

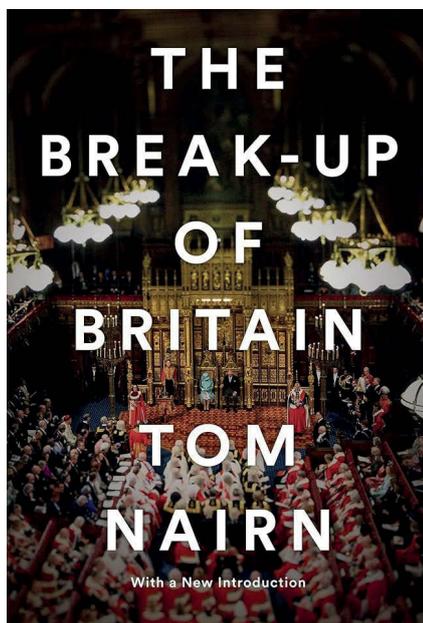
Gordon Craigie



An independent mind...

This month, I desperately want to live in a normal country...

NOT THAT YOU would've noticed from our mainstream media, but there was a major conference held in Edinburgh in mid-November. Inspired by the work of the late Tom Nairn and in particular his classic 1977 book, *The Break-Up of Britain*, more than 700 people attended the conference to celebrate Nairn's life and work and to debate *Confronting the UK's Democratic Crisis*. Given the direction of travel of the current UK Government in terms of suppressing acts of protest or "anti-Britishness" – whatever that is – then although the lack of media coverage is, regrettably, no surprise, perhaps the fact that it managed to go ahead is.



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One surprising participant – and all credit to him – was the Labour MP for Norwich South, Clive Lewis, who said:

The break-up of Britain is happening, whether we like it or not. The empire physically now has gone, and Brexit ... not by design but the outcome of that with Scotland voting to stay inside the European Union ... has seen the break-up of Britain ... been put on rocket boosters. The SNP are not going anywhere. What they're offering the people of Scotland is something that Labour will never be able to replicate whilst it has this kind of Unionist, first-past-the-post mindset.

I said Clive Lewis's participation was surprising but perhaps that does him a disservice as I do recall that he was the only Labour leadership candidate to say anything decent about Scotland at all during their 2020 leadership campaign which ultimately saw the unashamedly conservative (!) Keir Starmer promoted well beyond his pay grade. During that campaign Lewis said:

In the words of the 1989 Scottish Constitutional Convention, supported by Labour MPs, I believe "in the sovereign right of the Scottish people to determine the form of government best suited to their needs". It is not for me, as an English MP for an English constituency, to dictate to Scotland what that form of government should be, and there should be no question of Labour opposing a second independence referendum if there is a mandate to hold one.

Maybe the only surprising thing here is that Clive Lewis is still allowed to remain in Keir Starmer's Labour Party!

iScot readers interested in following up on some of the conference debate can find links to Independence Live's YouTube coverage at www.thebreakupofbritain.net.

But, while I found much of the discourse and commentary around the conference interesting, what particularly caught my eye was Lesley Riddoch's comments, in her *The National* column, about the sponsorship and organisation of the event:

The charitable foundations that normally back events like these rejected funding applications. It seems voting systems, centralisation and levelling-up are all acceptable

subjects for polite debate but not the viability of the current UK. That's just too hot to trot.

The reason this observation resonated with me was because my conversation last month with Jane McAllister – about the struggles she had in getting financial support for her film *To See Ourselves* – was still all-too fresh in my mind. Let's rewind to Jane's recollections:

I've had films in international festivals, and one in particular won a couple of awards in America, so I felt that I had proven myself and that we'd at least get a good enough hearing [from the funding bodies] about this project. But it was dismissed very quickly, essentially across the board, without watching it!

For example, the Scottish Documentary Institute has a pitching forum, the only one in Scotland, which is where you pitch to commissioning editors, funders, and international channels like Netflix. I applied confidently but I didn't get in [and] when I asked for feedback, it turned out they hadn't watched anything! [Of the 12 stories selected] there wasn't one story about Scotland. The first film was a documentary about Greenland and its fight for its independence and the BBC commissioner on the panel said, "I thought every country that wanted their independence had it", which was a surprise to me!

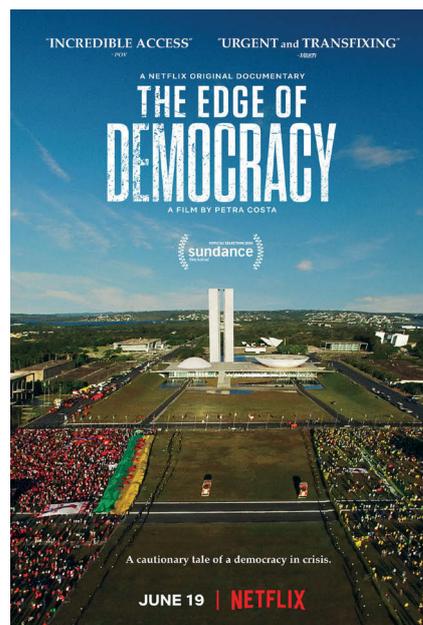
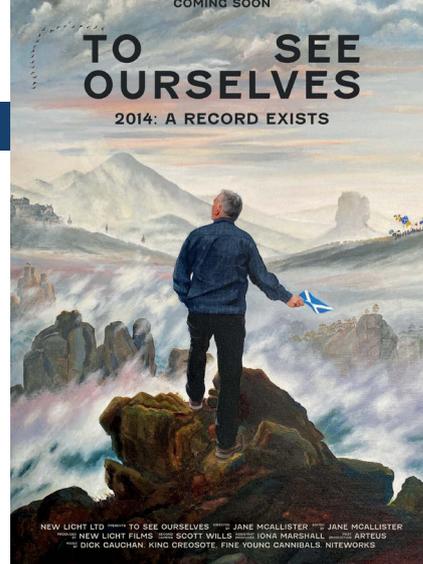
There's your BBC for you folks, acutely attuned as ever to Scottish sentiments! Jane also added some interesting context which, purely for wordcount reasons, didn't make it into last month's feature:

*I just think what a shame for our culture, and what an awful, abnormal situation we're in in this country where something that is very, very common in other countries, documentaries that are coming from a political perspective, and there's loads I can cite ... My [Brazilian] friend who I studied with at Edinburgh College of Art went home and produced a film called *The Edge of Democracy* – it was actually nominated for an Oscar, amazing! [The film's] about the Bolsonaro coup and how [the government was] overthrown and she doesn't hide her perspective at all. Very left-wing, very anti-Bolsonaro – and this was during Bolsonaro's reign! This documentary was funded in Brazil, wins awards in Brazil, is shown at film festivals in Brazil... and yet, in an SNP-controlled Scotland, [a film] that I don't think is controversial and certainly not niche ... even people who didn't vote Yes would be interested in seeing how this played out from the other side... [can't find financial support]. Are we trying to foster conversation, are we trying to foster empathy, is art not the only vehicle to do it? It's frustrating. I think we've got a feeling in this country that, "well, of course that's the way it is", and people have said "well, Jane, you've done a really political thing". But when I look around and I see *Knock Down the House* – a Netflix documentary about Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez going round the doors and winning and getting elected to the American Congress – winning awards...*

Why is it so difficult for anything even loosely associated with the independence movement to get financial support or media coverage? And yes, that is rhetorical! But it's no less frustrating just because we understand why it continues to happen, and the real question is how do we right these wrongs? Obviously by becoming a normal, independent country! So, where exactly are we with that...

Well, we definitely appear to have entered a new stage of colonisation as the insults and disrespect and disregard from our British Establishment masters are proliferating on a daily basis. As I'm writing this, just this week we've had one swivel-eyed Tory bampot wanting to house asylum

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seekers in Orkney, another, arguably more dangerous one, mouthing off irrationally about the Scottish Government's failure at practically everything before insulting all Scottish citizens by smirkingly concluding, "But they will have, of course, somewhere



Grangemouth no more?

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safe and warm to take heroin"... I think we should leave a blank space here to allow readers to insert their own swear words of choice!

If mere words from ranting lunatics on the increasingly emboldened political far-right are still not enough to get our undecided fellow citizens onboard with the urgency of reclaiming our independence, then let's consider some actual recent actions. Our offshore, wind-produced electricity is to be transported directly to England (while we still pay higher fuel charges than English residents!) and, while this is not currently a reality, there have also been suggestions, at UK governmental level, that the solution to forecasted future drought problems in England is to pipe Scottish water directly south of the border. Again, just this very week, we hear that Scotland's only oil refinery, the closest oil refinery to our North Sea production facilities, is to be closed. Why? And, more importantly, what is the Scottish Government going to do about this? So far, and this may change, it's early days in this story, all I've read from the Scottish Government is about concern for jobs. Now, while not in any way underestimating the importance of jobs for the people involved, the bigger picture concern here surely is why would an oil-producing nation accept not having an oil refinery, within its own territory, under its own control? That would certainly protect the jobs! And, irrespective of where we as citizens stand on the essential green transition plans, it is simply a fact that Scotland's capacity to extract, refine, use, and export oil will remain critically important in the short-to-medium term. The refinery may well be, officially, in "private" ownership, but does anybody seriously not see the dead hand of unionism and British State "interests" behind this latest example of the continual destruction of any infrastructure or capacity of an independent Scotland to "hit the ground running"?

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"! If our government doesn't get its proverbial

finger out then it'll be "Grangemouth no more" too...

And, while I'm on the subject of waiting too long, when did Humza Yousaf become First Minister? March. When did he promise – if elected – to set up a misinformation rebuttal unit? Also March. When did he appoint Murray Foote – yes, he of "The Vow" infamy! – as SNP Chief Executive, charged with setting up the aforementioned misinformation rebuttal unit as an "absolute priority"? August. Absolute priority? The Christmas lights are up here in Dundee, but there's still no sign of any rebuttal unit! Meanwhile, the insults, the lies, the gerrymandering, the anti-Scottishness, all continue apace from Westminster, slavishly repeated by the British mainstream media with barely a squeak of dissent. When the eminent historian, Professor Geoffrey Barrow, said that the greatest cultural disaster which Scotland suffered in the 20th century was "the failure of Scotland to establish its own broadcasting service", he wasn't wrong. 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.

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This turned out well...



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