

Funding the Future

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For readers in England it would be easy to be wholly unaware that Scotland is facing a massive political crisis.

No, I am not talking about the desire for independence.

Nor am I taking about the resignation of Richard Leonard as leader of Labour in Scotland yesterday, which is a matter almost inconsequential to Scottish politics , so remote is Labour from power in Scotland now.

Instead I am referring to a much more important question, and that is whether or not Nicola Sturgeon can survive as First Minister and leader of the SNP. This is in serious doubt, and for good reason, just months before Scottish elections are due to be held at which it is expected that the SNP will win by a landslide.

The doubts about Sturgeon's future are well founded. Two enquiries must report before the end of March. Both have to suggest whether or not Sturgeon misled the Scottish Parliament over her involvement in the prosecution of the former SNP leader, Alex Salmond, on charges of rape and serious sexual assault.

Salmond was cleared of all such charges. Although I know Alex Salmond, I am not seeking to discuss his case, as such. It has been resolved according to the due process of law. I accept that. In a very real sense, the allegations raised in that case are now closed.

What is not closed is the role of Sturgeon, and others associated with her (including her husband, in his role as chief executive of the SNP) had in that case ever being brought. The allegations here are of what might best be called corruption, and an abuse of public office.

I am not as aware of the facts as some who I know are. Robin McAlpine, the director of Common Weal, a think tank with which I have worked, is one person who has looked at the facts. He has written what I think to be an [important article](#) on the allegations made against Sturgeon. It was published yesterday. In it he says that his long political experience has taught him that:

Everything I have seen has driven me to the same conclusion; nothing is more important than integrity in public life. That may seem anachronistic to some (given modern political culture) and not particularly left-wing. But the positive change I want cannot be built on anything but the firmest of foundations; when corruption or misuse of power creeps into those foundations, nothing good can be built on them.

He added:

There is no doubt in my mind that there was and is a coordinated plan of action created by a powerful group of people, developed and executed in secret but using public resources, all with the sole purpose of forcing a perceived opponent out of public life in Scotland.

He elaborated, making clear the opponent was Salmond, and saying, having provided evidence, that:

The damage I believe this is likely to do to confidence in the conduct of public life in Scotland is substantial.

That the politician is Nicola Sturgeon, the man Alex Salmond, the civil servants a group surrounding Leslie Evans and the party officials a group surrounding Peter Murrell (husband of Sturgeon) should play no part in affecting the details I have set out above.

I reiterate that people like Robin McAlpine know a great deal more about this than I do. I have discussed it with others who have also reviewed it in detail. What I am sure is true is that this issue has the capacity to massively undermine confidence in Scotland just as it needs it. The political consequences can only be guessed at. But, they could be huge. The political rockiness of this moment does not look like it is going away.