

By **Chi Ting Kantz**, our Westminster correspondent



With just days to go before the deadline for agreement of the Fiscal Framework, the UK government's chief negotiator has decided to go down the pub instead.

If the two governments fail to strike a deal by next Tuesday, there will be no time for the arrangements to be ratified by Holyrood before the May elections, making the future implementation of the new tax responsibilities, and their impact on the Scottish budget, uncertain.

Tory Treasury Minister Greg Hands explained: "There seemed little point in continuing with the talks once the Jocks had rumbled our clever little wheeze to shave a few billion off their budget under the guise of new 'powers'. So I decided to head off to my little place in France for few

welcome days of wine sampling.

"Even worse than being found out was the attitude of these Jockinese politicians, who don't even seem to know how the game is played. It's as if they live in a different country.

"The politically correct behaviour, once they realised their compatriotes were about to be shafted, would have been to play along in the knowledge that they would be 'taken care of' in the fullness of time. That's how it has been for centuries.

"My predecessor, Danny Alexander, understood this perfectly and now has a plum sinecure in a Chinese bank. Clearly he has no role to play in the bank, as he knows practically nothing of international finance, but he has a fat salary and expense account and a really impressive office.

"And all he had to do was work assiduously against the interests of his own people. The way it has always been done.

"But these Seperatists are refusing to play along - almost as if they were genuinely trying to gain the best possible deal for their electors, as preposterous as that may sound.

"So, under the circumstances, what else could I do but head off for a little R&R? It's not like we really care whether the Sweaties get their new 'powers' or not - as long as we can blame the grievances of the Seps for the failure of the talks.

"But what the fuck? At least I managed to save rhe Fulham bus on my way out. Politics, in the end, is all about priorities."

A spokesnat for the Finance Minister John Swinney said: "We were unsurprised when Mr Hands decided to head off on a booze cruise instead of turning up for the negotiations.

"Since last May, we have seen every aspect of the Vow being reneged upon, and now they are even trying to cheat us out of the one good thing to come out of Smith: the principle of 'no detriment'.

"Quite frankly, you can't trust these people as far as you could throw a spunk-filled pig's head!"

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