

Torrance, D., 2014, *100 Days of Hope and Fear. How Scotland's Independence Referendum was Lost and Won*, Luath Press Limited, Edinburgh, pp. 192.

In recent years David Torrance has established himself as one of the most prolific and insightful observers of Scottish politics. He performs this role in various ways: as a praised biographer of political figures (e.g. Alex Salmond and Nicola Sturgeon), a frequent commentator in print and the electronic media (e.g. he is *The Herald's* columnist) and an independent scholar (he was the editor of *Whatever Happened to Tory Scotland?*, a volume published by Edinburgh University Press). Recent historic events in Scottish politics have inspired Torrance to explore new territories: first, and still before the independence referendum, he had gravitated towards the esoteric field of political theory in his pro-federalist tract, *Britain Rebooted. Scotland in a Federal Union* (published in May 2014); later – after September's vote – the book under review here was published, which is in fact a diary kept between May and September 2014.

On its pages a reader can encounter all the features of Torrance's style. There are examples of his usual level-headed analysis which is clearly visible in his approach towards prominent figures from the Better Together campaign. While acknowledging that Gordon Brown was a decisive asset to the No camp during the final weeks of the campaign, he is still not convinced about the depth of his commitment to the federal cause (and this in spite of being at once surprised and impressed by Brown's "substantial" book *My Scotland, our Britain. A Future Worth Sharing*). The same can be said of his opinions regarding another Labour politician, Jim Murphy. Even though the effort he put into the *100 Towns* speech tour is praised, Torrance is nonetheless critical of Murphy's attempts to exaggerate, for the sake of political ends, the abuse he was receiving from some Yes supporters. At certain points Torrance's far-sightedness fails him, but this is a part of his trade: he was neither expecting Murphy to give up his Westminster ambitions in order to try to turn the fortunes of the Scottish Labour Party, nor Alex Salmond's surprising resignation soon after a clear no majority in the referendum.

Among Torrance's strengths is an ability to spot an intriguing quote and to unveil often awkward contradictions in other people's statements. In the volume under review he does not disappoint in this respect; for instance, he questions Robin MacAlpine's off the mark statement claiming that the English are not part of the lives of the Scottish people by simply asking: "What about the millions of Scots who have English partners, relatives, friends or colleagues?" As for the quotes, especially the ones by Madeleine Bunting (her No-voting interviewee is describing how alienated he feels in his predominantly pro-Yes community, whose members express their views in a "utopian language") and Brian Wilson (responding to George Monbiot by accusing him of thinking that "[O]ther people's nationalism tends to look cuddlier from afar") deserve a mention as particularly interesting and debate-provoking. Torrance, however, seems to take them at face value.

It was certainly a good idea to enliven the diary with some details from the author's private life: it is a pure joy to read about Torrance's discussions with his enthusiastically pro-independence father. It can easily serve as a model example of the dinner table debates held in many Scottish homes before the referendum.

The book has some flaws too. Throughout his diary Torrance tries to uphold his journalistic neutrality (it should be added: in his professional relations; on the diary's pages he is quite clearly against independence). His willingness to be as neutral as possible is of course understandable. On the other hand, it is at times hard to sympathize with his struggle, especially if one considers his earlier writings. Does the publication of a short tract arguing for a federal Britain just before the referendum not indicate at least an indirect expression of his preferences? If yes, maybe it would be less confusing to speak about journalistic thoroughness, accuracy or fairness instead?

Even bearing in mind that it is a diary, it must be said that at times Torrance fails to elaborate on certain crucial questions (the extensive academic literature that tries to prove that sovereignty still means relatively a lot "in practice") or misses the opportunity to formulate a more nuanced view (in what particular ways should Germany serve as an example for Scotland?). Some of his opinions are somewhat debatable too (are Catalan arguments for independence indeed much stronger than those raised in Scotland?). As is

the case with most of diaries, Torrance is not shying away from the occasional bit of malice (e.g. are Ian Macwhirter and Lesley Riddoch “obsessed with” or just impressed by the Nordic countries?) or scorn (e.g. academics; in the opinion of the present writer it is actually a blessing that “[c]onstitutional lawyers are better on theory than they are on politics”). Torrance also seems to be more blunt when speaking about Scottish politicians in the international press (in the German media Alex Salmond is described by him – probably too harshly – as “Schottlands Jedermann ohne Ideologie” and careerist).

This book undoubtedly deserves to be rated as interesting and entertaining, although at times it can be rather challenging – especially for a person newly introduced to the realm of referendum politics – as a reader can easily feel lost in the labyrinth of the referendum campaign events and characters. As was stated above, Torrance’s opinions, even if from certain perspectives debatable, are always perceptive and deserve careful consideration. If we add that it is also a rare personal document, registering the tensions, controversies and emotions related with a crucial period, it becomes clear that this tiny book is a compulsory read for every student of contemporary Scottish and British politics.

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