

Gordon Craigie



An independent mind...

This month I'm reflecting on the year that was 2023...

IN ISCOT 81, the final issue of 2022, I was reflecting on how ridiculous Broken Brexit Britain was looking to the rest of Europe... sadly, there's nothing particularly new that can be added to that analysis as the Westminster cabal – led by the Tories but ably, and inexplicably, supported by both Labour and the Lib Dems – has simply doubled down on its anti-democratic and increasingly right-wing road to ruin. But a couple of things I chose to highlight in that article now seem especially prescient, or at least seem to have gained a renewed relevance as 2023 progressed. First up:

I get that some people are small-c conservative in their political beliefs – again, I will never understand why, but I respect their right to hold those views – but I will never get why ordinary working people choose to support the Conservative Party as it has evolved over the years. The controlling elite must laugh at them every single day for falling for their schtick – tax cuts for the rich, reducing benefits, cynically moving their businesses to Ireland (or other EU countries) despite convincing their electorate that “taking back control from Europe” via Brexit is in everybody's best interests... the list goes on.

Now, in the past few weeks – and the phrase “ordinary working people” may be doing a bit of heavy lifting here! – we've been subjected to the very public protestations, after years of steadfast silence, of Michelle Mone. Yes, the self-professed, self-made, entrepreneurial genius who had clambered her way to the very pinnacle of acceptance by the British Elite has finally discovered that

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she isn't actually “one of them” and may yet – if she ever has a genuine moment of critical reflection, not just a glossy, soft focus, made-for-TV appeal for sympathy – realise that she never was, and never, ever could be! They'll be perfectly happy throwing her to the wolves – deservedly so! – if it takes the focus away from them and their freeloading, lying, cheating, charlatan cronies. Nothing surer. If there's a war (Ukraine, Palestine) or a natural disaster (Covid) or a gerrymandered disaster (Brexit) then there's money to be made from the public purse, and these guys know exactly how to it! Disaster capitalism in practice...

Turning to matters more specifically Scottish:

So as we await the outcome of the strategic/foolhardy (delete according to your own belief!) request to the UK Supreme Court for confirmation of the right to hold our second independence referendum on 19 October 2023, and as we watch the neoliberal pantomime in Westminster continue to trash the UK's already shaky reputation in the world until the inevitable general election (which we absolutely should use as a plebiscite if it happens before next October in any event), what can we, the citizens of Scotland, actually do? We can march, we can gently persuade those not yet onboard, and we can demand that our politicians, and their supporters, set aside any differences – real or imagined – and get everything in place so that we are ready to reassume our independent statehood at the earliest possible opportunity, however that comes about – and the way Truss has started that could be any day now! They've been asked before in various contexts but the following questions should guide all Scottish independistas:*

If not us, who? If not now, when?

Well! We can now say with absolute certainty that “foolhardy” was the correct answer to the first question, and the final two questions are only becoming even more relevant on a daily basis. Also, Truss... who?

As *iScot Magazine* bravely ventured into 2023, I spent the first three issues overusing the word “scunnered”. I make no apologies for that because, as the year started to take shape, I genuinely did move from being scunnered through “even mair scunnered” before arriving at “hyperscunnered” – which is still my current status by the way!

In iScot 82, I started with this rant:

After almost 13 years of Tory rule at Westminster, aided and abetted by right-wing fanatics like Farage exhorting them to “take back control”, the British Establishment has been enabled and emboldened to levels probably not this obvious since the 1960s. As we’re all only too aware, they don’t even bother to hide it anymore! A procession of cosplay Prime Ministers – all from the same Oxford mould – has seen any semblance of propriety disappear from public life as they each made up the rules as they went along with the only apparent underlying philosophy being to make sure that they and theirs were immune from the havoc created by their ill-thought-out decisions and actions:

- *An advisory, and unnecessary, Brexit referendum which then suddenly became the will of the people... except for viewers in Scotland!*
- *A completely shambolic period of Brexit negotiations, followed by an inability to reach any kind of reasonable agreement, resulting in a self-destructive withdrawal forced through by the charlatan Johnson.*
- *Criminal negligence, incompetence, corruption and criminality during the Covid pandemic... again, except for viewers in Scotland!*
- *The eventual, long overdue, ousting of the worst-ever Prime Minister only to be replaced by an even worse one, for a few weeks anyway!*
- *The appointment of a billionaire puppet who only a few weeks earlier was overlooked by his party’s membership in favour of the aforementioned clueless specimen.*

That’s not even remotely close to an exhaustive list, but it’ll suffice for this rant!

Jeezo! I could’ve written that today with the only qualification being that the Covid Enquiry is proving way beyond reasonable doubt that incompetence, corruption, and criminality were, and are, indeed at the heart of the British State... and always will be!

By the time iScot 83 rolled around, Nicola Sturgeon’s resignation had been announced:

19 October 2023. No ifs. No buts. No maybes. And yet, here we are...

*My level of scunnerisation, as described in the last issue, has now gone up several notches. Not for the first time has the cliché “a week is a long time in politics” been redefined by those we elect to govern on our behalf, and it is increasingly obvious that too many politicians have lost sight of their raison d’être – that **we** elect **them** to govern on **our** behalf, we don’t elect them to follow their own agendas without reference to us, the electorate. Mandate, schmandate!*

Where to start... When Nicola Sturgeon led the SNP to yet another resounding election victory in 2021 she assured us that she fully intended to serve the full term – many of us were disappointed by that commitment only in the sense that it sounded like she didn’t anticipate independence happening within the five-year term of government! But she quickly appeared to retrieve the situation by promising to follow through on her umpteenth mandate to hold a second independence referendum with her “no ifs, no buts, no maybes” naming of the date, 19 October 2023. Not only is there clearly now nothing going to happen on that date but we’re already witnessing reverse gear being engaged on the “Plan B” promise of a “defacto” referendum via the next UK general election or Holyrood election while

simultaneously listening to some of our less-than-convincing fellow travellers in Westminster talking about a 50-year journey to independence! Do these guys think oor heids button up the back? We see you...

Aye, well, as we all know 19 October has been, gone, and went and we currently appear no closer to another date for decisive action. Yet by the time we’d reached midsummer, I started to see the green shoots of new growth in the independence journey, or did I...

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!”

My optimism was maybe a wee bit premature there as the SNP has clearly rejected any notion of a united front, as indicated by their candidate selection process going ahead in every constituency for the upcoming UK election. In my opinion this is sheer folly, particularly in the very high-profile instance of putting an SNP candidate up against the sitting independence-supporting MP in Na h-Eileanan Iar, Angus MacNeil. If the restoration of Scotland’s independence is genuinely still the absolute raison d’être of the SNP then this kind of intransigence makes no sense whatsoever – this will most likely result in a split vote which will very neatly allow a Unionist to sneak through, as we know for an absolute certainty that the old “better together” alliance will be in full swing... unofficially, of course! What are they thinking?

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WAR IS OVER!

IF YOU WANT IT

Love and Peace from John and Yoko

There then followed a few months of... waiting:

... waiting for the SNP Conference and waiting for the Rutherglen and Hamilton West by-election. After both of those events we should have a clearer idea of our immediate next steps, but our first-principle priority will not change – to regain independence. Factional differences and inter-movement sniping must be put to one side and a united approach supported by everyone – and we need that united approach to have visible leadership. Who's it going to be?

As it turned out, the by-election was both disappointing and worrying and the SNP Conference offered up more questions than answers. Were the SNP looking at a majority of votes or MPs as a fresh mandate for... something? If votes, was that to be pro-independence votes or simply SNP votes? After much public procrastination and further debate it seems that the conclusion reached was a majority of MPs. In the next UK election Scotland's representation will be cut – again! – to 57 constituencies. That means that the magic number for a "majority" of MPs will be 29. Why the SNP believe that achieving 29 seats provides a mandate for negotiations when they currently have 43 – and have previously held 56! – without pursuing such a mandate is genuinely beyond my comprehension. What is the plan and who is going to lead us there?

Coming right up to date, last month I mused further on this interminable waiting game:

Sadly, increasingly more often these days, politicians who we expect so much more from remind me of a line from The Proclaimers' Letter from America – "But you know our sense of timing, we always wait too long!"

Sadly, the anti-war rhetoric of war being over if we want it continues to be ignored by the so-called major powers

Funnily enough, after also taking aim at the lack of progress on Humza's "absolute priority" of the misinformation rebuttal unit, the final weeks of 2023 have seen a grand announcement of... not enough? My immediate reaction is that we need more than a website and a few leaflets, but let's see what develops. While Humza's leadership has been, for me, a mixed bag so far, I would like to reiterate something from last month:

Humza has won deserved praise for his statesmanlike words and actions in recent weeks regarding the horrendous situation in Palestine and Israel, but until his party and his government find a way to exercise their multiple mandates to restore Scotland's independence then he is a statesman without a state. I implore him to set aside whatever differences exist, or are perceived to exist, with all other independence-supporting parties and organisations and start campaigning seriously, on a united ticket, for our independence to be restored at the earliest opportunity. There will be a UK general election within the next year and a Holyrood election can be arranged at any time of his choosing by being politically astute. Don't put artificial barriers about things like EU membership or monarchy in the mix, just get everybody behind the one aim – getting us out of the toxic United Kingdom and restoring our sovereign nation state of Scotland to its rightful place on the international stage, as a normal country.

"So this is Christmas, and what have you done?" I know, it's no like me tae squeeze a Beatlesque reference intae an iScot article, but the underlying sentiments of John Lennon's anti-war, Christmas song seem relevant in two ways this year. Paraphrasing, as another year is over and a new one is about to begin, are we any further forward on our independence journey? For what it's worth, polling tells us that support for independence continues to steadily increase, particularly in the younger age groups, but how do we utilise that support through our electoral systems when the parties seem preoccupied with self-interest? This is our collective challenge for 2024. The other relevant theme from the song is that, sadly, the anti-war rhetoric of war being over if we want it continues to be ignored by the so-called major powers. What will 2024 bring for Ukraine and Palestine? That, my friends, is democracy's challenge. For both challenges we all need to consider:

If not us, who? If not now, when?

From all of the team at iScot Magazine, we wish all of our readers a Guid New Year, Bliadhna Mhath Ùr, and our sincere best wishes for 2024. Slàinte Mhath!