

# All Wales Convention Address

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**Professor Michael Scott,**

**Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive, Glyndŵr University**

- 1 Ladies and Gentlemen, the world has changed since your all Wales Convention was established. It is not only that the United Kingdom is facing one of the worst economic downturns since the 1930s but that there is a general weariness detected about politics on the right or the left. Sleaze has once again raised its head. This time it happened to be in relation to a Labour Government as last time it was to a Conservative one. People appear to feel let down and betrayed and the media appears to be pandering to anxiety and indeed feeding its fire. Yesterday's budget has sent pundits and politicians into a spin as they try to test its projections and come to terms with the scale of the planned borrowing.

## **Impact of economic situation**

- 2 Following a brief episode when the UK appeared possibly to be 'saving the world' the harsh reality has dawned – a devaluation of our currency by over 30%, unemployment through the decline of the market in many areas of our economy, the virtual collapse of the financial sector on which the UK's new economy had been based. Only yesterday we heard of the closure of another North East Wales manufacturer, Airproducts, based less than 20 miles from this Guildhall. As you leave Wrexham you will pass many homes where families are now coming to terms with a loss of income. Add to all this, political in-fighting and a frustration with government, evident in the polls, we have to ask whether or not this is the time to be talking about a new political make up of the United Kingdom based on the strengthening of the devolved authority given to Scotland, and Wales in particular?

### **Inspiration of Owain Glyndŵr**

- 3 This evening you will be holding a public meeting at Glyndŵr University, named after a proud self confident Welshman, Owain Glyndŵr, who at a time of upheaval in England and Wales when Henry Bolingbroke had usurped the throne from Richard Plantagenet, rose up in defiance over the economic policies of the new King which was resulting in the loss of wealth in Wales. It was a time when the country did not know what was true and what was false, whether Richard II was alive or dead, whether the new King truly had a right to rule.
- 4 Within all this uncertainty Glyndŵr had the courage to instill a confidence in the people of Wales, and thereby to be crowned Prince of Wales as he stated - by the grace of God; Glyndŵr further had the confidence to call a Parliament for the nobles and prelates of Wales; to ask aid from the King of France; to attempt to ally himself with the Avignon Pope to have freedom of expression and authority within the Welsh Church and to call for the creation of two universities, one in the North and one in the South. As a lawyer he recognized the four pillars of modern society, the authority of a Parliament, the independence of the judiciary, the freedom of speech and expression and the autonomy of the university.
- 5 He had the confidence to do this and for a little while Wales had the confidence to respond to his call, allowing people to hold their heads up high. They were of course dismissed and laughed at by Bolingbroke's court though Prince Henry of Monmouth learned much from what had happened and later according to Shakespeare at least, made a great deal of his Welsh identity as he brought people in England and Wales together in a common cause, against the France which had failed to respond to Glyndŵr's request in the famous Pennal Letter.

### **A new sense of identity**

- 6 There is no Glyndŵr to raise the confidence of Wales today but there is something much better and deeper. Since the establishment of the Welsh Assembly there has been a new confidence in the people of Wales, a new pride and self respect. There has also been a realization amongst politicians, perhaps reluctantly but nevertheless evident, that for this country to capitalize on its new sense of identity a different political order from that Westminster has to prevail. Political parties have begun to understand that they need to work together and create a joint vision for the country if we are to succeed in the world. In saying this I'm not just referring to Labour and Plaid in the One Wales Accord but to the discussions between all the parties about coalition government after the last Assembly elections.
- 7 Was this the start of something new in Wales, which would allow us to seek full law making powers and greater fiscal autonomy? Was it even more than this?

### **UK attitude towards devolution**

- 8 One of the great problems of devolution has been the fact that the English, including many in the UK government, do not understand what it really means. There has been, over the last 10 years, a huge change of culture in Scotland and in Wales but relatively little in England. As the Welsh Affairs Committee of the House of Commons remarked in their report on the provision of cross-border public services, there continues to be an unwillingness in UK government circles to appreciate fully the implications of devolution. But this situation is not confined to government departments. It is common in political parties, charities and other non-governmental organisations. Devolution is more than merely adding Cymru-Wales to an organisation's name.

- 9 This is not the time or place to talk about the importance of the devolution of multicultural England within the United Kingdom but it is an opportunity to remind ourselves of the multicultural and multilingual nature of our own country and to ask ourselves, whatever political party we might prefer, whether or not, after having made the great strides of the first years of devolution, we have actually understood the value of the new Welsh identity.

### **A new vision for Wales**

- 10 In short, if we are going to gain full legislative powers, are we mature enough to continue to define a new vision for Wales, which respects the past but realizes the realities of the present and looks forward to a future goal which will benefit all of the people, whether their first language be Welsh, English, Hindi, Polish, Gujarati or whatever?
- 11 Are we wanting our politicians to take forward a new way of political thinking in which they will seek to find positive strengths that cross the boundaries of party political dogmas for the future well being of all?
- 12 Has the new *realpolitik* of single accord or coalition had a lasting effect on all parties to allow for a maturity of government to listen to people and to move away from micro management, into visionary leadership that builds on the new confidence in Wales, through a macro approach instilling a greater sense of ownership within the people for the direction of their lives? Lives, that is, that can take pride in values, culture, sport, employment, health, financial stability.

### **A new democracy**

- 13 Let me therefore fly an entrepreneurial kite to stimulate some debate over the democratic make-up of Senedd representation. If we are to have fuller law making powers let's have a democratic Senedd system which in

addition to the political parties has a membership of elected experts in key fields of devolved authority in for example health and education. We do not have the luxury of appointing a second chamber of such experts so let them be elected to the Senedd itself and let them be non-politically aligned independents with elected members' responsibilities. Such an approach would do three things:

- I. It would put a crossbench group of individuals in the Assembly that would help develop the culture of co-operation rather than opposition.
  - II. It would provide on the spot expert advice cutting out some, though not all, bureaucracy and help to ensure in a single chamber democracy, the robustness of law making that is found mainly through a dual chamber system.
  - III. It would provide a greater communication bridge between the Senedd and Ministerial Civil Servants allowing more representation through expert presence in the decision making itself.
- 14 The proposal implies that the number of Assembly Members is increased to 80 with the additional 20 members being elected from a single national list of expert and politically non-aligned candidates. The electorate would vote for these candidates at the same time as they elect their constituency and regional Assembly Members. Consequently I describe this list of expert and politically non-aligned candidates as the Third List.
- 15 The Third List would be divided into five sections each covering an important aspect of Welsh national life. I would propose the economy, health, education, public services and transport and communication. Voters would be asked to vote for four candidates in each section.

- 16 Third List candidates would be nominated by specially constituted panels for each section. These “Vocational Panels” would comprise organisations whose objectives and activities were primarily related to the subject related to the Vocational Panel and whose members had knowledge and practical experience of the subject of the Vocational Panel. Panel member organisations would be able to forward names to the Vocational Panel for inclusion as Candidates on the Third List. The Vocational Panels would be responsible for ensuring the eligibility of the member organisations and the eligibility of the nominated candidates. This system has some similarity to the Seanad (SEN-AD) system in the Irish Republic, but with a much wider electorate and without the strong control exercised by the Irish political parties in their second chamber.
- 17 Third List candidates would be elected by single transferable votes and would play a full role in the activities of the National Assembly. Their presence would significantly strengthen the expertise of the Assembly and make it a body truly prepared to make laws for Wales.
- 18 If in receiving greater law making powers, Wales cannot start to rehabilitate political integrity, honesty and trust in the whole of the UK at least, if not in Europe, then what’s the point? If in gaining greater law making powers, we are merely going to create a political identity based on the model of Westminster’s aged processes, then what’s the point? Westminster’s political processes go back a thousand years of course and history cannot be summarily dismissed, but the practicalities of the current parliamentary system still have too many roots in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century age of imperialism. Its reforms since 1832 have tended to be by accretion. We have the opportunity to do something new in Wales, employing lateral thinking and determination under devolution to do certain things in our distinctive way.
- 19 Glyndŵr’s revolt petered out and was subsumed by the emergence of

Henry of Monmouth, Henry V, who had the political wisdom not to pursue Glyndŵr but to allow him to retire in obscurity. I doubt if there is a new Henry V on the horizon. Now, therefore, is perhaps the time to see whether in Wales, as a small country we can work together democratically to change political shibboleths and build something anew, a different political order, **based on co-operation rather than opposition**. I believe there are signs of this across all the political parties, though sometimes they might not like to admit it.

- 21 After the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, a great French philosopher, Teilhard de Chardin wrote:  
  
The Age of Nations is Past. It remains for us now, if we are not to perish, to set aside the ancient prejudices and build the world.
- 22 What he envisaged of course has not taken place yet, but that is not to say it is impossible to realize. Devolution is in essence a different concept of national identity which can work in harmony with its neighbours, for the common good of all. It is a new type of socialism, of conservatism, of nationalism, of liberalism. It is something – which dare I say it – can reflect all views in a new national vision and it is this for which we should strive as we seek full legislative and fiscal authority within the United Kingdom. Instead of having Government and Opposition, this scenario establishes a political law making structure whereby cross-party government is interrogated and held to account by a cross-party (and non-party) Senedd. It is a fresh democracy in which the people's representatives have the responsibility both to govern and to advise and challenge with authority. It thereby allows the people's voice to permeate the proceedings in a new constructive way.
- 23 Let me conclude therefore by returning to where I began, the economic crisis. The irony of Northern Rock was that it was built on sand not rock

and yet this was only the first example of infirm foundations in the British and Western economic system.

- 24    Whatever our vision, Wales cannot realize it without financial stability and the ability to gain income for itself. We have to start with economic policies and priorities. Here in the North East of Wales we have one of the largest manufacturing regions in the whole of the UK. In the current circumstances this has to be nurtured for Wales, as well as for the UK. Airbus and its supply chain needs focused attention from Cardiff. Our SMEs need help to weather the unnatural stillness of the economy. It is here, in the lands of Glyndŵr, that much of the future of Wales resides and if neglected no legislative powers will be able to make up the loss. For any system of government in Wales to operate effectively it must have some means of fiscal autonomy. That is not to say it should keep all the tax revenue raised in Wales and to take responsibility for all government expenditure in Wales but it does call for a re-examination of the formula for financing the devolved administrations. Even Lord Barnett expressed surprise that his formula was still being applied. Further, if Wales has spending powers so should it have power to enable income generating activities into government and the ability to borrow money, although this may put us back to questions about the stability or at least veracity of credit based nationhood that yesterday's budget has further fuelled. Nevertheless the whole question of financial authority and powers needs to be considered, with hopefully some further lateral thinking taking place.

- 25    For me, Ladies and Gentlemen, this All Wales Convention is not just about fuller legislative powers granted from Westminster. It's about much more. It's about a new vision for a future based on people working together. You'll be very welcome tonight at Glyndŵr University.

- 26    Diolch yn fawr iawn