SCOTTISH INDEPENDENCE REFERENDUM BILL

WRITTEN SUBMISSION FROM MICHAEL FORBES SMITH

I am a Scot, born, bred and educated in Scotland. I served for seven years in the Gordon Highlanders, including over two years in Northern Ireland in the early 1970s, before becoming a member of the Diplomatic Service, where I supported Scotland’s economy and culture as aggressively as was proper. In my last posting I was appointed the first resident British Ambassador in Tajikistan when a new Embassy was established there after 9/11 at the direction of Jack Straw. I currently live in London.

As a native born Scot, who has served Scotland for the whole of my working life and continues to do so, there is a moral obligation upon the Scottish Executive or Government, whichever is the proper description, to permit me to vote in the referendum. The argument is not merely a sentimental one. If Scotland were to become independent, I would be required to make a choice, as to whether I became a Scottish or English citizen. That choice has both legal and fiscal implications of considerable gravity. Thus, by not having a vote in the referendum, although I am a British citizen of Scottish nationality, I have no say on the fundamental question of that nationality; which could potentially have severe negative financial and other implications for me personally.

It is therefore doubly inequitable that anyone who is not a Scottish national should have the right to vote in the referendum when I, as a Scottish national, cannot. This is not a parliamentary question. This is a nationality issue of the first moment and thus the proper franchise is for those nationals who are directly affected and certainly not the nationals of any other EU state. There is indeed an argument that English nationals should have a vote as the independence of Scotland will have significant effects on England, both politically, economically and in the international arena. I do not argue for that. But I do argue that the only proper electorate for this referendum is of all those, and only those, who can show, through their birth details, that they were born in Scotland. Any other franchise makes a mockery of any rational concept of a democratic vote. At a stroke the specious argument about the bureaucratic impossibility of identifying the electorate disappears: turn up on the day with your passport, or alternatively a birth certificate accompanied by photo ID. For those who could not return to Scotland for polling day – and it would be grossly unreasonable to demand that they should – I can see no insuperable bureaucratic difficulty in providing for postal votes for Scots resident abroad through the diplomatic posts, and in England any police station should be perfectly competent to issue postal voting cards and envelopes on verification of identity as described above.

I therefore urge you to re-consider what must appear to any objective observer a biased and politically motivated exclusion of those with an existential interest in the outcome while allowing the vote to others who have no such concerns and therefore do not have the commensurate interest to weigh the balance of factors with the care and attention this matter requires.