

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 12 September 2001
(*Afternoon*)

Session 1

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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 12 September 2001

(Afternoon)

[THE PRESIDING OFFICER *opened the meeting at 14:30*]

One Minute's Silence

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):

Colleagues, at the turn of the century, we looked back at the episodes of carnage caused by human warfare in the trenches of the first world war in Europe, by the atom bombs in Japan and by so many other causes, and we seemed determined to create a more civilised global society in the 21st century. However, what happened yesterday brought a new dimension of indiscriminate terror and suffering into our world. It dwarfed the traumatic tragedy that we in Scotland experienced over Lockerbie 10 years ago. That is why the party leaders were right yesterday evening readily to agree that it would be unthinkable that we should meet today in this democratic forum and carry on as though what happened did not concern us.

John Donne wrote:

"any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankind".

We as politicians are by definition especially involved in mankind. We know that there are injustices in this world, as there are in our own country. We come together in parliamentary Assemblies throughout the world with our differing opinions to argue and debate our way towards solving the problems of mankind and every so often the people to whom we are accountable make their choice of the route that they wish taken. That is light years away from the motivation of those who yesterday perpetrated those acts of demonic barbarism on America.

In his inaugural address as President, Thomas Jefferson said that

"error of opinion may be tolerated where reason is left free to combat it".

Reason being left free is what brings us all together. What we saw yesterday was what happens when the forces of unreason unleash themselves on innocent people.

The vast majority of those killed had neither political nor military roles. They were office workers, aircraft passengers with their families, tourists, passers-by and rescue service workers. Over the coming days, thousands of people in different countries will be plunged into mourning

as they learn of the deaths of relatives or friends.

Before we begin to debate our motion of condolence, let us in sympathy with the victims rise and stay silent for a minute in our places.

Motion without Notice

14:34

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): I am minded to accept a motion without notice from Mr Tom McCabe and I assume that we are all agreed.

Members indicated agreement.

Motion moved,

That S1M-2099 be taken at this meeting of the Parliament.—[Mr Tom McCabe.]

Motion agreed to.

Business Motion

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

(a) as a revision to the Business Motion agreed on 5 September 2001:

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delete all, and insert

2.30 pm Motion of Condolence

Thursday 13 September 2001

delete all, and insert

9.30 am Business Motion.—[Mr Tom McCabe.]

Motion agreed to.

Motion of Condolence

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): We move to the motion of condolence, which is motion S1M-2208, in the name of Henry McLeish.

14:35

The First Minister (Henry McLeish): No words of ours in the Scottish Parliament today can truly convey what we feel in the wake of yesterday's atrocities in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania: our pity at the helplessness of ordinary passengers on ordinary morning flights that suddenly turned to terror and death; our revulsion at the idea of civil aircraft on innocent passage being transformed in minutes into weapons of mass destruction; our horror as first one and then another huge and busy workplace was hit and became an inferno; and our sheer disbelief, that so quickly turned to outrage, as great buildings fell and it became clear that there were human losses on a scale hitherto unimagined. Commuters, office workers, civil servants, people in the military, firemen, policemen, nurses and doctors and people who just happened to be there were caught up in their thousands in that unprecedented, unforgivable carnage on a bright autumn morning in America.

Yesterday, the Queen and the Prime Minister spoke for all of us in the United Kingdom when they expressed their horror at those barbaric acts. Today, the people of the United States are represented here in our Parliament chamber. That is as it should be, because we offer them our solidarity. Our hearts go out now to America—to all Americans, our cousins across the sea—as they mourn and we mourn with them. In our silence we joined with them.

The world has already condemned those who committed those awful deeds, those who planned them and those who offer support or concealment to anyone involved in them. In due course those people will be held to account. Meanwhile, let us all value even more what they sought to destroy: our freedom as citizens to travel, to work and to trade; our democratic rights and our freedom under the law; our traditions of tolerance and humanity; our respect for beliefs and for differences; and our continuing faith in our national and international institutions and in the democratic principles that we share with America. Those are principles that so much of the world embraces and to which so much of the rest of the world still aspires.

In our sorrow today for America and its people, in our indignation at the outrage and the violation of law and of civilisation itself, let us remember

quietly and proudly the values that the perpetrators of yesterday's atrocities can never overcome. In a poem about the men who fought for democracy at its darkest hour in the Spanish civil war, George Orwell wrote of the invincibility of those values in the face of the dangers and destruction of war. He told us:

"No bomb that ever burst
Shatters the crystal spirit."

The spirit of America and the spirit of all those across the world who believe in democracy and the rule of law may be sorrowful today, but that spirit remains unquenched, unshattered and resilient in its grief. We are determined that such evil shall be accounted for and that it shall not prevail.

I move,

That the Parliament condemns the senseless and abhorrent acts of terrorism carried out in the United States yesterday and extends our deepest sympathies to those whose loved ones have been killed or injured.

14:38

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): I associate my party with the motion that was moved by the First Minister.

On behalf of the Scottish National Party, I express to the people of the United States, to their President, to the many American people who are here today in Scotland—as residents or as visitors—our deepest sympathy at this truly awful tragedy.

Yesterday's atrocity in the United States could only be watched on television with horror, shock and bewilderment. On the radio bulletins this morning, a number of comments were made by, among others, police officers in New York, firemen in Washington, survivors of the World Trade Center attack, observers of the atrocity and the President of the United States. Their comments were broadcast against the soundtrack "How fragile we are".

We have been brutally reminded overnight of just how fragile we are. We have been reminded just how fragile human life can be at the mercy of terrorists. We have been reminded how fragile is the peace and security that people of my age have taken for granted all our lives but which my parents' generation have not always enjoyed. We have been reminded that, however much we cherish democracy, it is fragile when attacked by those who neither respect nor value human life or our human democracy.

This is not just an attack that has affected America. All of us will have felt that dreadful worry and concern at who might have been hurt by this atrocity: interns who have worked at the

Parliament; relatives and colleagues on holiday; friends and family in their offices in New York or Washington. The World Trade Center draws together people from many nations and backgrounds and from different continents—the human loss will be felt globally. Only time, patience and exhibiting the best of human values will unravel the full consequences of yesterday's attacks.

However, there is one thing about which we must be sure: our human and democratic values must triumph. That is why we stand here today, in respect for the tragedy that has happened in America, in testament to our commitment to the democratic process and in witness to our common humanity. Our democratic Scottish Parliament pays tribute to our friends across the water and joins hands with them in sympathy across the seas.

An uncertain period in international affairs undoubtedly lies ahead, but I am confident that in that uncertain time the interests of humanity and democracy will prevail over the forces of terror. We owe it to our human and democratic values to make that the case.

14:41

David McLetchie (Lothians) (Con): I associate myself and the Scottish Conservative party with the expressions of sympathy that have been so eloquently voiced by the First Minister and John Swinney. It is apparent that yesterday's outrages have shocked and sickened people across the world. We extend a special hand of friendship and sympathy to those visitors from the United States who are with us in the chamber and in Scotland today.

This cowardly and murderous act is an act of war that has been perpetrated against the people of the United States of America and democracy itself. In the face of this new outbreak of barbarity in our society, the civilised world must unite to defeat the scourge of terrorism. There must be no hiding place for those who commit such atrocities and those states that sponsor acts of terrorism or harbour terrorists as instruments of their foreign policy must be held to account for their actions.

I am struck by the contrast between the fanatics who flew into the World Trade Center and the people they attacked. That contrast could not be greater. New York is defined by its eclectic mix of peoples, cultures and races. As the most cosmopolitan city in the United States, it exemplifies the free and open society that was the vision of the founding fathers and that has been an inspiration for democracies around the world. That open society stands in stark contrast to the narrow world view of the fanatics who carry out such acts

and the hatred and intolerance that they represent.

One immediate consequence of yesterday's attacks will undoubtedly be a heightening of security—a heightening that restricts the freedom of a people who value freedom above all other values. You, Sir David, referred to Thomas Jefferson. It was he who said that the price of freedom is eternal vigilance. Such increased vigilance is clearly necessary, not only in the United States but throughout the civilised world.

However, what we must never do is abandon the very liberties that are the basis of our civilisation and that set us apart from the fanatics and the fundamentalists who wish to destroy our free and democratic societies. The vigorous promotion and assertion of our values will be a lasting memorial to those who have lost their lives and a legacy to those they have left behind and future generations.

14:44

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Justice (Mr Jim Wallace): On behalf of my colleagues in the Scottish Liberal Democrats, I endorse the motion moved by the First Minister and supported so eloquently by Mr Swinney and Mr McLetchie.

For all of us who witnessed them, the events of yesterday will be for ever etched in our memories. As the full scale of that horror became more and more apparent, the most basic human reaction was one of agonising and heartfelt sympathy, anguish for those who were trapped and perhaps sensed that death was inevitable, and a profound sense of grief for the families and friends of those who have lost their lives. Our greatest thoughts today are not only for those who have been killed, but for those who have been injured and remain in hospital or at the disaster sites.

Nothing could have prepared us for what happened yesterday. It is impossible still to comprehend in its cold, calculated barbarity. Our special thoughts are with the United States of America. Scotland's ties of kinship and friendship with America are as deep as they are old. America has been a loyal friend of ours in great adversity, and in the aftermath of such a terrible tragedy I join others in expressing our deepest sorrow to the people of America and in offering our support.

We also share with the United States a long-established democratic tradition. Mindless, callous terrorism is an affront to all who value democracy and liberty. Now is a time for us to renew our commitment to those values and to strengthen our resolve and determination not to be undermined by those who trade in terrorism. It is hard to believe that fellow human beings can meticulously plan and execute such carnage. That is the

chilling, literal reality of the words of Robert Burns:

"Man's inhumanity to man
Makes countless thousands mourn!"

Today in this Parliament we mourn and we offer our condolences. To those who mourn the loss of loved ones and to those who are suffering we say, "You are in our thoughts and you are in our prayers."

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament condemns the senseless and abhorrent acts of terrorism carried out in the United States yesterday and extends our deepest sympathies to those whose loved ones have been killed or injured.

Meeting closed at 14:46.

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