

Letter from Scotland

We are into our second week of a bin strike in the festival city of Edinburgh and it's now spreading to another 20 council districts across the country.

A long list of other public sector workers are joining the "cost of living" protest march, including teachers, school support staff, nurses and doctors, all demanding pay rises to keep up with the rate of inflation, now at 10 per cent and expected to rise to 12 per cent in the autumn.

COSLA the local government umbrella body and government ministers have been meeting to try to work out a solution. So far The Scottish Government has given councils an additional £140 million to help them increase their pay offer from the original two per cent to three and a half per cent. And it's also hinted that it may loosen the rules on designated funding to allow councils to divert money from other services or projects to increase the offer to five per cent.



Festival of rubbish

This might satisfy the unions, if it is packaged as a flat payment to all workers, each receiving, say £2,000 a year extra. It would increase the salary of the average waste collector up to £23,000, a 14 per cent increase. And flatten the pay structure generally, a move well over-due to roll back the inequality in society which has grown in recent years.

Of course the UK Government could also shake the magic money tree it discovered during the Covid pandemic. And the pressure is growing on it to do so, once it comes out of its leadership slumber.

But the bin strike has not just exposed our economic problems, it has dramatically exposed our environmental carelessness. We now realise just how much rubbish we throw away. The government agency, Zero Waste Scotland, reckons Scots leave 250 million items of litter in our streets and countryside every year. That's 15,000 tonnes of rubbish, 50 pieces of

litter each year for each person – drink containers, food packaging, cigarette ends and chewing gum. It costs councils £46 million a year to clear it up, £20 for every taxpayer.

We can blame ourselves for not taking our litter home. But we can also blame parliament for not passing laws which forbid fast-food outlets from using plastic or polystyrene packaging. Two small steps to save the planet.

A third step, even more controversial, would be to remove the price cap on energy bills, which has just gone up on Friday. (The price of electricity will rise on average from 28p per kWh to 52p in October-December and gas will go up from 7p to 15p per kWh). This would encourage us all to use less gas, petrol and electricity and so tackle climate change. Of course, the poor quarter of the population would need to be compensated, either by targeted government payments or by the energy companies loading their charges according to customers' ability to pay.

Happily, the future looks better than the present, with electricity prices set to fall in the years ahead as more wind power comes on stream. In this, Scotland is twice blessed, we have the wind and we have the technology. This week the first electricity flowed from the Seagreen wind farm off the Angus coast (114 turbines) and permission was given for three new wind farms off Shetland.



24 August is the 31st anniversary of Ukrainian Independence and was celebrated by the Consul General of Ukraine in Scotland along with the Rt Hon Lord Provost and other dignitaries PHOTO ©2022 The Edinburgh Reporter

The Ukrainian community living in Scotland have been suffering their worst independence day since the foundation of the modern state in 1991. There are now 13,000 refugees from Putin's war here in Scotland. They are a tiny fraction of the 12 million Ukrainians who have been forced to leave the country since February. But even this small number have not been found homes here, some are still living in hotel rooms or on the ship in Leith Docks. This week one of our politicians, Alex Cole-Hamilton leader of the Liberal Democrats, has stepped forward to offer a place in his own home to a refugee. A rare case of a leader leading by example.

It's been a sad week in so many ways. One of the saddest was the news of the death of Rab Wardell, the champion mountain-biker, who died of heart failure at the age of just 37. He was at home in Glasgow and his partner, the Olympic cyclist Katie Archibald, tried to resuscitate him but without

success. He died just three days after winning the Scottish mountain biking championships at Kirroughtree Forest in Galloway.

One of the festival performances I went to see this week was Tim Walker's play "Bloody Difficult Women" about the dying days of Theresa May's government. It turned out that most of the difficulties were caused by men and it captured the dysfunctional state of Westminster politics perfectly. The antics there have truly left us in a rubbish state, symbolised in the waste bins in the streets of Edinburgh this week. We are floundering outside the rest of Europe at a time of war and a global energy crisis, edging towards a break-up of the United Kingdom, running away from the climate emergency and facing a cost of living rebellion. And we're waiting for another difficult woman to bale us out.



PHOTO © The Edinburgh Reporter