

# Letter from Scotland

**It's been a symbol of the oil industry for a hundred years but this week we learned that the Grangemouth Refinery is to close in just 18 months' time.**

**We are witnessing the end of another of Scotland's eras. Their totem poles have come crashing down with surprising speed.**

The Ravenscraig towers were brought down in 1992, signalling the end of the age of steel-making. In 2021 the chimney at Longannet power station was blown up, bringing an end the long age of coal. And now, with the great refinery at Grangemouth closing, and North Sea oil production in decline, the age of fossil fuels is coming to an end.

I wonder if we are going to repeat the mess we made of those "transitions". What will the 400 workers at the Grangemouth refinery do in the spring of 2025? The owners say they want to convert the Grangemouth site into a terminal for importing refined oil from elsewhere, in an attempt to have a smooth transition to the renewables age. The trouble is we should have started that process 20 years ago. And now we are faced with having to end our dependence on fossil fuels in a hurry, in a climate emergency.



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Sir Jim, now in his 70s, was brought up in a council house in Manchester, the son of a joiner. He earned his way into university and became a chemical engineer. He rose in the industry and founded his own company "Ineos" in 1998, which now owns the refinery site at Grangemouth with an unlikely partner, a Chinese state oil company.

Ratcliffe is now said to be worth £30 billion. He owns a vast empire of chemical companies, a car factory making old-fashioned cars based on the design of the Land Rover, a formula one racing team, a cycling team, two football clubs in Europe and a quarter of Manchester United. I should also mention his 78 metre yacht and the fact that he bases his company in Switzerland and his residence in Monaco, saving him an estimated £146 million a year in tax. To be fair, he is also doing good things, like pioneering hydrogen as a fuel and giving money to children's sporting charities.

Three less extraordinary men have been making the news this week. One is the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Jeremy Hunt, whose plan for growing the economy has met with some disappointment in Scotland. Shona Robison, the finance secretary said it was "the worst-case scenario". It's true, she said, that the Scottish government is to get £545m extra

to spend on the NHS, but when rising wage costs are taken into account, there will only be £11m left. She would not have used the £20bn of "headroom" for tax cuts but would have used the money to shore up the public services.

The second less extraordinary man of the week is Anas Sarwar, the leader of Scottish Labour. He and his party voted for an SNP motion in The Scottish Parliament calling for a ceasefire in Gaza. This puts them in the rebel camp against the UK leader Sir Keir Starmer who supports the American line that there should only be pauses in the fighting.

And the third less fortunate man of the week is Michael Matheson, the health secretary. He is being hounded by the opposition parties for being less than frank about a bill of £11,000 of data roaming charges on his official iPad. He initially charged this as "parliamentary expenses" but when questions were raised he paid the bill out of his own pocket. However his explanation varied from day to day and finally he confessed to parliament that, unbeknown to him, his sons had been using the iPad to watch football while on holiday abroad.

It worries me that the opposition leaders think this is so important that they must spend time on it, when the economy and the public services are flat-lining and a quarter of the population are in a cost-of-living crisis.

It's as if they have become so detached from reality that must be living on a 78 metre yacht in a tax haven, watching, on their iPads, the passing of the oil age and nothing much being done to "transition" to a better future.





Health Secretary Michael Matheson, the First Minister and CEO of Thistle Foundation Mark Hoolahan PHOTO ©2023 The Edinburgh Reporter