

Scotland's progressives have to win or its curtains for...

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My friend Angus Brendan MacNeil, who is SNP MP for the Na h-Eileanan an Iar (the Western Isles) and chair of the House of Commons International Trade Committee, has had an [article published by Politics Home](#) that is going to open up debate in Scotland on the direction of independence campaigning. As Politics Home [says of the piece](#) :

In a direct challenge to the First Minister's authority, Angus MacNeil urged the Scottish Government to explore "all options" for securing independence, including holding a Catalonia-style wildcat poll on leaving the UK.

His dramatic intervention comes after Ms Sturgeon's latest request for the Scottish Parliament to have the legal power - known as a Section 30 order - to call a second ballot was rejected by Boris Johnson.

As they also note:

Speaking on Monday, the First Minister said she planned to continue pressing the case for "indyref2" with the Prime Minister, but said any route towards independence must be "legal and legitimate".

I am aware that Angus' view will not appeal to all in the SNP. Most especially it will not appeal to those around Nicola Sturgeon. Angus is breaking the almost unwritten rule of SNP politics of 'no dissent'. But there is dissent in the SNP now. And the dissent is over Sturgeon's view that the route to Scottish independence has to be along a path set by England.

I have already [discussed the fact that this is not necessary](#). Scotland can become independent, as a matter of fact, without English consent. International law says so. After all, if it did not almost no one would ever have achieved independence from English domination, from the USA onwards. In other words, Sturgeon is choosing a very narrow view of what legal means here. In effect she's defining it as UK law when that is precisely what Scotland does not want to be bound by.

But there's another dimension to this as well. It's forgotten just how much Brexit changes this. I rather strongly suspect that Alex Salmond had no choice but go down the UK approved referendum route in 2014 precisely because the UK was then a member of the EU, and he knew that meant two things. The first was that the EU exists to support its existing members: all clubs do. So they would not accept any Scottish departure from the UK without English / rUK consent. And so, secondly, they would not let Scotland back into the EU if they had left without that consent. So Salmond had to get a Westminster approved referendum.

But all that has changed. The UK is no longer in the EU. The EU is not worried about UK national unity anymore. It's simply not its issue. And some members are even quite seen to see it broken. In that case the EU will be more than happy to let Scotland back in now on the basis of international law, and that does not, as I have noted, [require that the rest of the UK approve the departure.](#)

Put simply then, what constrained Salmond to require Westminster approval should no longer constrain Sturgeon. She is simply wrong to say it does. All that was is no more in this context: everything has changed. Except, it seems, Nicola Sturgeon's view on seeking to please London.

This does not mean Scotland should be reckless. Far from it. [Robin MacAlpine has set out an excellent logic for going forward.](#) But as Angus MacNeil has said:

If we discount doing nothing bar shouting how unfair it all is, all the options open have surely to be considered.

I sense a bumpy ride for Scottish independence for all sorts of reasons over coming months. But this divide is the biggest one of all. And the split seems to be between those very comfortable with governing from Holyrood, and wanting to stay in power there, and those who want to drive Scotland forward.

I suspect the progressives will win. The reason is easy to identify. All that splits the SNP from much of Labour is their promotion of independence. On policy, or at least rhetoric, they are remarkably alike. Labour has been wiped out in Scotland. The SNP has been ascendant. But the moment it forgets independence is its reason for being then it will go into decline. That is what those who are saying Sturgeon is failing them sense to be the case. And based on pure political analysis alone, it looks like they have to be right.

This one will run, and run.