

CHAPTER X

MIGRATION AND UNEMPLOYMENT

*Scotland has a pool of labour which firms in the
South might envy*

A Cabinet Minister

1. *Emigration*

The Highlands and Islands have become depopulated through a long process which began with savage suppression and has been completed through greed and indifference and neglect. The same tendency to decline in numbers is to be found elsewhere, though in a lesser degree. The Border counties, in spite of the well-known toughness of their inhabitants, suffer from this wasting malady, as do also the Northern Isles – the Orkneys and Shetlands. Even in the rich industrial Lowlands the population, if it does not actually decrease, fails to increase in a normal way. The relative stagnation of industry which has been described earlier means more than a mere failure to increase material wealth. The resulting unemployment has caused many of the youngest and most vigorous men and women to seek their fortunes elsewhere. In economic decline Scotland could still survive; but a disproportionate drain on her resources of mind and character, great as these are, must mean in the end that Scotland will cease to be herself. It is fear of this that presses so heavily on those who care about the fate of their country.

The number of Scottish-born men and women living outside Scotland has been estimated at a million and a quarter – or about a fourth of her present population. Well over 600,000 of these are known to be settled in England. One authority has said that if we take into account the descendants of previous emigrants for three generations, the number of people with Scottish blood who live overseas (apart altogether from those living in England and Wales) must reach a total of twenty-five

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million – or five times the present population of the home country.

Even if some of these figures are exaggerated – and the second one does not profess to be more than a rough estimate – it cannot be denied that the number of exiles is disproportionate to the total present population. Nothing like this could be said of the southern half of the United Kingdom.

We can look at the situation in another way. In 1801 the population in Scotland was getting on for one-fifth of the population of England and Wales. In 1901 it was not very far short of one-seventh. By 1964 it had become less than one-ninth, and the process of decline is still going on. The rate at which the population increases in England and Wales is almost double the rate in Scotland. If the South of England is taken by itself, the rate of increase is said to be five times the rate of all the rest of Britain.

It may be replied that all this happens through the working of economic processes and is part of the inevitable price to be paid for the benefits gained from the Union with England. The price may seem rather heavy; but we shall be told in a politely jocular way that since the natural place for Scotsmen is at the top, they must necessarily gravitate to the centre of power and wealth. Perhaps we shall not even be spared the unprovoked rudeness of Dr. Johnson about the noblest prospect which a Scotsman ever sees – so often quoted as a gem of English wit. But Scotsmen do not complain that their compatriots may be led by the spirit of adventure to seek their fortune all over the world. What they resent is being forced to emigrate because they can find no work in their own country. This has been happening too long, and is happening now.

Like a human being, a country can give some of its blood with advantage to others and without serious loss to itself. But if this process is continued too far, it must result in anaemia, and ultimately in death.

2. *Unemployment*

The outstanding feature of the economic landscape in Scotland during the last fifty years has been the high rate of unemployment.

We need not go back to the nightmare period between the two Wars, though it is certainly not forgotten and has left a permanent scar. There is no comparison between what happened then and what is happening now, but the dreary fact remains that even in the Affluent Society and the Welfare State the rate of unemployment in Scotland has been consistently double that in the United Kingdom as a whole.

This way of describing the situation conceals the real disparity; for the United Kingdom as a whole includes Scotland and other regions of high unemployment like Wales and Northern Ireland. If comparison were made with England by itself, or – better still – with the favoured regions of the South, the rate of unemployment in Scotland must be at least three or four times as great. The character of Scottish unemployment seems also to be more oppressive: in November 1962, for example, it was stated without contradiction in the House of Commons that six out of every ten people unemployed in Scotland had been out of work for more than two months. This could not be said of the relatively few unemployed in the South of England.

Part of this unemployment may be caused by the way in which private English firms in times of difficulty close their Scottish branches or 'subsidiaries', whether these have been established by the firms themselves or are originally Scottish firms which have been taken over. But the modern system of centralised government and national corporations cannot be absolved of responsibility, direct as well as indirect. It may be mere coincidence, but the number of workers dismissed from the railways and the mines, together with the workers in the Shale Oil industry, which has been taxed out of existence, is not very far short of the total number of unemployed.

These body blows make the heart less sick than what may be described as a continual succession of jolts and jabs from which there appears to be no respite. Naval bases in Scotland are busy enough in time of war, but when the war is over they are dismantled and the ships are transferred to more agreeable quarters in the South of England. This is said to be necessary in the interests of economy; and we are told, no doubt in jest, that if Scotland had a permanent naval depot, some ships in the Royal

Navy would be manned entirely by Scotsmen, and even the British Navy cannot afford to have all its best men in a few ships. Royal Ordnance factories were closed at Dalmuir, Bishopton, and Irvine; naval establishments at Greenock, Dalbeattie, Invergordon, Rothesay, and elsewhere. British European Airways transferred maintenance work from Renfrew to the South; and so on and so on. The need for economy seems almost always to work to the disadvantage of the North.

Even apart from such large-scale economies the complaints about administrative action are many and various, as we have seen in earlier chapters. Here we must be content to give a typical, if very minor, example of the sort of thing that happens. Scottish buildings have traditionally been of stone, while the English practice is to use bricks. But Government buildings in Scotland have to be brick-built – on the alleged ground that bricks are cheaper: this may be true in England, but was not always true in Scotland. Even when stone is permitted, the type of stone is chosen on the basis of English experience; and then it is discovered, not surprisingly, that this type of stone has to be imported from England. Furthermore, by some curious coincidence, the ordinary rate per ton charged for moving Scottish stone on British Railways was, at least at one time, 25 per cent more than the rate charged for carrying Northumberland stone for similar distances. If this sort of practice prevails, it is no wonder that the trade of mason in Scotland should be in danger of extinction.

Complaints of this kind may, some of them, appear to be concerned with small matters, but it is no small matter if centralised administration always works in the same direction, not from any ill will, but from the inevitable tendency of English officials to base their decisions on English experience and on what is suitable for English conditions. Such decisions have indirect effects as well as direct ones. They set up chain reactions since the loss of income caused in Scotland acts unfavourably on other trades and so throws other people out of work besides those who are immediately affected.

This does not mean that a British Government will do nothing to counteract the damage done by its own sins of omission and

commission. On the contrary, it is prepared to make some attempt at stopping the leaks, especially when there is a General Election in the offing. The Local Employment Act of 1960 set aside large grants in order to bring industries to the regions which suffered most from unemployment. Of these special grants Scotland received more than the lion's share. This is sometimes used to show that Scotland is favoured at the expense of England and so has no ground for complaint. Welcome although these grants are, they are attempts to make good some of the losses suffered in the past. If you let a ship run on the rocks, it is no great favour to spend money in repairing the damage – especially when the money comes in the end from the unfortunate owners themselves. Without this help things would admittedly be even worse than they are, but new leaks are sprung as quickly as the old ones are stopped, and the population of Scotland has begun to decrease, not merely relatively, but absolutely. A policy with these results cannot properly be described as a success.

Some of these 'grants' may look more generous than they are. Many of them may be loans which have to be repaid at a high rate of interest. The amount freely given was said at one time to be about £200 for each new job created – less than would have to be paid for unemployment benefit.

3. *The 'brain drain'*

The unemployment figures for Scotland, serious as they are, conceal the true picture in another way. By the nature of the case they can take no account of the large numbers who have been forced to emigrate in order to find employment elsewhere. Without this enforced emigration the unemployment figures would be very much worse than they are.

Some of this emigration is unorganised – there are sad stories of isolated Scotsmen tramping the roads to the South in search of work. Some of it is organised by governmental action; some of it by private firms.

The village of Corby in Northamptonshire is a striking example. The majority of its inhabitants are now Scottish because in the depressed Thirties a large steel firm moved many

of its workers from the neighbourhood of Glasgow to the South. In this case the move was made in order to be near to some specially rich sources of iron ore, but it was none the less a blow to Scotland. Similar actions on a lesser scale and for less good reasons have the same unfortunate effect.

It is far more serious when emigration is organised by the Government itself. The uncontradicted allegation that the Forestry Commission refuses to let its Scottish graduates serve it in Scotland has already been noted; similar policies are said to be followed, if in a lesser degree, by various national 'corporations'; and a whole vista is opened up when a complacent Englishman proudly informs us that half the employees in a factory working for a public Board in Scotland are English. A better authenticated example of Government action in the strict sense is the case of the Royal Ordnance Factory at Dalmeir. When this was closed in 1958 skilled employees were transferred to the South. They had accepted 'the responsibility to transfer' under an agreement negotiated ten years before with trade union representatives, who were presumably mainly English. An example already mentioned is the organised transfer of Scottish miners to southern coalfields. At least in some cases redundancy pay was cut when an unemployed miner refused to move to England.

These transfers of skilled workers are a loss to Scotland far beyond the mere numbers involved. If under the present system the population of Scotland decreases steadily in relation to that of England, this is bad enough; but what is devastating is the decrease in quality. It is the best men who are taken away – the young men with their families, not the old; the skilled men, not the unskilled. This must in time produce an ageing population and an unbalanced economy.

On the higher levels of intelligence Government policy works even more disastrously in the same direction, though here its methods may be less obvious. A minor factor is the prevailing tendency to pay smaller salaries in Scotland than are paid in England. It is hard to see, for example, why a Scottish dentist should be paid so much less than an English one that he is unable to pay dental technicians, who in consequence have to

migrate to England; or again why Scottish teachers, even if better qualified, should be paid less than English ones. Scottish librarians are also grossly underpaid, partly, it is said, because there has been no time to pass a Library Act for Scotland such as has been enjoyed by England for some years. All such practices work against the interests of Scotland, but the greatest source of complaint is the unfair treatment of research. Nearly all government research departments – some say as much as 97 per cent – are located in England, especially in the South. Scotland may still produce far more than its share of graduates in science and technology, but it is said that nine out of ten can find no work in Scotland – they are compelled to leave if they wish to earn a living. The millions of tax-payers' money spent on the evolution of aircraft, radar, tanks, atomic weapons, guided missiles, torpedoes and so on go to establishments in the South. So too with less immediately practical institutes of research. Where there is money for these, the British Government appears to think first of placing them in Oxford and Cambridge and London, and perhaps in Manchester. Apart from a very few exceptions, almost always the result of violent agitation, Scotland comes last in the queue. When proposals were made in the World Health Organisation to establish an international centre of medical research in Edinburgh, these were met with a chorus of protests from the South of England.

We may hope that some of these charges are overstated. Even so, it is clear enough that through no fault of her own Scotland suffers from a 'brain-drain' far more serious than any drains of her material wealth and almost inconceivable anywhere else. This phrase has been used by English newspapers complaining that since the War some of our ablest scientists are tempted to work in America because of higher salaries and greater opportunities; but this loss is trifling in comparison with the loss suffered by Scotland through many years.

Englishmen can recognise clearly enough that it may be bad for England to lose her ablest sons, no matter what success they may achieve in exile; but they are strangely reluctant to accept the same principle for Scotland. When the Scots, in Parliament or elsewhere, complain of forced emigration, this is

commonly received with indifference or even irritation. If a Minister of the Crown expresses sympathy with Scotsmen who dislike being compelled to work in England, he is greeted with shouts of 'Why?' A vigorous Member of Parliament can loudly proclaim that the cure for unemployment in Scotland is to bring the Scots to England. Even in the House of Lords, where one might expect better manners, a noble peer can sneer at those who wish to remain in Scotland and suggest that this is because they prefer to enjoy the high rate of unemployment benefit.

So long as such attitudes are found in an all-powerful and predominantly English Parliament the prospect for Scotland is dismal indeed.

4. *The Irish Invasion*

The real extent of Scottish depopulation is concealed in other ways. So far the complaint has been merely that Scotland is denied her normal rate of increase: her population grows much more slowly than that of England and Wales. But this modest increase would have turned into a devastating decrease – there was for the first time an actual decrease in 1965 – were it not for one factor of which most Englishmen are blissfully unaware. The native stock has been steadily replaced by immigrants from Ireland.

The invasion of the Irish has been going on for a long time. Ireland too has suffered from misgovernment, far more seriously than Scotland, and has been unable to support her native population. In the Nineteenth Century when Scotland was pioneering the new industries, Scottish firms were able to import cheap manual labour from Ireland. As the Highlanders sailed out, the Irish sailed in. This first invasion is now a matter of past history. The second invasion is in some ways perhaps more serious. It occurred especially between the Two World Wars – during the very period when Scotland suffered so tragically from unemployment. It is still going on, although it has diminished in recent years and may diminish still more in the future. In Eire the Irish now control their own destiny and

can do something to staunch the outflow of Irish blood from which they have suffered to long.

The first invasion, although caused mainly by British misgovernment in Ireland, can be put down to the working of economic forces during a period of *laissez-faire*; but the second invasion has been furthered, if unconsciously, by the action and inaction of British Government, in Scotland itself.

It is hard to write on this topic without laying oneself open to the customary jibes at Scottish narrowness and intolerance; but this is no reason why the broad facts of the situation should be ignored. In Glasgow a third of the inhabitants are said to be Irish or of Irish descent; and any one who visits almost any Scottish town can confirm that they have spread over the whole country. The fear or hope is sometimes expressed that further immigration, coupled with a high birthrate, will in time reduce the Scots to being a minority in their own country.

Although these fears and hopes may be exaggerated, few reasonable men, and certainly few reasonable Scotsmen, will regard it as an unmixed blessing that an unusually homogeneous country should be split up into two nations. Yet if the native stock is doomed to decline, Scotland may be considered fortunate in so far as the Irish invaders belong to a race not wholly alien to her own. Provided their numbers were not too great, there would be some hope of their becoming assimilated in the course of time – there are already signs of their being affected by some of the traditional Scottish ideals. Some of them have shown themselves men of ability, and they have strengthened Scotland in the field of sport.

Whatever may be hoped for in the future, the mass immigration of men and women with a lower standard of living was not an unmixed blessing to Scotland – especially at a time when she was already crippled by unemployment. At least in the early stages the Irish sometimes failed to display the more sober virtues cherished by the Scots: law-abidingness, for example, has not always been their most outstanding characteristic. In the course of time they tend, some of them, to become rootless, especially if they abandon their religion. Even if they remain citizens of the Republic of Ireland and owe no allegiance to this

country, they are given voting rights which – notably on questions of marriage, divorce, termination of pregnancy, and so on – enable them to influence legislation for Scotland, and to some extent for Britain as a whole. They do not love the English, but it is doubtful how far they identify themselves with Scotland; the supporters of one of their great football teams are said to wave the flag of Eire with what looks like defiance at the playing of 'God save the Queen'. When they succeed in joining the Establishment, it is not unknown for them to proclaim that Scotland has all the self-government she requires. This is a little hard to bear, though not so hard as the taunt from Ireland itself 'You poor Scotch, you will never be free.'

The problem has not been made easier by the fact that there were two kinds of Irish invader – the Orange and the Green. The Orangemen came in far fewer numbers and were assimilated without difficulty – many of them were of Scottish descent. Nevertheless the double invasion meant that the more robust Irish methods of religious controversy were introduced as substitutes for the traditional Scottish practice of theological argument. The clash between the two kinds of invader sometimes led to disorder at the beginning of the century, and the effects of this bad tradition continue even to-day. Violence is always infectious, and it could not be claimed that native Scotsmen were immune. Troubles of this kind do not diminish when they are complicated by economic competition and racial differences, but on the whole there has been relatively little intolerance: there seems to be more in Liverpool, where there is a similar problem. In the poorer quarters the two races have had to live side by side, and such rowdiness as there is is now displayed mainly on the football field; it seems to spring more from traditional hooliganism than from religious conviction, and it is deplored alike by Scottish ministers and Irish priests. A distinguished Glasgow Irishman, Sir Patrick Dollan, testified, shortly before his death, to the absence of hostility between the two races. He spoke movingly of his boyhood when his strictly Protestant neighbours regularly prepared breakfast for his family who went to Mass, and his own family returned the

compliment by getting ready the midday meal for the Protestant family who had been attending Church.

This gentler spirit has not always prevailed, but it shines 'like a jewel for its own sake' in an intolerant world.

In spite of profound differences in temperament the Scots have shown sympathy for the fate of Ireland, which suffered so much more than their own country. As has already been said, they were willing to subordinate their own claims for Home Rule to the more pressing claims of the Irish. Yet the departure of Irish representatives from the Parliament at Westminster has been a serious loss to Scotland. The Irish never made the mistake of appealing to reason in the Scottish way which makes so little impression in the South. So long as they were in Parliament, they were able to sting the English out of the illusion that these islands are inhabited solely by Englishmen.

5. *The immigration muddle*

It may be said that all this has nothing to do with the policies of successive British governments.

This claim unfortunately is not wholly true, as would be obvious if we pushed our enquiries back into the Nineteenth Century. We forget too easily that in the Irish potato famine of 1845-49 nearly a million British subjects died of starvation in a country that was not short of food; and about the same number were forced to emigrate under conditions not far removed from those of a modern concentration camp. These disasters were accepted in London with the customary equanimity - 'Dependence on charity is not to be made an agreeable mode of life'. The whole tragedy sprang in the last resort from the system of land occupation in Ireland. This system, for which the British Government was ultimately responsible, was not reformed till the beginning of the present century, and it certainly played its part in forcing the Irish to abandon their own country and seek a livelihood elsewhere. But this is now past history. Let us be content to look at the last fifty years.

It is admirable to keep an open door for citizens of the Commonwealth and indeed of the world; but it is less admirable to entice masses of them through this door by artificial

inducements. On reflexion it may seem unwise so to arrange your Welfare State that immigrants after a very brief period should be paid more for doing nothing than they can earn by hard work in their own country: this is what may be called an artificial inducement. It may seem even more unwise to forbid the deportation even of those among them who devote themselves to a life of crime. Such measures, so far as I know, have not been adopted by any other country, whether in the Commonwealth or outside it.

To say this is not to reflect on the character of the immigrants, many of whom may be most worthy. It is merely to suggest that a government ought not to provide temptations which the imperfect human nature common to us all may not always be able to withstand.

One curious exception to this practice may be noted in passing. Immigrants who become dependent on public assistance or who turn to crime cannot be deported; but under the Criminal Justice Act of 1948 English magistrates were empowered to deport Scottish criminals and send them back to Scotland on probation. This they have done at times without even warning the probation officers. On one occasion three Scottish criminals were told 'go back to Glasgow where you belong'. All of them, it may be added, had Irish names. Whether this way of singling Scotland out for special treatment has now been abandoned, I am unable to say. It may be contrasted with the immunity from deportation of an Irish youth who appeared before the Scottish courts. He had been able for a considerable time to enjoy a comfortable life in Scotland by dint of inventing a wife and five children in need of public assistance. Apparently he had been born in 1933, married in 1935, and blessed with his first child in 1937. Apart from this achievement he was a good simple boy who sent the bulk of his weekly gains back to his old mother in Ireland.

There is a belief held in Scotland that Irish immigration in search of public assistance was not unorganised. In the terrible period of unemployment between the Wars the Irish were already well established. Ireland also was suffering from unemployment, and Irishmen, it is alleged, were brought over

in batches to fill jobs under Irish foremen long enough to qualify for the 'dole', as it was then called. When they were qualified, they abandoned the jobs, and a new batch of Irishmen was brought in to take their place. This process could be continued indefinitely.

These and similar legends may be exaggerated, though it is true that Irish immigrants still come in surprisingly well informed of their rights in the Welfare State, including those to sick pay. It seems fair enough to say that the untrammelled benefits provided by the Welfare State have played some part in bringing into this country too many of the less valuable elements in the Irish invasion. These results were unintended and unforeseen. They belong to the policy of muddling through.

One muddle leads to another one; and similar, though more difficult, problems which affected England have been met by restrictions on immigration which are bound to seem unfair and discriminatory. If the first muddle had been avoided, the second need never have arisen. But since the Irish are exempt from these restrictions, this question does not concern us here.

It must be emphasised that arguments of the type I have used depend on the relative numbers involved. Few political thinkers would maintain that we were morally bound to admit into this country millions of Russians and Chinese bent on obtaining the vote in order to destroy our democratic system and replace it with communism.

6. *Segregation in schools*

The immigration policy adopted by Parliament applies to the whole of the United Kingdom, but it has had special effects in Scotland because of another factor which is too often overlooked.

The bulk of the Irish invaders are Roman Catholics. As such they insist that their children must be educated in separate Roman Catholic schools. In other countries they have to follow this principle at a financial loss to themselves, and this they regard as unfair. In Scotland after the First War they were given educational privileges unknown outside predominantly Roman Catholic countries. They enjoy full control over their own

schools, which are built and financed and maintained by the State (including the local authorities).

There is much to be said for this generous system although it means that the Church of a racial minority is the only one to be subsidised by the State. The Scots have accepted it without question in accordance with their traditional demand of justice for all men. It sets an example of religious toleration which in these milder days we may hope will in time be followed elsewhere. But it has had two effects that are unfortunate for Scotland.

The first effect is an inevitable one in the circumstances. Since the religious division is also a racial one, the segregation imposed in the schools perpetuates and hardens the division of Scotland into two nations. The rift between them would be complete were it not for the fact that the Irish for the most part go to the Scottish universities for their higher education. It is only at this stage that the youth of the two nations begin to meet in a common effort and to enjoy the opportunity of achieving some sort of mutual understanding.

The second effect is less defensible. It arises because the Westminster Parliament, which was willing enough to pass this humane legislation for Scotland, is adamant in its refusal to give the same rights to Roman Catholics in England. This is one reason why so large a part of the Irish immigration has been siphoned off into Scotland. It helps to explain why a general muddle about immigration has hit Scotland so hard.

In order to avoid the usual misunderstanding it must be emphasised that the demand for complete segregation in the schools – even where, as in one case, the children are compelled by circumstances to use the same building and the same dining hall – comes solely from the Catholics, and not from Scottish Presbyterians. On the other hand, there has recently been some talk in liberal Catholic circles in favour of integration. This would be a great benefit to Scotland as a whole.

7. *Hopes and fears*

Of the two evils by which Scotland has been beset, an excess of immigration and an excess of emigration, the second is at present far and away the worse.

A flow of immigrants may enrich a country. The flow becomes an evil only when it is excessive in quantity; and what is, or is not, excessive may be hard to determine. Yet an inflow may be considered excessive when it becomes too great to be assimilated so that where we had one homogeneous nation we find ourselves with two that are very different. Something like this is what has happened in Scotland. On the other hand, Scotland was fortunate so far as her peaceful invaders were of a gifted stock akin to her own. If we peer into the remote future, it may seem not unreasonable to hope that in the course of time a new and perhaps richer nationality might emerge; it might combine Irish imagination with Scottish logic. This would be more likely to happen if the two races were able to meet openly in an Edinburgh Parliament and to co-operate, even if not without friction, in trying to settle the affairs of Scotland at present so mishandled from outside.

It is the excess of emigration which is apt to produce hopelessness and even despair. No country, not even Scotland, can suffer without permanent loss so great an outflow of her best blood and her best brains; and no amount of tinkering by amiable or indifferent strangers is likely to put matters right. The Scots, who have contributed so much to the welfare of Britain and the world, are being told, with kindly patronage or ill-concealed irritation, that their distresses spring from their own lack of vigour and initiative. It is hard to believe that initiative can be fostered by turning Scotland – and so many of her institutions – into a branch office of a London firm. If the remaining Scots are reduced to a race of mediocrities trained to await benefits and receive instructions from elsewhere, this would be a terrible condemnation of the present system. It is a gross exaggeration to speak as if they have wholly lost their ancient virtues; but if they are to recover their full vigour and initiative, this can come only by giving back to them some real control over their own fate.

These are long-term problems, and nothing is so uncertain as the future; but it is well at times to look forward to the distant goals that we may desire, or even hope, to attain.

One other observation – a more painful one – must be added.

Perhaps I spoke too hurriedly in saying that an excess of emigration is far and away the worse of the two evils by which Scotland is threatened.

In the South there is what is called an exploding population, and it is sometimes said that by the end of the century England will have an excess of twenty million inhabitants. As a result the envious eyes of some 'national' planners are set on the open spaces of the North. There is talk, for example, of a Solway barrage, which to some minds appears to mean that large stretches of South-west Scotland should be annexed to England. It has been suggested that the valley of the Tay and the fertile Carse of Gowrie could be turned into a series of conurbations for the benefit of English immigrants. Even in the Highlands the regions proposed for the new invaders include the Moray Firth and the country round Stornoway. Always, be it noted, it is the most favoured parts of agricultural Scotland that are singled out to become occupied territories. In comparison with this the unhappy efforts of Cromwell to establish settlements in Ulster would seem almost trivial.

Such schemes, if taken seriously, would mean the death of Scotland as a nation. If this is to be the final outcome of the Treaty of Union and of Scotland's loyal partnership through so many years, it would surely be time for the Scots to fight for independence before it is too late.