

# Letter from Scotland



Scotland in “The Fall”.

The Americans call it “The Fall” ...not a reference to Adam and Eve eating an apple from the tree of knowledge, nor a reference to the Reformation which this week celebrated its 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary, but a reference to the leaf fall of autumn.

I find it a sad time of the year. Memories of summer days like leaves are blown away or swept up and put in garden bins or on compost heaps. It’s a huge operation in cities like Edinburgh and Glasgow with more green space than any other major city in Britain. It’s a huge operation for our railway companies which together are spending £2.6m this autumn on 11 “leaf fall teams”.

But we cannot do without our trees and I’m right behind the government’s aim to increase Scotland’s tree cover from 17 per cent of the land area to 25 per cent by 2050. We are way behind the likes of Belgium (21 per cent), France (28 per cent), Germany (32 per cent), Estonia and Latvia (both over 50 per cent).

Of course, we’ve had our tree problems – Dutch elm disease, ash die-back, 3 million trees lost to our wind farms (according to the Forestry Commission). But we are now planting back. Even in the denuded Western Isles, they are planting 100,000 new trees over the next three years.

And we do love our trees. The Woodland Trust is currently running a competition to choose Scotland’s Tree of the Year – all six of the short-list are favourite old trees: the Passchendaele Fir tree in Crief, the Beaully Sycamore, the Big Tree in Kirkwall, the Carnegie Oak in Dunfermline, the Greenock Cut oak tree and the Old Holly Bush at Castle Fraser

in Aberdeenshire. The winner will be announced next month.

But there's been another "fall" this week. The Parliament at Holyrood has become embroiled in a similar sex-abuse crisis to that at Westminster. Like Theresa May, Nicola Sturgeon has urged members of parliament and political parties to set up a robust complaints procedure so that victims of abuse or unacceptable behaviour can report their concerns without fear of the consequences.



Presiding Officer Ken Macintosh MSP convenes a cross-party meeting at Holyrood to discuss sexual harassment. (left-Right) James Kelly MSP, Scottish Labour; Patrick Harvie MSP, Scottish Green Party; First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon MSP; Presiding Officer, Rt Hon Ken Macintosh MSP; Jackson Carlaw MSP, Scottish Conservative Party; Parliament Clerk Chief Executive Sir Paul Grice. Pic – Andrew Cowan/Scottish Parliament

It emerged this week that two SNP parliamentarians have had complaints made against them of inappropriate behaviour. And it comes as the Conservative Party and the Labour Party are inquiring into similar cases among their own MPs or officials. Nicola Sturgeon said she hoped the current crisis would be a "watershed.....in how we perceive and address the issue of sexual harassment and inappropriate sexualised behaviour in the work place."



(left-Right) First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon MSP; Presiding Officer, Rt Hon Ken Macintosh MSP; Jackson Carlaw MSP, Scottish Conservative Party. Pic – Andrew Cowan/Scottish Parliament

The dramatic events in Catalonia have, of course, been

followed closely here in Scotland. Some 20 SNP MSPs have signed a motion in the Scottish Parliament calling for the international community to recognise Catalonia as an independent nation. They want the European Union to intervene to ensure a peaceful transition of power from the Spanish state to Catalonia. The SNP leadership have been rather more cautious on the issue and the Conservatives have said the SNP should concentrate on making life better in Scotland not “agitating on constitutional matters hundreds of miles away.”

Meanwhile Labour’s big oak tree Gordon Brown has been publishing extracts from his autobiography. He hits out at the international community for not backing his rescue operation for the world economy in the aftermath of the banking collapse in 2008. He shreds the already sub-prime reputation of Fred “the shred” Goodwin, the man who ruined the Royal Bank of Scotland. And, turning on himself, Mr Brown admits he was never going to thrive in the new social media world.

Finally, Glasgow’s woodland jester Billy Connolly has become Sir Billy. He was knighted by Prince William at a ceremony in Buckingham Palace on Tuesday for services to entertainment and charity. “I’m kind of numb,” said the Big Yin. Knighthoods were not exactly on the horizon when he was growing up among the shipyards of the Clyde. But he has turned out to be the best tale-telling lumberjack the Caledonian forest has ever produced.