

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Tuesday 3 June 2003
(*Afternoon*)

Session 2

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Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 3 June 2003

(Afternoon)

[THE PRESIDING OFFICER *opened the meeting at 16:00*]

Address by Her Majesty the Queen

16:00

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Your Majesty, this is the third time that you have met with the Scottish Parliament. We are honoured that you join us again today.

Fàilte is furan oirbh, Ur Mòrachd, dhan choinneimh seo còmhla ri Pàrlamaid na h-Alba.

Four years ago, your Majesty, our first First Minister, Donald Dewar, spoke movingly of the challenges that were facing Scotland. He spoke of the echoes of the past—the shout of the welder on the Clyde, the speak of the Mearns, the discourse of the Scottish enlightenment, the wild cry of the great pipes and the distant din of battles in the days of Bruce and Wallace. On that day, we sought to give Scotland a future for her past, a Scotland guided by the words engraved in your gift of our mace—wisdom, justice, compassion and integrity—and a Scotland in which this Parliament would be a new voice in the land. The day we sat for the first time was a day of great expectations—a day when some thought that Scotland might be transformed straight away. However, as you remarked in Aberdeen last year, your Majesty, we Scots—after a parliamentary adjournment of some 300 years—were never going to build a new political culture overnight.

And so we enter our second session—a bit wiser, we hope more realistic, needing to concentrate on what really matters, and certainly more diverse. Looking round this rainbow chamber, no one can say that Holyrood is a pale reflection of Westminster. Yes, we are shaped in the great traditions of British democracy, but we have also drawn on the experience of the Commonwealth and, in all our diversity, we look distinctly European.

In this rainbow legislature, your Majesty, I have the task of ensuring fair shares. There will certainly be days when I will think back with nostalgia to the powers of my predecessors in the old Scots Parliament to have recalcitrant members escorted out by the Lord Lyon to the market cross

and there, in the presence of the lieges, publicly castigated, according to the orders of the time, to the sound of silver trumpets. However, the sheer diversity of this Parliament holds promise of new ways of doing Scottish business. There is a new voice in the land. It can offer new perspectives, and new insights into how we create an enterprising and compassionate Scotland and how we fit into Britain, into Europe and into the globalised society of the contemporary world.

Your Majesty, our First Minister now has a mandate to take forward his programme for government. It will be the task of the Parliament to subject that programme to full scrutiny. We shall do so in accordance with our founding principles: we shall be accessible to the people of Scotland; we shall continue our open-door policy and shall work in full partnership with the people; we shall be accountable; we shall work in transparency, making clear why decisions have been reached and where money has been spent; we shall practice equal opportunities because this is a land where all—regardless of origin or belief—are Jock Tamson's bairns; and we shall continue to share power between Executive, Parliament and people. The great change in the past four years is that, if we make mistakes, they are now largely our mistakes.

Lastly your Majesty—our Queen of Scots—the key challenge of the next four years is to build confidence in the Parliament as the place where the issues of devolved Scottish life are clearly delineated, properly debated, thoroughly scrutinised and finally decided. Your Majesty, I now invite you to address Parliament.

16:03

Her Majesty the Queen: Presiding Officer, First Minister, members of the Scottish Parliament, it is a pleasure to be invited to address this Parliament again and to do so once more here on the Mound in Edinburgh.

In your remarks, Presiding Officer, you referred to the challenges facing this new, diverse legislature. That diversity reflects the nature of Scottish society. There are many different traditions represented in this chamber and each can contribute to the shaping of Scotland. Throughout this nation's long history, the Scottish people have demonstrated many strengths of character: determination, principle and tenacity. All have contributed greatly to the life of the United Kingdom, the Commonwealth and indeed the world. That history is invaluable as a source from which to draw faith and confidence in the future. Many of the characteristics of this new Parliament—such as its single chamber, the importance it accords to committees and the role of the Presiding Officer—can trace their origins to

the old Scots Parliament as it developed over the centuries leading up to 1707.

We see in this new Parliament, even after four short years, clear signs of a legislature that is distinctly Scottish—a legislature that, as you said, Presiding Officer, is working to fit contemporary Scotland into Britain, into Europe and into the wider world. It is a modern reaffirmation of the ancient bond that has linked Crown, Parliament and people for hundreds of years. The days when Scotland was limited to a few acts each year are now over. Today, across a whole range of important issues, this Parliament is carving out a distinctly Scottish position.

I commend you, in particular, for your commitment to work in partnership with the people. At a time when in many countries there is disengagement from politics, Parliaments everywhere can draw on your experience of your petitioning process, the regular meetings of your committees throughout the land, your engagement with young people and your determination to employ the latest technology to reach out to the electorate.

Shortly, we shall become neighbours when the Parliament moves to its new campus at the bottom end of the Royal Mile. The old Scottish Parliament house was the first purpose-built legislature in the British isles. It is a building of great distinction and charm, sitting in the High Street, close to the people. The new Holyrood Parliament will be rooted in the land of Scotland, in an ancient part of this capital city, dramatically linking this country's future with its past. I hope that it, too, will be close to the people and be seen as a bold statement of Scotland's standing in the world.

When I addressed members of the Scottish Parliament last year in Aberdeen, I said that I had confidence in your commitment to the service of the Scottish people. I reaffirm that confidence today as you embark on this second parliamentary session. I wish you well in your discussions in such a diverse chamber. The different perspectives to which you referred, Presiding Officer, can indeed enrich debate, and the contributions of all shades of opinion will be listened to with interest, I am sure, not just here, but elsewhere in Britain, in Europe and in the Commonwealth.

The Duke of Edinburgh joins me in wishing the Parliament and its members every success as you embark on the work of your new session. May God bless your deliberations in the months to come.

16:09

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): Your Majesty, on behalf of the members here and all

the people of Scotland, I thank you for opening the second session of our Parliament.

Although our young Parliament has been in place for only four years, and some of the members have been here for only four weeks, you have been in your job for rather longer. I was fortunate enough to be at Westminster Abbey yesterday to join the celebration of the 50th anniversary of your coronation and I was very happy to represent the devolved Government in Scotland there.

Your Majesty, throughout those 50 years, you have shown a keen interest in Scotland and in the lives of the Scottish people. Not surprisingly, you visited Scotland as part of the first royal tour following the coronation in 1953. You arrived in Scotland at Waverley station on 23 June, when you were met by the then lord provost of Edinburgh—many members might be surprised to learn that the provost on the platform that day was not Eric Milligan. During that tour and since, Scots have enjoyed such visits and welcomed the support and encouragement regularly given by you and the Duke of Edinburgh to those who serve others in national organisations or in local communities.

We are grateful to you for the time that you have spent in Scotland and for the way in which you have engaged enthusiastically with people throughout Scotland in the past 50 years and with our Parliament since its opening day in 1999. On that day, the late Donald Dewar said that it was a

“rare privilege in an old nation to open a new Parliament”.

It was indeed, and it was an honour to sit as an elected member of this new Parliament for those first four years.

However, it has also been a challenge. It has been a challenge to establish a new voice in the land, to begin to pass good and just laws and to govern with compassion and integrity. We met that challenge and now we move into a new chapter with the second session. We are no longer establishing a new institution and learning to govern in new ways, but using our collective wisdom to build on that start and to win confidence and respect by making a difference in Scotland.

In those four short years, we in Scotland have also renewed our identity and impact abroad. We have taken our place among the devolved nations and regions of Europe, welcomed interest and visitors from all over the world and seen increased interest elsewhere in Scottish affairs. Later this year, we will be proud to host the conference of Commonwealth education ministers when they meet here in Edinburgh. That will be a special occasion that will mark the contribution of Scottish education to the rest of the world, but it will also involve discussion of the demands that a modern

education service must meet in an ever-changing world where gaps in ambition and achievement still too often reflect social conditions and injustice. That occasion will build on the past, but it will also help Governments across the Commonwealth, including our own, to build for the future.

Your Majesty, when you opened our Parliament on 1 July 1999, you gave us a gift of the mace, inscribed with the memorable words

“There shall be a Scottish Parliament”.

Also inscribed on the mace are the four words that have come to mean a huge amount to all of us: wisdom, justice, compassion and integrity. The creation of this Parliament was never an end in itself; it was a means to improve government and to improve life in Scotland. Similarly, those four words should not just underpin our actions and deliberations. They should lead us to deliver change that makes a real and sustained difference to those whom we represent; to deliver justice for the victims of crime or those who suffer prejudice or discrimination; to show compassion for those who need our help to raise their aspirations or realise their ambitions; and to take responsibility for the second chance that so many sometimes need.

Those words should lead us to behave with integrity, putting our duty of service to our constituents ahead of ourselves in ways that help to rebuild confidence in elected government, and to value wisdom, whatever its source. We need to show wisdom, too—the wisdom to realise that we do not have all the answers and that there are limits to what government alone can achieve. We also need the wisdom to listen and to act in the right way at the right time to make Scotland a better place.

This new Parliament has learned to walk; our task now is to ensure that, as the pace quickens, it walks in the right direction. With justice, compassion, integrity and wisdom at our core, we are much more likely to do so. Your Majesty, we have many challenges ahead of us over the next four years. We are pleased that you are here with us today as we begin that journey. On behalf of the Parliament, I offer you our thanks.

The Presiding Officer: With those words from our First Minister, I close this meeting of Parliament.

Meeting closed at 16:14.

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