're saying that the process is decolonization, you're saying that the process is basically political education. So how do you go about doing that?

Alf Baird: Well, I think what various groups are doing is great because it's about communicating with the people what this is about. Liberation movements have to communicate with and with the people as well as to them. The problem we've had is we've had a liberation vehicle, the National Party, that's never done that recent study of colonial society. It doesn't know what independence really means. What independence really means — what I found is it's decolonization and liberation. If you don't know that you don't know the path to it. The path then points you — first of all it warns you about the colonizer's political straitjacket you're held in. You're held in a political straitjacket. You will never be let go free for as long as possible, certainly not under the domestic legal system and that's what we found in our discussions with the UN Human Rights Council and others, NGOs in Geneva and New York, is that the vehicle is international law. It's because, as Craig Murray would tell you as well, independence is not a domestic law matter, especially not when you're restoring sovereignty. You're restoring sovereignty, you're not seceding. You're restoring sovereignty that was taken unlawfully and without consent of the people. So this is the argument that is going into the legal aspects of international law. Decolonization is a matter of international law. It has to be taken away from the colonial power. The annexing power has no rights at all — has no rights to dictate and determine what people desiring self-determination do or how they do it. So this asking for permission from 10 Downing Street is a bizarre approach. It's not an approach that internationally would be understood by the hundreds or so colonies that have extracted themselves from colonial powers.

Robin McAlpine: Every one of those colonies became independent through a bilateral agreement with the former colonial power and none of them went to the United Nations. Every one of them had strong majority support among its population for its own independence and all of them were existing in non-democratic societies. We got a vote in 2014. We had the choice to leave. We voted to stay in the UK. That makes it a voluntary union now. So whatever you think about 2013, by 2015 we had chosen consciously and knowingly as a people to be part of the UK. So let's start from that point. We had our chance and we chose to stay. You can show a democratic will to stay in the UK by the majority of the Scottish population. We've never changed that. There is no country that's ever been made independent because of a vote in New York. And just to be absolutely clear about it, I don't want to become independent in New York or Vienna or Budapest or the Hague. I want to become independent in Scotland. I don't want to have to crawl to bureaucrats in New York and say "please make us independent." Now we can become independent and I keep hearing that they won't give us independence. Well, we haven't made them. Nobody's giving you anything. There's a pitiful thing that we get from this movement: "Oh we've got 50% plus one person, give us everything we want now." That's not how the world works. You've got to force them to give you stuff. And if we want to force people to give us stuff, we have to create a settled will. We have to show them that it isn't a technical victory, a technical win, a statistical anomaly that we are independent. We've got to get to the numbers that prove that Scotland can become independent. Now one of the things which I find very strange is this suggestion that the UK is good at keeping hold of its colonies. I think the evidence suggests otherwise. I think the UK has slippery fingers when it comes to its colonies. I think every single colony that rose up against it wandered straight out the door. And I think Scotland — colony or not — I think Scotland can do that as well, but not from 50%. It's a score. We want everybody in this movement wants to get handed the trophy on a nil-nil draw. And I'm sorry, that's not how the world works. We are not winning. We have not persuaded the public. We have to

persuade the public. When we're in a majority position, then we can start to whine about "oh they're not listening to us." But they've got — we've given them no reason to listen to us. We have never actually got a strong majority proven and established for Scottish independence. It keeps going up and down within the margin of errors of a nil-nil draw. And until we do that, we can't get out. Now I'm happy to discuss whether the word "colonial" is better than the word "winter electricity bills." I'm going to go with winter electricity bills because I think that's probably what wins the people of Scotland. You can take a shot at colonialism, but until we talk to them, we're not going anywhere. And every minute you spend in New York is a minute you're not spending in Scotland fighting for your independence. That's how I feel.

Laura Webster: How do you respond to that?

Alf Baird: Well, I think what I did say was — if you were to have a demographic event, it wouldn't be under territorial alienation because territorial alienation means there is no democracy in this country. There is no democracy. And that's from the international legal perspective. We have to remember as well with population displacement, 4 million Scots have left, have been pushed out of this country through lack of opportunity and through forceful measures and other measures as well. So the population today is not the natural population of this territory as it would have been. For example, its population probably would have been similar to Sweden had it not been subject to colonial and population displacement. So we have a voting base that's also fundamentally affected by the conditioning of the society through the behavioural aspects that I point out in the book — cultural imperialism, the education system, the linguistic system that emphasizes certain aspects of the society and the values of the colonial power essentially are pushed forward at all times. So the identity of the people is confused in a colonial society. This is why it's important to do an analysis of a colonial society to understand what the makeup of the population is and how that affects them. The no vote, for example, when I was looking at it in looking at the Edinburgh research, Edinburgh University post-referendum research, it was quite clear that it was split linguistically largely. People with more anglophone and certainly with a more British identity, either English or people from the bourgeoisie or the middle classes in Scotland and so on, they tended to vote no. And the ordinary Scots people — and we know this from the outturn in the schemes in Scotland, which I come from originally — they came out for that one occasion to vote. They don't see the point in voting any other time. And in fact, the people who don't vote in Scotland, the large numbers of people that don't vote in general elections and regional elections, is — I think that's not an unsensible approach because under territorial alienation where your territory is controlled externally, your resources are extracted externally and so on, you don't have any democracy really. The other aspect here is the referendum — it doesn't have to be run by the UK. Under territorial alienation, it shouldn't have anything to do with a referendum on self-determination. It should be independently run. It should be run by the people here. It could be run under the auspices of the UN, for example. The UN might also agree to other criteria about the qualification because let's remember we're forced through the Scotland Act to use a local government franchise for national elections. That is completely irregular globally. Nobody uses a local government franchise for national elections, never mind constitutional referendums. Constitutional referendums, as we know from the Brexit referendum as well, was limited to certain people within the UK. And that is a norm throughout the world. So it's not something abnormal that we would say, but it needs — if you're going to go for a referendum, you need it properly run, properly managed, and outwith the control of 10 Downing Street because under international law, they shouldn't be involved in that.

Robin McAlpine: So there is no such thing as international law when it comes to domestic law? They're all notional. It hasn't been signed into domestic law. It isn't recognised here. It's only a notional thing. There is no such thing as a body of international law. Have a quick look at Israel. Come and talk to me about international law. So I've got to say there's a couple of things there I do disagree with. So where I don't disagree — well, actually I do slightly. I think you're underestimating the population loss in Scotland. If we had maintained Scotland's population and proportionate to the average increase in Europe, we'd probably be closer to 15 million and not 4 million missing, more like 10 million. Two wars and two massive periods of depopulation after those two wars absolutely gutted Scotland. But even more than that, it's who left and who died. It was young men that died in the war. So that kills a second generation. All the kids that they would have had, they didn't have. And it was young families that left for the new world. And so their kids didn't come along. So it's not just the people we lost. It's the children and the families they would have had that we would have got. And it is heartbreaking. It's tragic. The only country in Europe who depopulated faster than Scotland is Romania. That was because of all the things that happened there. So yes, absolutely that's the case. So we've now got two options. We can either get a time machine and go back before that happened and we can get on with it. So I'm in favour of getting on with it, right? The next thing I disagree with is that the UK isn't democratic. It is. And the UK doesn't run its elections. The Electoral Reform Services or others do. And they've got a very high regard internationally. They are honest and they are reliable results. So we can all discuss the terms of what the question is or the franchise. We can discuss that. That's what happened in the Edinburgh Agreement, but I don't agree that they're not reliable elections, and they are. And it's also — the UN is not going to run a referendum in the UK. It's just not going to. This is not going to happen. There's no chance this is going to happen. So I don't know why we talk about it. So once again, I'm not even interested yet about the referendum. People keep talking about referendums. The vast majority of countries that become independent don't have referendums. I keep saying this. People keep talking to me and say, "what do you think the most likely route or direction to independence is?" And if it hadn't been for us going on and on and on about referendums, which has now more or less trapped us into holding a referendum because we just talk about it all the time, it's a great delaying mechanism for the other side. If it hadn't been for us, the most likely route to independence is what I would have called the tap on the shoulder. We would have got to 60% consistently, with the tap on the shoulder of Westminster saying "it's over, guys, and let's negotiate a separation agreement." That's how — nobody else did it by referendum. That's how all the other countries left the UK. And I think that's the route that we would have probably have been more likely on balance to have taken. We've said referendum so many times we've put a gun to our heads. So now we're going to have to go through a referendum, I suspect. Now I've spent 10 years saying to folks "shut up about referendums." Nobody listened to me. So now we've more or less trapped ourselves into a referendum. But the referendum isn't the important bit. The referendum is the technical signing of the paperwork at the end. The important bit is the public support. You don't become independent on 51% support. Nobody becomes independent on 51%. It doesn't happen. Independence comes from the settled will of a majority of the people over an extended period of time. Everything else is just noise. So again, the question then is how do you win them over? And I agree we are getting wealth extracted from this country left, right, and center. But that's the Scottish economic development establishment as much as anybody else. I keep reminding people: head of development in the Scottish government was Peter Mandelson's right hand man at Global Consulting, his global consulting company. They are here selling Scotland to the highest — no, not even the highest bidder, just to whoever's the first to say "we'll take that." We're about to do it with data centers.

Massive, massive amounts of Scottish resource is going to be handed straight to non-tax paying US oligarchs aligned with Trump. Why? Nobody knows. Nobody can make any sense of it because nobody knows why we're actually doing this. So we do enough to shoot ourselves in the foot. But — and I'm going to say this every time — in political theory and campaign strategy theory, they've got things that they call first, second, and third order subjects. So a first order subject is something you're dealing with now. So yes, rent, yes, heating, but it's also parking, potholes, your kids' nursery provision, all these sorts. And those are first issue problems. Then you get second issue problems which we feel and directly impact on us, like the economy or global war or whatever. And second order worry us and we think about them but not on a daily basis, not on a minute-by-minute basis because we're not dealing with them on a day-by-day way. And then things like independence and particularly — I mean colonialism is probably fourth order, but independence — these tend to be third order subjects because they are not happening and they are there in the air, but they never become real and we don't give people a reason to engage with them, so they stay third order. Now we've got to turn — I mean the basic theory in this, and this is why I get so frustrated. None of this is complicated. This is just how everybody that's competent on the planet does it. You've got to turn a third level issue into a first tier issue. That's how you win. That's it. You've got to make independence about heating. You've got to make independence about nursery schools. You've got to make independence about parking places. I'm not joking. That is how you win an independence campaign. You've got to make it a first order issue. Now, where I think we probably disagree — because I mean I'm not fundamentally disagreeing with a lot of your historical analysis. I disagree with some of it, but I'm not fundamentally disagreeing with it. It just isn't relevant because it's like — that's a fourth order issue. That falls into the category of nobody ever thinks about this ever. I mean like never. "What were you up to?" "Oh, it was a terrible morning. I couldn't get parked." "Oh my god, I was worried about colonialism." It just — this doesn't happen. This is not how the universe works. So you can all convince yourself that this is how the universe works, but it's not. What you have got to do if you want to get people to sit up and pay attention and change their mind is give them a solution to a first order problem. The first order problem is how do I heat my house? A first order problem is — now, there is another factor in this and I can talk about this for hours, but I don't want to because I don't want to get into too much arcane detail here, which I can do for hours. I just want to get across this one message. But there is another important factor here which is — and this is about the cultural confidence element which again is really important, but it really works like this. If you don't begin with that cultural confidence, the rest is pointless. You have to have that first of all, which is to say you have to want to believe the independence could work. If you don't really want Scotland to have a chance of being a successful independent nation, you'll never ever support independence. So the question is where do we sit with that? And the answer is that there is at least comfortably 60% of the population who believe it, who want to believe Scotland could be independent. There's probably about an arcane percent who would quite like to sort of believe it, but their barriers are bigger. So I agree, let's build up cultural confidence. In fact, I've been saying for 10 years that we lost last time because of confidence. It's a confidence issue. The public said "we like the idea in principle, but we're looking at you lot, and you look unprepared." And I'd love to say they were wrong, but they weren't. And they said "we're not confident you can deliver what you see." And I mean, is that unfair? Was watching the performance of the Scottish government recently — did went wrong. So it's — the confidence is for real, and they do. We need to be confident ourselves. They need to be confident in their nation. They need to be confident in themselves, their communities. They need to be confident in the case, and they need to believe that we can deliver. So building confidence is important, and cultural confidence is a key

part of that. I had a half conversation with one of our Welsh contacts early in the week, and we were going over the enormous cultural resources in the three Celtic nations. I can't ask everybody up here, but I was just getting all the insight on which of the Irish — sorry, the well-known Welsh actors is pro-indy, nearly pro-indy — had come out, the whole thing. So I'll tell you afterwards. It's pretty cool. But I don't think it's for me to be outing all these people there. So I'm all for cultural confidence. I think it's really important. I think we should use that to boost things. And indeed, I would do a hell of a lot more in our own language, our own words, our own tone, our own spirit. I am one of the people that's 100% for getting UNESCO protection for our Scots Morning Roll, which is one of the great human inventions of all time. The Morning Roll and hangovers were made for each other, and I do not think they can be bettered. I'm all for these things, but this is the tone with which you make an argument. It's not your argument. Your argument has to be first order, or you lose. And we're not making a first order argument.

Laura Webster: Okay. I want to try and get your response to the kind of central part of Robin's argument here, which is that we have to build up the popular support. And I think this is what we keep coming back to. Why would it be more important to get an external opinion than build up the support of the people? Because Robin is saying — it's true, the polls maybe they move around a bit, but we're between 50, 52, maybe 53 on a good day percent for in support of independence. And so is it not the case that we do need to push that further before we take other steps around strategy?

Alf Baird: I think in the decolonization literature, it's very important that the people understand their condition. If they don't understand their condition, they won't desire independence. That's the problem. They need to be informed of their predicament, their condition, which we would argue is a colonial condition. There's also enormous amount of violations of human rights in this country. The people are suffering from not just cultural and political, but also the right to self-determination is currently being prevented. Rights to free speech, cultural rights, indigenous rights, language rights. Although the government has recently brought in the Scots Language Act, there's no resources for it and there's no teaching for it. There's no teaching mechanism for it. So that's fundamentally hopeless in that sense. So people have to be aware of what their condition is. If they don't know what their condition is — and remember that colonialism is based on psychology. It's based on psychology. And so you have to understand what is that colonial mindset about? And people have been starting to write about it recently a bit more, people in the independence movement trying to understand it. It's been written about in the Irish context quite considerably, the Indian context, the Kenyan context, even the Welsh context. It's been written about. The colonial mindset is one of the major barriers to getting people to vote yes. It's a psychological condition we're dealing with. It's not a political condition. It's not a condition — do you want to — you if you're going to be better off will you vote yes or whatever. It's a psychological condition you're dealing with. So we might remember the people who we know that would vote no last time and they said it doesn't really matter how Scotland's going to be performing financially, whatever. It could be the richest country in the world, which Macron said it would be at one point. But they would still vote no. So you have to understand why they do that. Why the half of the people really vote no. It's not —

Robin McAlpine: Tops, maybe 25.

Alf Baird: Yeah.

Robin McAlpine: No, that's really — that is really important. That is about 20, 25% of the population.

Alf Baird: It's just important to understand what we're dealing with here. That it's not just a political aspect that we're dealing with. It's a condition that comes through three centuries and more of colonial domination. Domination by another culture. That's why independence is a cultural emotion.

Laura Webster: So let's say that the UN come round and they say "we hear your arguments, we accept Scotland is a colony." What happens then? What is the plan from Salvo, from Liberation Scotland? That's the tangible plan.

Alf Baird: Well, there's lots of mechanisms that Liberation Scotland are looking at in terms of human rights. There's a whole range of mechanisms. There's a whole range of laws that actually apply to Scotland that are not being pursued at the moment. We are all volunteers.

Laura Webster: Could you give me an example? Because the Universal Declaration of Human Rights makes quite clear that the existing nation state is the unit of self-determination, not any sub part.

Alf Baird: But what it also tells you is territorial integrity is only respected so long as self-determination rights of minorities is observed. And this is something —

Laura Webster: [interjecting] — us a referendum. That's —

Alf Baird: No, but you're having a referendum that's an opinion poll really. It wasn't a referendum. And you're still depending on a foreign state to enact legislation which defines what you look like.

Laura Webster: It's not a foreign state. It's a state of which we are a member. Whether we want to be or not.

Alf Baird: You might say that, but our advice and our analysis — well, Professor Black —

Laura Webster: — that you're saying the UK is a foreign country.

Alf Baird: What I'm saying is there's no union. The union wasn't — it's an inoperable treaty. It's never been implemented. England continued — if you stop it, let me speak. England continued after the union. Scotland was dissolved. England's whole system of government continued. Its members continued. There were no elections. There was no new GB parliament created. It was just simply England's parliament rebranded and annexed. And that's what these other member states — what we are finding in the evidence now published on the Salvo for Scotland blog — it shows that all these other states in Europe knew that this was an annexation. That's why they continued to support the Scots monarch as well as the Scots kingdom. So we know that that was annexation. That argument will, I believe, be taken to international law.

Robin McAlpine: There's no international law. It doesn't — it's not binding. International law — binding. It's just —

Alf Baird: — complete — always ignore it.

Robin McAlpine: No, but it's not binding. It doesn't matter whether it exists. It's not binding. You can't enforce it.

Alf Baird: But what we know is that this can make quite a considerable difference to people's knowledge about the reality. If you don't understand the reality —

Robin McAlpine: So how many years are you going to spend getting a legal judgment so we can come back and educate Scotland on 300-year-old legislation?

Alf Baird: — elected every five years on the promise of a referendum that never happened.

Robin McAlpine: Oh, I mean — and I agree with you, a referendum is not essential.

Alf Baird: I'm not defending — I'm not defending — I mean the reason why we are who we are is because we spent the last 12 years not asking people to support independence but asking to support the SNP. That's why we are who we are.

Robin McAlpine: The last three elections have all been promises for referendums. So you have got several mandates built up which are violations of international law.

Laura Webster: I'm going to jump in because I want to touch on that point of the SNP and the Scottish government. Now I was at the SNP conference. I met an awful lot of members who are also members of Liberation Scotland, of Salvo and supporters of that cause. And so I want to come to you first and ask why do you think that the mainstream political pro-independence parties haven't engaged with this? I've barely seen them engaged with it at all.

Alf Baird: Well, the fundamental reason that post-colonial theory tells us is the dominant national party, right, it takes a different direction. It takes the people up blind alleys. It lacks innovation on the key objective, the most urgent matter which is freeing the people. It lacks any incentive to do that. It becomes part of the racket. It is brought under the wing of colonialism. These are big payments, big salaries they're getting. It's just becomes, as some people have observed, an independence industry where people are earning money out of this industry, but they're never going to deliver any liberation. Fundamentally, they don't understand what independence means. They're not preparing any ground for independence. There's no ground being prepared — currency, transport, anything. There's no ground being prepared. So they don't have an expectation that they're going to deliver independence. It's not their objective. And they are actually constraining the movement. And that's why we've had the rupture in the movement because that's also what happens in the theory. The National Party creates the rupture by taking the people up a blind alley. So you get split movements. You get new national parties created. You get new vehicles for liberation. People then understand the reality a bit more closely. We didn't understand what independence was about in 2014. Nobody told us what it was about. So now we understand it a little bit. A lot of people are understanding what colonialism really means, whether it's psychological, economic, cultural, political. It's all these dimensions and more. So we have to understand that and stop playing the game that just — you know, another political strategy might win the day when it really won't within the constraints of a colonial administration and English law which always is dominant against anything coming out of Scottish courts.

Laura Webster: I'm keen to hear your thoughts on this idea of more SNP members and people involved in the independence movement joining groups like Liberation Scotland. I hear from people all the time saying "oh why aren't you doing more coverage?" And certainly a lot of the members at SNP conference were frustrated that senior figures weren't engaging with Liberation Scotland. First of all, why do you think more people in the movement are siding up to this? And second of all, why do you think that the leaders in the movement aren't engaging with it?

Robin McAlpine: So, the "why are people siding up?" When you see more people — I mean, we are shrinking on a daily basis. There's fewer and fewer of us. There's a wonderful Far Side cartoon

where two penguins and a polar bear dressed as a penguin and one of the penguins says to the woman, "did there used to be more of us?" And I kind of feel that quite a lot. Every time I look at the window, there's fewer of us about. People are also getting more and more frustrated. So, when people get frustrated, they grasp for things. Why is the political parties not taking this seriously? Now, this is harsh and I'm really sorry to say this, but I have never met a single person that's not a member of Liberation or Salvo that thinks this is realistic. I mean, I've talked to lawyers, KCs, I've talked to political strategists, senior politicians, I know decolonialist theorists. They don't believe this is a credible route. I don't know anybody who thinks there's any chance this is going to happen at all. And the reason why — and I'm just going to be dogmatic — there's absolutely no chance this is going to happen. There is no chance, zero chance that a vote at the United Nations is going to be the methodology in any way via which Scotland becomes independent. We will do it here among ourselves with our own hands here. That's the only way we'll become independent. Why aren't people taking it seriously? Because you can't force any of the things that you're talking about. There is no court which will hear this. There is no court which can impose this. If the UK is really as pig-headed as people say, then a declaration from a non-binding court, which doesn't exist, but if it did, in the United Nations will not be taken anymore seriously than anything else. And my major question is: why don't we try to win over the people of Scotland first? I don't understand why it is there's always something else to do first. The SNP's always had one thing to do before we actually start to win over the people of Scotland. And I'm afraid for me this is the same — but we'll just do this colonial decolonialization thing, which might take us four years, and then we'll come back and start talking to the people of Scotland. And I keep saying, what is this constant reason, this constant search for one more thing to do before we actually talk to the people that matter? And that's what frustrates me. I don't understand what it is that is going to shake us out of our torpor and actually start campaigning. That's my question.

Laura Webster: Robin, you talk a lot about the need for people in the movement to work together and for more unity in the movement. And it does strike me that you are pretty strongly opposed to this particular group, to this particular organization. I mean, I can imagine that readers listening and watching will say, "well, that's a bit hypocritical, is it not?"

Robin McAlpine: No. No, and I think there's space for everything. I'm not saying don't do it. I'm just saying it's not going to work. But these are different things. I'm a pluralist. I believe in pluralism. I believe that let a thousand flowers bloom. Let's try lots of things. I'm all for it. It doesn't mean that they're going to work. And I'm not trying to expel people from the movement, and I'm 100% for unity. I'm very much hoping that what we can do is agree that we have to persuade the public. If you guys want to try and do that through the power of the colonialization frame, I'm not against it. I think you'll find more people will deliver the electricity bill leaflets, but I'm not against doing that. We've got to be united. We've got to come together. And it's not about lack of respect, and it's not about me not recognizing the commitment or the seriousness or the sincerity of other people. I've just got to make a judgment because — again, this is kind of tough for me to say sometimes, but I do this for a living. This is my career, my whole career, political strategy. I can't look at something and pretend it's going to work when it's not. I am not going to patronize people by pretending that it is. Now, I'm not saying it's not part of the patchwork. I actually think we could probably do quite a bit of education roundabout Scotland, about Scotland's history, no question about it. I felt a degree of horror in the summer because I was in Egypt on holiday, and everybody — every waiter, every kid begging outside the monuments — they know their history. They can tell you about their history, their culture, and we can't. And I think it's a mistake and I think it's an error.

And one of the great frustrations for me is I've never found a nationalist government less interested in Scottish culture, Scottish history, Scottish arts. I mean, I don't understand it. It's the Labour Party is more interested in Scottish history and Scottish arts than the bloody SNP in government. I do not understand it. Well, actually I do, but it's a bad habit they got into after they tried to denationalise themselves in the aftermath of the referendum. And I think it's a terrible mistake. So I'm not — these are all things I feel strongly about. The reason why we're talking about MacDiarmid earlier on is I'm a trustee of Browns Bank, MacDiarmid's Cottage, and we want to use it. I think there's never been a more important moment to rekindle the spirit of MacDiarmid, both in terms of he's using Scots language as a radical tool, but also in his dogged trouble making. This country needs a lot more trouble making right now. It is complacent and flabby and it's lost its ambition and we need to stand up and we need to do something. But — and I'm going to say this again a thousand times over — if your house roof is leaking, the place that you should be is up in your attic fixing your roof, not away in Strasbourg having a conversation about the legality of league of tiles. So get up and get your roof fixed. We've got so much that this country is needing just now. And independence is a key part of it, but we are going to get that by being here, working here with the people of Scotland and getting things done. And I'm not trying to say I have all the answers. I am trying to say I know what the path is because there's only one path in democracy, and that's to work through the people, end of story. Unless you're incredibly rich. If you're incredibly rich, you can sneak around the back and buy favours. For the rest of us, we've got to work through the system that's there.

Laura Webster: Alf — there is a criticism that I often see of Liberation Scotland and Salvo when we're talking about decolonization. And I would say this is from probably more of the left-leaning side of the independence movement, which is to say that Scotland was a willing and in fact enthusiastic participant of the British Empire. And thus to call it a colony is to belittle the crimes that were done under Scotland's name. I mean, you look at the amount of people in parts of the Caribbean with surnames that are Scottish surnames — that didn't happen by accident. So is it really fair to call Scotland a colony when in fact it as part of the British Empire had colonies?

Alf Baird: Mhm. Well, that's a good point. There's a difference but as I mentioned earlier between classical colonialism and post-colonial theory. Classical colonialism tends just to focus heavily on the slavery that occurred and so on. And the Scots were also enslaved as well having been sold and in that context. But people on the left in the theory often misunderstand post-colonial colonialism. They think it's a case of independence for — a case of left versus right, socialism versus capitalism, these kind of things. So it's a political ideological thing, whereas colonization is a racist ideology. We have to remember that. It's about subordinating one group of people, a group or other groups as well, and putting another culture above them and dominating with that culture. So there is a racist element which also transforms into what's known as internalised racism or appropriated racial oppression. I have a whole chapter on it. But it's to do with also with ethnicity, which is important in the Scottish context and any self-determination context because the solidarity of an independence movement is based on the oppression of the oppressed ethnic group. And this is important to understand. So there is that. We have to remember also that colonial armies were a common theme throughout the British Empire. Those colonial armies in Africa, India was the biggest one, Ireland and Scotland. So Scotland's colonial armies were used — well, they were used as colonial armies. England's colonialism started well before the Union. It started well before the Union and it just continued on and as I said England was just simply rebranded as UK. But that's — and this continued with its parliament. What was also common theme throughout the whole of the Empire was they were all subject to English law, not Scottish law. So there is that feature as well and

Scotland, as Professor Robert Black said, Scotland's legal system has been subordinated ever since. The classic example — well, the key examples are obviously the House of Lords and now the Supreme Court as well. So there's misunderstandings about colonialism. Yes, elites are always involved in colonialism. Native elites were always involved because colonialism is a cooperative venture with native elites. It's still the same today in Scotland. It's still a cooperative venture. We know who they are. They tend to own quite a lot of the land and other aspects and so on. So we've got that legacy as all colonies have but you'll find a lot of literature in Ireland and also in Wales — Adam Price, Wales, the first and last colony. They're no different from what I found essentially but it's just a careful analysis finds this out. It reveals the reality to the people and that's what's important because without revealing the reality the people will never know their true condition and if they don't know their true condition they won't find the only remedy which is liberation.

Laura Webster: I'd like to get you to respond to one of those points and then I'm going to get us to do just a quick wrap up because the time has flown by. And I'm curious to know your thoughts on this point that Scots effectively are victims of a kind of colonial racism. Do you think that that's something that's happened?

Robin McAlpine: Yes. I would argue that it's cultural. We're not really a different race with the same ethnic racial backgrounds. I'm not sure racism is quite the word. And I also think that there are — I mean, I kind of don't want to go into this because, like I say, there's an awful lot you can talk about the colonials and there are big differences in Scotland. So for example, Scotland is — if you do take the colonial frame, we're different than other colonies in that we heavily influenced the host. So there's yes, there's an anglification of Scotland, but there's quite a lot of Scottification of England. And you don't get that in the same way with other colonies. And I also think that it's difficult for us to engage with our past and its colonial roots. And I always point out — to our shame it's not called the Clue Clocks Association. We had very — the other thing that was different is it's absolutely true that rank and file Indian soldiers were conscripted into armies that colonised other places. But the difference is that the Scots led the colonisation of some of these places. So it wasn't Scots working under an English rule. Scotland actually did colonising as Scot — as the leader was the Scot. So I think there's all these sorts of differences. But my whole point being is: magic, let's do a history podcast. But what I think is more relevant is that if you were saying that people have to have their condition explained to them — I promise you the worst thing you can possibly do is sit down somebody and say, "now can I explain your condition to you?" That is not how to open a conversation with somebody. If you have to explain someone's condition to them, you have a major, major problem. But we don't because they understand because they're cold and their rent's due and they are struggling to get their kids into a university which isn't getting slashed left, right, and center and the labour market is absolutely rubbish. And this is the live material of a real liberation movement, not 300-year-old stuff, not debates about what happened in the past. The material from which a liberation movement is made is the experience of the people living in that country today and now. And you have to take that material and you have to shape it into a tool which breaks you free. That's what we're not doing and the more time we spend talking about absolutely anything other than that is just us wasting more of our own time. We have got to start talking to people on their terms, not on ours.

Alf Baird: I think we have to remember that Liberation Scotland is not a political vehicle. It's a voluntary organization of ordinary people in Scotland who have become — obviously they've understood that the political situation has its limitations. We know that through post-colonial theory

where you depend on the political graciousness of colonial power, you might be waiting a very long time. So there is a need for that better understanding. What I found in the research though by applying theory to the situation in Scotland — remember that's the only theoretical framework on Scottish independence that I've seen in a Scottish university. I'm not surprised at that because if you look at — what part of the research finds that only 10% of the academics at the ancient universities are Scottish, 90% are not. So there's very few Scottish academics around, certainly at professorial level and very few even doing PhDs these days because we don't fund enough people to do it. So our people are relatively underdeveloped and lacking opportunity, and that was always one of the reasons for the out-migration. So I think we have that legacy, but the people that have moved along from supporting independence to being more active within Liberation Scotland and Salvo — and Salvo is an educational program, remember, that's about taking the education, about the knowledge, about the history and heritage of Scotland, but also bringing it up to the present situation geopolitically and within the context of international law, which does exist, obviously, and Carnegie funded a building in the Hague for that purpose. So what we see is that movement, that rupture created by the SNP taking the movement into the blind alleys, consecutive blind alleys every five years or whatever, led to that rupture, and the shift from what was an independence movement to what we would call now a liberation movement. And that shift in mentality is about better understanding our oppression, our condition, which is an oppressive reality economically, culturally, politically, and so on. So it has all these factors involved in it, and that's where the understanding has to come about. What I would say is the people who understand this best are the people in the most difficult situations, the people living in poverty, people living close to poverty. They understand their condition. They understand readily their condition is colonial. They see themselves — the social and linguistic prejudice, the other discrimination that they suffer under, the Scots, whether it's housing, whether it's other aspects, employment, education, and so on. They see that on a daily basis. It's the more pampered parts of society in the colonial society, the middle classes, the elites, and so on, that are less — they are less taken by this. They're less — they can't see it necessarily, and they obviously hold the values of the colonizer. And the values of the colonizer are very important because included amongst these values is the crushing of the colonized, including their culture.

Laura Webster: Thank you very much, Robin. Thank you very much, Professor Alf Baird. I really appreciate both of you taking the time to come in. I don't know if either of you have changed your minds, but you never know. You may have influenced many of our listeners and readers to each side of your argument. I've really found it very interesting to take part in, and I look forward to our next debate. So, yeah, we'll be back next month with another debate. We've got all kinds of topics coming up. And we also are live on our normal National Podcast on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays at 1:00 p.m. So come and stay tuned, and you can get involved in the comments. And if you want to enjoy all of our wonderful podcasts and videos, they're available on YouTube or wherever you get your podcasts. So, thank you so much as ever, and you can head to the national.scot/subscribe to subscribe for just £1. Thanks for tuning in.

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