

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

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In nineteen eighty-eight we witnessed further new developments in the governance of Scotland. The implementation of the Local Government Act 1988, the completion of registration for the community charge (poll tax), major education reforms, the development of the inner city programme, the introduction of new housing legislation, and the establishment of Enterprise Scotland are some examples of policies which have been enforced from Whitehall. These changes have progressed against the wishes and without the support of the majority of the Scottish people.

Following the outcome of the 1987 general election, Mrs Thatcher's stated view was that the apparent divergence between central government policy and Scottish public opinion could be overcome by improving communication of her government's objectives to the Scottish electorate. As one method of 'getting the message across', Mrs Thatcher herself visited Scotland on no less than six occasions in 1988. Her speech to the Scottish Conservative Party Conference in Perth where she claimed that the Scots had invented Thatcherism, her 'Sermon on the Mound' address to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, and the high profile given to Scotland at the party's annual conference in Brighton, gained much media coverage. However, as the District Elections of 1988 and Opinion Polls in Scotland show, either the message has still not been conveyed to the Scottish people, or there are other more complex factors involved than the government is prepared to acknowledge.

One area where the government has claimed success is in relation to the so-called economic miracle in Scotland. In an interview given to Scotland's new Sunday newspaper 'Scotland on Sunday' Mrs Thatcher pronounced that Scotland was flourishing. While it can be acknowledged that in certain sectors of the Scottish economy there have been signs of economic revival, it would be premature to say the least to state that Scotland is experiencing an economic miracle. The Scottish experience has been more in the nature of economic recovery than an economic boom. Related to the general economic picture in Scotland, the government has also taken the credit for the decrease in the official level of unemployment and the increase in the rate of growth in the economy over the last year. Leaving aside the rather obvious contradiction that the government previously claimed that it could not influence the level of employment/unemployment and the disputes about the changes in the measurement of

unemployment statistics issued by the Department of Employment, the government seems prepared to ignore other economic indicators such as the deterioration of the Balance of Payments, the rise in inflation, and the resultant increases in interest rates. These latter trends are likely to have a detrimental effect on the British and Scottish economy and to impact adversely on the level of unemployment.

Unemployment continues to be a major concern for Scottish people. A MORI poll conducted just before the Govan by-election in November noted that jobs were the most important issue for all those interviewed in the survey. The official seasonally adjusted rate of unemployment in Scotland in September 1988 was 11.4% compared with a rate of 7.8% for Britain. The average figure given for the whole of Scotland, of course, disguises very much higher levels of unemployment in some regions, cities and towns in Scotland and the uneven distribution of unemployment within and between the different locations. Therefore, the government's claim to have cured the problem of unemployment must ring rather hollow for people in areas where one in five of the adult population are unemployed.

Recent developments and proposed changes in Scotland are also causing concern. For example the redundancies resulting from the sale of the Royal Ordnance Factory at Bishopton; the continuing decline of the Scottish Coal industry; fears about the effects of the privatisation of the steel and electricity industries; and the impact on Scottish firms of the single European market. Another worrying feature is the proposed takeover of Scottish and Newcastle Breweries, Scotland's largest manufacturing industry, by Elders IXL an Australian owned company. The political row which developed over this takeover bid was fuelled by the part played by the Royal Bank of Scotland in providing finance for the takeover and the involvement of the former Conservative MP, Sir Alex Fletcher, in setting up meetings between Elders' executives and Malcolm Rifkind, the Secretary of State. The Bank's involvement is all the more ironic when one considers its own escape from takeover by foreign buyers not so many years ago. Also Fletcher's role in advising Elders led to calls for his resignation from the board of the Scottish Development Agency. At the time of writing (November 1988) the outcome of this takeover bid is undecided.

A significant change in the Thatcher government's approach to training policy took a particular form in Scotland, upsetting textbook models of policymaking. I am referring, of course, to what is known as the Hughes Plan or the Hughes Initiative. The context of the change in policy was the dispute over the implementation of the government's latest training scheme – Employment Training or 'ET'. Even before the decision taken at the TUC Congress in 1988 to withdraw support for ET, and the government's subsequent decision to abolish the Training Commission (previously the Manpower Services Commission), Bill Hughes, Chairman of the Confederation of British Industry Scotland, hit the front page of the

Scottish newspapers in June with his new plan. His proposals involved the amalgamation of the work of the Training Commission in Scotland with the Scottish Development Agency (and possibly the Highlands and Islands Development Board) and the creation of up to 60 employer-led enterprise agencies to deliver training and job creation policies at the local level. Mrs Thatcher personally put her seal of approval on the initiative – to be known as Enterprise Scotland – and a White Paper (with green edges) is proposed for the end of 1988. The plans have not obtained the approval of all Scottish employers or members of the CBI, and concern has been expressed by the SDA about their future role. Malcolm Rifkind has largely ignored the first and assured the latter that they will not suffer as a result of this new initiative. In spite of opposition in Scotland, it is likely that the government will move to implement the proposals in the 1989/90 session of Parliament.

The Community Charge (Poll Tax) also continues to be a major source of controversy in Scotland. Splits between the opposition parties in Scotland and splits within the parties themselves have prevented a united opposition to the government. In spite of attempts to oppose registering for the poll tax or delaying registration, the government was able to claim that over 90% of the forms were completed in Scotland. However, as the Opinion Poll data indicates (see Reference Section) there is clear opposition to the imposition of this tax in Scotland, although the large percentage of the electorate who disapprove of the tax is not directly translated into the numbers who will refuse to pay.

1989 will be the anniversary of the 1979 referendum on the Scottish Assembly. Ten years later the demand for some form of devolved government is growing in Scotland, with many of those who voted 'No' in 1979, now prepared to change their minds as a result of the experience of almost ten years of Conservative government. Frustration in Scotland over the imposition of unpopular policies from south of the border is mounting, and the 50 Scottish Labour MPs not surprisingly came in for heavy criticism from the SNP for alleged lack of effective resistance to Thatcherism. The Campaign for a Scottish Assembly's document 'A Claim of Right for Scotland' and its central proposal to establish a Constitutional Convention to prepare proposals for Scotland's future form of government, to include an elected Assembly has attracted much attention and support in Scotland. Jim Sillars' victory at the Govan by-election for the SNP (reducing the so-called 'feeble 50' to the 'frightened 49') will give added confidence to anti-Thatcher sentiments and the Assembly movement in Scotland. As one commentator stated, Scottish politics will never be the same again.

1989 then promises to be a testing time for the government as it continues to operate without a mandate in Scotland. In addition to the issues raised above, there is likely to be continued unrest, for example within the education sector with the creation of School Boards and 'opting out' of local authority control; and within local government as the

government pursues its attack on local government finance and power.

This year's Scottish Government Yearbook continues to address key issues and debates within Scotland, some of which have already been referred to above. In addition to our regular features on the year at Westminster and election coverage, we are including articles on the coal and steel industries; housing and inner city policy; rural deprivation; and industrial relations. We also cover an assessment of TVEI in Scotland; the Arts Council; and the Media. Our two special sections highlight Social Work in Scotland with articles on the social work profession, social care policy and child abuse; and Women in Scotland with articles on the impact of Thatcherism, Women's Committees, Women in Trade Unions and Black Women in Scotland. The 1989 edition will also include a book review in addition to our regular Reference Section.

Our thanks to our regular contributors for their indispensable service; to all our authors who, despite the prevailing market culture, contribute their articles without any financial incentive; and to our advertisers, both old and new, for their support. My personal thanks to Dave McCrone, who is retiring as Editor of the Yearbook this year. I am indebted to him for passing on the skills of the trade to me and for his invaluable contribution to the Yearbook over the years. Last, but by no means least, to Helen Ramm, my thanks and gratitude for her advice and support, and for 'keeping me right' in my new role as Editor.