

# Letter from Scotland

**The east of Scotland, normally the driest part of the country, has had its wettest October since records began in 1836. Storm Babet, pushed the rainfall total up to 236mm, 82 per cent more than the average.**

There was serious flooding in Perth, Aberfeldy and Brechin, road and train services were disrupted, three people died in various accidents and fields of crops were destroyed. The next storm, Storm Ciaran, has arrived this week.

But climate change is only a distant threat, according to the UK government. Earlier this week it approved 27 new oil and gas developments in the North Sea and west of Shetland. It wants to make a smooth transition from fossil fuels to renewables, which rather assumes that climate change will be smooth too. The First Minister Humza Yousaf has said approving the 27 is “the wrong move”. But he too is a smooth transitionist, saying each development should be decided on its merits.



Colours of the passing year.

I wonder if there will be a judicial inquiry, in the sweltering heat of 2050, into what went wrong during the “climate change emergency”. Will ministers be held to account for the contents of their WhatsApp messages?

We have become obsessed in recent weeks with the two Covid inquiries, one for the UK as a whole and a separate one in Scotland. There’s been a parade of people giving verbal evidence – relatives of those who died during the pandemic, senior politicians and civil servants.

But I’m not convinced judicial inquiries are a good thing. They are too legalistic. They take too long. They are held ages after the event – when lessons have already been learned. They encourage vengeance, blame-seeking, and buck-passing. They open up psychological wounds in the victims of disasters. Far from getting “closure”, victims often end up disappointed with the verdict and the government’s response.

It is much better to have an expert make an immediate investigation and identify the lessons to be learned. Sometimes, it simply has to be admitted that bad luck plays a part in many disasters. We tend to forget that it was Covid which killed people and caused the lockdowns, not the scientific advisers, the politicians or the civil servants.

And as for the inquiries raking through thousands of WhatsApp messages, hoping to find some blue passages, how ridiculous! And how unfair. Why should anyone keep private, unofficial conversations for the delectation of the public years later. We should remember that, at the time, Covid was perceived as a real and present danger, hospitals were going to be overflowing, the economy was collapsing, public services were coming to a halt. Yes, there was panic in government, bad decisions were made and people in high places misbehaved. But who of us didn't panic, make poor decisions, or occasionally break the Covid rules?

Coming back to the present emergency in our schools, another wave of strike action has begun. Janitors, cleaners and other support staff in the largest union Unison closed schools in the West of Scotland on Wednesday this week. And the same will happen in other parts of the country in the weeks ahead, unless the current pay offer is improved.

Local council leaders are deciding, as I write, whether to impose a 5.5 per cent settlement on all support staff, given that two smaller unions have accepted the offer. I guess they would do so reluctantly, caught as they are in the battle of will between the government and the unions over this year's pay awards.

So far The Scottish Government has managed to head off major disruption to services and have settled pay disputes with teachers, doctors and nurses and council workers. Generally the government has made offers of around 7 per cent and thus avoided the longer strikes we've seen in the public services

in England. But things will remain unstable until governments, north and south of the border, face up to the question: do we want low taxes or properly funded public services?

The sight of Celtic supporters waving Palestinian flags at their match against Atletico Madrid last week has exposed the club to a possible fine by the European football authorities for breaking the ban on political demonstrations. This week, the club suspended the so-called "Green Group" of supporters from attending matches. Celtic says the Group has consistently broken the ban on flags, flares, fire-works, and intimidating behaviour.

Others see the Green Brigade as a colourful group of cheerleaders. But there is a fear among the football authorities that things are getting out of hand. On Wednesday evening the match between Rangers and Dundee had to be halted for nearly 20 minutes because of flares set off by the crowd. A summit is to be held later this month between the police, the football authorities and the government to try to control the use of pyrotechnics.

Guy Fawkes has a lot to answer for.