

Letter from Scotland

The outcome of the General Election may be blowing in the wind, but the climate change emergency has not been entirely forgotten.

The heavy rain and flooding in the north of England have seen to that. All parties are promising a green revolution of some sort. And this week in Scotland, it almost – but not quite – edged the two big issues of Brexit and independence aside.

Jeremy Corbyn came on a two-day visit here to sell Labour's plan for a £70bn investment programme north of the border which would include more public housing, more funds for social care and the fight against poverty, but also a big boost to public transport and off-shore wind development. Labour's green revolution aims to create 50,000 jobs in Scotland over the next ten years.



Blowing in the wind. Eaglesham Moor wind farm. Photo by Russel Fallis.

Meanwhile, Boris Johnson was

touring the flooded towns of Yorkshire and an electric taxi manufacturer in Coventry also pledging to invest in wind energy, car electrification and to spend £800m developing carbon capture. This time, the Peterhead gas power station may actually get the funds it was denied in 2015.

The Greens, of course, want to make this “the climate change election”, saying the government of the UK should be spending at least £100bn investing in renewable energy and energy conservation. They’ve attacked the SNP for continuing to support the off-shore oil industry. The SNP have hit back by saying they are “transitioning” away from fossil fuels, and they point to the Scottish government’s world-beating target of making Scotland carbon neutral by 2045.

But as I say, all this worthy talk of saving the planet was swept aside by another bout of referendumitis. At First Minister’s Questions, Nicola Sturgeon made no apology for wanting to hold two referendums next year, one on Brexit and another on independence.

Jeremy Corbyn found himself in trouble on both issues. Critics said his plan to negotiate a new deal with the EU and then put that to a referendum, without any recommendation, was unrealistic. And then he failed to make clear whether Labour’s refusal to allow Scotland a second referendum on independence applied to “the early years of a Labour government” or to its full 5 year term.

I suspect that if the SNP holds the balance of power at Westminster after the election, the “early years” option will be the one agreed. And, speaking of the balance of power, it’s another reason Nicola Sturgeon says she

should be included in the UK television debates between the main party leaders.

All this political uncertainty is being blamed for another set of poor employment figures this week. They are down by 43,000 over the last quarter, to 2.6m here in Scotland and it reflects the sharpest drop in the employment figures across the UK for four years. Unemployment in Scotland is now at 4per cent. If elections are about the economy, this is not a good omen for the Conservatives.

This week a public inquiry was announced into the strange case of the death of Sheku Bayoh. He was a 31 year old gas engineer, from Sierra Leone, who came to live in Scotland at the age of 17.

Early one morning in May 2015, he was reported to the police in Kirkcaldy by members of the public who said he was behaving "erratically" and was carrying what they believed to be a knife. Five police cars and two vans were called out and Mr Bayoh was arrested. During the arrest he passed out and never regained consciousness.

It's not clear how he died, though he was found to have taken drugs. He was not however carrying a knife, though a knife was found nearby. His family say he suffered bruising and other wounds and they suspect he died of suffocation. They say CCTV footage and phone records cast doubt on some of the police evidence. Although a fatal inquiry was held, the Crown Prosecution Service said no one would be charged with any offence and the police maintain it was a tragic accident and they did nothing wrong. So finally, after four years, The Scottish Government has ordered a full public inquiry, with the central question being: "Would the same have happened if Sheku Bayoh had been a white man?"

You may be alarmed to hear that Scotland is soon to be a world pioneer in driverless buses. The first passengers to board the Stagecoach single-decker were "driven" round a large car park in Glasgow as an experiment this week. The bus has been built by Alexander Dennis in Larbert and the driving system has been developed by Fusion Processing of Bristol. Five driverless buses are due to run the first scheduled service, across the old Forth Bridge, between Ferrytoll park-and-ride in Fife and Edinburgh Park station, at the end of next year. Apparently there will be a driver on board, just in case things go wrong.

Finally, Christmas begins this weekend! Or at least, the Christmas lights get switched on in Glasgow, Dundee, Inverness and here in Edinburgh. This year the Edinburgh Christmas market in Princes Street Gardens is the subject of some "tut-tutting".



East Princes Street Gardens at the end of October 2019 Photo: Martin P. McAdam www.martinmcadam.com

Those monitoring Edinburgh as a World Heritage Site say the market is taking up too much of the gardens and is spoiling the view. The city council will explore other venues for the market next year.

By then we might all be washed away by climate change. Or too busy fighting yet another election.