

Letter from Scotland

The contrast could not be much starker. While the Westminster parliament is divided from “the people,” the Scottish parliament is united with its people, at least over their opposition to Brexit. Thousands of Scots marched down the Royal Mile last weekend to a rally at Holyrood to protest against Boris Johnson’s devilish plan to take Britain out of the European Union in as scary a fashion as possible at Halloween.



Parliament and People

As Lady Hale's spider put it this week: "O what a tangled web we weave when first we practice to deceive." I'm sure the Supreme Court President was wearing her spider brooch in the full knowledge that the famous quote from Sir Walter Scott would underline her message that the Scottish judges were right.

Parliament had been suspended unlawfully and the Queen was deceived by a prime minister playing fast and loose with the rules of democracy.



Westminster

When MPs reassembled on Wednesday it became clear in those rowdy scenes that Boris is determined to pit parliament against the people. The 2016 referendum result, he said, should over-ride parliament, no matter how close it was and whatever exactly it meant. Did it mean leaving with a deal or no deal ? Did it mean leaving the Customs Union and the Single Market as well as the EU? And what about the other useful European arrangements over security, international crime and scientific co-operation?

And if the goings-on at Westminster were shambolic and disgraceful, what about the annual conference in Brighton of the main opposition party? On the crucial issue of Brexit, Labour is still hopelessly divided. By a narrow and chaotic show of hands, the conference decided to back Jeremy Corbyn's neutral stance on Brexit. So the party will go into the upcoming general election saying it will negotiate a Customs Union deal with the EU and then put that to a second referendum, with an option to remain. Except in Scotland,

where the party will be campaigning for a straight remain vote.

Meanwhile, at the Scottish Parliament on Wednesday, MSPs voted for the “toughest climate change targets in the world.” Not only will Scotland try to be carbon neutral by 2045, it will have an interim target of a 75 per cent reduction in greenhouse gases by 2030. The vote was unanimous, except for the curious abstention of the 6 Green MSPs. They were holding out for an 80 per cent reduction by 2030.



Young people marching in Edinburgh on 20 September 2019 PHOTO ©2019 The Edinburgh Reporter

It follows the school pupil strikes and the day of climate change marches across the world last Friday. Edinburgh and Glasgow saw thousands of pupils and students on the streets demanding their elders and not-so-betters do something meaningful to save the planet. They were every bit as angry as the girl who started it all, 16-year old Greta Thunberg from Sweden, who sailed across the Atlantic to tell the adults at the UN “you have stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words.”

As she was speaking, the company responsible for a good deal of carbon emissions, Thomas Cook, was collapsing. Scots holiday makers were arriving back in Glasgow with tales of chaos at foreign airports as Thomas Cook planes were grounded and the UK government had to arrange, and pay for, alternative flights home. It neatly illustrated the hard truth that, if we are serious about reducing carbon emissions, we need to fly less and pay the real pollution costs.

One man who won't be flying
less is Donald Trump. Nor perhaps will his US military air
crews who,
apparently, are encouraged to stay at Trump's Turnberry Hotel
when overnighiting
at Prestwick Airport. I don't know if
the allegation will form part of the
impeachment hearings in Washington but Trump is already in
trouble with
environmentalists in Scotland over his golf course on the sand
dunes of
Aberdeenshire. His agents have applied
for planning permission for a major housing development and
this week local
councillors approved a second golf course at the resort.

Loyal readers may recall that
Scotland became the first country in the world to introduce a
minimum price per
unit of alcohol in May 2018. Well, the
experiment seems to be proving a success in reducing the
amount of strong drink
consumed by Scots. It's down by 7.6 per cent, twice the
predicted amount. And the research, published in the British
Medical Journal, also found that it was the households which
consumed most
drink, especially strong ciders, which cut their intake most.
So that's one target which has been hit.

Finally, I was surprisingly moved by the pictures of a funeral
in Glasgow this week. It was for a Dutchman who had made
Scotland his home. Fernando Ricksen played right back for
Rangers for six years from 2000 and as captain led them to
trophy after trophy before the club's financial downfall. He
went on to play in Russia and then back in the Netherlands
until he was diagnosed with motor neurone disease in 2013. He
died in a nursing home in Lanarkshire aged 43. But not before

he'd raised over £1m for research into the disease. He leaves a wife and young daughter. Thousands turned out to say "Farewell," including the Celtic manager Neil Lennon. Some of Ricksen's former teammates wore black shirts with his number two printed on them as they bore his coffin into Wellington Church.

I suppose I was surprised to find that football is not just a game, it's about people and communities and the way we live our lives.