

Speech given by Colin Mackie at a function to mark his retiral as long-serving Secretary of the LA

Douglas, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for your great kindness in organizing this evening.

February 1991-the AGM of the local association - only Ian Scott, Douglas and Bill Henderson are left from the local association Executive committee of those far off days. The AGM heard my esteemed predecessor, Gordon Macgregor, indicate that he intended to retire from the post of secretary but that he wished to delay his departure until later in the year. “No” boomed Alex Munro, in that so distinctive and authoritative western isles accent, “I think that it is time to let the young Turks take over; I propose Colin Mackie as secretary.” and that was that!

Well, the young Turks are all just a little bit older and a little bit greyer. But for this young Turk the race is finally run. I have been incredibly fortunate throughout my teaching career and it is a career that I can look back on now with enormous pleasure and a sense of, I hope not immodest, satisfaction.

From 1970 until 1984 I taught in Perth High School, one of the biggest schools in Scotland at that time, in a history and modern studies department of at least 6 teachers. I was appointed-without interview I may say- as Assistant Principal Teacher to Eric Fogg -who I am so glad is here tonight. I learnt a very great deal from Eric whose great capacity to delegate a range of responsibilities to me as APT served me well when I moved to Kinross high school in 1984 as PT history. I would thank Eric for his support and friendship.

Eric also encouraged me -badgered might be a better word- to join a trade union. I had started -I have to confess to you tonight- as a dyed-in-the-wool Tory. I did join the EIS but my membership was...well, let us just say, patchy. I tended to chop and change my union

membership. it was only a few weeks after I started at Kinross that I rejoined the institute and immediately found myself on strike!

A few weeks later the EIS rep at Kinross stood down and suggested that I take over. God must certainly love a sinner come to repentance! (sorry Bill!!). within a year I was a member of the Local Association Executive and four years later its President. As a member of Tayside Regional Executive, I served as Assistant Secretary of the Regional Executive from 1989 until I became Secretary here in 1991. The experience of working in Tayside was of immense value to me. I learned an enormous amount from observing the way in which experienced colleagues like Eric Baillie and Peter Andrews worked...and I salute them both tonight.

I began to learn some of the skills required in negotiation: the importance of mastering every detail of a set of proposals or a paper because it is perfectly possible that the person or persons on the other side of the table may not be so well prepared; the absolute necessity of remaining calm and focussed in negotiation - losing one's temper clouds judgment; the value of polite persistence; above all the absolutely vital requirement to establish what might be called negotiating integrity - in other words, the assurance that one can be trusted to be able to deliver on an agreement or a commitment made in negotiation and that once made such an agreement will be adhered to and not renege upon.

In 1996 Perth and Kinross achieved its independence from Tayside and the role of LA secretary expanded from supporting individual members and casework to the full range of negotiation on education policies and procedures. We had our first Director - the inimitable Bob McKay. We had a whole directorate to deal with - Depute directors....Joe McCabe, Bob Ganson, Len McConnell - who I am also delighted to see here tonight - George Waddell. We had a new JCC to establish and to manage. Over the succeeding years we had to develop and then re-develop sound working relationships with a rapidly changing - almost revolving door-succession of Directors - Bill Frew, George Waddell, Len McConnell, Stuart Powell, David Montgomery and Depute Directors - Joe McGalliard, Chic Kiddie, Ian

Mason, Peter McAvoy, Alan Taylor, Chris Webb, John Fyfe....the list appears almost endless!

Until 2001 I had to juggle my responsibilities as PT history at Kinross with those as LA secretary. I need to put on record my deepest appreciation to my friends and colleagues in the history department for their support during these years. In 2001 I was seconded at first part time and from 2003 full time to concentrate as leader of the teachers' side of the now JNCT on issues relating to the implementation of the 2001 agreement. We have achieved, I confidently believe, a very great deal over the last decade, and more, within Perth and Kinross.

We have established excellent working relationships with the Directorate -in all its many manifestations- and with the Council, relationships founded on trust and respect. We have established sound negotiating mechanisms both at authority level through the JCC and now the JNCT and at school level through school staff consultative committees. We negotiated successfully on the full range of matters relating to the 2001 agreement; and here, again, I learned an invaluable lesson: if one can offer, or be invited, to produce a first draft of a new policy document by officers of an authority who are themselves busy and harassed individuals, one has the opportunity to produce something which though it may subsequently be amended in some of its detail is likely to form perhaps more than just a first draft would suggest. Yes, I must confess that many of the policies of Perth and Kinross relating to the 2001 agreement were actually largely written by me. I vividly remember the long, long night when I sat down to produce the guidance to schools on the implementation of the working time agreement. If you don't like it-you can blame me!!

But if there is one single achievement in recent years of which I am most proud it must be the retention of the full range of subject Principal Teachers in our secondary schools, bucking the trend in so many other local authorities throughout Scotland. None of this would have been possible without the contribution of so many people here tonight. I could not have done this job without the confidence and trust which you have placed in me. To our much loved and sadly

missed colleague, Carol Blair, to Douglas, to Alastair Webb and to Audrey Macaulay in particular I offer my profound thanks. I would also wish to thank Graeme Campbell for all his advice and support in recent years. But tonight I make no apologies for singling out one person for particular thanks. It is sometimes a lonely job being LA Secretary. Sometimes one needs to be able to bounce ideas off someone else or simply to use that person as someone to listen to problems which have cropped up. There has hardly been a week that has gone by over the years when I have not called Bill Henderson in Bridge of Cally and talked over issues sometimes at very considerable length. Bill's sound judgment has been of immeasurable help to me and is deserving of the widest appreciation. And, if at any time, by eccentricities of behaviour, manner or appearance I may have given any offence, I sincerely apologise.

What of the future? Well, firstly, can I say something about the EIS itself. We appear to live in an age of increasing and alarming materialism and selfishness. Trade Unions and trade unionism have not recovered from the pounding of the Thatcher years. Although we would undoubtedly agree that the EIS has been one of the most successful, if not the most successful union, in Britain fundamentally the climate of popular perception, certainly not discouraged by Tony Blair, remains unsympathetic to trade unionism.

So often however-as many of you will know- we hear the refrain "What is the EIS doing about.....?" It is much more a question of

"What can the EIS do for me?" Rather than "How can I contribute as a member to the work of the EIS?" It is not, of course, a problem confined to our own situation. The late French philosopher, Jean Baudrillard wrote about the theory of hyper reality- the inability of consciousness to distinguish, particularly in technologically advanced cultures, between reality and fantasy.

Generations of young and, now, not so young people brought up on a diet of soap operas and 'reality' game shows on television and on computer games may have difficulty in distinguishing truth from fantasy. They certainly seem to find it increasingly unattractive to

wish to participate actively in more traditional organizations like our own. These are challenges faced by society as a whole. The challenge for the EIS is to continue to engage effectively with government, employers, and parents and to energise its own base; to campaign for increased investment in the public sector-in education, health, and transport. Money is not the sole solution to the problems faced in education, but money does buy staff, money buys time, money buys better built accommodation. More staff and more time mean smaller class sizes, better discipline, better prepared and motivated teachers.

I have, no doubt, begun to depress you and for that I apologise!

In Douglas you have a new secretary of vast experience locally and nationally. I wish him well. You are in very safe hands. He will need, and I have no doubt he will receive, the same support and encouragement from the Executive Committee that I have had.

And for myself? People have asked me if I shall miss the work I have been doing. Well, this is probably the best time to move on in life. There is a new regime in Pullar House.....again! I have probably now seen my fair share of new directors, with another shortly to be appointed. It is time for others to take up the challenge of establishing fresh diplomatic relations.

Although the successful handling of difficult and sensitive casework is ultimately extremely rewarding, it can bring its own pressures in trying to ensure that the member's problems are dealt with both timeously and satisfactorily. It will certainly be a blessed relief to know that when the telephone rings in at least the immediate future it is not some new case to tackle. There is no doubt that in recent years the age profile of the profession, the stress which many teachers are suffering and the increasing tendency of members to seek legal recourse for problems has made casework more difficult.

I shall enjoy a long holiday in Iceland this summer and, hopefully, visit the Antarctic next year. I have many interests to stimulate and to enthuse. I hope that I shall be welcome on the odd occasion at EIS functions. This has been one of the most fulfilling parts of my life. Changing direction in mid life from teaching to being a full time EIS

secretary has provided fresh purpose and renewed focus. I am extraordinarily grateful for the opportunity, the challenge and the responsibility. For that I offer you my deepest and most profound thanks.

I wish you all the very best in the future.