

Donald Dewar
Memorial Lecture
10th Anniversary
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I am not sure how one begins a lecture like this. Traditionally I suppose I should say that I am delighted to be here today. But in so many ways I am not. Ten years ago today Donald Dewar, first First Minister of Scotland died. I remember the emptiness of that day and I wish I was not here today because I wish he was still with us.

But it was a privilege to serve under Donald, it is a privilege to be here to reflect on his contribution as first Minister, and it is a privilege to do so as his successor as leader of Labour in the Scottish Parliament.

I am pleased to make this contribution here, in this union, because it is probably the other place, apart from the Scottish parliament, associated with Donald and his memory. He was President of the Union, and the Debating Club, and many of the friendships he formed here sustained him throughout his life.

I cannot offer you a reflection on that life because I did not know him well at all until that first Scottish Parliament. I was not expecting him to call and ask me to be Labour's housing spokesperson in the 1999 election campaign. So much so in fact that when the phone rang that night we had visitors, I had promised myself a couple of hours off campaigning and I sent my daughter to answer the phone and tell whoever it was I was too busy to take the call. It was only some time later I thought to ask who had called and she replied Donald Dewar.

In those days a call from the secretary of state for Scotland was something which didn't happen to me much. Come to think of it does not happen much these days either. Clutching at straws, I tried 1471, got Bute house and Donald answered the phone himself, without turning a hair.

I never did know who had recommended an untried candidate from Pentlands to him. Mind you when all of our spokespeople met I discovered I was sharing the housing role with Frank McAveety. I did wonder of Donald could not tell us apart and simply appointed both of us rather than worry about which was which. It would have been a Donaldish solution for a Donaldish problem.

My favourite Donald after dinner story – and he was famous for after dinner stories – also involved mistaken identity. He would recount a train journey home from London, on which the woman opposite had clearly recognised him. After a while she nerved herself to strike up a conversation, beginning with the time honoured phrase “you are that politician aren’t you?”

Donald acceded that he was and a conversation ensued in which he quickly realised she thought she was speaking to Malcolm Rifkind.

Many politicians would have been offended, and most would at least have corrected the error. Donald, ever open to the opportunity for mischievous amusement did neither. Instead he whiled away an hour or so, until she left the train, in his words, “wiser, but rather puzzled at some of the views expressed by Mr Rifkind”.

I think that does show that Donald was an unusual politician – less interested in his own self importance than his own self entertainment. Playful where others might be pompous.

But he was serious too and leading the delivery of a Scottish parliament and then leading that first Scottish executive was a huge and serious political achievement.

He understood and articulated the profundity of what that new parliament meant for Scotland without pomp but with palpable pride.

The playfulness was never far away though. Who can ever forget, “There shall be a Scottish parliament.” Pause. “I like that.” Gloating, no. But gleeful. Oh yes.

I was fortunate to be one of those first MSPs ten years ago and remember well the opening ceremony. Many of you probably do too.

Donald Dewar made a great speech. Perhaps the greatest that has yet been made in our young Parliament.

As our first First Minister he wanted the first 129 Members of the Scottish Parliament to be conscious of the honour – and the responsibility – that lay upon our shoulders.

Ours was to be a people’s Parliament and it fell now to us to realise the hopes and aspirations of the Scottish people.

- The Scots who came before us, organising in the pits and steelyards towards home rule.
- The Scots who worked throughout the 1980s and 1990s through the Constitutional Convention to develop a vision for devolution, a Parliament dedicated to finding Scottish solutions to Scottish problems.

- The Scots who Voted Yes so overwhelmingly in the referendum of 1997
- The Scots who had voted for each and every one of those first MSPs and whom we now represented.
- And the Scots not yet born, for whom we held our new Parliament and our country in trust.

Donald called on those first 129 MSPs to listen for the voices of those Scottish people in one of the most often quoted passages of that great speech:

*the shout of the welder in the din of the Great Clyde Shipyards,
the speak of the Mearns rooted in the land,
the discourse of the enlightenment when Edinburgh and Glasgow were indeed
a light held to the intellectual life of Europe.*

Thus he christened our parliament not just with oratory but poetry.

I remember he said something else to us that day too. Something more prosaic, but in its own way just as powerful:

We are fallible. We will make mistakes. But we will never lose sight of what brought us here: the striving to do right by the people of Scotland; to respect their priorities; to better their lot; and to contribute to the commonweal.

Donald Dewar wanted us to keep two things at the forefront of our minds in the years to come: first, the Scottish people and second, their values. "To respect their priorities and to better their lot"

Labour's vision in the Constitutional Convention and then in the creation of the Scottish Parliament was of a parliament with a purpose, and that purpose was social justice. The Scottish parliament was created to be a powerful instrument of social progress.

We sought to address the democratic deficit of a different Scottish legal, justice and education system without a specific line of political accountability. We sought to bring the political leadership of Scottish civic life closer to the people whose lives it affected. And we sought to open up the democratic structures to greater accessibility and transparency to make them more responsive.

Our vision was to make Scottish politics – and politicians – serve the Scottish people better.

Labour is sometimes accused of setting up the Scottish parliament in the belief that Labour would always be in charge. That is quite wrong.

For one thing PR ensured that no party was ever likely to command an overall majority. And for another the commonplace myth that Labour has "run" Scotland for decades is demonstrably untrue.

Labour has never commanded an absolute majority of the popular vote in Scotland at any election. Forty years ago Glasgow was a Tory, or Progressive, city; Dundee has been Tory and Liberal, and was only Labour for a relatively short time. Meanwhile when Labour took control of Edinburgh in 1984 it ended several centuries of uninterrupted Tory rule in one guise or another.

No, the Scottish parliament was always going to be run at some time or another by someone who was not Labour.

A colleague pointed this out to me the other day and used the analogy of Spain. Spain, he argued, did not become a proven democracy when Franco died and the first Cortes was elected. It became a real democracy when power transferred peacefully from one party to another as a result of an election.

Our parliament came of age in 2007 when power changed hands. That is what happens in parliaments and it had to happen sometime in ours. The tragedy for the Scottish Parliament today is not that the SNP emerged as the largest party in 2007, that was the choice of the people. It is the foolish politician and a hopeless political party both destined for defeat and eternal opposition who tell the electorate that they got it wrong. No, the real tragedy for Scotland has been that the SNP have diverted the Parliament from its purpose.

For, too often, this administration have not used the Parliament to govern, but as a platform for their campaign to break up the United Kingdom.

The parliament itself has been treated with contempt. The Scottish government loses vote after vote in parliament, but simply ignores it.

That is a real democratic deficit right at the heart of our parliament, and it is more than an interesting debating point.

Significant resources and civil service personnel have been devoted to preparing a programme for separation under the banner of the "national conversation". The civil service dismissed concerns about this, on the basis that this is the policy direction of the executive arm which they serve.

But that executive arm had neither a popular nor a parliamentary mandate for this. In fact, the parliament made clear that it rejected this policy and wished it to stop.

If the executive is operating in defiance of the will of parliament, is that democratic?

Is this a parliament being used as vehicle for social progress, or as a vehicle for something else?

In 2007 the SNP presented themselves in an unremittingly positive poise. There was something admirable in that. No long-term observer or participant of politics in this country could fail to be impressed by such a well funded and slick operation that promised so much to so many.

The most positive campaign that Labour has ever run was surely that of 1997. And well do we know the disillusion that stems from great expectations that could never be met. Yet Labour ran that campaign on a policy platform that was entirely deliverable. As so many of the promises the SNP made to Scotland have been broken the tone of their Scottish Government has changed.

Their leaders said they would make the case for independence through making devolution work. As promise after promise has been broken they have changed to making the case for independence by telling Scotland that devolution doesn't work.

What I want to tell you tonight is that the dream of devolution Donald Dewar made real has worked, that it can work again.

But the future of our Parliament is radically different from the recent past. The economic, the political and soon, in all likelihood, the social context of our country is changed. We are weeks away from a paradigm shift in British politics. And we cannot confront the realities of what is ahead without honesty. The criticism of the current Scottish Government that I feel most keenly is that they have not been honest with Scotland. The prospectus they were elected on in 2007 was too fanciful a fiction to find its way onto the shelves of any great bibliophile as the one we honour tonight. Only by being honest with the electorate can any government have a mandate for the great shifts in public expenditure that will be required.

A mandate for how and where services will be cut. A mandate for how and where we will protect the vulnerable. A mandate for how and where we will grow our economy again.

This is the new landscape ahead of us. The current First Minister recently told our Parliament that the first era of devolution was over. You may not be surprised to hear that I would disagree. Our Parliament has already lived through two phases. And we stand on the cusp of the third.

There were the radical achievements in our Parliament's early years. Historic legislation abolished the remnants of feudalism in Scotland. The Land Reform Act opened this country up to its own people to enjoy, and gave rural communities the chance of owning the land on which they depended. A recent investigation by the Scotsman newspaper showed that ten years on, after centuries of stasis, this legislation has started to shift the patterns of ownership of the land of Scotland.

As a Minister I myself helped pass the Adults with Incapacity Act and Scotland moved from having some of the most arcane incapacity legislation in the world, to the most modern arrangements anywhere.

Meanwhile on issues like the smoking ban or clause 2A (the Tories' 'gay ban') the Scottish parliament blazed a trail which the rest of the UK followed.

These changes were about the kind of country we want to see, about opportunity, about our values, or as Donald would have said – in fact as Donald did say;

This is about more than our politics and our laws. This is about who we are and how we carry ourselves.

What is interesting is that none of these achievements were fundamentally about the funding and the structure of our public sector. The second phase of devolution became far too much about that alone. Much of the business of government will always be about what is taxed and what is spent. But that discussion alone is not the sum total of government, of politics or of our ambitions for our country.

Which brings me to the challenge for the Scottish parliament in the next few years and the third phase of devolution.

Firstly, the political context.

In the run up to the general election just past, when the accepted wisdom became that Labour would lose, there was much speculation in the commentariat about the sustainability of a situation where one party is in power in Westminster and another in power in Holyrood.

They could hardly have missed the point more comprehensively. This is what the Scottish parliament was created for. The democratic deficit it sought to address was 18 years when our education, NHS and legal system was uniquely Scottish yet governed by a party who had not won the argument in Scotland.

That is the position we are in now and so this should be the Scottish parliament's moment. The fact that we face this challenge at exactly the moment when thirteen years of rising public expenditure have ended and the resource the parliament has is about to reduce for the first time in its history just means that the Scottish parliament is even more important in ensuring that it *"is striving to do right by the people of Scotland; to respect their priorities"* as Donald said.

That is why for example I committed my party two weeks ago to the idea of a living wage – a minimum wage of around £7.15 per hour first in the public sector but then rolling out from their through procurement and contracts to the private sector. This is not to ignore the coming restrictions on public funds, but the reverse. I believe that we must have restraint in public sector pay in the next few years. But I also believe we must provide some protection for those on the bottom end of the pay scale to ensure that they do not pay the highest price.

I think that is striving to do right by the people of Scotland in the hardest of times. I see it as a stamen of my party's enduring values and a clear signal of intent. When hard decisions have to be made any government I lead will wear those values on our sleeves.

Hard times do not relieve us from the second part of the obligation Donald placed on us though.

the striving to do right by the people of Scotland; to respect their priorities; to better their lot; and to contribute to the commonwealth.

It is not enough for the Scottish parliament to try and protect the Scottish people from cuts; it is not enough for any party to simply explain how they would administer cutbacks in public expenditure – although they will have to do that. The Scottish public will also want to know how we intend to support them in bettering their lot and contributing to the commonwealth.

In other words, what are we going to do about jobs and the economy? Because the greatest protection from the economic storm for anyone is work. So the greatest task for the years ahead, for this next phase of devolution, is not public services but jobs and the economy. And that does not just mean how we grow the economy. It also means how we transform the economy.

Creating jobs and opportunity into the 21st century cannot mean recreating the jobs lost in the past couple of years. It must mean jobs in the new industries like renewable energy, energy efficiency and life sciences. It cannot mean waiting for investment from overseas to create jobs here, but has to mean internationalising businesses here to create jobs in Scotland serving markets around the world. It cannot mean manufacturing the products of the past but it certainly does mean manufacturing high quality, high tech products for emerging markets in china India, Brazil and, I hope, Africa too in the future.

We cannot avoid this challenge because resources are limited. And in any case our greatest resource is not. This year saw the death of another Scottish political activist Jimmy Reid. His famous rectorial address most often remembered for the passage on the “rat race” also included the line: “The untapped resources of the North Sea are as nothing compared to the untapped resources of our people.”

The resources of the North Sea have diminished somewhat since he made the speech. But the untapped resources of our people are as great as ever.

We have never needed them more than now. Whether it is refocusing our schools on improving standards of literacy, numeracy, science and maths, or supporting entrepreneurs and the development of new products, or retraining the workforce in the skills new industries need we have to find ways to help people create new jobs in new industries in a new Scotland.

We cannot let a lack of resources be an excuse, we must maximise the effectiveness of how we use the resources we have.

Let me give you two examples.

Carnegie College in Fife have developed an apprenticeship for renewable energy technicians. But the public funding available per place was not enough. So they have formed a partnership with Siemens, who have invested top up funding to let the programme go ahead. The company gets the skills they need, the college builds the expertise in teaching these cutting edge skills, and the apprentices get the skills they need to open up opportunity in a new and growing industry. We need more public private partnerships in training at every level from school to university.

In the summer I visited a diver training centre in Fort William. It is one of only three in the whole world and it actually owns one of the others in Tasmania. They are training hundreds of divers every year. But none are from Britain, never mind Scotland. Why? Because it costs around £20,000 to train in deep sea work. They used to train British divers because they could get loans to train. That scheme ended. But that is crazy. Qualified, these divers earn £1200 per day. So the loan is paid off in no time. And we are going to need thousands of divers in the next few years when offshore wind turbines are installed. We should be lending the fees to Scottish workers to become divers. The money will come back, they will earn a handsome wage, be able to work all over the world, and our offshore wind industry will get the skills it needs from Scots.

In both instances, one happening, and the other not, a bit of imagination can squeeze more for the individual and more for the economy, and more for businesses out of our limited resources.

Even in our traditional industries, like construction, the skills mix needed is changing as we move to more timber framed buildings, more energy efficient designs, the use of technologies like solar panels and ground source heating. I spoke with one well known Scottish company owner who explained their desire to develop the new apprenticeships they know they need. We need to be more nimble, more responsive and more focussed on the needs of the new economy. Just as that building company is constantly facing the challenge of new standards of energy efficiency and accessibility and competition by research, innovation and development, so Scottish government must find new, innovative and efficient ways to support economic growth and economic change.

So if the first eleven years of devolution was largely about improving and expanding public services in a time of plenty, the next few years have to be about expanding and transitioning our economy in a time of scarcity.

In these times, jobs and the economy are the priorities of the Scottish people and so they must be priorities of the people's parliament too. That does not for a moment mean any less of a commitment to social justice. Because if there is a single route out of poverty, a single step towards greater equality, a single remedy for ill health, disaffection and alienation, then it is work.

At Donald's funeral one of his favourite passages was read by David Whitton. This is from Tawney.

'It is possible that intelligent tadpoles reconcile themselves to the inconvenience of their position that, though most of them will live and die as tadpoles and nothing more.

'The more fortunate of the species will one day shed their tails, distend their mouths and stomachs, hop nimbly onto dry land and croak address to their former friends on the virtues by means of which tadpoles of character and capacity can rise to be frogs.

'This conception of society may be described perhaps as the tadpole philosophy since the consolation which it offers for social evils consists in the statement that exceptional individuals can succeed in evading them'.

The means by which security, happiness and peace is won should not be in the hands of the few. When we change our economy, when we grow it again, those who do not rise should not hear the croaking denunciations of those who have risen. Instead they should hear encouragement and feel the helping hand that they too may rise. Our country remains a lottery of birthrights that too easily discards those of capability of intelligence and talent. The great works of our Parliament and our Scottish democracy are surely ahead of us.

This is about more than our politics and our laws. This is about who we are and how we carry ourselves

One of the things I like best about the Scottish parliament building – the building that so bedevilled Donald's time in office, and which he tragically never saw – is the inscriptions carved into the walls and sometimes the floor.

You will not find Donald's words from that first day of the Scottish Parliament on any wall. But on our good days they are echoed in our own speeches and the laws we pass and the decisions we take.

And on our great days. And we do have some. On our great days, Donald's words are inscribed on our hearts and reflected in the Scotland we are creating day by day.

I do not believe that to say the task of our Parliament is the bread and butter of jobs and training and business is to bring Donald's vision of that parliament down to Earth. From Adam Smith to Robert Burns it has always been from the everyday of work and family viewed through the prism of our

values and morality that great Scots have made our imagination soar and our inspiration sing. In the book of his legendary Harvard Justice Course, Michael Sandel challenges us to imagine a politics which takes moral questions seriously and brings them to bear on broad economic and civic concerns. Not just about how we distribute things, but how we value them.

He quotes Bobby Kennedy. "Even if we act to erase material poverty...there is another greater task. It is to confront the poverty of satisfaction which afflicts us all"

The first twelve years of devolution have been a success. I think Donald would have been proud. But he would not have been satisfied, certainly not self satisfied. Nor should we be. Devolution's great test is coming now. I know that Donald would have been equal to it. I only hope that I might be, but I gain strength and confidence from the talents and convictions of my fellow Labour MSPs. The chance we have together, which Donald was denied is to prove now that we are equal to the test.

One of the things many Scots do not realise about the Scottish parliament is the degree to which it is used for events and receptions relevant to its work but drawing far beyond its own efforts. There are few days when the committee rooms or the garden lobby – the heart of Holyrood are not turned to the achievements or the concerns of Scotland and its people.

A few weeks ago I attended one of these events in the parliament – a performance by the Rinconada orchestra of ten year old musicians who had learned to play through the Big Noise project in the Raploch housing scheme in Stirling. The big noise is based on El Sistema, the Venezuelan project which began in a car park in Caracas and now teaches 300,000 children across that country. It has produced some world class musicians but many more enriched lives and happy well equipped citizens.

Standing there, in a stunning space designed by a Spanish modern architect, listening to the ode to joy – to my mind the most sublime music ever conceived by a human being, played by children from one of the most deprived areas of one of our major cities – trained by a methodology we learned from Latin American slums - alongside their parents glowing with pride at an achievement unimagined a few years before.

I thought this.

Donald – patriotic scot, polymath and scourge of parochialism. Donald - lover of excellence, connoisseur of unexpected achievement and lifelong possessor of a sense of wonder.

I think Donald would have said, "I like that."

