

Letter from Scotland

One of Andrew's few appearances in the Bible is in the story of the "feeding of the five thousand". It was he who noticed the lad who came well supplied for a day out with a lunch of five loaves of bread and two small fishes. "But what are they among so many?" Andrew asked, prompting the famous miracle.

If Andrew were here for this St Andrew's Day, he might well be asking sceptical questions about the loaves and fishes that are on offer from the political parties. Each election manifesto unveiled in Scotland this week promises a miracle.



What would St Andrew make of this St Andrew's Day ?

Boris Johnson breezed in on Tuesday to announce £3 billion extra spending on Scottish public services, £211m for the

farmers, new deals for the fishing industry, the whisky distillers and the main cities, more seasonal agriculture workers and, of course, “getting Brexit done” and, emblazoned on the cover of the blue manifesto “no2indyref2”.

The Labour Party, meanwhile, is offering Scotland £100bn more public spending over the next 10 years, free school meals for all pupils, 120,000 new council houses, a £2bn fund to encourage “green bus travel,” and a second referendum on Brexit. The Scottish Party will be allowed to campaign for “remain” even if the UK party has negotiated a new deal with Brussels. And on a second referendum on independence, Labour’s final position on this is that it would sanction such a referendum if The Scottish Parliament asked for it but not in the first two years of a Labour government.

The SNP manifesto spends much of its 50 pages laying out its opposition to Brexit and its call for a second EU referendum. Nicola Sturgeon has also been laying down her conditions for supporting a minority Labour government, if the SNP holds the balance of power on 13 December. They include an immediate Scottish referendum, the phasing out of Trident nuclear weapons, more devolved powers for the Scottish Parliament on immigration and a big boost to public services, including £4 billion for the NHS.

The Liberal Democrats say Scotland will get its share of the “£50 billion no-Brexit bonus” plus its share of the extra money going to the NHS from the 1p increase in income tax. And while they want a second referendum on Brexit, they are against a second referendum on Scottish independence.

The Greens are only contesting 22 seats in Scotland but they hope to win support for a radical de-carbonising of Scottish industry and transport, a citizen’s wage to replace the benefit system, and a pay ratio no more than one/ten in

the public sector.

Like the SNP they are demanding a second EU referendum and an immediate referendum on Scottish independence.



All the Green candidates in Edinburgh seats PHOTO ©2019 The Edinburgh Reporter

All the opposition parties, naturally enough, are trying to draw attention to the SNP's failures and weaknesses in government. This week it's been about police morale and an infection scare at the new Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Glasgow.

The Labour Party says it has evidence the local health board was warned about the possible contamination of the water supply in the children's ward several times over the last four years but did nothing about it. Every few days another case of a child who died at the hospital emerges and parents are increasingly

suspecting the water supply. The Conservatives are demanding to know when the results of a public inquiry into the issue will be available. Meanwhile the ward has been closed and the board has been put under “special measures”.

Twelve of Scotland’s 19 universities have been affected by the UK-wide strike by teaching and support staff. The strikes are spread over 8 days and thousands of students have had their studies interrupted. The dispute is over pay and pension changes and the “commercialisation” of the universities which had led to poorer working conditions. Higher education has been one of the main casualties of government austerity and although Scotland doesn’t levy fees on our own students (unlike the £9,000 a year charged in England), fee-paying English and non-EU students have changed the nature of our universities.

The change in the nature of our high streets was underlined this week when we Edinbughers were shocked to learn from the Edinburgh Evening News that the iconic department store Jenners may move out of Princes Street. All of us have a fond memory of the place. Mine is being taken to tea in the restaurant on the top floor on a school trip from Aberdeen in the 1960s. It’s been there since 1838 and was, until a few years ago, the oldest independent department store in the world. The owner of the building, the Danish businessman Anders Holch Povlsen wants to turn it into a hotel, and the retail business operating under the brand name Jenners and owned by Mike Ashley, will move elsewhere. The announcement has sparked yet another debate about “over-tourism” and the loss of Edinburgh’s heritage.



Jenners Christmas Tree. Photo: Martin P. McAdam
www.martinmcadam.com

This week saw the premier of a film about Andy Murray's struggle back to fitness after his hip operation. It gives an insight into the pressures our top sports stars are under, physical and emotional. By coincidence, a television documentary is to be aired this weekend telling the story of our other Scottish tennis star, Elena Baltacha who died of cancer in 2014 at the age of 30. Although she was born in Kiev, she was brought up in Perth where her father played for St Johnstone Football Club. She rose to be British No1 but not without a struggle against injury and poor health.

To be top of your game is not easy. I think too often we forget that the prominent people we read about in the news often don't have an easy life.

And, at this election time, we ought to have more sympathy and understanding for those who put their personal lives on the line to serve us

in the
necessary, if messy, business of politics.