



■ Canon Kenyon Wright

Politics: Rules for the New Paradigm

SCOTLAND's land reform agenda requires strategic thinking, warns a leading architect of the coalition representing civic organisations.

Land reformers had an obligation to ensure that parliament remained bound by the tough and unique set of rules which it had agreed to adopt, said Canon Kenyon Wright at a conference of the Land Reform Convention (LRC) on Nov. 20. He listed the rules.

✦ Power would be shared between the legislature and the people.

✦ The Executive is accountable to Parliament and to the people.

✦ Parliament must be accessible and responsive and must develop procedures that make possible the participative approach to the development of policy and legislation.

✦ Equal opportunity. Parliament's committees, said Canon Wright, were conceived as alternative centres for developing policies and laws. They were not meant to just respond to action by the Executive.

He urged the 150 land reform activists who met in Stirling to remain vigilant about the enforcement of the five tests against which the effectiveness of legislation should be assessed. Those tests were:

1. What problem is the proposed legislation intended to address? What is the strategic thinking behind it? "Politicians hate strategic thinking," said the canon. "It implies looking long-term."
2. What options were examined, and why was this particular option chosen?
3. What consultation was undertaken before the proposal was framed?
4. What were the financial implications as far as could be seen?
5. What was the impact on human rights, sustainable development, equal opportunities and on the communities on the islands off the Scottish coast?

Said Canon Wright: "The LRC should use this formula when we look to the future. The great reformers always taught us that reformation is not something that takes place once. Land reform is not a once-off event: it is a process that needs longer term strategic thinking".

He wanted the reformers to be partners with parliament in the development of policy. This was essential because land and our relationship with it was vital for a healthy society. It was our home, our heritage and part of our harmonious relationship with one another.

For the canon, who played a leading role in a previous convention which helped to drive the devolution campaign, land reform would be the litmus test for Scotland's new politics.

"Land reform may well be the test of the Scottish Parliament's ability to reshape our society. Land reform may be perhaps the crucial test of the ability of the Scottish Parliament

to make a real difference. Land reform is the symbolic test of the integrity of parliament.

"This convention could be a real pioneer for a new way of working in what has to be a participative – and not purely representative – democracy in Scotland."

The LRC – which represents charities, trade unions, local governments and the churches – should expect to participate in shaping policy at every stage, said the canon, rather than just responding to government proposals.

He pointed out that for Christians, the land issue had greater claim to be the central motif of the Old Testament than any other subject. Theology could justify the claim that there would be a restoration of rights in both heaven and on earth. But Canon Wright did not rely exclusively on biblical authority. He acknowledged that "power is the key" when it came to resolving disputes over the ownership and use of land.

SCOTLAND: 3 PAGES OF ANALYSIS ON LAND REFORM
