

CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION'S CAMPAIGN

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By mid summer 1990, the Scottish Constitutional Convention was nearing completion of the first task set for it by the "Claim of Right for Scotland" document which was to "draw up a scheme for a Scottish Assembly."

The Convention members then began to look ahead to the next stage outlined in the "Claim of Right" which was to "mobilise Scottish opinion behind that scheme."

To help achieve this objective the Campaign for a Scottish Assembly received funding from the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust to pay for a Campaign Director for the Convention until the next General Election. At the same time the CSA provided from their own funds finance to pay for a part-time Associate Director.

Harry Conroy, former General Secretary of the National Union of Journalists was appointed Campaign Director and took up his post on September 3 1990, while Kathy Galloway, a Church of Scotland Minister joined the Campaign staff as Associate Director in mid-October. Unfortunately Ms Galloway had to resign in January 1991, for family reasons.

The Convention agreed to final key proposals for a Scottish Parliament at their sixth plenary meeting in the Queen's Hall, Edinburgh on September 27 1990, and that these should be included in a document giving additional background material to the Convention's work and presented to the Scottish people.

It was agreed that the most appropriate date for such a presentation would be St Andrew's Day, November 30 and the newly opened Royal Concert Hall in Glasgow was chosen as the venue.

The public launch of the final document entitled "Towards Scotland's Parliament" was presented in a gala fashion with leading Scottish political figures sharing the Concert Hall stage with Scots entertainers. To add to the historic significance of the occasion the civic heads of Scotland's Regional and District Councils were invited to attend in addition to the Convention members.

Senior representatives of the major organisations within the Convention endorsed the proposals from the platform. They were John Smith, MP,

Labour Party's Shadow Chancellor, Malcolm Bruce, Leader of the Scottish Liberal Democrats, Norman Shanks, Convener of the Church of Scotland's Church and Nation Committee, Jean McFadden, President of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, Campbell Christie, General Secretary of the STUC and Isobel Lindsay, Convener of the Campaign for a Scottish Assembly.

The St Andrew's Day event was also seen as the start of the second phase of the Convention's work and 100,000 copies of an eight page tabloid newspaper "Scotland's Voice" were produced to both publicise the proposals and inform the public.

A leaflet summarising the main Convention proposals was also published by the Campaign office which carried for the first time the "Scotland's Parliament - We Say Yes" logo designed to identify the Campaign.

The publicity material was an integral part of the Campaign strategy which was agreed by the Convention's Executive in the run-up to the St Andrew's Day launch.

The agreed strategy was:

- (i) To launch a media campaign to gain publicity for the proposals in TV, radio and press.
- (ii) To organise a Parliamentary campaign to put pressure on the Government to accept the Convention's proposals.
- (iii) To carry out a grass-roots campaign to inform the Scottish public about the proposals and seek their support.

During the period between September and November 30, the Convention came under pressure on the question of a referendum. Those supporting a referendum argued that only by such means could the Convention demonstrate support for their scheme and force an intransigent Government to implement the proposals.

The debate attracted a great deal of media comment both within and outside the Convention with a call being made for a multi-option referendum with the voters being given the choice between (1) status quo (2) Convention's proposals for a Scottish Parliament within the United Kingdom (3) Independence outside of the UK but within the EC.

The Convention's Executive Committee agreed a statement which said that the way to test public opinion was at the General Election, when parties endorsing the Convention's proposals would be making a manifesto commitment to secure the earliest possible implementation of the proposals.

The Executive went on to say that whether a referendum is necessary or

what form it would take would depend on the outcome of the General Election, and the willingness of the Westminster Parliament to accept the clearly expressed mandate of the Scottish people.

The discussion led to the Scottish Green Party suspending their Convention membership although they had agreed the proposals contained in "Towards Scotland's Parliament" and did not withdraw their support for these.

Immediately following the November 30 launch of the Convention's proposals the Campaign and Co-ordinating Working Group met to discuss how to go about implementing the agreed strategy.

The first salvo in the parliamentary campaign was fired on December 21 at a Campaign Press Conference when the political parties announced they would be pressing for a Scottish Grand Committee debate on the constitutional issue to take place in the former High School building in Edinburgh which in 1978 had been earmarked as the home of the Scottish Assembly.

Donald Dewar, MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Scotland and Malcolm Bruce, MP, Leader of the Scottish Liberal Democrats, joined forces under the Convention banner to make the call. This was a high profile media and Parliamentary launch for the Campaign work to illustrate that the constitutional question remained a live issue on the political agenda.

The Government were not keen for a debate on this issue to be held in Edinburgh and eventually after months of haggling the debate took place in Westminster on June 25.

At the same time the Campaign had to plan ahead although it was constrained in how far ahead by the fact that the timing of the next General Election was now high on the political agenda. The Campaign also had to adapt to changing circumstances and the departure of Mrs Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister and her replacement by John Major had to be taken account of.

Mrs Thatcher was extremely unpopular in Scotland and had not shown a great enthusiasm for visiting the country. Mr Major on moving into No 10 Downing Street immediately claimed he would be a "listening PM" and actively promoted a more positive image in Scotland.

Shortly after taking office he visited Edinburgh but confined most of his brief time to meeting Conservative Party supporters. The Convention's Executive Committee Chair, Canon Kenyon Wright, issued a statement on the day of Mr Major's visit, January 11 1991, regretting that Mr Major had not met a wider range of Scottish opinion. Canon Wright said: "He claims to be willing

and even eager to listen. Sadly the present visit leaves Scots still looking for the evidence."

The Convention wished to establish if the arrival of a new Prime Minister signalled a possible change in the Government's attitude towards devolution. Under Mrs Thatcher the Conservative Party had distanced themselves from Mr Heath's "Perth Declaration" and set themselves firmly against any transfer of political power from Westminster. The Convention wanted to know would Mr Major alter this policy or at least have a more open mind on the issue and at least listened to the arguments.

Despite describing himself as a "listener", the first signs were not encouraging from the Convention's viewpoint. During his initial brief visit to Scotland he expressed his personal opposition to a Scottish Parliament, citing as an argument against the "higher taxation" which would result from such a reform. It appeared the office holder had changed but the message had not.

A few days later Canon Kenyon Wright rebuked the Prime Minister. The Campaign office issued, as a Press Release, extracts from a speech Canon Wright made at the Edinburgh University Union in which he said: "The Prime Minister sadly blew the chance to use his first visit to Scotland, to do some real listening. The greatest proof that he has not been listening, is his repetition of the old chestnut that a Scottish Parliament will inevitably and automatically cost the Scottish people and businesses more in taxation."

However, the Convention's Campaign and Co-ordinating Committee believed Mr Major should be given an opportunity to hear the case for the Convention's proposals personally to establish (1) if Mr Major was, as he claimed, a "listening PM" and (2) if there was any change in Conservative Party policy.

The belief that the occupant of No 10 Downing Street had changed but the anti-devolution policy remained unaltered grew with the publication of a letter to Harry Ewing, MP, joint Chair of the Convention from Mr Major in which he reiterated his opposition to the Convention scheme once again citing higher taxation flowing inevitably from a devolved system of Government.

The Convention reacted to the publication of this letter by convening a Press Conference in Glasgow attended by Labour's Donald Dewar and Liberal Democrat Malcolm Bruce and chaired by Canon Wright to publicly answer the Prime Minister's assertions in relation to taxation and to call on him to meet the Convention.

Canon Wright said: "We ask the Prime Minister on his next visit to Scotland, to meet a broadly-based and representative group from the Scottish Constitutional Convention, so that Scotland's case can be honestly put and genuinely heard".

Following this Press Conference the Campaign and Co-ordinating Working Group (CWG) decided that a direct approach should be made to the Prime Minister asking for a meeting.

The letter was signed by the Joint Chairs of the Convention, Harry Ewing MP, and Sir David Steel MP, as well as Canon Wright, Chair of the Convention's Executive Committee.

In their letter, dated March 27, the Convention leaders wrote: "Your expressed wish to listen, and the substantial areas of misunderstanding or misrepresentation persuade us that we should request an early meeting with you in order that you may be in no doubt as the views and acceptance of the Scottish people. We look forward to hearing that you are willing to meet us".

A month later Mr Major replied declining a meeting.

The media/political campaign was continuing in other areas during the crossing of swords with Mr Major. From the start of the Campaign it was recognised that efforts should be made to raise public interest/knowledge of the Convention's proposals among the public living in other parts of the United Kingdom. To do this the Convention had first to interest the London-based media. In the run-up to the launch of "Towards Scotland's Parliament" there had only been sporadic interest in the Convention's existence by the UK national media and it was agreed that we should organise a briefing in the House of Commons for lobby correspondents.

Such a meeting was organised for February 6 with the joint Chairs, Harry Ewing and Sir David Steel in attendance in addition to Canon Kenyon Wright, Donald Dewar, Malcolm Bruce and Campbell Christie, General Secretary of the STUC. The attendance of 15 journalist representatives was satisfactory but what was disappointing was that only 4 were from the London-based media.

A further attempt was made to interest the media in the South by inviting James Cornford, Director of the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) to attend a Convention Press Conference in Glasgow on March 27 on "Constitutional Change in the UK". Mr Cornford was invited because his Institute are at present preparing a report on the topic. They are examining the feasibility of creating a number of regional assemblies in England and Wales in addition to a Scottish Parliament. Once again the issue received publicity in Scotland but was ignored elsewhere in the UK.

Efforts will continue to be made to stimulate media interest at least in the London quality titles and it is hoped that the reports from the IPPR and the Labour Party's Constitutional Committee which is looking at devolution throughout the UK will attract media attention when they are released in the summer.

At the same time as the various media and political thrusts were taking place the "grass-roots" campaign began to take shape. The CWG had agreed in December that a series of regional launches of "Towards Scotland's Parliament" should be organised throughout Scotland. The aim of the regional launches is to continue to demonstrate that the Convention is not a Central Scotland body but one which represents the interests of all parts of the country. The first such launch took place in February 17 and 18 taking in Aberdeen, Inverness and Elgin.

During the two-day visit the Convention was represented by Canon Kenyon Wright, Malcolm Bruce, Campbell Christie and Donald Dewar.

The North of Scotland launch began with a Press Conference in Aberdeen's Music Hall followed by a meeting with representatives of local organisations and Grampian Regional and Aberdeen District Councillors. Prior to the evening meeting Mr Bob Middleton, Convener of the Regional Council, invited the delegation to an informal meal. The following day the party travelled to Inverness where once again there was a conference with local and regional media representatives. Provost Allan Sellar of Inverness District Council hosted a lunch for the delegation before they departed for Elgin, where the Convention members met the Moray District Council before addressing a public meeting in Elgin Town Hall.

A further regional launch took place on April 8 when the same delegation visited Stranraer and Dumfries, once again meeting local press and Dumfries and Galloway Regional Councillors as well as Stewartry and Nithsdale District Councillors. The one-day visit ended with a public meeting in the County Buildings, Dumfries.

A third regional launch was held on August 19 with a visit to Tayside. On this occasion the delegation comprised Canon Kenyon Wright, Campbell Christie, John Maxton MP, Jean McFadden, President of COSLA and a Liberal Democrat MP.

To further involve as many groups as possible and at the same time demonstrate public support for the Convention's proposals a **POSTCARD CAMPAIGN** was launched in the Spring. The postcards carried the simple message "*Dear Mr Major, I say YES to a Scottish Parliament*" and the public were asked to write their name, address and signature on the card before returning it to the Convention's Campaign office. To focus attention on the **POSTCARD CAMPAIGN** a "We Say Yes" day was organised on May 4 with local groups throughout Scotland being asked to go into their shopping centres with the cards and other publicity material to publicise the Convention's proposals and seek support. Stalls were organised in Glasgow (several) Edinburgh (several) Elgin, Forres, East Kilbride, Biggar, Paisley, Kirkcaldy, Ayr, Irvine, Stirling, Dumfries and Bathgate.

The **POSTCARD CAMPAIGN** was launched by actress and comedienne Elaine C Smith of "Rab C Nesbitt" fame and thousands of cards have been distributed through trade unions, Labour, Scottish Liberal Democrats, Communist parties and Campaign for a Scottish Assembly branches. On June 25 Canon Kenyon Wright and Isobel Lindsay, Convener of the Campaign for a Scottish Assembly delivered more than 5,000 signed cards to the Scottish Office in reply to a statement made in the Commons by Scottish Office Minister Allan Stewart that the Government had received only 246 pieces of correspondence on the devolution issue and 222 were against devolution. It later transpired that the 222 against were cards organised by the Young Conservatives.

At the same time the Campaign office have produced publicity material prepared in addition to the newspaper and leaflet. This material was aimed to help local groups raise funds for the Campaign and to give the Convention a visible presence at trade union and political conferences. The material included Gaelic as well as English language posters and stickers.

During the March, April, May period the main British political parties had their Scottish Conferences as well as the STUC. The Campaign office had a stand at the Labour, Liberal Democrat and STUC Conferences in addition to fringe meetings at the political conferences.

The Conference season was an important period for the Convention as "Towards Scotland's Parliament" featured as a major debate at all but the Tory Conference. The debates not only engendered a greater understanding of the Convention's proposals among those taking part but also generated publicity.

It was not expected that the Conservative Party would debate the Convention's proposals at their Scottish Conference in May and the CWG agreed to challenge prominent Conservatives to debate the proposals at a fringe meeting. However, what did come as a surprise was the Conservative Party's decision not to debate devolution at all – at least that was the Party manager's ambition.

The reality was somewhat different. The non-debate became the biggest debate of the Conservative Conference under the guise of a motion relating to local government reform.

However, the formal decision not to allow such a debate gave added importance to the Convention's challenge, which was issued to Edinburgh Councillor, Struan Stevenson, Bill Walker, MP for North Tayside and Sir Nicholas Fairbairn, MP for Perth and Kinross.

The Convention chose as their representatives Canon Kenyon Wright, Alistair Darling, Labour MP for Edinburgh Central and Bob McCreadie, Vice

Chair of the Scottish Liberal Democrats. The Convention side turned up but the Conservatives refused to participate. This added to and helped focus the Conservative Party's leadership unwillingness to debate the issue. Individual Conservatives in the build up to the Conference proposed a variety of devolution schemes and there were a number of pro and anti fringe meetings during the Conference organised by various factions within the Tory Party.

The Convention's meeting went ahead with three empty chairs where the Conservatives should have been seated and attracted considerable media coverage before, during and after.

The Convention intends to maintain a visible presence at future political and trade union conference meetings in Scotland where political policy and decision-makers gather and at the time of writing plan a presence at the Educational Institute of Scotland Conference in Perth and the NALGO Conference in Glasgow. Bearing in mind the importance attached to taking the issue South of the Border there will be a major drive to establish the Convention in the minds of the 2,500 delegates attending the British TUC Congress in Glasgow early in September.

Part of the media campaign strategy has been to develop how a Scottish Parliament would possibly affect the day-to-day issues facing the public.

In April there was a Press Conference on "A Scottish Parliament and Education" with Jim Martin, the General Secretary of the EIS, alongside spokespersons from the Labour and Scottish Liberal Democrats giving their views on how education would benefit from a Scottish Parliament.

On July 5 a further "theme" Press Conference was held on Health. Canon Kenyon Wright chaired this conference which was attended by Sam Galbraith, Labour MP and Charles Kennedy, Scottish Liberal Democrat MP as well as Bob Thomson, Chair of the STUC's Health Services Committee. A third Press Conference is being organised on the Economy and Jobs in conjunction with the STUC.

Another oft forgotten aspect of the Convention's proposals is their relationship with Europe. The Convention members have recognised that as the EC develops the regions of Europe will insist on having a direct influence on EC policy-making. Mechanisms are already being developed to allow the regions such as the Basques and the Catalonians to be part of the consultation procedure. The UK at present has no means to participate in this regional process.

Recognising the need for a European dimension the Convention is actively arranging a briefing for consulates and embassies on "Towards Scotland's Parliament". A much more ambitious project is the organising of a Seminar in Edinburgh or Glasgow to discuss the regional role in Europe with

representatives from the numerous regions being invited to attend.

We therefore are seeking to develop the Campaign not only within Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom but also abroad, another example of which was the Executive Chair's New Year message to the Scottish "diaspora" around the world. The message was sent to Scottish societies in Hong Kong, Australia, New Zealand, USA and Canada.

In addition to these activities the Convention speakers are invited to address meetings throughout the country with Canon Wright alone doing two meetings a week. Publicity and information is constantly being distributed through CSA branches, political parties and trade unions. Almost 90,000 copies of Scotland's Voice have been circulated in Scotland and 80,000 of the "We Say Yes" leaflet.

To keep Convention members aware of the Campaign and Convention activities a four-page newsletter "Scotwatch" has been published and it is hoped this will become a quarterly publication.

And to join in the summer fun a coloured postcard featuring the former Edinburgh High School building superimposed on the colours of the Saltire has been printed. The postcards carry the message "Scotland's Parliament – We Say YES". A special edition of this card is being printed with the No 10 Downing Street address to allow Scots to send Mr Major a postcard during the summer recess!

The Convention also plan to play a part in the Edinburgh Festival with debates on the effects a Scottish Parliament could have on culture and broadcasting being held in the Traverse Theatre and the Edinburgh City Chambers.

At the present time the Convention's Campaign must work on the basis of a possible October election and maintain a public profile through the summer months to ensure that the electorate are aware of the Convention's proposals and where the various political parties stand in relation to them. If there is no Autumn election then the Campaign will obviously continue through into 1992.

Election or no election, one date is already firmly marked on the Convention's calendar and that is November 30 1991 the first anniversary of the launch of "Towards Scotland's Parliament". There will be an "event" to celebrate the occasion.

It should be noted that the Campaign activities described here have been carried out with few resources. The National Graphical Association and the West of Scotland and Scottish Graphical Branch of SOGAT provided an office and finance for office equipment.

The Campaign for a Scottish Assembly also through their membership raises funds but the Campaign has to be mainly self-financing by selling publicity material to Convention members.

Despite these constraints more Scots than ever are being made aware, and being given the opportunity to support the Campaign slogan "Scotland's Parliament – We Say YES" or in our Gaelic tongue "Parlamaid N H-Alba – Canaidh Sinn Tha!"

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