

# Letter from Scotland

## The shockwaves from Donald Trump's dive into "the swamp" in Washington are hitting Scotland.

The rise of right-wing anti-government rhetoric across America and Europe has alarmed our First Minister, John Swinney. This week he declared: "Storm clouds are gathering. The threat from the Far Right is real." He has called a summit of all respectable civic and party leaders in April to form an alliance against our version of Trumpism, Nigel Farage's Reform Party.

Despite having no real campaign on the ground in Scotland, Reform took seven per cent of the vote at the general election last July. It's now riding at 12 per cent in the opinion polls, well ahead of the Greens and the Liberal Democrats. The latest poll across the UK (YouGov) puts support for Reform at 25 per cent, higher than any other party.



Dark clouds are gathering. Loch Ossian, Rannoch Moor.  
Mr Swinney says Nigel Farage is an apologist for Russia, blaming the West for provoking the war in Ukraine. He's accused him of racism over immigration and of taking advantage of the public's understandable frustration with governments in an age of uncertainty. "It's time to draw a line in the sand against the politics of fear," he said.

Scotland is not drifting to the right as much as England, France, Germany or the USA but Trumpism does make right-wing opinions seem more main-stream, which is what Far Right manipulators, like Mr Farage, are hoping for. Thus it's become more fashionable to question the need for a quick transition to a low-carbon economy, or to demand less government, or to wish for things as they were in some imagined heyday or just to be angry with life. It's making us into a more selfish society.

So when Keir Starmer needs more money for British defence, he

takes it from the poorest countries in the world and cuts our international aid programme, just as Trump has done. When the Scottish Labour leader Anas Sarwar wants to improve his poll ratings he promises a new department of government efficiency, just like Elon Musk's DOGE, and makes impossible promises, like all GP appointments within 48 hours.



Sir Keir Starmer MP, The Prime Minister (Holborn and St Pancras, Labour) PHOTO courtesy of the UK Parliament

It became clear at the Scottish Labour Conference last weekend that the party is struggling to escape from the spending restraints imposed by the Starmer government. No date was placed on the promise to tackle NHS waiting times, or fix council services or increase welfare spending. Mr Sarwar will need to do better if Labour is to regain the support it's lost since last summer's general election, down from 30 per cent to just 18 per cent.

In an effort to stop the slide, Keir Starmer used his speech at the Scottish conference to pull £200 million out of his hat for Grangemouth. The refinery there is due to close in the

summer. The owner, Petroineos, has begun issuing redundancy notices to the first of the 400 staff who work there.

The site has become a test case for Labour's promise to transition from a fossil fuel economy to a green economy. But little has been done about it, except set up the "Willow Project" to look at possible new industries like hydrogen production and developing clean aviation fuel. Now at last there is £200m from the Westminster government and £25m from the Scottish government, but, as yet, there are no private investors, no factories and no new jobs.

In another sign of backsliding on climate change, BP has joined Shell in cutting its investment in renewable energy, preferring to follow Trump's advice and "drill baby drill."

It says shareholders are demanding more immediate profits rather than long-term returns. It will be interesting to see if the Labour government sticks to its policy of no new oil exploration, now it's been forced by the courts to reconsider approval for the Rosebank oil field off Shetland and the Jackdaw gas field off Aberdeen.

The SNP are not immune from the backlash against an immediate transition to renewables. It's followed the UK government in postponing the ban on new petrol and diesel cars till 2035 and gas heating boilers till 2033. It's also abandoned its annual carbon emissions targets, hoping that by 2045 we can still reach net zero. And on oil and gas exploration, the SNP has rolled back on its previous "presumption" against new developments and says it will judge each case on its merits.

Mr Swinney has however stood against the Trumpian winds of change on Gaza and Ukraine. He's condemned the president's policy of redeveloping Gaza as a holiday resort without the Palestinians, describing it as "ethnic cleansing". On Ukraine he said the West must present a united front in support for Ukraine. He's backed Keir Starmer in increasing Britain's defence spending but says it should not include Trident

nuclear weapons and it should not be paid for by cuts to overseas aid.

If President Trump is the brash tycoon with hair-brained projects, John Swinney is the bank manager saying, "let's be careful."

We Scots are more used to a quiet world where the rules of decency matter and the future of the planet is not to be played with.