

AUTONOMY, NOT AUTOCRACY : GEORGE EUSTICE & SARAH NEWTON ARE WRONG

George Eustice and Sarah Newton are wrong. The campaign for Cornish devolution was not the product of Mr Prescott's regionalisation initiative – Mr Prescott made the mistake of many people in London by assuming that London 'logic' is the only logic, and that governance is about systems, not feelings. Good governments, like good carpenters, work with the grain. Mr P Had clearly not wielded a plane in many a long year! The Cornish campaign began in 1497, possibly earlier!

The North East regional campaign failed not because devolution is a bad idea, but because Mr Prescott insisted, despite all advice, that regions had to be of a certain size. What wrangled was a Government telling people they were to be 'fully integrated into macro-regions' with democratically elected assemblies that would not represent them! Democracy only works in places where people feel comfortable with the areas to be represented, which reflect their identities. Beware! Many macro-regional evangelists still lurk in quiet corridors and offices waiting to re-kindle its flame. Others are also at work trying to re-make the 'arranged marriage' of Devonwall.

Nobody in Cornwall has ever said that the devolution campaign, which focuses on the clear and easily understood concept of a 'Cornish Assembly', seeks separation or divorce from Britain, or to break the Union - this is rubbish put about by people who don't want to think carefully about how good governance works, or how good governance needs to embrace both history and geography – and feelings.

Cornwall's unique culture derives from its geography – its physical location, climate and natural features – they shape behaviours, relationships and activities – key cultural elements. Britain's most southerly point, with its rocky shoreline, metals and minerals, and knowledge, is a junction – where skippers make key navigational decisions. Look at the archaeology and heritage! Why, Christianity, in its journey North from the Mediterranean, stopped here for directions – hence Joseph of Arimethea naming My Lor'!

In our newly emerging digital world, dominated by the need to manage climate change, the Cornish position is no less pivotal. Stuck out, and natural traders, Cornwall has always been very well connected to the world around it – brains and curiosity make it so, that's our culture!

Cornish culture has also been affected by remoteness from London and the Midlands. This has led to chronic mistakes in governance, economic management, social policy, investment and equality which have left Cornwall exploited, misunderstood, mis-managed and unacceptably poor. Centralists say that peripherality makes no difference – experience tells us, as it told the Romans (and the Brits), that this is not so. Yet, London persists, which causes fragmentation, great cost to achieve least effectiveness, and Cornish disaffection. Why?

Because, Sarah and George, as well as never talking about cessation, or craving total independence, Cornish people, communities and institutions, want to contribute to the best of their not insubstantial ability to the wellbeing, resilience and evolution of Britain, Europe and the World – in all of which the Cornish have profound, personal interests. Climate change, 'peak' oil and globalism only serve to quicken this ambition – many of us see it as Cornwall's destiny. Its Cornwall's persistent exclusion, diminution and impotence we want to change – it's in the national interest!

Internally autonomous governance does not risk separatism – look at Guernsey and Jersey – both have strong, long-founded, legislative and fiercely loyal governments. The Guernsey model in particular inspires those in Cornwall who see governance as an evolving aspect of social development, not the imposition of authority. It is so clear that one-size-fits-all London policy is counter-productive – look at the mess in land-use planning, or the cost of trying to make the NHS and Local Government work together, or the travesty that was the RDA!

It is important for central governments to realise that distinctive regions (not bureaucratically delineated or politically expedient chunks of land but real, vibrant, identifiable and loved regions)

need clear, internally autonomous governance to evolve and to fulfil their potential – not to break away, but to ensure that the principles and overarching objectives of society are practically and equably achieved, fairly and democratically, in ways that fit with our different cultures – diversity being a key principle!

When you read between Sarah and George's lines they are actually saying this. But London's clearly getting to them! All this talk about the untried and untested Localism Act! Well you two, it's your job – and if the boys 'up England' cut up rough, then cut-up back! It's the Centre that needs educating – not Cornwall! Enlightened states should celebrate the nations within them – like organs in a body! Is that not what we tell China about Tibet, or the Kurds in Iraq? The Cornish just want to 'giss on!'

So, let's be inclusive – Stannators and second home owners, the Duke and St Petroc's! Let's bury the separatist tag! Let's talk together about the most intelligent way of sustainably governing this vibrant, distinct British region so that it can fulfil its potential and ensure equality of identity and opportunity for one and all – and then let's persuade the Government to enable Cornwall to enhance British culture and resilience by evolving our own, tailor-made governance – autonomy, not autocracy!

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Devolution is defunct – Cornwall must embrace its role in the UK

Cornwall Conservative MPs George Eustice and Sarah Newton believe Cornwall is best served by remaining a unique and dynamic part of the UK, not attempting to go it alone.

During the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, the Royal Barge leading the flotilla of boats up the Thames flew five flags relevant to the United Kingdom: England, Wales, Northern Ireland, Scotland and, yes, Cornwall. You only have to look at the number of St Piran's flags on display in the county to realise that Cornwall has a very strong sense of identity and pride.

Cornwall has always had a special place within the United Kingdom and has historically derived its real power through being enthusiastically British. During the industrial revolution, Cornwall was home to some of Britain's most successful inventors. The key symbol of Cornwall, the shield with fifteen gold "bezants", is said to represent the money raised by Cornish towns and villages to pay the ransom needed to free the Duke of Cornwall as long ago as the Crusades in the 12th century. It is from this legend that the motto, "One and all" comes and, even today, this Cornish emblem simultaneously represents both Cornish self-confidence and our unwavering commitment to the United Kingdom.

Recognising the historical context of Cornwall's special place within the UK matters if we are serious about giving it modern meaning. It is time to let go of the failed and divisive "assembly" agenda of the 1990s and focus instead on a forward-looking approach.

Fifteen years ago, Tony Blair argued for a whole new tier of costly and bureaucratic government in Britain which envisaged regional assemblies across the UK which would then deal directly with the European Union and bypass Westminster.

The idea was never popular. Wales only voted for more politicians by the narrowest of margins and the first big test came in 2004 when John Prescott tried to introduce a regional assembly in the North East. . A well organised, people's campaign inflicted a crushing defeat on the idea with nearly 80 percent of people said "no" to more politicians and that was the end of the assembly agenda.

Instead of clinging to this defunct devolution agenda, Cornwall must embrace a forward-looking approach. This should be less about paying for more politicians in a costly assembly and more about giving those Councillors we already have a greater say. Rather than espousing the politics of victimhood and isolationism, our agenda must project Cornwall as a distinct, self confident but outward-looking and enthusiastic part of the UK.

The new Localism Act provides a great vehicle for local communities in Cornwall to take over responsibilities from central government. It has also created a new "general power of competence" for all local authorities so that, rather than having to wait to be given permission to do anything by Whitehall bureaucrats, Cornwall Council can step up to the plate and come forward with innovative solutions to local problems and pitch for central funding to take control in new areas such as transport, housing and further education. It is good to see Cornwall Council rising to this challenge.

However, power must pass downwards at all levels: from Brussels to Whitehall, from Whitehall to Cornwall Council and from Cornwall Council to our parish and town councils. The formation of a unitary authority for the whole of Cornwall three years ago was always going to create a challenge for local accountability which was recognised at the time and was the reason that "community networks" were introduced. Longer term, we need to see more powers and a larger budget transferred to parish and town councils. While Cornwall Council has made a start handing over new powers to local councils there is more to do.

In ancient times, Cornwall had its own "Stannary Parliament" which performed a scrutiny role on the tax policies of the day. It fell into abeyance during the early 18th century but the principle might have a modern application within Cornwall. One idea would be to create a modern day "Stannary Chamber" made up of the Chairmen of all the parish and town councils to perform a scrutiny role at County Hall on local issues. The areas over which parish and town councils could have authority is already set out in detail in the 1972 Local Government Act but, in practice, Cornwall Council continues to take responsibility in many of these. You could even introduce the principle of "co-decision" when it comes to spending certain funds like the New Homes Bonus and the Community Infrastructure Levy where the agreement of both Cornwall Council and the parish council is required before funds can be spent. This would make the parish and town councils partners rather than mere stakeholders.

These are exciting times for Cornwall and we must take greater ownership of our destiny but without the divisive, political agenda of those who seek to undermine our place in the UK.

George Eustice is MP for Camborne and Redruth. Sarah Newton is MP for Truro and Falmouth