



It's just not working. Let's examine what has happened here.* Alex Salmond has explained, in plain language and in a very matter-of-fact manner, the procedure which would apply given a particular outcome in the coming election. What he is describing are the British state's own rules for dealing with the scenario he envisages. To the extent that he sets out any action which would, or could, be taken by SNP MPs this is what is required or permitted by the British political system. Nobody has challenged the accuracy of his account of the procedure. All of which makes the hysterical response from Conservative HQ rather difficult to understand. What they are saying is that democracy, as it is understood within the context of the British state, can be "sabotaged" simply by abiding by the rules which are supposed to make that democracy function.

But it gets even more extraordinary. It seems that there can be two different actors within the system, SNP and British Labour, both adhering to the same rules, following the same procedure and taking the same action, but where one of those actors (British Labour) is held to be behaving in a perfectly legitimate manner, the other (SNP) is vehemently condemned as an enemy of democracy. Does it not occur to anybody at Conservative HQ that there is something seriously wrong with a system in which following the rules produces an outcome in which "the democratic will of the British people" is thwarted?

But let us now examine that claim. In what way is the will of the electorate being thwarted by the proper operation of a system which is supposedly designed to respect the will of the electorate and ensure that this is reflected in the government which the system produces? If the term "British people" includes the people of Scotland, does their democratic will not count just as much as the democratic will of other UK voters? Acting within the rules as Alex Salmond has stipulated, are the elected representatives of the people of Scotland not just as entitled to influence the process of forming a UK government as elected representatives from any other part of the UK?

If they are not, then how can it be claimed that the people electing those representatives are equal citizens within the UK? To treat their democratically representatives as inferior is to treat the people who elected them as inferior. Just as the formal process for appointing a new government in the wake of an election makes no distinction among MPs on the basis of which part of the UK they are from, neither does it make any distinction on the basis of party. To treat elected representatives belonging to a particular party as inferior to those from other parties is to treat the people who voted for them as inferior to other voters in the UK.

Whichever way you look at it, the message from Conservative HQ is that, regardless of what the rules say, voters in Scotland can legitimately be treated as inferior, either because they are in Scotland or because they vote for the national party of Scotland. Worse even than that, the Tories are saying that Scottish and/or SNP voters MUST be treated as inferior in order that the democratic will of what they mean by the "British people" can be held sway. A message which is, with only insignificant variations, echoed by the other British political parties.

After two years of demanding that Scotland must remain part of the UK and assuring us that we are well served by having representation in the British parliament, the British parties are now telling us that democracy as they understand it cannot function in the British state with the people of Scotland participating on an equal footing with the people of the rest of the UK. Simply by pointing out how the British political system works, Alex Salmond has highlighted the fact that it doesn't work at all for the people of Scotland.

Peter A Bell

Local Government Finance: Having gone through the recent round of Council budget setting meetings you would be forgiven for thinking that the cuts being imposed were all the responsibility of the Scottish Government. At least that is what our unionist opponents would like you to believe. The reality is quite different and we should be ready with some basic facts to counter this nonsense. Labour politicians in particular seem incapable of acknowledging that Westminster austerity has cut the Scottish Government's budget, or that as a percentage of public spending that Scottish local government gets a larger share, of this smaller cake, than it did when they were last in office. Nor should we forget that at no point since 2007 has the Scottish Branch Office of the Labour Party moved an amendment to the Local Government Finance order seeking to provide any additional funding for Scottish local government.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation's report "*The Cost Of The Cuts: The Impact On Local Government And Poorer Communities*" quantifies the actual scale of cuts which local government has suffered. Between 2010/11 and 2014/15 Scottish local government lost 11% of its spending power, which compares very favourably to the 27% reduction endured by English local government. A key finding is that in England spending has reduced more, in both percentage and per capita terms, in more deprived localities.

Thankfully we have a progressive Scottish Government working alongside local government to deliver the best possible deal for people in Scotland and to protect our public services as much as possible from the austerity agenda being imposed by Westminster. Under the Scottish Government local government has been treated very fairly over the last few years particularly in comparison to councils south of the Border. Indeed Councillor Sir Merrick Cockell Chairman of the Local Government Association following the 2013 UK Spending Review said that – "Every year I meet my opposite numbers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and they listen to us in wide-eyed disbelief at the budget cuts we are enduring and they are not."

Martyn Day- SNP Candidate for Linlithgow & Falkirk East

Clutching at Straws to Distract from Broken Promise. Kezia Dugdale at First Ministers Questions on Wednesday 18.03.15 unsurprisingly launched an attack on the Scottish Government for its predictions on oil price pre referendum and how the SNP's calls for 'Devo Max' in the lead up to the General Election would mean a £7.8 billion shortfall in revenue because of the Barnett Formula being scrapped in the event of Devo Max being delivered. This line of argument and determined narrative are many things, but whatever they are, their validity and accuracy are not amongst their strengths.

Firstly, what Labour and the other unionist parties of course will not want to highlight is that when the Scottish Government was predicting an oil price of \$110 a barrel, at the same time the Office of Budget Responsibility (OBR) within the UK Treasury was predicting an oil price of \$100 a barrel and the UK Governments Department of Energy and Climate Change was even predicting an oil price of \$120 a barrel. So it's fair to say two things. The first is that the SNP made a **moderate and reasonable** projection, but also that **everyone's** predictions of the price of oil were wrong - the UK Governments just as much as the Scottish Governments.

However, the more troubling narrative for me emanating from Labour's branch office is the hope that they, not for the first nor the last time, want to pull the wool over the eyes of the Scottish electorate. The argument they are trying to construct is that because of the reduction in revenue from oil returns currently, it would be folly to pursue Devo Max or the near federalism the SNP are saying they want because of '**The Vow**' - as we **all** know, the very thing **Labour promised** us. Essentially because in their eyes, we would be worse off. That's right **worse off with** oil revenues! Only in the corrupt political system of the UK can oil revenues (even if they do fluctuate) be a burden.

So any reasonable person of balanced mind can deduce from the latest desperate ramblings of a party, which is only too aware of its terminal decline, is that they can't or **won't keep their promises**. Therefore these current efforts are designed to put people off the idea of Devo Max or lose interest in the promises made, rather than acknowledge that **they lied to us** - again! Incidentally, OPEC are predicting an oil price of \$200 a barrel within the next 12 months - I wonder how the narrative from Labour will paint oil as a burden then.

Finally, let us remind ourselves that **with** oil revenues (and its fluctuating prices) Scotland has the 14th strongest economy in the world. Without any revenues, our economy is on a par with Italy's (20th in the world). So for me, as well as being a deliberately flawed argument, it's also a redundant one. If it's good enough for Italy, it's good enough for me. What about you? **Raibeart MacPhàrlain**

On Saturday 28th March in Glasgow Nicola Sturgeon delivered her keynote speech at the packed SNP spring conference. She started her address by stating *"Where better to re-commit our Party and our movement to the values that define us. The values that have excited the imagination of so many across our country. The values of **fairness, prosperity and opportunity** for all. The restless desire to make Scotland the nation we know it can be. A prosperous country where everyone gets the chance to fulfil their potential. A fair society where no-one gets left behind. A confident nation, working with our friends and family across these islands."* After announcing the current SNP membership figure of **102,143** she went on to say *"We need not be powerless in the face of remote Westminster decisions. We can make Westminster sit up and take notice and, friends, that is exactly what we intend to do. And let us understand this. Our voice - as a country - will be louder if it is united. That's why my message today reaches far beyond the ranks of our Party. It goes to every home, community and workplace across our land. To Yes voters and to No voters. To those who have always voted SNP in Westminster elections and to those who have never done so before. On May 7th, let us put the normal divisions of politics to one side. Let us come together on that day as one country."*

After highlighting the Better Together Parties (Labour, Libdem, Tory) claim that Scotland was a valued member of the family of Nations and that those same 3 Parties fell over themselves to tell us our voice really mattered, pointing out the BT slogan **"Scotland shouldn't leave the UK, we should lead the UK"**. Nicola stated *"now, when it looks as if the people of Scotland might actually take them at their word, and vote for a Party that will make Scotland's voice heard, these same politicians throw their hands up in horror. How dare we seek to influence the Westminster system they begged us to stay part of. Now that Scotland appears to be abandoning Labour and turning to the SNP the Westminster Parties are screaming in panic claiming that it is undemocratic, is it only democratic when Scotland votes Labour and maintains the hegemony of a one Party state? I say no, in a democratic union of nations, Scotland has every right to send whichever Party we so choose and that Party should be treated with the same respect as all others."*

Nicola continued *"But at this General Election - with the power of the big parties weaker than ever before - I say this to people of progressive opinion all across the UK. As long as Scotland remains part of the Westminster system, we will **be your allies** in seeking to **shake up and reform** that outdated and discredited system once and for all. Westminster needs to change. To be **more responsive to the needs and demands of ordinary people**, wherever they are in the UK. So to people in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, I make this promise. The SNP stands ready to work with you in making that positive change for all of us. We bring to that task **vast experience of government** - of successful, effective and stable government. It was as a minority government that we restored **free education, abolished prescription charges and froze the council tax**. So we can - and we will - **use that experience in a minority led House of Commons to get good things done there too. We will demand an alternative to slash and burn austerity. Responsible deficit reduction, yes. But cuts that tear at the very fabric of our society, penalise the poor, threaten our public services and stifle economic growth, let me make it crystal clear - those will not be in our name. We will demand an NHS in public hands. A fair wage for all, Pensions that protect our older people. And a decent welfare system that helps people into work. And let me also promise this - At a time when in-work poverty is on the rise and people are being forced to use food banks, when public services are under strain and conventional defence forces are being cut to the bone, we will stand firm and unwavering against a single brass penny - let alone £100 billion - being spent on the obscene status symbol that is a new generation of Trident nuclear weapons"***.

The only way we can achieve a **stronger fairer** Scotland is to have a Party that stands up for what is right and fights for the good of Scotland, SNP are the only Party that will and can do that. A vote for the SNP is a vote for a Scottish voice at Westminster, a vote for the SNP is a vote for Scotland. To read the full speech go to <http://snp.org/media-centre/news/2015/mar/nicola-sturgeons-address-snp-conference>