



It's a sad day for everyone at Freedom of Information, on Facebook but more so the family of Alan McPhail, who passed away today, 3 February, 2015, at the tender age of 67. Our condolences go out to his partner, family and friends at this sad time.

Alan was a dedicated supporter of Scottish Independence and the SNP, an excellent writer with an astute mind for politics and people. Over the 14 weeks spent doing the bulletin I have grown to know Alan albeit via email and Facebook. He had an incredible understanding of politics and its effect on people, I for one have learned a lot from him.

All of us at Freedom of Information would like to take this opportunity to say thank you for all your dedication, excellent and insightful introductions and articles for our wee bulletin. We will forever appreciate the work and advice you gave us that all helped make the bulletin a reality.

Thank You Alan McPhail you will be sorely missed, rest in peace our friend and rest assured we will continue the fight for Scotland and her right to self determination.

FIRST Minister Nicola Sturgeon has said she will personally lead the SNP's negotiating team in any discussions on forming a new coalition government at Westminster after the general election in May.

Peter A Bell's insight: Interesting! We would normally expect David Maddox to be all over any comment which might be spun as suggesting the side-lining of Alex Salmond by his successor. Could it be that this is a foolish notion too far even for a "committed" unionist? A notion so outlandish as to be best left to the real lunatic fringe of British nationalism, as so ably represented by The Telegraph's self-parodying Alan Cochrane?

Could it be that, despite having been part of the dishonest propaganda effort to portray the Yes campaign as entirely a "Salmond vanity project", Mr Maddox has belatedly realised that there is rather more to the SNP than one man? Is it possible that, having spent so much time and effort trying to present the SNP's policy platform in the most ludicrously crude and simplistic terms, Maddox has finally recognised that the party is far more nuanced in its approach to politics than he had previously supposed?

Being so deeply immersed in the British political system, Maddox and his ilk cannot help but think that all politicians are driven to seek the obvious trappings of power offered by that system. Thus, it is all but impossible for them to imagine that Alex Salmond would not be seeking a prominent position with a title and status and direct participation in the game of politics at the highest level. That somebody like Salmond might choose to stand aside from the game and exercise influence in more subtle ways simply doesn't fit the only model of politics that British nationalists are capable of imagining.

Danny Alexander, on the other hand, is not at all shy about spouting silly notions. The suggestion that the SNP might compromise its integrity by being associated with the same Tory/Labour/LibDem alliance that was responsible for the shameful Project Fear. The fact that Alexander actually uses the term "Better Together" is ample enough indication of how detached British politicians are from Scotland's politics. He is plainly unaware of the extent to which these words provoke resentment and anger in Scotland.

And therein lies as good an explanation as any for the surge in support for the SNP and the precipitous decline of the British parties in Scotland. When the people of Scotland look at the SNP they see a party that relates to them. When they look at the British parties they see an alien presence. **The British parties are IN Scotland. The SNP is OF Scotland.**

A Confusion of Lies It is not clear whether Miliband is talking about a real Home Rule Bill or merely some kind of rehashing of "Cameron's Clauses".* He says that his Bill will "give Scotland the powers that were promised". Is he unaware that his minions in Scotland have been telling us that Cameron's Clauses represent delivery of what was promised? In what way will Miliband's Bill differ from what is being proposed by British Labour's Tory allies?

And if Miliband's Bill does not differ significantly from Cameron's clauses, how can he claim that it represents Home Rule when former British Labour First Minister, Henry McLeish has stated explicitly that it is not. A position echoed by academics, trade unions, the voluntary sector and all the Scottish political parties.

Yet another aspect to this confusion is the fact that, while Miliband now seems to be saying that the infamous "vow" promised Home Rule, only a few days ago British Labour MSP Lewis Macdonald was on BBC radio vehemently denying that Home Rule had ever been mentioned - despite the fact that ex-politician Gordon Brown is on record as having said that it was. It seems that British Labour can't keep track of their own lies.

Although largely uncovered by mainstream media the process of Fracking has started to gain some exposure; however if you are still confused, the latest Labour party stance isn't likely to make things clearer. The new leader of Labour in Scotland, Jim Murphy, had garnered support from Friends of the Earth (FoE) with his promise to introduce a Moratorium (temporary ban) in Scotland if elected in 2016; with his deputy Kezia Dugdale going as far as to say "*Fracking isn't something the Tories will get to test in Scotland. Ob no – no guinea pigs here*". Although this stance appears to be contradicted by the actions of Labour MPs, only a handful of 'rebels' who actually supported the UK wide Moratorium vote last week – with East Renfrewshire member Jim Murphy not even present (due to a pressing engagement at Pittodrie where in a full Scotland football strip he appeared to have scored an own goal). What can be taken from this? That Labour are perfectly happy for residents in the rest of the UK to be used a guinea pigs? The recent announcements by 'Scottish' Labour '*1000 nurses more Scots than SNP from South East England Mansion Tax; and higher pensions in Scotland than the rest of the UK*' seem to be aimed at feeding cross-border divisions, which appear to be based on a fundamental misunderstanding of what independence was about. It was Scottish self-determination, not one-upmanship on the rest of the UK.

In the meantime with Fracking licensing remaining at Westminster the SNP have put a temporary Moratorium at planning application level (which is devolved). However the Scottish Government would benefit from receiving a copy of the DEFRA report from the UK Government (without redactions), to allow informed decision making. The SNP announced this Moratorium will be in place until Fracking safety can be established, and public consultation has taken place. This has been welcomed by FoE (who also expressed surprise at Labour in largely abstaining from the UK-wide Moratorium). If you are one of the many who would like to know more about Fracking join the Facebook Group: **Scotland against Fracking**, and if you can make it along to the **protest scheduled for 1st March** there will be ample opportunity to get clued up on the process itself and the potential risks (to health, environment and property) so that you are well equipped to give your opinion in the public consultation.

In the UK the NHS exists as Three separate bodies, NHS England and Wales, Health and Social Care Northern Ireland and NHS Scotland, it never has been just one organization within the UK, so what this means is if you receive treatment within an area you are not from, i.e. In England if you live in Scotland the bill is picked up by the English NHS and paid to Scotland and vice versa. Worryingly, if you do an internet search on NHS funding for Scotland you get this; www.gov.uk/government/news/facts-about-nhs-funding-in-scotland, nothing about the actual source of funding but really just a propaganda, 'everything is ok we spend loads' statement.. Looking deeper into NHS funding for Scotland reveals surprising facts.

The Barnett formula is said to have "no legal standing or democratic justification", and, being merely a convention which could be changed at will by the Treasury. In 2009, the House of Lords Select Committee on the Barnett Formula concluded that "the Barnett Formula should no longer be used to determine annual increases in the block grant for the United Kingdom's devolved administrations... A new system which allocates resources to the devolved administrations based on an explicit assessment of their relative needs should be introduced." The formula consists of a baseline plus increases to central Government funding to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland based on increases in public spending in England in comparable programmes, applied in proportion to current populations:

For example, in 2000, the Scottish and Welsh populations were taken to be 10.34% and 5.93% (respectively) of England's population. For programmes in the Department of Health, the comparability factor for Scotland and Wales was 99.7%. Therefore, if £1 billion was to be added to planned health expenditure in England, then the extra amount added to the Scottish block, compared to the year before, would be $£1bn \times 10.34\% \times 99.7\% = £103$ million, and the amount added to the Welsh block would be $£1bn \times 5.93\% \times 99.7\% = £59.1$ million.

So NHS Scotland funding comes from Westminster as calculated above and yes it is true the Scottish Parliament does decide how it is spent but not how much it gets, Scotland's share of funding is presently calculated at 10.23% of what England receives since 2002. The lack of a statutory basis for the formula troubles Scottish and Welsh citizens. The devolution legislation states only that the Secretary of State for Scotland (or Wales) will make a grant of such monies as Parliament makes available. This is seen as relying too heavily on the good will of the Westminster Parliament, and infringing the independence of the devolved Executives.

The SNP pointed to what has been termed the *Barnett squeeze*.¹ They point out that rather than protecting the favourable spending position of Scotland, the Barnett formula steadily erodes that advantage: if a 4% increase is needed in expenditure to cover inflation, Scotland will get an increase of only 3% of its total budget, whereas England will get the full 4% (proportional to population share) – after inflation, that would mean a 1% budget reduction for the Scottish Government.

Opponents of that view claim that these are not cutbacks, merely lower growth, and that spending convergence between the home nations is not a policy objective of the current UK Government or Scottish Government but the continuing privatization by stealth contradicts this in England where it is clear that for profit organizations now have a firm hold on many essential services with an astonishing 70% of contracts awarded since 2013 to private firms. NHS is just that in name, behind the scenes it is rapidly evolving into an American system where in the future it'll be health care if you can afford it.

Please dont forget to register to vote. The way in which we are registered has changed, many of us do not have to do anything, but many more will have to check they will be eligible to cast their vote on May 7. Even if you believe you are registered take 5 minutes and check, you have nothing to lose except your opportunity to cast your vote in probably the most important General Election in a lifetime. Register at: <http://www.aboutmyvote.co.uk/>

Next Issue February 21, 2015

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