

Letter from Scotland



Can Scotland's Joan of Arc save us from Brexit ?

Will Nicola Sturgeon turn the tide on Brexit ? She's certainly trying hard. She's using this weekend's SNP conference in Glasgow to call for a grand coalition of all opposition parties and pro-Europe Tories to keep Britain in the Single Market...the so-called "soft Brexit" option.

And she's got several powerful arguments at her disposal. She points out that all parties in the UK parliament fought the last election with a manifesto pledge to remain in the EU and reform it. She reminds Westminster that Scotland and Northern Ireland voted to remain in the EU and much of the legislation and regulation that comes from Europe applies to devolved matters like agriculture and the environment.

She supports the legal challenge being mounted in the English courts to ensure that only an act of parliament can trigger the Brexit negotiations. The SNP will be voting against the great repeal bill on European legislation and is urging other parties and the Tory rebels to do the same. Meanwhile she's insisting on Scotland having a powerful voice during any Brexit negotiations. And if all this fails, she's threatening to take Scotland out of the UK with a second independence referendum. She drew cheers from the conference with the announcement that the draft legislation will be published for consultation next week.

Nicola Sturgeon has already established herself as a star of the UK political stage with her performances during the 2015 general election and the EU referendum. Now she is on the way to becoming a Joan of Arc/Oliver Cromwell figure, fighting the cause of her country's freedom and parliamentary democracy,

against the royal prerogative of the May government.

This week the SNP's international affairs spokesman Stephen Gethins described the UN government's slow slide towards the European exit door as "a dog's Brexit."

*[@StephenGethins](https://t.co/JgttE0b2jy): Tories heading for a dog's Brexit.
<https://t.co/JgttE0b2jy> [pic.twitter.com/JD5cXwSSsw](https://t.co/JD5cXwSSsw)*

– Editor_SI1926 (@editor_si1926) [October 9, 2016](#)

And the financial markets took much the same view, the pound falling below the value of the Euro for the first time. That devaluation is pushing through into higher prices in the shops and worries about inflation and economic growth.

I suppose it's the desperate pursuit of growth that has persuaded the Scottish Government to back the plan for a third runway at Heathrow Airport. It makes the astonishing claim that it would mean 16,000 new jobs in Scotland, and construction projects worth £200m, over the next decade. Why the same benefits wouldn't accrue from the rival plan at Gatwick has not been explained. And, anyway, how does airport expansion square with our "ambitious" targets on climate change. Our main airports at Edinburgh and Glasgow are already seeing a worrying growth in passenger numbers, both reporting record highs for the month of September.

I'm happy to report that fewer people are being murdered in Scotland. The number of cases of murder and culpable homicide last year dropped to 57, the lowest for 40 years. But half of those involved the use of a knife, despite a police campaign against knife crime. We had a shocking example this week when a shopkeeper from Clydebank, John Leathem, was jailed for 27 years for the murder of a teenage girl, Paige Doherty, who had gone into his shop to ask for a job. The court heard that he stabbed her 61 times.

Also this week, Aberdeen council's report into the death of Bailey Gwynne was published. He was stabbed to death by a fellow pupil at Cults Academy in a row over a biscuit. The report said other pupils knew the killer regularly carried a knife into school but failed to report it to the staff. The government is considering giving teachers the power to search pupils for weapons, as is the case in England.

Scotland has had another bad day on the football field. We lost to Slovakia 3-0 which puts us out of the next World Cup, unless there is a mathematical miracle in the rest of the group games. The hotheads who live in the intoxicated world of social media are calling for the manager Gordon Strachan to be sacked. But, actually, we all know that our players are simply not good enough to compete at the top international level because we've neglected the junior levels of the sport.

Golf too is having a tough time. Both Turnberry in Ayrshire and the Menie golf course in Aberdeenshire have reported heavy losses. But then they are owned by a Mr Donald Trump, a man who can write off millions against tax and then have the effrontery to run for President.

Finally, a man who has some real skill. Danny MacAskill, the stunt cyclist from Skye, has made another film. "Wee Day Out" takes us on a cycle journey across Scotland. I say "across" advisedly because Danny cycles across the roof of a cottage, across a steam train, across a rolling bale of straw and much else as he makes his way from tea shop to tea shop from the Pentlands to Speyside. I was one of the 45 million people who saw his last film, cycling across the Cullins of Skye, and I'm still steadying my nerve to watch the "Wee Day Out".

Just in case you have the nerve here it is (hang on to your seats!)