

# **A Vision and Strategy for Independence**



**Roseanna Cunningham MSP**



## **Introduction: the importance of vision**

It is important that we distinguish between aims, strategy and tactics when we think and plan for elections and for independence.

For a long time, I have had a concern that too much resource has been frittered away in a pre-occupation with short-term tactics, to the neglect of two key strategic issues: SNP organisational health, and building support among the electorate for independence itself.

Clear thinking on aims, strategy and tactics is needed to give us the foundation for fresh impetus in the challenges of the Westminster election in 2005, the Scottish Parliamentary election of 2007 and indeed the local government elections also in 2007.

I ask you to think it through with me, so that we can take the actions necessary to build on the foundation we identify, moving forward together as a united party.

That unity will come about when we are expressing a clear vision for independence and how we get there.

## Vision for leadership

This is a contest for selection of a leader, and I therefore want to say something about my intended leadership style and to make a few promises.

**I will be seeking to encourage the policy-making process in the party** so that our best minds and our experts in their fields are stimulated to bring forward the very best work that they can achieve in the interest of our country.

Policy work is not an optional extra to be reduced to identifying the few sound-bites we can get on a leaflet or squeeze into the minutes of TV access we enjoy.

We put ourselves forward and are elected to do a serious job by the electorate: they rightly expect us to master subjects in depth, make correct decisions and think through creative proposals.

That is why **I am proposing a series of policy commissions** to undertake proper reviews of policy areas in depth, seeking to involve those with an interest and knowledge in the field concerned and consulting before taking proposals to the party's policy making bodies; Annual Conference, National Assembly and National Council.

Particular concerns and proposals for consideration have been placed in the appendix to this manifesto: they are not intended to be a complete re-write of existing party policy nor are they re-statements of existing party policy except when it comes to those policies we have neglected over the last 5 years. They are intended to show sparks of the new kind of thinking that is needed.

**I will be trying to mend divisions in the party** by helping to identify appropriate missions for every activist and member.

If you elect me, **I am going to lead you and the party back to work**, so that the party functions properly as a campaigning organisation, whose members have a relentless determination to succeed; as an organisation which is growing, whose members have some fun; and as a political party which is trusted, whose elected representatives behave as people do when they have the spontaneous solidarity that arises in the successful pursuit of a common and agreed task.

**That is my vision for the party.**

**I will be interested in the philosophy of our policy-making** and will make my arguments to Conference and Council for consistency, for joined-up thinking.

**I will encourage the party not to be afraid of its radical roots.**

**I will be a consistent advocate for an effective social justice agenda** allied to boldly pragmatic wealth-creation initiatives: **wealth with a purpose, wealth for the people.**

The leader should both **lead and inspire** – being at the same time both servant of and advocate for the party, not its dictator.

**That is my vision of the leadership we need.**

## Vision for Scotland

But it is the vision of a free Scotland that the **whole** party offers that will lead our people to choose independence in the end.

We must offer a **true vision** and project it effectively in the times ahead.

The road ahead must be about successfully projecting that vision.

**We must commend the opportunities available to a free Scotland in developing its own prosperous future as a small advanced nation, building sustainably on its own favourable population / resource balance. That means having the opportunity to make our own decisions on pensions and on benefits – it means taking the right decisions on our own economy and setting our own priorities. It means negotiating in Europe on the basis of what is in Scotland's best interests.**

**We must evoke revulsion against the militaristic foreign policy of the British state, rejection of its culture of patronage and its fossilised politics and refusal to accept or condone the loss of our sovereignty as a people and the alienation of our national assets. That means for example, being able to refuse to become a dumping ground for nuclear waste from elsewhere – and most importantly of all, being able to keep Scotland out of unjust and illegal wars.**

We must talk about the the desire to be the best nation we can make ourselves, a positive force in the world for ecological responsibility and world peace and one that takes care of its own people by fostering their success in a culture whose touchstone is social justice.

**That must be our vision for Scotland**

## Aims and Strategy

### *What the SNP stands for*

The membership card says:

- a) *Self-Government for Scotland – that is, the restoration of Scottish National Sovereignty by the establishment of a democratic Scottish Parliament within the Commonwealth, freely elected by the peoples of Scotland, whose authority will be limited only by such agreements as may be freely entered into by them with other nations or states or international organisations for the purpose of furthering international co-operation, world peace and the protection of the environment.*
- b) *The furtherance of all Scottish interests.*

The membership card also says:

*I endorse the Aims of the Scottish National Party, agree to abide by its Policy and Direction, and accept its Constitution and Rules.*

*I am not a member of any other Political Party active in Scotland.*

These two statements imply the domain of our strategy: we do politics.

- We are a political party, and we voluntarily undertake the discipline of that strategic decision. We are not a pressure group.
- We stand in the European elections, and we win 2 seats of 7.
- We stand in the Westminster elections, and we win 5 seats of 72.
- We stand in the Scottish Parliamentary elections, and we win 26 seats of 129.
- We have 179 councillors.
- We regularly score somewhere between 20-28% of the popular vote.

- Our candidate coverage is complete in all parliamentary elections and we field upwards of 500 candidates in local elections.
- We turn over £1 million annually within the central organisation, another £1 million at least in parliamentary groups' spending, with perhaps another £200,000 spent by local branches.
- We are a powerful organisation.

Political conditions are favourable. New Labour has forfeited its goodwill in the sands of Iraq, and will struggle with a narrower likely win in 2005: by 2007 the inevitable return in England of the Tories will be concentrating minds.



## SNP Organisational Health

Despite all of the above, the frequency of elections at all levels imposes a need for resources that a reduced membership finds it hard to produce and we have seen a worrying fall in our vote percentage at the European elections.

In 2003 we obtained significant direct wins in a general election against Labour in Ochil, Dundee and Aberdeen, all areas where we had built up support over the years strengthened by successes in local government.

The rise in small party support damaged our list position, but it was and remains **significant that these small parties could only make headway by embracing the independence position.**

### How do we move forward?

If elected, it will be one of my main personal missions to persuade the membership of the party of its central importance and to **re-motivate** that membership.

Its ability to meet the electorate on the doorstep, A5 leaflet in hand, was a principal foundation of our current success and we cannot move forward without the enthusiastic continuing help of those activist members.

The membership is the main resource that stands between the SNP and its constant under-mining by a hostile media, our direct conduit to the public.

Why have we failed to address some of the changes that have taken place in our electoral system in recent years?

### **List Votes**

What was our strategy for list votes in 2003?

The electorate had clearly taken the view that their second vote was just that, an opportunity to take that walk on the wild side that custom and the old single vote system had prevented in the past. Our second vote was down, as indeed was the case for all the big parties, but we were the opposition, we should have been its natural home.

To win we must attract back those who have taken the easy road to protest through minority parties through a dual approach which respects that others have different views, but explains why the SNP through independence is the way to achieve a better Scotland.

### **Postal Voting**

Why did we fail to maximise participation in postal voting, no longer the preserve of the few but the opportunity for the many?

Why risk the vulnerability of our older supporters on polling day when their votes could have been piling up in advance of the polls opening?

Younger voters who haven't adopted the habit of going to the polling station often find postal voting easier and less intimidating.

We may have understood all this, but we need a clear process to explain what requires to be done, well in advance of election day, with organisational support for those areas which need it.

Local successes in postal vote strategy only serve to highlight the collective failure.

## **Membership**

How can we strengthen membership recruitment against a trend of non-participation among the public that has affected many organisations and not the SNP alone?

Hindsight shows that even during the political gains for the SNP made through the 90s, recruitment was insufficient to replace the current generation with new members coming through.

I believe the answer must lie in **working with our branches**, helping them to become attractive organisations which through community participation can draw new people into their orbits.

**That means addressing the increasing centralisation of our HQ operation to ensure that some of the centrally based organisational resources are dispersed throughout the country.**

Branches have varied experiences of the new membership system and we need to work closely with branches to maximise the potential of the new system, and get it properly bedded down.

But membership of a political party, of our political party, should not focus in on the internal machinations of its own operation but face out to the issues and concerns of the community.

We should be **aiming for a party of independence minded community activists not a community of inward looking party activists.**

We will not spread the message of independence by talking to one another but by talking to those around us.

Ideas and politics are certainly serious but they should also be fun. If we are boring, the electorate will be bored.

## **Building support for Independence**

The second major strategic matter that I stated had been neglected, was **building support among the electorate for independence.**

We always say we will do more about this, but indeed our actual failure to address it has produced a disaffected minority who wonder aloud what on earth has happened to the party's principal aim, its unique selling point.

I will make the very clear commitment here that if elected, I will take advice on the setting up of a **mission-tasked research unit** involving activist volunteers and staff, with particular responsibility for **independence education and campaigning**, whose output must form the invariable content of our strategic message, for dissemination through website, literature and campaigns.

But most importantly of all, the party **must return to campaigning.**

In previous decades, the support for independence was increased by people beginning to draw conclusions from other struggles they may have been involved in – such as the anti-nuclear movement.

Unless we **return to serious campaigning, both local and national**, on issues which are of current concern we will be losing opportunities to make our case for independence in the most direct and obvious ways possible.

Voters are not turned off politics, they are turned off party politics.

Tens of thousands of them, however, are active in a variety of campaigns many of which are the natural home for much of the SNP's historic campaigning zeal.

We must restore that zeal in areas of current concern, such as the MoD proposal to break up nuclear submarines and dump the radioactive

components at Coulport, the search for new dumping grounds for nuclear waste, the demand for health services to be delivered locally, the campaigns against poverty and low wages.

In all such campaigns, there are valuable conclusions to be drawn from Scotland's loss of sovereignty – we must be able to do that from a position of strength.

## The Challenge of 2005-2007

Think through with me what we have to do in 2005 (Westminster) and 2007 (Holyrood and Councils).

By 2005, and in order to sustain that campaign next year, we must have our **cost base under control and a revenue stream adequate to purpose.**

Our goal in 2005 must be to build on the 2003 results and do Labour further damage, reducing its hold on the Scottish mind.

Blair's Iraq War gives us a very direct argument for independence from such British adventurism.

We can draw clear contrasts between **peaceful independence** on the one hand and wars and nuclear dumping at home on the other; between **a strong team to watch Scotland's back** or pressing on with a now largely faceless parcel of rogues.

The 2005 message must announce and lead through into the 2007 themes, beginning to place the ideas that **Scotland must move forward**, will move forward, is moving forward.

Perhaps we should be **talking more about the nation, somewhat less about the party.**

By 2007 we must also be well-prepared for one of the guaranteed political successes we will enjoy that year: the election of a far larger number of SNP councillors throughout Scotland, a result of the new system of proportional representation which will be in place by then.

We must have our very best candidates up front everywhere, ready for their coming role in what may be a large number of coalition administrations displacing or diluting Labour in Councils throughout Scotland.

Effective work by credible local representatives is not an inconvenient and problematic extra indulgence for us: it ought to be and we must make it the spearhead of our growth in electoral support, patiently building trust by honest work throughout Scottish communities.

Our greatest parliamentary successes have often had the way paved for them by success at local government level.

### **Local Government**

Local government electoral success is vital in building the unstoppable political momentum we need to drive forward to independence.

More two-way dialogue between the leadership and council groups will be required and the party must find ways to service the needs of elected councillors and council groups appropriately.

There are a number of ways in which this can be done:

- **Send the parliamentary timetable and SNP briefings of every parliamentary debate to the Council leaders so they feel that they have the opportunity to contribute to the debate if they want.**
- **Set up a leaders' group where each leader of an SNP group can meet every 3 months with Leader to discuss how best to implement policy.**
- **Invite Council Group Leaders to SNP Group away days.**

- **Appoint a Shadow Minister for Local Government –with the remit of promoting local government issues as well as being a bridge between council groups and the parliamentary group.**

Our Councillors, particularly in existing SNP councils, deserve our support and can be a source of helpful information for the party. We need to work on improving two-way communication with our Council Groups

## **2007 and beyond**

We can win in 2007 and thereafter carry the Scottish people with us in an independence referendum vote following that success.

But we will not win if the voters don't believe we can **run** Scotland and we will not win if the voters aren't comfortable with the **idea** of independence.

### **How do we achieve both?**

Firstly, our critique of this bankrupt administration must be coherent. We must make sense to the voters, our opposition must be well founded, our tactics geared to drawing lessons from the government's ineptitude, not simply the political equivalent of the collective raspberry at the latest gaffe.

Secondly, our coherence must be founded upon arguments for independence. Government failures must be linked to devolution's failures and to the opportunities of independence. In the end we will win when the voters believe in us **and in our message** and not just because they are scunnered with our opponents.



## Strategy for the Scottish Parliament

### Holyrood: making it work

Regrettably, the advent of the Scottish Parliament has resulted in a blurring of our focus as we have attempted to square the circle of working in a devolution environment but still striving for independence.

The atmosphere of hostility and negativity which has surrounded the Scottish Parliament has affected SNP voters just as much as the electorate at large. The Parliament is seen as having failed Scotland and we have not had a distinctive enough voice to avoid being branded with that same failure.

We **must** change that.

Working within the Parliament is important. But we need to be smarter about what we do and how we do it and we need to maximise all the opportunities we have to lead the opposition within the Parliament and make that opposition more effective.

It is essential that we have a strategy for how we will do that over the next 3 years.

There are key areas in which we can succeed:

- **instead of working individually without much reference to either each other or the short and medium term goals and campaigns of the party, the Scottish Parliamentary Group needs to work more co-operatively to achieve maximum impact at Question Time, in the use of Members' Bills and with the opportunities offered by Members' Debates and Opposition debates**

- **we also need to ensure that the campaigning work undertaken by the party is reflected in our work in the Parliament but is also supported directly by MSPs – which will require a more flexible and relaxed approach to the Whip's system currently in operation.**
- **we can create tactical alliances amongst the opposition parties in a way that was achieved in the recent SNP-inspired GM debate, which ran the Executive to only a single vote majority, the only time in the last year when that has been the case. More of that will indicate our ability to work effectively in leading opposition to the New Labour/LibDem coalition.**
- **we can also maximise the opportunity afforded by being in the forefront of an informal 'coalition for independence' which, despite some reservations, could play a key role in certain debates and arguments in Parliament**

Independence is the key. We must argue the case for it, make it attractive and show people why it is the number one priority for Scotland, building a high and advancing vote on that basis, sufficient to carry us into power through the substantial challenges we will face.

I will measure the success of my leadership in the steady growth of the loyal independence vote, in increasing SNP electoral success and consolidation and in seeing around me increasing numbers of active members together with sound finances on a rising trend.

**If we achieve that year on year, then we will have success in 2007.**

## **Appendix**

### **The development of policy – some key areas for consideration**

The party has good policies in many areas such as the proposal for Not for Profit Trusts to ensure the delivery of good, efficient public services without resorting to privatisation. Obviously, the Trust idea works equally well in transport, housing, water – across a whole range of public services.

These proposals therefore are not intended to be a complete re-write of existing party policy – instead they indicate the direction of my thinking. In particular, they focus on the need to re-balance the party's thinking between wealth creation and the uses to which national wealth can be put, in this case the social justice agenda.

**Social justice**

One of the principal problems over the last few years is that the SNP has completely lost its social justice focus, allowing others to move into ground which should have been ours.

The policies that the party has in abundance have largely been overlooked for want of a clear voice articulating the social justice agenda. It would be my intention to create a Shadow Cabinet post with that title and to direct the formation of a social justice policy commission with a remit to draw together existing relevant policies and identify and fill gaps.

Within the social justice agenda there are certain key areas which need to be addressed as a matter of urgency:

### **1. Affordable housing**

The lack of affordable housing is now one of the key obstacles in both urban and rural development in Scotland. I believe that we need a package of measures to begin to solve the problem. These measures could include:

- **increase the availability of land by making it possible for local authorities to compulsorily purchase land at a controlled price and through a more speedy compulsory purchase procedure than is available at present.**
- **ensure that Scottish Water is in a position to raise the levels of its capital expenditure so that the various development embargoes, large and small, currently in place across Scotland because of outdated, unsuitable sewage and drainage systems can be lifted.**
- **consider offering a First Time Buyer's Grant**
- **the availability of affordable housing is an issue about money and priorities, not about who the landlord is so we should make the case for increased capital investment in the social rented housing sector where there is a particularly damaging shortage right now.**
- **ensure a continuing 'right to rent' by restricting the right to buy in the future, not by removing existing tenants' rights but instead by introducing a new system for new tenants or alternatively for newly built and tenanted houses.**

## **2. Demographics**

If we are to believe the statisticians, Scotland is facing a demographic time-bomb in a UK obsessed with the problems of immigration, illegal or otherwise. Attempts to address this have been half hearted and hampered by devolution's limitations.

- **We need the power to ensure that the skills of asylum seekers and refugees can be harnessed in Scotland providing both self respect for individuals and economic benefit to Scotland.**
- **We need the power to develop a sensible immigration policy for Scotland that would reflect both our own needs and the needs of those who wish for whatever reason to come and live here.**
- **As well as having the powers to ensure that new arrivals are welcomed and encouraged, we should also be looking at financial and other ways to encourage childbirth and support the nurturing of our youngest.**
- **One proposal would be to begin the payment of Child Benefit at the end of the first trimester of pregnancy.**
- **In Norway, child benefit is paid at a higher rate in rural areas under pressure of depopulation, to incentivise people to remain in such areas and preserve the economic base. I believe that is an idea worth consideration for Scotland. The policy also has social justice value in responding to the greater expenses usually faced by families in such areas.**
- **We should also be assisting parents to maintain their place in the workforce. This is an issue of national and economic importance and we are failing future generations if we do not address it now.**

## **Cultural and tourism policy**

There should be three clear priorities for a Scottish cultural policy:

- **that we ensure the healthy growth and development of all our indigenous arts and music – if we do not do so, no-one else will and the world will lose something precious, not just Scotland**
- **make it possible for all creative artists to continue their work supported by the community**
- **be able to offer access to the very best the world has to offer**

Funding decisions can only be made on the basis of clear priorities and that is a manifest failure of the present government.

There needs to be a greater understanding of the importance of our own culture to the tourist industry. An apparent mistrust of national issues of cultural importance, especially when it comes to the exposition of our history, blights tourism initiatives. Spending often seems directed at poor-quality substitutes for our real national heritage.

- **Visit Scotland should be turning its face to the outside world instead of trying to be a tourist police force within Scotland. It should be focussed on bringing visitors to Scotland and making sure that they are aware of the vast range of events, shows, festivals, heritage trails and other local initiatives that are offered throughout Scotland but are often only discovered too late by visitors.**
- **We should be encouraging, through direct support if need be, the growth of small businesses in this area of tourist endeavour.**

## **Democratic Accountability**

One of the major reasons for voter cynicism and disillusion is the apparent failure of politicians to take responsibility for decision making, instead passing off this responsibility to unelected, unaccountable boards and quangos. This problem is evident across a number of sectors. We only need to consider recent controversies within the justice system where we have a Minister refusing to take responsibility for anything; with decisions taken by Scottish Water having a devastating effect on development in some communities yet without there being any sense of responsibility on the part of the Environment Minister; and an Enterprise Minister who seems to have nothing to say at all, leaving everything to Scottish Enterprise and HIE.

However, nowhere is this more evident than in the health service with endless expensive consultations carefully constructed to give the appearance of listening without any apparent imperative to act on the clear wishes of those who are consulted.

The problem is being experienced all over Scotland, with communities up in arms at threats to the services available in local hospitals and Health Board managers insisting that the views of the public are of secondary consideration.

This must end.

It means:

- **directly elected places on health boards in the short term,**
- **and the possibility of eventually merging local government and health boards in the longer term to create new authorities with**



**real power and real clout, but also with real responsibility and accountability to the voters.**

## **Economy**

We need to grow our economy.

The SNP under John Swinney put economic growth at the top of the political agenda. We need Independence, because without it we will continue to lose ground and continue to lose jobs.

Economic growth is about creating jobs and lifting wage levels. Scotland has some of the worst unemployment rates and the some of the lowest paid jobs. Women and families living in the poorest parts of Scotland bear the brunt of that.

We correctly stress that full economic powers can only come with independence, but I think it is also time that we developed and publicised our critique of the very extensive powers and spending that lie now with the Scottish Executive, its quangos, and local councils.

Is Scotland getting the best for what is spent?

Our political strategy to nurture wealth creation must exist in correct balance with levying from companies enough tax to meet Scotland's needs without chasing them furth of the country.

It is said that a cut in corporation tax rates across the board can produce a national competitive advantage and have the effect of raising more money and producing more jobs in a virtuous circle.

- **I believe there may also be merit in gradation of corporation tax rates for smaller and medium-sized enterprises undertaking investment in Scotland.**

- **Similarly, turnover-based and activity-based business rates relief may be a better policy than across-the-board reduction, preserving revenue levels while also protecting the diversity of high streets with lower-turnover shops, and helping the emergence of some new activities such as warehousing and storage that may be very important in strategic developments such as trying to revitalise Scotland's ports.**
- **Analysis of Ireland's recent economic success has also laid stress on planning relaxation as an engine of growth helped in Ireland's case by a pattern of small land-holding that allowed many families to develop and sell on houses on their own land. Scotland's situation is different; but within the powers of our existing Parliament we can and should take further radical steps, perhaps through land value tax, to make the wealth represented in Scotland's land work for its people.**
- **And of course we must keep our eyes on what may be the greatest economic development prize of all: Scotland's opportunity to use its coastal geography and location to become a major producer of tidal and wind energy, ensuring that just as Denmark became the lead country for onshore wind energy technology, Scotland is able to do the same for marine energy technology.**

## **Education**

Education is a major spender of public money, and perhaps the biggest industry in Scotland. Including both children at school and students in further education, it is estimated that a million of us are engaged in it daily.

Excellence in education is a product of intellectual freedom.

It is a key interest of ours that Scottish history, literature and languages are properly taught, as at present they are not, with the partial exception of Gaelic.

- **It is time to revive the proposals of the Review of the Scottish Culture Group carried out for the then Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum and consider how best to implement those proposals which stressed the teaching of Scottish languages and History. Big ideas must not be suppressed.**
- **We should also ensure that real choice is available within the state system. That means not just a continued support and recognition for Catholic schooling and for Gaelic medium education, but a recognition that the same ideal can be offered to other communities across Scotland where there is a substantial demand.**
- **We must also ensure a real reduction in class sizes, particularly in the early primary years and combine that with an assurance that the McCrone deal is properly resourced.**

## Environment, transport and land reform

- We need to address the problem of high fuel prices in rural areas but we should not be in favour of across the board cuts in fuel duty. We have to have a policy which is sustainable and which recognises our obligations with regard to the international priorities set by Kyoto.
- Development of a truly integrated public transport system operating effectively in both rural and urban areas plays a key role in achieving environmental aims. Our railway system needs a strategic re-appraisal to ensure that communities where there is an expressed demand for new or re-opened rail links are brought into the debate. Improvement of the existing services is important but should not be considered as an alternative to the provision of new services.
- We need to continue our opposition to the growing of GM crops in Scotland, joining with those councils in Scotland who are seeking to ensure that Scotland is a GM-free zone and in campaigning on this issue, we need to link with a growing group of communities within the European Union who are seeking a similar future for their own territories.
- The recent land reforms must be strengthened by extending the right to buy to tenant farmers and by reviewing the current trigger for community right to buy to establish where it could be extended.

## **Europe**

The European Union has changed substantially from the organisation joined by the UK in 1975.

Our consideration of the potential future for Scotland as an independent member of that Union must be kept under constant scrutiny.

The real test must always be: is it in the interests of Scotland or is it not?

The key questions may lie in whether Britain enters into deals with Europe grossly harmful to Scotland prior to independence.

In that case, I am certain a future free Scotland could not avoid revisiting the issues.

## **Local Government**

I have outlined my commitment to improved two way communication in the section on strategy.

**We must also continue the promotion of our existing policy on replacement of Council Tax by Local Income Tax, a political opportunity to campaign and win an important victory within the powers of the devolved Parliament: a vital step in building back its public repute. However, that does not preclude us from also considering the introduction of a Land Value Tax and I believe that we should be investigating the opportunities such a Tax would bring.**