

# Letter from Scotland

Climate change has given us a misleading lead-up to Halloween. It's been a mild 18C for most of the week and the leaves have been falling in a gentle breeze.

The early darkness has reminded us it's time to put our clocks back an hour this weekend and prepare for the ghouls and ghosts, and the pumpkin faces and the broomsticks and the fancy dress of a wild Halloween.

In Scotland we are still reeling from the frightening changes "down south" in the boiling cauldron of Westminster. The ghost of Trussonomics still hangs in the air, like the smoke of an exploded firework. And in, on a broomstick, flies the Peter-Pan figure of Rishi Sunak, the youngest prime minister since 1812 and the first prime minister of Indian heritage. Queen Victoria would be amused to learn that "a colonial" had taken charge of her empire.

The financial markets may have got over their fright on black Friday, mini-budget disaster day, but here in Scotland we are spooked by the cuts due to come on blue Thursday, 17 November.

Nicola Sturgeon says she wants "a constructive working

relationship" with the Sunak government but she warned against continued austerity. At least Mr Sunak has phoned Ms Sturgeon, unlike his now ghostly predecessor.

The Scottish Government is in desperate need of a larger block grant from Westminster. It's facing steeply rising costs. A five per cent pay rise has already been promised for council workers. 50,000 NHS staff are being balloted on a pay rise of £2,000 (a rise of between 2 and 11 per cent). Nurses, teachers, university lecturers are holding pay ballots and another strike on the railways is due on Saturday.



### Changing seasons

The latest public services to warn of cuts are the police and fire brigade. Police chiefs say they may have to close down the non-emergency 101 phone line and the number of police officers will have to be reduced by 4,500 over the next four years, if there's no increase in funding. 500 fire officers turned up at the Scottish Parliament on Thursday to protest

against the current 5 per cent pay offer. They say over a thousand jobs have been lost in the service in the last ten years and further cuts would threaten everyone's safety.

The unseasonably warm weather has reminded some of us that it's a year since Glasgow hosted the UN conference on climate change. Another protest march through the streets of Glasgow has been organised to highlight the sad fact that not much, except the weather, has changed. The UN has again warned we are heading for a 2.8 degree global heating disaster as it holds yet another COP conference next week in Egypt.

The weather is not the only thing that is changing, the Scottish Government's view on "gender" is changing too. The gender recognition bill will make it easier for someone to change their legal sexual status, cutting the time required from two years to six months and cutting the minimum age from 18 to 16. Supporters of the bill say it's a pioneering reform which will ease the distress of many "trans" people. But those against say it allows men to "self identify" as women and will be an invasion of the right to women-only spaces, such as changing rooms, hospital wards and women's refuges.



Ash Regan SNP ©2021 The Edinburgh Reporter

It's led to the biggest split in the SNP since the beginning of the Scottish parliament. Seven of the party's MSPs voted against the bill, two abstained and one minister quit, Ash Regan, the community safety minister. Most Conservatives also voted against. The final vote was 88 in favour and 33 against. The bill now goes forward for detailed amendments.

Even though we are half way through the football season, Scottish professional football has entered the new world of VAR, video assisted refereeing. The first game, at Easter Road, went off without controversy. But when it was used at Celtic and Ranger games, it just gave rise to new controversies. One of which is : how much does the crowd who bother to turn up to the stadium see of the video pictures, and how much are they kept in the dark, sometimes for several minutes. Is it a goal when the referee blows his whistle or isn't it? Can I cheer now, or later?

It's an issue we need to put to the first ever graduates in refereeing. Clare Daniels and Christina Barrow have just been

awarded masters' degrees in refereeing and umpiring from Napier University in Edinburgh, the first such course in the world.

So much has changed in just a week...the season, the British government and most of its policies, the world of football and, more seriously, the climate.



Graduations – Oct 2022 – Before the Wed ceremony. SAS and TBS PHOTO courtesy of Edinburgh Napier University