

The Sturgeon Factor: The Scottish National Party and the British Elections

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Region: [Europe](#)

"I'm just facing up to reality. A minority government can't govern without support from other parties. Either Ed Miliband will accept that or he won't." - Nicola Sturgeon, SNP Leader, The Guardian, May 3, 2015

Nicola Sturgeon of the Scottish National Party has proven to be unimpeachable and powerful. Despite losing the referendum on Scottish independence by 10 points, the SNP has been rumbling along in its efforts to unsettle the Labour status quo and, more broadly speaking, that of British politics.

And rumbling with force and measure it is. Not since 1885 has a nationalist party – the then Irish Parliamentary Party – have such force. Membership is soaring, having reached levels around 110,000. In seven months, this has made the SNP the third largest political party in Britain. The Tories, as expressed by the likes of Thatcher's old hand Norman Tebbit, fear that it will constitute a "puppet government" comprising Labour and the SNP. The she-demon Sturgeon is set to be the puppeteer, holding the strings of an ever malleable Ed Miliband.

The idea that elected government has to work hard for its decisions, seeking alliances, forging deals, is something that leaves a poor taste for British establishment politicians. It is the fearful refrain of comfortable majoritarian tyranny. "Such an arrangement could be unstable in the extreme, even without taking into account that securing votes in the House of Lords would make the proverbial task of herding cats look like child's play" (*The Telegraph*, May 4).[1]

Home Secretary Theresa May prefers the catastrophic scenario: any arrangement with the vibrant Scottish nationalists would trigger a constitutional crisis, the worst, in fact, since the abdication of King Edward VIII in 1936.

Showing how proportion expands as paranoia breathes down its neck, May suggested that the measure of such seriousness could be gauged by how the ruling classes were positively paralysed in wake of the monarch's affair with American divorcee Wallis Simpson.[2]

"It would mean Scottish MPs who have no responsibility for issues like health, education and policing in their own constituencies [as they are devolved to the Scottish Parliament] making decisions on those issues for England and Wales."

Rupert Murdoch's swill churning centre *The Sun*, in its own merrily misogynist way, has taken to portraying Sturgeon in Tartan bikini straddling a wrecking ball. Channelling Miley Cyrus, the image of Sturgeon spells doom for the United Kingdom. [3]

Foolishly, Labour's Miliband has been rattled enough to suggest that any prospect of entering a coalition with the Sturgeon factor would be unthinkable. This, despite the prospects of an ignominious annihilation of Labour's traditional grounds in the north which made a sitting Labour MP claim that he was "set to Defcon fucked".[4]

Undeterred by the prospects of this electoral liquidation, Miliband wanted to remind listeners about a certain clarity of thinking. "I want to be clear about this. No coalitions, no tie-ins... I've said no deals. I am not doing deals with the Scottish National Party." [5] Sturgeon has her Labour counterparts in the South worried about the succubi tendencies she has been accused of, feeding off Labour even as it seeks to win office. Vote for Labour, urged Miliband, because the alternative will allow a stampede of instability.

The policy platforms of the SNP show that it is no midget force in the scheme of British politics.

The foreign policy tendrils of the party are worth noting. It maintains a strong policy against the utility of Trident, the long in tooth nuclear submarine fleet that David Cameron has promised to overall should he win office. A sore, and a sucker, it bleeds resources from the sceptred isle, with an expected bill of £20bn issuing from the coffers to replace four Vanguard-class submarines. The total cost, however, is likely to come to £100bn.

Sturgeon has gone so far as to make the ditching of the nuclear submarine fleet essential to any coalition deal with Labour. "The SNP have made it clear that Trident is a fundamental issue for the SNP so we would never be in any formal deal with a Labour government that is going to renew Trident and we would never vote for the renewal of Trident or for anything that facilitated the renewal of Trident." [6]

Miliband's own list of grievances against the SNP have been noted. "I disagree with them on independence. It would be a disaster for our country. There are other big disagreements: on national defence, on the deficit and a bigger philosophy question." By means of contortion, Miliband suggests that the Tories and the SNP share a common thread of destructive ambition. "They want to set one part of the country against another."

All of these are worth noting, because they make the Scottish upstarts seem light years ahead of their opponents. There is clarity about Europe and the role with the EU. (Britons may have a referendum on the issue of Europe and the EU, but Scots may think differently, triggering another visit on the independence issue.) There is a firm stance about the issue of recognising a Palestinian state.

Domestically, there is an insistence that austerity measures should be eased, if not scrapped altogether. Instead, an increase in the minimum wage is advocated. A 50 percent top tax rate is endorsed, with an extra tax on homes worth over £2 million while banking bonuses will endure new levies.

Five years ago, the SNP won a fifth of the Scottish vote, and only six of Scotland's 59 parliamentary seats. The arithmetic odds have narrowed dramatically. Far from being a wrecking ball of history and the sacred union, Sturgeon may well prove to be a great reminder about forcing a complacent, tired establishment into the necessary discomforts of engaged democratic practice.

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Notes

[1] <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/general-election-2015/politics-blog/11581325/A--choice-between-Cameron-and-Miliband-If-only-Maggie-were-here....html>

[2] <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3055575/Theresa-SNP-Labour-pact-spark-biggest--constitutional-crisis-abdication-Edward-VIII.html>

[3] <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/nicola-sturgeon-accuses-the-sun-of-sexism--over-miley-cyrus-poster-10111055.html>

[4] <http://www.economist.com/news/britain/21648017-best-bits-second-week-election-campaign-trail>

[5] <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/apr/26/ed-miliband-rules-out-confidence--and-supply-deal-with-snp>

[6] <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/election-2015-snp-leader-nicola-sturgeon-rules-out-any--deal-trident-1495651>

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