

Last night I attended the Inaugural Annual Chrystal Macmillan lecture at Edinburgh University which was made by Professor Pippa Norris. The lecture compared women's political representation around the world and what mechanism had been used to successfully bring about increases. We were reminded that whilst Scottish parliament does somewhat better than the Westminster parliament with regard to women MSPs we are losing ground. We know from experience in Scotland that having women in politics makes a difference to the policy focus and the decisions that are made and as Pippa Norris emphasised women's representation in politics as MPs and MSPs catalyses the engagement of women in other areas of political and civic life. So it is important that we organise and energise efforts in preparation for the next elections. Whether we see constitutional reform, electoral reform, party commitment, capacity building or cultural change as the way forward we need to be taking action now.

At the dinner following the lecture the discussion centred around what more Edinburgh University could bring to the women in politics agenda and to build constructive links between academia and politicians. Symbolically they have decided to commission a painting of Chrystal Macmillan to hang next to the many 'dead white men' that adorn the walls of the institution. More practically they are looking at how they can build on Chrystal's legacy. Suggestions from fellow diners included training for MSPs not only in political process but more significantly in policy analysis, the facilitation of a reflection on women in parliament since devolution with the Scottish parliament, the mentoring of women MSPs by academics and ex- women MSPs, and taking advantage of the unique opportunity that Edinburgh University has to act as a critical non partisan friend in generating commentary on gender and the political process in the Scottish Parliament (not least because of the expertise and knowledge of Dr. Fiona Mackay) . This final idea was best communicated by Helen Kay (an expert on Chrystal MacMillan who is working on her biography). Helen reflected that Chrystal Macmillan was a radical, blue sky thinker and that any legacy should reflect that.

I came away thinking that an investment by Edinburgh University in the development and facilitation of a non partisan critical think tank on women in Scottish politics that worked with the Scottish Parliament, political parties and the women's sector to generate informed analysis and action towards to increasing and maintaining women's participation in politics in Chrystal Macmillan's memory would certainly be a welcome development.

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