

The mess that the SNP is in might be an opportunity for...

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That Humza Yousaf has failed as leader of the SNP should not be a surprise to anyone.

Yousaf was chosen as the SNP establishment candidate following the now unsurprising resignation of Nicola Sturgeon as party leader, with the obvious intention of keeping the coterie of advisors that had been close to her in continuing political power within the party.

His only obvious strengths at that time was that he had that powerful backing, and that he was not either Kate Forbes, who might be charming but is fiscally and socially conservative, or Ash Regan, who refused to follow the party line on gender-related issues.

None of these candidates were able to bring together the wide diversity of opinion within the Scottish independence movement that had, fortuitously, until that time been able to compromise around a single party leaders with the charisma to lead that movement, excepting the period of office of John Swinney, who was leader from 2000 until 2004.

Alex Salmond has an extraordinarily astute political brain, and still has as far as I can see, albeit that the prospect of his returning to any form of office would seem to be remote.

Perhaps Salmond demonstrated this ability most particularly when preparing a successor for office. Sturgeon flourished under his leadership and then succeeded him before seeking to break the man who had provided her with her opportunity in life. The message should have been heeded at the time. Salmond was found not guilty. Sturgeon had revealed her ruthless desire to control. She never had any intention of preparing a successor for office, and the mess that has followed her own demise is, as a consequence, her most serious and damaging legacy for the cause of independence.

As a consequence, in the moment of considerable stress for those who believe that

Scotland should leave the union, discussion is turning to appointing John Swinney as leader of the SNP, despite his obvious failure in this role in his previous period when holding this office.

Joanna Cherry remains sidelined, which is another SNP own goal, because she is both competent and possessed of serious political appeal to a broad range of people.

Forbes is unreformed.

Regan is now with Alba.

Excepting Stephen Flynn, who is proving to be an astute political operator in Westminster, albeit with some difficulty in holding his group together, there are no other obvious candidates to turn to, whatever some might think of their chances. And Flynn cannot lead from Westminster. It's as if the Union was set up to undermine the SNP.

So, Scotland has a rudderless independence cause.

I don't

think that this undermines that cause, which is being as strongly supported as it has been for a decade, odd aberrational polls apart. However, this does gift yet another opportunity to Labour, which they neither deserve or need given that their current range of policy options are no answer to any issue facing Scotland, let alone the UK as a whole.

So, It is time for the independence cause to reflect. It is suffering because of the requirement to very largely identify with a particular political party, whose policies are by no means universally popular, and whose fiscal stance is contemptuous of its membership, just as is Labour's. First-past-the-post at Westminster is proving as problematic for Scotland as it is for the rest of the UK.

Nothing will solve this problem in the short term. The SNP is in a mess right, and will remain so for the time being. In that case, it is time for those who believe in independence to make clear precisely what the reasons for supporting it are and to make that clear to any sustainable SNP leadership when it emerges, which I doubt that it will do as yet.

There is a long game to play in Scottish politics. Labour might win in the short term. The Tories are a spent force. But, Labour's period of popularity might be short lived. The time for pragmatic policy to achieve independence will come, but not yet. And until the narratives surrounding that pragmatic politics have been firmly fixed the delay is not a problem. It is more like an opportunity, not least to get over the toxic legacy of Sturgeon. But it may take time for that to become apparent.