

# Donald Dewar's speech at the opening of the Scottish Parliament 1 July 1999

**(Donald Dewar was Scotland's first First Minister, 1999 - 2000)**

"This mace is a symbol of the great democratic traditions from which we draw our inspiration and our strength.

At its head are inscribed the opening words of our founding statute:

„There shall be a Scottish Parliament.“

Through long years, those words were first a hope, then a belief, then a promise. Now they are a reality.

This is a moment anchored in our history.

Today, we reach back through the long haul to win this Parliament, through the struggles of those who brought democracy to Scotland, to that other Parliament dissolved in controversy nearly three centuries ago.

Today, we look forward to the time when this moment will be seen as a turning point: the day when democracy was renewed in Scotland, when we revitalised our place in this our United Kingdom.

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.

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.

Walter Scott wrote that only a man with soul so dead could have no sense, no feel of his native land. For me, for any Scot, today is a proud moment; a new stage on a journey begun long ago and which has no end. This is a proud day for all of us.

A Scottish Parliament. Not an end: a means to greater ends. And those too are part of our mace. Woven into its symbolic thistles are these four words:

„Wisdom. Justice. Compassion. Integrity.“

Burns would have understood that. We have just heard – beautifully sung – one of his most enduring works. At the heart of that song is a very Scottish conviction: that honesty and simple dignity are priceless virtues, not imparted by rank or birth or privilege but part of the soul.

Burns believed that sense and worth ultimately prevail. He believed that was the core of politics; that without it, ours would be an impoverished profession.

„Wisdom. Justice. Compassion. Integrity.“ Timeless values. Honourable aspirations for this new forum of democracy, born on the cusp of a new century.

We are fallible. We will make mistakes. But we will never lose sight of what brought us here: the striving to do right by the people of Scotland; to respect their priorities; to better their lot; and to contribute to the commonweal.

I look forward to the days ahead 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.”