

Gordon Craigie



An independent mind...

This month, I'm being "a professional cynic, though my heart's not in it"¹ ...

REGULAR READERS will know that there's usually one or more triggers – however vaguely connected they may appear to be! – behind the monthly thoughts explored in this column. This month there are several and, quite possibly, more disparate than ever!

Something that's "ripped my knitting"² for a long, long time has been the apparent ineptitude and complete unsuitability for "high office" of Westminster politicians of whatever hue. I first wrote about this in 2015, in the aftermath of our Referendum, and harked back to it in an article in iScot 62:

Lies, damned lies, and... eh, experts?

A funny thing happened to me during the Scottish Independence Referendum campaign last year – I pretty much gave up on a lifetime habit of reading newspapers and generally ended up avoiding TV news and current affairs programmes too. As far as I could manage it this continued, in truth intensified, during the recent UK General Election too.

Why? I was, am, fed up, frustrated, outraged and, well, just generally hacked off with being lied to or hearing interminable and unintelligible spin masquerading as fact. Now, I'm not naïve, I expect to be lied to by politicians, that's just what they do. But they are getting worse. More blatant. Sometimes they don't even try to spin to disguise the fact they've lied, they just blunder on regardless and either hope we haven't noticed or, more likely, they simply don't care. And too many



Who would've thought a Britpop band would be quoted in iScot!
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journalists appear all too happy to perpetuate their lies.

To be fair, even though I'm really not inclined to be, sometimes they're not exactly lying per se, they just don't know any better. And therein lies the real problem, and the fundamental reason I've stopped listening. They are not experts. I'll say that again for emphasis... They. Are. Not. Experts.



Take George Osborne (and I really wish someone would!) as an example, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, in charge of all the dosh and all of our economic futures, has a degree in Modern History. His immediate predecessor, Alistair Darling, studied Law and the one before that, Gordon Brown, History (in all senses!). Am I the only one spotting a pattern here?

Moving on, how about the Health Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, (and how accurate was James Naughtie about him, by the way?) – the dreaded Philosophy, Politics, and Economics, usually glorified as PPE in ‘meeja’ circles. His shadow, Andy Burnham, is an English graduate. Maybe Education is better served...? Maybe not. Nicky Morgan was a Solicitor, and her shadow, Tristram Hunt, is another with a History degree.

I’m shouting at the page now... **They. Are. Not. Experts.**

What about the people who allegedly hold them to account, the journalists? Let’s take just one example, Jeremy Paxman. He has an English degree yet we are expected to accept his forensic questioning on economics, health, education, defence, foreign policy, and everything else, unquestioningly. Just because he’s read a bit of Shakespeare?

Now, I’m not saying you have to have been a doctor to have an opinion on health, or a teacher to have an opinion on education, but in positions of absolute authority surely it helps? And perhaps someone with a sound and proven grasp of Economics might just have a better understanding of, well, and I’m just throwing this out there, Economics, than some hooray with a History degree?

As I said, I’d ruminated on that rant for years before finally committing my thoughts to print in 2015, yet when I revisited it for iScot 62 – back in May 2020, while we were being lied to, mismanaged, and misdirected, through the Covid pandemic by that particular generation of charlatans – it was still absolutely relevant, as my research proved:

Now, to be fair, maybe the intervening years have been kind to our honourable members and the current lot are better qualified but, to be honest, ye’d be richt tae hae yer doots!

An institution with the motto “The Lord is my light” should produce brighter graduates!



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This week’s Chancellor of the Exchequer – no guarantees before we publish readers! – is Rishi Sunak who has the same degree as the aforementioned Jeremy Hunt, which is handy as it gives me the opportunity to clarify that, in this context, PPE is ‘Philosophy, Politics, and Economics’ and not ‘Personal Protective Equipment’ – mind you, methinks that would’ve been a whole lot more useful during the current crisis!

His shadow, Anneliese Dodds (who she?), was apparently born in Scotland but, like the odious Michael Gove, is now firmly entrenched in the Britnat Establishment with her PPE from Oxford. The tragicomic Health Secretary, Matt Hancock, is another of the Oxford PPE brigade while his opposite number, Jonathan Ashworth, must have been aff seek when the Economics class was on as his degree is Politics and Philosophy only. Gavin Williamson is the Education Secretary, with a Social Sciences degree while his shadow, Rebecca Long-Bailey (to hyphenate or not, that is the question?), is a Politics and Sociology graduate

Finishing off this update, I suppose the current day Paxman role probably lies somewhere between Robert Peston and Andrew Marr – I’m not sure, I don’t watch either! Peston’s another PPE guy and Marr echoes Paxo with his English degree. Just for the record, former PM David Cameron (remember him?) schmoozed his way to a PPE degree, Keir Starmer qualified in Law, and, as if you couldn’t guess, Alexander Boris de Pfeffel Johnson’s degree is Classics...

So, here's where this month's first trigger kicked in dear reader. In conversation with a group of like-minded independistas – fitlike Farfar loons! – as a collective we could recall political debates over the years, as well as newspaper features, discussions, and news and documentary programmes, that still had relevance today. In effect, we concluded, has anything changed? Maybe the people, the personalities involved have changed, but the issues and arguments, particularly as they relate to Scotland's constitutional issues, have barely moved despite so much else changing in our world. It's like we're caught in some kind of time warp, or Groundhog Day, where we keep having the same discussions and arguments without the issues being resolved in any way. Indeed, most of those issues have only worsened. So that's what initially took me back to those scribblings from 2015 and 2020, and the second trigger was re-reading my thoughts – five years apart remember, and now another five years removed – on the "go-to" university qualification for the clueless politicians with our lives, literally, in their hands...

This PPE thing, a degree in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics, really gets my goat, especially as they all seem to get it from Oxford – which will doubtless be the topic of another rant very soon. Now, if we are to believe the official Oxford University description of their course, "Philosophy, Politics, and Economics (PPE) arose from the belief that the advanced study of all three subjects would transform students' intellectual lives, to great social benefit. This conviction remains as firm today as it was then. As the world has evolved, so has PPE. The course brings together some of the most important approaches to understanding the world around us, developing skills useful for a wide range of careers and activities." Aye, right! Given the standard of politician that it has consistently produced, it seems to me more likely to be the kind of university degree that would usually come out of a lucky bag!

I thought I was the only one who felt so strongly about this until I read an article recently in the *Sunday National* by Richard Murphy – which was, effectively, a third trigger – where he magnificently eviscerated Rachel Reeves' planned cuts to the benefits bill:



Keir Thatcher!
Credit: skwawkbox.org

It is as if those Cabinet members and Labour MPs supporting this have all had a surgical procedure that I described as an "empathy bypass", which removes their capacity to care.

This is, however, unsurprising. The one thing that many in this group of people have in common with their political opponents in the House of Commons, and so many in the upper echelons of power in the UK, but not in Scotland, is that they took a politics, philosophy and economics degree, most often at the University of Oxford. For the last 40 or more years, that one degree has produced more Cabinet ministers than any other subject from any other university in the country.

Dangerously, what is taught in that degree course is that every single person is identical. We all, it is claimed, have consistent preferences, desires, and goals. We are all, it is said by those promoting this education, possessed of equal opportunity. We also all have access to wealth, according to them. What is more, we all define our success solely on the basis of what we can accumulate.

This is an inhuman philosophy ... Those Labour Cabinet ministers and others who attend such courses do, however, seem to believe that these nonsensical claims are true. They then base their worldview, and so their politics, on them. What is more, because they rarely mix with anyone who has ever been exposed to any other sort of education, they reinforce that belief in each other and presume that everyone else must share their worldview.

Richard Murphy is a respected political economist, with views on finance and taxation very much aligned to what I, and I'm sure many of us, would envisage to be desirable in an independent Scotland. For me, it was extremely pleasing to see my personal views on that whole PPE/Oxford cabal vindicated by someone of his stature.

So off I went on a trawl of the current UK Cabinet to see what qualifications this current generation of dangerous fools have to back up their political chutzpah. First up, I was amazed to discover that there are no fewer than 22 members of the Cabinet, with another 5 who "also attend" – I always thought a cabinet would be around a dozen people at most. Secondly, I was surprised to find that I only recognised 10 names on the list, and didn't have a clue that 3 of them were actually cabinet ministers! I knew that Keir Starmer, Angela Rayner, Rachel Reeves, David Lammy, Wes Streeting,

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Richard Murphy
Credit: The Cambridge Trust for New Thinking in Economics





Liz Kendall, and Ian Murray, were all ministers and, though I'd heard of Yvette Cooper, Ed Miliband, and Hilary Benn, from their previous incarnations, I thought they were all “yesterday's people”!

Anyway, one pleasant surprise was that the Oxford influence does not appear to be as strong as it used to be, only Starmer, Reeves, Cooper, Miliband, and another four of the lesser-lights have degrees from that institution, though, obviously, the fact that Starmer and Reeves are on that list means that the malevolent Oxford mindset is still at the forefront of the big decisions. Another extremely surprising but equally welcome revelation was that the dreaded PPE degree is also not as prevalent in the ministerial backgrounds as was previously the case, only three in fact. Unsurprisingly, the old guard of Cooper and Miliband are PPE graduates but, more worryingly though not entirely surprising, the other Oxford PPE representative is... Rachel from Accounts! I think discovering that alone was further vindication of my thinking on both the value of a PPE degree and, probably even more so, the value of Rachel Reeves – she is particularly clueless, which is no mean achievement given the company she keeps! (One final thought on this innumerate bean counter, and her Oxford PPE grounding – despite being awarded that spurious degree covering three subjects, we know from her doomed-to-failure, self-imposed, “fiscal rules” that she has no idea about *economics* and that her *politics* appear to lie somewhere to the right of Genghis Khan. But surely the most damning indictment is that her understanding of *philosophy* didn't prevent her from lying on her CV leading to her, ultimately, getting the gig as Chancellor of the Exchequer! They really are not experts...)

Finally, on this particular theme, as a gratifying aside, the Scottish Cabinet consists of only 11 Cabinet Secretaries, plus 3 functionaries who also attend including, controversially, the Lord Advocate Dorothy Bain. Not only is this a much more manageable number of participants but there is also, thankfully, not a PPE degree nor an Oxford graduate in sight!

Now, no doubt all of this is very interesting – I hope! – to those of us who spend an inordinate amount of time thinking about politics and the road ahead for Scotland, but I suspect it means very little to the “average” man or woman in the street who only gets engaged, often reluctantly, when an election comes around. But it's important that activists are aware of these facts as I think that they are extremely relatable and straightforward to explain to people when they do engage. People should be encouraged to question why certain people are in

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certain jobs, what their background and understanding of their job is, and to decide for themselves whether they believe these people have their best interests at heart. It's all too clear that absolutely none of the current mob meet the requirements of the position they hold. Starmer has u-turned on every pre-election promise he made, aided and abetted by the fraudsters elected to Westminster as “Scottish” Labour and the powerless puppet Sarwar who, like Starmer, only exhibits consistency in his ability to lie or to obfuscate. It's just not good enough, and we deserve better. In the *Sunday National* article I quoted from previously, Richard Murphy eloquently outlines “what we need to do now”:

We need to tell them they are wrong. We need to tell them that there is another world out here, [reality] ... We want something very different from you because we want to live in a better world than the one you want to supply. We want to live in a world where everyone matters. You just want to subject us to your view. We think your views belong to yesterday. We think we are tomorrow. But what that means is that what we need to do now is to build that tomorrow, starting from today. Then we might have that world that cares.

We have that chance here in Scotland. We can, indeed must, initiate that tomorrow by starting today to build towards a united front for the 2026 Holyrood election. We must demand that John Swinney, Kenny MacAskill, and all the other pro-independence party leaders, set aside whatever differences they may have and unite behind the imperative of regaining Scotland's independence in the shortest possible time frame and with total unity of cause. It's time for bold, courageous, and decisive, leadership. Are they up for that? They'll have to be!

End notes...

There's a couple of quotes with superscripts at the beginning of this article – here's their explanations!

1. I've been waiting for ages to use that great line from the 1995 Blur song, “Country House” – *I'm a professional cynic, though my heart's not in it* – it just seemed appropriate this month!
2. I tend to use *scunnered*, or variations thereof, to describe my frustration at the nature of politics so, just for a change, I thought I'd use one of our glorious leader Ken McDonald's standby phrases instead, hence the appearance of *ripped my knitting* instead!