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“Another referendum would be divisive and cause huge economic uncertainty at the worst possible time”

Theresa May reacts to Nicola Sturgeon's demands for a second Scottish independence poll next year

News Reaction & Analysis Pages 4-9



The Daily Telegraph

NATIONAL NEWSPAPER OF THE YEAR

The new battle for Britain

PM rules out new independence vote before Brexit and delays Article 50

By Gordon Rayner and Simon Johnson

THERESA MAY last night ruled out Nicola Sturgeon's plans for a new Scottish independence referendum before Brexit, but postponed triggering Article 50 after the First Minister's demands caught her by surprise.

In a day of high drama, Ms Sturgeon appeared to wrong-foot No10 when she announced she would set the wheels in motion for a second referendum next week, and insisted the ballot should take place between autumn 2018 and spring 2019 - while the Brexit negotiations are still going on.

The Prime Minister issued a stern rebuke, telling her “politics is not a game”, and accusing her of “tunnel vision”. Sources close to Mrs May said she would not allow a referendum until several months after Britain's EU exit.

Hours after Mrs May's riposte, Downing Street made the unexpected announcement that the Prime Minister will not now invoke Article 50 before March 27.

The Article 50 Bill is expected to receive royal assent from the Queen this morning, and it had been widely anticipated that Mrs May would choose today to make the historic announcement. Whitehall departments had been told to work to a March 14 deadline.

Downing Street yesterday insisted that the Prime Minister had always intended to wait until the end of the month, but Ms Sturgeon's announcement left Mrs May scrambling to seize back the initiative. The referendum



Sturgeon hopes to strike before her dream slips away from her

Fraser Nelson

Nicola Sturgeon has been running out of time not to hold a referendum. Her personal approval rating, once stellar, has been falling for months. Her party has governed Scotland for 10 years now, with results that do not make the case for independence.

The SNP lost its majority at the last Scottish Parliament election, and now relies upon the Greens to vote for a rerun of the 2014 referendum. Even this majority might vanish at the next Holyrood election so it makes perfect sense for Ms Sturgeon to strike now, demanding another referendum within two years. It makes less sense for Theresa May to agree.

Ms Sturgeon's strategy is fairly simple: to trap the Prime Minister in a vice between the opponents of Brexit and her resurgent nationalists.

Ms Sturgeon has calculated that this is best done in 2019, when the terms of Brexit are being absorbed by a Scotland that didn't vote for it - but even this is a huge gamble. Brexit has recruited strikingly few to the SNP's cause; polls have usually shown support for independence at about 45 per cent. Nor is there appetite in Scotland for yet another referendum; a recent poll found that just one in four voters wanted to reopen a question that Ms Sturgeon herself had promised would be put “once in a generation”.

But never again might she face such weak opposition. The Scottish Labour party is in disarray, a danger only to

Continued on Page 4

row overshadowed Mrs May's achievement in successfully steering the Article 50 Bill through Parliament last night.

A threatened Tory rebellion on the issue of giving MPs a “meaningful vote” on the final Brexit deal failed to materialise, with the result that two Lords amendments to the Bill were defeated in the Commons.

Mrs May and Ms Sturgeon now appear set for a prolonged and bitter fight. And Mrs May now faces the unprecedented challenge of negotiating Brexit while attempting to see off a new campaign for Scottish independence.

The Prime Minister said: “The tunnel vision the SNP has shown today is deeply regrettable; it sets Scotland on a course for more uncertainty and division, creating huge uncertainty.”

“And this is at a time when the evidence is that... the majority of the Scottish people don't want a second independence referendum.”

Drawing attention to Ms Sturgeon's questionable record on domestic policy, Mrs May told her that “instead of



Let's forget our differences over Brexit and fall out over independence instead

playing politics with the future of our country the Scottish Government should focus on delivering good government and services for the people of Scotland.”

Ms Sturgeon claimed she had been forced to act because Mrs May had refused to consider a special Brexit deal for Scotland that would allow it to remain part of the single market.

Her decision to call for a referendum as early as next year represents a huge gamble: a BMG poll for the *Herald* newspaper yesterday showed 44 per cent of Scots opposing independence, with just 41 per cent supporting it.

Equally significantly, 49 per cent said there should be no referendum before Brexit, with just 39 per cent wanting one.

The First Minister said she would next week ask the Scottish Parliament to agree the details of a Section 30 order with Westminster - the legal process that allows a referendum to be held.

She argued that by autumn next year the shape of the UK's Brexit deal with the EU would be clearer, giving Scots a

chance to decide between a future as part of the Union but outside the EU, or a future outside the Union but as part of the EU.

If Mrs May refused, the Government would not only have “sunk the ship” for Scotland, which voted overwhelmingly to remain in the EU, but would be “puncturing Scotland's lifeboat” as well, it was claimed.

Ruth Davidson, the Scottish Conservative leader, said the timetable demanded by Ms Sturgeon would “force people to vote blind on the biggest political decision a country could face” because they would not know the details of the Brexit deal by then.

Although Downing Street would not officially be drawn on the timing of any referendum - or even if Mrs May would allow one - it is understood that Mrs May will put off a ballot until several months after Brexit.

It means she will block a referendum until at least summer 2019, though she is unlikely to refuse one altogether, as doing so would risk stoking nationalist fervour north of the border.



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News

Council worker lied to secure school place Don't bag it, dog owners are told – flick it

By Harry Yorke

A MOTHER who could no longer afford to pay private school fees asked a council worker to forge documents to get her daughter into a leading state school, a tribunal heard yesterday.

Bernadette Hendrickson, a former education co-ordinator for Cardiff council, agreed to fake official forms in order to mislead a top primary school in Newport into thinking that the five-

year-old was in care. The school was told that the girl, who was transferring from an £8,568-a-year independent school, was a "looked-after child" – meaning her education was supervised by council officials.

Hendrickson, 50, from Cardiff, who was sacked over the incident, agreed to the scam after a close friend failed on two occasions to get her daughter accepted into the oversubscribed primary school. Under Welsh social care

guidelines, children classed as looked after are supposed to be given priority places. However, officials at the school became suspicious and found that Hendrickson had fraudulently named a social worker who she had claimed was responsible for the girl's welfare.

A disciplinary hearing held by the Welsh Education Workforce Council gave Hendrickson a four-month suspension order banning her from teaching until the end of July.

By Sophie Jamieson

DOG owners should adopt a "stick and flick" method instead of using poo bags, according to advice from the Forestry Commission.

Discarded plastic dog waste bags are an eyesore, the organisation says, and the best approach to clear dog mess from a footpath is to find a stick and flick it into the undergrowth.

The guidance was highlighted by

Tory MP Anne Main ahead of a Westminster Hall debate on the issue yesterday.

"Over the last few years I've noticed an increasing number of poo bags hanging off bushes, trees and railings and it's disgusting," she told the BBC.

"People think it's the right thing to do to pick it up, but when they find there aren't any bins, they jettison the poo bag into the undergrowth or lob it over a garden fence where animals can

eat them, children pick them up or cyclists ride into them."

The Forestry Commission has produced a poem to spread the message about the stick and flick method. It includes the lines: "If your dog should do a plop, take a while and make a stop, just find a stick and flick it wide into the undergrowth at the side. If your dog should do a do, you don't want it on your shoe, find a stick, pick a spot, flick into the bushes so it can rot."

Teacher sent explicit messages to girl after they read 50 Shades

By Harry Yorke

A CREATIVE writing teacher sent "sexually charged" and suggestive messages to a teenage pupil after they read *50 Shades of Grey* together, a court heard yesterday.

When discovered, Thomas Stirling, 24, attempted to cover up the string of explicit messages by claiming he had been comparing the erotic novel's "grammar and content" with the dialogue in *Macbeth*.

However, Grimsby Crown Court heard the true nature of Stirling's messages was later laid bare when his girlfriend uncovered a string of "compromising" photos on his mobile phone, which he had exchanged with a

17-year-old girl. After uncovering additional messages they had exchanged on the social media site Instagram, his girlfriend broke off the relationship and alerted the education authorities in her home city of Sheffield.

Stirling, whose contract at Franklin College, Grimsby, was later terminated, was also found to have made references to the 17-year-old pupil's virginity and a number of sexual acts that were described in court as having "an element of fantasy" about them. He

admitted causing or inciting a child to engage in sexual activity while he was in a position of authority between Sept 1 and Nov 17 2015.

Patricia Doherty, defending, said Stirling had recognised that his actions had been "incredibly foolish", adding that there had been no physical contact with the girl.

"He had some problems of his own in the past and foolishly and naively thought that he could help her," she added.

"He resigned and got himself another job as a receptionist at a hotel in Derbyshire.

"He knows that he can't go back into teaching at all. He has taken this job because it keeps him away from youngsters. He has put distance between himself and the girl."

Mrs Doherty said the girl was close to turning 18, adding that had the messages been sent a few weeks later, Stirling's life "would not have been ruined".

Recorder Eric Elliott told Stirling that his actions amounted to a "significant breach of trust".

"She was having certain personal and domestic problems and looked to you to help her. You, very misguidedly and perhaps naively, thought you could help her," he added.

He added: "You knew full well, bearing in mind you were a teacher in a position of trust, that you ought not to go down that road."

He instructed Stirling to attend a rehabilitation centre and be registered on the sex offenders' list for a total of five years.



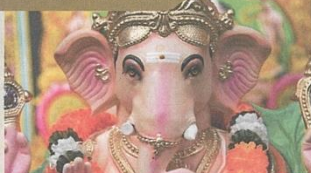
Thomas Stirling claimed he had been comparing the dialogue in the erotic novel with that found in *Macbeth*



Eye for fine art Laura Culpan, co-curator of Cure3, a Bonhams exhibition for the Cure Parkinson's Trust, studies 'Dutch Children with Giant Snow White', by Sir Peter Blake. Damien Hirst is among 50 artists featured in the online sale.

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