

# Letter from Scotland

**So, we have a sea-change in British politics and Scotland is part of the tide that has brought Labour to its biggest victory for quarter of a century. But unlike its other great victories – Attlee's 1945 and Wilson's in 1966 and Blair's in 1997, there is no specific plan, just a promise to change the country after 14 years of "Tory austerity, Brexit and chaos."**

In Scotland, it's been a very different campaign from the other nations. The only parties that really mattered were Labour and the SNP. And in that battle, the figures speak for themselves. Labour have increased their number of MPs from 1 to 37, the SNP have fallen from 48 to 9 (though that may increase to 10 when the Inverness result comes in). The SNP leader John Swinney admitted the result was "difficult and damaging" and the party had to learn to re-connect with the people.



5/7/2024 First Minister John Swinney after the vote at Port of Leith Distillery. Edinburgh PHOTO Alan Simpson





Field of Dreams and the uneasy art of post-match analysis. The Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats were confined to the rural fringes of the country. The Conservatives have six MPs and the Liberal Democrats six after the SNP's Drew Hendry conceded defeat amid the recount. The Greens increased their vote but not enough to upset the apple cart and bring them a Scottish seat. Alba and Reform left the field, ignored and disappointed.





23/5/2024 Scottish Labour leader Anas Sarwar took to the campaign trail to support Scottish Labour candidate for Edinburgh North and Leith, Tracy Gilbert, just off Leith Walk Edinburgh. Picture Alan Simpson

Labour fought a very steady, careful campaign. They made no mistakes. They stuck to their positions bravely. They could so easily have trimmed on tax and spend, Brexit, more powers for the Scottish Parliament, their opposition to new oil and gas fields, the future of Grangemouth refinery. Their only specifically Scottish promise was to base their new Great British Energy Company in Scotland. Their leader Anas Sarwar performed well in the television debates and was a convincing commanding officer in Starmer's New Model army in Scotland.

John Swinney, the SNP leader and first minister, also grew in stature during the campaign. He even seemed to enjoy himself at times, though he never lost his bank-manger gravitas, indeed he purposely emphasised it. His lips grew tighter when he tried to explain the SNP's somewhat complicated policy on new oil and gas fields. And you have to admire the way he finessed the party's route to independence without causing a split in the ranks. Even if they won a majority of Westminster seats, he said, it would only "put pressure" on Labour to grant a second referendum, it would not be a unilateral declaration of independence.



Douglas Ross announcing he will stand as an MP in the General Election. PHOTO ©2024 The Edinburgh Reporter

Douglas Ross, the Conservative leader, had a bad game. At half time, he threw his captain's armband on the ground, quitting as party leader, and substituted himself for the candidate in Aberdeenshire North – who was on sick leave at the time. It didn't work. He lost the seat to the SNP, though he remains a reluctant member of the Scottish parliament. The

Conservatives in Scotland suffered from having only one Scottish policy – bash the SNP.

In fact none of the parties had specifically Scottish policies. Labour very much followed the Starmer lead of promising as little as possible. The SNP railed against “austerity” from both main parties at Westminster. The Liberal Democrats mirrored their counterparts in England, down to amusing photo-shoots by their leader Alex Cole-Hamilton – with eagles and paddle boards.

The SNP’s embarrassing uncle, Alex Salmond, hardly broke through the media glass wall to fight for “independence now”, championed by his new Alba party. And although the Greens’ co-leaders Lorna Slater and Patrick Harvie put in a few feisty appearances, the issue of climate change never really featured in the campaign – despite it being the biggest issue of our times.

On election night, the Star Wars control centres at the television stations brought us the constituency results as they rolled in. Labour stormed to victory in Glasgow and took control of the central belt, all the way to Edinburgh (except the Lib Dem enclave of Edinburgh West) then into East Lothian, where the former Labour cabinet member Douglas Alexander was returned. And in a surprise, Labour picked off the Western Isles where the nationalist vote was split.

In the North East, the SNP Westminster leader Stephen Flynn hung on to Aberdeen South. They also kept Aberdeen North, Aberdeenshire North, and Moray, largely because of their defence of fishing and the oil industry. For similar reasons, the Conservatives held Aberdeenshire West. Their other stronghold was their three seats in the South – the Borders, Dumfries and Galloway and Dumfries itself. The result in sleepy Dumfries itself didn’t come till 10am on Friday morning. And the Inverness Western Ross and Skye result has had to be postponed till Saturday, and recounted, because of a



mix-up over the ballot boxes.

In short, the election has left Labour in its traditional commanding position in Scotland, before the rise of the SNP. It's left the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats on the margins. And it's left John Swinney with the massive task of rebuilding the SNP and the shattered case for independence. What a night!



5/7/2024

First Minister John Swinney after the vote at Port of Leith Distillery. Edinburgh PHOTO Alan Simpson