



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

DRAFT

Meeting of the Parliament

Tuesday 30 January 2024

Session 6



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 30 January 2024

[The Presiding Officer opened the meeting at 14:00]

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Good afternoon. The first item of business is time for reflection, and our time for reflection leader today is Gordon Hay, who has spent many years translating the Bible into Doric.

Gordon M Hay: Presiding Officer and members of the Scottish Parliament, thank you for the invitation to share in today's time for reflection. That invitation came from my having produced the first translation of the whole Bible in any variant of the Scots language, 640 years after the first English translation. I will share a couple of excerpts.

First, why do we speak different languages? Genesis chapter 11 explains:

"Noo, at ae time e hale warl aa spak e same tongue an e same wirds. As fowk wannert about i the east, they cam on a bit o flat grun about Shinar an sattlt there. They said tae een anither, 'Come on, an mak a puckle bricks an fire them hard.' Sae they hid bricks for biggin wi, an dubs tae haud them egihter. Syne they said, 'Fat sorra idder, we'll bigg wirsels a gran toon wi a muckle tooter wi e tap o't raxin up tae hivven, an we'll mak a name for wirsels for fear we be scattert ower aa e warl.' Syne e Lord cam doon tae see e toon an e tooter att they fowkies hid biggit. An he said, 'Here they are, ae fowk wi ae tongue an iss is jist e start o't, seen they'll be able tae dee onythin they wint. Come on, we'll gyang doon an mak a mixer-maxter o their wirds an they winna ken fit een anither's sayin.' Sae e Lord scattert them awa fae there ower e hale warl an they stoppit biggin e toon. Att's e wye it's caaed Babel cause e Lord made a babble o the spik o aa e warl."

Here is the famous passage from chapter 3 of the book of Ecclesiastes, again from the Old Testament:

"Aathin his its sizzon, an for ilka thing ye dee aneth e hivvens there's a time:

A time tae be born, an a time tae dee; a time tae shaav, an a time tae hairst; a time tae dee awa wi, an a time tae mak aa better; a time tae pu doon, an a time tae bigg up; a time tae greet, an a time tae lauch; a time tae moorn an a time tae dance; a time tae scatter steens, an a time tae gaither them up; a time tae gie a bosie, an a time tae haud back fae gien a bosie; a time tae sikk, an a time tae tine; a time tae haud on tae things, an a time tae fling awa; a time tae rive, an a time tae sort; a time tae be quait, an a time tae spik oot; a time tae loo, an a time tae hate; a time for waar, an a time for peace."

Those words, written 2,500 years ago, are still pertinent today.

Thank you for the invitation. [Applause.]

Topical Question Time

14:03

Professor Sam Eljamel
(Independent Clinical Review)

1. **Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what role the national clinical director has had in relation to the clinical review process for former patients of Professor Eljamel. (S6T-01765)

The Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care (Michael Matheson): The national clinical director is not involved in establishing the independent clinical review. Although Professor Leitch is part of the same directorate as those officials, he is not one of the officials undertaking that work.

Scottish Government officials are progressing the necessary work to establish both the independent clinical review and the public inquiry. Once established, those will be carried out and chaired independently of both the Scottish Government and NHS Tayside.

Liz Smith: *The Courier* newspaper reported today that Professor Jason Leitch has been employed by NHS Tayside since September 2012 and has been receiving a Scottish Government salary under the service level agreement. As yet, there has been no full disclosure of exactly what Professor Leitch's NHS Tayside role has been since 2012 or of whether Professor Leitch has taken any action, even indirectly, in relation to the Eljamel case. Will the cabinet secretary confirm that?

Michael Matheson: As I have just explained, Professor Leitch is not involved in the work to set up the independent clinical review. Professor Craig White is progressing that work, which is at a very advanced stage.

On his terms of employment, the national clinical director is employed on standard NHS consultant terms and conditions by NHS Tayside and works for the Scottish Government under a service level agreement. That is typical of the arrangements through which the Scottish Government can draw on specialist knowledge from the NHS. Most of our clinical advisers working for the Scottish Government are engaged through a service level agreement or are on secondment from a health board in exactly the same way as Professor Leitch.

Liz Smith: So that it is absolutely clear, am I to understand that Professor Leitch has given no input whatsoever, even on an indirect basis, to any

of his staff who have been involved in the Eljamel case?

I hope that the cabinet secretary can understand that the most recent revelations in the United Kingdom Covid inquiry have created considerable concerns among former patients of Eljamel, who consider that it would be totally inappropriate if Professor Leitch was in any way involved, even indirectly, in the process.

Michael Matheson: As I have explained, Professor Leitch is not directly involved in the matter. Back in September last year, the chief medical officer and the national clinical director agreed that the most appropriate way to establish the review would be for officials who already have an established understanding of the issues relating to Eljamel to do that. That is why the matter was passed to Professor Craig White, who was asked to take forward the work to establish the independent clinical review process.

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): The cabinet secretary has focused on the independent one-to-one reviews. When will those begin and, more crucially, when will they be completed? Will he also give assurances, given the real resistance from the victims, that Professor Leitch has not been involved in the establishment of the public inquiry and is not offering any advice to Government officials regarding the process?

Michael Matheson: Professor Craig White is taking forward the public inquiry and the engagement around that. As I have previously stated in the chamber, as has the First Minister, that work is at a very advanced stage, and we have been engaging with the Lord President to appoint a chair for the public inquiry.

Alongside that, we will be appointing an individual who will be responsible for carrying out the individual clinical reviews for patients who wish them. I cannot give the member a completion date, because it is down to individual patients whether they choose to participate in the programme. The completion point will be dependent on the numbers of people who wish to take part in it.

The prospective chairs have been engaging with one another to look at how the whole process will be managed collectively.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): Pictures have emerged in *The Courier* today of a smiling Sam Eljamel. I know that that has insulted many of his victims. Those victims are also quite angry that we do not seem to be any further forward on the public inquiry. The cabinet secretary has indicated that we are at an “advanced stage” on the individual case reviews. Is he at an advanced stage in relation to the public inquiry? When might we get an update?

Michael Matheson: Yes, we are at a very advanced stage in appointing a chair, as the First Minister stated in the chamber in response to a question from, I think, Liz Smith the other week. As I mentioned earlier, there has been engagement between the two prospective chairs on how the clinical review and the public inquiry will intersect with each other. It is important that we get that right.

I can understand that patients who have suffered at the hand of Eljamel will be disgusted at seeing pictures of him continuing to practise in Libya. Of course, any decision to pursue the matter on a criminal basis would be for Police Scotland and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, and it would be for them to consider pursuing the individual. I can understand why people would be deeply hurt by seeing that the individual continues to practise in another part of the world.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): This case has highlighted Professor Leitch’s employment status as a secondee. Is he regarded, from a management perspective, as a civil servant, and is he subject to the civil service code?

Michael Matheson: I cannot give that detailed information, because that is an operational matter for the civil service, not for ministers. Professor Leitch’s employment arrangements are exactly the same as those for other clinical experts and NHS employees who provide the Scottish Government with advice under a service level agreement. How the civil service code is applied is a matter for the civil service directly. I would, of course, expect an appropriate mechanism to be in place for anyone who undertakes civil service responsibilities, but that matter is not for ministers directly.

Single-use Vapes

2. **Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government, in light of the announcement from the United Kingdom Government that it plans to ban single-use vapes to protect children’s health, whether it will outline what action is being taken in Scotland. (S6T-01768)

The Minister for Public Health and Women’s Health (Jenni Minto): The Scottish Government was the first Government in the UK to commit to taking action on single-use vapes, so I was delighted to announce yesterday that we plan to introduce a ban on single-use vapes, alongside raising the age at which people can be sold tobacco and restricting vape flavours and packaging, in order to protect children and young people, public health and the environment. That will help us to create a generation free from tobacco addiction, tackle youth vaping and take us

closer to a tobacco-free generation by 2030, in line with our “Tobacco and Vaping Framework”, which was published in November.

We continue to work with the UK Government, the Welsh Government and the Northern Ireland Executive to take forward the plans across the four nations.

Emma Harper: I have been really concerned by the dramatic rise in levels of youth vaping, given the evidence from experts, including physicians and ASH Scotland, on the health impact of e-cigarettes and vaping and the negative impact of nicotine on young people.

As the founder and, now, the co-convenor of the Parliament’s cross-party group on lung health, I recently heard from a mother how her school-age daughter has experienced anxiety, aggression, agitation, depression, withdrawal and shortness of breath since starting vaping. She has also missed school. What steps will be taken to minimise the health impacts of youth vaping, given the announced ban on single-use vapes?

Jenni Minto: I recognise the issues that Emma Harper has raised, having met some fathers to talk about exactly those issues. The Scottish Government has already been taking action to address the issues, as we committed to doing in the programme for government.

This month, we laid a Scottish statutory instrument in the Parliament to enable provisions in the Health (Tobacco, Nicotine etc and Care) (Scotland) Act 2016 to be enacted, including the ability to tighten rules on the advertising and promotion of vaping products.

In December 2023, we launched our “Take Hold” marketing campaign, which educated parents, carers and children about the dangers of vaping and about the harms and risks of nicotine addiction. We have been hearing very positive information about the campaign’s reach. A key aspect of the campaign involved speaking to children in order to understand what they would like us, as policy makers, to do. I spent a very informative morning discussing exactly that with the Children in Scotland advisory group.

Emma Harper: In addition to the health concerns, there are clear short-term and long-term environmental impacts of single-use vapes, with communities, including communities in Dumfries and Galloway, being blighted by them, as they are dumped and discarded on our streets. Does the minister agree with me and charities such as Keep Scotland Beautiful that the ban on single-use vapes will benefit our environment, as well as keeping our communities safer and cleaner?

Jenni Minto: Absolutely. On Friday, I had the privilege of joining one of the classes at Sunnyside

primary school in Alloa, which is part of the Children’s Parliament. The children complained to me that they are seeing vapes in spaces for children, which really upset them.

Last year, the Scottish Government commissioned an urgent review of the environmental impact of single-use vapes. The review found that up to 26 million disposable vapes were consumed and thrown away in Scotland in just one year. An estimated 10 per cent of them were littered, and more than half were incorrectly disposed of. The ban will tackle the detrimental impact that single-use vapes have on our environment, local communities and young people.

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): Can the minister set out timescales for the introduction of the ban and what the associated repercussions are expected to be if the ban is not complied with? How will the Scottish Government work with shop owners and others who sell such products so that they can safely dispose of their stocks?

Jenni Minto: As I said in my first answer, we are working from a four-nations perspective and we await the legislation from the UK Government, with which we, as a Government, have been working closely. We already have legislation on enforcement, but we will be looking to tighten it as best we can.

We must ensure that disposal is done in the most environmentally friendly way, which is why I am working closely with my colleague Lorna Slater.

Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): I place on record my thanks to the campaigners and organisations involved, and to the *Daily Record* for working with me and other MSPs in campaigning for the ban. The proposals are a huge victory for them, and I thank the Government for the positive conversations that I have had with it throughout the campaign.

As we move forward, other tactics might emerge in the evolution of vapes. What conversations is the minister having with colleagues across the UK on how we can anticipate some of the changes and ensure that any legislation that we introduce appropriately tackles any measures that we might see?

Jenni Minto: I echo Gillian Mackay’s thanks to those who campaigned for a ban on disposable vapes.

We aim to implement a ban at the earliest opportunity in order to ensure that the health and environmental benefits are realised as soon as possible. As I have said, we propose to align the coming-into-force dates of our regulations with those of the other three nations, where feasible, to

provide certainty for businesses and consumers. We will legislate separately in Scotland to enact a ban, as it will be taken forward using powers under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 that are devolved to the Scottish ministers.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes topical questions. I will allow a moment for those on the front benches to organise themselves for the next item of business.

European Union

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-12004, in the name of Angus Robertson, on Scotland's place in the European Union. I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons, and I call Angus Robertson to speak to and move the motion.

14:17

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): Tomorrow marks the fourth anniversary of Scotland being taken out of the European Union. Scotland was not only removed from the EU but forced out of the single market and the customs union. The United Kingdom Government imposed an end to freedom of movement, and it removed opportunities for our young people by abandoning the Erasmus scheme. Moreover, as we all knew would happen, the UK Government once again broke its promises to Scotland's fishing communities. In short, not only did the UK impose Brexit on Scotland, but it imposed the hardest and most damaging of Brexits.

All of that was despite the fact that people in Scotland voted overwhelmingly to stay in the European Union. The Scottish Parliament expressed its support for remaining in the EU and the single market on many occasions, yet the people of Scotland and their elected Parliament were ignored time and again. The Brexit referendum and its aftermath did not just relate to the relationship between the UK and the EU; it revealed something fundamental about the very nature of the UK, which is that the UK can no longer be described as an equal partnership of nations. It is a Westminster-knows-best state that routinely ignores the views of the people in Scotland, and that is democratically unsustainable.

From a practical point of view, Brexit is an ongoing economic disaster. The leader of the UK Labour Party, Keir Starmer, says that his priority is "growth, growth, growth", but unfortunately the obvious problem with that is his commitment to Brexit, Brexit, Brexit. Brexit has already increased inflation, harmed trade and reduced investment—the list goes on. Scottish workers have lost income and consumers have to pay higher prices for food, which makes the cost of living crisis worse.

A recent study from the National Institute of Economic and Social Research estimates that the UK economy is now 2.5 per cent smaller as a result of Brexit. That impact equates to a cut of around £2.3 billion in public revenues for Scotland.

Estimates from other bodies, such as the Centre for European Reform, suggest that the damage has been even worse. That is not the end of it; analysis by Cambridge Econometrics estimates that the economic damage will continue, reaching 10 per cent of gross value added by 2035.

The impact of Brexit is not only economic; it has severely reduced the opportunities for Scotland to collaborate with European partners on cross-border challenges. It has removed our ability to live and work freely across the EU, and we have lost out on access to EU exchanges and funds. Despite the huge benefits of European Union membership, the overwhelming evidence of the harm of Brexit and the predictions that the damage will only get worse, neither the Conservatives nor the Labour Party—nor even the Liberal Democrats—say that they are fully in favour of rejoining the European Union.

The Scottish Government takes a different position. Scotland's interests need not continue to be wrecked by the UK Government's approach to Brexit. The views of people in Scotland, as expressed through democratic elections to Westminster and Holyrood, need not be able to be ignored or overridden. The powers of our devolved institutions need not be able to be altered unilaterally by Westminster, without the agreement of the Scottish Government, this Parliament or, indeed, the people of this country.

The seventh paper in the "Building a New Scotland" series sets out the Scottish Government's alternative. Our vision is for an independent Scotland to join the European Union. Doing so would offer Scotland the chance to regain what has been lost because of Brexit. It would provide Scotland with what devolution cannot deliver—notably, a framework to collaborate as equals, with relationships governed by values, co-operation and law. It would mean that, for the first time, Scotland would be at the table, advancing its interests directly in the European Union. It would allow Scotland to contribute to the EU, bringing our expertise and resources to work towards shared goals.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I think that the minister will be bored with his own speech, given that he has made the same one several times before. Nevertheless, has he drawn together any evidence on the impact of independence ripping us out of the UK single market in the same way that he has drawn together evidence on withdrawing the UK from the EU single market? Surely he has done that basic homework.

Angus Robertson: Willie Rennie knows that the European Union single market is, as I think that I am right in saying, seven times larger than the United Kingdom's. Unlike him, I am not in

favour of economic dependency. He is keen on the Scottish economy remaining dependent on the UK single market. I am much more confident that we can be like Ireland, which has been able to succeed economically and to have a significantly higher gross domestic product per head of population than the United Kingdom. We should take no lessons from the Liberal Democrats, who, once upon a time, were a pro-European party but, sadly, no longer are.

I am in favour of Scotland being part of the world's largest single market, with free movement of goods, services, capital and people.

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Angus Robertson: I want to make a bit more progress on this point, but I will give way later to Mr Bibby.

The EU market is seven times the size of the UK—almost 450 million consumers compared with the UK's 67 million. Scottish businesses trading in the EU would face reduced barriers to trade and the free flows of data, as well as less bureaucracy.

That position was supported by the Scottish Labour Party and by Mr Bibby's leader, Anas Sarwar, who said:

"That's why nobody can credibly claim they want to protect jobs and not support membership of the single market and the customs union. I am the only candidate in this contest"—

that is, for the leadership of the Scottish Labour Party—

"who supports permanent British membership of the European single market and the customs union."

Perhaps, if I give way to him now, Mr Bibby would clarify whether that is still the Scottish Labour Party's position.

Neil Bibby: I am not sure what the Scottish National Party's position on the customs union is, because, in 2019, during the Brexit votes, it did not vote in favour of a customs union when its votes were critical in that matter.

Talking about his own position, Angus Robertson MP said in 2008 that the Lisbon treaty, the current foundational document of the European Union, was "unacceptable" and "a travesty". Does Angus Robertson MSP agree with that?

Angus Robertson: I agreed at that time that people should have a view and should be able to cast a vote in favour of the European Union. That was my support for there being a referendum at that stage. I also note that Mr Bibby did not take the opportunity to confirm whether the Scottish Labour Party's position now is to rejoin the European single market and the customs union. I

invite everybody to listen very closely to his speech in the debate to see whether he clarifies that.

I was making the point that Scottish businesses trading in the EU would have reduced barriers to trade and free flows of data as well as less bureaucracy, and that they would benefit from the EU's network of highly favourable trading relationships across the world. Trading would be cheaper and quicker, online shopping would be easier and safer, and Scottish firms would be able to trade freely with more businesses and sell to more customers.

Indeed, EU membership would provide more job choices and more career opportunities for people in Scotland. Our citizens would have access to more training, more research, more exchange opportunities, and the opportunity to improve language skills through the Erasmus+ programme. We could attract and retain people from across the EU to sustain our businesses, our world-leading universities and our public services. Scotland would regain access to the EU's law enforcement tools, which would help in the fight against cross-border crime and other threats. Our citizens' rights, such as guaranteed minimum working conditions and social security rights, would be protected by EU law, and, of course, Scotland would, for the first time, have a seat in its own right at EU decision-making tables.

With a voice in debates and a vote on outcomes, Scotland could contribute directly to the policies of one of the most influential actors in global trade negotiations on international human rights and equality. The evidence is clear. For countries of Scotland's size, EU membership works.

People here have a choice. We can continue down the road of a Brexit-based UK economy that suffers from low growth and low productivity, high inequality and increasing isolation—

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Angus Robertson: I am going to finish this point. We can continue down that road or we can seek to emulate the success of comparable independent countries in Europe that are wealthier and fairer than the UK—countries such as Finland, Denmark and Ireland. Indeed, the *Financial Times* reported in 2022:

“Far from simply losing touch with their western European peers, last year the lowest-earning bracket of British households had a standard of living that was 20 per cent weaker than their counterparts in Slovenia.”

Perhaps Alexander Stewart would wish to reflect on that.

Alexander Stewart: We know that Scotland's exports are three times those of the EU. The London School of Economics and Political Science centre for economic performance has talked about the potential disruption with the rest of the UK that could result in a per capita reduction in Scottish income of about 6.3 per cent.

Angus Robertson: I noticed that Alexander Stewart was not prepared to reflect on the relative economic decline of Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom, as clearly demonstrated by the *Financial Times*. That is a great shame, because it is there for everybody else to see.

On Scotland's opportunities, I have made the point in answers to others that the single European market is significantly larger than that of the United Kingdom. I have great hope and great expectations that Scottish business and exports, strong as they already are, could be even stronger within a much bigger international market—namely, the single European market—while, of course, we protect and enhance our trade position with the rest of the nations on these islands. That does matter tremendously, but being part of the bigger single European market is absolutely key to reaching our full potential.

Our commitment to the European Union is grounded in more than the practical benefits that that brings, substantial though those are—and I have pointed them out to detractors in the chamber today. More fundamental is our shared commitment to the EU's founding ethos of peace and security, and the core values of human dignity, democracy, freedom, equality, human rights and the rule of law. In an age when intolerance and volatility seem to be on the rise, the EU's values are more important than ever, and co-operating with the EU improves our ability to tackle challenges at home and amplifies our voice in international negotiations.

The European Union has demonstrated that countries can deliver practical benefits for each other through peaceful co-operation, so we will seek to rejoin the EU as soon as possible after independence. After 47 years as part of the EU, Scotland has a thorough understanding of how the EU operates. We have developed networks among policy makers in the European Commission, the European Parliament, EU member states and their regions. We are committed to EU values and already have a high level of alignment with European Union law.

In currently reserved areas, Scotland would build capacity as required to ensure that it fulfilled all EU membership obligations. Scotland is therefore well placed to move smoothly and quickly through the EU's merit-based accession process. That view is shared by many distinguished experts, including Fabian Zuleeg,

the chief executive of the European Policy Centre, who said that, for Europe,

“rejecting a country that wants to be in the EU, accepts all conditions, is willing to go through the appropriate processes and follows European principles ... should be inconceivable.”

Moreover, when asked about the level of support in the EU for an independent Scotland joining the EU, the former president of the European Council and now the Prime Minister of Poland, Donald Tusk, said:

“Emotionally I have no doubt that everyone will be enthusiastic here in Brussels, and more generally in Europe.”

We will therefore rejoin not simply as a country with much to gain but as one with much to contribute. Just as the EU has lots to offer Scotland, so Scotland has much to contribute to the EU as a member state. Our vibrant culture would make an important contribution to a dynamic and forward-looking EU. Our academic sector is a leading source of innovation and research and could help deliver new technologies of EU-wide importance. Our strengths in renewable energy could contribute to the transition to net zero.

Reaching net zero is an environmental, moral and security imperative. It will help us reduce our dependence on gas and oil imports from around the world. Scotland’s large sea area and high average wind speeds mean that we have a key role to play, and our significant offshore wind and tidal energy potential could help the EU deliver its sustainable growth strategy. Scotland is already home to the world’s leading wave and tidal test centre, the world’s largest planned tidal stream array and, according to its makers, the world’s most powerful tidal stream turbine.

Scotland is among the best-placed nations in Europe to deploy carbon capture and storage because of our unrivalled access to vast carbon dioxide storage potential in the North Sea. We could also support the EU’s priorities to develop offshore grid and renewable energy potential in the North Sea.

It is widely recognised that green hydrogen has a crucial role to play in decarbonising heavy transport and energy-intensive industries, and Scotland’s surplus hydrogen production could help the EU to achieve its hydrogen targets as part of its transition towards renewables. We also see it as a way of enabling ourselves and our European partners to make collective decisions that reflect Scotland’s priorities.

Our paper provides evidence of what the people of Scotland have known all along: EU membership is central to Scotland’s future economic, political, security and social prospects. It is no wonder that

people in Scotland voted decisively to remain in the EU in 2016, and no wonder that polling that has been undertaken since the 2016 referendum has consistently found large majorities in favour of EU membership.

That is why I believe that Scotland’s future will be best served by being part of the EU. The UK Government did not get the fantastical deal that it promised, nor is it willing to acknowledge that being outwith the EU’s single market and customs union is dragging the economy down, despite the evident damage that Brexit is causing. Given the position of the main parties at Westminster, the only route back to the European Union is for Scotland to become an independent member state. That is why Scotland needs independence.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the Scottish Government’s paper, *Building a New Scotland: an independent Scotland in the EU*, and believes that Scotland’s economic, social and political future is best served by being part of the EU.

The Presiding Officer: Members will wish to know that there is time in hand for interventions. We will be as generous as possible in that regard.

I call Donald Cameron to speak to and move amendment S6M-12004.2. You have up to 11 minutes, Mr Cameron.

14:33

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands (Con): The title of this debate is “An independent Scotland in the EU”.

The Minister for Independence (Jamie Hepburn): I just want to correct the record. That is not the title of the debate. It is “Scotland’s place in the European Union”. That will be an important point as the debate continues, I fear.

Donald Cameron: I thank Jamie Hepburn for that very important intervention.

Here we are, yet again, debating a hypothetical wrapped in speculation inside a misconception, to misquote Winston Churchill. As the Covid inquiry takes evidence at this very moment about the conduct of the SNP Government, its ministers and its civil servants, and tries to get to the bottom of what went on during the pandemic, what does the SNP Government come to this chamber to debate? It comes to debate the hypothetical question of an independent Scotland joining the EU.

It is very tempting to take the bait. I must confess that I always enjoy debating with Angus Robertson and Jamie Hepburn. They give as good as they get, and they manage to do so with grace and humour.

It is tempting to point out that about a third of SNP voters supported Brexit and voted that way. More than a million Scots voted to leave the European Union, including SNP luminaries such as Alex Neil, no less.

It is tempting to point out that great minds such as Alex Neil and many other nationalists see that it is simply illogical for those in the independence movement to, on the one hand, complain about the shackles of Westminster and, on the other, support being chained to Brussels.

It is tempting to point out that there are those in the independence movement, such as the former First Minister, Alex Salmond, and his Alba Party, who recognise that one viable path for an independent Scotland would be membership of the European Free Trade Association instead of the EU.

Those are all rabbit holes that I am very tempted to go down, but I will not, because, rather like Alice in Wonderland, who went down the original rabbit hole, to do so would be to enter the realms of fiction and fantasy.

Willie Rennie was right when he said that the cabinet secretary might be getting bored with his own speech, because he has made it so many times before—we have all made these speeches many times before.

Back in the real world, there are many more pressing problems that the people of Scotland want to see addressed, such as the fact that there are nearly 830,000 patients across Scotland waiting for national health service treatment. There are problems such as the fact that rural schools are twice as likely to be in poor condition as urban schools. The Highland Council area has the poorest school estate in Scotland, and it also happens to be bottom of the league table for literacy and numeracy. There are problems such as the fact that more than 71,000 violent crimes were recorded last year, which is the highest total since 2011-12. Those are the issues that people really care about, and they are getting worse, not better, because of this Government's narrow focus on the constitution.

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): Mr Cameron has listed a lot of worthy things that we would all like to do, but does he recognise that the Centre for European Reform has estimated that Brexit costs the UK Treasury some £40 billion in tax receipts a year, which is £40 billion that could be spent on the public services that he has described?

Donald Cameron: Of course, an independent Scotland would incur huge costs and, like many of his fellow party members, Kevin Stewart is incapable of recognising the severe economic

damage that independence would do to people in Scotland.

There are not just glaring problems in our NHS, our schools and our justice system. On housing, in the previous parliamentary session, the SNP failed to meet its 50,000 affordable homes target on time. In the Highlands and Islands, available and affordable housing is at such critical shortage that local authorities such as Argyll and Bute declared a housing emergency last year. I am sure that the cabinet secretary will have seen that *The Herald* newspaper is dedicating this week to publishing its editions from my region in order to highlight the acute issues of depopulation in the Highlands and the devastating consequences that that can bring. What were this Government's solutions to that housing emergency? A botched islands bond, which it scrapped shortly after consultation; a rural housing fund, of which only half has been allocated; and a rural affordable homes for key workers fund that, almost nine months after it was established, has secured zero properties.

On transport, there has been a failure to dual the A9, despite the SNP promising to do so in multiple election manifestos, and there is the national disgrace that is this Government's ferry replacement policy, with two vessels sitting in a dockyard on the Clyde that are four times over budget and more than six years late.

On infrastructure, there was a failure to roll out superfast broadband to every home and business in Scotland, despite a cast-iron pledge to do so by 2021.

I am beginning to understand why the SNP Government brings forward debates such as today's rather than trying to defend its appalling domestic record. It has nothing to say about the issues that people expect it to deal with. It is becoming increasingly clear that people across Scotland are growing weary of the excuses and distractions.

When the SNP-Green Government works with rather than against the UK Government, much can be achieved. Instead of using the debate to complain about a democratic UK-wide referendum result that has long since been settled, we should be debating how we can find new and better ways of working with our partners in the EU. It is nearly a year since the Prime Minister agreed with the European Commission President the landmark Windsor framework, which provided a new legal and constitutional framework for the UK's relationship with the EU. The past year has shown that the Windsor framework and its associated negotiations have instilled a much more positive relationship with our close friends and allies in the EU. I hope that that will continue to prosper and grow. Let us hope that the news overnight from

Northern Ireland is a new and positive chapter in that story.

The cabinet secretary will be aware that the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee recently began an inquiry into the trade and co-operation agreement, ahead of its review in 2026. As he has recognised in the past, Scottish Government officials and UK Government officials work well and constructively on a number of issues.

Rather than breaking away from the world's most successful union and becoming a smaller state with less influence in the EU, Scotland is much better served as part of our United Kingdom. I will point out one of the many aspects of that. With Scotland as part of the UK, 500,000 Scottish jobs—about one in every four—are supported by the fact that 60 per cent of our trade exports go to the rest of the UK, which is approximately £48 billion-worth. As part of the UK, Scotland has access to 200 UK-wide public institutions. As part of the UK, Scotland can use the pound—one of the world's strongest currencies—which ensures that pensions are protected. We are the world's sixth-largest economy.

As part of the UK, Scotland remains at its most influential. We are a member of the UN Security Council, the G7 and the G20—and I could go on. That is why people continue to support Scotland's place in the UK. We, the Conservatives, not only respect that but will continue to fight to protect it.

The SNP may want to keep fighting battles that have long since ended, but the Scottish people are tiring of the Government's lethargy and incompetence. They want a Parliament that is focused on solving the challenges of our time, not on issues that were settled in referendums eight or 10 years ago. What a crying shame it is that the SNP continues to bring forward such debates, rather than focusing on the issues that really matter to people.

I move amendment S6M-12004.2, to leave out from "notes" to end and insert:

"regrets that the Scottish Government continues to disrespect the outcome of the two referendums held in 2014 and 2016, and calls on the Scottish Government to focus on the real priorities of the people of Scotland rather than obsessing over the constitution."

14:43

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): I am not sure whether the cabinet secretary is a fan of fantasy football, as I am. If he is not, I encourage him to become one, because he would be better spending 10 minutes of a weekend playing that fantasy game than subjecting the rest of us to hours of today's exercise in fantasy politics.

Hours of valuable parliamentary time have been taken up with a debate about a paper that few have read and even fewer are interested in. Such papers do not focus on the priorities of the people of Scotland, are a waste of taxpayers' money and do not even convince the SNP's supporters. It is therefore a further waste of parliamentary time to debate such a paper today.

Members do not need to take my word for it. Even the former SNP cabinet secretary Alex Neil said recently that the Scottish Government needs to

"ditch the crap"

and

"Get focused entirely on the people's priorities by delivering better services and supporting the Scottish people".

He said that the SNP should stop

"constantly contemplating our navels".

I agree with him on that.

The debate is a transparent and desperate distraction from the SNP's mounting political problems and from the urgent issues that matter to the people of Scotland. The truth is that the Parliament and the Scottish people do not need a made-up debate on Europe. If we are concerned, as the motion states, about what best serves Scotland's economic, social and political future, we should be debating more pressing matters.

We should be debating the cost of living crisis that continues to afflict communities and families across our country; the winter crisis and the spiralling waiting lists in our NHS; and the outrageous and savage cuts that the Scottish Government has inflicted on local councils and the degrading of our public services.

At a time when the Scottish Government is spending nearly £2 million on the production of the "Building a New Scotland" papers, day centres for adults with learning disabilities in Renfrewshire are under threat of closure and merger as a result of the Government's budget cuts. Our most vulnerable adults face losing lifeline services on which they rely, while the Government wastes vital resources on that charade.

Recent weeks have revealed—as Donald Cameron mentioned—this Government's mass deletion, on an industrial scale, of WhatsApp messages. That is a clear attempt to thwart the work of the UK Covid inquiry, and a massive betrayal of Covid bereaved families and the Scottish public. Why are we not debating that?

It is not just WhatsApps that have disappeared; so, too, has trust in the Scottish Government. We know why we are not debating those issues. It is because this Government, rather than face its own record, its own failings and its dearth of ideas,

seeks to engage in a transparent diversion, and in yet another desperate attempt to pretend to its own supporters that it has a plan when it does not. It is an attempt to create what we might even call a good old-fashioned rammy, in order to breathe some life into the SNP's dwindling poll numbers.

It is disappointing. Like Donald Cameron, I have considerable respect for Mr Robertson and Mr Hepburn. I think that they are better than this, but the debate is a symptom of a party that has lost its way after 17 years in government. I worked constructively with Mr Hepburn when he was Minister for Business, Fair Work and Skills. He did an important job in that brief and, in my view, he did it well. Now, however, he is, unfortunately, in a non-job in which he prepares glorified talking points for non-debates.

Just a few weeks ago, I had a constructive meeting with the cabinet secretary in which we discussed a range of useful ideas and issues in relation to matters affecting the culture sector. That is what the cabinet secretary, and all ministers, should be doing: using their powers to effect real change now. It is a great responsibility and a great privilege to hold those positions, but doing stuff like this is a dereliction of duty.

Just a few weeks ago, the cabinet secretary was praising the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee for its unanimous report on devolution post-Brexit. He knows that the committee is, as we speak, embarking on an inquiry into the trade and co-operation agreement with the EU. If we want to debate Europe, surely we should do so on publication of the committee's report. We should let the committee do its work and then debate the issue when we are in full and proper possession of the facts and evidence.

Nevertheless, here we are, and we should be clear: the Tory Government has made a complete mess of Brexit and of much else. Its botched Brexit has left no one—not even Brexit supporters—happy. It has burned bridges with our allies and partners, and left businesses and those who trade and deal with Europe drowning in a sea of red tape. It has presided over economic calamity and political chaos. That is a dismal and disgraceful record.

The answer, however, is not for us to have yet more years of social division, constitutional upheaval and costly economic damage. Brexit should act as a warning of the consequences of withdrawing oneself from an economic and political union for the sake of a constitutional obsession, in particular one that does not command the support of the majority of Scotland's people.

Angus Robertson: When Mr Bibby intervened on me earlier, I asked him what the Scottish

Labour Party's position was. He was not able, or not prepared, to answer then, so will he do so now? Is it the position of Anas Sarwar and the Scottish Labour Party to support

“permanent British membership of the European single market and the customs union”?

It is a yes or a no.

Neil Bibby: We will seek to fix the Tories' Brexit mess. I will come to the details of how we want to have greater co-operation with our European partners.

However, the SNP wants to ignore the inconvenient truth about the customs union that we have with the rest of the UK, and the fact that we share a land border, a currency and so many institutions with it. Angus Robertson talked earlier about how big and important the single market was, but he neglected to mention that the UK makes up 61 per cent of Scotland's export market.

The SNP's plans would make Brexit look like a cakewalk. What is more, the Scottish Government's own analysis indicates that for an independent Scotland to join the EU, it would take years—possibly many, many years—of complex negotiations. The Scottish Government should be honest about those trade-offs and about the costs—

Jamie Hepburn: Will the member give way on that point?

Neil Bibby: No—I have to make progress.

People need change, and that process can start by booting out the Tories and electing a UK Labour Government. Labour has set out practical and achievable solutions to fix the Tories' Brexit mess with a better relationship with the EU and improvements to the TCA.

We need to use the scheduled review of the TCA to tear down unnecessary trade barriers. We also need to support our world-leading services and scientists by seeking the mutual recognition of professional services. Labour will seek a better deal for financial services, and a new defence and security pact with the EU. In the realm of culture, Labour has set out clearly its intention to fix the visa issues for touring musicians and artists, and to seek an EU cultural touring agreement.

People also want a wider programme of economic and social change. The creation of Great British energy and a new deal for working people are just two important examples of practical, deliverable change that can improve people's lives.

That is in sharp contrast to the SNP. Its members are not principled on Europe; they are opportunists. The nationalists opposed EU membership in the 1975 referendum. In 2014, they

were willing to forsake our place in Europe. We must not forget that the SNP spent more money on the Shetland by-election than it spent during the entire EU referendum campaign. In 2019, during the Brexit votes, it did not even vote in favour of a customs union.

Its policy position on the issue remains unclear and confused. I ask the cabinet secretary about his comments on the Lisbon treaty being

“completely and utterly unacceptable”

and

“a travesty”.—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 26 February 2008; Vol 472, c 1020.]

That seems hard to square with the more recent enthusiasm to render an independent Scotland subject to that treaty.

The Government wants an independent Scotland to join the EU but seems ambivalent on whether it is prepared to join the euro—something that many experts agree would be essential. The Government’s own internal analysis, which has been released through freedom of information, shows that it would take years for an independent Scotland to even join the EU—years of vast economic upheaval, about which the Scottish Government is rarely candid with the Scottish public.

That is why people cannot take seriously these debates and those papers. The sad reality is that the debate has more to do with the SNP Government’s internal politics than with matters of substance and of pressing concern to the people of Scotland.

The people of Scotland deserve better. They deserve Scottish and UK Governments that will deliver on their priorities and tackle their concerns.

I move amendment S6M-12004.1, to leave out from “being” to end and insert:

“Scottish and UK Labour administrations.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): I call Willie Rennie to speak to and move amendment S6M-12004.3.

14:52

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I always listen very carefully to the cabinet secretary. However, the more I listened to him this afternoon, the more I heard echoes of Jacob Rees-Mogg. That is not a throwaway insult. The detail of what the cabinet secretary said contains many similar arguments to those that were made by the Brexiteers. Talk about a deadweight UK and slow economic growth are what Nigel Farage and Jacob Rees-Mogg said about the EU, at that time. The cabinet secretary’s argument that there is a

huge market elsewhere in the world is exactly the same as the one that was made by Jacob Rees-Mogg. Equally, the argument about our democracy being overruled has frequently been made by the cabinet secretary and Jacob Rees-Mogg. There are many similar echoes between the two arguments; those two forms of nationalism are taking over the debate.

One thing that we have learned over the past few years is that putting up barriers causes economic damage rather than creating economic opportunity. The only real and tangible benefit that we have had from Brexit has been the trade agreement with Australia and New Zealand, which was criticised by the former agriculture minister at the time that it went through.

We therefore know that there are no real benefits from Brexit—we have seen none of the tangible things that Jacob Rees-Mogg talks about—and we know that it would be exactly the same if we were ever to be in the unfortunate position of breaking up the United Kingdom.

In recent weeks, I have noticed that several members on the SNP benches have been exercised by the new “Not for EU” labels that are being stuck on to UK produce. That is the consequence of the Windsor agreement—the protocol on Northern Ireland—to deal with green lane issues.

I say that not to point to the failure of Brexit—although I think that it is a failure—but to warn about what would come if we were ever to be in the unfortunate situation of breaking up the United Kingdom. We would be replacing those labels with labels that said “Not for the UK”. That is what would be on our produce in Scotland. The thing that we get very angry about now is exactly the thing that would happen if we were ever to break up the United Kingdom. The SNP should be careful regarding what it campaigns about and what it claims to support.

I think that the cabinet secretary and I agree with the National Institute of Economic and Social Research on the impact of Brexit—the 2 to 3 per cent GDP drop, which is £850 per person. That is a big economic disadvantage to citizens in this country, which comes on top of the damage of Ukraine and Covid. Brexit has also brought difficulties in attracting workers for important sectors such as social care and the NHS, and it has caused division. We saw that tensions were raised again last night in Northern Ireland, with the protests outside the Democratic Unionist Party meeting.

We know that there are tensions, we know that there is economic damage and we know that there is a shortage of workers, and we have to ask ourselves a question: what do we do next? Do we

repeat those mistakes or do we learn the lessons? I am determined that we learn the lessons.

I was opposed to Brexit and I am still opposed to Brexit. Of course I want to be in the European Union. I wish that I had not gone through the past few years of arguing endlessly about pointless things that have not given any advantage to our country. I am trying to learn how we can get back to a position where we can reduce the economic damage, get the workers back into our NHS and social care sectors and eradicate the division.

The gradualist approach has to be the one that we are in favour of. The SNP used to be in favour of that, but it does not seem to be any more. We need a gradualist approach to make sure that, for example, we bring the UK REACH—registration, evaluation, authorisation and restriction of chemicals—regulation together with the European REACH regulation. There is hardly any difference between the two, so let us get them working together. Let us have mutual recognition of trades and professions, so that a joiner from Auchtermuchty can go off to Brussels and do exactly the same job over there. That should be the opportunity that we are presenting for people. We need to look at veterinary checks and eradicate some of the bureaucracy around that. Those are the practical steps that we should be taking.

We also need to implement powers that we said we were going to utilise. For example, the Taith scheme is the replacement for Erasmus in Wales, but the pilot for the replacement here has been delayed. Young people in Scotland are being deprived of an opportunity that the SNP said in its manifesto that it would provide but that it has failed to deliver. In Wales, students are going to 23 European Union countries and 40 countries in the rest of the world, thanks to the programme that has been put in place. However, in Scotland, it is a case of, “Nah. We’re not interested, because it’s not the slogan that we’re really after any more. We were able to use Erasmus to make our arguments for independence, but we’re no longer interested, because it doesn’t suit our case any more.”

The cabinet secretary said that he would take no lectures from me about Brexit. I am going to lecture him about this, because he needs to remember, as Neil Bibby rightly pointed out, that the SNP was more interested in the Shetland by-election than it was in the European Union referendum. The SNP spent more money up there on that by-election than it did in the whole of Scotland on the referendum. In the whole of Scotland, it spent a fraction of the money that it spent in Shetland. That does not look like a pro-European party to me.

I remember something that happened at the time. Alex Salmond used to be the leader of the SNP—

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Willie Rennie: No, not just now. I am just making this very powerful argument. [*Laughter.*]

I remember that Alex Salmond was more obsessed with attacking the UK Government than he was with making a positive case for Europe during that referendum. I remember two direct interventions. The only intervention from Alex Salmond in that European referendum was to attack the UK Government. The SNP does not really care about Europe; it only uses it for its advantage as much as it can.

We need to make the positive case for Europe by working closely with our neighbours in Europe to undo the damage—the economic damage and the division—and make sure that we can get the workers for the UK that we need. Let us not repeat the mistakes that we made in the referendum on independence.

I move amendment S6M-12004.3, to leave out from “notes” to end and insert:

“believes that close UK-European cooperation is a benefit to Scotland and the whole of the UK; notes that work must be done to rebuild the UK’s relationship with the EU and the trust and partnerships that have been badly damaged by the UK Conservative administration; believes that a comprehensive step-by-step plan is required to rebuild those ties with the UK’s nearest neighbours, removing barriers and forging a new partnership built on cooperation, and that these essential steps on the road to EU membership will help restore the economy, prosperity and opportunities; considers that, while this work is ongoing, there are choices that can be taken right now by the Scottish Government to ensure that people in Scotland can still access the many benefits of a close relationship with the EU, and calls, therefore, on the Scottish Government to fulfil its commitment to create a full replacement Erasmus scheme, following the example of the Welsh Government and its Taith scheme.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate.

15:00

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): I tried to intervene on Mr Rennie when he was making his argument about what we spent on the EU referendum. He forgets that we won that referendum in Scotland—we won it by a huge margin. Was 64 per cent not enough for him? Would 88 per cent of the vote in Scotland going for Europe have been enough? Mr Rennie argued that we did not do enough, but it is evident that the people of Scotland wanted to stay in the EU.

There was much furore last week when British negotiators walked away from the trade talks with

Canada. Although concerns were raised on new segments by food producers and whisky companies, it was not reported that, if we had not left Europe, following a campaign based on lies and the othering of our European neighbours, our producers would be enjoying the comprehensive economic and trade agreement—CETA—which is a modern and progressive trade arrangement that offers the EU more and better opportunities in Canada.

I sit as convener of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee, and Donald Cameron and I sit as observers on behalf of the Scottish Parliament on the UK-EU Parliamentary Partnership Assembly. The PPA is composed of a delegation of UK House of Commons and House of Lords representatives and members of the European Parliament. The Assembly has discussed on many occasions, and has made some progress on, a number of the post-Brexit concerns that have been raised in the chamber this afternoon.

The Windsor agreement brought some meeting of minds on those areas. We have back our participation in the Horizon and Copernicus programmes, which we gave up with Brexit. We have discussed youth mobility and exchange, which we gave up with Brexit. We have discussed touring artists and the burdens of multiple visas and cabotage, which did not apply before Brexit. It seems that we are spending our time picking and choosing to get back the very rights that—inconceivably—we gave up when the UK left the EU.

So, where is the big Brexit bonus? As has been shown in the chamber this afternoon, there just isn't one. Brexit has led to our economy suffering from rising costs, borders to trade and an inability to recruit and retain valuable employees in our economy. Our European friends no longer enrich our communities in the way that they once did. Plans for energy interconnectors, security issues and unrest on the European continent and in Gaza all bring our world closer together, yet the Brexit disaster has left the UK isolated on the fringes of Europe. As I have said, the Scottish people did not want that. It happened against our will. Even when we tried to get some of the benefits that have been afforded to Northern Ireland—for very good and understandable reasons—that was denied to Scotland, so we no longer have access to the European free market.

The Royal Society of Edinburgh is conducting the Scotland-Europe initiative. A series of 10 events has now been held by the RSE as part of its project to examine the future relationship between the United Kingdom and Europe, which, as the RSE says, “remains unsettled.” At the same time, the RSE recognises that Europe itself

“is undergoing substantial change”,

and that we must look

“closer to home”

for

“distinct Scottish issues and options.”

In providing rigorous analysis of those issues, the project is drawing on academic research, examining the policy and institutional options for responding to some of the challenges, and engaging in dialogue with Government, business and civil society in Scotland. It is somewhat churlish to suggest that this, our country's Parliament, is not an appropriate place to examine those very issues.

The Scottish Council on Global Affairs has been established. The University of Glasgow, the University of Edinburgh and the University of St Andrews are providing a non-partisan hub for expertise on international issues. Professor Phillips O'Brien, chair of strategic studies at the University of St Andrews, said:

“It's time that Scotland had a rigorous, non-partisan, people-focussed Global Affairs institute that can bring together Scotland's brilliant researchers with a range of groups from across society.”

The very best minds in our country are looking at our future and at Scotland's place in Europe, which is the subject of the motion that we are discussing today. It is really important that we come to the subject with open minds and with a view to discussing all the ways forward for Scotland. We will disagree constitutionally, but we cannot ignore the fact that Brexit has been an absolute disaster for our country. We must all come together and look to the future and the options that are open to our country.

I believe that the best option is an independent Scotland and a return to the heart of European politics; others will have other ideas. Let us discuss the ideas rather than talk about the past and what people did in 1975. This is the future, and it is a future with Ukraine as a possible member of the European Union. We should remember what is happening in our world and look to Scotland's future in that European Union, too.

15:06

Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con):

The last time I debated one of the prospectus for independence papers, we were discussing the creation of a modern constitution for an independent Scotland. The paper told us that Scotland would adopt a new fantasy constitution, which was to be triggered by a fantasy independence referendum, which would then trigger the adoption of a fantasy interim constitution, before another fantasy referendum to

adopt a permanent fantasy constitution. I hope that that all made sense. It is quite hard to keep track of all the fanciful claims that have been made in the prospectus for independence papers.

Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): Does the member believe that a statement of fantasy could be “Vote no to stay in the EU”?

Maurice Golden: The disappointing aspect is that the member is not representing her own constituents. In 2016, the SNP promised to reduce rail journey times from Aberdeen to Edinburgh and Glasgow by more than 20 minutes, but just 3 per cent of that budget has been delivered so far. I am sure that the member’s constituents up in the north-east are really disappointed by the fantasy promises of the Scottish Government.

Just last month, in response to another of those prospectus papers, the First Minister claimed that families would be £10,000 better off in an independent Scotland. However, previous to becoming First Minister, he also suggested that those prospectus for independence papers were a waste of time. He was right—they are a waste of time. Given the many issues that we could be debating here today, why are we debating this one? Unfortunately, the SNP has a real habit of using its debates to duck scrutiny by avoiding the issues that really matter to the people of Scotland.

Jamie Hepburn: The member suggests that we are seeking to avoid scrutiny. We are debating a Scottish Government publication that we have published using Scottish Government resources, entirely legitimately—we have a mandate to do so. We have brought it here for debate so that it can be scrutinised. Why does he not up his game and engage with the subject matter?

Maurice Golden: The fundamental point is that the papers are a waste of money. The Scottish Government is paying £1.5 million a year to civil servants in its constitutional futures division to work on the prospectus for independence papers and similar projects. It is no surprise that the SNP has chosen the subject of EU membership for one of those papers, as it is one of its favourite subjects for grievance-filled bluster.

Take the bluster with which the UK Withdrawal from the European Union (Continuity) (Scotland) Act 2021 was passed. The SNP would have had us believe that it was the most important piece of legislation passed by the Scottish Parliament since devolution—we are talking about legislation that made it the Scottish Government’s default position to align with new EU law as it was introduced. Even though it has had numerous opportunities to do so, the Scottish Government has chosen to align with newly introduced EU law only once, and it has provided no explanation of why it has not aligned with every other new EU law that has been

introduced. We often learn more from the things that this Government does not do.

In the same vein, with the Government’s paper on its vision for an independent Scotland in the EU, as with all good propaganda exercises, it is far more interesting to know what it does not say. It claims that Scotland would have access to the world’s largest single market, with reduced barriers to trade, but any reduced barriers to trade would come with increased barriers to trade with Scotland’s actual largest single market—its market with the UK, which is the source of 67 per cent of Scottish imports and is responsible for more than half a million Scottish jobs. That is almost four times the number of jobs that are linked to trade with the EU. The paper also fails to mention the fact that the EU requires members not to have a deficit of more than 3 per cent and that Scotland currently has a deficit of 9 per cent.

As for currency, it is anyone’s guess as to what the paper actually says about that. Of course, that is one of the major issues on which the SNP has never had a coherent answer. The paper states:

“The Scottish Government would apply to join the EU as soon as possible after independence, while continuing to use sterling at the point of application.”

So, an independent Scotland will apply to the EU while using sterling.

The paper then says that

“Scotland would, as soon as practicable, move from sterling to having its own currency, a new Scottish pound”,

and that

“The process of establishing a Scottish pound would be closely aligned with the process of re-joining the EU.”

During the application process, when Scotland’s deficit is already three times higher than the EU limit, Scotland will be creating the new mythical Scottish pound just in time for EU accession. The paper states that we would be able to keep the mythical Scottish pound as long as we wanted and that other countries have done that, so we could, too. However, the paper fails to also state that countries that have kept their currency have done so with existing currencies, not newly created mythical ones.

Who knows what the answer is? We could be using sterling, the mythical Scottish pound or the euro, but the SNP will not let such small details get in the way of its constitutional obsessions.

I urge members to support the amendment in the name of Donald Cameron.

15:13

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): Scotland may be physically at the north-west of Europe, but we have always been spiritually and

economically at the heart of Europe. We can see that from the history of my city of Aberdeen—for centuries, we traded with the Hanseatic league, as did other parts of our nation. Our position at the gates of the Atlantic allowed us to form a bridge between Europe and America. We sat on the Baltic trade route from the Americas across the North Sea to the low countries, Germany and Scandinavia and on to the Baltic states.

That European trade was vital to the development of modern Scotland, and, despite the efforts of the UK Government, in the past it must not remain—trade with the EU must be our future. The single market—a cornerstone of the EU—is not a romantic notion but a tangible engine of economic growth. Access to 500 million consumers opens doors for Scottish businesses, unleashing their potential to compete and thrive.

During his contribution, Mr Rennie said that 61 per cent of our trade is with the rest of the UK. Next year, he might stand up and say that it is 62, 63 or 64 per cent. Some folk in the chamber seem to think that that is a good thing, but it is a very bad thing, because it shows that our capacity to export to Europe and the rest of the world is shrinking and that we rely overly on trade within these islands alone. That is not good for anyone; it is not good for Scotland and it is not good for England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Willie Rennie: Who has been in charge of the Scottish Government for the past 16 years and presided over that?

Kevin Stewart: As Mr Rennie well knows, the difficulty is that the main levers of power with respect to the economy are in the hands of the UK Government. Beyond that, we have seen a situation in which trade with other areas has shrunk because of a Brexit that Mr Rennie and his party now seem to support. His leader, Ed Davey, has said that rejoining the EU is “for the birds”. I think that rejoining the EU is for the wise, not the birds, and I will stick with that.

Access to more than 500 million consumers opens doors for Scottish businesses, unleashing their potential to compete and to thrive. Brexit-erected barriers have dampened exports and are stifling innovation. It is no coincidence that UK growth began falling even faster after the Brexit vote. Despite massively deficient spending by the UK Government, peaking with Trussonomics and the disastrous mini-budget, Britain’s growth remains insipid.

I said to Mr Cameron, who is no longer here, that the Centre for European Reform estimates that, to date, Brexit has cost the UK £40 billion in tax receipts, a figure that, to no one’s surprise, almost matches the £46 billion in tax hikes carried out by Rishi Sunak. It is quite simple: if the

resources to fund our public services do not come from trade and business, they will come from our back pockets. It is that simple.

Like Mr Cameron, I want to see more money being spent on public services. There is probably no one—actually, there are probably a few Tories, but there is next to no one—in the chamber who does not want to see more being spent on our public services. However, Brexit has harmed our tax take, which means that there is less money to spend on the NHS, education and infrastructure.

We must look to trade not only with the 60 million people on these islands, because that will never compensate for the ability to trade with the 500 million people in the rest of Europe. As I said, taxpayers are left to pick up the bill for Brexit in the form of that lack of trade. The British Government tries to tell us that, if we stick a union jack or a “Not for sale in the EU” sign on everything, our market will be bigger than 500 million, but it will not. Scotland’s trade, Scotland’s place and Scotland’s future must be with those 500 million people and must involve openness to Europe and to the world.

How can we achieve that? We should look again at that traditional Baltic trade route and follow the example of the Baltic states. They threw off the shackles of a decaying empire and took their place alongside the other independent countries in Europe. That is what Scotland should do. We should give up on broken Brexit Britain and stand free as an independent nation within the European Union.

15:19

Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): Simone Weil, the late French politician and Holocaust survivor, said that Europe is an ideal for which one must be prepared to fight. We have just marked Holocaust memorial day, and it would be remiss of us not to consider exactly how the European project came about. Out of the ashes of war, when so many lives were torn apart, nations across the continent yearned to build a better future—one that preserved the right of national sovereignty but saw beyond rigid borders and isolationism, with each allied nation working together on common policy areas such as food production, justice, security, environmental protections and the promotion of human rights.

The European Union, as it is today, is the home of 27 member states and around 450 million people. It is a co-operation of nations that is three times the size of the Russian Federation, and is a highly influential and formidable player on the global stage, of which, sadly, we are no longer part.

We are no longer part of the single market, which provides frictionless trade with our nearest international neighbours. We are no longer enjoying freedom of movement, enriching our citizens with broader horizons and the ability to live, work and even fall in love in new surroundings.

Shockingly, we are no longer a part of the Erasmus+ programme, which gave students across our continent the invaluable opportunity to live and learn in a different nation, experience different cultures and learn different languages. Instead, it has been replaced by the vastly inferior UK Turing scheme, which, unlike Erasmus+, does not even cover tuition costs.

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): Would we enter the European Union with the euro, the pound or the Scottish pound? What significance would that have?

Kaukab Stewart: I will come back to some of those points. My points are about what we are missing out on. Remember, Scotland did not vote for Brexit.

As I was saying, Erasmus+ has been replaced with the vastly inferior Turing scheme. The European project—the European ideal—has been stolen from us by a governing Tory party that was tearing itself apart on EU membership. Admittedly, that cost the party two Prime Ministers, but it cost the rest of us so much more.

I am sure that colleagues on the side of EU membership will discuss some of the broken promises of Brexiteers, which is a word that I cannot abide as it attempts to heroise those who inflicted this dreadful mess on us. Last year, the UK Government's Office for Budget Responsibility predicted that Brexit had caused long-run productivity to be 4 per cent lower, and both exports and imports to and from the EU to be 15 per cent lower.

However, at least the UK can now forge its own trade deals with nations around the world, right? When Liz Truss, the then international trade secretary, signed a trade agreement with Japan in 2019, she boasted that one of its benefits is the lifting of tariffs on cheese products from the UK. What a triumph! We can now sell more cheese halfway around the world to a nation where 90 per cent of the population is lactose intolerant.

There is not a single tangible benefit of Brexit that those who perpetrate it can cite. It has turned the UK into an insular state on the periphery of real influence; it has denied our citizens a myriad of crucial rights and privileges; and it has made it harder for key industries such as agriculture and hospitality to employ seasonal workers. That all happened without the democratic consent of the four nations of the UK.

Unlike the European Union, the United Kingdom is not a union of equal partners. Scotland voted, as a whole, by 62 per cent to remain in the EU. In some parts of my constituency, that figure was as high as 78 per cent. That is why I am glad that we are debating the issue today. Brexit and EU membership cannot be allowed to drop off the radar of public debate.

The Scottish Government's paper "An independent Scotland in the EU" is an informed prospectus of what we can aspire to be as a nation. With Labour now fully absorbing the Tory policy of staying out of the EU, along with the Liberal Democrats, it is clear that the only route back for Scotland is to become an independent country. I am therefore encouraged that the Scottish Government's position is that Scotland would apply to become a member of the European Union as soon as possible after achieving independence.

There are, of course, certain criteria for joining, but those matters would be subject to negotiation once Scotland had become a candidate country.

"I think that when independent the Scots could apply and probably get in pretty quickly through the door marked accession."

Those are not my words but those of Lord Kerr, former ambassador and now permanent representative to the European Union.

I am mindful of the time, so I will come to a close. Scotland's brightest days lie ahead of us. Independence in Europe is normal—just look around. Small independent nations such as Denmark, Finland, Slovakia, Croatia and Ireland, which have populations that are similar in size to Scotland's, are in a true union of equals, with equal say and voting power in the Council of Europe to that of larger nations such as France and Germany. We deserve so much better, and I believe that the door is open for us.

15:26

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I have always believed that it is a privilege to speak in the chamber, but I must confess that I am becoming frustrated by the Government's priorities and its failure to use its time in the chamber to acknowledge and address the massive challenges that the people of Scotland are living through.

Today, we could be debating how we will tackle the increasing waiting lists in our NHS, what the Government will do to deal with the pressures that the social care system is under, or the fact that it has kicked its unworkable national care service policy into the long grass.

In Fife, ambulances line up outside hospitals for hours on end, but we are not talking about that or

even about how we might fix that situation. General practitioners are struggling under the pressure. More are due to retire, but NHS Fife tells me that it does not have a plan. Indeed, it acknowledges that it has no idea how many GPs are due to retire in the coming years. The answer that it gives is that general practices are private businesses. That is not good enough, and the issue requires the attention of Parliament.

Jamie Hepburn: Does Mr Rowley recognise, as many others do, that one of the significant pressures that the national health service faces right now is the inability to recruit from other parts of the world, including from the European Union?

Alex Rowley: I certainly acknowledge that the national health service faces massive pressures, one of which relates to the ability to recruit from abroad, but the biggest one is the result of the Government's failure to provide a workforce plan for our national health service. It is high time that the Government accepted some responsibility, because we will not sort out the problems in Scotland until we have a Government that accepts its responsibility for doing so.

There are so many other issues that we need to address. How will we fix Scotland's failing transport system? What are we doing to ensure that further education can survive the latest round of budget cuts? Only last week in the chamber, I asked the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills to make Government time available to discuss the crisis in our schools and what must be done to address it. However, here we are, today, in another debate about building borders with England, with members fantasising about independence in Europe.

Kevin Stewart: Mr Rowley is a reasonable man who always asks for increased funding for public services. I fall into the same category. Does he recognise that the estimated £40 billion of lost tax receipts as a result of Brexit has had a major impact on public service spending across these islands?

Alex Rowley: I am glad that Mr Stewart said that there has been an impact "across these islands". I acknowledge that, but I point out that the waste that we have seen in Scotland because we have not prioritised our public services, or used the powers that we have in Parliament, is part of the problem. For as long as we have a Government that will not accept its responsibility for running public services in Scotland, we will make hardly any progress.

I believe that Brexit has been bad for the UK, and I am sure that a large majority of members in this chamber agree. However, we are where we are, and we must face up to the reality of the situation and act in the best interests of the people

of Scotland. I believe that this country would be in a better position now, were it not for the disastrous attempts of successive Tory Governments to negotiate the terms of the exit from the EU. However, the UK voted by a majority to leave the EU and has spent a considerable amount of time negotiating the details and working to disentangle our economic, political and social system from that of the EU.

I note that the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee is about to carry out an inquiry into the trade and co-operation agreement with the EU. If the Scottish Government is serious about the issue, why not wait until the committee reports before having a debate such as this one?

To be clear, I fully support freedom of movement and have argued for devolved migration powers for the Scottish Parliament. However, that in itself will not fix every problem that Scotland faces—far from it. In fact, I would go further and say that people who come to this country will face the same problems that people who already live in this country face—a massive shortage of affordable and social housing, ever-increasing waiting lists in healthcare, a social care system that is buckling under the pressure of an ageing population, and a clueless Government with no idea how to fix those things.

Therefore, instead of spending our time arguing about what could be, I will close my contribution by looking at what is on the table that could actually improve the conditions across the UK in anything close to a reasonable timescale: that is, a UK Labour Government that wants to end the division that has come from Brexit, both within our country and with our closest neighbours. When in government, Labour will prioritise improving relations with our closest neighbours to support businesses. Labour will improve the Brexit deal to help trade, and it will invest in clean energy, including the creation of a new public energy company—GB energy—which would be headquartered here in Scotland.

It is for the SNP-Green Government to decide whether it will make the most of those new arrangements, in the best interests of the people of Scotland, or continue to argue that, until it has every power, it cannot make use of any power. Scotland deserves better than this SNP Government.

15:33

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I thank Alex Rowley for his Labour campaign message, and I say to him that we could do more for the NHS and public services in Scotland—and in England,

where strikes prevail, incidentally—if the UK economy, which dictates our economy, was not in such a mess, as even Sir Keir Starmer admits it is.

I want to go back to the better together mantra in the 2014 referendum campaign, which—there is no doubt in my mind—cost us the small percentage of votes that were needed to take us over the 50 per cent hurdle to independence. Namely, the mantra that we could guarantee Scotland’s EU membership only by staying in the UK. Well, what to do? Should we accept the current mess because some people, including Alex Rowley, say, “Well, we are where we are.”

I will come back to that, but let me start at the very beginning—it is a very good place to start. In 2016, Scotland voted overwhelmingly to remain in the EU, by 62 per cent to 38 per cent. We cannot say that often enough. Every single one of Scotland’s 32 local authority areas voted to reject Brexit. We cannot say that often enough. We were dragged out of the EU, and it was done in the middle of a pandemic. Brilliant timing.

I say to Neil Bibby that, in the 1975 referendum campaign on whether to join the European Community, yes, the SNP campaigned for no but, crucially, it was, “No—not on anyone else’s terms.” We not only joined on someone else’s terms—members should check with Scotland’s fishing community—but we left in the same way.

How sensible we were to reject leave. Since the referendum, we have had food shortages, a fishing sell-out, an export crisis and workforce shortages—to name but a few impacts. Scotland, like the rest of the UK, is now forced to pay the price of the Tories’ damaging hard Brexit. What happened to the “oven-ready” meal?

Promises that were made include—not in any particular order of merit—the better together campaign director Blair McDougall telling Scotland that Boris Johnson would never become Prime Minister. The biggest and most disputed claim that was put forward by the leave camp was that Britain sent £350 million a week to the EU and that that money could be used to fund the NHS instead.

We were told that the UK provides strength, stability and international clout. Move over Liz Truss: during her tenure as Prime Minister, the pound’s value fell to the lowest level ever recorded. Instead of the UK having surplus cash to use at its leisure, its economy has shrunk. The Centre for European Reform said in December that Brexit has left the UK economy 5.5 per cent smaller than it would have been had it remained in the EU.

Donald Cameron told people to vote no to protect their pensions. The UK has a lower pension than any neighbouring country and is at

the bottom of the league in the developed world—according not to Christine Grahame, but to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

We were told that Brexit was about “taking back control of our borders”.

Net migration has been unusually high in the past two years. The Office for National Statistics estimates that net migration to the UK was 745,000 in 2022. That is up from 184,000 in 2019, which was before the pandemic. Most migrants are legal. Meanwhile, Brexit has created a shortage of workers in the UK.

Alex Rowley: Will the member give way?

Christine Grahame: I will certainly give way to Mr Rowley, as I mentioned him in dispatches.

Alex Rowley: Does Christine Grahame not accept that we have a problem in Scotland, in that people are not coming to stay here? That is partly down to the fact that we do not have the houses to house them in and the public services to offer them.

Christine Grahame: I do not like to say it to such a nice man, but Alex Rowley should stop shooting himself in the foot. He knows perfectly well that our capital budget is dictated by what Westminster divvies out to us. He knows it as well as the rest of us and is too clever to pretend otherwise. I know, however, that he has to try to fight the corner for the Labour Party, no matter what.

We have a shortage of workers in important areas. Brexit has contributed significantly to that situation.

We come to levelling up. Broadly speaking, that funding is money that used to come directly from the EU to Scotland for projects. It now comes from London, bypasses the Scottish Parliament, which has responsibility for infrastructure, for example, and goes straight to local authorities, thereby deliberately undermining devolution.

We were told that there would be no border down the Irish Sea. Well, there is. Although I welcome the probable return of power sharing in Northern Ireland, which is certainly for the good of the people, what is the £3.3 billion that has been offered? Is it an enticement or a bribe? Details are to follow.

On cross-border issues between England and Scotland, I say to Neil Bibby that he should look over the North Sea to Sweden and Norway. Both countries are members of the Schengen area and, therefore, there are no immigration controls. Sweden is part of the European Union and, crucially, the customs union. Yes, there are customs checks between the two countries. Those

checks are performed by the Norwegian customs and excise authorities and the Swedish customs service. They are sporadic along the Norway-Sweden border. Cars are not usually forced to stop and, to combat smuggling, use of closed-circuit television surveillance has been increased, with systems using automatic number plate recognition. It works—it is not a problem.

The reality is that Brexit has been an unmitigated disaster for the UK, let alone Scotland, but the scales have fallen from the eyes of many people who were deceived by false promises and, in Scotland, by that threat in the 2014 referendum—a threat that we would have thrown out if Scotland had voted yes. It is no wonder that we are being denied a referendum now.

The sense of Brexit progress can be measured in the latest UnHerd study, which found that, UK-wide, 54 per cent of people now feel that it was the wrong decision, while less than 30 per cent now mildly or strongly agree that it was the right move.

If I have time, Deputy Presiding Officer, I will turn briefly to the amendments.

Labour's leader, Sir Keir Starmer, has ruled out rejoining the EU or the single market if his party comes to power. He has steadied the Labour ship by veering into soft Tory territory—as the managing director of Iceland, Richard Walker, let slip recently. Once, Richard Walker sought to be a Tory MP, but he is now happy that Sir Keir Starmer has moved into central Tory territory.

The Tory amendment is pretty pathetic and tedious. It was a Tory Government that, by a whisker of leave votes UK-wide, caused a constitutional earthquake, and we are still suffering the aftershocks.

The Lib Dems' very wordy amendment—that is typical of a Liberal amendment—says at one point, in line 6, that

“these essential steps ... to EU membership will help restore the economy”

and so on. I am pleased to see that the Lib Dems' long-established skills at fence-sitting remain undiminished. Rejoin or not? Who knows? Do they?

I go back to the beginning. As members know, people often say when they are faced with the results of bad decisions, “Well, we are where we are.” I say that to Mr Rowley. If I was given a wrong turn and ended up facing a precipice, I would put the car into reverse gear in the blink of an eye. An independent Scotland will do just that and rejoin the EU.

15:41

Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate.

I have just noticed—although I may not be correct about this—that four of the previous five speakers have been SNP back benchers. I do not know whether that is because the Opposition parties are not taking up their speaking slots in the debate. I would be interested to have a look at that later.

That pertinently speaks to my first point. It is unusual, in a democracy, to have an issue on which there is a clear majority of people in favour of a particular course of action—particularly in Scotland, but also, now, across the rest of the UK—but to have almost all political parties opposed to taking that course of action. As Christine Grahame has identified, there is a very clear majority in favour of rejoining the European Union. That situation is unusual on such an important issue as that which is before us today.

Despite the efforts of some Opposition members to talk down the issue, it is hugely critical to Scotland's economy and to much else besides. We can understand the Tories, because they are running scared of Nigel Farage, who is playing cat and mouse with them. They are absolutely petrified of what Reform UK or whatever party he is running just now will do to them at the forthcoming election.

Labour is running scared of red-wall voters in Tory seats. As a consequence, it is sitting on the fence on the issue, as it is on much else in Keir Starmer's lack of a manifesto for a Labour Government, and it has a lack of principled positions on what it would do if it won the next election.

Then we have the Lib Dems, who are scared of blue-wall voters in Tory seats and have abandoned their pro-EU position. Even their amendment cannot bring itself to argue for rejoining the EU.

It is only the SNP that is unambiguously in favour of rejoining the EU, recognising the importance of what that could deliver to Scotland's economy and society and reflecting the very clear position of the vast majority of Scottish voters.

The reality of the hard Brexit that we have ended up with, with no free movement, single market or customs union, and the economic impact that that has had on growth, tax revenues and access to the European market for business, has been mentioned. I cannot remember, but I think that, back in 2016, Donald Cameron was in favour of remaining in the EU, because he is a more reasonable chap than some of his colleagues are. Perhaps he will correct me if I am

wrong, but I think that that is where he was. However, I do not know what planet he is on when he can stand and talk about rural depopulation and not recognise the link between that and Brexit, and talk about the virtues of the Windsor agreement but not ask why it is good for Northern Ireland to have the ability to be part of the European market, but not good for Scotland.

Neil Bibby stands up for Labour and fails to recognise the damage that Brexit has done to our economy, to our tax base and, as a consequence, to our public sector funding. He talks about labour shortages without recognising the impact that Brexit has had on people's ability to come to and live, work and share their skills in Scotland.

Labour's policy on the EU talks about its aspirations to forge closer links, but there is no recognition of how that would come about or why the EU would give those benefits to a third country without significant negotiations. The only way to secure those benefits is to be a full member of the European Union. That tired old nonsense about some experts having said at some point that we would need to join the euro is debunked misinformation that was being spread by the Labour front bench.

The third of the Brexit boys—I will not leave Willie Rennie out—said that the opportunities will come from taking small steps towards removing barriers, which rejoining the EU would solve in one step. Why has rejoining not been mentioned explicitly and clearly in the Liberal Democrats' amendment? Why does the amendment delete the unambiguous calls to rejoin the EU that are in the SNP motion?

On the failure to deliver the benefits of Brexit, some colleagues have talked about trade deals. There is, of course, no US trade deal. The Canada trade deal has fallen because of a disagreement over cheese while, as has been mentioned, the EU has made the CETA deal with Canada. The New Zealand and Australia deal was badly negotiated and it will cause significant problems for Scottish agriculture.

On the Tories' argument that Brexit would have the alleged benefit of restricting and reducing immigration, which we recognise was a hugely damaging step, their obsession with stopping people coming to these shores is the issue that is still ripping the Tory party apart.

As Christine Grahame has already said, we should never forget what we were told during the 2014 referendum, which was that voting no to independence would guarantee EU membership. How ridiculous that position looks now.

The other point that has been well made by the Government in the motion is that the Brexit process clearly showed Westminster's contempt

for the wishes of Scottish voters in its complete unwillingness to negotiate or entertain any separate deal for Scotland vis-à-vis the EU, such as has been agreed for Northern Ireland.

Our unashamed vision, which has been clearly articulated in the Government's paper and by the cabinet secretary in his comments today, is of an independent future in the EU. That reflects our values, which are very different from the values of the Tory party, and nobody knows where Labour's values are these days. It would enable free movement and vast economic opportunity.

Scotland is a part of the European family of nations, like other small, successful European countries, and it is important that we keep this item on the agenda and keep reminding voters in Scotland of the damage that Brexit is causing to our economy and society. The fact is that rejoining is overwhelmingly popular and the SNP is the only party that is offering that. We should take that message forward to the voters of Scotland.

15:47

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): I am once again baffled. We have been brought to the chamber to debate a topic over which we have no jurisdiction about an organisation of which we are not even a member. We are seeing before our eyes the dying days of a nationalist Government. It is losing the argument about the breaking up of the United Kingdom, and it knows it. Its dreadful record of failure and secrecy is being exposed, day by day, and it has no fresh ideas on the failures that it has created. Therefore, it has decided to waste everyone's time by spending an entire afternoon of chamber business on an exercise that will have no positive impact on the people of Scotland.

Come the end of the current parliamentary session, in two and a half years' time, I am sure that we will begin to hear a number of excuses about how the SNP has run out of time to deliver legislation, and it will, yet again, have broken promises to the Scottish people. The truth is that it is content to waste all the time in the world discussing its own constitutional obsession instead of people's priorities.

The SNP likes to throw around accusations of democracy denial, but it is the SNP that is in denial. It has decided that the results of the referendums in 2014 and 2016 are too inconvenient for the narrative that it is trying to spin. Instead, it sticks its head in the sand, insisting that the public was somehow duped.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I appreciate your taking the intervention. I am a substitute member of the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee. Do you agree that the convener of that

committee, who happens to be a Conservative member, has tried to delay a bill and the passing of legislation in this Parliament? Despite that, you are blaming the Scottish Government.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Members must speak through the chair.

Jeremy Balfour: I think that what he is trying to do is scrutinise this out-of-touch Scottish Government, which brings forward proposals but hates any form of scrutiny.

The truth is that the majority of people made the assessment that we are better off as a member of the United Kingdom. Two years later, a majority of people in the United Kingdom made the decision that they no longer wanted us to be a member of the European Union. That is it—it is really that simple.

We do not need to rehash this over and over. The SNP must accept that rejoining the European Union is nowhere near the top of people's list of priorities. Most people do not care about constitutional grievance. They care about high-quality public services, the standard of children's education and having access to the NHS. We would be far better off debating those topics, but we will not do that, because the SNP does not like scrutiny.

Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP): I thank Jeremy Balfour for taking the intervention and for taking the trouble to be brought to the chamber this afternoon to do his job. If he is concerned about public services, is he aware of the £40 billion that Kevin Stewart mentioned as having to be loaded on to make up for the Brexit deficit, and of the additional information that we have heard today that £2 billion will be added to council taxpayers' bills in England? That is the cost of Brexit and why we cannot improve public services to the extent that we would like.

Jeremy Balfour: Before I answer that, I point out to Keith Brown, who might not know this, that I have been in hospital for 10 weeks and that, during those 10 weeks, I did not miss one vote. Therefore, I ask him to withdraw the statement that he made about being dragged to the chamber.

The areas that I mentioned would also be far more worthy of investment, and that is what the public want the SNP to do. People do not understand what is going on. I would be interested to know how much money the Government has spent on the independence movement. How many more nurses, carers or teachers could have been paid with the money that has instead been spent on the paper? How much has been wasted, while there will no longer be an eye pavilion here in the capital, in the cabinet secretary's constituency?

Jamie Hepburn: Just for clarity, I put on the record the fact that the sum total of what we have spent on the production of the papers thus far represents 0.00025 per cent of the Scottish Government budget, which is perhaps not quite as much as Jeremy Balfour thinks, and it is an awful lot less than was wasted in the morass of Michelle Mone procuring personal protective equipment, when hundreds of millions of pounds was spent by the UK Government.

Jeremy Balfour: When I bring forward my proposal for a disability commissioner, if I am told that it is too expensive but it costs less than that figure, I look forward to Jamie Hepburn coming back and telling me that that is not a good use of money.

This is not a serious debate. If it was, the SNP would be able to answer the most basic questions, such as how long it would take to rejoin the EU, what currency we would use and what the border situation would be. The minister is pointing at the paper—it is in there, but it is fantasy, minister. We have no honest answer, because the SNP knows that the answer is ridiculous. For example, it is an absurd proposition to abandon a strong currency such as the pound and shackle ourselves to the euro, but that is what the SNP would do if we joined the EU.

It is ridiculous to suggest that we would put ourselves through what one SNP adviser has described as "Brexit times 10". I encourage the Government to reconsider wasting Scottish people's time and money on vanity projects. Instead, it should get on with the day job and deliver what people's priorities are; if it cannot, it should move over and let us do it instead.

15:54

Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): It is not often that I agree with my colleague Jeremy Balfour, but I agree with his statement that we are in the last days of a dying nationalist Government—the one at Westminster.

The debate marks the publication of the seventh paper in the Scottish Government's "Building a New Scotland" series. The first paper in the series set out a detailed analysis of the UK's performance across a range of economic and social indicators relative to that of 10 European countries, including Norway, which is a member of EFTA, and Denmark, which is a full member of the EU. That analysis of the economic and social performance of the UK, and therefore that of Scotland within it, in comparison with 10 countries suggested overwhelmingly that independent countries of Scotland's size do better. That is particularly true of independent countries of

Scotland's size in the internal market—be that via EFTA or as a full member of the EU.

Last summer, I stood atop the picturesque clifftop at Rosehearty, in my constituency, and looked across the North Sea. Aside from providing spectacular coastal scenery, those rocks are the closest point of our mainland to Norway. If members looked at the 16th century Carta marina map, they would be forgiven for thinking that Scotland was just a stone's throw from Norway and Denmark. The first map of the Nordic countries to give details and place names greatly exaggerates our proximity, but our relative closeness in geography and culture has meant that, for many centuries, the commercial and social connections between Scotland and the rest of Europe—particularly its northern reaches—have gone from strength to strength.

It therefore came as a surprise to no one that Scotland voted by nearly two to one to remain in the European Union. Scotland is European. I have said that before, I say it again and I will continue to say it for as long as I have the privilege to be a representative in Scotland's national Parliament, because the democratic will of Scotland will not be ignored.

This might be an inconvenient detail for the unionists, but remaining in the European Union is the clear will of the Scottish people. Scots now find that our membership of the internal market, our freedom of movement and the social, cultural and economic benefits that came with that have been stolen from us by a UK Government and an indifferent Westminster Opposition, which delivered us the hardest of Brexits on a vote that was won by the narrowest of margins south of the border and was based on many lies—lies about taking back control and about a Britain that is bursting at the seams.

The most egregious lie affected the coastal communities, which put their faith in the UK Government to deliver for them a sea of opportunity. When I spoke with fisheries stakeholders recently, I was given numerous examples of seafood-processing businesses that are still suffering the consequences of this denial of Scottish democracy, more than seven and a half years on from the vote. Some of those businesses are composed of up to 90 per cent migrant workers. Our loss of freedom of movement, coupled with hostile immigration policies, is threatening Scotland's flagship industries.

We have all heard the stories of shellfish rotting on the way to European markets because of the new UK Government red tape, but it is not only fisheries that have been let down. Our farmers are being undercut by the few trade deals that the UK Government has managed to negotiate. We could

not export our seed potatoes, and our soft fruits have been rotting on the vine at each harvest without adequate numbers of seasonal workers to pick them. All of us have heard about the hospitality sector's woes because of staffing shortages. I have met hoteliers in my constituency, where the lack of chefs has been extraordinarily detrimental to local services.

Perhaps the saddest point of all is about the impact that Brexit will have on the futures of Scotland's children. In the past couple of weeks, some of my children have been preparing their university applications, which has caused me to reflect on the opportunities that they might have in years to come. With the UK Government's refusal to negotiate membership of the Erasmus+ programme, Westminster has deprived many young Scots of the opportunity to live, learn and exchange across the continent. I urge the Scottish Government to do all that it can to restore Scotland's membership of that cross-border educational, social and cultural initiative, which does much to build friendships across borders and maintain lasting peace in Europe.

Independence offers Scotland the opportunity to rejoin the European Union and regain all that we have lost. Scotland's history is interwoven with the histories of our European neighbours; Scotland's present is as European as our past; and Scotland's future is as an independent state in the European Union.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The last speaker in the open debate will be Bill Kidd.

16:00

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): I am the last speaker in the open debate, and the sun is still blazing down outside, possibly as it knows that I am getting up to speak. [*Laughter.*] Somebody laughed—thank you.

From listening to the arguments today, it is clear to me that the benefits of being part of the EU far outweigh those of not being a member. In the Scottish Government's "Why EU membership matters" document, which accompanies its "Building a New Scotland: an independent Scotland in the EU" paper, a number of benefits are listed. Although these points have been touched on throughout the debate, I feel that it is important to reiterate some of them in order to recognise the practical day 1 benefits to ordinary Scots of EU membership.

Let us recognise these facts. The document states:

"As a Scottish citizen, and an EU citizen, you would have the right to live, visit, study and work freely in any EU member state, without burdensome paperwork.

You would have the right to equal access to healthcare if you fall sick or have an accident while travelling in the EU. You would also be able to use your driving licence throughout the EU.

You would have more job choices, with your professional qualifications being recognised throughout the EU. You would also have the right to establish your business in any EU member state.

Your rights would be protected by EU law, benefiting from guaranteed minimum working conditions and protected social security rights. And you would be able to boost your career opportunities and improve your language skills through access to the Erasmus+ programme.

Thanks to being part of the world's largest single market, you would enjoy more product choice at the supermarket for the best prices."

In answer to members' points about the effect on the current UK arrangements, let us also recognise these facts:

"You would continue to be able to move freely between Scotland, the rest of the UK and Ireland with no new passport or immigration checks through the Common Travel Area. You would also continue to have the right to live, work, and access services, including housing, education and healthcare in the UK and Ireland under the Common Travel Area."

Those are facts: not conjecture or hope, but simple, plain facts that need to be recognised by all parties on all sides of the chamber, regardless of members' personal views, if we are to have an informed and honest debate about the issue.

If we are to be honest with the people of Scotland, we need to be clear in our position regarding EU membership, regardless of our position on Scottish independence. Although I believe that independence offers the best route towards EU membership, alongside a continued positive relationship with the rest of the UK, I do not believe that, for those who are against independence, that precludes them from supporting EU membership. I ask us all to be honest with ourselves, and honest with the people of Scotland, about the undeniable benefits of EU membership.

We have heard today of the benefits of EU membership for ordinary Scots, and the benefits to our economy and to businesses are equally undeniable. The document states:

"As an EU member state, we would be part of the world's largest single market with almost 450 million consumers compared to the UK's 67 million. Scottish businesses would be able to sell to more customers and trade freely with more businesses. Checks on goods between Scotland and the EU would be removed and measures would be put in place to smooth checks required as a result of Brexit on goods moving to and from England and Wales.

EU membership would make trading cheaper, quicker and would be an important factor in attracting foreign direct investment to Scotland. Scotland would be able to draw people from across the EU to work in our businesses, study at our universities and contribute to our public services.

People living in Scotland would be able to offer their services throughout the EU and Scotland would have the opportunity to influence future EU regulations and standards in ways that reflect the interests of Scottish businesses. Online selling would be easier and safer, with better protection for businesses.

Scotland would have the same opportunities as other member states to access EU funding such as support for agriculture, infrastructure, regional economic development, and guaranteed participation in programmes such as Horizon Europe, which supports research and innovation."

It is clear that, if we are to be true to the pledge that got us elected—to best serve the interests of our constituents and of Scotland—we need to support EU membership. To be honest, having listened to the other political parties in the chamber, I say that the way to do that is through independence. I support the motion.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): We move to the winding-up speeches.

16:05

Willie Rennie: The debate has been a bit soporific. The only element of excitement was when Ivan McKee talked about John Mason being turned on. I suspect that he was talking about the microphone rather than anything else but, nevertheless, it was a dangerous double entendre. That was the only excitement in the whole debate.

Christine Grahame: Will Willie Rennie take an intervention?

Willie Rennie: I will in a second, but I must finish my point.

In reality, the debate is more about independence than about the European Union. The SNP is desperate to shore up its support across the country, because that is leaking away fast. That will be of deep concern to it, which is why it is scrapping around trying to find issues to shore up the support for the party.

Jamie Hepburn: Will Willie Rennie give way?

Willie Rennie: No—I will take the intervention from Christine Grahame.

Christine Grahame: First, Mr Rennie, I found your contribution exciting and riveting. You should not have stopped me from intervening, given that I was going to compliment you, but will you please explain to me whether the Liberal Democrats are in favour of rejoining the EU at some point in the future?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Speak through the chair please, Ms Grahame.

Willie Rennie: It is no secret that we are a pro-European party and that we would love the UK to be a member of the European Union.

The SNP has failed to strike reality, in that people today are worried about how they will pay their energy bills and how they will house themselves. They are overcrowded. Lots of people in North East Fife are desperate for a home. Those are the issues that people face now, not some esoteric debate about potentially joining the European Union at some point.

Of course, we have to improve the economic conditions for the country, which is why my gradualist approach of making sure that we break down the trade barriers so that it is easier for people to trade across Europe—

Kevin Stewart: Will Willie Rennie give way?

Jamie Hepburn: Will Willie Rennie give way?

Willie Rennie: Let me finish my point, please.

That is why my gradualist approach of breaking down trade barriers, so that it is as easy as possible for people to trade across the European Union, which will help people in their jobs here, in Scotland, is the sensible approach that people in this country are desperate for politicians to address, rather than having some remote debate that is a proxy for a debate about independence.

Jamie Hepburn: I wonder whether Mr Rennie has looked at the motion that we have lodged. There is nothing in it that is inconsistent with his taking and articulating the approach that he has laid out. His so-called gradualist approach could be easily accommodated in a simple and straightforward declaration that Scotland would be best served by being part of the EU. Why does he not support that?

Willie Rennie: I do not support the SNP's approach, which is about using Europe to try to secure independence.

It is curious that, in the debate, there was conflict between different members of the SNP. Some, such as Clare Adamson, said, "Let's not talk about the past." Coming from the party that celebrates Bannockburn and argues over fragments of the stone of destiny—whether those were in Alex Salmond's house or SNP headquarters—that is curious. Kevin Stewart read out lyrics from *The Corries*. Karen Adam talked about ancient connections with Norway.

If we are going to be serious about this and deal with constituents' concerns such as their energy bills and housing, which I am deeply concerned about, we need to be rid of this pointless debate—

Kevin Stewart: Will Willie Rennie give way?

Willie Rennie: Can I finish the point, please?

We need to be rid of this pointless debate on independence, which the SNP lost in 2014 but simply cannot accept.

Kevin Stewart: As do Mr Rennie's constituents, my constituents face many problems. Some of those have been exacerbated by Brexit. One example is a shortage of medicines. Britain hosted the European Medicines Agency, which has now gone elsewhere. Europe intends to bolster its supply of medicines, which puts at risk medicine supplies here. Would it not be a good idea to join the European Union and rejoin the European Medicines Agency?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can give you the time back for the interventions, Mr Rennie.

Willie Rennie: Of course, I would love to have pragmatic solutions to those medicine problems, but Kevin Stewart needs to face the reality that we lost the argument on Europe and we need to find pragmatic ways of moving forward.

The other thing that the SNP did not talk about is currency, on which Maurice Golden was bang on.

Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Willie Rennie: I am trying to develop the point that Maurice Golden eloquently made in his contribution. He said that the policy would be for an independent Scotland to keep the British pound and then it would move towards adopting its own currency. That would take some years—some say up to 10 years—but we know that it would be impossible for any country to join the European Union if it had adopted the currency of a country that was outside the European Union. Potentially, we would have a 10-year period in which Scotland would be developing its own currency, when we would be both independent and outside the European Union.

We know that it has been deeply damaging to be outside the European Union, and we know that it would be deeply damaging to be outside the United Kingdom, but to be outside of both would be superisolation. Maurice Golden explained that incredibly well. Unsurprisingly, none of the SNP members talked about it. I wonder why that was—it was because there is a gaping hole in the SNP's policy.

Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Willie Rennie: Not just now.

The other issue that the SNP did not talk about was immigration. It said that there were negative impacts of Brexit on immigration, and I agree with that whole-heartedly. However, it did not say why Scotland seemed to be incapable of attracting even a fraction of the net 700,000 immigrants who come to the UK. If we are an incredibly attractive place, as the SNP says that we are, surely they

would be flooding over the Scottish-English border, but they are not. So, what hope would we have that an independent Scotland would be able to attract all the hordes of people that we say we are desperate to attract to the country? That is another issue that the SNP simply did not address. It picks only the issues that advance its argument not for the EU but for independence.

I come back to the very powerful point that Alex Rowley made when he said that we get the feeling that the SNP is not prepared to use any of its powers until it has all of the powers. The SNP is sacrificing people in the process in order to make its case for independence—I do not think that that is in Scotland's interests.

16:12

Foyso Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): In the past few months, we have seen countless debates on the SNP's ideological pipe dream of independence, and valuable taxpayers' money has been spent on the white paper outlining that fantasy scenario. This vital time in the chamber could have been used to address the many people in Scotland who are still struggling with the cost of living crisis. We could be discussing the vast array of health and social inequalities that are still present in Scotland, or addressing the serious problem with NHS and mental health support waiting times. Instead, we are here to once again talk about independence.

The SNP is doubling down on politics of division in a desperate attempt to distract from the real problems faced by people in Scotland. As Maurice Golden and Neil Bibby outlined, the SNP is wasting money working on myths and fantasy. Instead of hypothetical papers outlining a series of ifs, whens and maybes, the Scottish Government could, right now, be implementing policies that can minimise the damage caused by Brexit.

Willie Rennie highlighted that the UK's withdrawal from the Erasmus programme meant the loss of opportunities for thousands of Scottish students to travel and study abroad. The opportunity for thousands of international students who would have wanted to visit and study in Scotland was also lost.

If the Scottish Government is serious in its ambition to build a more vibrant, visible and connected Scottish community around the world, it must replace the Erasmus scheme. In order to maintain good relations with the EU, the Scottish Government must commit to renewing an international student exchange programme.

Alasdair Allan: Will the member take an intervention?

Foyso Choudhury: The Welsh Labour—

Angus Robertson: Will Mr Choudhury member give way?

Foyso Choudhury: Let me make progress. I will come to the member in a minute—I have a lot to get through.

The Welsh Labour Government has already implemented the Taith scheme to replace Erasmus, with funding of £65 million over five years. There will be an estimated 15,000 participants from Wales by the end of August 2026. The Scottish Government must implement an international educational exchange programme now to ensure that Scotland stays visible and connected in terms of education.

Angus Robertson: The best answer to being outside the Erasmus+ scheme is to be back in it. Is the position of the Scottish Labour Party, or indeed the UK Labour Party, like that for Horizon—in favour of rejoining Erasmus+? It is quite simple: it is a yes or a no.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Foyso Choudhury.

Angus Robertson: He does not know.

Foyso Choudhury: I find it very difficult to understand our cabinet secretaries and ministers: we are out of Europe now, so why are we talking about the past when a lot of colleagues have said that we should move forward? If they can do it in Wales, why can we not do it in Scotland? Why are we just talking about what we have done? Why should we not move forward?

Clare Adamson outlined that the Brexit disaster has isolated the UK from the benefits that EU members are receiving as part of the customs union. By the Scottish Government's own admission, for an independent Scotland to join the EU would take years of complex negotiations and deals—not to mention the chaos that would ensue from trying to separate Scotland from the place with which it shares a border, a currency, countless institutions and an internal market.

If Brexit has taught us anything, it is that withdrawing from an economic and political union is shrouded in difficulty and regret. Neil Bibby highlighted the mess that the Tories have made over Brexit. They created divisions and difficult relationships with our European allies and economic partners, and they created a sea of chaos for businesses seeking to maintain trade and business in Europe. As has already been said in the chamber many times, however, independence is not the solution to Brexit chaos.

Labour wants to make Brexit work. Revisiting old rows will only create more divisions and distractions from the real and immediate problems facing people in Scotland.

Kevin Stewart: Will Mr Choudhury give way?

Foyso Choudhury: We would seek to end divisions between the UK and the EU due to Brexit, and to reset our relations in Europe.

Kevin Stewart: Will he give way?

Foyso Choudhury: Labour's priority in government will be to improve our relationship with our closest neighbours to help businesses and working people in Scotland and across Britain. We would review and tear down unnecessary trade barriers and seek a new defence and security pact with the EU.

Kevin Stewart: Would Mr Choudhury give way on that point?

Foyso Choudhury: I have a lot to get through.

Kevin Stewart: I will be very brief.

Foyso Choudhury: A lot of SNP members had their chance; let us have our chance and put our points across, too, please.

Kevin Stewart spoke about the doors that have been closed for Scottish businesses involved in trade, because of Brexit.

Kevin Stewart: Now that he has mentioned me, will he give way?

Foyso Choudhury: In 2025, there is to be a scheduled review of the trade and co-operation agreement, and the UK and Scottish Governments should be working together to take the opportunity to fix mistakes in the Brexit process.

That is the serious work that the Scottish Government could be doing to mend the broken relationship with our EU counterparts. As Alex Rowley highlighted, the Scottish Government should be looking at what it could do now to improve conditions in Scotland. Instead, it continues the fantasy of the ideological pipe dream of independence, which does nothing to help the people of Scotland. The people of Scotland deserve better and Labour is prepared to pave the way to make that happen.

Kevin Stewart: Will the member give way on that point?

Foyso Choudhury: Finally, Kevin Stewart spoke—[*Interruption.*] I am bringing up Mr Stewart's points.

Kevin Stewart spoke of the Balkan states throwing off their imperial rulers. Is the SNP still trying to compare Scotland's union with the UK to being an imperial colony? That is insulting to all those countries that fought hard for independence from Scotland as part of the United Kingdom. The SNP needs to focus on what the people of Scotland desperately need, instead of doubling down on a useless argument for independence.

16:21

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am pleased to be able to close the debate on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives. I will be supporting Donald Cameron's amendment.

The issue of Scotland's relationship with Europe is, indeed, important and is a topic worthy of time in the chamber. Unfortunately, however, today's debate has focused on some of the old constitutional arguments that we have heard repeatedly since 2016. We may well be in a new year, but the SNP Government's assertion of and addiction to grievance-fuelled policies and grandstanding about the constitution continue to be an old story.

The SNP's latest independence wish list, entitled "An independent Scotland in the EU", follows the same pattern as all the previous independence papers since 2022. The SNP is happy to make bold claims about the future of an independent Scotland, but it is even happier to sweep under the carpet any of the potential problems that may arise from that.

A common theme throughout the Scottish Government's paper is that it is somehow inherently undemocratic when the wishes of Scotland differ from the wishes of the United Kingdom as a whole. The paper states that Scotland is a devolved nation within the United Kingdom but does not have a seat at the table or a voice in the debate. As well as ignoring the fact that Scotland sends 59 MPs to the House of Commons, the paper has a mistaken belief that having a seat at the table is the same as a political union, which means that the parties will always agree with one another. Political neighbours very rarely agree with one another. The truth is that all political unions involve a certain amount of give and take, and that would be no different for an independent Scotland in the European Union.

As the Scottish Parliament information centre pointed out in its analysis of the Scottish National Party's paper, even through an independent Scotland, we would have only a small influence in the Council of the European Union. SPICE highlights that it is not necessarily the case that that influence would always lead to the outcome that Scotland wished for, and that Scotland would often have to compromise in order to achieve an EU position.

Jamie Hepburn: On the supposed equivalence of the two unions, Alexander Stewart mentioned that we send 59 MPs to Westminster—although that is soon to be reduced to 57 members—but, of course, that is out of 650 MPs, which is before we even get to the more than 800 unelected members of that legislature.

Alexander Stewart is right to refer to the fact that political neighbours will often not agree with one another, but does he not recognise that the set of arrangements that exists in the European Union means that such neighbours are truly equal partners, because they are full member states of the European Union, unlike the sub-state entity that Scotland is as part of the United Kingdom?

Alexander Stewart: The minister makes a point, but the best union that we have had is the union of the United Kingdom. The strength that has accumulated over generations and the possibilities that have been realised show that to be very much the case.

It is hardly surprising that the SNP condemns that kind of political give and take, because it does not want give and take. It wants to ensure that it can continue to have the concerns that it has raised. SNP members have made many points in the debate, but they have made them many times before.

There is a similar doubling down from the SNP in its paper when it comes to issues such as trade. The paper is keen to talk about the opportunities of rejoining the single market, but very little is said about the risks of leaving the UK's internal market. We know that, as we have heard, Scotland's exports to the rest of the UK are worth three times more than its exports to the entire EU. Given that, it is hardly surprising that research by the centre for economic performance at the London School of Economics found that trade disruption with the rest of the UK could result in a reduction in Scottish income per capita of at least 6.3 per cent.

Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP): Mr Stewart said that it was questionable that we had an influence in the EU. To give an example, between 1979 and 2020, the Highlands and Islands received more than £1 billion from the EU—I understand that it received £1.024 billion. My late mother was influential in obtaining some of that, under objective 1. Surely that is a very good example of us having a positive voice in Europe even though, numerically, we were not strong.

Will the Conservatives, as a gesture of good will, following the £2.5 billion sweetener to Northern Ireland, put in a couple of billion so that we can get on with dualling the A9 and the A96 even more quickly?

Alexander Stewart: I thank the member for his intervention, and I acknowledge the contribution that his late mother made in her time. That is well documented and should be recognised. He makes a valid point, but if this Government could manage to, for example, dual the A9, we would not have to depend on funding from other places.

As I have said, it is hardly surprising that we find ourselves in this position. Even if Scotland were to

rejoin the European Union straight away, there would be certain issues and timescales. We have heard about some of the problems that may arise, and SPICe talks about the lack of answers on many issues.

The Scottish Government's paper does not really address the current volume of trade. The Scottish National Party is happy to celebrate the benefits of free trade when it does not involve other parts of the UK. Just as it did in its previous independence paper, the Government simply shrugs its shoulders and does not confront serious issues when it comes to independence.

Before I address some of the many comments that members have made in the debate, I note that we do not have any members of the Green Party with us in the chamber and that no Green members made a contribution to the debate.

Donald Cameron said that a third of Scottish National Party voters and a million people in Scotland voted for Brexit, and he talked about being chained to Brussels.

We should be talking about the priorities of many people in Scotland today—health, education and law and order. It is well documented that those are people's priorities. We should be spending time on the issues that the Scottish Government should be addressing.

We have heard about the Government's failure to meet targets. We know that housing targets have not been met, we know that the Government has failed to meet its A9 dualling target and we know that it is focusing its time on things that are not relevant. The priorities of Scotland and its population are vitally important, but the focus today has been on fantasy politics, as Neil Bibby said.

Debates such as today's are old debates—they are not about the issues that we should be discussing. They are not about the way forward. They are not about the possibilities of what could happen in Scotland. They are about constitutional division. Willie Rennie talked about the two forms of nationalism—that was a very valid point—the wrangling that goes on and the difficulties that arise. [*Interruption.*]

My time is tight, so I will need to conclude.

Maurice Golden talked about the vast issue of where we would be with currency, about failure and fantasy, about the money that is being wasted and about how things are not working for the people of Scotland.

Jeremy Balfour touched on the idea that, even though the SNP has been, and continues to be, in government, it is not looking at people's priorities but is instead wasting time, paper, policies and funding on all of this.

At the beginning of my speech, I spoke about the vital importance of our relationship with Europe and the worth of the historical understanding that we have with Europe at different levels. Despite what the Scottish Government would have us believe, Scotland can continue to have a strong relationship with Europe. We need to have a strong relationship with Europe. That will not be helped by Scotland becoming independent, but it will happen if we keep exploring what we can achieve, rather than manufacturing grievance. People want the UK and Scottish Governments to work together to maintain a strong relationship with Europe. More importantly, that will help the whole United Kingdom to work together.

I look forward to hearing more about that in the future, because I have no doubt that there will be many more debates of this nature.

I support the amendment in the name of Donald Cameron.

16:31

The Minister for Independence (Jamie Hepburn): I thank the members who have taken time to contribute to this debate. I am somewhat disappointed that we have not had a bit more engagement from the parties that are ranged against today's motion. That might seem to be an unusual thing to say, but I welcome a debate about Scotland's future and I would have hoped for more participation. Mr Kidd suggested that the reason why the sun was still shining when he was speaking was to welcome him to the debate, but in fact it was because there was a lack of participation and engagement from certain quarters. That is a matter for regret, and I hope that more members will engage in the debate when we return to the issue in the future.

Neil Bibby: The only party that does not seem to be represented today is the Scottish Green Party. Is that who the minister is criticising?

Jamie Hepburn: I am not a member of the Scottish Green Party, but the members of Mr Bibby's party are ordinarily lined up to take part in debates. Where are they today? We have had a meagre contribution from Mr Bibby's party.

Let us talk about the purpose of today's debate. As the cabinet secretary said at the beginning of the debate, the background is that we are approaching the anniversary of the UK's withdrawal from the European Union, so it seems entirely appropriate to debate the issue at this juncture.

It is also entirely appropriate to debate the issue when we consider the harm that has been wrought to the UK and Scottish economies as a consequence of Brexit. The cabinet secretary

mentioned the 2.5 per cent reduction in the UK economy, and we have seen the OBR forecasting a 4 per cent reduction to UK GDP in the long run, as a consequence of Brexit. We know that there have been social harms and that our businesses and public services have been damaged as a consequence of Brexit.

The other purpose of the debate is to bring the latest of our series of papers into this place to be debated. That is entirely legitimate when we have undertaken that work, as we have a mandate to do, and I will come to that subject when I turn to Mr Cameron's amendment. If we are going to take forward that work, I will bring it to the chamber to be debated, because I think that it is the right thing to do and that Parliament should have the opportunity of engaging with that material. I hope that we will see more of that in future.

We deliberately worded our motion as we did to provide everyone with the opportunity to come together and to do as we have done before, which is to reassert our position that Scotland is best served by being part of the European Union. We have voted in favour of that proposition several times and we deliberately worded the motion to enable people to do that.

It is, of course, the Scottish Government's perspective that independence is the means by which we can re-engage with the European Union and become part of it again. I recognise that others do not agree with that perspective. That is why I intervened on Mr Cameron, who seemed a little surprised that I had done that and dismissed it a little by suggesting—somewhat facetiously—that my intervention was important.

It was an important intervention, because Mr Cameron had suggested that the title of the debate was "An independent Scotland in the EU." The debate is not styled as that—it is "Scotland's place in the EU". All those who supposedly believe that Scotland would be best served by being part of the European Union still have the opportunity to back that proposition and vote in favour of the motion that we have lodged.

I turn to the amendments that other colleagues have lodged, starting with that of the Tories. They derided our motion for being predictable. I am afraid to say that the Tory amendment was entirely predictable. It seems to be necessary, once again, to remind the Conservatives that it is entirely proper and appropriate that the Scottish Government takes forward the activity that we are undertaking. Why is it appropriate and legitimate for us to undertake this activity? We stood on a platform of saying that we would undertake it, and we derived a mandate from the people of Scotland to undertake it. The Conservatives can complain as much as they want, but we will keep taking

forward this activity and bringing it back to this place to be debated.

Incidentally, I have to say to Jeremy Balfour, who suggested that this debate would somehow push our legislative agenda off the table, that we would take his comment rather more seriously if the Conservative convener of the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee had not determined, unilaterally, without recourse to the committee, that the committee would not meet to consider stage 2 of the Wildlife Management and Muirburn (Scotland) Bill.

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): Will the minister give way?

Jamie Hepburn: That will cause a delay to that legislation. I have to say that the suggestion that the cancellation of a committee meeting is a means by which the Government can be held to account is a new one on me, Mr Balfour.

Of course, I will give way to Mr Carson.

Finlay Carson: I am really surprised by what appears to be a personal attack. The decision to postpone that meeting was taken for the best interests of the committee. As a member of the Parliament for quite some time, the minister should know that it is at the discretion of the convener to set the agenda for their committee.

Jamie Hepburn: That—rightly—is a matter for the committee, but my perspective is that, when someone from Mr Carson’s group comes forward and says that it is the Government that is delaying the legislative agenda, frankly, they must be told that it is his group that is doing so.

Let me turn to the amendment in the name of Mr Rennie. I have to say that it somewhat circuitously and almost begrudgingly refers to EU membership, unlike the very clear position in our motion, which I will read out to Mr Rennie:

“That the Parliament notes the Scottish Government’s paper, *Building a New Scotland: an independent Scotland in the EU*, and believes that Scotland’s economic, social and political future is best served by being part of the EU.”

Our motion says that Parliament “notes” the paper—not that it necessarily supports it, Mr Cameron. There is nothing inherent in our proposition that is inconsistent with the supposed gradualist approach that Mr Rennie has laid out. That is not one that I agree with, but there is nothing in our motion that would delegitimise his position and prevent him from supporting our motion.

Willie Rennie: I love it when the minister gets all cute. It is important to understand that, seven minutes into his speech, he has not once talked about the currency issue. Mr Golden set out a very clear challenge to the SNP and not once has the minister responded to that. Will we spend years

outside both the UK and the European Union under his proposal?

Jamie Hepburn: I will return to the issue of chronology, as I want first to come to the Labour Party’s position. However, that is a peculiar line of attack—that the process that an independent Scotland would undertake to join the European Union is somehow a weak position.

It is somewhat disappointing but probably predictable to see the proposition that has been laid out in the Labour amendment. Under that proposition, supposedly, Scotland rejoining, re-engaging with and being part of the European Union is not needed; instead, what is needed is just a change of Governments.

Let us look at Keir Starmer’s prospectus and the number of U-turns that he has taken. On social security, he wants the two-child cap and the rape clause to be administered more fairly, as if such a thing were possible. We have seen Labour’s U-turns on its green pledge and on the abolition of tuition fees in England. It is clear that that is not much of a proposition or platform for change. Ivan McKee was right to suggest that we do not know what Labour’s values are, although, frankly, that might be because the Labour Party has no values, as is clearly shown by its lack of comments ahead of the election.

Neil Bibby: I talked about the change that a Labour Government will bring by fixing the Brexit mess that the Tories have left, but I also outlined our positive policy agenda. What we need is change. This has been a completely pointless debate, because we have not talked about people’s priorities in relation to the cost of living crisis, the NHS crisis and many others. It is about time that we had a change of Government so that we can tackle the real issues, which the Scottish Government is ignoring.

Jamie Hepburn: I will come to why this debate is important in a minute.

Let us look at what Anas Sarwar said in 2017. The cabinet secretary made this point earlier. Mr Sarwar said:

“I am the only candidate in this contest”—

the Scottish Labour leadership contest—

“who supports permanent British membership of the European single market and the customs union.”

I say to Mr Sarwar and his Labour colleagues that they should prove that today by voting for the motion that the Government has lodged.

Let me turn to other issues relating to the motion that the Government has lodged. I am clear that, in our proposition paper, we have laid out a compelling case for an independent Scotland to rejoin the European Union. We have heard from

Donald Cameron, Maurice Golden, Neil Bibby, Alex Rowley, Willie Rennie, Foysol Choudhury and Alexander Stewart that we should focus on the issues that matter. Our place in Europe does matter.

Brexit has resulted in additional costs for businesses and has contributed to less choice. Consumers are having to pay higher prices for food, which is exacerbating the cost of living crisis. The London School of Economics and Political Science has published a report that highlights that post-Brexit trade barriers drove one third of the increase in food prices between December 2019 and March 2023, which raised food price inflation by 8 percentage points. We have seen the damage to our economy and the lack of investment coming to the UK, including Scotland.

However, do not just take my arguments on why the matter is important. Mike Park, the chief executive of the Scottish White Fish Producers Association, said:

“It is costing more and taking longer to get fish into the continent and there are a lot of paper trails required and red tape.”

Maurice Golden spoke about “fantasy promises”. The UK Government said that there would be benefits to fishing communities the length and breadth of Scotland. What about that for a fantasy promise? That was an absolute fantasy from the Conservative Party.

Elizabeth Carnahan—

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): In conclusion, minister.

Jamie Hepburn: —whose cosmetics firm in Falkirk relied on European trade, said that her business with the EU plummeted by more than 60 per cent, which forced her to reduce her staff by half. Those are not Scottish Government voices but the voices of people across Scotland, who are setting out why this is an important issue.

The only reason that there can be for opposing the Government’s motion—which is worded carefully and is not necessarily predicated on support for independence—is that the other parties now support Brexit. The position of the Tories, the Labour Party and even the Liberal Democrats is clear: they are born-again Brexiteers. The only way for Scotland to rejoin the European Union is to become an independent nation.

I urge members to vote for the motion in the name of Angus Robertson.

Committee Announcement (Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee)

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is an announcement by the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee on the people’s panel on Scottish Government effectiveness in consulting and engaging the public on its net zero targets. I call Edward Mountain, the convener of the committee, to make the announcement.

16:44

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): There seems to have been quite a lot of heat in the chamber this afternoon. Let us see whether I can add some light.

Presiding Officer, I am pleased to notify you and all other members of a new people’s panel that will start its work this weekend. The panel comprises 25 individuals who have been randomly selected, but who reflect the demographic balance of Scottish society. Over two intensive weekends, they will reflect on this question: how effective has the Scottish Government been in engaging the public on climate change and Scotland’s climate change targets?

The work of the panel advances no fewer than three strategic goals of the Scottish Parliament. The first is to make more use of tools of deliberative democracy such as people’s panels, as was recommended by the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee in its report “Embedding Public Participation in the Work of the Parliament”. The Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee is pleased to be a pioneer in that area.

Secondly, the panel promotes post-legislative scrutiny—in this case, of the provisions in the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, which lie behind the question that the panel is considering. We all agree that we need to do more to hold to the light laws that the Parliament has made to see how well they are working. The panel’s work will do exactly that.

Thirdly, there is the Conveners Group agreement that tracking Scottish Government progress against net zero targets is a collective priority for committees in this session of Parliament. The panel’s work will contribute directly to that, and I expect that we will want to pay careful attention to what it tells us when the committee scrutinises the Scottish Government’s next climate change plan, sometime later this year.

This is new territory for us all, and one thing that I have learned is that a considerable amount of

time is needed to prepare the ground for the panel before it even begins work. My thanks go to parliamentary staff for their endeavours so far—in particular, the participation and communities team. I also thank the distinguished members of the panel expert group, who are drawn from academia, business and the third sector and who have kindly given up their time to help us to ensure that the panellists get a broad and balanced selection of views, data and information on their deliberative journey.

I look forward to welcoming all the panellists in person to the Parliament this Friday. The committee really looks forward to reporting back to Parliament later in the year on the work and on what we have learned.

Motion without Notice

16:47

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): I am minded to accept a motion without notice under rule 11.2.4 of standing orders, that decision time be brought forward to now. I invite the Minister for Parliamentary Business to move such a motion.

Motion moved,

That, under rule 11.2.4 of standing orders, Decision Time be brought forward to 4.47 pm.—[George Adam]

Motion agreed to.

Decision Time

16:47

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): There are four questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Donald Cameron is agreed to, the amendments in the name of Neil Bibby and Willie Rennie will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S6M-12004.2, in the name of Donald Cameron, which seeks to amend motion S6M-12004, in the name of Angus Robertson, on Scotland's place in the European Union, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division. There will be a short suspension to allow members to access the digital voting system.

16:48

Meeting suspended.

16:50

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We come to the vote on amendment S6M-12004.2, in the name of Donald Cameron, which seeks to amend motion S6M-12004, in the name of Angus Robertson, on Scotland's place in the European Union. I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Donald Cameron is agreed to, the amendments in the name of Neil Bibby and Willie Rennie will fall.

Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is closed.

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app did not connect. I would have voted no.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Bibby. We will ensure that that is recorded.

Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app did not connect. I, too, would have voted no.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Leonard. We will ensure that that is recorded.

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab) rose—

The Presiding Officer: I can confirm, Ms Clark, that your vote was recorded.

For

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)

Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-12004.2, in the name of Donald Cameron, is: For 29, Against 85, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-12004.1, in the name of Neil Bibby, which seeks to amend motion S6M-12004, in the name of Angus Robertson, on Scotland's place in the European Union, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is closed.

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My phone had a minor error. I would have voted no.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Kidd. We will ensure that that is recorded.

For

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 O’Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)

Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-12004.1, in the name of Neil Bibby, is: For 17, Against 97, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-12004.3, in the name of Willie Rennie, which seeks to amend motion S6M-12004, in the name of Angus Robertson, on Scotland’s place in the European Union, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and

Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)

Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-12004.3, in the name of Willie Rennie, is: For 6, Against 109, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S6M-12004, in the name of Angus Robertson, on Scotland's place in the European Union, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)

Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

Against

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)

Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)

Abstentions

Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 64, Against 49, Abstentions 1.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament notes the Scottish Government's paper, *Building a New Scotland: an independent Scotland in the EU*, and believes that Scotland's economic, social and political future is best served by being part of the EU.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Michael “Mick” McGahey

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The final item of business is a members’ business debate on motion S6M-11389, in the name of Richard Leonard, on recognising the contribution of Michael “Mick” McGahey. The debate will be concluded without any question being put. I ask those members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes that 30 January 2024 marks the 25th anniversary of the death of Michael “Mick” McGahey, miner, intellectual, activist, agitator, President of the National Union of Mineworkers Scottish Area (NUMSA) from 1967 to 1987 and Vice-President of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) from 1972 to 1987; recognises what it sees as his contribution, based on unerring principles, to advancing the interests and welfare of the working class; notes his steadfast support for the establishment of the Scottish Parliament, including moving a motion in support of its establishment at the Scottish Trades Union Conference in 1968; believes that he was, as he described himself, “a product of his class and his movement”, and notes the belief that the Parliament should mark this anniversary by engaging with NUM to erect a bust of Michael McGahey within the Scottish Parliament.

17:00

Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): Mick McGahey represents everything that is good about the working class and labour movements: an underground miner, who was a political visionary; a leader who earned the respect of not just the miners but the entire labour movement; and an inspiring orator who turned his words into action. As Mick himself said, he was “a product of” his class and his movement, and he remained fiercely loyal to both.

Thanks to Melissa and Joshua Benn and Ruth Winstone, we can read a touching diary entry in which Tony Benn, at the 1980 miners’ gala, recorded the following:

“I sat between Mick and his wife who were absolutely delighted by their seven-month-old grandchild—they had brought her along and Mick’s face was creased with smiles. I thought, if only the press could see him as a father, and grandfather, the image would be so different.”

So, to Elaine and Caroline, who join us in Parliament tonight; to young Mick; to the miners and their families; to the communists, the socialists, the trade unionists and the tribunes of labour, who are all here in the public gallery, comrades all, we say that without you there would be no Mick McGahey. This great man was so great only because he represented great people and a great cause, and because he had the greatest love and support of his family.

Today is especially poignant. It marks, to the day, the 25th anniversary of his death. Next year, we will celebrate the centenary of his birth. Mick McGahey was born in Shotts, just a year before the general strike. His father, Jimmy, was jailed, sacked, evicted and blacklisted during that bitter dispute, so the family were forced to move over 400 miles away to the Kent coalfield in search of work. It was not until the 1930s that they moved back north, to Cambuslang.

In 1939, at the age of 14, Mick left school and went down the pit. By the age of 18, he was leading the miners at the Gateside colliery on strike, in defiance of the wartime ban on industrial action. He was sacked, and he had to leave home to find work. In the coming years, the Labour Government nationalised the coal industry. Mick became a National Union of Mineworkers branch delegate. By the 1950s, he was chairing the union’s Scottish youth committee, advocating international peace and disarmament. By the 1960s, he was moving anti-Polaris motions at the Scottish Trades Union Congress.

In 1967, the year that he was elected as the president of the NUM Scottish area, nine miners tragically and needlessly lost their lives, poisoned by fumes caused by an underground fire at the Michael colliery in Fife. His unerring principle, agitation and determination in the wake of that tragedy led to every miner in every coalfield being fitted with self-rescuing breathing equipment as standard.

The following year, Mick McGahey made history at the Scottish TUC, invoking the spirit of Bob Smillie and of Keir Hardie. He called for the establishment of a Scottish Parliament to bring power closer to the people. Scotland was

“a nation”,

he said in that seminal speech,

“not a region of Britain”.

But he rejected completely

“any theory of a classless Scotland”,

citing the common bonds of the Scottish miners with the Durham miners, the Sheffield engineers and the London dockers.

Defeated in his campaign to become NUM national president in 1971, in 1973 he was elected as national vice-president, helping to lead the miners to victory in 1974. Like John Maclean before him, he was accused by the establishment of sedition. He was bugged by the secret services, with phones tapped; vilified in the tabloids; denounced by the Labour right and witch hunted by the Tories, but he never hid his politics and his lifelong membership of the Communist Party. He spoke out on the crimes of Chile and the injustices

of South Africa, but he also led the miners from Scotland down to the picket line at Grunwick—an act of solidarity that was never forgotten by those migrant, predominantly women workers in north-west London, led by the fearless Jayaben Desai.

Today, we mark the 25th anniversary of Mick McGahey's death, but 2024 is also the 40th anniversary of the miners strike—without doubt the most significant industrial dispute since 1926. Mick prophetically warned of the decimation of the Scottish coalfields if the Thatcher Government had its way. It was a strike not about wages but about jobs, pits and communities—and even the very way of life itself in those communities. It was a turning point. As Mick often said,

“If we stop running, they will not chase us. Stand firm and fight.”

After the strike, he was literally “bruised, battered, but unbowed”. He never wavered in his demand for the reinstatement of the victimised miners.

“Are we walking away?”,

he challenged the Scottish TUC from the Congress rostrum in 1985,

“from those boys who did one thing wrong in their life: they fought for their jobs. They fought for the right to work.”

Two years after the strike, Mick retired, but he was far from done. He helped to establish the Scottish pensioners forum. He was always a great teacher who understood the importance of political education. He was a man of principle and integrity and of honesty, humour and culture. This man, who left school at the age of 14, could draw extensively on Marx and Morris, on Gallacher and Maclean, on Burns and Grassie Gibbon, to prosecute his argument.

He could deploy wit, too:

“The only time I have ever heard of a wage explosion”,

he declared,

“is if you burst into your employer's office on a Friday morning and blow the safe with gelignite”,

because trade unions existed not simply

“to fight the annual wages battle, but to end the wages battle by the redistribution of national wealth.”

He also recognised the central role of women in the struggle.

“Have you ever seen a plane fly with half a wing?”,

he used to say.

An intellectual and an internationalist, Mick McGahey truly was a working-class hero. That is why it is important that he is properly commemorated and immortalised in this Parliament, which he did so much to create, where

his ashes were scattered by his family and where his spirit will always be.

Mick used to say:

“We are a movement, not a monument”,

but no one should underestimate the impact of that speech to the STUC in Aberdeen in 1968, not just because of what was said, but because of who was saying it.

He reignited the radical tradition of the Scottish labour movement. That was his first political priority in his first year as the new leader of the Scottish miners. In so doing, he changed the course of history. So, let us ensure that the people of Scotland are reminded of that, in this Parliament building, so that they—and we—can pay our enduring thanks to him. Let us turn our words into action so that his values, his principles, continue to echo down the ages, and so that his legacy lives on: the monumental, the glorious legacy of Mick McGahey. [*Applause.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I say to our visitors in the public gallery that you are all most welcome here tonight to observe our proceedings in the debate, but I have to advise you that that does not include participation, which in turn precludes applauding. I hope that you will bear with us in the observance of that rule, but you are very welcome to be here.

17:10

Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP): I congratulate Richard Leonard on bringing to the chamber this members' business debate on Mick McGahey, on the 25th anniversary of his death.

As a proud trade unionist for the whole of my working life, I am delighted to speak today—all the more so given that my Rutherglen constituency is so steeped in mining history. I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests, as I am a member of Unison.

As in much of Lanarkshire, the pits in Rutherglen, Cambuslang and Blantyre were key sources of employment, but sadly they were blighted by a history of disaster and loss of life, which has been forgotten to many over the years. Scotland's worst mining disaster took place in Blantyre in 1877 and claimed the lives of almost 6 per cent of the total population of the town.

That catastrophe for the town and its surrounding area is commemorated by a memorial and an obelisk and by a new memorial that was unveiled on 4 February last year. In September, I was pleased to attend the unveiling of a new miners' memorial on Rutherglen Main Street, which stands as a fitting reminder to all who

worked in Rutherglen's coal mines from the 1500s through to the 1930s.

Although my constituency has had a proud mining history over the centuries, one of the key local figures over the past 100 years was undoubtedly Mick McGahey. The Cambuslang miners' memorial wheel bears an inscription that is dedicated to the man himself. As we heard in Richard Leonard's speech, Mick McGahey was born in Shotts and then moved to England with his family before settling in Cambuslang, in my constituency, where he spent his formative years. He attended a local school; I understand that he left school on a Friday at the age of 14 and that, by the time that Monday morning came round, he was working at Cambuslang's Gateside colliery—at the same pit as his father.

Just four years on from Mick McGahey's starting work at Gateshead colliery, he became a union branch secretary at the age of just 18. Growing up in a family of miners shaped his outlook in his life and his politics. His work, his trade unionism and his political beliefs went hand in hand.

Mick McGahey was a giant in the trade union movement, serving as vice-president of the NUM for a period, and, as we have heard, a lifelong member of the Communist Party. He was a man who dedicated his life to improving the working conditions for his membership, and he played a key role in the formation of this Parliament. At the 1968 Scottish Trades Union Congress, he moved a motion to try to shift the labour movement's constitutional position to one in support of devolution. Although it was not immediately successful, he played his part in changing minds and policy.

Although Mick McGahey was not alive to see our Scottish Parliament reconvened, I share the views of Richard Leonard and the NUM that there should be a permanent memorial installed here in his memory. In addition to the plaque on the Cambuslang miners' wheel, as I mentioned, there is a street in the Whitlawburn area in my constituency, McGahey Drive, which, I understand, is named after him.

Mick McGahey must count as one of the most influential people to have come from my constituency in recent times. A lot has changed in the 25 years since he passed away, not least the formation of the Scottish Parliament and the closure of the last deep coal mine in Longannet. What have not changed are the attacks on workers' rights and their terms and conditions, and tragically, as we remember every year on international workers memorial day, people being killed in accidents at work. The need for strong trade union voices and representation is just important today as it was in the past.

On this anniversary of Mick McGahey's death, I can see that there is no more fitting tribute than the creation of a memorial to him here, in Parliament, and I am proud to add my name in support of such calls.

17:14

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I speak in support of Richard Leonard's motion. In particular, I highlight my support for the belief that the Parliament should engage with the NUM to erect a bust of Michael McGahey in the Scottish Parliament. I say that because, throughout his leadership of the National Union of Mineworkers in Scotland, Mick McGahey had a profound impact on the lives of the Scottish people for more than half a century. Ewan Gibbs has written an excellent essay that charts McGahey's life, his politics and his activism, which I would recommend to anyone with an interest in Scottish history. For me, it is the impact of the National Union of Mineworkers on Scottish life, under McGahey's leadership, that merits the recognition that is called for in the motion.

Other members will speak of McGahey's impact on health and safety for miners, which, when McGahey took over, was appalling. The union leadership fought for better working conditions and facilities, such as washing facilities. It also fought against poverty wages, and rightly so. However, my focus is on the improvements that were made to the lives of the mining communities—miners, their wives, their children and all working people.

It is reported that McGahey left school with little formal education and was self-educated, becoming absorbed into a culture that regarded books as treasures. He drove that thirst for knowledge and education throughout his lifetime, throughout the NUM and into the mining communities of Scotland. Miners became more aware of the importance of reading, writing and education—not just for them but, more importantly, for their children—to succeed in life. The evidence of that can be found in the progressive role that Scottish local government played throughout the second half of the 20th century, driving up education for the masses as well as driving the agenda for decent housing, access to health, the arts and culture and so much more for working-class communities up and down Scotland. Those councils that were driving and delivering such change were full of councillors who were miners, who fought for social justice and for their class, driven by the encouragement and support that they gained from their trade union, the National Union of Mineworkers, under the leadership of Mick McGahey, through highly skilled and educated pit delegates and NUM social

committees, which worked well beyond the pits, into the communities and into miners' homes.

When I grew up in the mining village of Kelty—my dad and my granddads all miners—I knew the name Mick McGahey from a very early age. The miners' union was part of our lives, with the pit galas in the summer, the Christmas parties in the winter, the funding for the pipe band that I played in and the welfare funds for those who were struggling in my community and in communities across Scotland. I heard McGahey speak at many miners' galas in Edinburgh, in the strikes in the 1970s and on the picket lines in the 1980s, but my greatest honour was to share a platform with Mick McGahey when he, along with Gordon Brown, unveiled the Kelty miners memorial in 1997, in front of many hundreds of people in my home village of Kelty.

I hope that the Parliament will agree to give this recognition and honour in memory of Scotland's 20th-century working-class pioneer.

17:19

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): I thank Richard Leonard for bringing the debate to the chamber and I congratulate him on his passionate and heartfelt speech.

I am very pleased to be speaking in the debate. I come from a family where four uncles were Lanarkshire miners. Like many others of my generation, I have a vivid memory of Thatcher's destructive years in the 1980s, when she decimated mines and industry throughout the United Kingdom.

As Richard Leonard says, Mick McGahey was a working-class hero. He was born in Shotts in 1925 and he died of emphysema in 1999. Emphysema is, of course, a disease of the lungs to which miners were particularly prone, due to the hazardous nature of their daily work. He started work as a miner at the Gateside colliery at the age of 14—a child—and was a member of the Communist Party and the National Union of Mineworkers all his life. As we have heard, a monument to Mick stands in Cambuslang, where he and his family moved when his father was in search of work.

Among the many memorable things that Mick McGahey said during his lifetime, the quote that Richard Leonard mentioned is particularly apt. He said:

“We are a movement, not a monument.”

However, I would definitely support a monument to Mick McGahey here, in the Parliament.

He was a man who never lost touch with his working-class roots and socialist values. To this

day, I still find it astonishing that miners had to fight for every penny that they received for doing such a dirty and dangerous job—and then had to fight for those jobs. I recall that several of my uncles had what was termed a “miner's mark” on their heads, due to falling coal and rock. Why would society seek to begrudge those men a decent living wage?

I also recall Mick and Arthur Scargill, who fought long and hard for the mining industry, being demonised by the media, which referred to them as “loony lefties”. They were humiliated on shows such as “Spitting Image” and were laughed at simply for trying to better the lives of people who kept our homes warm, kept the lights on and put food on the table.

During the bitter miners strike of the 1980s, I stood in solidarity on the picket line at Polkemmet colliery in West Lothian, blinded by flashlights that were designed to intimidate and distress us. It was a huge learning curve for me to experience the lengths that the establishment would go to in order to keep the workers in their place and to avoid giving them respect and a decent wage.

I rattled a can on Glasgow's Maryhill Road, and I found great support from people, most of whom had little to spare themselves. I realised then that the media slurs and misinformation do not always cut it with the Scottish public, who have a social conscience and understand the motivation of a greedy, corporate establishment.

Mick McGahey will be remembered, along with other legendary union leaders and socialists such as John Maclean, Jimmy Reid, Mary Barbour and many others I do not have enough time to mention. I often wonder what they would think of the society that we are in today, with zero-hours contracts and unpaid work trials prevailing—actually, I know exactly what they would think.

“Working-class hero” and “man of the people” are overused phrases, but not in the case of Mick McGahey, who demonstrated his passion and commitment to the working man throughout his life. It is a tragedy that miners had to fight for dignity and respect throughout their hard-working lives. That is a dark stain on the British establishment to this day. We should have learned from those dark days, but I am afraid that the jury is out on that.

17:22

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): I congratulate Richard Leonard for securing this important debate.

There are many things that we could say about the life of Mick McGahey and his contributions to our politics and civic life, but I want to focus on his

contribution to democracy. One thing that I share with Mick is that I am a member of Democratic Left Scotland—he was a member of that organisation for many years. At the heart of Mick McGahey's politics and those of Democratic Left Scotland is a commitment to freedom: freedom from exploitative wage labour, freedom from apartheid, freedom from Pinochet's terror and the freedom to govern ourselves. For him, that meant Scotland having democracy—and it is important to note how that conception of democracy might differ from what we have today. It was not democracy in the narrow sense—that is, about parliaments or assemblies or other institutions—but was something much more radical. It was about defending the interests of the Scottish working class, and the institutions could follow. As with many people in his tradition in the 1960s and 1970s, he understood what was coming.

Some people have made the mistake—it is easy to do—of confusing centralisation with solidarity. In his famous speech to the STUC in 1968, Mick reiterated his commitment to workers in England. He understood that we can choose solidarity even if we do not have the same Government. When the STUC eventually adopted devolution as its policy in the mid-1970s, it was in defence of Scottish industry and Scottish workers. Some at Westminster made that mistake, however, and they amended the bill for Scottish devolution so that it required a qualified vote. In 1979, Scotland was denied a devolved Assembly by the Government; it was denied devolution and its own voice at a vital time.

For Mick McGahey, as for many advocates of devolution at the time, a Scottish assembly had the potential to stand up to any future Conservative Government and its attempts to destroy Scottish industry and, with it, the Scottish working class. A Scottish assembly could have been a bastion against Thatcherism. However, centralisation gives opportunities for people such as the Conservatives to wield their destructive axe against the working class.

As we commemorate the 40th anniversary of the miners strike and consider the future of steel production on these islands, it is sobering to think of the impact that Scottish devolution could have had in facing down the brutal and inhumane Thatcher Government's attacks on Scotland. We could have had a just transition for the miners and the coal industry, and we could have had control over our own steel, which is a cornerstone of the green transition that we now need to make.

Democracy is not a distraction from the interests of workers. It is not something that we do instead of solidarity. It is absolutely at the heart of building a better world. Indeed, it is a cruel irony that someone so associated with democracy was

undemocratically manoeuvred out of the opportunity to be general secretary of the NUM. Again, we must consider how differently the miners strike could have ended had Mick been at the helm. Mick is here with us in his commitment to Scottish industry and to a devolution that is not about the narrow politics of institutions but about exercising power through and on behalf of the people.

As a member of the Smith commission, I argued for the devolution of trade union laws to Scotland. I am glad that that is now a more widely shared position, but I am sad that we have not been able to resist the latest anti-worker legislation foisted on Scotland by Westminster.

We need a democracy that can rebuild our industry for the climate crisis that is approaching, and we need to understand that that democracy will reinforce our solidarity with others around the world, not diminish it. That would be, alongside a tribute in this building, a fitting monument to Mick's memory.

17:27

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): I congratulate my colleague Richard Leonard on securing this debate, and I speak in favour of the motion.

As for many others, my main recollection of Mick McGahey is from the 1984-85 miners strike and the many interventions, rallies and meetings that he spoke at. This year is, of course, the 40th anniversary of the commencement of that strike. I hope that, later this year, the Parliament will again consider the impact that that dispute had on Scotland, because there are many lessons that those who wish to see the empowerment of working-class communities can learn from it. The dispute shows us again the need for unity and solidarity. The miners and their families suffered terrible financial hardship during it. They did so because they understood the significance of the dispute for their communities and for future generations. I believe that history has proved that they were correct.

Mick McGahey was, of course, a significant trade unionist and working-class leader in Scotland over many decades. Like his father, Jimmy, he was a Lanarkshire miner and a member of the Communist Party. He worked in the pits from the age of 14 and, by the age of 18, he was already chair of his NUM branch. He was an active member of his union throughout his life. Mick McGahey's family's story of being blacklisted and having to move for work is shared by many families. As a trade unionist, most of his time was spent on the fight for pay, health and safety

measures—and, indeed, compensation for those who were injured.

He gained prominence in the 1972 and 1974 miners strikes. Much like we see today—indeed, we have seen this since the creation of the trade union movement—and as Rona Mackay has said, he and other trade union leaders were painted as monsters by the press and by their political opponents. Prime Minister Edward Heath, in his 1974 election campaign, singled Mick McGahey out as being a leader of a small group of unelected communists who wanted to run Britain. The 1974 strike, of course, ended with a 35 per cent pay increase for miners.

The timing of the 1984-85 strike was not decided by the miners but by the then Conservative Government, which had a vision of closing the pits and smashing the miners' union and the organised working class. As was said repeatedly during that dispute, if you close a pit, you kill a community. The experience of working-class communities is that, when there are closures, the jobs are not replaced. Even now, communities across Scotland have not recovered from the defeat in the 1984-85 strike and the subsequent pit closures. As was also said at the time, if the miners were defeated, it would be more difficult for every struggle and dispute that came afterwards.

The motion today seeks to recognise Mick McGahey with a bust in the Parliament. When Mick McGahey died, his ashes were placed beneath the grounds of this Parliament. He fought for this Parliament and for a working-class Parliament, and I believe that it would be fitting to have a commemoration of his life in the building.

17:31

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I, too, congratulate Richard Leonard on securing the debate, and I welcome Mick McGahey's family to the Parliament.

I am pleased to speak to commemorate this extraordinary individual, not only because I have mining areas in my constituency in Midlothian—Penicuik, Gorebridge and Newtongrange, where the National Mining Museum Scotland is—but because my mum was the English daughter of a Welsh miner who mined in the Derby pits. He died in his late 40s after a pit prop fell on him, causing a severe head injury from which he never recovered. He left behind a large family of orphans, including my mother. She was all her days a formidable advocate for the miners and their communities, and never more so than during the miners strike in 1984-85, which I witnessed.

I saw the charges on the miners by mounted police, the women manning barricades at the picket lines and collecting for their communities, and communities—and, indeed, some families—being torn apart. I listened to Arthur Scargill and Mick McGahey in those days, and there was a world of difference between the capabilities and, I suspect, the strategy of both men in disputes with the UK Government.

Thatcher was out to avenge the demise of her predecessor, Edward Heath, who took on the miners—with the resulting three-day week—failed and lost an election. That brought in a minority Labour Government under Wilson. When Thatcher then came in, she was hellbent on emasculating the unions, starting with the miners. To some extent, it was handed to her on a plate. Why strike in the summer, when the coal was piled high?

During that long strike, the voice of Mick McGahey was more measured than that of Arthur Scargill, although, right to the end, Mick McGahey insisted that the 1984 strike was unavoidable and that the union's tactics had been correct under the circumstances. I understand, however, that there was a failed attempt to solve the dispute, involving secret talks between Lord Whitelaw, the Tory deputy leader, and Mick McGahey. The talks were facilitated by Bill Keys, the leader of the print workers' union. The negotiations, which began over a bottle of Chablis in the House of Lords—my goodness!—are revealed in the hitherto unpublished diaries of the late Keys. The initiative collapsed when Arthur Scargill ruled out the deal because it would lead to pit closures. Maybe he was right—maybe not.

How different history might have been if Mick McGahey had led the charge. Instead, as a result of that devastating rout of the miners, trade union legislation has made it tougher for all workers, and that legislation has not been repealed by successive Conservative and Labour Governments. I cannot see Sir Keir reversing any of that—can you? I suspect that, if he had a grave, Mick McGahey would be birling in it, but, as we know, his ashes are scattered beneath this very building, which is fitting for a democrat who supported devolution long and hard. It is therefore appropriate that it was this Government and this Parliament that granted a pardon to those who were convicted during the strike, making us the first part of the UK to do so.

Richard Leonard, other members and I have also long campaigned for UK reform of the mineworkers pension scheme, which is a rip-off that has seen the UK Government benefit with no contribution while miners receive a pittance.

Mick McGahey was a bright, brave and colourful man—an orator, eloquent and educated, but with a thick Lanarkshire accent that utterly confused

the boffins at MI5 who were trying to eavesdrop on what he was up to. I love that.

Most of all, he was a man of integrity and, genuinely, a man of his people. We could do with more folk of that ilk.

17:35

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): Comrades in the gallery and members in the chamber, we have heard that few people in our recent history have made themselves heard on the national stage and truly altered the course of history. They are people we can call titans of the working class, and Mick McGahey is certainly one of them.

To this day, McGahey remains a respected figure across the political left and a feared adversary across the political right. He was a man who stood against injustice, exploitation and corruption wherever it was evident around the world. He was a lifelong communist, a proud Scot and a trade union leader who worked with everyone he could to achieve tangible improvements for his class.

He remains an inspiration to the many who have since followed along the path of socialism. I never met him, but people in my home town of Mauchline and surrounding areas and villages certainly did. His socialism is a path that many people from my area have followed or hold a lot of respect for. Only recently, I spoke to former miners in Cumnock who met him and who were out on those picket lines with him. Many of them said to me that, although they might not always have agreed with McGahey's line in the disputes of old, they still possess tremendous respect for a man who always remained consistent and steadfast in his defence of them.

He is an important part of our working-class history, and we should commemorate him here. I shudder to think what he would have had to say about the Tory Government's egregious attacks on the rights of workers to defend themselves from exploitation, which are going on today. I imagine, however, that he would have said, "Stand firm and fight."

He was a man who not only stood for what he believed in but advocated passionately for those who were worse off than him, and he committed his entire life to giving voice to the voiceless and resisting the vested interests of the people at the top. I can think of few figures more fitting for a memorial in this Parliament, which he did so much to build, creating a sustainable foundation for Scotland.

McGahey, and people who knew him, always knew that there was never going to be a simple

day on which victory occurred and progress took hold. He understood that it would be a process of struggle and conflict that led to brighter days ahead for his class. Part of that was about securing the right of the Scottish people to have devolved powers in a Parliament of their own. It was to be a working-class Parliament.

We owe his generation a great deal for holding fast in that pursuit and for holding that reality. I very much doubt that he would be a great fan of the self-congratulation and endless delay that goes on in the Parliament now, but he would be proud, nonetheless, that voices and opinions of a varied and experienced mixture of society flourish in this building. That is part of the legacy of what he fought for and championed as democracy, particularly a democracy that reflected the unique views of working-class people in Scotland.

I thank Richard Leonard for bringing the debate to the chamber and members for their participation. I hope that we see the likes of Mick McGahey again.

17:39

The Minister for Small Business, Innovation, Tourism and Trade (Richard Lochhead): I extend my thanks to Richard Leonard not only for lodging the motion but for his passionate and heartfelt contribution and introduction. I also thank him for reminding members that Mick McGahey was a leader, a campaigner and a much-loved family man. Members have given their considered and thoughtful insights, and I note the heartfelt contributions and passion from across the chamber. I say to Alex Rowley that, if he wishes to send me a copy of the essay that he referred to, I would be very interested to read it.

I welcome Mick McGahey's former mining colleagues, friends and family who have joined us in the public gallery of the Scottish Parliament's chamber.

I never had the opportunity to meet Mick McGahey. However, as a teenager in Scotland during the miners strike, I can remember the horrific scenes on our television screens and the regular interviews with Mick McGahey. I remember his unmistakable voice—a voice full of conviction and authenticity. I have vivid memories of him from those days, in particular.

As someone whose great-great-grandmother lost her father, husband and son in separate mining accidents, I agree with Richard Leonard that we owe a debt of gratitude to Mick McGahey and others who fought so hard for the welfare and the health and safety of our mining communities.

I spoke to one of the planning officials at a meeting today and explained that I was closing

tonight's debate. He said that, in his home village, which is a former mining village, there is a street named after Mick McGahey. Other members have mentioned that that is the case in their communities, which is a reminder that Mick McGahey was much loved and is remembered across Scotland in many of our communities today.

It is therefore entirely appropriate that, on the 25th anniversary of his passing, we take time to celebrate Mick McGahey—who was known as Michael to those closest to him, I understand—and remember his contribution. Colleagues have highlighted some of Mick's many achievements, including his principled trade unionism and advocacy for a devolved Scottish Parliament. Again, it is very fitting that we are debating his legacy in the Scottish Parliament, which he fought and campaigned for.

Of course, there was much more to him than that.

"More than just a militant"

is how the *Glasgow Times* put it in 2014, while *The Herald* wrote about his "grit and intellect". That was not an accident. Like many other Scots, he was a voracious reader with a passion for poetry, including a love for the works of Burns and Shakespeare. I am told that he was as comfortable advocating for his union members as he was debating the novels and other works of Lewis Grassie Gibbon and other working-class poets of the time.

Like many who were born into the coal and steel town of Shotts, Mick was introduced to trade unionism and the minds that would define his life. Other members have referred to that in their speeches. By 14, he had left school—although, as we know, not his education—and followed his father into the pits. He later followed in his father's political footsteps by joining the Communist Party of Great Britain. At just 18 years old, he had already risen to become union branch secretary at Gateside colliery, later becoming president of the National Union of Mineworkers Scottish executive and vice-president of the UK NUM.

Years later, in 1968, before many of the current generation of MSPs were born, Mick made the case for devolution, as Richard Leonard and others have said, by moving a motion in support of a Scottish Parliament during his address to the STUC, and he was a key figure in pushing the STUC to support the campaign for the Parliament's creation.

Political allegiances aside, if Mick was here today—as many members, including Clare Haughey, have said—he would value the relationship that the Scottish Government has with the trade unions. We are very proud of our

collaborative approach and the recognition of the vital role that trade unions play in society today.

Together, we are forging a society that thrives on shared prosperity, embraces equality, fosters opportunity and values community. Fair work, which we often debate in this Parliament, is central to that, and trade unions play a key role in its delivery. Although fair work was not captured in the same terms back then, and it was a very different labour market, I am sure that Mick would still have been a strong advocate for it, given his campaigns for workplace improvements, health and safety, pay and conditions and preserving economic security through resisting pit closures.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): I thank the minister for giving way and for giving a fine speech, but does he recognise that one of the things that Mick McGahey stood for was a more active industrial policy? His hope was that the devolution process would defend against industrial closures. We see the record of closures such as the Springburn railway works and the Clydebridge steelworks, and we could do much more to safeguard high-skilled manufacturing and industrial employment in this country.

Richard Lochhead: Paul Sweeney refers to the legacy of Mick McGahey and others in resisting such closures over the decades, but I am proud of the fact that Scotland is now looking at creating many more manufacturing jobs in this country and, I hope, reinventing a lot of that industrial heritage in a way that is fit for purpose in the 21st century.

As many members have noted, Mick McGahey saw value in community mobilisation and support. He campaigned throughout Britain to politicise miners and empower them to get off their knees, as he said, and fight against deindustrialisation, which Mr Sweeney just mentioned, in what he saw as a struggle to save Scotland's economy. Many members have echoed the point that he would surely be appalled by the persistent erosion of workers' rights by consecutive Conservative Governments at Westminster. Back in 2016, we saw the introduction of the abhorrent Trade Union Act 2016, and, in 2022, there were attempts to change the rules to allow the use of agency workers during strikes, for instance. We also now have the unnecessary, unwanted and ineffective Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act 2023. As has been said, Mick McGahey would agree that it is time for a change in terms of those attacks on workers' rights.

Mick McGahey rightly fought hard for the retention of the mining workforce, and his legacy continues. The Scottish Government recognises the importance of the right to strike and of an effective workers' voice. That voice is paramount and valued, not just in the workplace but in shaping our future as we strive to become a fairer

economy. It behoves us all to ensure that we use our incredibly rich resources to build a wellbeing economy that benefits all our communities and people, as well as meeting 21st century challenges, such as achieving our net zero targets. Although Mick fought hard for the coal industry in his day, we can collectively recognise today the need for a just transition, which did not happen when the mining communities were closed by Thatcher and the Tories in the 1980s, so that we can provide good green jobs for people in future generations.

Christine Grahame: Will the minister be kind enough to acknowledge the position of the Deputy Presiding Officer, who is unable to take part in this debate but often speaks in debates in support of mining communities?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am not getting involved—I cannot, as Deputy Presiding Officer.

Richard Lochhead: Absolutely. I am quickly trying to work out the protocols in my head, but I will just say that Annabelle Ewing has a very good track record in speaking up on those issues in the chamber.

As the motion rightly notes, we should absolutely recognise the impact that Mick McGahey has had on the trade union movement, particularly in Scotland. I am confident that his integrity and commitment would transcend party politics. His influence continues through the legacy of his work with the NUM and the STUC. As has been said, Mick never got to see this Parliament open, as he sadly passed away just months before it did. As we have heard, his advocacy for the working classes and the trade union movement continues to inspire many, and it is poignant that his ashes are buried in the foundations of the Parliament.

It is fitting that we recognise his contribution with a bust in the Scottish Parliament—a place that is founded on the principles of accountability, citizen participation, power sharing and equal opportunities—if others choose that as something to deliver. I very much welcome the debate and call on the Parliament to support the sentiments of Richard Leonard's motion.

Meeting closed at 17:48.

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The deadline for corrections to this edition is:

Tuesday 27 February 2024

Published in Edinburgh by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

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