

A WOMAN'S PLACE? THE FUTURE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

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This article examines the current debate on women's representation in Scotland and the role played by the Scottish Constitutional Convention in raising the issue. It identifies arguments around women's representation within the Convention, and underlines the opportunities for improving Scottish women's representation presented by the creation of a Scottish Parliament or Assembly. It is revealing, however, to set the current interest in women's representation in context; some discussion of the lessons that might be drawn from the historical experience of women's representation at Westminster precedes the section on the Convention. It is hoped that this article will provide encouragement to aspiring women politicians, and the conclusion attempts to offer a constructive but realistic assessment of the prospects of making a Scottish Parliament a woman's place.

Women and Party Politics in Scotland since 1918

In 1918 most women over 30 got the vote and women over 21 won the right to stand as parliamentary candidates. The vote on equal terms with men was won in 1928 when the vote was extended to women over 21. Yet, as Table 1 shows, from 1918 to the present day, only 21 women – 11 Labour, 6 Conservative, 3 SNP and 1 Liberal Democrat – have represented Scottish constituencies at Westminster.⁽¹⁾ The UK's under-representation of women has been mirrored in Scotland. However, low levels of women's representation have gone hand in hand with low levels of interest in improving women's representation.

Women were certainly the political novelty of the 1920s, and there was great uncertainty as to how the new female electors would vote. As the suffragette historian, Ray Strachey noted, the emergence of a Women's Party was dreaded, and men did not know how best to win women's votes.⁽²⁾ The welcome discovery in 1918 that 'there was no appearance of anything like a tendency to a block vote'⁽³⁾ and that women voted on the same party lines as men ensured that the novelty faded. In addition, as Deirdre Beddoe has commented, 'larger events, including the economic crisis at home, the rise of Fascism in Europe and the growing threat of war ... crowded women off the stage of history'.⁽⁴⁾ Only five women were returned for Scottish seats in the inter-war period, but the lack of women MPs does not seem to have been a burning issue. The preoccupation of the parties was winning women's votes, not in providing the electors with women to vote for.⁽⁵⁾ The few people urging

TABLE 1

Scotland: Women MPs, 1918-91

1923-38	Katherine, Duchess of Atholl (Con)	Perth & Kinross (West)
1919-31	Miss Jennie Lee (Lab)	North Lanark*
1931-45	Rt Hon Miss Florence Horsburgh (Con)	Dundee
1931-35	Mrs Helen Shaw (Con)	Bothwell
1937-45	Mrs Agnes Hardie (Lab)	Springburn*
1945-70	Rt Hon Margaret (Peggy) Herbison (Lab)	North Lanark
1945-59	Mrs Jean Mann (Lab)	Coatbridge
1945-46	Mrs Clarice Shaw (Lab)	Kilmarnock
1946-66	Lady Grant of Monymusk (Con) (as Lady Tweedsmuir after 1948)	Aberdeen South*
1948-69	Mrs Alice Cullen (Lab)	Gorbals*
1958-59	Mrs Mary McAlister (Lab)	Kelvingrove*
1959-79	Rt Hon Betty Harvie Anderson (Con)	Renfrewshire East
1959-87	Rt Hon Dame Judith Hart (Lab)	Lanark (Clydesdale 1983-)
1967-70	Mrs Winifred (Winnie) Ewing (SNP)	Hamilton*
1974-79		Moray & Nairn
1973-74	Mrs Margo MacDonald (SNP)	Govan*
1974-79	Mrs Margaret Bain (SNP)	Dunbartonshire East
1987-	(as Mrs Ewing)	Moray
1982-83	Mrs Helen McElhone (Lab)	Queen's Park*
1983-87	Mrs Anna McCurley (Con)	Renfrew West & Inverclyde
1987-	Mrs Maria Fyfe (Lab)	Maryhill
1987-	Mrs Ray Michie (SLD)	Argyll & Bute
1990-	Mrs Irene Adams (Lab)	Paisley North*

* indicates first elected in a by-election

measures to increase women's representation were swimming against the tide.⁽⁶⁾ The assumption of the inter-war years seemed to be that a gradual and natural increase in women's parliamentary representation might be expected.

Women's representation at Westminster, however, has remained low. With 44 women MPs currently in the House of Commons, UK women's representation has reached its highest-ever level of 6.8%. The highest levels of Scottish women's representation occurred in 1959 and 1964 with the return of 5 Scottish women MPs, or 7%. The proportion of women MPs out of the total of Scottish MPs returned has been marginally higher than the UK average at 14 of the 20 general elections since 1918.⁽⁷⁾ Since 1979, however, Scotland has returned a lesser proportion of women to Westminster than the UK average. Most of the present campaigners for better women's representation have underlined the poor return of only three Scottish women MPs at the 1987 election.

It seems likely that there is a connection between the raising of the issue and increasing awareness of far higher levels of women's representation outside the UK. In most European countries there has been a continuing upward trend since 1945 particularly in the Scandinavian countries.⁽⁸⁾ The upward trend in Norway and Sweden has been most marked since the beginning of the 1970s when major parties in those countries adopted quota systems to make sure that a certain proportion of parliamentary candidates was female. In Scotland and the UK instead of a gradual upward trend there has been a rise and fall within a low level. Table 2 compares the percentage of women MPs returned in Norway, Sweden, Scotland and the UK at general elections since the 1960s.⁽⁹⁾

TABLE 2

Women MPs returned as a % of the total number of MPs at general elections over 1961-89 in Norway Sweden, Scotland and the UK

NORWAY

1965	1969	1973	1977	1981	1985	1989
8.0	9.3	15.5	23.9	25.8	34.4	35.6

SWEDEN

1961	1965	1969	1971	1974	1977	1980	1984	1988
11.2	11.5	13.8	14.0	21.1	22.9	27.8	28.9	38.1

SCOTLAND

1964	1966	1970	1974(F)	1974(O)	1979	1983	1987
7.0	5.6	2.8	4.2	5.6	1.4	2.8	4.2

UK

1964	1966	1970	1974(F)	1974(O)	1979	1983	1987
4.6	4.1	4.1	3.6	4.3	3.0	3.5	6.3

Over the 1980s the Social-Democratic, Liberal, Green and Labour parties began to explore options for improving women's representation. Formed in 1981 the SDP adopted candidate selection rules seeking a minimum of two women on every shortlist where possible. In 1987 the Alliance put up the highest number of women candidates of all the parties – 105 in the UK and 16 in Scotland.⁽¹⁰⁾ Following the Liberal-SDP merger, the Liberal Democrats have adopted a variation of the SDP women and shortlists rule, the obligation to have at least one woman on a shortlist if a woman is nominated. Over the 1980s the Green Party has explored a number of options for increasing their proportion of women candidates including adopting quotas and targets. Since 1987 the Labour Party has adopted measures to raise the profile of women in the party. In 1988 Labour adopted 'one woman on a shortlist where a woman is nominated for selection' and since 1989 the Parliamentary Labour Party has been obliged to vote for at least 3 women for the 18-strong Shadow Cabinet. At

the 1990 Labour Party conference the NEC was instructed to establish a programme which will within 10 years phase in 50% women's representation within the PLP. These developments mark a radical shift. Clare Short, Labour MP for Birmingham Ladywood, recently commented, 'It's unbelievable... I keep waiting for the resistance but it doesn't happen'.⁽¹¹⁾

Despite the steps taken by some of the parties, however, a recent *Labour Research* report indicated that women's representation at Westminster is unlikely to improve dramatically at the next election.⁽¹²⁾ In the context of the record of low women's representation at Westminster the implications of the discussion on women's representation in a Scottish Parliament can be viewed as dramatic and far-reaching.

The Scottish Constitutional Convention and women

The current debate on women's representation in Scotland has taken place in the context of the premiership of Britain's first woman Prime Minister who dominated British politics in the 1980s. How much Mrs Thatcher achieved for other women during her period in office is a matter of controversy. In a recent assessment of Thatcher's legacy for women in Scotland, Alice Brown commented that 'an unintended consequence of Thatcherism can be argued to be ... the debate within the Scottish Constitutional Convention about the equal representation of women in a Scottish Parliament'. Brown suggested that this might be interpreted as part of the general response to Thatcherism in Scotland, linked to declining Scottish Conservative fortunes, the arrival of the 'Doomsday Scenario' in 1987 and the setting up of a Scottish Constitutional Convention to arrive via consensus at proposals for Scottish constitutional reform.⁽¹³⁾

Before the 1987 general election, the unpopularity of Mrs Thatcher and her policies in Scotland led to speculation about the political and constitutional implications of the return of a third Thatcher government combined with declining Tory fortunes in Scotland. This was the so-called 'Doomsday Scenario', and in 1987 it arrived in no uncertain terms. Mrs Thatcher was returned to office with a parliamentary majority of 102, but in Scotland her party suffered its worst election defeat since 1910, being reduced from 21 seats to 10.

Against this background, the cross-party Campaign for a Scottish Assembly (CSA), revived the idea of holding a Constitutional Convention. The CSA invited a committee of prominent Scots (but not including any prominent politicians) to draw up a report on the state of the current government of Scotland, and to make recommendations as to what should be done. This committee met from January to June 1988. Its main recommendation was the setting up of a Constitutional Convention to press for a Scottish Assembly. In the months following the launch, there was a series of

consultation meetings with the political parties and other Scottish institutions to test the support for the Convention proposal. While it was no surprise that the Conservative party refused to take part, by late autumn of 1988 all the opposition parties seemed likely to participate in the Convention and strong support had come from the trade union movement, the churches, and local authorities. The SNP, however, withdrew in early 1989. The Green Party withdrew in early 1991 but may yet rejoin – as indeed may the SNP. Yet in its methods of working via cross-party consensus and in the emerging proposals for the status, powers and financing of a Scottish Parliament the Convention has now moved far beyond the 1978 Scotland Act. A symptom of this movement is the increasing use of the term 'Parliament' rather than 'Assembly'.

An important and fresh dimension in the devolution debate has been the raising of how best to ensure women's greater involvement in a Scottish Parliament. As will be seen, the activities of 'A Scottish Woman's Claim of Right' publicised low levels of Scottish women's representation while the setting up of a Women's Issues Group along with other Convention working groups provided a focus for submissions on how to improve women's representation. This provides a contrast with the campaign in the run-up to the referendum on devolution in March 1979. While the contribution of individual women on either side of the devolution debate is noted in Bochel, Denver and Macartney's account of the referendum campaign,⁽¹⁴⁾ there was little focus on involving women in a Scottish Assembly. The Scottish Convention of Women (SCOW) was one of the few groups which attempted to raise the question of attitudes to women's representation in an Assembly. Formed in 1977 out of the International Women's Year (1975) and the London-based Women's National Commission, SCOW had a small membership based on representatives from trade unions, local groups including the Women's Guilds, and individuals, with the aim of promoting the quality of life for all women and men. SCOW circulated a questionnaire to the political parties in an attempt to discover what they were thinking of in terms of women's representation. Maidie Hart of SCOW has since described this exercise as 'not very productive ... and then the whole (devolution) debate fell apart anyway'.⁽¹⁵⁾

The Women's Legal and Financial Independence Campaign also made a contribution to the devolution debate by preparing a Charter for legal reforms in the areas in which an Assembly would have powers. The Scottish Women's Charter covered areas such as divorce, financial provision, and custody; housing, abortion, contraception and maternity services; childcare and violence against women. It drew on the concerns of the women's movement which was raising issues it saw as crucial in the shaping of women's lives, but outwith the formal structures of the political parties. But as Esther Breitenbach has pointed out, the Legal and Financial Independence Group did not take up a position for or against devolution.⁽¹⁶⁾ In 1979, the feminist *Misprint* actually went so far as to comment, 'On the whole the women's movement ignored the referendum or saw it as irrelevant'.⁽¹⁷⁾

Kate Phillips, Esther Breitenbach and Alice Brown have recently argued convincingly that the perceived impact of Thatcherism on women in Scotland has had the effect over the 1980s of diverting the energies of women, who had previously involved themselves exclusively within the women's movement, into party political activity, principally although not exclusively within the Labour and Green parties.⁽¹⁸⁾ This development can be argued to have played a part in sharpening the focus on women's representation in the revived devolution debates over 1988-91. In response to the Claim of Right and the setting up of the Constitutional Convention, 'A Scottish Women's Claim of Right' was launched in April 1989, 'because 52% of this country's population provide just 4% of its MPs'.⁽¹⁹⁾ While Green Party women were prominent in its launch, it was a cross-party and non-party group of women committed to drawing attention to women's low representation in government and to campaigning on four points set out in an April manifesto:

- * An Assembly which deals urgently with obstacles to women in housing, education, employment, childcare, health and personal safety.
- * A move away from the battleground style of present day politics and a move towards greater co-operation in the cause of social justice, recognising the value of women's experience and wisdom.
- * Positive support, training and encouragement to enable women from any sector of society to take an active part in public life.
- * Constitutional reform **GUARANTEEING** equal representation for women in the political arena!⁽²⁰⁾

The campaign mounted conferences in 1989, won a certain amount of publicity and promised to set up working groups, and a data and monitoring unit on women's representation, and to form local groups. A submission was made to the Scottish Constitutional Convention and individual members such as Jackie Roddick have contributed articles on women's representation to *Radical Scotland*.⁽²¹⁾ Although the book, 'A Woman's Claim of Right', was published in the summer of 1991, at the time of writing the organisation appears to have faded.⁽²²⁾ This is perhaps because 'A Woman's Claim of Right' found itself pushing at an open door in the spring of 1989.

It was not however, immediately clear that this was so. The first meeting of the Constitutional Convention on 30 March 1989 has been dubbed 'mainly manly' by Emma Simpson, as only 23 women attended the first meeting of around 140 delegates from political parties, local authorities, trade unions, churches, business and industry, ethnic minorities and the Campaign for a Scottish Assembly.⁽²³⁾ The Convention unanimously adopted a Declaration acknowledging the sovereign right of the Scottish people to determine its own form of government and pledging the Convention to work towards the

preparation of a scheme for an Assembly or Parliament for Scotland which would be put to the Scottish people for endorsement. Detailed work was to be carried out in working groups to examine areas including constitutional issues and the structure of government, powers and responsibilities, financing Scottish expenditure, and 'making the Scottish Parliament truly representative'. Criticism of the low numbers of women involved in the Convention's proceedings (albeit a much larger showing than at Westminster) prompted Labour members of the Convention Executive to propose the setting up of a Women's Issues working group to consider how to make a Scottish Parliament truly representative. The Group was chaired by Maria Fyfe, Labour MP for Glasgow Maryhill and then Labour deputy shadow spokesperson for women's affairs. Other members were Yvonne Strachan of the TGWU, the Rev Norman Shanks, Labour MP John McAllion, and Bruce Black, COSLA Deputy Secretary and Secretary of the Constitutional Convention.

The Women's Issues Group

The Women's Issues Group set about its task with constructive optimism. As Maidie Hart of SCOW put it, 'Women had got in at the ground floor for once'.⁽²⁴⁾ In May 1989 the Group wrote to a wide range of Scottish organisations seeking their views on how it could be ensured that a Scottish Parliament involved women. Views were sought on six areas identified as crucial in the shaping of the Parliament. These areas were: working patterns; remuneration; provision of allowances and facilities; the Parliament's format; reflecting women's views; and electoral arrangements. In September 1989 an interim report was drawn up for the Women's Issues Group by the present author.⁽²⁵⁾ Further submissions were received later but did not significantly depart from the initial findings and recommendations. The Interim Report had set the agenda for discussion within the Convention of women's involvement in a Scottish Parliament.

Submissions received by the Women's Issues Group were unanimous on the need to ensure that the low level of women's representation in Scottish politics was not continued into a Scottish Parliament. Several barriers to women taking an equal part were identified. The STUC Women's Committee summed up the major barrier to women's participation:

The present political system is constructed in such a way as to virtually exclude women from participation. In a society where the main domestic responsibility for child and dependent care lies with women, it is not surprising that there are so few women MPs or local government elected representatives. This responsibility or assumption that the responsibility is a woman's is unlikely to disappear in the next few years, if even within this century. A Scottish Assembly should, from the outset, therefore, make itself accessible to women.⁽²⁶⁾

Domestic responsibility and the range of practical limitations it poses on what kind of work women do and where they are able to do it was seen as the major barrier. Other areas identified included women's lack of confidence and experience in operating in formal power structures, the Westminster timetable and women's discomfort in the formalised slanging match epitomised by Westminster. The submission from 'A Woman's Claim of Right' noted that 'because a Scottish Assembly would be more local and accessible, we would expect some natural improvement in female representation to follow its introduction in any case'. Yet Lothian Regional Council commented that 'within the present structures and processes of central and local government women's representation is substantially less than would be expected on the basis of both population, qualifications and experience'. Discrimination against women in party selection procedures was not emphasised as a barrier, however; the underlying assumption was that women were ruled out of consideration a long way short of the selection meetings.⁽²⁷⁾

The interim report listed proposals intended to boost women's representation. Throughout, Westminster served as a powerful negative model. On the working pattern of a Scottish Parliament submissions were unanimous in favouring Parliament's sitting during office hours and taking recesses in line with school holidays. There were various options for the Parliamentary week, such as 3 days in the chamber and 2 days in the constituency. There was a consensus that members of a Scottish Parliament should hold their seat as a full-time salaried post paid in line with Westminster MPs. Submissions were unanimous too on the need for a flexible system of child and carer allowances and creche facilities. Travel, research and secretarial expenses were also considered necessary. There was considerable support for fixed term parliaments and for the development of a committee structure to deal with the main business of a Scottish Parliament. The creation of a Scottish Equal Opportunities Commission and a Ministry for Women within the parliament found support as did the idea of requiring each political party to publish an equality audit at elections.⁽²⁸⁾ The report made by the Convention on 30 November 1990, *Towards Scotland's Parliament*, confirmed that the working structures and patterns of a Scottish Parliament should positively encourage the involvement of women, and ethnic and other minority groups.⁽²⁹⁾

Making a Scottish Parliament truly representative

The area of least consensus in the submissions was and remains that of electoral arrangements; that is, the arrangements by which the increased representation of women is to be achieved. The options which have emerged within the Convention have included electoral reform, quota systems and the 50-50 option. The parties involved in the Convention have each expressed a preference among these options without yet arriving at a final position.

The most radical proposal, in the sense of its certain impact on women's

representation, is the 50-50 option. Originally proposed in a submission to the Women's Issues Group by the STUC Women's Committee, 50-50 is based on the requirement that 50% of elected representatives should be men and 50% should be women. Despite the similarity between 50-50 and Bernard Shaw's earlier proposal of the 'Coupled Vote', the STUC Women's Committee drew their proposal from the recommendations of the Kilbrandon Commission that a Scottish Parliament should have two-member constituencies.⁽³⁰⁾ The STUC submission proposed:

We would suggest that each constituency should be entitled to return two representatives to the Assembly; one woman; one man... If current parliamentary constituencies were changed this principle could still apply; and indeed, it would work if PR was introduced. If constituencies were changed to area groups, two categories of voting would still be applicable.⁽³¹⁾

The 50-50 option, if compulsory, would bring about an instantaneous transformation in Scottish women's representation at least at the level of a Scottish Parliament. The option moved to the centre of the political argument on representation when it became Labour Party policy. At its 1990 Scottish Conference the Labour Party ruled out 'first-past-the-post' for elections to a Scottish Parliament; decided that men and women should be equally represented in the chamber; and began a process of consultation on electoral systems.

Although Labour committed itself to moving away from first-past-the-post for a Scottish Parliament, as it adopted the goal of equal representation of men and women Labour's commitment to 50-50 has been viewed with suspicion by the Liberal Democrat and Green parties in particular lest Labour use 50-50 to scupper PR. Those opposed to 50-50 inside and outside the Labour Party have argued that it is not feasible to combine 50-50 with proportional representation. The Chair of the Women's issues Group, Maria Fyfe, has been a firm defender of the 50-50 proposal, seeing it as 'the opportunity to create an equal say for women for the first time in the history of Scottish politics' and arguing that:

As a matter of fact, it would be perfectly possible to ensure equal numbers of women and men under any electoral system... Under the Alternative Vote, the voter would list male candidates in order of preference, and female candidates likewise. Under the Single Transferable Vote in multi-member constituencies the number of members in each constituency would need to be divisible by two, and odd numbers would need to be avoided. If, say, six members were required, then three men and three women would be elected. In the Additional Member System, a male and female MSP would be elected in each constituency, and each political party entitled to additional members would top up with

equal numbers of men and women.⁽³²⁾

In 1989 the Green Party offered electoral reform as the solution to improving women's representation. Any form of proportional representation was regarded as likely 'almost certainly in and of itself (to) raise the number of female members of any future Scottish Parliament, though it might not do so immediately in the parties which the majority of voters choose'.⁽³³⁾ The Green Party initially recommended the use of a 30% quota of female candidates and the adoption of the Additional Member System (AMS) on the former West German model. The quota policy has now been replaced by a 'trigger mechanism' whereby party members will be alerted if it seems as though fewer than 30% of candidates will be women in any round of selections. To an extent the trigger seems to be connected to an unloaded pistol in that it will not guarantee that a certain proportion of women candidates will always be selected. However, if a selection round fails to select over 30% women candidates then there would be an inquiry into why women were not selected or did not come forward.⁽³⁴⁾ The Green Party was also closely associated with the idea of requiring each political party to publish an equality audit before elections.

The Liberal Democrats have adopted a similar approach to that of the Greens – supporting the idea of an equality audit, attempting to devise internal party structures that will prove appealing and supportive to women, support for would-be women candidates, training and encouragement and the setting of targets as distinct from quotas. In an internal consultation Scottish Liberal Democrat women were asked how best to ensure the involvement of women in a Scottish Parliament. The outcome of the consultation given in the recent *Report of the Scottish Liberal Democrat Women's Commission* showed that 50-50 was overwhelmingly rejected by the members.⁽³⁵⁾ Its radicalism was acknowledged but many objections were raised. It was feared that 50-50 would marginalise women; that the men's election would be treated more seriously than the women's election; 'that if, for example, the man who came second in the male ballot got more votes than the woman who won the woman's ballot, it would seriously undermine the woman'; that it might be unpopular with the voters and so make a Convention package more difficult to sell; that it might in some areas as in Gordon lead to a decrease in women's representation. (Liberal Democrat women's representation on Gordon District Council is uniquely high, around 60% of the party group.) Quotas were also rejected by the Commission.⁽³⁶⁾ In the Convention, Liberal Democrat Sheila Ritchie vigorously insisted that she wanted to beat men as well as women.⁽³⁷⁾ While the Liberal Democrats have now modified their strong preference for the STV form of PR, the party retains its commitment to the introduction of PR, and echoes the Greens in maintaining:

If the Constitutional Convention leads to a Scottish Parliament elected by a sensible system of PR there will be opportunities for women. If there is a sufficient number of women candidates they

will get elected.⁽³⁸⁾

So what kind of electoral system is likely to emerge?

It is still difficult to say, although some signposts are now in place. Emma Simpson's survey of Convention members in 1990 found that 70% supported special measures to increase the numbers of women in a Scottish Parliament. Thirty per cent wanted proportional representation, 20% a quota system and 18% the 50-50 option. It is perhaps relevant that the survey was carried out before Labour formally adopted the 50-50 option in March. Support for 50-50 may have increased after the March conference. From her survey, however, Simpson concluded that women were on the march in Scottish politics and that there were prospects of a breakthrough in women's representation.⁽³⁹⁾ The Labour Party at its 1991 Scottish Conference reaffirmed a shift away from 'first-past-the-post' for a Scottish Parliament adopting the following position:

The Labour Party in Scotland therefore reaffirms its view that 'first-past-the-post' is not an appropriate system for a Scottish Parliament; that both the Alternative Vote and the Additional Members System or some form of it justify further consideration; that whatever system is used it must take account of the Party's declared support for equal representation for men and women in the Scottish Parliament and that the Party should seek agreement on one of these systems.⁽⁴⁰⁾

All of the parties involved in the Convention's negotiations on electoral arrangements have shown flexibility, reflected in the report made by the Convention on 30 November 1990, *Towards Scotland's Parliament*:

1. The present "first-past-the-post" electoral system is not acceptable for Scotland's Parliament and does not produce a truly representative assembly.
2. The Convention seeks for Scotland's Parliament an electoral system which should be assessed in terms of the following principles:
 - (a) that it produces results in which the number of seats for various parties is broadly related to the number of votes cast for them;
 - (b) that it ensures, or at least takes effective positive action to bring about, equal representation of men and women, and encourages fair representation of ethnic and minority groups;
 - (c) that it preserves a real link between the member and his/her constituency;
 - (d) that it is as simple as possible to understand;
 - (e) that it ensures adequate representation of less populous areas; and
 - (f) that the system be designed to place the greatest possible

power in the hands of the electorate.

3. Having secured the firm commitment of all the major participants in the Convention to these principles, including equality of representation of men and women, the Convention will seek to identify the precise electoral system which best meets these criteria.⁽⁴¹⁾

The 1991 Scottish conferences of the Liberal Democrat and Labour parties gave their representatives within the Convention powers of negotiation on an electoral system but early agreement appears unlikely. The Labour Party at the British level, for instance, has set up a working party on electoral reform, chaired by Professor Raymond Plant, and with a wide remit to examine electoral reform options for the UK as well as Scotland. The Plant Committee produced a preliminary report in July 1991 but its final report is not likely to appear until 1992.⁽⁴²⁾ It is not clear whether agreement on a system of election for a Scottish Parliament will await the final report of the Plant Committee or not. An Alternative Vote or AMS system appears to be emerging as Labour's preferred option while the Liberal Democrats could now find a form of AMS acceptable. But as Alice Brown has commented, 'The options favoured by the different political parties reflect their anxiety about the potential outcome of any electoral change. To a large extent the question of equal representation has been subsumed under this debate'.⁽⁴³⁾

Nonetheless, *Towards Scotland's Parliament* makes a clear commitment to equality of representation. Yet given Liberal Democrat hostility, the fate of the 50-50 option is uncertain and the vagueness of Labour's 1991 Scottish Conference pledge 'to take account of the party's declared support for the equal representation of men and women' in arriving at a final choice of electoral system is worth noting. A possible outcome may be agreement on a form of AMS with two-member constituencies in the first-past-the-post constituency section. This would allow the parties to arrive at their own answer to pursuing equal representation in their own selection arrangements. For instance, a party could impose 50-50 on its own selection procedures for a Scottish Parliament. That is, a man and a woman would have to be selected as candidates for the party in each of the two-member constituencies. A similar arrangement would be made for the top-up list such as listing woman, man, woman, man. Such an agreement may well boost women's representation in a Scottish Parliament without bringing about the overnight sensation of equal representation.

The attitudes of the parties outside the Convention will become more important as the Convention package is tested at the next general election. Although not directly participating in the Convention the SNP and the Conservative party have been unable to avoid responding to Convention discussions thus far but their contribution to the debate on women's representation has been minimal. The parties within the Convention have

been put into the position of having to define a position on women's representation. The resulting proposals have presented a challenge to the parties themselves and may have an influence outside Scotland.

Conclusion

Can women lose out of this? Time will tell. The brief review of the history of Scottish women's representation at Westminster reveals a gloomy picture of under-representation. The figures for women's representation in Scottish local government are better and have shown a steady line of increase. Since 1974 the proportion of women councillors in Scottish District Councils has risen from 12.9% in 1974 to 19.6% in 1988, clearly an improvement on the Westminster figures.⁽⁴⁴⁾ These figures offer some support for the view that, even if nothing is done to try to ensure that more women are elected to a Scottish Parliament, there will be more women than at Westminster because a Scottish Parliament is likely to have several features in common with local government. The Westminster record, however, offers a telling answer on what happens if women's representation is left to rise naturally. The lessons from the setting up of new parliaments in Eastern Europe also underline the need to plan for increased women's representation. Despite the introduction of PR electoral systems women's representation tumbled in the new democracies – from 32.2% to 20.5% in the then GDR, from 21% to 8.5% in Bulgaria, from 20.9% to 7% in Hungary, from 29.5% to 6% in Czechoslovakia, and from 34.3% to 3.5% in Romania.⁽⁴⁵⁾

Yet the setting up of a Scottish Parliament offers an exciting opportunity to involve women from the outset. The Green, Labour, and Liberal Democrat parties have committed themselves to improving their record on putting up women candidates. The Constitutional Convention has provided a platform for a wide-ranging debate on how best to involve women in a Scottish Parliament. Equal representation of men and women has been set as one of the criteria to be met by an electoral system. These are positive developments for women's representation.

Some urgency, however, attaches to the final outcome of the Convention negotiations. The next general election must take place by 1992. In the event of a Labour victory a Scottish Parliament could be in place within a year. Such a timescale must concentrate minds. And if a Scottish Parliament is to be in place by 1993 then the parties would begin the candidate selection process some months earlier. If the final choice of an electoral system involves some compulsion on the parties to put up women candidates then in their parties women will be sought out. There will be places for women. If it is left to the parties to resolve in their own way then historical experiences suggest that women will lose out. Even so, in the first round of selections there would be the rare advantage of a clear slate – no sitting members in place. But if the first election to a Scottish Parliament reproduces the 93:7 male:female ratio presented by Westminster then the golden opportunity of making a Scottish

Parliament a place for women as much as for men would have turned to dross. The same uphill struggle to increase women's representation would have to be faced in a Scottish Parliament as in other areas. The moral must be that if women want to make sure of places in a future Scottish Parliament, **NOW** is the time to do so. There will never be a better time.

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August 1991

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6. *Ibid.* See also Jennie Lee, *My Life with Nye*, (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1981), p168, and Jean Mann, *Woman in Parliament* (Odhams, London, 1962), p42.
7. This calculation is based on election statistics drawn from F W S Craig, *British Electoral Facts, 1832-1987*, (Parliamentary Research Services, Aldershot, 1989), *passim*, and *The Year Book for Scotland 1966*, (Scottish Conservative & Unionist Central Office, Edinburgh, 1966), *passim*.
8. For a comparative overview of women's representation see Joni Lovenduski & Jill Hills (eds), *The Politics of the Second Electorate: Women and Public Participation - Britain, USA, Canada, Australia, France, Spain, West Germany, Italy, Sweden, Finland, Eastern Europe, USSR, Japan* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1981).
9. Figures drawn from Lovenduski & Hills, *op cit* and F W S Craig, *op cit*.
10. Elizabeth Vallance, 'Two cheers for equality: Women candidates in the 1987 General Elections', in *Parliamentary Affairs*, January 1988, p 88.
11. *Tribune*, 12 April 1991.
12. *Labour Research*, January 1991, pp9-11.
13. Alice Brown, 'Thatcher's Legacy for Women in Scotland', in *Radical Scotland*, Apr-May 1991.
14. John Bochel, David Denver & Allan Macartney (eds), *The Referendum Experience: Scotland 1979*, (AUP, Aberdeen, 1980), *passim*.
15. Interview with Maidie Hart, cit in Emma Simpson, "'Mainly Manly": The Scottish Constitutional Convention and the implications for women's representation', Edinburgh University Politics Honours dissertation, 1990, pp39-40.
16. Esther Breitenbach, "'Sisters are doing it for themselves": The Women's Movement in Scotland', in *The Scottish Government Yearbook 1990*, (University of Edinburgh, Unit for the Study of Government in Scotland, p216).
17. *M Sprint*, editorial, Issue No 3, cit in Esther Breitenbach, *op cit*, p216.
18. See Esther Breitenbach, *op cit* and "The Impact of Thatcherism on women in Scotland" in *The Scottish Government Yearbook 1989* (University of Edinburgh, Unit for the Study of Government in Scotland); Kate Phillips, letter to *Radical Scotland*, Apr-May 1989; and Alice Brown 'Thatcher's Legacy for Women in

- Scotland', *Radical Scotland*, Apr-May 1991.
19. Leaflet issued by 'A Scottish Women's Claim of Right', Apr 1989.
 20. *Ibid.*
 21. See Jackie Roddick, 'Women and Voting Systems', *Radical Scotland*, Dec 1989-Jan 1990.
 22. *A Woman's Claim of Right in Scotland* (1991). Woman's Claim of Right Group. Edinburgh: Polygon.
 23. Emma Simpson, *op cit*, p21.
 24. *Ibid.*, p40.
 25. See 'Women and a Scottish Parliament', pp85-103, in *Towards Scotland's Parliament, Consultation Document and Report to the Scottish People, Oct 1989*, (Scottish Constitutional Convention, Edinburgh, 1989).
 26. *Ibid.*, p93.
 27. *Ibid.*
 28. *Ibid.*, p92 & pp99-100.
 29. *Towards Scotland's Parliament, A Report to the Scottish People by the Scottish Constitutional Convention*, Nov 1990, (Scottish Constitutional Convention, Edinburgh, 1990), p17.
 30. Information supplied to the author by Yvonne Strachan and Jane MacKay of the STUC Women's Committee.
 31. 'Women and a Scottish Parliament', Scottish Constitutional Convention, *op cit*, p102.
 32. Maria Fyfe, 'Womens' Voice - Equal Representation', in *Equal Voice*, Winter 1989-90.
 33. 'Women and Scotland's Parliament', Scottish Constitutional Convention, *op cit*, p101.
 34. Information supplied to the author by Irene Brandt of the Scottish Green Party.
 35. *Report of the Scottish Liberal Democrats' Women's Commission*, Nov 1990, p4.
 36. *Ibid.*, pp4-5.
 37. Sheila Ritchie speaking at meetings of the Scottish Constitutional Convention in Apr and June 1990.
 38. *Report of the Scottish Liberal Democrats' Women's Commission*, Nov 1990, p6.
 39. Emma Simpson, *op cit*, *passim*.
 40. Executive Statement passed at Scottish Labour Party Conference, Aberdeen, March 1991.
 41. *Towards Scotland's Parliament, A Report to the Scottish People by the Scottish Constitutional Convention, Nov 1990*, (Scottish Constitutional Convention, Edinburgh, 1990), p17.
 42. *Guardian* 12 July 1991.
 43. Alice Brown 'Women in Scottish Politics', paper presented to ECPR Conference, University of Essex, 22-28 March 1991, p16.
 44. Information provided by the Scottish Local Government Information Unit based on statistics compiled by John Bochel and David Denver following the 1988 District Council elections.
 45. *Guardian*, 25 July 1990.