

Herald on Sunday Letters: on cycling, Sturgeon and gender recognition

Letters



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Rab McNeil’s piece on cyclists the The Herald on Sunday (Voices, October 28) is a disgrace. It is basically an incitement to hatred and virtually encourages drivers to behave badly around cyclists. If it was meant to be tongue-in-cheek, then it has failed. He has trotted out all the familiar canards of wobbly, red-light jumping cyclists, yet fails to mention the impatient, tailgating, speeding, phone-using motorists who bring the real danger to our roads.

Our town centres are blighted by pollution and our population is in the midst of an obesity crisis. Both of these issues can be mitigated by encouraging and facilitating active travel, such as cycling and walking, and by improving public transport.

Perhaps The Herald on Sunday can publish a piece extolling the benefits of cycling and recognising the significant achievements of Scots cyclists like world champion Katie Archibald, Chris Hoy, Graham Obree, Mark Beaumont and, most recently, Jenny Graham.

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Readers of the daily Herald will know that I am not slow to put fingers to keyboard when I see something in that paper that concerns or even angers me. This, though, is my first letter to the Herald on Sunday and the feeling I have is far beyond even anger. My interest was raised on Sunday when my eye caught the picture of the lycra-clad, helmeted man on a bike in Rab McNeil’s column.

I use a bike but not as that man does; I don’t go for the lycra and helmet but gloves and a jacket and a woolly hat if it’s cold, but then it wouldn’t do if we were all the same, would it? However, my interest soon turned to outrage as I started to read the article. What was this vile attack on people who, despite the lack of cycle infrastructure, choose to use their bike, as I do, for journeys to work, to the swimming pool, to the shops and sometimes just to enjoy the beautiful countryside around **Scotland**?

I was stunned at the language used; it was that of Trump and the bigots who attack minorities, spreading lies and innuendo, with no evidence given to support it. I have been encouraging my three-year-old granddaughter to ride a bike; it’s fun and enjoyable and I hope that as she grows up conditions for cycling, and walking, will significantly improve. It’s a tragedy that people are deterred from this excellent mode of transport by such mistruths as are peddled in this article.

Yours – just about recovering from Sunday,

Patricia Fort

Glasgow

It seems to be a truth that some people like telling jokes and stories in which the subjects of humour are marginal societal groups. When I was a child back in the 1960’s, the particular subjects of the jokes make me cringe now. Despite joining in, even then I was aware that this wasn’t really right. Happily most of us grow up and leave such “humour” behind us.

I say most people grow up, because I was appalled to read the column by Rab McNeil. I know Mr McNeil sets himself up as a contrarian, and we need provoking journalists. However, there is fair comment, there is satire, and then there are crude savage attacks. In this case Mr McNeil turned against cyclists. On a very superficial level he tried to dress his article as humour but it is so lacking in mirth that all that remains is savagery.

The article implies he doesn’t cycle but I would like to take him out on the road with me. It’s not fun cycling when drivers shout abuse from their window; it’s not fun when a driver delivers a close “punishment pass” and it really is vile to be spat at from the window of a passing van. All these things have happened to me simply for having the temerity to be innocently cycling. Language like Mr McNeil’s has consequences.

Studies have shown that constant negative stereotyping of cyclists leads to more aggressive behaviour from mo-torists which can be translated into injury and death of cyclists.

Bob Downie

Glasgow

Rab McNeil’s puerile diatribe about cyclists last week, casting car drivers as rightful Kings of the Road and cyclists as self-indulgent interlopers, was frankly unworthy of The Herald. It was not not clever and certainly not funny, at a time when there is a crying need for public education about responsible road use. His most worrying statement, that cyclist “cause cars to overtake into oncoming traffic”, is a case in point: it’s illegal!

No less a King of the Road than Jeremy Clarkson last year backed a **police** campaign in England reminding drivers of rule 163 in the Highway Code: "give motorcyclists, cyclists and horse riders at least as much room as you would when overtaking a car". Most drivers have felt frustrated at being held up by cyclists, but we should all remember the words of Olympian Chris Boardman: “People on bicycles are flesh and blood, they’re mums and dads, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters.”

Wendy Faulkner

Aberfoyle

GET YOUR FACTS STRAIGHT

Martin Redfern’s capacity for self-delusion know no bounds; in The Herald on Sunday (Letters, October 28) he accused **Nicola Sturgeon** of trying to take Scotland out of the EU in 2014, and now trying to keep Scotland in the EU in 2018. In the first instance the **SNP** leader and First Minister was **Alex Salmond** and there was no demand to take Scotland out of the EU apart from the Unionist parties. Mr Redfern and his merry men were adamant that the EU would refuse Scotland entry; it is axiomatic that with seas full of fish and oil and gas, the EU would be happy to accommodate Scotland, and this remains the case.

Once Mr Redfern and his pals have got the UK out of Europe no barriers are foreseen to Scotland. The Spanish may still continue to oppress Catalonia, but any nonsense from them will result in them being told to take their fishing boats elsewhere; any Scottish **Government** will co-operate on fishing but we will set the quotas unlike the free-for-all of Ted Heath. I do not believe that the countries of Europe will shed tears if the UK leaves.

Jim Lynch

Edinburgh

An interesting aspect of the latest Survation poll into **Holyrood** voting trends, besides reconfirming the ongoing decline in SNP strength, is the growth in backing for the **LibDems**: their seats are predicted to double.

Many voters in Scotland, as we know, feel positively towards the EU and the LibDems have a strong record of supporting the UK’s place in Europe. Meanwhile, the Tory party is split over the EU and **Jeremy Corbyn**’s pro-European record is certainly patchy.

And the SNP are busily hijacking **Brexit** for their own principal objective: **indyref2**. Nicola **Sturgeon** protests her European credentials but it would take a decade or more of austerity for an independent Scotland to meet the EU’s stringent economic entry criteria.

However, while increasing numbers of voters in Scotland right now may well feel warmly about the LibDems’ pro-UK and pro-EU stance, by the 2021 election might the EU be less front of mind for all us?

Martin Redfern

Edinburgh

IMPORTANT DISTINCTION

Thank you to The Herald on Sunday for supporting, through your letters page, dialogue on the proposed reforms to the Gender Recognition Act.

We would like to correct a crucial misunderstanding of the proposals, repeated in Susan Smith’s letter (October 28). Neither the current proposals, nor the Gender Representation on Public Boards Act passed earlier this year, redefines female to include those who, on a whim, or for devious purposes, simply say they identify as female. The proposal for gender recognition law is that a person must be living as a woman, and must intend to continue to do so for the rest of their life, to obtain legal recognition as a woman (and similarly for recognition as a man or a non-binary person).

A person who falsely declared they were doing that would be committing a criminal offence. The definition in the Public Boards Act is more technical, but amounts to the same thing.

People who are living as women already access single-sex spaces as women (no woman is required to show her birth certificate or her genitals to enter a single-sex space). Those who seek to abuse such spaces or who pose a risk can lawfully be excluded whether they are trans or not. None of that will change with the reform to gender recognition law.

Becky Kaufmann

Scottish Trans Alliance

Edinburgh

In her letter to you about changes to the Gender Reform Act, Susan Smith speaks of “the conflation of sex and gender”. Alas for clarity in this and related spheres, the word “gender” seems to slide and slither between at least three distinct meanings.

Sometimes, it is merely a synonym for “sex”, meaning a person’s biological sex.

Sometimes, it is used to mean the cluster of characteristics and behaviours conventionally associated with persons of a particular sex. We are being told about gender (or gender role) in this sense when we are told that women are caring and men can’t express their feelings; women do housework and men put up shelves; women are from Venus and men are from Mars; women wear lipstick and dresses but men don’t.

Sometimes “gender”, by itself or in the phrase “gender identity”, is used to mean the sex a person feels themself to be, ie "identifies as", which may differ from their biological sex.

This ambiguity seemed to me to infect both the Scottish Government’s consultation and that of the UK Government.

Paul Brownsey

Bearsden

SNP SHOULD HAVE BIGGER THINGS TO WORRY ABOUT

Only the SNP could react so negatively to nearly £1 billion of additional funding for Scotland in the Chancellor’s Budget. The determination among the SNP leadership to feign maximum grievance and disappointment was palpable.

Perhaps uppermost in their minds was the need to try to draw attention away from the continuing flow of bad news about SNP flagship policies that appear to be missing target.

Holyrood’s health committee has just reported that the bodies created to drive integration of health and social care appear so far to not be up to the task, with many critical shortfalls in delivery, poor leadership, and unspent funding. This follows Audit Scotland’s scathing report warning that the transformation of our health service is happening too slowly, expressing concerns that in its current form the **NHS** is unsustainable.

Other headline initiatives from the SNP which have recently been reported as falling short include the introduction of new childcare plans with nurseries unable to deliver the planned cover, the proposed reform of Freedom of Information which still leaves scope for ministerial and spin-doctor interference in the process, and an education testing initiative that is now mired in controversy. In each case, the issue is not simply funding, but rather is demonstrably the result of mismanagement of resources that are being applied.

This SNP Government’s continued attempts to blame Westminster for anything and everything, looks like just so much misdirection, as its own shortcomings are becoming ever more obvious.

Keith Howell

West Linton