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This month, I'm on holiday and musing over Scotland's political inertia from afar...

AS I WRITE THIS, it's a roastie-toastie 39°C here and I'm keeping my peely-wally, blue-tinged Scottish whiteness well awa fae that muckle yellae thing outside! That said, it was 42.5°C the other day so we are thankful for small mercies! At this point dear reader, you may have already worked out that we are not in Dundee – Scotland's sunniest city is currently experiencing a very-attractive-sounding 16°C and 100% cloud cover! – and you would be completely correct. We are enjoying the delights of la bella Italia and generally avoiding any sort of in-depth news coverage from back home. However, old habits die hard, and I cannae help but keep a wee lazy eye on events from home, particularly since our esteemed editor keeps reminding me that he's waiting on an article...

Watching from a distance and being, temporarily at least, semi-detached from our constitutional impasse has some benefits in bringing clarity as to what the key issues really are as opposed to the irritatingly repetitive minutiae that serve only to cloud those key issues. Now, I'd promised myself I wouldn't use a specific word again this month after overdosing on

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it in the last three issues, but it's the only one that really fits in the next sentence! I'm particularly scunnered (that's the word!) by some of our better-known political commentators for perpetuating myths and promoting side issues that detract from the key message, that independence is normal, essential, and long overdue. The "my way or the highway" approach to independence almost guarantees failure as it fails to recognise that "my way" isn't necessarily "your way", "oor way", or "the right way". You know who you are! Actually, you probably don't, because you don't consider other views to be important...

In explaining to Italian friends and others exactly where the issues lie with Scotland within the UK, and the likelihood or otherwise of independence any time soon, you can actually see their eyes glazing over. They simply can't comprehend why we, as a people, accept the undemocratic and anti-democratic situation we're in. They are appalled by the excess of the monarchy and – despite having experienced the shenanigans of Silvio Berlusconi and others over a long period! – are simply amazed that a charmless, entitled, imbecilic, dishonest buffoon like Alexander Boris de Pfeffel Johnson could be in charge of what they still view as a major power. And just try explaining why Brexit happened – and why it happened to Scotland despite 62% voting to remain! – and the "90-day rule" is met with wide-eyed astonishment as to how stupid people must be to vote for, and accept, that scale of self-inflicted loss of liberty in addition to the economic damage. But in attempting to explain or describe the history of our struggle, and the realities of where we are now, it does at least clarify and simplify some things for me.



An independent mind...



For example, why do I vote the way I vote? Before devolution I had voted SNP all my political life – in every single election, by-election and local government election from the age of eighteen – because it was the only political party whose fundamental aim was to restore Scotland's independence. Since devolution that justification has remained and indeed intensified as devolution has clarified that none of the unionist parties are in fact

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Scottish – “Scottish” Labour, “Scottish” Lib Dem, and “Scottish” Conservative (and Unionist!) are, literally, branch offices of the English parties. Why would anyone ever – ever! – vote for a political party whose loyalty and direction lies with, and in, another country?

So that was my reasoning and it was valid for me until 2021 when Alba entered the fray for the Holyrood election with an astonishingly simple proposition – vote SNP/Alba to get an independence supermajority in the Scottish Parliament. Hmm, you just might be on to something here guys! Unfortunately, they entered the campaign too late in the day, primarily because of the trumped-up court case that kept Alex Salmond occupied until almost the end of March, with the election then only around 6 weeks away. Nevertheless, the establishment of the Alba Party gives voters in Scotland another Scottish-registered party to consider supporting – Alba, ISP, Scottish Greens, SNP, Scottish Socialist. Interestingly, and not-at-all coincidentally, each of these parties support independence...

For me, my vote will always be based on independence, and independence alone, until it is achieved. After that my vote is very much up for grabs. Do I agree with every SNP policy? No. Have I ever agreed with every SNP policy? No. Do I agree with every Alba policy? No. Have I ever... OK, let's not labour this, but you get my drift. My point is that the things that I believe in politically are simply not achievable unless or until Scotland's independence is restored. At that point I will happily examine every political party's manifesto in minute detail and, guess what? I won't agree 100% with any one of them! But the one that most promotes an acceptable – to me – balance of social justice, fairness, compassion, and internationalism will most probably convince me.

I've written several times before in this magazine that I desperately want to see an independent Republic of Scotland with a written, socially-just constitution that guarantees every citizen the right to free world-class healthcare and education supported by a welfare system that provides home, food and income security, backed by a Scottish central bank and our own sovereign currency. A nuclear-free and environmentally ambitious Scotland that is welcoming and international in outlook, with an open and engaging relationship with our European neighbours, either as a member of the EU or EFTA. But I fully recognise that this doesn't reflect everybody's vision and that these are debates to be had *after* independence is re-established. I would also like to see these debates take place in a modern, democratic way involving some form of constitutional and citizens' assemblies, as successfully demonstrated in recent times by countries such as Iceland and Ireland.

It's always useful to be ready for the

wailing and gnashing of teeth that inevitably follows such a declaration of hope and aspiration, so here goes...

- **But what currency will you use?** That old trope will no doubt be thrown out by some unionist goons with no positive vision to promote, completely forgetting that the whole of the UK changed currency in 1971 without the sky falling in.
- **What about our pensions?** Well, what about them? Are you happy to continue to receive one of the worst state pensions in the world? Could a modern, independent, socially-just, European state with natural resources in abundance maybe, just maybe, offer a more realistic state pension?
- **But, but, but, we're subsidised by England!** Ah, finally we get to the crux of the matter, the trope of all tropes, that Scotland as a country, and the Scots in general, are subsidy junkies who cannot possibly support themselves. The old "too wee, too poor, too stupid" myth as espoused by the then Scottish branch manager of Labour, Johann Lamont, when she let the mask slip in a live TV interview during the referendum campaign in 2014 and made explicit what many of us already knew was the unionist mantra – "Scots are not genetically programmed to make political decisions". Just read that quote again... excuse me? Aye, right, ye think so?

That last trope is surprisingly easy to refute without getting into too much detail about, well, anything really. Just look at the bunch of money-grabbing charlatans currently running the UK, and the equally incompetent wannabees on the other side – as Chris McEleny recently observed, "it is clear that the Labour Party and the Tories are still two cheeks of the same backside" – and ask yourself about their motivation to keep Scotland under UK/English rule? Are we really supposed to believe that UK politicians who:

- won't let tenants on benefits/pensions have an extra bedroom in their house
- support tuition fees
- support the Rape Clause
- support sending the navy to "stop the boats"
- then send to Rwanda any refugees who somehow manage to get through
- support low taxes for high earners
- move their personal fortunes to offshore tax havens

are genuinely so concerned for the welfare of Scots to the extent that they are prepared to subsidise us to protect us from ourselves out of the goodness of their hearts? Please! If anyone truly believes that then I would seriously worry about their level of intelligence and/or sanity!

Anyway, the point to this diatribe – if indeed there is one – is that Scotland cannot afford to remain part of this dysfunctional, one-sided, undemocratic Union any longer. Therefore, something significant has to be done to get us out of this state of constitutional inertia. As I understand it, Angus MacNeil and others believe the answer is to force a Holyrood election at the earliest opportunity and to then take an independence-supporting majority as the basis to negotiate the terms of independence with Westminster. This would appear to me to be analogous to Alba's idea of running a Scotland United campaign at the next UK election should the Holyrood option not be enacted before that. If people can be persuaded to vote SNP/Alba or SNP/Green at Holyrood to ensure a supermajority in favour of independence, or Scotland United at Westminster, then surely that replicates a yes/no referendum vote?

Incidentally, I'll never quite understand how unionists get away with pontificating in Holyrood anyway when the vast majority of them are only there thanks to an electoral

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system that they don't support – if their favoured first-past-the-post system had been in place for Holyrood in 2021 the current parliament would consist of:

- 62 SNP
- 5 "Scottish" Conservative
- 4 "Scottish" Lib Dem
- 2 "Scottish" Labour

Interesting...

Anyway, I digress...! So, the view from my shady nook 1500 miles away from my hometown dreich is this... the SNP has a lot to do to regain the full trust of the independence-supporting community, and the First Minister has to come up with a bit more detail on his strategy than he has so far – maybe he will at the October conference? I admit that I was fully signed up to the softly-softly, long-game approach believing, as many of us did, that things were at least happening in the background... up until the point where it became alarmingly clear that softly-softly was actually timid and cowering, that things weren't happening in the background, and the long-game timescale was effectively infinity! As the famous economist John Maynard Keynes once said, "When the facts change, I change my mind. What do you do, sir?" And the fact is that it is now even more important than ever to regain our political independence as quickly as possible using whatever means are necessary. As the SNP is still by far the biggest independence-supporting party in terms of membership, MSPs, MPs, and voters then it is incumbent on them to come up with a viable strategy as a matter of urgency – a strategy that must include all independence-supporting parties and the wider independence movement. We'll see...

However, I'm really disappointed that the entire SNP MP cohort failed to support their colleague, Margaret Ferrier, in her recent suspension vote and I'm even more disappointed that the party has pre-empted, and indeed encouraged, a recall petition in Rutherglen and Hamilton West and has actively started fundraising and campaigning before the petition has even concluded. Loyalty works both ways. Equally, I'm appalled by the treatment of Angus MacNeil as, again, loyalty works both ways and if he's painting an accurate picture of debate within the SNP under the previous leader then clearly he's stayed loyal for some considerable time under challenging conditions, to say the least.

I'm encouraged that the tide finally appears to have turned in respect of Alex Salmond's long-overdue reintegration into mainstream political life as, notwithstanding all of the qualities that Nicola Sturgeon had previously demonstrated, Alex has always appeared to me to be more proactive and politically savvy. He also knows how to play the Westminster game expertly and the fact that the unionist politicians, particularly in Westminster, are petrified of his presence at the forefront of the campaign pretty much says it all. By the way, if anyone is tempted to dismiss this as simply SNP-bad/Alba-good rhetoric, then they couldn't be more wrong – my personal position always has been, and remains, country before party before personality. That previously mentioned savvy is exactly what is behind Alex's Scotland United call and I fervently hope that Humza Yousaf will see the light, bury the hatchet, and help reunite the whole independence movement before the next electoral event, Holyrood or Westminster. As the old song goes, "the people united will never be defeated!"

Talking about United – tenuous link folks but stick with me, there's another one coming soon! – alongside casually fretting about Scottish politics, the fortunes of my beloved football team, the world-famous Dundee United FC, are never far from my mind. After the complete disaster that was season 2022/23, I and my fellow Arabs

are looking forward (?) to the delights of Alloa, Arbroath and Ayr et al. in the forthcoming Scottish Championship season. Methinks it won't be easy, and the opening-day cup defeat to Spartans didn't exactly have me thinking, "I'm really glad we bought our season tickets before we came away!" But season tickets we have, and we'll be taking our seats for the first home league game of the season when Dunfermline Athletic come to the big city on 12 August – may the best team in tangerine win!

By that time, of course, Italian sunshine will be a vague memory and there is every possibility that the parka will be out early for a dreich August Saturday afternoon! But season tickets have two purposes: they're a symbol of loyalty to your club and they also ensure that you can sit in the same seat every game, surrounded by familiar faces with a common purpose. Ahem, here comes that previously trailed second tenuous link... being an *iScot Magazine* subscriber is a wee bit like having a season ticket: you ensure delivery (postal or digital) of each issue of your favourite award-winning magazine, and you're in the company of like-minded friends with a common purpose. Did that link work? Mibbees aye, mibbees naw, you can be the judge!

Anyway, as a reward for sticking with us through an extremely challenging two years or so we are delighted to offer a free gift (worth £34.99) to our *iScot Magazine* family members – and to any new subscribers that you can recruit – asking only that you are kind enough to pay the postage & packing cost (£5). Our glorious leader, the blessed Ken, has procured a supply of top-quality leather passport wallets in Saltire blue and embossed with a bespoke variation on the Scottish coat of arms. This stunning wallet is perfect for hiding the hideous "take back control" UK passport, which is printed in Poland by a French company... so that "take back control" thing is working well then! And, after all the hullabaloo about "we want our blue passports back" it actually appears black to me! Those of you who still have the previously issued burgundy leather passport holder will note that, in addition to changing the colour to Saltire blue and subtly redesigning the embossed coat of arms – thanks Maurice – we've also, sadly, dropped the "European Union" wording as, well, we're not in the EU anymore! Rest assured that as soon as that situation changes we'll be back with *iScot* passport holder #3, hopefully emblazoned with "Republic of Scotland" – but maybe that's just me!

Full details and timescales next issue dear reader, but definitely available well before Christmas... hint, hint!

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