

Letter from Scotland

In a wood in Glen Feshie
there is a series of tree-carvings
with a distinctly political theme.
There are figures with two faces,
bodies
within bodies, strong men fighting,
a farm labourer and his laird,
bland faces
on high totem poles looking down on
starving children carved into tree
stumps,
a lady looking sadly at a
reflection in a pond, and the
screaming face you see
above, entitled "The Witness". They
are all by the local self-taught
sculptor
Frank Bruce.

Right now I feel like that "witness", looking on in horror at
the goings-on at Westminster and wondering how awful the
European Parliamentary Election results will be...not another
Brexit victory surely!

It's the election that wasn't supposed to happen. It's also the election where four of the parties have not published manifestos. The Conservatives and Labour are too fragmented to have a policy on Europe. And the two Brexit parties, Nigel Farage's new Brexit party and his old party UKIP both say their stance can be summed up in that one ugly word, Brexit.



The Brexit Party rally last week in Edinburgh
In Scotland, that leaves the SNP, the Greens, and the Liberal Democrats who all want a second referendum and that, preferably, to result in no Brexit at all. Then there is the new "Change UK" party which surprised us all when its lead candidate in Scotland, David Macdonald, announced he was now urging people to vote for the Liberal Democrats.



Scottish Green candidates for the European Elections 2019
And there are two
independents, Gordon Edgar a member of the Borders District
Council whose
policy is "Borders First". And Kenneth
Peake who runs a crematorium in Angus and whose policies I
cannot find on the
internet.



“The Witness” looking on in horror.

The First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, has of course been urging people to vote SNP, even those who don't agree with Scottish independence. She says it's the only way of making sure Scotland's voice is heard in the whole sorry affair. She took time off the election trail however to deliver a speech (we must not call it a sermon) to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. In it she praised the Kirk for being Scotland's voice during the 300 years when Scotland did not have its own parliament. She went on to praise all religious leaders in Scotland for “standing together against intolerance and bigotry which appear to be on the rise in many parts of

the world.”

Getting back to my role as horrified witness, I was shocked to learn that the French energy firm EDF is contemplating building its wind-farm towers in Indonesia and not in the Bi-Fab yards in Fife. The new wind farm is only ten miles off the coast of Fife and I agree with the union leaders that it seems crazy to build the towers on the other side of the world. I know the wages bill for the thousand workers in Fife will be more than the labour costs in Indonesia but should a European firm be using cheap labour?

It's also sad, indeed devastating, that the new low-carbon Scotland is finding it so hard to create the thousands of “green energy” jobs promised. Instead we are drilling on with oil exploration and production. BP held its AGM this week in Aberdeen in what can only be seen as an act of defiance. But environmental campaigners seized the opportunity to stage a protest against the further use of fossil fuels. The company said it was keen to make the transition to renewable energy but it would take time.

On Thursday we found out how dependent Scotland's islands have become on air travel. A 24 hour strike by air traffic controllers brought flights to a halt at six regional airports – Dundee, Inverness, Kirkwall, Sumburgh, Stornoway and Benbecula. The dispute is over pay, with the Prospect union wanting a 10 per cent pay rise to match pay in the private sector. The airports are owned by the Scottish government and the managers have only offered a 2 per cent rise. Some 6,000 passengers were affected and there's every chance of more strikes unless the government relents.

Do you remember Kazakhstan? This far-away country, ranked 117th in world football, had the temerity to beat Scotland 3-0 in the Euro 2020 qualifiers back in March. This not unnaturally led to the dismissal of Alex McLeish as Scotland manager. He'd only won 4 of his 11 matches in charge. The

face of "The Witness" in Glen Feshie captured the national anguish at the time.

This week however, all has changed. A new Scotland manager has been discovered not far away, in the dressing room at Kilmarnock Football Club. Steve Clarke has turned the club's fortunes around since he arrived there two season ago after a successful spell of coaching in England. A former St Mirren and Scotland player himself, he told his first press conference as manager that he wants Scotland to become top of our qualifying group for Euro 2020, despite the knock back in Kazakhstan.

He wants his players to draw inspiration from the Scotland's women's team which has qualified for the World Cup in France this summer. And I guess he will be watching for inspiration, and players, at Hampden this weekend when Celtic are hoping to complete an unprecedented "treble treble" beating Hearts to win all three major trophies for the third successive time.