Q: So, I just wonder if you can think back for me for the first time you heard that there was going to be a referendum.

A: Well, I’ve always taken an interest in this. I was actively involved in the 1979 campaign to set up what at that time was called a Scottish Assembly.

Q: Oh, okay.

A: I was very disappointed actually by the way that was handled. And then they agreed to hold last year’s referendum. Well, I’ve known about it ever since the process started. So, that’s the background.

Q: You said that in 1979, there was a sort of petition, was it?

A: No, there was the suggestion that there would be a Scottish Assembly set up at that time under the Labour government and the Labour party were hostile towards it. I was a member of a party that was formed at that time called the Scottish Labour party which was campaigning for an Assembly. What came to be known as the forty percent rule was introduced, which went completely against any parliamentary procedure; it had to be forty percent of the voting population who would vote in favour, not simply a majority, but forty percent of the total number of voters eligible to vote, before a decision in favour of an Assembly would be accepted.

Q: Okay, right.

A: Which was a very underhand way of doing it, introduced by a Scotsman who was the Labour MP for a London constituency at that time. So, I mean, I still feel quite annoyed when I think about it. Anyway, that’s all in the past now. I was a bit cynical about what was going to happen in the recent referenum and my cynicism, I think, was proven founded. But anyway, that’s where I came to be interested in it.

Q: So, I mean, so when the SNP had the majority and it was clear that the referendum was going to happen, what kind of sense did you have as to how likely it was going to be to get the ‘Yes’ vote?

A: I thought it was unlikely. Although, the SNP obviously did make substantial progress during the campaign, I always thought it was very unlikely there would be a ‘Yes’ majority. I thought there would be a substantial minority and that if the minority were big enough then there would be a move towards a greater expansion of powers.

Q: Right.

A: I mean, I’m in favour of home rule. I’m not in favour of complete independence. I think that having proper control over domestic policies: something like the Basque system in Spain where the Scottish government takes the tax revenue and then delegates to London what it sees as the amount that is needed for UK services and retains the rest to develop its own systems and services. That’s how I hoped it would develop and, well, I think it did go some way towards that, but I’m still a bit sceptical about what’s going to come out of it. I mean, Cameron immediately set the whole thing back, by his declaration on the morning after the referendum that it would be English votes for English laws that would be tied to it, you know. I’m very cynical about Westminster, I must say. That’s my position. I met recently a friend who writes copy for the Labour party, who was down in London at the time of the referendum writing stuff for Labour politicians to utter, and he said that he felt very upset. He felt quite contaminated by what he had to do. He’s a very strong Labour supporter but he felt that what happened was not in his view really ethical. Anyway, that’s another perspective on the matter.

Q: I mean, did you have any particular opinion on what appeared on the ballot paper in the end?

A: I thought there should’ve been an intermediate choice. I realise that would’ve been difficult but I don’t think it would’ve been impossible to have some intermediate option to say, “Well, I want more devolution but not independence” because the question at the end was always going to be, well, what happens if there’s a ‘No’ majority? There’s no clear statement of what that ‘No’ means and, well, obviously that’s what’s coming with the Smith Commission. I think the Smith Commission has done a reasonable job but being a business man, Smith did it in a very businesslike way. He said, “Well, we’ve got so much time” and the deadline was set for two months after the end of the referendum. I think that was – although they listed it from one point of view, it was not the best way to guarantee you would get a clear outcome – because what happened in the end, and my friend, again, was involved in some of these discussions with the Smith Commission. Well, not involved but he was present and he said that there was a lot of horse-trading going on and that what came out was what different parties were willing to compromise on and whether it would have been any different at the end of a longer session, I don’t know; but I think it probably would’ve been. So that’s that.

Q: I mean, what do you think the rationale was for that timetable?

A: Well, I think he wanted it to be-, I think he didn’t want it to draw out and clearly, being a business man, he thought, time was important and if you set a time limit then people’s minds would be focused on that. That’s how I think it was. Obviously I’m not privy to his thinking but that’s my thoughts about it.

Q: It’s interesting because you’ve described it as, you thought it would’ve been difficult to have an intermediary option on the ballot paper. Do you mean difficult to negotiate politically or difficult practically?

A: No, I mean practically: to say, well, within that range, what powers would you want to have?

Q: Oh, I see.

A: I mean, yes would have meant independence; and, again, I think the great majority of Scotland don’t want independence but they want to have more control over their own affairs. We got left again with a compromise that is determined mainly by Westminster. Well, I think within the independence campaign, I thought George Osborne really made it plain. He said, “Well, if you go for independence you can’t have the pound.” Well, the pound: it’s a United Kingdom, there are two kingdoms in it and the pound belongs as much to Scotland as it does to England and he said, “Well, you can’t have the pound.” Well, that suggested to more than myself that Scotland isn’t an equal partner. Scotland is a kind of subordinate unit in an arrangement which is dominated by one party who decides the way things happen. That seems to me to be how things are, and will remain so unless there is proper home rule; and I don’t think home rule will be coming out of what the Smith Commission recommended.

Q: I mean, do you think in general that the process has been beneficial for extra powers in Scotland?

A: I think it has.

Q: What has come out of it recently? What’s being discussed at the moment?

A: Do you mean by the recommendations, by what has emerged from the Smith Commission? I think it’s – well, of course, we still don’t know what’s going to come out and there are still lots of constraints – I mean, it’s some way towards home rule but they are still uncertain whether the Scottish government is sovereign or whether everything is subject to some kind of agreement by Westminster. So, I mean, I think ultimately home rule. Of course, the difficulty getting a federal system going is that England is such a big unit relative to the other nations of the UK and to devolve some powers to different areas in England is going to be difficult is partly because England has its legal system and you couldn’t have legal powers delegated to different regions unless they had their own different legal systems. But again, Spain is a good example, where the Basque Country have home rule. They decide; they take in the tax and then delegate a portion to Madrid. Catalonia has something more like Scotland has currently. It gets money from Madrid to decide how to spend on its services, but the main powers are still retained in Madrid. I think something like that would work, where there were regional assemblies in England and Welsh and Scottish parliaments with different powers. So, how that would then work would need further thought, how it would be that-, whether it would be that they would get block grants, whether they would collect. I suspect it would be block grants we’d get. The other thing I think in amongst this was the dominance of London and the south east. I mean, everything is sucked into London and it means – well, I used to work in Newcastle many years ago and I heard recently somebody in a radio discussion saying that for every, I forget how much, it was something like for every fifteen or seventeen hundred pounds of public expenditure per head goes to London and the south east, seven pounds per head goes to the north east. So, the inequalities: it’s not a matter of Scotland against England; it’s a matter of London which is so dominant that the rest of the country is suffering. And I suspect, incidentally, the same would happen with the high speed rail, that people would get jobs in London and commute from further afar. As far as I understand now, a former student who now works in York says that people commute from York daily to London because they can afford houses in York and maybe they were previously employed in York, but now they keep their house there and they go to London to work. It’s just incredible.

Q: You talked about what George Osborne was saying about the pound and things like that. What do you think were the most important messages from people from the ‘No’ campaign, that they were trying to get across?

A: Well, I think the currency was a major one.

Q: Do you think that was influential to people?

A: I think it was, yes, undoubtedly. I think, well, the argument that if Scotland became independent it couldn’t share the pound because the interest rates would still be determined by the monetary committee and the implication that-, what would Scotland be like if it were independent? Well, it could join the Euro or set up its own pound and then that was ridiculed by, “Oh, it would be the Merc or the Bawbee”. So, silly comments like that that undermined any credibility in the Scottish currency.

Q: Comments in the media or-?

A: Well, not only the media: by politicians as well.

Q: Right, right.

A: People or the newspaper. When I think again, the newspapers were a disgrace. There was only one that was broadly of the independence campaign, which was the Sunday Herald. It was disgraceful, frankly. The press were supposed to be reporting things objectively, rather than presenting a party line and, well, I think that was one of the factors that increased the ‘Yes’ vote actually. People were so disenchanted by this constant monotonous litany of, “Oh, you can’t have this, you can’t do that”. The people just gave up on the press. They didn’t believe them any longer, thinking, in many cases, “Oh well, this is just another scare story” and I think the same will happen if there is a Euro referendum, although I am in favour of, I’m in favour of remaining in the EU, but the EU campaign will be, well, it will all be fear of what would happen if we left and I think that would put me off; but I would still vote for remaining in the European Union.

Q: Did you see a difference in-, I don’t know if you compared the national newspapers and the Scottish newspapers, apart from the Herald.

A: Well, there was no difference. There was no difference. The Scotsman was just loud and clear every time there was a story. I forget the journalist’s name, but he was always-, and he was obviously told what line to present in his articles and it was always twisted round to give a negative message. I think the Herald was a bit more balanced; but it was the Sunday Herald that that gave more balanced view. Scotland on Sunday is of course owned by the same group as The Scotsman. The Evening News, well I don’t really buy it much. Well, certainly anything I did see was negative. Well, I think newspapers like The Press and Journal in Aberdeen were, again, hostile.

Q: Right, right, and did you watch any of the TV debates?

A: Yes. I did.

Q: What did you make of those?

A: Well, I thought the first debate Alex Salmond was stupid when the first question he asked Alistair Darling was-, well, I forget its exact format, but it was something like, is Scotland open to invasion by aliens, because that was something somebody had said on the ‘No’ side. There were one or two other similar stupid, stupid arguments of the kind that the ‘No’ side was putting up, and he was trying to ridicule them but he only set himself up as a figure of fun by pressing questions that nobody really took seriously. I mean, all he needed to have said, “Well, look, these are the kinds of things that they’re saying, but nobody believes them now”, and ask a serious question, but I think that he really undermined his position in the first debate. Then Alistair Darling, in his dogged way, managed to really highlight the silliness in that. I think on other points actually Alex Salmond put forward a stronger performance than Alistair Darling did, but I think his whole position was really torpedoed by that way of approaching his first questions. Then in the second debate, I thought he really wiped the floor with Alistair Darling. Alistair Darling just was-, well, he couldn’t answer the question being made, but by that time, I actually think opinion was beginning to change. I was aware after a holiday during the first two weeks of September when my wife and I got back a couple of days before the referendum date. While we were away I was reading some newspaper – well, being abroad and having to depend on digests of news from different papers – and it was clear that the ‘Yes’ campaign were gaining ground. We were in a group with a lot of Americans who were taking a surprising amount of interest, because Americans are usually so ignorant about what’s happening anywhere outside America. So, I think they were really agog and said, “Oh-“. In fact, while we were there, the ‘Yes’ vote in one of the polls got 52% of the total and the Americans were really interested. Well, because I was one of the few Scots in the party I was asked questions by a number of Americans.

Q: Okay. Do you think that the ‘Yes’ campaign ran a good campaign?

A: They did, yes. They did.

Q: What did they do that worked so well?

A: Well, I think that-, well I think Alex Salmond is a credible figure. I mean, I know a lot of people dislike him intensely. Not just dislike him, but hate him and think he’s a shyster. There is an element of that about him. He is a bit of a smart Alec, he does bluster and things, but I think there was a lot of intelligence in his points. I remember in the debates, the first debates, he got Alistair Darling on the hop when he asked, “Do you think that Scotland could be a successful small independent country?” and Alistair Darling couldn’t answer because – well, David Cameron had admitted Scotland could be a successful small country – he obviously couldn’t answer ‘yes’ without undermining his own case. So, I think that was very clever. Well, I think that, maybe because I personally was more convinced about the ‘Yes’ campaign, I thought they were a better campaign, but I thought that because the ‘No’ campaign were just so almost uniformly negative, “You can’t have that. If you do that then this will happen, or people are going to flood out the country”, which is ludicrous. Who is going to, because there is a vote for independence? People are going to have to find jobs. Where are they going to find jobs and so? So, there wouldn’t be a rush for, but that kind of stuff, I think, well it put me off. In the longer run, as I said earlier, I think it put a lot of other people off because the campaign was just so devoid of any reasonable arguments. I mean, there are reasonable arguments for the union, but that was the thing that they were not presenting in a way that said, “Well the union is a good thing. It’s a partnership and we benefit from being in a union. As England benefits from our presence, we benefit from their presence”, that’s *my* position, but I was willing to vote ‘yes’ because I just thought that the No side’s arguments were so poor.

Q: Yes. I mean, did you think that anybody was making those positive arguments about keeping the union?

A: Well, I didn’t hear any. There may be-, because there were so many radio debates or radio phone ins, there were people making those comments in phone ins, but these were private citizens.

Q: Yes. There wasn’t an official party line?

A: No, the people who were from the campaigns were always arguing. There may have been one of two who said “We’ve been a successful union for more than 300 years”, and that kind of thing was said, but there was no emphasis, no focus on the benefits of the union. It was all about the non-benefits of independence.

Q: I wonder if you think-, do you think that there were, for the public as a whole, do you get the impression that there was some particular lines from the ‘Yes’ campaign that were influential to people, that were persuasive to people?

A: Well, I think the argument about not having money through the Barnett formula. Scotland has a tenth of the population and third of the land mass and therefore needs more resources for those and economic development. The Barnett formula, how far is that a rational formula? I’m sure there must be a strong political element in the decisions made. They’ll say, “Well, we’ll give them a bit more and keep them happy”, but I think there is an underpinning of proper, reasoned analysis. So, I think that, while having said that, I think that people would feel that the way that everything is determined on the basis of a block grant that comes from Westminster on the basis of a formula that nobody really quite understands and then is presented by papers like The Sun in England as “Oh, the Scots are just leeching. They are all scrounging and they are all welfare cheats”, and so on, which is another element, I think, that got a lot of people’s backs up and maybe increased the ‘Yes’ vote.

Q: Yes. Do you think that the SNP did well out of the referendum?

A: Undoubtedly, yes. They increased their membership to become the third largest party in the UK. How far they’re going to be able to build on that is an open question because people may become a bit bored. “Och well, I’ve joined but I’m not going to be an active member”. I think there is always that danger, but the fact that they got such a big increase in the membership was an undoubted effect of the referendum.

Q: Do you think that momentum is going to continue through to the general election?

A: Oh, I think so. Yes. I think the problem for them is that they’ve got all of these new members who have come in from other parties in many cases. A lot of Labour supporters, for example, as has happened in Glasgow, for example. You’ve seen that the Labour vote has just melted in Glasgow and there may be some concerns, I don’t know, but they will be coming with a different set of priorities and knowing that they have to be brought together and hammered out in a new political setup where you’ve people coming in who eventually agree with some of the things that SNP-, although I think SNP coming forward as a social democratic party with ideas more to the left than the labour party was a big benefit for them, but they are going to have to develop their policies in a way that will keep people with different perspectives and priorities happy. There will be some people from a more traditional position within the SNP who will be arguing for other ways of doing things. Of course, there is still the debate over devolution max, devo max, against independence and that’s always going to be a fault line inside the SNP. I think Alex Salmond’s success was in presenting himself as a devo max person. I think he obviously still ultimately would favour independence, but I think he was able to get a lot of people over from the Labour side by presenting himself as somebody who was seeking more benefits within the United Kingdom for Scotland.

Q: What do you think Nicola Sturgeon’s position is?

A: I think she’s pretty much like that. Ultimately, again, she is like Alex Salmond, that she would wish independence, but it quite happy to go to some intermediate stage with a view to building on that onto ultimate independence, which I think would have been Alex Salmond’s position as well, but I don’t think that independence-, well it may happen, I don’t know. I mean, if you read, Iain MacWhirter wrote a very interesting book, well he wrote one on the referendum campaign, which I think was very, very interesting, very informative, but he’s written another one called Disunited Kingdom, which came out earlier this month, in which he looks at the referendum campaign and at the composition of Scottish politics. He makes his point about George Osborne saying you can’t have the pound, and he thought that that was an offensive thing to say because it did state a position that a unionist would not state. A proper unionist would say, “Well, we are all together and the pound is as much yours as it is ours”. Anyway, that’s another matter, but I think that he is ultimately saying, they did very well on the ‘Yes’ side. Ultimately they didn’t persuade enough people, but he thinks that ultimately there will be independence. I mean, because of the way things have settled down and because of Westminster’s bullying negative attitude towards Scottish aspirations, that there will ultimately be a successful campaign for independence. So, that’s-, well I’m not sure about that myself, but I think I probably on balance would agree with him, but it does depend – because you can’t say anything definitively – it does depend on the way that Westminster behaves ultimately, I think, and the opposition in Scotland behave. It’s going to be interesting to see what happens in the election. I was hearing Ruth Davidson this morning on a radio discussion, an interview. I’ve got very ambivalent views about her. She comes over as quite an unpleasant person in some respects, but quite a convincing person in other respects, but she was talking about the conservative vote often getting support and going up in constituencies and how the last time they had an equivalent number of voters for conservatives at the last general election as there were Lib Dems or SNP, but they came out with one victory because they were dispersed across the country.

Q: Even with PR.

A: Yes, but this is for the general-.

Q: Oh right, okay. Okay.

A: UK election, not the Scottish election, the British, the UK election.

Q: Okay.

A: They were going to say that she has now got campaign hopes of those seats and they now think they can win if they get enough people. So, she is talking about – well, I hope that doesn’t happen. There would be nothing worse than a conservative majority anywhere – but that’s what she is thinking. Well, I don’t know how successful, because I think there is such an antipathy towards Conservatives in Scotland that it’s going to be a hard, hard struggle, which she accepts. I don’t know if I went off the point there.

Q: No, no. Not at all. Not at all. I wonder what you think about the prospects for Labour now after the referendum in Scotland?

A: I think the prospects for Labour are pretty grim actually. I think Jim Murphy doesn’t come over for me as a convincing person.

Q: Right, right.

A: I think he was a divisive-, he is divisive, I think. He was so prominent in the ‘No’ campaign and so many Labour people didn’t vote ‘No’. In Glasgow, I think, Glasgow and the west of Scotland, Lanarkshire, in the Glasgow area, they lost so many seats-, so many votes there that it’s going to be a hard struggle for them.

Q: Why do you think that is? Why did they lose so many votes?

A: Well, I think they’ve had such dominance in Glasgow and of late as the council for Strathclyde and for Glasgow. The MPs, I mean Labour MPs in the Scottish party, it’s been absolutely disastrous for their constituents. A lot of shop stewards who are semi articulate and don’t present very convincing arguments, but are there because of the usual if they put up a donkey, it would win because people just vote the same way, I think that’s passed. I think people see Labour as a busted option in the west because of the deprivation in Glasgow and in Lanarkshire and Ayrshire. Those-, I don’t know how far you’ve travelled there, but going to Ayrshire, it’s really depressing. It’s like the north east of England where, of course, the decline of heavy industry, the destruction of heavy industry, has left people hanging onto a vote because they always voted that way and then find that at the end nothing has happened. Seeing, well, all of the disgraces over things like MPs’ expenses or tax avoidance, all of that kind of thing, I think again that’s just poisoning the whole atmosphere.

Q: Yes.

A: Michael Martin, a Labour MP from the west of Scotland was the speaker in the House of Commons, was supporting these expenses scandals. He was telling MPs, “Put that on your expenses claim-“. There was quite a good documentary at play on TV about it, and based on the evidence that was available, he was telling people, “Oh, put that on your expenses because your salary is not as big as I think it should be and you-“. Again, a shop steward approach to things. For his members, he was doing his best. Rather than saying, “Well, this a representative house for the country and you should really be setting an example”. So, anyway, again that’s going a bit beyond the point you asked.

Q: Do you feel that, I mean you were talking about the differences in Glasgow and Ayrshire, do you feel that the support for ‘Yes’ and ‘No’ was very regional?

A: Quite a large difference. Glasgow and Dundee, Strathclyde and Tayside, or Dundee, certainly were very strongly ‘Yes’. Edinburgh was pretty strongly ‘No’. Aberdeen was mixed.

Q: Do you think that there was variation within Edinburgh?

A: I haven’t seen any analysis, but I would suspect there was. I think the affluent, middle class suburbs would have voted ‘no’ and well Leith, parts of Leith, Pilton and Craigmillar would have voted ‘yes’. I suspect, but that’s just pure speculation.

Q: Why do you think there was such a divide along the income lines?

A: Well, I think income would be influential. People who have got a good lifestyle and things are okay as they are, whereas if you are less well off – since the government introduced these changes to the welfare system, the bedroom tax and all of that kind of thing – then people say, “Is that what Westminster has done for us?” and that is concentrated in areas of impoverishment because it only affects you if you’re in a council house. Well, of course, the much more harsh principles on which benefits are allocated again would be affecting people living in areas where benefits are an important issue. I think Edinburgh tended to support the ‘No’ campaign because Edinburgh has got pretty well full employment – it’s not full, but there is not a lot of unemployment in Edinburgh – whereas in Glasgow and the west there is. In Dundee, which is beginning to rise, again there is still quite a lot of deprivation.

Q: That’s interesting. How do you feel that the mood in Edinburgh was in the run up to the referendum?

A: Well, I think people were excited about it. I think it was a very stimulating time actually and I think that has remained. I think people are now much more conscious about politics. I have lunch every month with twelve former colleagues who retired within five years of each other and we inevitably talked over our lunches about the referendum and voting in terms of – well, nobody was every asked, how are you going to vote? But there was a lot of discussion and it was pretty evident from that that the majority, not universally, but out of twelve people certainly the majority were ‘No’ voters and were willing to express quite hostile attitudes towards the ‘yes’ campaign.

Q: Right, interesting.

A: I think that, of course, that’s a particular segment of the population, very middle class, but they were talking about their neighbours and one said, “I haven’t met anybody who is going to vote ‘yes’”. I did in a later meeting say, “I’m going to vote ‘yes’” for the reasons I’ve stated, to increase the yes vote but in the expectation of an overall ‘no’ majority. A couple of other individuals around the table have said to me that they were going to vote ‘yes’, but didn’t express this to others. So, I think what happened was that in the polls that were taken before the event, several people around this particular table of former colleagues said that they thought ‘no’ voters were unwilling to say that they were going to vote ‘no’ because the atmosphere was developing around ‘yes’.

Q: Right.

A: That the ‘no’ vote was underestimated as a result.

Q: Okay, okay.

A: Now, I think there is probably something in that, but I don’t know.

Q: I mean, apart from that group of friends, did you have discussions with, I don’t know, members of the family or with people in the pub or cafes?

A: Yes. I mean, my wife voted ‘no’.

Q: Okay.

A: She happens to be English, but that’s not the reason she voted no. She just things were better as they were and there was no problem in it. We didn’t come to blows or anything in the household. We were and remain very amicable. I know that, well one of my sons lives in London and he said he would vote ‘yes’ were he living in Edinburgh. I would discuss it with him in the presence of my wife’s sister’s husband; but I’ll be saying more about that in a minute, but my son said, “Well, I think it would be best to have a federal system”, in the discussion with this brother in law, and my brother in law interjected – it’s so typical, I think, of a certain attitude. It’s not all English people by any means, I’ve got a lot of English friends, many of whom are sympathetic to what happened in Scotland – but his starting line was, “Well, what are they going to do about the national debt?” and that was supposed to be an argument. I mean, well, how they are going to pay their part of the national debt? that was his question. That was not based on a wish to look at the issues. Without any prior discussion, what are they going to do about their bit of the national debt? How are they going to pay that? On the assumption obviously that Scotland couldn’t afford to pay its part of the national debt because it wasn’t rich enough. As it happens, from the campaign, John Swinney had set aside a sum to be paid for the payment of the national debt on an annual basis, as it would be for the parliament of Westminster. As a matter of fact, Scotland entered the union without a national debt, but that’s a separate issue. Anyway, so my son and I know my older son voted ‘yes’. I don’t know about my daughter. Her partner is a very strong Marxist.

Q: Oh right, okay.

A: Still, but I think he was in favour of ‘yes’. Well, I know he is in favour because we had quite a lot of discussion and he strongly implied-, he didn’t say, “I’m going to vote ‘yes’”, but it was apparent to me that he was going to vote ‘yes’ and I think my daughter would have voted ‘yes’, but she-, well, all this would be discussed as we were washing up and so on, he would wash and I would dry.

Q: It felt like it was something that people were debating. People were talking about it.

A: Yes, inevitably.

Q: Oh yes, yes. What did you think about the level of engagement, the turnout?

A: I thought it was very impressive. 84%? 85, was it?

Q: Why do think it was so high and so good?

A: Well, because I think the whole campaign generally was an interesting stimulus to thought. I think maybe because it was a long campaign it did make people think. Had it been a shorter campaign, I think the turnout would have been much less. I think also people felt about the issue and felt they needed, because maybe also because it looked as though the vote was going to be so close according to the polls that they must vote in order to guarantee what they wanted and to help it to come into effect what they felt about one or the other side.

Q: Okay. I think that’s everything actually. That’s great. Thank you.

**[Transcript Ends 00:41:09]**