

By **Andrew Page**, our *Token Liberal Correspondent*



**In a stunning about turn, Scottish First Minister Alex Salmond has publicly stated that he has "changed his mind" about Scottish independence and will in fact now be voting "no" in the referendum he has worked so hard to facilitate.**

It is believed that the volte-face is a product of some intense soul-searching at the top of the Scottish National Party and a number of senior SNP MSPs have backed Mr Salmond's change of heart.

Speaking to Angus McTavish on Radio nan Gaidheal this morning, the First Minister explained his reasons:

"I've realised, after giving the issue a great deal of thought, that Scotland would not survive without the Union's benevolence. We are so dependent on the subsidies and the goodwill that Westminster has always given us, asking for nothing in return. I've been re-reading our White Paper for independence and realised what a load of unrealistic populist polemic it is – what Scotland needs is not the freedom to determine its own destiny but enslavement to a political system that regards the retention of murderous nuclear weapons and demonisation of already oppressed minority groups as of greater significance than the creation of an egalitarian, tolerant and liberal society."

When challenged by McTavish as to why the climbdown was so complete, Salmond responded with a surprisingly blunt defence. "Look, we all make mistakes. I spent years believing that Scotland could be a better place if she was independent. I wanted to create the kind of Scotland Scots would actually like to live in, which I naively thought meant increased democracy and control over our own affairs, with our own resources in our own hands. But I realised I was too idealistic. Scots don't really want or need that – they just need BBC TV and the knowledge they don't need passports to take dirty weekends in Blackpool. And the chance to be governed by

Tories they didn't vote for."

Other SNP MSPs have similarly declared their rejection of belief in Scottish independence, among them Nicola Sturgeon and Roseanna Cunningham. Ms Sturgeon made clear that there has been a creeping realisation within her party that independence would "be bad for Scotland". Writing on the party's website, she refers to "dangerous delusions" that the SNP had previously considered to be unquestionable truths. "Scotland just can't compete on the world stage. We're too small. Just think if the likes of Luxembourg, Iceland, Austria or Denmark were to be independent. It doesn't bear thinking about. We also need to remain part of the UK if Scots are to be successful in sport – take a look at other wee countries like Belgium and Holland and see how bad they are at, say, football."



Sturgeon continued: "An economically strong Scotland needs to be part of the EU, which is something we've always said as a party. But we don't need to be independent to achieve that. The EU won't welcome a new member that is a net contributor. The best way to remain within the EU is to stay in the Union – we know English people love the EU as much as we do and are guaranteed to vote for continued membership in Cameron's planned in-out referendum."

Cunningham pointed to the many things that were good about the Union, when she spoke to

McTavish on his Current Affairs for Kids slot. "We have to be honest, it's a political system that's tried, it's tested and it works. With First Past the Post, an unelected second chamber, reserved places for Bishops and an electoral system that is biased towards two major parties, it's incredibly representative of Scotland." She also spoke of how proud she was to be British: "I'm Scottish but I'm also British. This means that I love red phone boxes, the Queen, the Dunkirk spirit, HP Sauce, Winston Churchill, the established Church with its well-deserved privileges, a welfare system that discriminates and marginalises, waving Union Jacks, Morris dancing and being prone to bouts of uncontrolled sentimentalism whenever a member of the Royal family does something as natural as giving birth. All Scots should find identity in these things – these are what make us who we are...not some pitiful belief in autonomy, increased freedom and self-governance."

An un-named SNP councillor contributed to the debate on the Radio's phone-in. He added that Salmond was only saying what many within the SNP felt, and that the idea that Scotland has the economic potential to be independent was just a nasty lie spread by cybernats. "Just think of the cost of passports", he said. "And printing our own postage stamps. It's right that the leadership has made a firm statement now because we don't want to continue to mislead people." He was asked what persuaded him to change his mind, after over 35 years of fighting for independence. "Well, if Alex Salmond thinks it's the right option, I believe him!"

Salmond has now been invited to co-chair the Better Together campaign alongside former chancellor and owl lookalike Alistair Darling. "This is indeed a privilege", explained Salmond, "and I will do my utmost to ensure a 'no' vote as the only way to give Scots the future they deserve – a future based on backward-looking and nostalgic notions of British cultural identity that only really exist in the minds of right-wing Tories and Nigel Farage."

Not all within the SNP are happy, however. Some members have already broken away to form a new "Real SNP", and have elected MSP John Mason as their leader. Mason has already confirmed that God has called him to set Scotland's people free - or at the very least establish a Theocratic Republic of Shettleston.



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