

The Big Indy Debate at the Queen's Hall

It was immediately obvious that The Big Indy Debate at the Queen's Hall was not so much a preaching to the converted event but the ordained and in some cases sanctified too.

Chair, Lesley Riddoch, opened the [proceedings](#) by congratulating the Yes movement for not giving up on the cause, noting that Unionists appeared to be rather lax on that front.

Volunteers for Indy Live were streaming the event online, "Where's Union Live?" she demanded. Well, there's not much appetite for rallying for something they already have, I suppose. "Friendship and doggedness is the currency of Yes," Riddoch declared proudly.

Involved in the campaign she said: "If the residents of the Isle of Eigg knew at the beginning it would take eight years for them to claim ownership, most wouldn't have started." Apparently Pavarotti tried to buy the island at one point.

Before the debate it was time for some music. Mini-kilted Amanda Brown was first up to entertain us and is a regular at Indy events. Brown admitted she has given up whisky in favour of running, and began with a comedy Scotland the Brave "A nation of fannies, we'd sell our ain grannies" followed by a rendition of Flower of Scotland, that made the dirge of a song sound almost passable, and a "gie it laldy" Scot's Wha Hae. A great performance and an excellent way to begin the evening.

On the panel: Robin MacAlpine, a director of Common Weal, Michelle Thomson, SNP MSP for Falkirk East, Colin Fox, lead spokesperson for the Scottish Socialist Party, Mike Small, editor and co-founder of online political and cultural magazine, Bella Caledonia, Gillian Mackay, Scottish Greens MSP for Central Scotland and Selma Rahman, Press and Publicity officer for the Edinburgh Branch of Woman for Independence.

Riddoch assured us the debate will be “frisky” and kicked things off by asking why since the Covid pandemic have the poll leads for independence turned around.

This was where it became obvious that there would not be much of a ‘debate’ this evening. The panel broadly agreed with one another and regular themes of a “lack of engagement” with the electorate were prevalent. Mike Small made the point that the public are scarred, tired and exhausted and although there’d been a failure of Indy leadership in recent times, it’s right not to campaign throughout a pandemic.

Gillian Mackay worried that the perception of Scottish independence is that it might cause the same problems as Brexit and said “We’ve got to take the people with us”. I would have liked to have heard Riddoch challenging her as to how she might go about doing that. It’s Mackay’s remit, after all.

The discussion ranged around the possibility of a second referendum in 2023, and discussion of more detailed points of currency, the border and an Independent Scotland in or out of the EU? Michelle Thomson suggested a dual currency to begin with which elicits a couple of boos from the audience – perhaps the most controversial part of the evening.

Lesley Riddoch makes for a commanding and passionate host but her job as a chair involved little more than telling the panellists whose turn it is to speak. Because of the general subject matter and (due to Covid restrictions) a lack of

questions from the audience, there's not much chance of her getting a ding dong going, never mind a rammy.

The low point in the evening for me was a skit from 'The Rt Hon Honourable Archie Cornwall MP for the Berkshire constituency of Eton and Dorney'. It doesn't take a genius to guess what was in store here. A send up of the Tory overlords might be all very well if it was actually funny. In the event it was an ill-advised addition which would only remind the soft core of Indy voters what they dislike and mistrust about the independence movement.

For all the panellists talk of "bringing people together" this act didn't reflect such a sentiment. I'd sooner have welcomed a comedy act like the washed up football manager Bob Doolalley give us some chat on the future of Scottish Football. A bit of self deprecation wouldn't go amiss.

Out of all the panellists former MSP, Colin Fox, certainly came out on top. Like the Jocky Wilson of politics he gets in quickly with the big scores but most essentially knows how to finish.

Musicians Johnston and Gordon wind up the evening in a lively fashion but despite Lesley Riddoch declaring the evening to have been a "stoater" it felt rather predictable. If the independence movement truly want to engage the broad church far more controversial questions need to be asked. Here's an idea for their next event: Is the independence movement helped or hindered by the SNP? They can have that suggestion for free.

Big INDY DEBATE

with Robin McAlpine
Michelle Thomson
Colin Fox, Gillian Mackay
Mike Small
chaired by Lesley Riddoch



POLITICAL SATIRE FROM ANDY PATERSON
MUSIC BY AMANDA BROWN, ANDREW GORDON &
EUAN JOHNSTON

Queens Hall
Tuesday 21 September