

# The First Three Years

May 1999  
- June 2002



**Michael with Sean Connery on his visit to the Parliament in September 1999**

"After three years representing you in the Scottish Parliament, I thought the time was right for a special edition of the regular newsletter to highlight some of the issues on which I have been working.



The Scottish Parliament has had a difficult time. But as we move to independence we should also make sure that the Parliament serves all the people and works to bring about a better, more just, more caring and more equal Scotland.

In my work with local organisations, in my advocacy of individual constituency cases, in my activities as the SNP's Spokesman on Children, Education and Culture and in everything else I do I want to make sure our Parliament is seen as relevant to every day life, hard working and determined to improve. I hope I can continue to achieve those aims during the coming year and beyond."

## Michael

Michael Russell won the Herald Debater of the Year Award in 2000, was shortlisted for the Channel 4 Politician of the Year in 2002, and shortlisted for Herald Front Bencher of the Year in 1999.



**Michael represented Scotland at a conference on "Parliaments and the Media" in New Delhi in February 2000."**

Michael is a member of a number of Cross-party groups in the Parliament including those on Borders Rail, Epilepsy, Culture and the Media (Vice-convener), Gaelic (Vice-convener), Information, Knowledge and Enlightenment (SPIKE), the Scots Language, Scottish Traditional Arts (START), and Tobacco Control. He is also an Executive Member of the Scottish branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association"

*This special edition of the newsletter reports on Michael Russell's work in the first three years of the Scottish Parliament from May 1999 to June 2002.*



## A Just Society

### ACT OF SETTLEMENT

"With a written constitution and a bill of rights, we could transfer the matter to the history books. United, we can say that discrimination is wrong. Let us end it. That would be a suitable Christmas and millennium gift from this Parliament to the people of Scotland. I move, That the Parliament believes that the discrimination contained in the Act of Settlement has no place in our modern society, expresses its wish that those discriminatory aspects of the Act be repealed, and affirms its view that Scottish society must not disbar participation in any aspect of our national life on the grounds of religion."

*Extract from a debate in the Scottish Parliament, 16th December 1999*

### Shirley McKie

Michael Russell has campaigned for justice for Shirley McKie, the former Strathclyde Police detective wrongly accused of perjury when her fingerprints were said to have been found at a murder scene. She was acquitted after the evidence against her was discredited.

Justice minister Jim Wallace was urged by more than 120 international experts to admit a mistake had taken place and that the fingerprint evidence at her trial was incorrect. And they warned unless the situation was rectified, fingerprint evidence and the Scottish justice system would be undermined. Michael planned to use a recent member's debate in Parliament to discuss Ms McKie's case. But this was blocked on the grounds that it could have interfered with a civil case being brought by her.

The First Three Years

MICHAEL RUSSELL MSP

# A Caring Society

## PEOPLE MATTER MORE

"I do not think anyone can deny that historical imperatives have been a great source of problems for Scottish heavy industry and have caused the devastation of our traditional industrial communities. That situation applies to the central belt, most of the south of Scotland and many other places in Scotland. The main hope of regeneration is people. One can invest in almost anything in Scotland, but it will be hopeless without people. People matter more than anything else. A Government that is obsessed with ticking boxes and with targets and indicators forgets the importance of people. There will be no regeneration in Scotland until we remember that." *Extract from a debate in the Scottish Parliament, 7th March 2002*



## Unemployment

Michael Russell has campaigned to improve the environment and quality of life throughout the South of Scotland, and Scotland, but especially in the Ardeer area and in Stevenston where he has pursued residents concerns on drugs, vandalism, poor housing, and for action on a pedestrian bridge at the local level crossing, the gates of which are closed for around five hours and 114 times a day.



## & deprivation

Commenting on league tables, released by the SNP, of the best and worst councils in Scotland, based on Audit Scotland figures,

Michael Russell said, "All three Ayrshire Councils are placed in the bottom eight of the league. North Ayrshire sitting 25<sup>th</sup> out of 32 is firmly stuck in the relegation zone of the league. The lesson for local people may be to relegate Labour at the next elections."



Irvine Sorting Office

## Job losses

Commenting on the announcement that the Parcelforce depot in Irvine is to close with the loss of hundreds of jobs Michael Russell said, "These job losses are driven by the Labour Government's plans to force competition into the mail market. The Royal Mail and the Post Office are public services and we must put people before profit."

The Chancellor's policy of high interest rates and the high pound made competing in the world market extremely difficult and has led to disastrous job losses for many communities. Clydesdale and West Lothian were hit by the loss of jobs at DAKS Simpson, Irvine by losses at the Volvo plant. The Borders too has had its problems and Michael is pursuing strategies to deal with the expected closure of Chapelcross.

## Stonehouse Hospital

Michael Russell tabled questions on the decision to pursue any new hospital in Stonehouse by means of a PPP project rather than by normal capital consent. "This is a bad decision which will cream off much needed health service money into the pockets of a private company."

## Lanark Health Centre

The new health centre for Lanark, being built at the initiative of the Lanark Doctor's Practice will provide state of the art facilities for Lanark and the surrounding area and will be part of a health campus which will also include services provided directly by Lanarkshire Health Board.

## Foot and mouth

Speaking of the pyres Michael Russell admitted, "It is a hideous and frightening sight, which makes us all wonder whether we could ever again tolerate that means of dealing with the disease—essential as it was. Let us hope the situation never arises again. When the crisis is over, we must think again about how we treat animals, about how we relate to the countryside and about what our stewardship of the countryside means."

*Extract from a debate in the Scottish Parliament, 10th May 2001*

## LEAD IN WATER PIPES

Michael tabled a series of questions to Scottish Ministers asking how many people are affected by continuous exposure to lead in water pipes, how many premises are affected and how much money is available at the start of the 21st century to overcome this 19th century problem.

## HEALTH

In 1999 a report from Bristol University showed 32% of Cunninghame South's population living beneath the poverty line, in the least healthy 10% of all areas in Britain. 50% of deaths between 1991 and 1995 were found to have been avoidable - half the deaths would not have occurred had people lived in one of Britain's wealthiest constituencies. Michael responded, "These figures prove beyond doubt that poverty determines life expectancy. Nine of the UK's 15 least healthy constituencies are in Scotland. Significant improvement appears doubtful as under New Labour the gap between rich and poor has actually widened."

**"I intend to keep fighting for a real public health service, not a privatised one."**

The real verdict on the health services in Scotland does not come from this chamber; it comes from the people we meet on the street, from our own experiences and from anecdotal evidence that we might get when talking to people at a party or in the pub. People have lost faith in the leadership of the health service in Scotland. That leadership sits on the Executive benches. Until the people have faith in politicians and what they can achieve, things will just get worse. *Extract from a debate in the Scottish Parliament, 6th July 2000*



Sod cutting ceremony at Lanark

# Opportunity and Potential



## THE UNION HAS FAILED SCOTLAND

**"The only future for Scotland is as an independent nation", said Michael Russell**

*Extract from a debate in the Scottish parliament, 16th January 2002*

**"Proportional representation is about providing services to the people who are in the gallery. It is about governing Scotland better. It is about empowering local authorities – it is about democracy."**

*Extract from a debate in the Scottish Parliament, 29th November 2001*

"Scotland is not immune from a terrorist threat. It is absolutely right that the Government of Scotland engage the people of Scotland in debating the appropriate response to the present international situation. That is happening in every country in the western world and beyond. This Parliament is being denied the right to do so by the Scottish Executive. We cut out the possibility of engaging Scotland in the debate and getting the whole-hearted support of the people for measures that may be necessary to defeat world-wide terrorism." *Extract from a debate in the Scottish Parliament, 15th November 2001*

**"I remind the First Minister that this is question time. For him, it is answer time."**

Michael Russell accused the Executive of financial mismanagement during First Minister's Question Time in Parliament, when he stood in for Scottish National Party leader John Swinney. Michael was commenting on news that the Scottish Executive had under spent its budget by £718 million. He asked whether First Minister, Henry McLeish, would consider selling tickets for his next meeting with the Prime Minister, adding, "It will be truly worth witnessing. On the one hand you will have to explain why you are constantly telling the press you need more money for programmes, on the other hand you can't spend the money you've got."

*Extract from First Minister's Questions in the Scottish Parliament, 19th September 2001*



Galashiels

## We owe it to ourselves

"We need to invest, as a nation, in the best prospects for our future. To do so we must take radical and direct action to reduce class sizes in the early primary years to 18 pupils or less. That policy has shown its benefits elsewhere and could show its benefits here: it leads to better attainment, more help for the disadvantaged, has long-term effects and, in economic terms, it pays for itself. It is absolutely essential that the present generation of school pupils and those about to enter school are equipped and prepared to the highest standard for their working lives. We in Scotland know we have an under-performing economy. We are the generation that will have to plan to make it perform for the future, if we are to go to our old age able to sustain our standard of living, our standard of health care and our standard of welfare. Not only do we owe to our children the best education that we can give them; paradoxically, we owe it to ourselves."

*Extract from a debate in the Scottish parliament, 7th February 2002*



"Neither a Westminster Government nor the Westminster-controlled parties can deliver effective and efficient public services. The Tories and Labour have failed to deliver services in Scotland over many generations. We must change the system. The SNP is the only party that will do that."



**"The SNP looks forward to a European future in which we will fly the European flag and the saltire outside the Scottish Parliament on Europe Day"**

"The idea of a group of nations co-operating as equals has been overturned in the Executive's mind because of the angels-on-the-head-of-a-pin argument about Scotland's status and because the Executive cannot admit Scotland is a nation. The Executive now argues it is better that big countries speak for small countries. That is a direct perversion of the idea and the ideal of Europe."

*Extract from a debate in the Scottish Parliament, 9th May 2001*



## STUDENT DEBT

"Here we are listening to a group of ministers and MSPs who benefited from free access to higher education and who are content to allow a new generation of students to fall into debt. That debt turns young people off higher education, drives them out of higher education and makes them regret they ever entered higher education. After the Scottish Qualifications Authority debacle, the last thing we should be doing is deterring young people from higher education. We need to make people respect politics and the Scottish Parliament. Sadly, the bill does nothing of the sort. Instead, the bill shows it is possible to put together a tawdry political compromise to save the Liberal-Labour Executive. That was its purpose."

*Extract from a debate in the Scottish parliament, 31st January 2001*

**Michael at Hampden**

# Laughter and warmth and life



**"Fad na bliadhna rè gach ràithe Gach la's gach ciaradh dhomh Is e Alba nan Gall 's nan Gàidheal Is gàire, is blàths is beatha dhomh."** *George Campbell Hay*

"In another language, that means, "All year long each season through Each day and each fall of dusk for me It is Scotland, Highland and Lowland That is laughter and warmth and life for me". **Sea Trek 2001** That is what culture in all its aspects is about. It is laughter and warmth and life. It is neither a five-year plan nor something for control freaks." *Extract from a debate in the Scottish parliament, 3rd September 1999*

## The Creative Economy

"Something funny happens to politicians when they are confronted with culture. When politicians talk about culture, they get very serious and tongue-tied, and seem to forget that creativity is about excitement. One or two of us have worked in the creative industries. I know that Andy Kerr was a stand-up comic in another life, but I am sure that even he would agree that, when the Scottish Executive describes the creative industries as including architecture, advertising, arts and cultural industries, design, film, interactive leisure software, music, new media, publishing, radio and television it means it is about all the things we enjoy and like participating in. It means the things—or most of the things—that give us pleasure but the reality is that this strategy is a way of shoving into a convenient drawer some things that might get some good publicity."



*Extract from a debate in the Scottish Parliament, 27th September 2000*

## INDUSTRIAL MUSEUMS

Michael Russell urged Parliament to heed warnings from the Director of the Scottish Museums Council that nine industrial museums were in imminent danger of closure because of funding difficulties. **Verdant Works, Dundee** Amongst these were Wanlockhead Museum of Lead-mining, and the Scottish Maritime Museum (Irvine).



## Aberlady

"Small villages are important to Scotland. The pressure on housing in East Lothian for commuters to Edinburgh is leading to the destruction of such villages. In Aberlady I am happy to support the local conservation society which wishes a complete review of the planning guidelines so that all building is of an appropriate type and scale, and so that vast increases in the size of such villages, and in resulting commuting traffic, do not take place against the wishes of the residents."



## Gaelic - In danger ...but alive

"Well, I think that this is the first debate in Gaelic since the Parliament met in Ardchattan, Argyll in 1309. King Robert the Bruce was in your chair, Presiding Officer, and freedom for Scotland was the first item on the agenda. Gaelic is alive in today's Scotland too—in danger, but alive. If our promises on Scotland's culture are to mean anything, we must make a space for Gaelic—and Scots and English. Furthermore, we should recognise a place for the other languages in Scotland—the languages from China, Pakistan and India which are spoken in our country and which give welcome life to our culture." *Extract from a debate in the Scottish parliament, 2nd March 2000*

# On the move

## Transport Links

"Special circumstances dictate we take some action now on the A75. There are safety reasons for that and the community requirement. There are reasons to do with the designation of the road as a European route of major importance and interests from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. There is the crucial fact that a large number of jobs depend on the route. The council's unpublished economic study indicates the route directly affects something like 1,160 jobs in the community and 2,500 in Scotland as a whole. Stranraer is the busiest port in the United Kingdom after Dover and is clearly a major asset to the Scottish economy."

*Extract from a debate in the Scottish Parliament, 18th January 2001*

## HAMILTON TO LARKHALL RAIL LINK

Michael pursued the issue with Ministers. "It is vital a commitment is obtained from the Scottish Executive to this rail link. In the light of the continuing threat to jobs in Larkhall, there has never been a greater need to improve investment in the area if it is to prosper in future."

## Borders Rail Link

"This is not, as Mr Jenkins said, an historic debate or an historic day. The historic day will be when the line is built, when the Borders is opened up once again to the rest of Scotland, and when the terrible mistake of 30 years ago is overcome. On that day the people of the Borders will be able to open their newspapers and no longer see a list of national transport priorities that includes tramlines for Manchester, investment in Nottingham, a Docklands light railway, double-decker trains and a Borders railway about which the Executive says, "We are committed to this, but we won't tell you when, we won't tell you how, and it won't happen."

*Extract from a debate in the Scottish Parliament, 1st June 2000*