

Twenty years on: the 1997 referendum

11th September 2017



Today is twenty years since Scotland voted for a Scottish Parliament, which was then delivered by the last Labour government.

Here are some memories from the Labour family from '97.

Elaine Smith, Labour MSP for Central Scotland:

Labour's election victory and the referendum for a Scottish Parliament gave many people in Scotland hope after the devastation of 18 Tory years. I have friends who joined the Labour Party due to our promise to deliver a parliament and they have remained active members. The SNP at the time famously said Labour 'couldn't deliver a pizza never mind a parliament'. Ironically 20 years on and it is an SNP government who are failing to deliver social justice, failing to tackle poverty and failing to address the crisis in health and education. The full potential of the yes/yes vote and our powerful parliament has yet to be achieved and that is very disappointing for those of us who campaigned with such high hopes.



Elaine Smith's Yes/Yes badge.

Paul Sweeney, Labour MP for Glasgow North East:

Although I was only 8 years old, I remember the sense of excitement and of hope in that year and in the two years later during the first Scottish Parliament elections and the opening ceremony, which I remember vividly – particularly the poems and the singing of A Man's a Man. It felt like the new Labour government, with some now legendary figures in Scottish politics at its heart, was leading the progress of our country and doing so in a way that unified people behind a common purpose. A stark contrast to the divisiveness of the 2014 referendum.



The Scottish Parliament chamber

David Whitton, former adviser to Donald Dewar and Labour MSP for Strathkelvin and Bearsden:

There is no doubt that Scotland was very lucky that, when it came to delivering Labour's 1997 election promise of devolution, Donald Dewar was that man.

A lifelong believer in home rule for Scotland, when to be so was to court unpopularity among the party faithful north and south of the border, allied to a ferocious work ethic and shrewd intellect, Donald Dewar was the ideal choice to pilot such a historic piece of legislation through the House of Commons.

Some in the media dubbed Donald the "Father of the Nation," not a title he would have ever have claimed for himself. Yet, there is no doubt history will record that Donald Dewar was the deliverer of devolution and that cannot be denied.



Donald Dewar, Labour and Scotland's first First Minister.

Lewis Macdonald, Labour MSP for North East Scotland:

I've still got the t-shirt: the one I wore canvassing football fans at Scotland v Belarus at Pittodrie on 7 September 1997 (We won that one 4-1!)

