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Land reform and the list vote

IT is understandable that political parties who are contesting the forthcoming Holyrood election are urging their supporters to use both votes for their party. Every party wants to maximise their chances of electoral success. But we should be concerned when SNP member Hugh Kerr tells us that he may face “expulsion” from the party for casting his constituency (first) vote for the SNP but his regional list (second) vote for the Greens (Letters, April 27). No political party that supports the founding principles of the Scottish Parliament, with its commitment to diversity, consensus and transparency should be criticising anyone in the electorate who chooses to support different parties with their two votes.

Mr Kerr is in good company. Election guru Professor John Curtice of Strathclyde University has explained that, with current polls predicting a majority SNP government will be secured through the constituency vote alone, a second vote for the SNP is a “wasted” vote in most regions as it will not lead to the election of further SNP MSPs. This situation may encourage many SNP members to follow Mr Kerr and vote for another independence-supporting party with their regional list vote.

Mr Kerr is voting Green to strengthen the Parliament’s commitment to land reform. In doing this he is reflecting the criticism levelled at the Scottish Government during the land reform debate at the SNP conference last autumn. Sadly, the First Minister seems to have learnt nothing from that conference defeat, still going on bended knee to appease landowners who want to build more roads into our hills, while burning, overgrazing and eroding soils as though there is no tomorrow. As the deer, sheep and grouse nibble away, preventing tree regeneration and vegetation recovery, the consequences of the next rainstorm are felt below, with water pouring off the hills to flood towns and villages near and far away. Elsewhere, as landowners seek new ways to keep people off their land, the First Minister approves camping by-laws, a draconian measure designed to criminalise innocent citizens who are out in the great outdoors enjoying the fresh air.

Welcome to Scotland, 2016, where the Government has taken us back to the bad old days of the Trespass (Scotland) Act 1865 which first made camping a criminal offence, until it was repealed in 2003. Why do we allow so few, who own most of our land, to do so much damage to everyone else? Yes, real land reform progress in the next Parliament will depend on the presence of a large number of Green MSPs. They will be put there by SNP supporters and others who have used their second vote wisely, knowing that an SNP Government alone will not deliver effective land reform.

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