

Home Rule for Scotland launched



The Campaign for Scottish Home Rule was launched yesterday in Edinburgh, claiming to bring together key figures from across Scotland's political spectrum as well as from outwith party politics. Sadly we were not invited to their launch yesterday at Our Dynamic Earth and they have no images on their press pages as yet, so we have to resort to Twitter for a photo of the line up behind this group. It is led by Chair Ben Thomson who is also behind the think tank Reform Scotland and a declared supporter of Devo Max during the Scottish Independence Referendum campaign. We hope to meet with him soon to find out what role they believe that the new group Home Rule fills.

The team [@ScotHomeRule](#), coming together to argue the case for [#HomeRule](#) pic.twitter.com/jV0exhB4QA

– Scottish Home Rule (@ScotHomeRule) [November 3, 2014](#)

So excited to be part of the [@scothomerule](#) steering group. Really good launch this morning at [@ourdynamicearth](#) pic.twitter.com/ONdMNChBSc

– Susan Egelstaff (@SEgelstaff) [November 3, 2014](#)

The Campaign has a steering group of 12 people including figures closely associated with Labour, the SNP, the Liberal Democrats, the Conservatives and the Greens, as well as people

with no party affiliation. They have come together to make the case for an effective, sustainable and productive Home Rule settlement for Scotland.

The Campaign has made a submission to the Smith Commission. Its core recommendation is for the Commission to require clear underlying principles. The Campaign itself has three underlying principles, which are:

– Responsibilities Devolved

There should be a presumption in favour of devolving responsibility to Holyrood. Schedule 5 of the Scotland Act 1998 should be reviewed and the burden of proof for reserving a power rest with Westminster should it wish to retain that responsibility. The precedent was set in the original 1997 Act, but the implementation of it has not been in keeping with the spirit of its intent.

– Raising what you spend

Ensure that both Holyrood and Westminster have responsibility over the tax and borrowing powers required to make each of them responsible for raising the money that they spend. We believe if either tier of government is overly reliant on fiscal transfers from the other (whether that is from Westminster to Holyrood, or Holyrood to Westminster) this diminishes responsibility and blurs lines of accountability.

– Mutual respect

We understand the desire to ensure the Scottish Parliament is made permanent. Without a written constitution for the UK or similar changes at that level we cannot see how this could be meaningfully implemented in anything other than a symbolic way. However, we believe that we can address the democratic deficit and improve the relationship between Scotland and the rest of the UK by strengthening the mutual respect between parliaments and considering other ways to strengthen the

security of the constitutional position of Holyrood.

Further detail on these three underlying principles can be seen in the Campaign's Smith Commission submission and on homerule.scot

The Campaign believes that the No vote in the referendum on Scottish independence indicated that there is a desire amongst the people of Scotland to see meaningful Home Rule within the United Kingdom.

The steering group's members have written for the Campaign's blog – The Route Home – explaining why they are part of the Campaign. The full text can be seen on homerule.scot, but extracts of steering group members' views are below.

Derek Brownlee, former Conservative MSP and Finance Spokesman, said:

“There are two main reasons why I support this campaign.

“First, if we want to avoid endless discussion of the constitution, and to focus on the other political issues which matter, we have to find common ground and build a genuine constitutional settlement which lasts.

“Second, politics works best when there is strong accountability – when voters can see the link between the votes they cast, the people they elect, and the decisions they take.”

Susan Egelstaff, former Olympic badminton player, said:

“For Scotland to be as successful and prosperous as I believe that it can be, the country needs to have full fiscal autonomy which would, in turn, generate more opportunities for Scottish people to thrive. I believe that it is important for Holyrood to have more powers because, at present, it feels like Westminster still has a sizeable degree of influence over what happens in Scotland.

“I think that Scotland should be responsible for raising its own funds and then spending them in a way in which the country sees fit which would result in a fairer, more equal society.”

Dr Alison Elliot, former Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, said:

“Scotland is itching to take more control of its future. During the referendum, people gave voice to the kind of country they wanted to live in and offered to put their energy behind making that country a reality, whatever its constitutional makeup. It is important to seize this moment.

“An offer of enhanced devolution is being made. We can continue to shuffle along, picking up the crumbs that fall off the Westminster table, or we can do the job properly and develop a principled plan of action that will place sufficient power into the hands of people in Scotland so that they can make the best contribution they can to the life and prosperity of the Union.”

Prof. Richard Kerley, Chairman of the 2000 Renewing Local Democracy Working Group, said:

“I have argued ever since 1998/9 that a Parliament with a good range of domestic powers – certainly a mix of powers comparable to many jurisdictions in federal or semi-federal systems elsewhere – would always be handicapped and distorted by having such limited financial powers. That’s why I think it important that we urge the introduction of a set of arrangements that balance greater powers with responsibilities and accountabilities that are far closer to a federal arrangement.”

James Mackenzie, former Green Party Head of Media, said:

“Home rule wasn’t my first preference. That was – and remains – independence. But the result was clear and has to be respected. The No vote in September was secured in part by

promises of much more radical devolution, to be promptly delivered: the so-called Vow, or devo max or home rule. Although it was never well explained, it seems pretty clear to me, and the three principles of our campaign set it out perfectly.

“First, all legislative power should be devolved unless there’s a clear reason not to. Second, as we take more responsibility for spending, so we should take more responsibility for raising taxes. Third, we need to see the Scottish Parliament itself put on a firmer footing.”

Henry McLeish, former Labour First Minister, said:

“The Scottish Parliament has gained new powers in 1999, 2012 and is likely to have more powers in 2015. But this devolution of powers has to have a purpose and be part of a sustainable and progressive vision for Scotland not just another response to a political or constitutional crisis.

“Our Home Rule campaign should seek to inspire and enthuse and raise the level of political and constitutional debate.”

Margaret Smith, former Liberal Democrat MSP and Health Committee Convener, said:

“I’ve believed in Scottish Home Rule in a federal United Kingdom for the whole of my political life. For me devolution of decision making to national Parliaments and to local government has always made good common sense.

“The referendum message is that the vast majority of Scots, whether they voted Yes or No, want a louder political voice, greater powers for Holyrood and an aspirational politics which is humane, responsive and grounded in the character and circumstances of Scotland.

“A lowest common denominator offering won’t be good enough. We need a workable proposal which gives Scotland effective powers

over economic and social policy levers while we retain partnership with our neighbours in the UK in our mutual defence, foreign affairs and macro economics.”

Ben Thomson, Reform Scotland’s Chairman, who will also Chair the Campaign steering group, said:

“If I have learnt anything from 30 years in business it is that people generally work best if they have proper responsibility to get on with the job, are given the tools to do it and there is mutual respect. I see no reason why this should be any different in the public sector.

“If Holyrood is going to be effective and genuinely accountable to the Scottish people, then it should have proper responsibility for domestic matters in Scotland. This should enable the Scottish Parliament to be able to set policies that can deliver a better economy and society.

“To do this it should have the tools that match its responsibility, including welfare and fiscal powers.”

Andrew Wilson, former SNP MSP and Finance Spokesman, said:

“The whole country needs to come together and secure the highest common denominator that will unify the vast majority of us that want progress and a much more responsible Parliament. The twin goals of economic prosperity and social fairness must be pursued with the same passion and vitality that drove the referendum.

“This is a journey without end. But we must move at a pace that builds deep and wide foundations of support. Now it is time to build a bridge between the “45” and the “55” not dig a trench.”

The steering group’s members are as follows:

- Matthew Benson
- Derek Brownlee

- John Dunsmore
- Susan Egelstaff
- Dr. Alison Elliot
- Prof. Richard Kerley
- Hamira Khan
- James Mackenzie
- Henry McLeish
- Margaret Smith
- Ben Thomson (Chair)
- Andrew Wilson