

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Friday 13 October 2000
(*Afternoon*)

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Scottish Parliament

Friday 13 October 2000

(Afternoon)

[THE PRESIDING OFFICER *opened the meeting at 14:00*]

One Minute's Silence

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): I declare this special meeting of the Parliament open, and invite colleagues, friends and guests to stand for a minute's silence while we remember Donald Dewar.

14:01

The Presiding Officer: This is not a meeting that any of us would have wished to hold. The news of our First Minister's death came with such devastating suddenness, after we had all assumed that he had come safely through his serious heart operation.

It is cruel how Scotland has been robbed in recent years of so many able politicians in their prime: John P Mackintosh, Labour; Alick Buchanan-Smith, Conservative; Allan Macartney, SNP; John Smith; and now Donald Dewar. Donald, however, at least had the satisfaction of leaving behind the completion of what he described as first a hope, then a belief, then a promise and then a reality—the restoration of Scotland's Parliament after 300 years.

He questioned the title "father of the nation", but he was without question the father of the Parliament. Under his leadership, this new Parliament had already found its head, its energy and its skills. Today, as it meets to mourn his death, it has found its heart.

Over the past two days, hundreds of tributes have been paid to Donald Dewar, so many that it is difficult to find anything new to say about him. We do not need to find anything new to say, because what is remarkable about all the newspaper coverage is that the same words keep leaping out from different pages—decency, integrity, trust, dignity, scholar, service and commitment.

Tributes have been coming in from all manner of people. He visited the Irish Parliament a few months ago. Its Presiding Officer wrote to me:

"Having paid tribute to the integrity and proficiency of such a fine politician, the members of the Dáil rose in prayerful silence."

In May, we had a visit from the President of Malawi. Donald's heart trouble had already been diagnosed and he had cancelled most of his engagements prior to his operation. However, he was due to give a dinner in Edinburgh Castle for the President and he told me, "That is one I am going to keep." He not only gave the dinner, but he spent the evening showing the President round the castle and over the honours of Scotland, revelling in expounding our history and discussing Scotland's links with Africa through David Livingstone and others. On Wednesday evening, within hours of the tragic news, I was astonished to receive a telephone call from the President of Malawi himself, expressing his sadness and conveying his condolences to the Parliament. Those two tributes show how Donald touched and impressed those whom he had met but fleetingly. How much more painful, therefore, is his loss to

those who knew him well.

However, tributes have come not just from the great and the powerful, but from every walk of life. One Scottish organisation wrote:

“While we and he had not seen eye to eye on every aspect of policy, it had been a comfort to know that the Executive was headed by a man who personified the highest possible standards in public life.”

I add the words of two typical individuals, which I have chosen at random. One said that he

“was not a supporter of his party but, like many others, knew him to be a great ambassador for Scotland and a genuinely good man.”

Another stated:

“Yesterday should have been a day of celebration for me—it was my 40th birthday. I had never met the man, but when I heard the news of his death, I simply had no stomach for a party.”

Furthermore, one entry in our condolence book contains, alongside the signature, just one word: “Thankyou”. That is what we come together today to say. However, Donald would not forgive us if we turned this into a greetin meeting, because there was one other characteristic of Donald’s that I have not yet mentioned—he was always enormous fun to be with. I am going to miss our tête-à-tête dinners dreadfully.

Let me tell you about two episodes with Donald, which both—like all good Donald stories—involve food. More than 40 years ago, a group of Scottish university students visited the Soviet Union. Donald was one, I was another and the Deputy Presiding Officer, George Reid, was also there. We spent a week in Moscow and a week in Leningrad, and the food—especially student food—was of disgustingly poor quality; indeed, a few of us, including Donald, were quite ill.

On our arrival in Kiev for the third week, we sat down to lunch. Suddenly, plates of cream buns appeared and Donald more or less led a standing ovation. He inquired hopefully whether, by any chance, any of the rest of us did not like cream buns and generally displayed such excessive enthusiasm that, to his delight, our host produced cream buns again for dinner. He also produced them for breakfast the next morning, and again at lunch, and for every single meal during that week. I blame Donald for the fact that I have never since then been able to face a cream bun.

On Monday evening, the night before he died, I formally opened the new visitors centre at Holyrood. I spoke of the progress on our new building and of the importance of public access to its development. I paid tribute to architect Enric Miralles, whose widow was with us. I had just finished my speech when Donald shambled into the room. I had not been expecting him and mockingly scolded him saying, “You’ve just missed

the best part of the evening.” With a withering look, he said, “Your speech? Oh, I don’t think so. These look like excellent canapés.” He added, “As a matter of fact, David, I think I have just demonstrated for you yet again my impeccable sense of judgment and timing.”

Donald Dewar elevated the profession of politician. As an occupation, politics is too easily derided, but to be a politician should be the highest and noblest calling of all—involvement in the responsible and accountable governance of people’s lives. In a television interview about a decade ago, Lord Hailsham said:

“Nobody I think who knows enough about politics really wants to be a leader. Only a fool would want to stand in that position when you are exposed to the whims of fortune and chance and all the rest of it.”

I do not agree. Of course leadership involves taking knocks and Donald had his share, both personal and political. However, it also provides an opportunity to point a course, to stamp a platform and to gather others to one’s cause—Donald used his qualities of leadership to do all of those.

Now that he is gone, where does that leave us? I commend to you lines by Archbishop Darbyshire, who wrote:

“Not names engraved in marble make
The best memorials of the dead;
But burdens shouldered for their sake
And tasks completed in their stead.”

All of us in the chamber have tasks to complete in his stead.

Motion of Condolence

14:09

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): I call Jim Wallace, the acting First Minister, to speak to and move the motion of condolence, motion S1M-1260.

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Justice (Mr Jim Wallace): The motion before us this afternoon states:

"That the Parliament expresses its deep regret and sadness at the untimely death of its First Minister, The Rt Hon Donald Dewar MP, MSP; offers its sympathy and sincere condolences to his family and many friends whose grief is shared by all members of this Parliament; agrees that tributes should be paid to a distinguished Parliamentarian and great leader of Scotland; further agrees that as a mark of respect no other business will be taken today."

Today we meet as a Parliament that is tragically bereft. Indeed, Scotland is a nation bereft. We have reconvened to express our deep shock at the sudden and oh, so untimely death of our First Minister, Donald Dewar. We meet to pay tribute to a great leader, an outstanding parliamentarian, a colleague and a friend. Put simply, Donald was a fundamentally honest and decent man. He was also a loyal man. He was loyal to his friends, to his colleagues and to the Labour party—the party that he not only led, but to which he devoted his life. Above all, he was loyal to Scotland. Our grief and sense of loss is shared by millions who never met him or knew him. However, the thoughts and most heartfelt sympathy of all of us in the Parliament go to his closest friends and to those who loved him most—Marion and Ian.

I met Donald first about 20 years ago in a Glasgow sheriff court, but I hasten to add that we were both there in a professional capacity. Later, we became friends, even although we were political opponents most of the time. However, recently I had the privilege of working with Donald in Government. Ours was a partnership that was based not only on a written agreement, but on trust. Donald Dewar was a man whom people could trust. His parliamentary skills were legendary, although wonderfully expressive phrases such as, "Get down on your hunkers", delivered in his typical quick-fire manner, must have created consternation among the Hansard reporters.

Donald relished the cut and thrust of political debate, but what he relished most was doing things—achieving things, turning political words into political action and making a difference for people, most of all here in Scotland.

Donald Dewar loved Scotland. He loved

Scotland's places, Scotland's art, Scotland's culture, Scotland's history and even Scotland's football. Most important, he loved Scotland's people and spent a lifetime in politics fighting for a fairer and more socially just nation. Each of us will have heard him argue with passion that his constituents in one of our country's most deprived areas should enjoy the same opportunities, the same life chances and the same life expectancy as those who live in Scotland's more affluent communities.

If Donald loved Scotland's people, the tributes from across the land have shown just how much the people loved and revered him. It is difficult enough for a politician to earn respect, but it requires a very special person to earn respect and win affection. Donald Dewar was a man who, through a lifetime of tireless political service, showed that our profession of politics can be a noble calling.

In one respect, for Donald the opening of our Parliament was the culmination of years of dedicated and sustained endeavour: the bitter disappointments of 1979; the long years in Opposition; the hope that was rekindled by the constitutional convention; the scale of the referendum victory; the delivery of the Scotland Act 1998; the establishment of this Parliament; and the historic achievement of becoming our first First Minister. For Donald, however, the creation of our Parliament was not enough. In the memorable speech that he delivered in the chamber on 1 July last year he said:

"A Scottish Parliament. Not an end: a means to greater ends."

He looked forward to the days

"when this Chamber will sound with debate, argument and passion. When men and women from all over Scotland will meet to work together for a future built from the first principles of social justice."

Therefore, how fitting it is that we pay tribute to Donald Dewar today in the Scottish Parliament—the Parliament for which he campaigned, the Parliament that he delivered and the Parliament that he led.

As leader of the Scottish Liberal Democrats, I want to share a quote from the great Liberal Prime Minister, W E Gladstone, although I know that had Donald still been with us, he would have rolled his eyes to the ceiling at this point and come out with a witty and well-honed put-down. However, Donald had a keen sense of political history, so I have decided to share the quote anyway.

In a speech that he gave in the Dalkeith Corn Exchange in November 1879, William Gladstone said:

"The man who shall devise a machinery by which some portion of the excessive and impossible task now laid upon

the House of Commons shall be shifted to the more free and therefore more efficient hands of devolved authorities, will confer a blessing upon his country that will entitle him to be reckoned among the prominent benefactors of the land."

Donald Dewar was the man who devised and delivered such machinery.

This Parliament is his legacy, not only to the Scotland of today, but to future generations of Scots. Our most real and lasting tribute to Donald Dewar will be to secure the Parliament's success and, through that, to build a nation of which he would have been proud.

We will miss him terribly.

I move,

That the Parliament expresses its deep regret and sadness at the untimely death of its First Minister, The Rt Hon Donald Dewar MP, MSP; offers its sympathy and sincere condolences to his family and many friends whose grief is shared by all members of this Parliament; agrees that tributes should be paid to a distinguished Parliamentarian and great leader of Scotland; further agrees that as a mark of respect no other business will be taken today.

14:16

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): I begin by associating the Scottish National Party with the motion moved by Jim Wallace.

I wish to express the sadness of the Scottish National Party at the death of Donald Dewar and to extend our sympathy to Marion and Ian Dewar, to Donald's many friends and to all those who worked alongside him in the Executive, in the Labour party, in the civil service and in the Scottish Parliament. We have all lost a fine colleague.

These have been difficult days for everyone in Scotland—unimaginably difficult days for those who were closest to Donald Dewar. We all pray that in the days ahead, everyone who has been affected by the death of our First Minister will find comfort and peace.

I speak today after only three weeks as Donald Dewar's opposite number, but I speak on behalf of all my colleagues who enjoyed co-operation—and conflict—with Donald over many years. Donald was a man whose legacy we see around us: he was a man who changed a nation for the better. What greater tribute can there be?

This Parliament is our nation's Parliament. It was crafted by the skills and energies of many people. Donald Dewar talked about those people—some of whom did not live long enough to see our Parliament—on 1 July last year when he stated:

"Today, we reach back through the long haul to win this Parliament, through the struggles of those who brought democracy to Scotland".

He was talking about others, but today I am talking about him.

Donald Dewar was a man who supported devolution when it was in fashion and when it was out of fashion. To the exasperation of his spin doctors, but to the delight of the people, being in fashion never seemed to fash Donald Dewar.

We heard a poem about Scotland by Iain Crichton Smith on the Parliament's opening day. He called on our country to be

"true to itself and to its origins,
Inventive, original, philosophical".

Donald Dewar was a man who was true to himself and to his origins. The Scotland Act 1998, which he delivered, was an inventive and original piece of legislation. He devoted his energies and intellect to crafting—through many battles, I am sure—legislation that has given clarity to our Scottish Parliament.

Donald Dewar never saw the Scottish Parliament as an end in itself, but he saw it as the means to transform the lives of the people of our country—today I salute him for that.

Donald had a habit of often expressing the grandest of comments in a downbeat or matter-of-fact way—perhaps even using massive understatement. He opened his last major speech, which he delivered on 29 September in Dublin, with these words:

"Political dialogue is not always easy in my country".

Well, we can all think of moments that showed that he had a point, but we can also think of times when political dialogue has worked and when Donald Dewar ensured that that was the case.

I think particularly of the 1997 referendum campaign. After a bruising election, Donald went out of his way—in the language that he used, in the style that he deployed and in the dialogue that he undertook—to ensure that we in the Scottish National Party, with our different yet complementary agenda, could play our part in delivering the devolved Parliament. The mechanism that he used for that purpose—the pledge that he gave to that end—was a plain recognition that the people who live in this country have the ability to determine their own future.

Donald captured that sense again in his speech to Parliament on 1 July 1999, when he stated:

"For me, for any Scot, today is a proud moment; a new stage on a journey begun long ago and which has no end."

For all that we had—still have—different visions of our final destination, Donald Dewar saw that we all agreed that the journey had to begin. He made sure that it did. Donald Dewar was able on that and other occasions to reach beyond his party interest to speak to and for the whole of Scotland.

One strong voice has gone, but its echo will remain; its message will continue in all our voices, determined to make this Parliament a success and determined to win the precious social justice that Donald Dewar sought in his political life.

In the past few days, many people, including a number of people in the SNP, have spoken of the immense loyalty and affection that Donald Dewar generated in those who worked closely with him. I am told that civil servants referred to him not only respectfully as the First Minister, but as “the boss”. He led and was part of a team. To build, motivate and hold the genuine affection of such a team shows the very special combination of qualities that were held by our late First Minister.

In conclusion I will refer for the last time to some words that were used by Donald Dewar when he addressed Parliament at its state opening. It is a speech to which I have referred frequently, because it was a most beautiful speech. Donald talked of the four words that are woven into the symbolic thistles on our mace. Those four words are wisdom, justice, compassion and integrity. Those are words that we should live up to in the Parliament—they are our founding principles.

Today, we reflect on the sad loss of our First Minister; the loss of a towering figure in Scottish politics and the loss of a father and a grandfather. For some, that loss is the loss of a friend. For some, it is the loss of a colleague and for others, it is the loss of an adversary. For us all, it is the loss of a fellow Scots parliamentarian.

We can hold firm to the words on our mace. We can say truly of Donald Dewar that, in his life, he offered wisdom, justice, compassion and integrity. In his memory, we in the Parliament should live up to those words.

14:22

David McLetchie (Lothians) (Con): I am pleased to associate the Scottish Conservative party with the terms of the motion of condolence that was moved by Jim Wallace.

Any tribute to Donald Dewar must recognise his enormous contribution to Scottish political life, but it is equally, if not more, important to recognise his qualities as a man. The regard in which he is held by Scots from all walks of life is recognition not only of his political talents and achievements, but of the way in which he conducted himself in public life. He was a towering figure—literally and metaphorically.

One does not have to be of the same political persuasion as another to recognise in them someone who has ability, sincerity and conviction. Donald Dewar was committed to serving his fellow Scots and to improving the lives of everyone in our

country. It is a goal that we all share, even if we may differ on what the means should be.

The creation of a Scottish Parliament was central to the achievement of his goal. It was for him, as we all know, a very personal crusade. As opponents of the proposals, we in the Conservative party know only too well that no one did more than Donald Dewar to advance that case with rational argument and passion, which was founded on his conviction that it was the right course for Scotland. By delivering overwhelming majorities in the referendum, he put devolution beyond doubt. That has changed the political landscape for ever for all of us and not least for those in my party.

Once the dust of the election battle had settled, his appointment as the first First Minister of the Scottish Parliament was a foregone but fitting conclusion. It was a post made for him and made by him.

Sadly, his time as First Minister has been cut short, but his place in the history books is assured. To attain high office in politics is a long climb to the top of a greasy pole. However, to hold high office with distinction requires greater qualities and virtues. It is widely recognised that Donald Dewar had those qualities and virtues in abundance. He was a man who combined many of the traditional virtues that we admire in our fellow citizens—honesty, decency, integrity, industry and self-sacrifice. He brought those qualities and virtues to this most modern of Parliaments.

My acquaintance with Donald Dewar was short compared with that of many of the others who have paid tribute to him in recent days, because I am one of the 105 members of the Scottish Parliament who have not previously been a member of any Parliament. However, as one of the new boys, I appreciated Donald’s unflinching courtesy towards opponents and his sense of propriety, which brought dignity to our proceedings. Donald Dewar set the standard for Scotland’s Parliament—a standard to which we can all aspire, even if few of us will equal it.

As I know from my regular jousts with Donald at question time, he was a man who relished debate and possessed great intellect, erudition and a sharp wit. In the modern vernacular, he would be described as a class act. As many people have pointed out, Donald Dewar was a politician who had a wide range of interests—art, history and literature. He brought a width of knowledge and learning to the chamber, with which he enriched our debates.

We all have personal memories of him. I recall a question time last April when he commented that I had a “pawky manner”, which

“occasionally suggests something from Trollope.”—[Official

Report, 6 April 2000; Vol 5, c 1457.]

As I sat in my seat thinking of a response, I knew only two things. First, it was Anthony and not Joanna Trollope whom he was talking about. Secondly, if Donald Dewar said that one was like a character from a Trollope novel, it was a judgement that it would be pointless to contest.

We were all deeply shocked and saddened by the death of Donald Dewar, none more so than his close colleagues who worked with him from day to day. On Tuesday and Wednesday of this week, it fell to his adviser, David Whitton, to undertake the distressing and unenviable task of reporting to the country on the First Minister's condition. I would like to place on record our admiration for the moving and professional manner in which David Whitton discharged that role.

However, our greatest sympathies are reserved for Donald Dewar's family and all our thoughts are with them at this time. I hope that in the days and weeks ahead, knowledge of the country's deep respect, regard and affection for Donald Dewar will bring them comfort and strength. They can take pride in the fact that, by his life and work, he will be remembered as a Scotsman for all seasons.

14:27

The Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Henry McLeish): When Donald Dewar walked into this Parliament 15 months ago, as First Minister at the first meeting of the first Scottish Parliament, he spoke not only as the architect of Scottish devolution, but as the advocate for what had shaped his lifetime of service—social justice.

We all think of Donald not simply as a parliamentary colleague, but as a friend. We do not bear the full impact of this tragedy, unlike Donald's family—Marion and Ian—and his close friends, but we feel their loss and we are thinking about them today.

As a nation, here in our new Parliament we mourn together the loss of Donald. Today, in our grief, we speak for the whole Scottish nation, giving voice to the feelings of all the communities that we represent.

In an age of cynicism about politicians, to the people of Scotland, Donald was never "one of them"—he was always "one of us". He had no pretence and no pomposity. He was a man of the people and he was close to the people—a man whom people felt they knew before they met him. There was no title of which he was prouder than the one that he shared with every one of us: member of the Scottish Parliament. Donald Dewar was a man who sought that position for what he could do, not for what he would be.

Donald's life was rooted in Glasgow. To him, his first and foremost responsibility was to his constituents, whom he served with dedication and pride. He thought of his duty to others first and of his personal welfare last. It is no surprise to those of us who knew him well that, even while he was desperately ill only three days ago, he was determined to get on with the job and do his duty. He was more worried about inconveniencing anybody else than he was about his health. He even apologised for causing a fuss. He was courageous, selfless, kind and concerned for others to the last.

Donald also had faith in his nation and he truly embraced the soul of Scotland. He was a cultured man—an expert on literature, the arts, poetry and sport and a collector of books and paintings. Let us remind ourselves of the brilliant and moving speech that he made at the opening of Parliament last July. Donald said:

"This is about more than our politics and our laws. This is about who we are, how we carry ourselves. In the quiet moments today, we might hear some echoes from the past.

The shout of the welder in the din of the great Clyde shipyards; the speak of the Mearns, with its soul in the land; the discourse of the enlightenment, when Edinburgh and Glasgow were a light held to the intellectual life of Europe; the wild cry of the Great Pipes; and back to the distant cries of the battles of Bruce and Wallace."

He concluded by saying that

"The past is part of us. But today there is a new voice in the land, the voice of a democratic Parliament. A voice to shape Scotland, a voice for the future."

Over many years, many have championed the cause of devolution. We all know that, in debates and in discussions in the Scottish Grand Committee and the Scottish Constitutional Convention, Donald Dewar did more than anybody to make devolution happen. He, more than anyone, won the referendum, because the Scottish people trusted him to make it work. With his unique parliamentary skills, he drove the Scotland Act 1998 through the Westminster Parliament. In 1999, people put their faith in him because they knew that he was on their side and, of course, as our leader, he has steered us through our Parliament's first year.

Many stories have been told about Donald Dewar in recent days, such as the Presiding Officer's story about cream cakes, and I want to contribute to that and illustrate how self-effacing Donald was and how he was a man of great achievement who never blew his own trumpet.

In the early days after 1997, the fleshing out of the details of the devolution white paper in Westminster involved Donald in day-to-day combat with some of the biggest political beasts in the Westminster jungle. Invariably, he would come back to Dover House exasperated and gloomy

about his performance and, of course, suffering fools gladly was never one of Donald's strongest suits. I became slightly concerned about that daily ritual and so I decided to speak to the Scottish civil servants who had been with him to find out what was happening. As I suspected, Donald had on every occasion won hands down. That intellectual and physical stamina produced the basis of where we are today. That is a poignant message for me, because it was part of the task of winning devolution for Scotland.

Today Parliament gathers united in grief. We all mourn, but we on the Labour benches mourn for one of our own.

Throughout his lifetime of service, in Edinburgh, at Westminster and in his years of service in his constituency, Donald fought for devolution and social justice. He was unshakeable in his opposition to poverty and held the simple conviction that all should have an equal chance. He put those causes first.

His ambition was not for the Parliament of Scotland but for the people of Scotland. He believed that everyone was of equal worth and that all should have an equal chance. That is why he treated everyone equally. It is those principles that will serve as a guide to us all in the days that lie ahead.

Speaking only a few weeks ago, Donald said:

"We will hold to our principles. Top of the list is the attack upon poverty, the drive to create opportunity . . . the vision of a just society."

His intellect, his good humour, his unsurpassed debating skills and his integrity have graced this Parliament. More than that, his vision now challenges this Parliament. With devolution, he turned a dream into a promise and a commitment into a reality, in this building.

Colleagues, we have lost the most powerful voice for that dream, but Donald has left his vision, his values and the hopes that they awakened. We are now the trustees of that dream. It falls to all of us to ensure that his dream, his promise and his commitment to a socially just community can also become a reality in the chamber and in Scotland. Let us commit ourselves to that today.

All of us will remember the last time we saw him—each of us has our own private memories and personal experiences of a life that was so tragically cut short.

Donald Dewar—1937 to 2000—now takes his special place on the list of Scotland's favourite sons. Donald the person, the politician and the patriot gave us a unique record of public service and his greatest achievement was devolution—a great life and a great legacy.

Motion agreed to.

Meeting closed at 14:36.

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