

Letter from Scotland

As I stood watching the Armistice Day service at the Scott Monument in Edinburgh on Thursday, I tried to imagine the sense of utter despair there must be when a world war has finally ended. Lives, livelihoods and cities lie in ruins. Yet the huge task of reconstruction must begin and the building back must be better.

After each war there was a determination in every country to save humanity from destroying itself. The League of Nations, then the United Nations, were formed in a global effort to build a better future. I like to think there is a similar mood as we come out of the Covid lockdowns and as we face the next emergency, climate change.



Remembrance and rebuilding

I felt it in the drum beat at the climate march through Glasgow last weekend. Despite the rain, 100,000 people turned out to urge the UN's COP26 conference to get serious about climate change and stop "pretending". As I write, delegates from 120 countries are haggling over the final agreement.



The climate march makes its way through George Square. What has emerged so far has been piecemeal and timid. Saving

the world's rain forests has been promised twice before, and this time with even less money allocated. The methane gas targets don't include Russia, China, India or Australia. The phasing out of coal over the next 20 years has only been agreed by 40 of the 120 countries and the UK government seems determined to go ahead with a new coal mine in Cumbria. The conversion to electric cars by 2040 has only been signed up to by 24 countries. And the Clydebank Declaration to establish zero-emission sea routes by 2050 has only been signed by 19 countries.

Little has been said about ending the large state subsidies given to fossil fuel users (£134bn worldwide, according to the IEA) or the tax breaks given to oil exploration and aviation fuel. And, again as I write, there is still a shortfall in the £72bn promised by 2020 to help poor countries cope with the floods and droughts caused by the rich countries' gas emissions.

For aw that and aw that, I feel that the Glasgow COP has changed the mood and the public at large have got the message that the carbon economy has to come to an end soon. The political leaders still have to catch up, open the windows of their SUVs, and start listening to the crowds outside.

Our First Minister Nicola Sturgeon has spent most of the week at the climate conference, speaking at various fringe events and greeting the world leaders and their delegations. This week, the stars of the side-shows were Barack Obama who warned us again hopelessness and "Little Amal" a giant puppet who has been making her way from Syria across Europe pleading for help for the world's refugees.



STORM meets Little Amal in Glasgow Let it Grow 'Enough is Enough' photo call, Govan Cross, Glasgow, 10th Nov 2021

© 2021 J.L. Preece

Back in The Scottish Parliament, the deputy first minister

John Swinney was left minding the shop. He had to answer angry questions from the opposition parties about the creaking National Health Service. Why were so many patients waiting for operations? Why were people having to wait hours for an ambulance? Why is there a shortage of doctors and nurses? His answer was Covid and rising demand. And more money than ever before was being pumped into the health service, another £300m announced last month.

The pandemic is still a real and present danger. Over 20 people are dying every day. The number of cases is still high, at over 3,000 a day and over 760 people are in hospital with Covid. There are suggestions from the government that the Covid passport scheme may have to be extended to cover hospitality venues, cinemas and concerts, as well as night clubs and football matches.

I cannot mention football matches without holding my breath that the match about to begin in Moldova, at the time writing, results in Scotland winning a place in the World Cup finals. But even that has been overshadowed by the news that Steven Gerrard is leaving his job as manager of Rangers. The former England captain rescued the team from its doldrums three years ago and has rebuild it so as to win the league earlier this year. He's off to manage Aston Villa, the latest talented manager to use Rangers and Celtic as stepping stones to the high sierra of world football.

At a time of Remembrance and global struggles against Covid and climate change, it may seem irreverent to speak of football. But sport reminds us of our common humanity. Even in the trenches of the First World War, German and British soldiers arranged their own cease-fires to play football on Christmas Day 1914. The tragedy is that their leaders did not see things that way. Let's hope that in our present emergency, our leaders are not so short-sighted.