

Scotland Will Have Boris to Thank for Independence

By [Johanna Ross](#)

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If ever there was evidence of the Johnson government inadvertently aiding the cause of Scottish independence, it was an interview with Scottish Secretary, Alister Jack, on the [BBC Politics Scotland](#) show last Sunday. The interviewer Gordon Brewer, came across more passionate for retaining the Union than the interviewee. Reminding Jack of the various polls which have come out in favour of Scottish independence of late, Brewer asked what exactly Jack and his colleagues were doing to try to prevent the 300 year old Union from dissipating. He gasped, rather exasperatedly, in disbelief, 'I'm curious, as a member of Boris Johnson's government and as Scottish Secretary, what you're saying to Boris Johnson...there's a crisis here...what are you proposing to him that he does? Presumably you must be saying to him that we have to do something'.

At one point, Brewer started to feed the Scottish Secretary his own ideas, telling him what he could do to try to curry favour with the Scottish public. It couldn't have looked more pathetic. The contrast between Brewer's energy and enthusiasm for the Union and Jack's complete apathy could not have been more stark. But Alister Jack is just the tip of the iceberg. Since Boris Johnson took office it has seemed as if he himself has done everything to boost Scottish independence. It almost makes one ask: does the PM himself secretly support the dissolution of the Union?! Unlikely. What is more likely of course is that Boris Johnson simply doesn't care about Scotland and doesn't value its place in the Union.

After all, Johnson has never been exactly warm towards the northern nation. He once said a Scottish MP should categorically not become Prime Minister of the UK, stating Gordon Brown's appointment would be 'utterly outrageous...because he is a Scot and government by a Scot is just not conceivable in the current constitutional context'. He even went further to suggest being Scottish was Brown's 'political disability'. Then there was the time he oversaw the publication of an anti-Scottish satirical poem whilst editor of the Spectator magazine. The poem, written by James Michie, was nothing short of fascist, describing the Scottish people as a 'verminous race' who were 'polluting our stock' and that the nation should be turned into a 'ghetto' with the inhabitants only fit for 'extermination.' Johnson may not have written this shocking piece, but he presided over the publication when it was published, and so the ultimate responsibility lies with him.

These examples give something of the angle from which Boris Johnson is coming from in his relationship with Scotland.

One may have thought, given the huge opposition to Brexit in Scotland, that Johnson may have started a special effort to try to win over Scots increasingly disillusioned by the decisions taken by Westminster against their wishes. But instead, Johnson has done nothing. Support for the SNP has been steadily rising in Scotland for the last two decades, with the UK government's austerity measures clashing with the more socialist values of the north. But the Brexit vote was a turning point from which there is likely no going back. Scots voted

decisively against Brexit – 62% – and yet the country is being taken out of the European Union regardless. What makes it worse is the fact that there are hardly any Conservative MPs left in Scotland, and yet these huge decisions are being made on Scotland's behalf by a ruling Conservative party down in Westminster.

Nicola Sturgeon is a skilful politician however. She has known all along, that if you want to become an independent country, then first you have to start acting like one. And during this pandemic she has perfected this art. Steering Scotland on its own path through the Covid crisis, she has provided incredible leadership to the nation at a time when Boris Johnson has fumbled his way along. The contrast between them couldn't have been greater, with Sturgeon sailing high above her Westminster counterpart in the polls. And as Sturgeon's ratings have climbed higher and higher, so have those in support of Scottish independence.

All polls carried out since March this year have come out in favour of independence. The latest survey by Ipsos Mori recorded a high of 58% for Yes – the highest ever figure supporting it. It is becoming increasingly clear that independence is now a question of when, not if. One of the likely triggers of the latest surge is the controversial Internal Markets Bill, which essentially takes away previously devolved powers back to Westminster after Britain leaves the EU. It has caused outcry in devolved nations like Scotland and Wales. But few are taking notice. One Tory peer, Lord Cormack, recently warned that to neglect Scotland's concerns over the bill would effectively 'endanger the future of the Union.' He admitted that Scotland would 'almost certainly' become independent in the next decade and stressed the importance of the issue: 'there is no subject which should cause more concern or potential heartache to any member of this house that the subject of the future of the United Kingdom.'

If only Boris Johnson were listening. But he isn't. He's fiddling as Rome burns, and Sturgeon will be there to pick up the pieces...

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