

Letter from Scotland

If they had been judges on Strictly Come Dancing, the three Scottish appeal court judges would have given Boris Johnson a total score of zero for his constitutional dance to suspend the UK parliament. It was a withering condemnation of the Prime Minister. They ruled that the “prorogation” was unlawful because it was motivated by a desire to “stymie” debate over Brexit.

It was, they said “an egregious case of a clear failure to comply with generally accepted standards of behaviour”. They simply didn’t believe the government’s argument that a five week suspension of parliament was normal practice in the run up to a Queen’s Speech. And they said HM the Queen had been misled and should not have agreed to the prorogation.



Awaiting the verdict. Protestors at the Court of Session. In Scotland, the judges, Lords Carloway, Brodie and Drummond-Young, have been hailed by The Scotsman as “heroes of the people”. Their judgment overturns an original court ruling from the Lord Ordinary Lord Doherty that the matter was “political” and not something the law courts could deal with. The High Court in England (a lower court than the Inner House of our Court of Session) last week, however, agreed with Lord Doherty and the whole question is to be resolved at a final appeal hearing at the Supreme Court in London on Tuesday.

The Supreme Court in the past has been a staunch upholder of parliamentary democracy – insisting that MPs be given a chance to debate any Brexit deal before it is signed off by the government. But which way they will jump this time will be intriguing and controversial. The atmosphere at Westminster during the elaborate prorogation ceremony on Monday night was positively Cromwellian, with MPs having passed a law

preventing a
no-deal Brexit, then holding up signs saying “silenced” and
SNP members singing
“Scots wha hae.”



Westminster

Meanwhile, north of the
border, we are still fighting the battles of long ago. No
fewer than five Irish
Republican or Loyalist marches were due to take place this
weekend in
Glasgow. But the city council has banned
them all, following trouble at a march last month and at two
marches last
weekend. The justice minister Humza
Yousaf has said he supports the council and is looking at ways
of reducing the
number of sectarian parades in Glasgow.

There's been good pre-election news for the shipbuilding yard
at Rosyth. Babcock's have won the competition to assemble the

Royal Navy's latest frigates. Announcing the £1.25bn contract, Boris Johnson said it would create or secure 2,500 jobs across the UK, not only at Rosyth but at other yards, possibly Ferguson's shipyard at Port Glasgow and Harland and Wolff in Belfast, both of which are in financial difficulties. Five of the new Type 31 frigates will be built for the Royal Navy and it's hoped there will be many more built for export. "They can be used for all sorts of things," Mr Johnson assured us, "peace keeping, fighting piracy and controlling illegal immigration." Work will begin on the new ships at the end of this year.

Scotland needs all the work it can get, according to the latest employment figures. The number of people in work is down and unemployment is up to 4 per cent, compared with a UK average of 3.8 per cent. There's also been a drop in the number of job vacancies and we're all wondering if there's a Brexit recession on the way.

The Scottish Parliament is not involved in all this proroguing nonsense, so things were proceeding relatively gracefully at Holyrood. At First Minister's Questions on Thursday, Nicola Sturgeon came under attack for the delay in getting the new children's hospital in Edinburgh fit for purpose.

We learned this week that it won't be open till next autumn because of faults in the drainage and ventilation system.

Apparently they've arisen over a misunderstanding in the paperwork laying down the specifications for the building. It means that on top of the £150m cost, another £16m will be needed to put things right, and meanwhile a further £6m will be spent keeping the old hospital in operation. Ms Sturgeon and her health secretary Jeane Freeman were reduced to expressing their deep regrets and promising to learn lessons for the future.

Finally, the students are back, like migrating birds. University towns like Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen, Dundee and

St Andrew's are swamped with "freshers" finding their way round their flats, super-markets, pubs and clubs, labs and lecture halls, all with the aid of their smart-phones. Do they ever look up ? Do they see the fine towns and institutions they have landed in ? According to the Time Education Supplement, Scotland has four universities among the top 200 in the world. Edinburgh University comes in at number 30, Glasgow University at 99, Aberdeen at 168 and St Andrew's at 196.

But the top university, of course, is not as the Times would have it Oxford, but the University of Life.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-YNpGfqXsq>