

Robert Burns song to open the new Scottish Parliament

by Mark Calney and Mark Burdman

The new Scottish Parliament, when it inaugurates its first session in almost 300 years, on July 1, will sing the great national poet Robert Burns's 1795 song, "A Man's a Man for a' That," instead of "God Save the Queen," the British national anthem. Thus, when the Queen presides over the formal opening of Parliament, she will hear the words of the poet:

Ye see yon birkie¹, ca'd a lord,
Wha struts, an' stares, an' a' that;
Tho' hundreds worship at his word,
He's but a cuif² for a' that,
For a' that, an' a' that,
His ribband, star, an' a' that:
The man o' independent mind
He looks an' laughs at a' that.

On May 31, Ian Maitland, who is the 17th Earl of Lauderdale and the hereditary bearer of the Scottish flag, denounced this decision as "an extraordinarily silly choice and quite infantile. It sounds like a deliberate snub to me. . . . The new Scottish MPs took the oath of allegiance to the Queen, and this does not seem to go with that at all." His daughter, Lady Olga Maitland, said that the Queen will be "horrified." Contacted by *EIR*, Buckingham Palace refused comment.

It is no accident that the British oligarchy has spent much time and effort to slander and destroy Scotland's greatest poet, Robert Burns (1759-96). In particular, they have despised the fact that Burns was an avid supporter of the American Revolution and was capable of conveying the principles of the new American republic through his poetry and songs.

In 1759, the year Burns was born, Benjamin Franklin visited Scotland for the first time. He was in the process of collaborating with James Watt in the development of the steam engine, and Franklin began recruiting a number of Scots, such as James Wilson and John Witherspoon, who would later become signers of the Declaration of Independence. Although written out of contemporary history books,

it was that circle of Franklin's friends in Scotland that intersected those of Robert Burns.³ Burns, like many people of the time, believed that the success of the American Revolution would usher in a new Age of Reason, replacing the tyranny of the oligarchical system with modern nation-states, Scotland included.

Undoubtedly, the Royals would much prefer that the Scots stick to the romantic images of man and nature purveyed by Sir Walter Scott, rather than Burns. In 1814, as British troops burned Washington, D.C. to the ground, Scott wrote a crude parody of Burns's republican song "A Man's a Man for a' That," in support of the British Empire's war against the American republic. Scott scrawled:



Robert Burns

America they ca' that! A coward plot her rats had got. . .
The British flag shall bear the grie, And win the day for
a' that!

In contrast to today's oligarchy, a spokesman for the Scottish National Party said: "The opening of the Parliament is about Scotland looking to the wider world, and restating its identity on the international stage. One of Scotland's great international songs, by one of Scotland's most famous sons, would seem to be entirely appropriate. . . . We would regard it as an ideal way to usher in Scotland's new democracy and new Parliament." The woman who will sing the Burns song, Sheena Wellington, said that the song "sums up what we want the Scottish Parliament to be about."

On July 1, it is both fitting and proper that Scotland and the rest of the world take hope from Burns's song "A Man's a Man for A' That":

Then let us pray that come it may,
(As come it will for a' that,)
That Sense and Worth, o'er a' the earth,
Shall bear the gree⁴, an' a' that.
For a' that, an' a' that,
It's comin' yet for a' that,
That Man to Man, the world o'er,
Shall brothers be for a' that.

1. fellow
2. fool

3. Mark Calney, *Robert Burns & the Ideas of the American Revolution* (Glasgow: Scots for Peace and Freedom, 1996).
4. prize