

SNP leant on M&S over country labelling row

16 May 2018



SNP government officials pressured Marks and Spencer amid a “Union Jackery” row over food and drink labelling, it has emerged.

Nationalists were furious when the retailer listed whisky and Scottish gin under the “United Kingdom” section of their website.

And after this was reported by a pro-independence publication, the SNP government immediately contacted M&S to demand an explanation.

Documents obtained under Freedom of Information by the Scottish Conservatives have revealed rural affairs secretary Fergus Ewing was then briefed on the conversation with M&S.

He was told by officials: “Scottish Government officials spoke to M&S to seek clarity on the situation with regard to the status of these products on their website. M&S urgently investigated this and reverted back confirming that this was indeed an error which they immediately rectified and sent out a tweet apologising for their error.”

After M&S agreed to back down, the Scottish Government official then asked: “Do you guys plan to send any tweets (or something) to clarify the situation? Just wondering as I’m sure if you did Mr Ewing would respond positively.”

The FoI response also reveals First Minister Nicola Sturgeon received similar briefings over Tesco’s decision to sell Scottish strawberries under a Union Flag logo in 2016.

Scottish Conservative MSP Murdo Fraser said:

“There’s not a person in the world who doesn’t know whisky is Scottish.

“But for the SNP to actively pressure a leading retailer in this way is petty and, frankly, a waste of public resources.

“It shows just how parochial the SNP government is, that it would sooner berate businesses for daring to refer to the UK, than actually help them create jobs and grow the economy.

“Instead of obsessing about Saltires and pandering to the extreme elements of the Yes movement, the SNP government should be getting on with representing the whole country.”

Sturgeon 'wants a crisis' over Brexit

15 May 2018



Nicola Sturgeon "wants a crisis" over Brexit – after the SNP led a revolt on the EU withdrawal bill in Holyrood today.

The nationalists are expected to be joined by Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the Greens in voting to reject the UK Government's Brexit bill later this afternoon.

This is despite the Welsh Government agreeing terms on the same deal, and senior Liberal Democrat figures hailing the offer.

Now Scottish Conservative constitution spokesman Adam Tomkins has said the SNP was inviting a crisis on Brexit, as it was the best way for the party to push its own independence agenda.

Scottish Conservative constitution spokesman Adam Tomkins said:

"A deal is there to be done on Brexit. It is deeply regrettable that the SNP has refused to take it.

"Scottish Labour's position simply doesn't make sense; in Wales, the Labour administration has today backed this deal yet, here in Scotland, Richard Leonard is content to do the SNP's bidding.

"As for the Lib Dems, they admitted today that they weren't even voting on the Brexit withdrawal deal, but because they don't back the EU referendum result.

"It's patently obvious that Nicola Sturgeon wants a political crisis to provide cover for her independence drive.

"We will stand up for anyone – Conservative, Labour or Lib Dem – who wants to see the SNP challenged and taken on.

"The SNP has taken the wrong path today. It's deeply disappointing that the leaders of Labour and the Lib Dems have helped them do it."

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15 May 2018



The Scottish Conservatives have issued a final plea to Labour and Liberal Democrat MSPs to support the amended Withdrawal Bill when it comes to a vote in Holyrood.

Speaking ahead of the debate on the Bill, constitution spokesman Adam Tomkins has urged the two parties to put aside political interests and support a deal which will both strengthen the Scottish Parliament's powers, and protect the integrity of the United Kingdom.

He will say ahead of Tuesday's debate: "Let's be clear: Labour and Liberal Democrat support would not amount to backing for the UK Conservative Government. They would be supporting our United Kingdom and our established system of devolution."

The amended Withdrawal Bill – changed by the UK Government following cross-party pressure at Holyrood – has now been backed by the Labour Government in Wales.

Several Labour MSPs backed that deal at the time, saying it showed "co-operation" between the UK and Welsh Governments, and expressing "disappointment" that the SNP had failed to back it.

In addition, Liberal Democrat figures such as former Deputy First Minister Lord Wallace of Tankerness has described the SNP's government's failure to sign up to the plan as "regrettable", while Lord Steel, Holyrood's first Presiding Officer, has said it is "really quite a good deal".

The Scottish Conservatives will support the UK Government's amendments – and are now urging the Liberal Democrats and Labour to do likewise.

Scottish Conservative constitution spokesman Adam Tomkins said:

"The UK Government has changed the Withdrawal Bill to accommodate fair concerns raised by all parties in Scotland.

"Those changes mean that, when we leave the EU, power will be held closer to

people and communities across the UK. The Scottish Conservatives pushed hard for these changes and we are pleased to support them.

“These plans have been backed by the Labour Government in Wales.

“They have received support from senior Labour and the Liberal Democrat figures in Holyrood and Westminster.

“It’s what businesses across Scotland want.

“The Scottish Conservatives will vote to give our consent to the amended Withdrawal Bill today.

“It’s profoundly regrettable that we don’t have a deal in Scotland to allow us to move on.

“The blame for that lies entirely with the SNP. Nicola Sturgeon has refused to compromise. It’s not in Scotland’s interests that the SNP prefers picking fights to making a deal.

“It’s obvious that the Greens will, as always, back the SNP today.

“But we would appeal to Scottish Labour and Scottish Liberal Democrat MSPs to think hard before siding with the nationalists.

“Let’s be clear: Labour and Liberal Democrat support would not amount to backing for the UK Conservative Government. They would be supporting our United Kingdom and our established system of devolution.

“So, we would make a final plea to them today – this isn’t a time for narrow political interests.

“As the Labour Government in Wales has recognised, it’s a time to put the national interest first.

“Labour and Liberal Democrat MSPs have the chance to do that today and I hope they take it.”

Scottish Labour and Lib Dems must clarify Brexit bill stance

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The Scottish Conservatives have called on Scottish Labour and the Scottish Liberal Democrats to clarify their stance on the Brexit bill.

This comes after senior members of their parties in the House of Lords backed the UK Government's position.

Scottish Conservative constitution spokesman, Adam Tomkins said:

"It is good to see committed supporters of devolution in the House of Lords offer their support to the compromise that the UK Government has proposed here."

"Labour and Lib Dem peers have backed the UK Government's fresh plan – because it does now respect devolution."

"Richard Leonard and Willie Rennie now need to make their positions clear on this, so we know where they stand."

"As for the SNP, it is time to drop the political games and accept a deal that both supports our own UK internal market and hands huge new powers to the Scottish Parliament."

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- Sturgeon must come clean on plans to cut police numbers

3 May 2018



The First Minister must come clean on how many police officers will be cut to balance the books of the single force, the Scottish Conservatives have said.

It emerged this week that officer numbers are at a nine-year low, with reports that up to a further 1200 could be cut as Police Scotland attempts to address its £30 million black hole.

But while Nicola Sturgeon said she agreed such a reduction would be "unacceptable", she refused to say by how many the headcount would fall in future.

In Holyrood today, Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said Police

Scotland was under immense financial strain, despite efficiency being one of the reasons the SNP cited for creating the organisation.

Hundreds of charges last year had to be dropped because under-pressure officers couldn't get the paperwork in on time, including allegations of firearms offences, child sex crimes and drug dealing.

However, instead of pledging to support frontline numbers, Ms Sturgeon merely pointed to the situation elsewhere in the UK.

Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said:

"Police officers and the public are rightly worried about the prospect of further cuts to frontline policing.

"That's why Nicola Sturgeon has to come clean on how many officers face the axe as she attempts to reduce the single force's deficit.

"Both the justice secretary and the First Minister seem to think reductions in police numbers are fine, yet officers themselves have criticised these claims.

"We were told the creation of a single force would free up resources and provide huge savings, all of which could be invested in the front line.

"Instead, we have a financial black hole with cuts on the way.

"Officers are questioning whether or not they can do their job under these circumstances.

"The least they should expect from this First Minister is honesty about future plans."