

The Scottish National Party and the American state

Brian Kemp

2023 is shaping up to be a tumultuous year for Nicola Sturgeon's SNP. Not because they plan to enforce change, but rather because they are running out of road to avoid change. The grassroots are frustrated with eternal prevarication. The list of excuses leading to inaction grows shorter as each cul-de-sac is exhausted.

The root of Sturgeon's pathological caution remains uncertain. Any reference to the will of the party is void: Sturgeon *is* the party. The party payroll is as close to a cult as I have witnessed in mainstream UK politics. Thatcher experienced greater dissension within the Tories at the height of her popularity.

There are two main schools of thought regarding Sturgeon's inaction in progressing independence.

* The payroll SNP (elected and staff) are incompetent careerists, comfortable in their existing state sinecures. Independence comes with risk and responsibility they would rather avoid.

* A tight managerial group around Sturgeon have been captured by the US State Department.

I tend towards the latter explanation. There is evidence to support both hypotheses and the precise position may lie somewhere in between.

Certainly, weak individuals (middle class politics graduates who've never had proper jobs) have demonstrable connections to the US State Department. These individuals prosper within the party hierarchy. I believe this is an exercise in cultivating assets rather than planting agents.

Circumstantial connections between Sturgeon's inner circle and the Anglo-American Security State are copious.

Readers of *Lobster* are likely familiar with the British American Project (BAP) and its official origin story.¹ This official history was, of course, sparse camouflage intended to deflect only the most studiously incurious enquiry.

¹ <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/nov/06/usa.politics1>>

The BAP has long encouraged its alumni to exercise restraint when discussing its activities beyond internal confines. We should not be surprised to learn from the recent leak of internal BAP documents to Matt Kennard at *Declassified UK* that attendees at the 2022 Minnesota conference were advised that they should 'not post any photos of BAP conference on your personal social media'.²

It seems this curious lack of candour for an organisation with nothing to hide is shared by the US State Department's International Visitors Leadership Programme (IVLP). A piece on *Wings over Scotland* revealed that Scottish National Party (SNP) Westminster MPs Patrick Grady and Angela Crawley were in Washington on the 13 July 2016 at the same time as an IVLP delegation selected from elected representatives and associates of the Scottish Parliament.³ Grady and Crawley's presence was documented by an indiscrete social media post from Member of the Scottish Parliament (MSP) Jenny Gilruth. Confirmation that Grady and Crawley were in fact included in the IVLP trip can only be established through reference to the US website of the company managing the IVLP contract for the State Department.⁴

Neither Grady nor Crawley declared this gratuity in their House of Commons (HoC) register of interests. MSPs Kezia Dugdale and Jenny Gilruth declared the trip, valued at \$11.6k, in their Holyrood register of interests, while MSP Ross Thomson declared the trip in his House of Commons register (he became an MP in 2017). All three attributed the gratuity to the US Embassy without reference to the IVLP.

Grady and Crawley are members of the British American Parliamentary Group (BAPG). Are we to understand that the BAPG are exempt from declaring State Department gratuities in their register of interests? The IVLP's guests were in America from 9 to 23 July. Westminster didn't go into Summer recess until 21 July. Do Grady's and Crawley's constituents not need to know what they're doing on parliamentary time?

Seven Scottish elected representatives are known to have enjoyed the largesse of the State Department's IVLP: Patrick Harvie (Green), Humza Yousaf (SNP), Ross Thomson (Con), Patrick Grady (SNP), Kezia Dugdale (Labour), Jenny Gilruth (SNP) and Angela Crawley (SNP). Of the seven, only Yousaf is

² <<https://tinyurl.com/267x845t>> or <<https://declassifieduk.org/the-secretive-us-embassy-backed-group-cultivating-the-british-left/>>

³ 'All the jolly boys and girls' at <<https://wingsoverscotland.com/all-the-jolly-boys-and-girls/comment-page-1/>>

⁴ <<https://tinyurl.com/mrrwt2ca>> or <<https://blog.meridian.org/center-for-global-leadership/ivlp/u-k-parliamentarians-meet-with-u-s-representatives-through-bapg-exchange-program/>>

heterosexual. That's not coincidence, that's targeting

The State Department's identification of Yousaf and Gilruth as 'Scottish Opinion Leaders', proved to be remarkably prescient. Yousaf was inducted into the IVLP in 2008 whilst in his second year as a humble parliamentary aide. Yousaf was elected as an MSP in May 2011, being elevated to junior ministerial status in September 2012. In June 2018 Yousaf was promoted to Cabinet status as Cabinet Secretary for Justice. School teacher Gilruth was in Washington as an IVLP Fellow, 35 working days after being sworn in as a rookie MSP. Nonetheless, the State Department's intuition proved accurate. Gilruth made junior ministerial level in February 2020 as Minister for Europe, Migration and International Development, before an apparent promotion in January 2022 to the troubled brief of Minister for Transport.⁵

I am not suggesting that individuals or groups are being bought off by trips to the States. The game being played is more subtle. Free holidays are a tawdry, materialistic currency when what is really on offer is career advancement. The analogy I have used elsewhere is that of a mafia of the mediocre forming a self-supporting group to reach otherwise unattainable heights, like a Catalan human pyramid (*castell*). Applying its influence, resources and decades of experience skilfully honed elsewhere, the American state is manipulating events to bring these individuals together

The unifying theme is weak, inexperienced individuals receiving promotion while those more suited to senior management positions are overlooked. The weak are almost invariably young humanities graduates (something with Politics in the title). They pose no threat to Sturgeon; rather, they are beholden. In Westminster and Holyrood, SNP ministerial and shadow ministerial posts are occupied by nonentities while the backbenches are filled by older talent replete with a breadth of qualifications, together with commercial and life experience. The most outrageous example is perhaps the replacement of Joanna Cherry KC as SNP Westminster spokesperson for Justice in 2021 with Anne McLaughlin who has a degree in Dramatic Studies from the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama. This would qualify as black comedy if the consequences weren't serious.

In both Westminster and Holyrood the Committee system is intended to hold the executive to account. While in Westminster committee members are elected by the backbenches, in Holyrood committee members are appointed by the party leaders. A perfect recipe for bad law and corruption.

⁵ Gilruth former Scottish Labour leader Kezia Dugdale in 2022. See <<https://tinyurl.com/mryv4h8w>> or <<https://www.holyrood.com/news/view,congratulations-as-jenny-gilruth-and-kezia-dugdale-marry>>

That Sturgeon and the payroll SNP may be content to languish in their present sinecures may seem counterintuitive to those not immersed in the machinations of Scottish politics. The wages of maintaining devolution are not insignificant. The so-called Short money⁶ provided by the British state to the Party for financial year 2022/23 is £1,178,000.

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⁶ Named after Labour Minister Edward Short under whose aegis this was introduced in 1975.