

12

DEVOLUTION

Hamish Watt came to see me today about our attitude to the Devolution Bill. He began by stressing that there was room for agreement between the SNP and the Conservatives and he accepts that we are likely to win the next General Election by a substantial majority. Like us he would like to see this happen sooner rather than later - not least because 'the longer Labour stays in power the greater the damage we shall have to repair'.

He stressed again and again his wish that M.T. did not after the Queen's Speech commit the Party to vote against the Devolution Bill. If she does it will be impossible for the SNP to have any working arrangement with us. He would like to see a free vote and accepts that he would expect to see us voting against the details of the Bill. In particular he mentioned that the SNP did not think it fair that with a Scottish Assembly there should be the present representation in the Westminster Parliament and he would support us if we moved amendments to this effect.

Hamish Watt is of course an ex-Tory candidate. I do not know what influence he has with his colleagues, but this is all obviously in his mind because he came back several times to see me and our conversation lasted a good half hour.

I gained the impression that since the SNP were likely to be a dominant force in Scotland after the next General Election and since we were likely to be the next Government he was anxious to come to some sort of working arrangement with us.

He particularly stressed that these views should be passed to M.T. 'so that she could weigh them before making up her mind about her attitude to the Devolution Bill in her reply to the Queen's Speech' (quote).

J.W.

18.11.76.



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON, S.W.1

22nd November, 1976.

*Dear Margaret,*

I attach hereto a report I have received from Jack Weatherill, which I think you will find of interest. I am sending a copy to Francis Pym.

*Yours ever*

*Humphrey*

The Rt. Hon. Margaret Thatcher, M.P.