

Another one from the archives...

by Gordon Craigie



Coming to a hard border near you as soon as possible!
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Welcome to
Scotland
Fàilte gu Alba

IS IT DÉJÀ VU or Groundhog Day? For independistas like me, surely one of the most wearisome aspects of our continuing fight to restore Scotland's independence is the absolute keich spouted by people who have no right to impose their opinion, never mind their will, on Scotland or the people of Scotland. If you think that opening sentence gives you your own feeling of déjà vu, fear not dear reader! I used that exact sentence to introduce a wee rant in Issue 59 (*When is enough really enough?*) which in itself represented a form of Groundhog Day as I was introducing a piece that I'd originally written in 2014. That got me going on a wee retro theme so, in Issue 60 (*There's a love-bomb in Downing Street!*), I revived another two articles, but this time originally dating back to 2011 – 9 years ago! Yet they were all still, sadly, relevant today. As we're all enduring some form of Groundhog Day existence during this lockdown period, it seems appropriate to dig yet another one out of the archives for your delectation which, again, and again sadly, still retains its relevance despite being written in 2015...

Lies, damned lies, and... eh, experts?

A funny thing happened to me during the Scottish Independence Referendum campaign last year – I pretty much gave up on a lifetime habit of reading newspapers and generally ended up avoiding TV news and current affairs programmes too. As far as I could manage it this continued, in truth intensified, during the recent UK General Election too.

Sometimes they don't even try to spin to disguise the fact they've lied, they just blunder on regardless and either hope we haven't noticed or, more likely, they simply don't care

Why? I was, am, fed up, frustrated, outraged and, well, just generally hacked off with being lied to or hearing interminable and unintelligible spin masquerading as fact.

Now, I'm not naïve, I expect to be lied to by politicians, that's just what they do. But they are getting worse. More blatant. Sometimes they don't even try to spin to disguise the fact they've lied, they just blunder on regardless and either hope we haven't noticed or, more likely, they simply don't care. And too many journalists appear all too happy to perpetuate their lies.

To be fair, (even though I'm really not inclined to be), sometimes they're not exactly lying per se, they just don't know any better. And therein lies the real problem, and the fundamental reason I've stopped listening. They are not experts. I'll say that again for emphasis... They. Are. Not. Experts.

Take George Osborne (and I really wish someone would!) as an example, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, in charge of all the dosh and all of our economic futures, has a degree in Modern History. His immediate predecessor, Alistair Darling, studied Law and the one before that, Gordon Brown, History (in all senses!). Am I the only one spotting a pattern here?

Moving on, how about the Health Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, (and how accurate was James Naughtie about him, by the way?) – the dreaded Philosophy, Politics and Economics, usually glorified as PPE in 'meeja' circles. His shadow, Andy Burnham, is an English graduate. Maybe Education is better served...? Maybe not. Nicky Morgan was a Solicitor, and her shadow, Tristram Hunt, is another with a History degree.

I'm shouting at the page now... They. Are. Not. Experts.

What about the people who allegedly hold them to account, the journalists? Let's take just one example, Jeremy Paxman. He has an English degree yet we are expected to accept his forensic questioning on economics, health, education, defence, foreign policy and everything else, unquestioningly. Just because he's read a bit of Shakespeare?

Now, I'm not saying you have to have been a doctor to have an opinion on health, or a teacher to have an opinion on education, but in positions of absolute authority surely it helps? And perhaps someone with a sound and proven grasp of Economics might just have a better understanding of, well, and I'm just throwing this out there, Economics, than some hooray with a History degree?

And that's mainly why I switched off.

I also believe there's an agenda in the media. The BBC has made it explicitly clear that it is the State broadcaster with an absolute responsibility for promoting the Establishment position at all times. Its conduct during the Scottish Referendum campaign was reprehensible. By the time the UK General Election rolled around most people in Scotland, thankfully, had realised that and treated everything broadcast by the BBC with an entire proverbial salt cellar.

So, what am I really trying to say here? People have to see beyond what's presented as 'fact' and look behind the rhetoric. Returning to my Scottish Independence theme, for just one important example, I know that our friends in England have been fed a line by UKIP, fuelled by Labour and the Tories, that 'their' money is subsidising free prescriptions, free education and lots of other goodies in Scotland. That is a lie. It is simply not true.

But our beloved State broadcaster won't correct it. Other

vested interest outlets such as The Torygraph, The Daily Wail and others gleefully perpetuate it because it suits their agenda. Ask yourselves why? Even those erstwhile paragons of virtue The Guardian and The Independent are not immune, and just don't get me started on Dan Snow! It suits the Establishment to perpetuate such mistruths and they rely on the 'it's in the paper so it must be true' mythology.

And, it's not just me. Something has fundamentally changed in Scotland over the past couple of years, and central to that has been the increasing numbers of ordinary people finding alternative sources of information. There is widespread mistrust of the so-called MSM (mainstream media) and new, mainly online, outlets have sprung up to fill the void. The rest of the UK must now do the same and hold the traditional political parties and news outlets to account. Remember my main message here – they are not experts.

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Tony Hancock

What's the difference between Matt and Tony Hancock? One was deliberately a comedian...
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Wee Willie handles sheep better than numbers!
Photo © Willie Rennie/Facebook

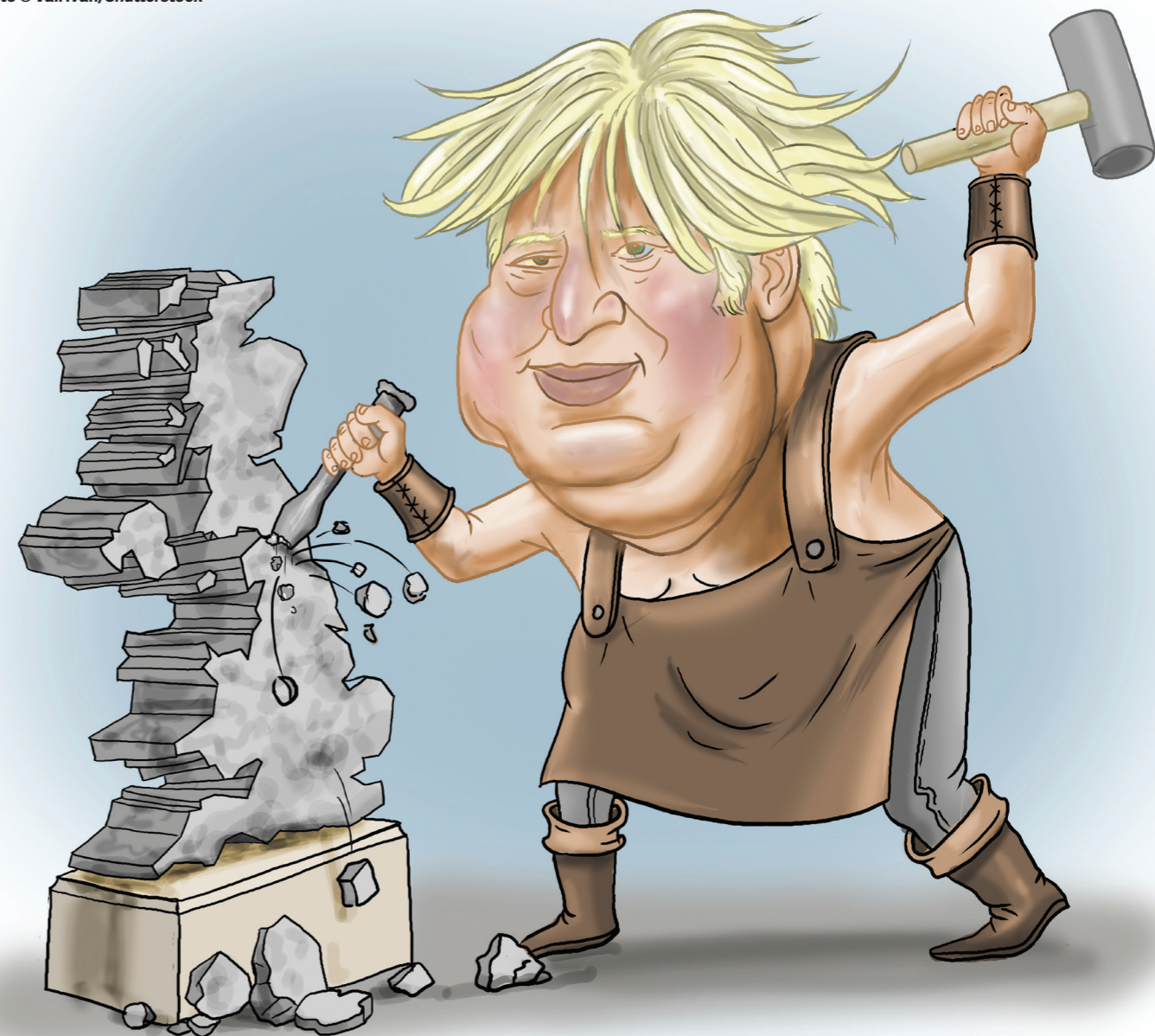
Alexander Boris de Pfeffel Johnson's degree is Classics...

Now, to be fair, maybe the intervening years have been kind to our honourable members and the current lot are better qualified but, to be honest, ye'd be richt tae hae yer doots! This week's Chancellor of the Exchequer – no guarantees before we publish readers! – is Rishi Sunak who has the same degree as the aforementioned Jeremy Hunt, which is handy as it gives me the opportunity to clarify that, in this context, PPE is 'Philosophy, Politics and Economics' and not 'Personal Protective Equipment' – mind you, methinks that would've been a whole lot more useful during the current crisis! His shadow, Anneliese Dodds (who she?), was apparently born in Scotland but, like the odious Michael Gove, is now firmly entrenched in the Britnat Establishment with her PPE from Oxford.

The tragicomic Health Secretary, Matt Hancock, is another of the Oxford PPE brigade while his opposite number, Jonathan Ashworth, must hae been aff seek when the Economics class was on as his degree is Politics and Philosophy only. Gavin Williamson is the Education Secretary, with a Social Sciences degree while his shadow, Rebecca Long-Bailey (to hyphenate or not, that is the question?), is a Politics and Sociology graduate. Finishing off this update, I suppose the current day Paxman role probably lies somewhere between Robert Peston and Andrew Marr – I'm not sure, I don't watch either! Peston's another PPE guy and Marr echoes Paxo with his English degree. Just for the record, former PM David Cameron (remember him?) schmoozed his way to a PPE degree, Keir Starmer qualified in Law, and, as if you couldn't guess, Alexander Boris de Pfeffel Johnson's degree is Classics...

For the record, it's also worth looking at the equivalent posts in the Scottish Government. For Health, Jeane Freeman was a nurse before studying Politics and Sociology; for Education John Swinney has a Politics degree; in Finance, Kate Forbes qualified as a Chartered Accountant following her History degree; and First Minister Nicola Sturgeon's degree is in Law. I fully accept that I'm biased, but that's looking a whole lot more reasonable. As each of the opposition parties has its own shadow team, it would take too much paper and ink to go through them all and do them justice. But there are some belters and, in my opinion, most of them appear ill-suited to their brief! To be fair, at least the Labour Education spokesman, Iain Gray, was originally a teacher (as he never tires of pointing out mind!) but special mention must go to wee Willie Rennie who, when he's not busy being savaged by a sheep, is struggling manfully with the Finance brief backed up only by his degree in Biology – bless! Finally, as

De Pfeffel continues to aid the cause of Scottish independence!
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there's no political analysis of note on mainstream Scottish broadcast media anyway, there's probably no point in digging too deeply there!

As I said in the original article, written back in 2015, I'm not saying you have to have been a doctor to have an opinion on health, or a teacher to have an opinion on education, but in positions of absolute authority surely it helps? It also must help enormously to have had a real life with a real job and in that respect we are undeniably far better off in Scotland with, relatively speaking, fewer career politicians and more who have previously worked in the real world.

iScot readers are, by definition, very clearly o independent mind, and that quality of analysis and discernment will be needed more than ever in the months ahead. Project Fear II is already well and truly underway and you can be sure that the levels of disinformation, misinformation, outright lies and general skulduggery that have been only too evident during the COVID-19 crisis will be ramped up in order to save the Precious Union™. With memories still fresh in the mind of how the broad shoulders™

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and better together™ rhetoric only served to kill and endanger more Scottish citizens than was necessary during the pandemic – compare and contrast with the likes of Iceland, Faroes, Finland, New Zealand, Germany etc. – critical analysis of the follow-up rhetoric will surely exercise all our independent minds. Politicians and journalists are not experts, or at least aren't necessarily so, and it's incumbent on every one of us to challenge what they say and force them to justify their views and actions. We do not have to accept that a 'post-truth world' – the phrase peddled by populists to justify and normalise lies and distortions – is inevitable. We must continue to ask critical questions and encourage everyone we know to always be o independent mind.