The Editor

Nineteen eighty three was the year of the General Election. Nineteen eighty four is the year in which we have to learn to live with its consequences. It was not a result which Scotland had much of a hand in, although its ramifications were felt north of the border. Labour continued to be the dominant party, although it was argued that it had reached its electoral limits in a four party contest. The performance of the Alliance caught most people by surprise, particularly the SNP who appeared to suffer most.

As John Bochel and David Denver show in this edition of the Yearbook, all is not what it seems, and significant changes are occurring among the Scottish electorate. Beneath the apparent stability, the electorate is volatile and unpredictable. Chris Baur and James Naughtie argue that the political landscape has opened up the 'mandate' question in a new and subtle way, presenting new opportunities as well as dangers for the Labour Party in particular. Under the astute political management of George Younger, the Tories have increased substantially the powers of St Andrew's House, at remarkably little electoral cost. The despair and frustration felt in local government is conveyed by Ronald Young in his assessment of local government reorganisation since Wheatley.

The first task, then, of the 1984 edition of Scottish Government Yearbook has been to analyse the General Election of 1983. We depart from previous practice in this edition by examining in detail two important topics: oil and the Scottish economy, and the governance of Scottish education.

In the early 1970s, much was written on North Sea oil, most of it optimistic, and some of it fanciful. In the 1980s, we are entitled to ask 'Whatever happened to North Sea oil?'. The Yearbook sets out to answer this question. Alex Kemp argues that successive governments have used oil revenues as a convenient source of short-term revenues.
Neil Robertson develops the point by showing how the Government has used these revenues to reduce its borrowing requirement, to deflate the economy, and to allow the non-oil trading position to deteriorate. Peter Wybrow documents what he calls the 'freemasonry of the North Sea' among oil companies who have been allowed to operate relatively unhindered. In his review of recent books, Robert Crawford points to the need for a far less secretive system of government in Scotland, as well as for a more accountable one.

When times are hard, the Scots tend to have recourse to well-worn myths to protect themselves against cold and hostile winds. No set of myths comes to hand more readily than those associated with education. In recent years, education has been at the sharp end of government policy in Scotland: the extension of 'parental choice', changes in the secondary school curriculum, the problems of youth unemployment. Walter Humes examines the cultural myths in Scottish education, and argues that they operate as effective social ideology for leadership groups in the Scottish educational establishment. Alistair Macbeth points out that the Scottish education system has to be analysed primarily as part of a broader British one, and makes a plea for more openness and debate. David Raffe highlights the fundamental problems for traditional conceptions of education, of government policies for youth unemployment. He argues that because the focus of these policies is almost entirely on the supply side of the problem, the 'training' of young people is seen as the solution. Working at the sharp end of education policy as a director of education, David Robertson takes a more optimistic view of recent changes, arguing that traditional education has ill-served the mass of young consumers, and that a more broadly-based, vocationally oriented education and training service might offer more.

As many of our contributors point out, the word 'crisis' readily comes to mind in discussing many of Scotland's current social and economic problems. It is hard to find a more appropriate term to describe the fundamental changes in Scotland's economic and social structure: the collapse of traditional manufacturing employment, the return of mass unemployment and widespread poverty. In one of the landmarks in Scottish publishing in 1983, the book by Gordon Brown and Robin Cook* should be required reading for all politicians, policy-makers and analysts of Scotland's condition. There are few areas of human affairs untouched by mass poverty on the scale we now have. When one in five (or one in three) of Scottish people is poor, the nation's policy-makers should be concerned for our social and political institutions. Perhaps 1984 (a good year) will be the one in which Scotland faces up to this crisis of poverty and unemployment before it overwhelms us.

The Yearbook continues to provide an up-to-date review and analysis of Scotland's government and politics. The editor is indebted to all his contributors, and particularly those who serve the Yearbook faithfully year after year. Hamish Henderson continues to provide his unique review of Scottish legislation in the face of government neglect of this task. We are indebted to Richard Parry for editing the reference section, particularly in an election year, and to Chris Allen for his valuable bibliography which so many of our readers continue to rely on. John Nimmo and his staff in the Research Centre for Social Sciences continue to print the Yearbook, and to cope with our demands with patience and humour.

The editor is indebted, above all, to Helen Ramm who has borne the brunt of producing the Yearbook, and who manages to translate contributors' hieroglyphs into grammatical prose. Finally, the Unit for the Study of Government in Scotland would like to thank the readers for subscribing to the Yearbook, now in its eighth year, and we hope that we can continue to provide the service in editions to come.