

REVIEW: THE ALMANAC OF SCOTTISH POLITICS

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Gerry Hassan and Peter Lynch, **The Almanac of Scottish Politics**, Politico's, 2001, ISBN 1902301 536. £30.00.

In the introduction to **The Almanac of Scottish Politics**, Gerry Hassan and Peter Lynch recall a recent report that came to the stunning calculation that each Scottish voter is now represented by 18 different people: one Westminster MP, one constituency MSP, seven regional list MSPs, eight MEPs representing Scotland in Europe and one local councillor. Political consultant Hassan and politics lecturer Lynch are perceptive observers of the Scottish political scene, and this fruit of their collaboration is a timely route map guiding its readers through the complex, multi-layered, structure that is now Scottish democracy.

Two thirds of the Almanac's 450 pages constitute a constituency by constituency guide to each of Scotland's 73 Westminster and Scottish Parliament constituencies, and the 8 Scottish Parliament regional seats. In each case Hassan and Lynch describe the constituency, trace its political and electoral history from 1945 to the present (where geographic continuity permits), detail the results of the 1997 general election and 1999 Scottish Parliament elections, and include a biography of the current MP and MSPs.

The remainder of the Almanac is given over to a series of useful tables, including:

- the socio-economic characteristics of Scottish constituencies;

Dr Robert McLean works with the City of Edinburgh Museums and Galleries service. Convener of Scottish Labour Action from 1988-1998 and a member, and later Vice Convener, of the Campaign for a Scottish Parliament from 1980 to 1999, he has written widely on Irish and Scottish nationalism and on the history of the Scottish radical and labour movement. He is currently working on a history of the Campaign for a Scottish Assembly/Parliament.

Scottish Affairs

- Scottish general election and by election results since 1945;
- European election results since the introduction of direct elections in 1979;
- Scottish local government election results from 1974;
- Scottish referendum results from the Euro poll in 1975 and the devolution referendums of 1979 and 1997.

It also includes a history of opinion polling on voting intentions and preferred Scottish constitutional options. This allows for easy comparison between responses to pollsters and real votes that were cast in the privacy of the polling booth. Such comparisons should be compulsory reading for politicians suffering from inflated expectations spread by opinion poll results.

The Almanac includes a useful list of those who have served as Scottish Secretary and Secretary of State for Scotland since the post was first created as Scottish Secretary in 1885 in response to early demands for home rule. It also includes a list of the Scottish Executive as constituted at 29 October 2000, following the McLeish reshuffle caused by the death of Donald Dewar to whose memory Hassan and Lynch dedicate the book.

The concluding chronology of post-war Scottish politics dates from Dr. McIntyre's SNP by election victory in Motherwell in April 1945 to 25 January 2001 and the Executive's 'finessing' of its position on care for the elderly in response to a majority demand in the Scottish Parliament.

The Almanac is essential equipment for political trainspotters, and political practitioners are sure to surreptitiously flick through the index to count their mentions. It deserves a wider market. General readers will find it informative, and many of the constituency and politician profiles are not without humour.

By definition, reference works of this nature date with every turn of the electoral cycle. This first edition will either be a one off, a snap shot of Scottish government at the turn of the millennium, or the first in a series regularly updating the evolving Scottish political scene. Will Hassan and Lynch inherit the mantle of Bochel and Denver? On the basis of this first edition of **The Almanac of Scottish Politics**, I think they might.

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