

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

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The experience of more than ten years of Thatcherism in Scotland has contributed to major political developments and changes in the fortunes of the political parties north of the border. In 1990 disputes over the poll tax, the government's proposed reforms of the legal, education and health services, and yet more closures in Scottish industry, ensured that the political temperature remained high.

As Iain Macwhirter's article makes clear (see 'Year at Westminster'), 1990 proved to be a very difficult year for the Conservative Party in Scotland and for the Scottish Secretary in particular. The poll tax, legal reform and the proposed closure of Ravenscraig presented Mr Rifkind with a sufficient number of problems on which to exercise his political skills. Speculation about the future of the Party Chairman, Michael Forsyth, and the internal squabbles within the Conservative Party – accusations, counter-accusations and resignations (which even the Labour Party would be hard pushed to match) – provided the Scottish media with ample copy. Not having taken the opportunity in her last Cabinet re-shuffle to re-deploy Mr Forsyth, it was assumed that Mrs Thatcher was determined he should stay put. That was until the ex-Secretary of State, George Younger, joined the 'Michael must go' lobby. In a political twist that caught most people by surprise, Forsyth was indeed asked to resign the Chairmanship but was promoted to Minister of State at the Scottish Office, with a wide range of responsibilities including health, education and social work. According to political commentators in 'Scotland on Sunday' this move was at the behest of the 'old enemy' Rifkind himself, who in spite of the policy differences between them, considered it would be to the advantage of the party to have Forsyth as one of the Scottish Office team.⁽¹⁾ Is this an example of it is better to have Forsyth 'inside the tent p..... out' than 'outside p..... in'? What happens next remains to be seen. After all, it was only last year that Mr Forsyth was brought in to reverse Tory decline in Scotland and lead the party into the next general election. Forsyth may attempt to dismiss the infighting as "midsummer madness generated by the summer heat"⁽²⁾ but it is unlikely that his new appointment will end speculation about his own political future or troubles within the Conservative Party.

Not surprisingly the poll tax continued to feature high on the political agenda especially after it was 'discovered' south of the border. The topic was debated in numerous TV and radio programmes and between outraged MPs in the House of Commons, as if it had come as a great surprise to everyone (witness John Major's gaffe in his Budget speech). Meanwhile as Scotland fought for the right to receive the reforms conceded to English taxpayers,

Scottish councils are now facing the harsh reality of trying to maintain services in the face of significant non-payment. The irony of introducing a tax, partially on the grounds of greater efficiency, and then resorting in many areas to employing twice as many staff and resources to administer it, is now all too apparent.

As the Conservative Party toughs it out on the grounds that in time we shall all come to realise what a wonderful tax the community charge really is, the Labour Party in effect scored an own goal. Pressured into revealing its alternative to the poll tax and quoting actual figures in the run up to the Regional Elections, Labour then appeared to back down as it gave way to the successful Tory campaign against the so-called 'roof tax' and opinion poll data which noted a preference for the old rating system. In reality, of course, the 'roof tax' was based on the old rating system. It had all the same hallmarks. The difference lay in assessing the rates or tax on the basis of the capital value of a property rather than on the notional rent which it may attract. Meanwhile the Labour Party in England announced their 'fair rates' package based on pre-poll tax principles, with the capital value of property being only one element in the assessment. Whether the Scottish proposals for a scheme based on capital value assessment are compatible remains to be clarified. For their part, the SNP have kept up their attack on Labour Councils especially for engaging in warrant sales. Bridges on the M8 motorway, daubed with an SNP logo, carry the message 'Vote Labour for Warrant Sales'.

As evidence from the 1990 Regional Elections (see Bochel and Denver) would indicate, Labour does not appear to have suffered electorally in Scotland as a result of the political mishandling of the issue. However, factors other than the poll tax were at play in the spring of 1990. For the first time in eleven years it seemed possible that Labour stood a chance of winning the next general election. This was bound to affect the political fortunes of Labour's main opposition in Scotland, the SNP.

There was some speculation that the SNP suffered as a result of their non-involvement in the Constitutional Convention. And since the elections, the SNP have had to cope with their leader, Gordon Wilson standing down and a leadership contest between Margaret Ewing and Alex Salmond. It remains a matter of speculation as to whether the new leader Alex Salmond, and his policy of targeting disaffected Labour voters, will have time to make an significant impact before the next election.

In last year's edition we carried an article outlining the setting up of the Constitutional Convention. At this stage it is still too early to judge the full political implications of this development. The Convention has come a long way, however, in working through the issues of major importance to any move for self-government in Scotland. The Convention has tackled the questions of financing home rule; electoral reform; and the gender imbalance in representative politics. In respect of electoral reform and improving the representation of women, it can be argued that discussions are far advanced of

those taking place at Westminster. At the time of writing (September 1990), beyond a commitment to ensure that electoral reform makes equal representation of men and women a reality, there is no clear statement from the Convention on how this is to be achieved. A Scottish Parliament holds real opportunities for Scottish women and other groups denied representation. It is to be hoped that the unique opportunity will not be lost.

It is clear that self-government for Scotland is firmly established on the political agenda, but as Macwhirter records the forces for change are not solely from those involved in the Convention or the Nationalists. As the debate over the share of public expenditure allocated to Scotland continues, the prospect of 'leaving the Jocks to get on with it' has received support from other quarters.⁽³⁾

The 1990s then promise to be interesting times. This edition looks forward to the prospects for Scotland of the Single European Market in 1992 and to other developments in the 1990s and beyond. Section 1 has three chapters which examine the impact of 1992 on the Scottish economy, business and trade unions. Section 2 looks to the future in assessing the consequences of environmental factors, Scottish migration and constitutional options.

The General Section includes a range of articles on local authorities – their international links, a political history of the Lothians and the results of the 1990 Regional Elections – as well as a chapter on the Scottish Office in the 1980s. In addition other pieces examine policy issues relating to defence, child-care, fiscal conservatism and Scottish prisons. Finally the Reference Section carries up-to-date information on Opinion Polls, Scottish legislation, election results and a comprehensive Bibliography of relevant publications.

As this is my last year as Editor of the *Yearbook* I would like to extend my personal appreciation and thanks to all those who have contributed over the last four years and to our advertisers for their financial support. I am indebted to David McCrone, who has been my co-editor for this year's production, for his advice and encouragement. My special thanks to Helen Ramm, who has acted as my editorial assistant, for all her support. On behalf of the Unit for the Study of Government in Scotland, I would like to record our appreciation of Helen's invaluable contribution. She has been involved in the production of every *Yearbook* since it was first published in 1975 and has provided all its editors with excellent service.

References

1. Derek Bateman and Kenny Farquharson, *Scotland on Sunday*, 2.9.90.
2. Peter Jones and Brian Pendreigh, *Scotsman*, 6.8.90.
3. Iain Macwhirter's reference to the 'Economist' article in 'Year at Westminster', *Scottish Government Yearbook 1991*.