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Political Change and Scottish Nationalism in  
Dundee 1973-2012

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PhD Thesis  
University of Edinburgh  
2019

## **Abstract**

Prior to the 2014 independence referendum, the Scottish National Party's strongest bastions of support were in rural areas. The sole exception was Dundee, where it has consistently enjoyed levels of support well ahead of the national average, first replacing the Conservatives as the city's second party in the 1970s before overcoming Labour to become its leading force in the 2000s. Through this period it achieved Westminster representation between 1974 and 1987, and again since 2005, and had won both of its Scottish Parliamentary seats by 2007. This performance has been completely unmatched in any of the country's other cities. Using a mixture of archival research, oral history interviews, the local press and memoirs, this thesis seeks to explain the party's record of success in Dundee. It will assess the extent to which the character of the city itself, its economy, demography, geography, history, and local media landscape, made Dundee especially prone to Nationalist politics. It will then address the more fundamental importance of the interaction of local political forces that were independent of the city's nature through an examination of the ability of party machines, key individuals and political strategies to shape the city's electoral landscape. The local SNP and its main rival throughout the period, the Labour Party, will be analysed in particular detail. The thesis will also take time to delve into the histories of the Conservatives, Liberals and Radical Left within the city and their influence on the fortunes of the SNP. Through this, it will shed light on Dundee's political development, the emergence of the SNP as a major force in Scottish politics and the reasons for the emergence of strong party traditions in particular localities more generally.

## **Lay Summary**

This thesis will examine the political history of the small Scottish city of Dundee between the 1970s and the 2010s. Throughout this period, the Scottish National Party enjoyed far greater popular support in Dundee than it did in any other city. This thesis will attempt to explain why the SNP achieved such long lasting success in Dundee and not in other parts of Scotland. It will question whether Dundee was inherently prone to Nationalist politics as a result of its economy, demography, geography, history, and local media landscape. It will then point to the importance of the relative strength of local party machines, comparing the city's SNP to its main rival in the Labour Party, and to the variety of smaller groups it competed with at various points in the period covered in the Conservatives, Liberals and Radical Left. Through this, it will shed light on Dundee's political development, the emergence of the SNP as a major force in Scottish politics and the reasons for the emergence of strong party traditions in particular localities more generally.

Word Count: 88,557

## Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been composed by myself, it is my own work, and the work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Signed Thomas Stewart

Date: 29/10/2019

## Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been completed without the assistance of a number of important people who have helped me along the way.

Firstly, my supervisors Professors Ewen Cameron and James Mitchell have provided me with advice, guidance and suggestions over the past three years that have proven invaluable in bringing my ideas into focus and onto the page.

I am grateful to the sixteen individuals that agreed to be interviewed by me during this project, whose insights held this thesis together. I would also like to thank the School of Scottish Studies for assisting me with the technical side of the oral history aspect of my research and for agreeing to archive my interviews.

I owe a debt of thanks to those who gave me access to their private collections. Professor Bill Knox allowed me to make use of interviews he had conducted with political figures in Dundee, Alan McKinney let me view some of the documents from his career in the SNP and Donald Hay provided me with access to the wonderful collection that the city's Conservative councillors have assembled over the decades. I also appreciate the help given to me by archivists across the institutions I visited over the past three years in navigating the collections they curate.

On a personal side, two people stand out above everyone else. My mother, Laura Stewart, provided me the inspiration and encouragement to start doctoral study, while my fiancée, Therese Estall (soon to be Therese Stewart), gave me the love and support to finish it.



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## **Introduction**

### **Research Questions and Secondary Literature**

This thesis examines the politics of the small city of Dundee between the 1970s and the beginning of the 2010s. It seeks to understand why the Scottish National Party enjoyed far more electoral success in the city than it did in any other urban area. It will analyse the elements that contributed to the development of a local party tradition that has endured for successive political generations. While all focussed case studies carry their limitations when used to make more general observations, they offer the opportunity to go into greater depth and provide more character to events. Dundee, in particular, is an excellent location for a study of this type. Its relatively compact size allows for a more fully rounded analysis of the city and its politics than would be possible if a larger city or entire region were being covered. Although distinct in its own right, its social and political character bear a much closer resemblance to Scotland's Central Belt mainstream than the other, largely rural, parts of the country in which the SNP achieved similar breakthroughs. Its electoral divergence from Scotland's urbanised core since the 1970s brings attention to political differences among the nation's cities, which have often been less appreciated than regional and rural-urban divisions within the country. At the same time, its demographic similarities to the historically industrial communities of West-Central Scotland that make up the largest part of Scottish society allow it to act as a case study for the analysis of broader developments in Scottish politics over the past half century.

This thesis will engage with a body of literature examining the development of Scottish politics in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.<sup>1</sup> It will also make use of studies that question the importance of the activity of local political parties. Although grounded as a historical study, it will go beyond the writings of historians to engage with political science literatures as well. This material provides a different perspective to existing historical accounts, with greater focus on statistical evidence and the mechanics of both election campaigns and political parties.<sup>2</sup> These texts are vital to a thesis that seeks chiefly to explain election outcomes. As such, it will place greater emphasis on the mechanics of party political competition than most other historical studies. As a highly localised case study, this thesis has the chance to address these ideas from a unique grassroots perspective. Furthermore, historians have yet to fully address developments in Scottish political history since the advent of devolution in 1999, making political science writing especially important to analysing developments in the twenty-first century.<sup>3</sup>

With more focus being given to the SNP than any other group, this thesis will offer a substantial contribution to historical understandings of the party's development. In particular, it will examine the validity of the wide variety of theories that arose to explain

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<sup>1</sup> Ewen A Cameron, *Impaled Upon a Thistle: Scotland Since 1880* (Edinburgh, 2010)

James Mitchell, *Strategies for Self-Government: The Campaign for a Scottish Parliament* (Edinburgh, 1996)

Richard J Finlay, *Modern Scotland 1914-2000* (London, 2004)

I G C Hutchison, *Scottish Politics in the Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke, 2001)

Andrew Marr, *The Battle for Scotland* (London, 1992)

Michael Fry, *Patronage and Principle: A Political History of Modern Scotland* (Aberdeen, 1987)

Catriona M M MacDonald, *Whaur Extremes Meet: Scotland's Twentieth Century* (Edinburgh, 2009)

<sup>2</sup> Paul Whiteley, Patrick Seyd and Jeremy Richardson, *True Blues: The Politics of Conservative Party Membership* (Oxford, 1994)

Patrick Seyd and Paul Whiteley, *Labour's Grassroots: The Politics of Party Membership* (Oxford, 1992)

<sup>3</sup> Paul Cairney, *The Scottish Political System Since Devolution: From New Politics to the New Scottish Government* (Exeter, 2011)

Charlie Jeffrey and James Mitchell, *The Scottish Parliament: 1999-2009 The First Decade* (Edinburgh, 2009)

its initial rise to prominence in the 1960s and 1970s. This is a subject that has garnered a great deal of scholarly attention but has yet to be adequately explained. While few researchers have pointed to a single of the party's rise, a number of key factors have been identified. The importance of the economic and political context of the period is widely recognised, with Scotland enduring a process of long-term industrial decline through much of the second half of the twentieth century that left its economy lagging behind England's. Hechter and Nairn claim that this led to the emergence of a growing cleavage between the interests of Scotland and the rest of Britain.<sup>4</sup> Richard Finlay, places primacy on the role played by these problems in encouraging Scots to be drawn to the SNP as a protest vote against the failures of different British governments to address the nation's economic troubles.<sup>5</sup> Other historians draw out further factors contributing towards the party's rise. Tom Devine points to the importance of a perceived long-term decline in British identity, as well as the growth of a vacuum in Scottish politics created by the decline of the Unionists, later restyled as the Conservative Party, across much of the country creating a key opportunity for the Nationalists.<sup>6</sup> Concurring with much of Devine's analysis, Ewen Cameron brings attention to the SNP's strength in associating themselves with key 'Scottish issues' in the minds of voters.<sup>7</sup> The SNP's skilled use of the rise of North Sea oil as a political issue in the 1970s was seen as fundamentally important to the party by many contemporaries, and is discussed in the greatest detail by Christopher Harvie.<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, James Mitchell located the SNP's electoral successes in this period within the long-lived movement for Scottish self-government.<sup>9</sup> This thesis will highlight the party political nature

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<sup>4</sup> Michael Hechter, *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development* (New Brunswick, 1999) 350

Tom Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism* (London, 1981) 175

<sup>5</sup> Richard J Finlay, *Modern Scotland*, 346

<sup>6</sup> T M Devine, *The Scottish Nation 1700-2007* (London, 2006) 150

<sup>7</sup> Ewen A Cameron, *Impaled Upon a Thistle*, 293

<sup>8</sup> Christopher Harvie, *Fool's Gold: The Story of North Sea Oil* (London, 1994) 130

<sup>9</sup> James Mitchell, *Strategies for Self-Government*, 7

of the SNP's rise, and question its place in wider British politics. It will assess the extent to which its emergence was a distinctly Scottish phenomenon, or whether it was a part of the broader breakdown of the British two-party system in these years, bringing more attention to the British context in which Scottish Nationalism broke through.

It will also inspect later fluctuations in its support, as it declined in the late 1970s and early 1980s before beginning to recover. This part of the SNP's history has been somewhat neglected, with scholarly interest in the party tending to follow periods of its electoral success with less interest being drawn to its leaner years.<sup>10</sup> It will consider the nature of the party and its electorate and the extent to which this changed over time, placing particular emphasis on developments resulting from the tumultuous internal conflict it experienced in the 1980s. The party's character has been strongly disputed since Scottish Nationalists were first labelled as 'Tartan Tories' in the 1960s, and has remained a point of contention even as it has gradually adopted a clearly defined left-of-centre identity.<sup>11</sup> This project will allow for a critical analysis of the impact of the party's shifting ideology over the period at a local level. Importantly, it will provide a historical approach to the study of the party's rise to power in the twenty-first century, a transformative moment in Scottish political life that has principally been analysed by political scientists rather than historians.<sup>12</sup>

This study is not solely focussed on the SNP, but explores the histories of the other major political parties active in Dundee. The greatest attention will be given to the Labour Party. Dealing with UK-wide parties will provide further opportunities to engage with British

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<sup>10</sup> Peter Lynch, *SNP: The History of the Scottish National Party* (Cardiff, 2002)

<sup>11</sup> Gerry Hassan (ed.), *The Modern SNP: From Protest to Power* (Edinburgh, 2009)

<sup>12</sup> Rob Johns and James Mitchell, *Takeover: Explaining the Rise of the SNP* (London, 2016)

political historiography, analysing the local impact of trends taking place on both Scottish and British-wide scales.<sup>13</sup> It will assess the impact of the internal struggles and radical politics that the Labour Party experienced across the United Kingdom in the 1970s and 1980s. The city's prominent experience of municipal corruption during these decades will also allow this thesis to address the rarely explored party-political implications of such activity and the scandals surrounding them.<sup>14</sup> It will examine the impact of the modernisation process and the New Labour project on the party on the ground, looking beyond national election victories and the politics of government. Critically, just as it explores the SNP's rise to power, it will also contribute towards explanations of the final breakdown of Labour's hegemony over Scottish politics in the twenty-first century, a topic that has not garnered the scholarly attention deserving of such a momentous change.<sup>15</sup> Through this, it will shed light on the weakening of its hold on working class communities across the rest of Britain. It will also address the dramatic decline of Scottish Conservatism in the second half of the twentieth century, and the extent to which this fall was linked to the SNP's rise.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, the failure of the Liberals and their successors to develop any sort of foothold in Dundee politics brings attention to the histories of these parties.<sup>17</sup> By addressing the part played by the SNP in suppressing their support in localities like Dundee,

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<sup>13</sup> Andrew Thorpe, *A History of the British Labour Party* (London, 2015)

Eric Shaw, *The Labour Party Since 1979: Crisis and Transformation* (London, 1994)

James E Cronin, *New Labour's Pasts: The Labour Party and Its Discontents* (Harlow, 2004)

<sup>14</sup> Alan Doig, *Corruption and Misconduct in Contemporary British Politics* (Harmondsworth, 1984)

<sup>15</sup> Gerry Hassan and Eric Shaw, *The Strange Death of Labour Scotland* (Edinburgh University Press, 2012)

<sup>16</sup> David Torrance (ed.), *Whatever Happened to Tory Scotland?* (Edinburgh University Press, 2012)

David Seawright, *An Important Matter of Principle: The Decline of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party* (Aldershot, 1999)

<sup>17</sup> Tudor Jones, *The Revival of British Liberalism: From Grimond to Clegg* (Basingstoke, 2011)

Ivor Crewe and Anthony King, *SDP: The Birth, Life and Death of the Social Democratic Party* (Oxford, 1995)

John Stevenson, *Third Party Politics since 1945: Liberals, Alliance and Liberal Democrats* (Oxford, 1993)

this thesis will draw focus to the shared histories of the Nationalists and Liberals as third parties and encourage greater linkages in the historiographies of both groups.

Throughout the thesis, the relationship between local and national politics, on both a Scottish and British scale, will be drawn out. This will involve placing Scotland's distinctive, although not separate, political history within Britain's wider narrative. Pointedly, this study highlights the shortcomings of treating Scotland as a single unit of history analysis, as it draws out the divergent experiences of different parts of the country and the inability of a Glasgow-centric approach to account for the entire nation. Although a history of every individual community in the country is patently unnecessary, this study calls for an awareness of the diversity within Scotland itself, that goes beyond rural and urban or Highland and Lowland divides. It also engages with more general debates on the relationship between the local and the national, with great focus given to the reasons why political parties are able to outperform the national swing in any given area. This is a topic that has been hotly debated by political scientists for decades, although few historians have grappled with it. For much of the second half of the twentieth century local-level constituency electioneering in general elections was believed to be inconsequential relative to national campaigns, with little impact on electoral outcomes.<sup>18</sup> However, by the turn of the century perspectives had shifted. Accepting the importance of this level of political action, scholars have instead focused on examining the scale and character of the influence these local activities have.<sup>19</sup> The qualitative historical approach of this study will offer a valuable new perspective to this question that will complement the methods used by

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<sup>18</sup> David Butler and Dennis Kavanagh, *The British General Election of 1987* (London, 1988) 211

<sup>19</sup> Gary C Jacobson, 'How Do Campaigns Matter?', *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol 18 (2015) 41

David Denver, Gordon Hands and Iain MacAllister, 'The Electoral Impact of Constituency Campaigning in Britain, 1992–2001', *Political Studies*, Vol 52 (2004) 290

political scientists. The case of the SNP, whose experience in Dundee differed a great deal from national patterns, will illustrate the significant difference local leadership, organisation and image can make to electoral outcomes. The Dundee Labour Party, whose experience was much less exceptional, presents a more subtle interplay of these different factors that still influenced the development of the city's politics.

### **Source Materials**

This thesis makes use of a wide variety of sources, taking advantage of the richness of available materials regarding Dundee's political history. The core of the research will be based upon archival collections, the local press and oral history interviews. These will be supported by autobiographies, Westminster and Holyrood parliamentary records, census data, online resources, documentary films and television news.

The National Library of Scotland, the Scottish Political Archive held at Stirling University, the University of Dundee Archive, the Dundee City Archives and the Lamb Collection held in Dundee Central Library hold substantial collections relevant to this thesis. A smaller number of papers were referred to from the Glasgow Caledonian University Archive and the University of Essex Archive. This project has brought to light new archival materials in the Dundee Conservative Party Council Group Archive, a large collection that has been assembled and cared for by successive Conservative councillors in the city since the 1970s and contains a raft of material that had not been gathered elsewhere. This unusual archive had previously been used by the Conservative group as a campaigning resource, allowing them to refer back to the previous political campaigns of their own party and their rivals. It

has never been housed in a publically accessible institution. Its existence was uncovered following an oral history interview with one of the Conservative Party's councillors, Donald Hay, who agreed to make it available for this project without any restrictions. This project also refers to the unarchived papers of Alan McKinney, a key figure in the SNP in Dundee between the late 1960s and his elevation to the post of National Organiser in 1977, which are held at his private residence. McKinney possesses a large body of papers from his career in politics; however, he maintained a tight control over it by only providing access to a few select items. The Dundee Liberal Democrats make a number of archival materials available on their website, which have been referred to. The largest individual contribution to these resources are the diverse records of Gordon Wilson that are housed by the NLS, SPA and University of Dundee. There are also several smaller individual collections deposited by the SNP politicians James Halliday, Robert MacIntyre, Robert Knight, Rosemary Hall and Gavin Kennedy; the Labour parliamentarians John McAllion, James Craigen, George Robertson and George Lawson; the Conservative Lord Provost of Dundee William Fitzgerald and the Liberal Party leader Jo Grimond. The archives contain national SNP materials as well as the papers of the local SNP, Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat, Social Democratic and Green parties. Within them, there are several categories of source: letters and correspondence, internal party documents, press releases, election materials, local newsletters and press cuttings.

The correspondence mostly consists of letters sent either to or from Gordon Wilson, although there are smaller numbers of letters between various other individuals. They relate to a wide array of concerns, particularly discussions on political strategy, opinions on recent events and complaints to various individuals and organisations alongside responses. The internal documents and press releases are mostly from the SNP, being derived from

both the local and national party. They cover a variety of issues, including analysis and discussion of polling and election results, discussions of strategy, ideology and administrative matters as well as reports, minutes and transcripts of various meetings. The election materials referred to pertain to local and parliamentary elections contested within Dundee during the period. They contain candidates' leaflets, political pamphlets and posters. Across the various collections, it has been possible to consult the output of all parties throughout the period. Closely related to these election materials are propagandistic local newsletters, often published during and after political campaigns. These include newspapers published by the SNP and Labour Party, the Liberal Democrat *FOCUS* newsletters issued in a variety of different neighbourhoods in the city, a non-party political newsletter serving the working class Whitfield council estate, and the *Dundee Independent*, written anonymously by the ex-Labour councillor James L Stewart who used it to attack his former colleagues during the 1980s.

Private correspondence and internal party documents were once seen as the cornerstone of political histories, with Maurice Cowling representing a tendency among historians to identify them as the only effective insights into the true thinking of politicians and the workings of the political system.<sup>20</sup> They play a key role within this thesis, allowing for an especially deep analysis of the Dundee SNP's strategies. They are undoubtedly far more candid in their language, the topics discussed, and opinions put forward than the public pronouncements made by politicians, providing a lens into their private thinking. However, this thesis will stress the value of engaging with the election literature and newsletters issued by political parties. This follows more recent trends in political history that have

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<sup>20</sup> Maurice Cowling, *The Impact of Labour 1920-1924: The Beginning of Modern British Politics* (Cambridge, 1971) vii

given greater credence to the analysis of the language used by politicians and parties publicly. James Martin points to the way in which rhetoric is the means by which political actors demonstrate and win confidence in their worldview with the public.<sup>21</sup> Jon Lawrence highlights that parties must go through a constant process of negotiation to justify themselves to the electorate, that is revealed their public pronouncements.<sup>22</sup> By delving into the literature produced by Dundee's political parties this thesis will gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between the city's different parties and the electorate. Finally, the archives contain a number of collections of press cuttings, with those of Gordon Wilson, William Fitzgerald and the Dundee Conservative Party being particularly well organised by theme and period. They address topics of interest to their respective collectors, principally their own careers or the fortunes of their parties locally, and tend to privilege stories that are more receptive to their particular viewpoints. These clippings are mostly drawn from the local press, but include articles from national publications that concern events in Dundee directly. This thesis will not depend on these collections, as they will form a part of a wider reading of the press.

There are a number of autobiographical accounts available that are relevant to this project. Two of the most senior figures in the Dundee SNP of the 1970s and 1980s, Gordon Wilson and James Halliday, have provided detailed insights into the city's Nationalist politics, and particularly the Dundee East constituency in which the two were based.<sup>23</sup> Wilson's account of Dundee begins with the 1973 Dundee East by-election and Halliday's with his arrival in the city in 1967. Each continue their narratives into the late 1980s, when they became less

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<sup>21</sup> James Martin, *Politics and Rhetoric: A critical introduction* (Abingdon, 2014) 10

<sup>22</sup> Jon Lawrence, *Speaking for the People: Party, Language and Popular Politics in England, 1867–1914* (Cambridge, 1998) 267

<sup>23</sup> Gordon Wilson, *SNP: The Turbulent Years 1960-1990* (Stirling, 2009)  
James Halliday, *Yours for Scotland: A Memoir* (Stirling, 2011)

actively involved. As the first part in a planned series covering his entire political career, George Galloway has released an account of the city's politics in the 1970s, bringing to bear his left-wing Labour perspective that differs greatly from that of Wilson and Halliday.<sup>24</sup> This provides much greater local detail than his previous autobiography, which focussed on contemporary political polemics.<sup>25</sup> Alex MacKenzie, the city's Progressive Lord Provost between 1968 and 1970, published a memoir in 1976 that provided a close eye on the city's Conservative Party during a period of crisis in the mid-1970s.<sup>26</sup> However, with the text covering a career that went back to the 1930s, its section dealing with the 1970s is comparatively brief. John Letford, who served as Lord Provost under Labour and later Dundee's first SNP administration between 2001 and 2012, provides a relatively light account of his long career in local government politics between the late 1980s and 2012.<sup>27</sup> Unfortunately, the text is short and provides very little depth or detail on the period before he became Lord Provost. A number of autobiographies written by individuals with political careers outside of Dundee contain information relating to the 1973 Dundee East by-election, with the SNP leader Billy Wolfe, Labour MP Tam Dalyell and Scottish Labour organiser Jimmy Allison all providing useful accounts of the by-election.<sup>28</sup>

Autobiographies are a key resource in political history, and are especially useful in a local study in which specific individuals played a larger role than would have been possible in a national context. They provide key details and personalised perspectives that cannot be found elsewhere, giving politicians the space to go into greater length on their thinking and

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<sup>24</sup> George Galloway, *Street Fighting: A Memoir of the 1970s* (London, 2017)

<sup>25</sup> George Galloway, *I'm Not the Only One* (London, 2006)

<sup>26</sup> Alex MacKenzie, *And Nothing But The Truth* (Dundee, 1976)

<sup>27</sup> John Letford, *Fae the Boatyaird to Buckingham Palace* (Dundee, 2016)

<sup>28</sup> Billy Wolfe, *Scotland Lives: The Quest for Independence* (Edinburgh, 1973)

Tam Dalyell, *The Question of Scotland: Devolution and After* (Edinburgh, 2016)

Jimmy Allison and Harry Conroy, *Guilty by Suspicion: a life and labour* (Glendaruel, 1995)

observations. Importantly, usually being written after individuals' retirement from active politics, they offer their authors the chance to reflect more openly on their experience in a way that is impossible during the heat of events, when the need to present the right image to the public is paramount for politicians. However, these texts have key shortcomings. Not only are they often reliant upon the memories of the authors, they present a more clearly curated narrative than any other key group of sources. Their writers take the time to make sure their autobiographies put forward the narrative they wish to tell, with many treating them as an opportunity to contribute to their own legacy. As a result, they cannot be wholly relied upon in the absence of supporting materials. This thesis will make sure to balance the autobiographies available to it against other sources in order to avoid depending upon them.

This project will extensively explore Dundee's local press, with election period coverage being examined in detail. The newspaper industry in the city was dominated by the titles of the DC Thomson publishing house: the *Courier*, *Evening Telegraph* and *Sunday Post*. These were very influential and well-read in Dundee and the surrounding areas. The *Courier* catered to a large audience across Dundee and its hinterlands in Tayside and Northeast Fife, where it has long been the leading morning daily. The *Evening Telegraph's* circulation was smaller and more focussed on the city itself, while it shared many of the same stories as its morning sister-paper. Meanwhile the *Sunday Post* was aimed at a larger Scotland-wide market, having a national rather than local scope, but remained rooted in Dundee. In the 1970s, it was by far the nation's most popular Sunday paper, although its influence has subsequently declined, with its sales starting to fall behind other titles from the 1990s. A close reading of these publications, particularly their election coverage, will form the basis of this project's engagement with press sources. Together, they provide an unparalleled

degree of depth and quantity of information regarding both Dundee's politics and the broader development of the city. This project will also make use of other minor local papers in the *Broughty Ferry Guide & Carnoustie Gazette*, the *Dundee Extra*, and the leftist *Dundee Standard*, alongside other Scottish and London-based newspapers. The press is a hugely important source to political history. Dundee's unusually rich newspaper culture makes it especially so in the case of this study. These publications provide detailed day-by-day reporting on political campaigns, act as organs for parties to put their messages forward, collect the view of local residents in their letters pages and point to the wider concerns of the time. Not only do they provide a vibrant lens into Dundee's political culture, they also play a part in shaping it through their presentation and analysis of the news. They are also the only substantial category of source used by this project that are not overtly attached to any particular party, carrying a greater degree of neutrality despite the strong partisanship of the DC Thomson press discussed in Chapter One. By looking beyond DC Thomson's publications alone, the project will be partly shielded from being overly influenced by this perspective, while further deepening its grasp of city politics.

Gordon Wilson's collections undoubtedly dominate the sources relevant to the 1970s and 1980s. He looms over press coverage of the period, during which he served as MP for Dundee East between 1974 and 1987 and SNP leader from 1979 to 1990, and provides the largest part of the archival material available. He has also recorded numerous oral history interviews due to his national prominence. This situation creates a number of concerns for the project. Wilson's own narrative of events assumes an outsized role in source materials, while he is a focus of attention even in sources outwith his collections. Although he was clearly a very significant figure in Dundonian politics, it is important that this study avoids placing too great a focus upon him as an individual, as well as being mindful of alternatives

to his perspectives. It is not only Gordon Wilson as an individual that is over represented in source materials, but the Nationalist outlook in general, with SNP-related archival and autobiographical resources outweighing those of other parties. Despite this discrepancy, the perspectives of other groups are available across press, archival and oral history sources, albeit in less quantity, ensuring this study has not been completely reliant on SNP materials.

Oral history testimonies are a critical element of the research that this thesis is based on. They have allowed the project to cover a broader historical period, helped to address the lack of party balance in archival materials and offered insights that are hidden from more traditional sources. A total of sixteen original interviews were conducted between June 2017 and February 2018 with politicians who were active in Dundee's political life at different points between the 1970s and 2000s. The interviewees were: Nigel Don, Joe FitzPatrick, Ken Guild, Stewart Hosie, Alan McKinney, Shona Robison and Willie Sawers of the SNP, George Galloway, Kevin Keenan, Iain Luke, John McAllion, Richard McCready, Jim McGovern and Helen Wright of the Labour Party, the Conservatives' Donald Hay and the Liberal Democrat Fraser MacPherson. However, one of these interviews, with the former Labour MP Jim McGovern, was lost due to a technical error, meaning only fifteen were made use of in this thesis. These have subsequently been archived with the School of Scottish Studies at the University of Edinburgh. With the exception of Alan McKinney and George Galloway, who played organisational roles, all of these individuals served as either elected councillors or parliamentarians for the city at some point in their careers. They were selected based upon their availability and their ability to cover different aspects and periods of the city's political history. A degree of balance was achieved between the city's two leading political groupings, with seven interviews each being held with figures from

SNP and Labour Party backgrounds. However, it proved difficult to find individuals from the Liberal Democrat and Conservative parties with a breadth of experience and a willingness to be interviewed, resulting in only a single interview being conducted with councillors from each party. No set script was used, instead interviewees were asked about specific details regarding their parties, election campaigns and political careers, to describe their experiences, to reflect on broader trend and themes and offer their personal opinions. Care was taken to ensure that each interviewee was aware of the purpose of the interview and that their permission was given for their use and archiving. Although a number of interviewees were retired, there were no concerns about the competence of any individuals. This has resulted in the collection of a wealth of valuable material that has been integral to this study.

This thesis will also make use of oral history recordings compiled by others. The Scottish Political Archive houses three separate collections of full-length interviews with political figures: one concerned with the two devolution referendums of 1979 and 1997, one assembled as a part of a radio programme on the history of Scottish Nationalism aired in 2012 and the other for the 'Road to Referendum' television documentary broadcast in 2013 in preparation for the following year's independence referendum. Within these collections, there are three interviews with Gordon Wilson, alongside substantial interviews with George Galloway and John McAllion and shorter ones with a number of other relevant figures. Whilst these focus upon broader national questions related to the respective programmes they were formulated for, local politics is examined in detail and a long-term perspective, exploring events from the 1970s to the present day, is adopted. The historian Bill Knox has provided access to three interviews he conducted as part of his research for a biography on the well-known trade unionist and activist Jimmy Reid, who

stood as the Labour candidate for Dundee East in the 1979 general election. These include interviews with John McAllion, Raymond Mennie, a Communist and later Labour activist, and John McAuley, a Labour member. They relate to left-wing politics in Dundee during the 1970s and 1980s with a particular emphasis on the 1979 election in Dundee East. This thesis also consulted the interview with the Conservative parliamentarian John Allan Stewart held by the History of Parliament Oral History Project, in which he discusses his experience of standing in Dundee East at the 1970 general election. Extracts from interviews with various members of the Dundee City Labour Party created by Raymond Chalmers for a 1978 MA thesis on Labour politics in the city have also been consulted.<sup>29</sup> No full-length recordings or transcripts were available, although the interviews are quoted extensively through the dissertation text. All other collections of interviews available to this project were conducted in the twenty-first century, with events in the 1970s very distant from the minds of interviewees. As a result, Chalmers' extracts provide a view into the contemporary thinking of Labour figures in these years that is not available elsewhere.

These archival, autobiographical, press and oral history resources form the core of the research for this thesis. However, it will also make use of census data, parliamentary records from the British and Scottish Parliaments, documentaries from the National Library of Scotland's moving images library, news footage from ITN's online archive, local politicians' blogs and government reports pertaining to Dundee. These sources will be used extensively in the first part of this thesis, examining the character of Dundee, and to a more limited extent in its later parts, which focus on the city's political parties and elections.

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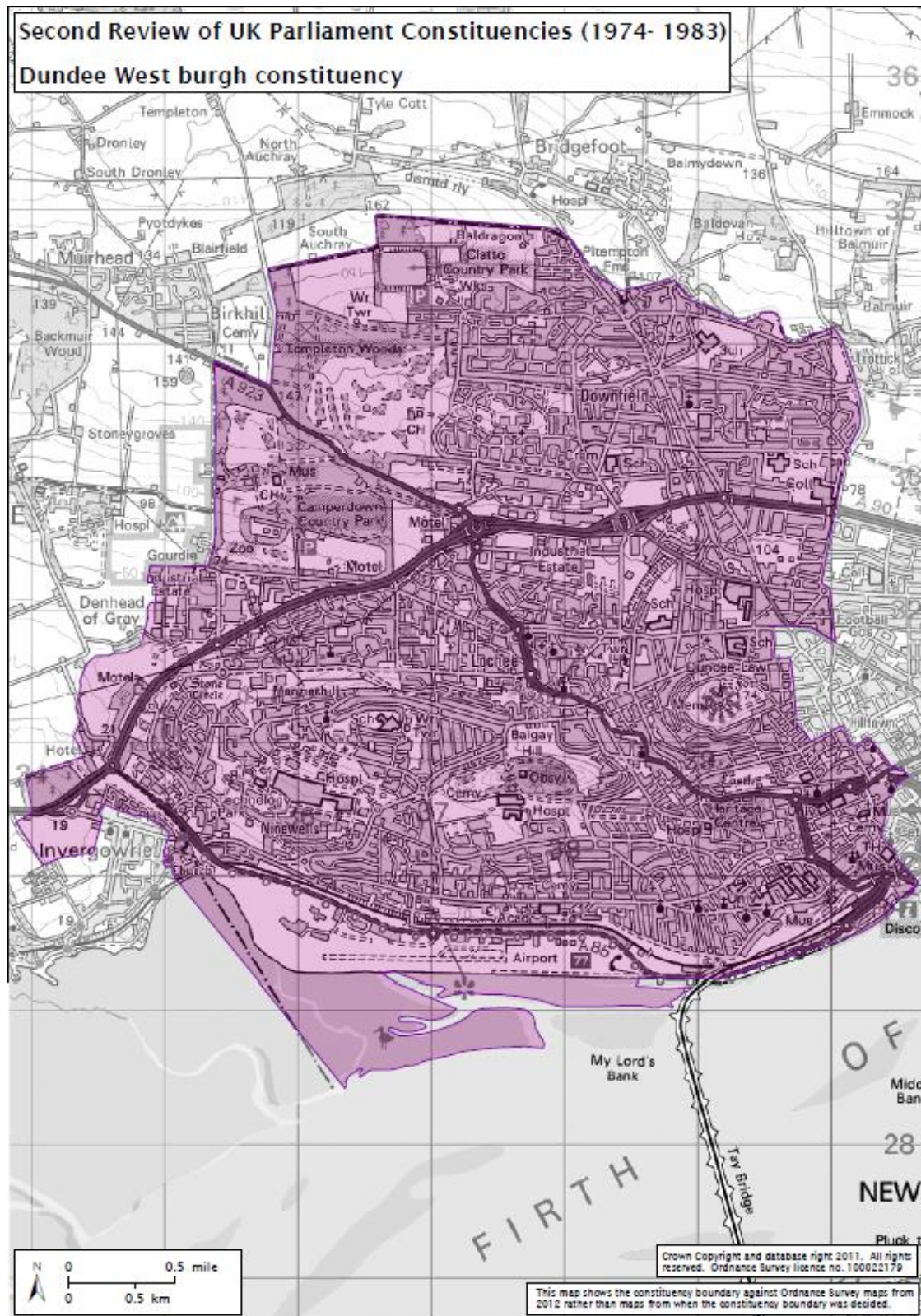
<sup>29</sup> Raymond Chalmers, 'Labour Party Politics in Dundee', MA Thesis, University of Edinburgh (1978)

This thesis covers a broad historical timeframe of four decades, from the 1970s until the early 2010s. The sources available do not evenly cover this entire period. Instead, there is a preponderance of rich material, especially among the written sources, covering the 1970s and 1980s. From the 1990s, there is relatively little archival material available and few autobiographical accounts. This is in part due to the fact that many individuals from this era remain active in Scottish politics and have therefore not yet reached the stage in their lives in which they have written contemplative memoirs or sought to deposit records in archives. In particular, most of the senior figures of the 1990s and 2000s SNP are still in elected offices. Moreover, Dundonian Nationalist politics of the 1970s and 1980s is unusually well-endowed with archival records as a result of the assiduous collection of materials by Gordon Wilson, and to a lesser extent James Halliday and Alan McKinney, over their careers and their decisions to make these materials available. These sources offer rich insights into the private discussions and personal thoughts of the city's political actors that are not available to the same extent for the period since the 1990s. Other key bodies of sources are also less useful for this later period. There was a noticeable and rapid decline in the quality of the local press in Dundee during the 1990s, with the intuitive analysis and detailed reporting of previous decades becoming less common. This made it impossible to use the press in the same way when covering more recent decades. Election materials also grew less localised, offering fewer insights into the city's politics specifically and focussing on national themes. They became less sharply political, instead tending towards the inoffensive rhetoric that parties across the country came to favour in the 2000s. This has rendered these sources far less revealing of the strategies and appeals of parties, as well as key Dundee-specific election issues.

These shortcomings have been compensated for by the use of oral history. It has provided information on the perspectives and activities of local political actors that can be derived from other sources for the earlier period covered by this thesis, but is unavailable for the later part. As a result, the portions of the thesis covering the 1990s and especially the 2000s rely heavily upon oral evidence, employing a much less diverse array of sources. This will require an awareness of the vagaries of memory, which can change over time, adopt confused inaccuracies and be influenced by subsequent events, and the strong political biases of the interviewees. However, the number of interviews conducted has made individual errors clear, and allowed for the two main sides of the city's partisan divide to articulate their different viewpoints. This has created as rounded a picture of this later period as has been possible to capture through existing source materials. Nonetheless, interviews, particularly with those who are still politically active, do not offer the same depth of insight into the private thinking of political actors as the materials available for earlier period, ultimately constraining the depth of analysis that is possible for the years since the 1990s. Nonetheless, the interviews are sufficiently rich that it is not necessary to limit the timescale of this these to the 1970s and 1980s, a period for which there is greater access to traditional source materials. Instead, the interviews allow it to expand its focus and achieve a broader examination of political change over time.

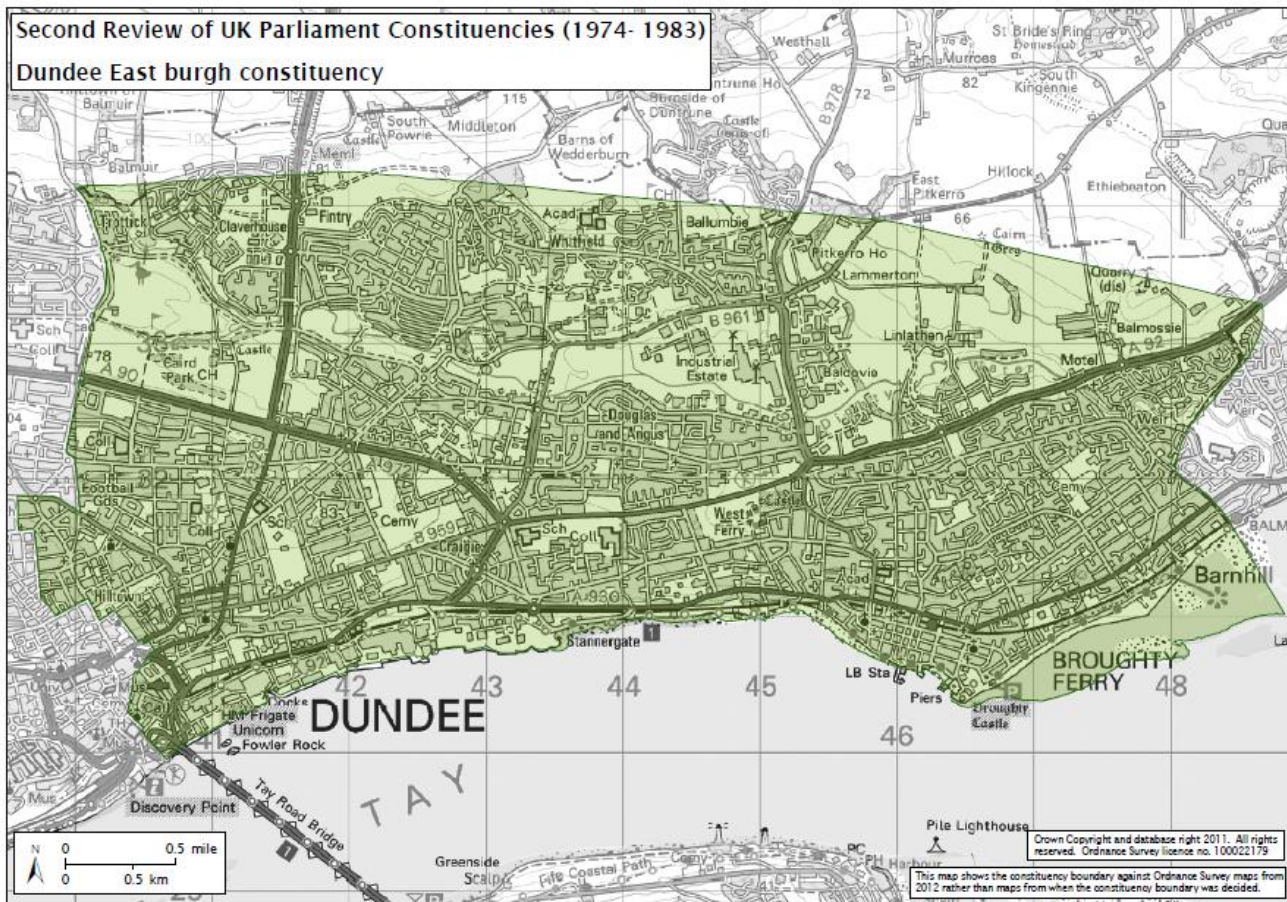
## The Scottish National Party in Dundee

*The Dundee West constituency 1974-1983<sup>30</sup>*

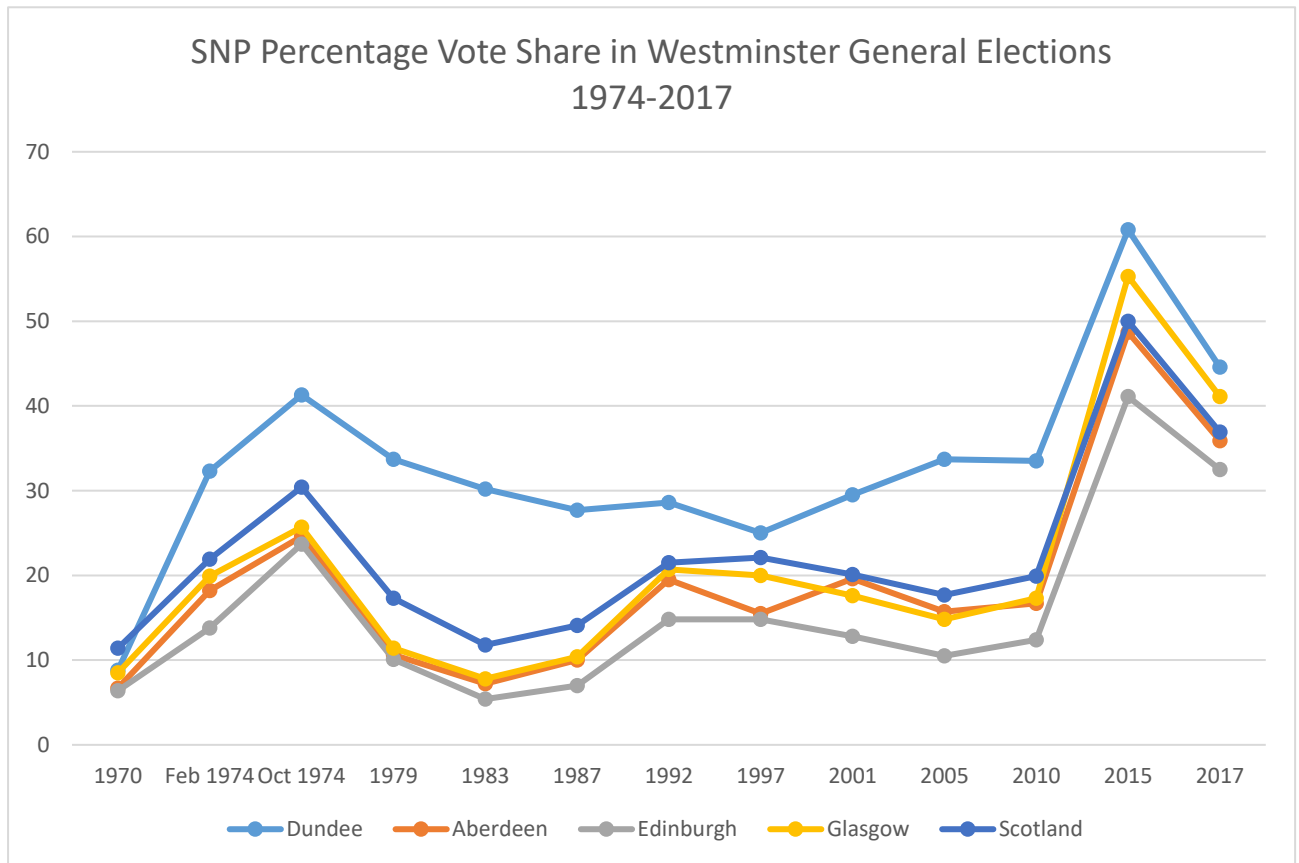


<sup>30</sup> 'Dundee West burgh constituency 1974-1983', *Boundary Commission for Scotland*

The Dundee East constituency 1974-1983<sup>31</sup>



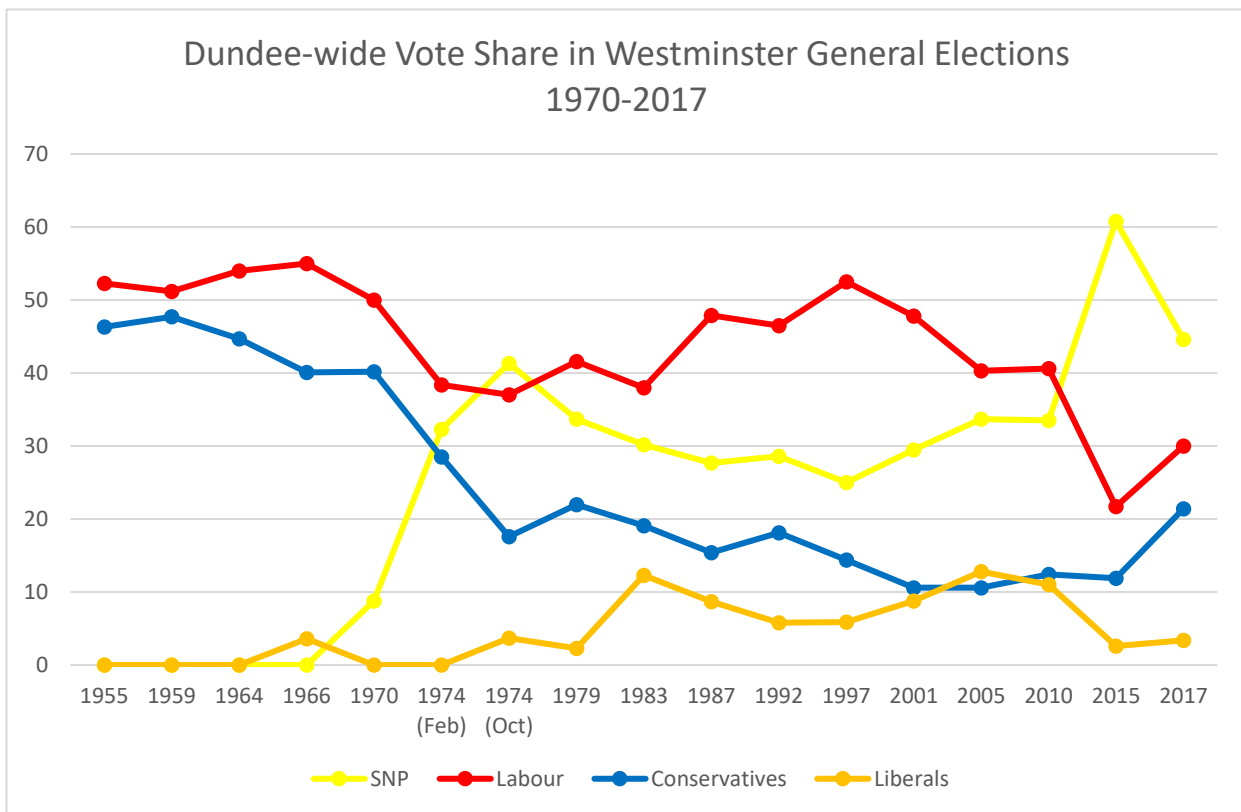
<sup>31</sup> 'Dundee East burgh constituency 1974-1983', *Boundary Commission for Scotland*



This section will detail Dundee’s electoral history, and specifically the SNP’s history in the city, from the 1970s to the present day. It will highlight the ways in which its results differed from those of other cities and the rest of Scotland, how they changed over time and, importantly in the case of Dundee, the differences in the party’s fortunes within the city itself. An appreciation of this background, and the various contours of the city’s political history, is necessary before this thesis can present its analysis that seeks to account for the SNP’s long-term local success.

Since 1973, Dundee has been one of the SNP’s greatest bastions of support, and the only urban area in which it has enjoyed consistent strength. With support well above the national average, the SNP has been markedly more successful in Dundee than in Scotland’s other major cities. Indeed, the SNP vote in each of Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen was

below the national average in every general election between February 1974 and 2010. The party's vote in Dundee did not follow national electoral trends as rigidly as it did in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen. Most notably, the Dundee SNP held firm between 1979 and 1987 in the face of a dramatic drop in their fortunes across Scotland. During these three elections, the difference between the city and the rest of urban Scotland widened to the extent that the SNP vote was around three times higher in Dundee than in each of the country's other cities. Although it moved more closely in line with the rest of the country in the 1990s, the Nationalist vote also began to rise earlier in Dundee than other parts of Scotland in the early 2000s, preceding the party's nationwide rise to power later in the decade.



The SNP's distinctive history of success in Dundee can be divided into three phases, the first beginning with the 1973 Dundee East by-election. Prior to that contest, the city was not the dependable source of SNP votes it would later become. The party had achieved very little in

Dundee during its initial drive into the political mainstream in the 1960s. As Billy Wolfe admitted 'our record in Dundee had not been very good' in the years before 1973.<sup>32</sup> Even in the absence of a Liberal competitor, the party won just 7.4 per cent of the vote in the Dundee West by-election of 1963. Coming at a time when the party's fortunes were improving, with the Nationalists winning 18.7 and 23.3 per cent of the vote at the 1961 Glasgow Bridgeton and 1962 West Lothian by-elections respectively, the Dundee result was deeply disappointing.<sup>33</sup> When the party ran its first Dundee candidates at a general election since 1945 in 1970, it won less than its national average vote in both of the city's parliamentary seats. Similarly, in the 1968 municipal elections, which saw a major breakthrough across Scotland, the Nationalists won a notably lower share of the vote than in either Edinburgh or Glasgow and only picked up one councillor.<sup>34</sup> In local contests in 1971, the party's results in Dundee were internally regarded by the SNP as being amongst the worst in the whole of Scotland and again lagged behind all the other major cities and the party lost its only councillor.<sup>35</sup>

Over the course of the following decade, the Dundee party put its years of underperformance behind it. This began the first phase of the growth of the SNP in Dundee, with the party performing strongly in parliamentary elections but having little impact on council politics. The SNP registered a breakout result at the Dundee East by-election on 1 March 1973. In a contest in which the Tories were heavily tipped in the media to emerge victorious, the Nationalists' Gordon Wilson stunned observers by finishing clearly ahead of the Conservatives on 30.1 per cent of the vote, just 2.5 per cent behind the

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<sup>32</sup> Billy Wolfe, *Scotland Lives*, 158

<sup>33</sup> Gordon Wilson, *The Turbulent Years*, 7

<sup>34</sup> Ewen Angus Cameron, 'Arthur Donaldson', James Mitchell, and Gerry Hassan (eds), *Scottish National Party Leaders* (London, 2016) 238

<sup>35</sup> National Library of Scotland (hereafter NLS), Acc.10754/8, SNP Local Government 1966-1975, 'Local Election Results 1971 – Summary'

victorious Labour candidate.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, the incumbent's margin of victory was smaller than the vote obtained by the Labour Party of Scotland – a group formed from a split in the local SNP the previous decade.<sup>37</sup> The result was all the more impressive as Dundee East was regarded as a 'marginal seat' in which the realistic possibility of either a Labour or Conservative victory was expected to make voters more reluctant to stray from their traditional parties.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, John Allan Stewart, the Conservative candidate for the seat in 1970, noted that the preceding general election had been so closely fought that Labour had been forced into 'bussing people in' from other parts of the country to see off the Tory challenge.<sup>39</sup> In the two general elections of 1974, the SNP's vote soared. At its high point in October, the Nationalists gained more votes in the city than Labour, reaching 41.3 per cent of the poll. After seeing Gordon Wilson take Dundee East in February, the party greatly increased its majority in the eastern constituency and ran Labour close in the west. Although this result was not repeated, the SNP's support remained much higher and more stable than elsewhere. With the exception of October 1974, from February 1974 until 1987 the party consistently won between 33.7 and 27.7 per cent of the vote across Dundee's two seats. The city also gave its backing to the Nationalists' Home Rule ambitions. The Tayside Region, in which Dundonian votes were counted, rejected devolution by a razor-thin margin in the 1979 referendum. Yet, it was widely reported by all political groups locally that 'there was a strong yes majority in the city of Dundee'.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Dundee City Archives (hereafter DCA), GD/LP/WF/1/1, William Fitzgerald Papers, 'Sunday Post Clipping'

<sup>37</sup> James Halliday, *Yours for Scotland*, 83

<sup>38</sup> *Courier & Advertiser*, 2 March 1973, 11

<sup>39</sup> The History of Parliament Oral History Project, C1503/72, Interview with John Allan Stewart by Malcolm Petrie

<sup>40</sup> *Courier & Advertiser*, 3 March 1979, 13

Percentage Vote Share in Westminster General Elections 1970-2017

	Dundee West					Dundee East					Scotland			
	SNP	Labour	Cons	Libs		SNP	Labour	Cons	Libs		SNP	Labour	Cons	Libs
1970	8.7	51.5	38.2			8.9	48.3	42.4			11.4	44.5	38	5.5
1973*						30.2	32.7	25.2	8.3					
1974 (Feb)	25.1	43	30.5			39.5	33.7	26.3			21.9	36.6	32.9	7.9
1974 (Oct)	35.1	41	18.5	4.6		47.7	32.7	16.8	2.8		30.4	36.3	24.7	8.3
1979	26.4	47.3	25.6			41.7	36	18.2	4.6		17.3	41.5	31.4	9
1983	17.1	43.5	21.7	17.1		43.8	33	15.5	7.7		11.8	35.1	28.4	24.5
1987	15.3	53.4	18	12.7		40.1	42.3	12.9	4.6		14.1	42.4	24	19.2
1992	23.6	49	18.5	7.5		33.4	44.1	17.8	4.1		21.5	39	25.6	13.1
1997	23.2	53.8	13.2	7.7		26.5	51.1	15.8	4.1		22.1	45.6	17.5	13
2001	27.3	50.6	9.1	9		31.4	45.1	12	8.6		20.1	43.3	15.6	16.3
2005	30	44.6	9.3	14.4		37.2	36.2	12.8	11.4		17.7	39.5	15.8	22.6
2010	28.9	48.5	9.3	11.4		37.8	33.3	15.2	10.6		19.9	42	16.7	18.9
2015	61.9	23.7	8.6	2.4		59.7	19.9	15	2.9		50	24.3	14.9	7.5
2017	46.7	33.1	16.2	3.1		42.8	26	27.4	3.8		36.9	27.1	28.6	6.8

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Support for the SNP was very uneven across the city in this period. In Dundee West, the party failed to overturn Labour during its 1970s high tide and was challenged for the role as the second party in the seat through the 1980s. Although the SNP vote in the constituency remained higher than the Scottish average, it mostly mirrored national trends, leading to catastrophic decline from 1979. In 1983, the party finished in fourth, with less than half of Labour's vote, well behind the Conservatives and three votes behind the recently formed Social Democratic Party. Four years later, the party lost support in the seat at an election in which the SNP made gains around the country, although it rose to third ahead of the Alliance. The SNP's performance in Dundee East was far more impressive. From Gordon Wilson's narrow loss in the 1973 by-election, through his four consecutive victories and to his eventual defeat in 1987, the SNP vote held solidly against the national swing at a very high level. Remarkably, the Nationalists increased their vote share and almost doubled their majority in 1983. Nationally this was the party's worst result since 1970, as their vote fell further, they won just one other seat and came within 10 per cent of the winner in only three others.<sup>42</sup> Even in 1987, the SNP vote slipped only slightly as they finished just 2.2 per

<sup>41</sup> \*Indicates the 1973 Dundee East by-election result.

Cons indicates Conservatives, Libs indicates the Liberals, Alliance and Liberal Democrats.

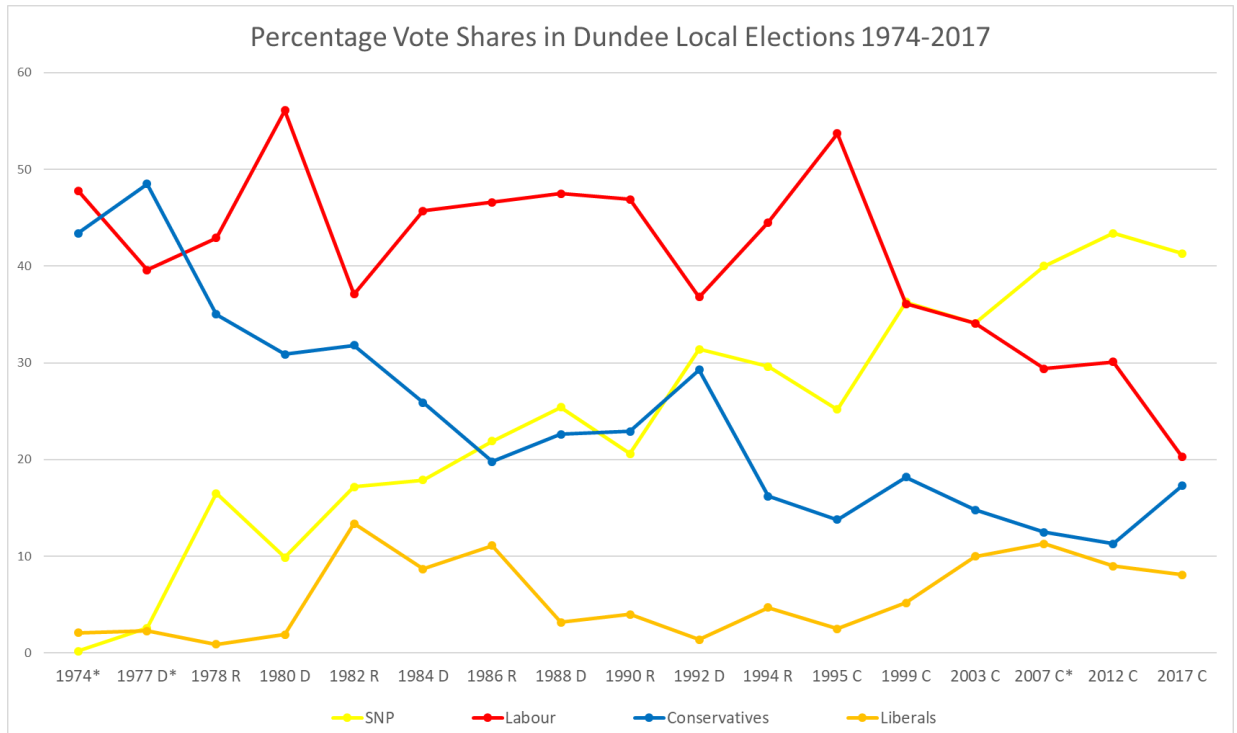
<sup>42</sup> David Butler and Dennis Kavanagh, *The British General Election of 1983* (London, 1984) 122

cent behind the victorious Labour candidate. This was a margin of defeat one quarter of the size of the next best placed Nationalist competitor in Galloway.<sup>43</sup> In local elections, the Nationalists were far less prominent. Although they took part in council elections in the late 1960s and early 1970s, holding one seat between 1968 and 1971, they had very little success in comparison to the rest of the country. Between the 1973 Dundee East by-election and 1978, they abstained entirely from local contests before opening up gradually to council politics thereafter. Indeed, they did not contest the majority of wards in the city until the 1982 Regional elections.<sup>44</sup> Even then, they achieved a far lower share of the vote than in parliamentary contests, and did not win any council seats at either tier of local government until the 1984 District Council elections when they secured their first two since the 1960s. Instead, Conservative support held up strongly, with the SNP not surpassing their vote share until the 1986 Regional elections and consistently won far fewer council seats than the Tories who remained Labour's main opposition on the council.

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<sup>43</sup> Richard Parry, *Scottish Political Facts* (London, 1988) 7

<sup>44</sup> Gordon Wilson, *The Turbulent Years*, 149



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The second phase in the city’s development followed Gordon Wilson’s 1987 defeat and carried on through to the end of the 1990s. It was punctuated by the Labour Party’s total dominance of Dundonian politics. The Nationalists’ support in Dundee East fell drastically in consecutive general elections in 1992 and 1997, while it rose in line with the national trend in the west. This led to a flattening of the party’s vote across the two seats, as the gap in the SNP vote share between them dropped from 24.8 per cent in 1987 to 3.3 per cent ten years later. The same period saw a convergence between the party’s performance in Dundee and the national average, with the difference between the two falling from 13.6 per cent to 2.9 per cent in the same period. As the SNP struggled, the 1997 devolution referendum pointed to comparatively weak support for self-government in the city.

<sup>45</sup> D indicates Dundee District election results, R indicates Regional election results from wards within the Dundee District and C indicates unitary City Council election results. The 1974 election is an aggregate of District and Regional election results held on the same day. In 1974 and 1977 the SNP did not stand official candidates, but the results of independent Nationalists and the Labour Party of Scotland splinter group are included. Since 2007 local elections have been conducted under the single transferable vote rather than first-past-the-post.

Although Dundee joined the country as a whole in providing a ringing endorsement for the new Scottish Parliament, its 76 per cent vote in favour was only marginally higher than the Scotland-wide result and was well behind other former industrial areas. In contrast, Glasgow voted 83.6 per cent yes while five further council areas in the Central Belt also backed devolution by more than 80 per cent.<sup>46</sup> In local elections, while Labour continued to dominate, as they had done since returning to power on the District Council in 1980, the SNP emerged as by far the most credible opposition. While between the 1986 and 1992 local elections the SNP and Tories had won roughly equal shares of the vote in council contests, from the 1994 Regional elections a substantial gap emerged with the Nationalists gaining around double the Conservative vote share from the mid-1990s onwards. Although the concentration of the Tory vote in the city's most affluent communities allowed them to retain a slightly larger contingent of councillors than the SNP until 1999, by the first unitary City Council elections in 1995 the Nationalists were in either first or second place in twenty-nine of the thirty-four wards that they contested and were clearly the only realistic alternative to a Labour council administration.

*Percentage Vote Share in Scottish Parliamentary Elections 1999-2016*

	Dundee West				Dundee East				Scotland			
	SNP	Labour	Cons	Lib/All	SNP	Labour	Cons	Lib/All	SNP	Labour	Cons	Lib/All
1999	37.2	37.6	11.5	10.3	34.3	43.3	14	6.8	28.7	38.8	15.6	14.2
2003	28.7	32.9	5.5	2.8	39.6	39.2	11.9	6	23.7	34.5	16.6	15.3
2007	45.1	37.1	7.4	10.4	49.6	32.7	11.1	6.7	32.9	32.2	16.6	16.2
2011	57.6	31.4	6.6	4.3	64.2	22.6	9.9	3.1	45.4	31.7	13.9	7.9
2016	57.8	26.1	10.2	3.6	58.1	19.7	17.5	3.2	46.5	22.6	22	7.8

From 1999, Nationalism in Dundee entered its third phase as the SNP challenged and then surpassed Labour as the city's leading party. The party began its upward trajectory, which eventually lead it into government in 2007, earlier in Dundee than it did across the rest of the country. While the SNP emerged as a party of government within a decade of the

<sup>46</sup> Neil McGarvey and Paul Cairney, *Scottish Politics: An Introduction* (London, 2008) 37

Scottish Parliament's creation in 1999, it began its upward trajectory in Dundee years before it did nationally. In 1999, benefiting for the first time from voters' greater propensity to vote SNP in devolved elections, the Nationalists performed strongly in both Scottish and council elections. Although the party lost in both constituencies, they came far closer to overturning Labour than observers had expected.<sup>47</sup> They missed out by just one hundred and twenty-four votes in Dundee West and a larger margin in the east, while their citywide list vote was almost equal to Labour's at 35.5 per cent.<sup>48</sup> On the same day, the Nationalists gained a marginally higher share of the vote in the City Council elections. Although Labour comfortably won more seats, the SNP's representation was greatly increased. In the 2001 general election, the party performed promisingly. As it lost support nationally, the SNP saw its vote rise by 4.5 per cent across the city, making solid gains in both seats even as Labour retained sizeable majorities. However, the Scottish elections of 2003 provided a breakthrough moment. In Dundee East, Shona Robison overcame the veteran Labour parliamentarian John McAllion to win the constituency. While the presence of a popular independent as well as a Scottish Socialist candidate, the SSP having stood aside in Dundee East in deference to the Labour left-winger John McAllion, contributed to a swing against the SNP in Dundee West, the party performed respectably citywide. Its vote in Dundee fell by a fraction of the amount it did nationally, at 1.3 per cent compared to 5 per cent. To further highlight the exceptional nature of the party's performance, Dundee East was one of only two constituencies the party gained, and one of two in which its vote rose more than any other party's.<sup>49</sup> In the council elections, the Nationalists secured twenty-one votes more than Labour and, more significantly, became the single largest group on the council. Yet they remained shut out from participating in the city

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<sup>47</sup> *Courier & Advertiser*, 7 May 1999, 10

<sup>48</sup> University of Dundee (hereafter UD), MS 325 Box 10, Dundee City Labour Party Papers, 'Election Results 6 May 1999'

<sup>49</sup> David Denver, 'A 'Wake Up!' Call to the Parties? The Results of the Scottish Parliamentary Elections 2003', *Scottish Affairs*, No 44 (2003) 34

administration as Labour cobbled together the support it needed through a minority coalition with the Liberal Democrats and an informal alliance with the Conservative Party.

While boundary changes that added SNP-leaning Angus towns to the Dundee constituencies in 2005 exaggerated the party's performance in that year's general election, there was still clear progress. Both constituencies retained reduced notional Labour majorities going into the election, yet the Nationalists built upon their 2003 victory by narrowly claiming Dundee East at Westminster and squeezing Labour's majority in the west.<sup>50</sup> These modest increases were achieved despite the party shedding support across Scotland once again. Indeed, after the gap between the SNP's national and Dundee votes had closed to 2.9 per cent in 1997, by 2005 it had widened again to 16 per cent, with the party winning a shade over a third of the city's vote compared to just 17.7 per cent around Scotland. When the SNP advanced into government at the 2007 Scottish elections, its support rose at a notably higher rate in Dundee, allowing the party to increase its majority in the east and win the western constituency. This gave the Nationalists complete control of the city's Holyrood representation. The result saw the party secure a larger share of the citywide vote than Labour for the first time in a parliamentary contest since October 1974, with 45.8 per cent. In the local elections, the SNP increased its lead over Labour, yet fell two seats short of a majority on the council. The scale of the SNP's breakthrough had been limited by the introduction of the new single transferable vote system into Scottish local elections, that asked voters to rank parties in order of their preference and produced more proportional results than the previous first-past-the-post system had. This allowed the Unionist coalition that had reigned since 2003 to remain in place. In light of the Nationalists' achievements, the *Courier* proclaimed 'Dundee is the first Scottish city to

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<sup>50</sup> *Courier & Advertiser*, 22 April 2005, 10

become an SNP city in history'.<sup>51</sup> Following a council by-election victory in the Maryfield ward in early 2009, the Nationalists finally gained control of the city administration. Labour's Lord Provost John Letford rebelled against his party by lending the SNP the aid of his casting vote, retaining his position as the city's civic head as an independent until the next election.<sup>52</sup> In doing so, he ended twenty-nine years of continuous Labour control of local government in Dundee, a party which sat in office for fifty-two of the sixty-three years between 1946 and 2009. It has remained out of office in the city throughout the decade since.

One year later, as Labour recorded its last electoral victory in Scotland at the 2010 Westminster general election, the SNP disappointed expectations as they retained Dundee East but failed to eject their rivals from the city's western constituency, having 'believed they had it in the bag' prior to polling day.<sup>53</sup> The *Evening Telegraph* journalist Grant Smith described the result as 'a score draw between Labour and the SNP ... across the city Labour polled six votes for every five that went to the Nationalists'.<sup>54</sup> During the SNP's landslide in the 2011 Scottish elections, its vote soared to 61 per cent in Dundee. This exceeded the vote won in the city's constituencies in either of their two post-independence referendum triumphs in 2015 and 2016. The eastern and western constituencies recorded the third and eighth highest SNP votes in Scotland, registering the party's two strongest results in urban seats by a distance. This level of popular support far exceeded any vote Labour had ever managed to gather in the city. In 2012, the SNP capped its domination of Dundonian politics by winning an absolute majority on the City Council. With proportional representation limiting the number of local authorities coming under single-party control,

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<sup>51</sup> *Courier & Advertiser*, 4 May 2007, 1

<sup>52</sup> John Letford, *Fae the Boatyard to Buckingham Palace*, 69

<sup>53</sup> *Courier & Advertiser*, 7 May 2010, 1

<sup>54</sup> *Evening Telegraph*, 7 May 2010, 5

Dundee and neighbouring Angus were the only councils in which the SNP were able to gain complete control despite the party achieving the highest share of the vote in local elections across Scotland.<sup>55</sup> The 2014 independence referendum campaign resonated particularly strongly in the city. Dundee produced the nation's largest vote in favour of independence. Its 57 per cent yes vote diverged more from the national average than any other council area. Dundee was unique in being the only historic SNP heartland to produce a majority for independence. The SNP's grip on the city's politics has continued to tighten since. As it swept the country in 2015, the Nationalists won 60.8 per cent of the vote citywide with Dundee West recording the highest and Dundee East the fifth highest SNP shares in Scotland. In 2016, it won 57.8 per cent across the city, two and a half times Labour's vote. While the party's fortunes waned in 2017, Dundee produced the largest share of SNP first preference votes of any council area at the local elections, with the party retaining control of the city administration as a minority. In the general election one month later, it again provided the largest and fifth largest Nationalist votes in Dundee West and East respectively, with their citywide vote dropping to 44.6 per cent and the party retaining control of both seats.

## **Structure**

In order to explain the SNP's local strength, this thesis will be divided into two Parts. The first will analyse the city of Dundee itself and the second will examine the parties that have contested its political life. In the first Part, it will assess the case for 'Dundee exceptionalism', the view that the view that the city's tendency towards Scottish

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<sup>55</sup> Hugh Bochel, David Denver and Martin Steven, *Report on the Scottish Council Elections 2012* (Lincoln, 2012)

Nationalism can be accounted for by its unique traits. It accomplishes this through an exploration of the city's economic history, demography, geography, political history, local media landscape and the differences within Dundee itself. This section will provide a detailed background on the city and its character, which is vital to understanding the context within which its politics played out. Crucially, it will present a thorough examination of the view that unusual political behaviour in a particular area can be simply explained by pointing to the eccentricities of that locality, before highlighting the shortcomings of this perspective. It will find that although these factors did combine to give the SNP advantages it did not enjoy elsewhere, they do not fully account for its political development. This will make clear that an alternative explanation is necessary.

Part Two will present the argument that Dundee's tendency towards the SNP was the result of the activity of the city's political parties and the dynamics between them, finding them to be the key force shaping the city's divergence from nationwide electoral patterns. In order to achieve this, it will discuss the history of each major party in turn. Beginning with the SNP itself in Chapter Two before moving on to Labour in Chapter Three and then the other groups involved in Dundee politics in Chapter Four, it will examine the changes they underwent over the course of the forty-year period and the ways in which they interacted with both each other and the electorate. It will discuss the importance of organisation, local leadership and ideology, and the extent to which these altered the way in which national political changes were felt in the city. This section of the thesis has been arranged by party, rather than chronologically, in order to present a more coherent narrative of each group's history, allowing for a greater understanding of the long-term factors affecting each party and their distinctive development over time. It will argue that Dundee's experiences illustrate that these factors can play a decisive role in altering the

shape of political competition in given localities, as they came together to forge a reliable Nationalist tradition in the city.

## **Part One, Chapter One: The Characteristics of Dundee**

This chapter will assess the extent to which the Scottish National Party's strong electoral record in Dundee was the result of the city's particular characteristics creating an environment that was especially well suited to the party. It will describe and analyse the city's economic structure, and the dramatic changes it underwent over the course of the period, its demography, geographical location, political history and popular press. It will evaluate the ways in which these factors made Dundee a particularly hospitable setting for the party and how they interacted with national political trends. It will demonstrate that while Dundee differed from Scotland's other cities in key ways, and its character played an important part in making the Nationalists' local success possible, they did not predetermine its political development. It will also seek explanations for the difference in the SNP's performance between the city's eastern and western constituencies during the 1970s and 1980s, and the closing of the gap between them thereafter.

### **The Economy**

#### *Historical Overview*

Dundee's economy changed drastically between the mid-twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries. In an experience familiar around much of the Western world, it transformed from a thriving industrial centre into a modern, service-based, economy.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Jim Phillips, *The Industrial Politics of Devolution: Scotland in the 1960s and 1970s* (Manchester, 2008) 3

Dundee had initially risen to wealth in the nineteenth century, growing famous for ‘jute, jam and journalism’. Home to a proud and successful journalistic tradition, which coalesced around the DC Thomson publishing house in the early twentieth century, the city also housed Keiller’s confectioners who had, according to local legend, invented marmalade in the late eighteenth century.<sup>57</sup> In the first half of the twentieth century, Keiller’s was one of the world’s largest companies in its industry.<sup>58</sup> Yet, despite the symbolic value of these trades, the city’s economy was founded upon the predominance of jute – a rough textile used in the manufacture of a number of products including sacks, rope and carpet backing. At its peak, recorded in the 1911 census, it employed 48 per cent of the city’s workforce and its influence loomed over every part of urban life.<sup>59</sup>

With its economy already frail by the 1920s, Dundee was badly hit by the great depression as it suffered the worst levels of unemployment in Scotland.<sup>60</sup> The jute industry, always dramatically impacted by shifts in the business cycle, went into freefall. At the same time, it came under intensifying pressure from Indian competitors, who benefited from labour costs that were a fraction of those in Britain as well as proximity to the areas in which the raw materials used in jute production are grown.<sup>61</sup> Despite concerted lobbying from the city’s economic interests, the British government felt constrained from offering any sort of economic protection against the Indian mills in this period due to their concerns that this might destabilise the Empire.<sup>62</sup> The industry was also buffeted by a long-term slackening of

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<sup>57</sup> W M Mathew, *Keiller’s of Dundee: The Rise of the Marmalade Dynasty* (Dundee, 1998) 1

<sup>58</sup> Gregor Stewart, *Dundee at Work: People and Industry Through the Years* (Stroud, 2017)

<sup>59</sup> Neil Hood and Stephen Young, *Multinationals in Retreat: The Scottish Experience* (Edinburgh, 1982) 111

<sup>60</sup> David Newlands, ‘The Regional Economies of Scotland’, T M Devine, C H Lee and G C Peden (eds), *The Transformation of Scotland: The Economy Since 1707* (Edinburgh, 2005) 167

<sup>61</sup> W Stewart Howe, *The Dundee Textiles Industry 1960-1977: Decline and Diversification* (Aberdeen, 1982) 158

<sup>62</sup> Gordon T Stewart, ‘The strange case of jute’, John MacKenzie and Bryan S Glass (eds), *Scotland, Empire and Decolonisation in the Twentieth Century* (Manchester, 2015) 80

demand for jute products in the West in favour of higher quality substitutes.<sup>63</sup> As a result, the portion of the Dundonian workforce it employed collapsed from 41 per cent in 1931 to 23 per cent in 1951.<sup>64</sup>

However, in the decades after the second world war, the city's wider economy steadied and performed very strongly. Its unemployment rate stayed below the Scottish average until 1970, and it enjoyed strong wage growth.<sup>65</sup> Although the wider Scottish economy had started to face serious challenges by the 1960s, Dundee remained buoyant.<sup>66</sup> This success was based upon a strong manufacturing sector that employed around half of the city's workforce in 1970.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, at the beginning of the 1970s Dundee was home to a formidable 1.5 million square foot of factory floor space.<sup>68</sup> This compared to a total of 6.8 million square feet across the whole of Wales in 1967.<sup>69</sup> While the jute industry did not flourish in these postwar years, it remained a major feature of the city's economy. The threat of India's mills and the changes in consumer taste remained. Yet, the government's adoption of protectionist policies shielded the industry and allowed it to stabilise in the following decades.<sup>70</sup> From the second world war until the end of the 1960s, jute employment fell only marginally while modernisation and improvements in productivity temporarily preserved its viability.<sup>71</sup> The industry's health was highlighted by the ability of

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<sup>63</sup> *Courier & Advertiser*, 10 March 1973

<sup>64</sup> Neil Hood and Stephen Young, *Multinationals in Retreat*, 111

<sup>65</sup> D S Riddell, 'Social Structure and Relations', J M Jackson (ed.), *The Third Statistical Account of Scotland: The City of Dundee* (Arbroath, 1979) 461

<sup>66</sup> Richard J Finlay, *A Partnership For Good? Scottish Politics and the Union Since 1880* (Edinburgh, 1997) 147

<sup>67</sup> Joe Doherty, 'Dundee: A Post-Industrial City', Christopher A Whatley (ed.), *The Remaking of Juteopolis: Dundee circa 1891-1991* (Dundee, 1992) 25

<sup>68</sup> Andrew Murray Scott, *Modern Dundee: Life in the City Since World War Two* (Derby, 2002) 100

<sup>69</sup> Paul N Balchin, Jeffrey L Kieve and Gregory H Bull, *Urban Land Economics and Public Policy* (Basingstoke, 1988) 44

<sup>70</sup> George Peden, 'A New Scotland? The Economy', T M Devine and Jenny Wormald (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Scottish History* (Oxford, 2012) 661

<sup>71</sup> Michael Pacione, 'Traditional and New Industries in Dundee', *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, Vol 88 No 1 (1972) 57

firms to pay out large dividends. The Low & Bonar company paid an average annual dividend of 20 per cent in the 1950s and 18 per cent in the 1960s.<sup>72</sup> As late as 1973, it was assumed the industry had a long-term future in Dundee 'jute was not finished – far from it'.<sup>73</sup>

Other traditional staples of Dundee's Victorian economy also endured. The Robb Caledon shipyard celebrated its centenary with pomp in 1974, despite a steady decline in its output since the 1940s.<sup>74</sup> Engineering and metalworking also employed large numbers into the 1970s.<sup>75</sup> Even Keiller's was still in operation. Meanwhile, the city's journalistic traditions remained in practise as DC Thomson met with great commercial success with a variety of different publications. It printed popular newspapers including the *Sunday Post*, *Courier & Advertiser* and *Evening Telegraph*, iconic children's comics such as the *Beano* and *Dandy*, and numerous magazines, featuring Britain's bestselling weekly in the teen girls' favourite *Jackie*.<sup>76</sup> With its offices in the city, it was one of Dundee's largest employers with almost 1,900 workers in 1963.<sup>77</sup> Yet the basis of Dundee's prosperity in these years was its development of a new economy. Mostly American multinational firms, which included Timex, Michelin, NCR, Dayco Rubber and Veeder Root, flocked to the city, providing it with 14,000 light-factory jobs by the early 1970s. At their peak, these employed 12 per cent of Dundee workers, more than anywhere else in Scotland.<sup>78</sup> The foreign firms allowed Dundee to diversify its economy and become involved in new industries, while retaining a

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<sup>72</sup> Jim Tomlinson, Carlo Morelli and Valerie Wright, *The Decline of Jute: Managing Industrial Change* (Abingdon, 2016)

<sup>73</sup> *Courier & Advertiser*, 14 March 1973, 5

<sup>74</sup> Andrew Murray Scott, *Modern Dundee*, 126

<sup>75</sup> J M Jackson, 'Leading Industries', J M Jackson (ed.), *The City of Dundee*, 153

<sup>76</sup> Angela McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture* (Basingstoke, 1991) 67

<sup>77</sup> J M Jackson, 'Leading Industries', 175

<sup>78</sup> Catherine Di Domenico and Marialaura Di Domenico, 'Heritage and urban renewal in Dundee: Learning from the past when planning for the future of a post-industrial city', *Journal of Retail and Leisure Property*, Vol 6 No 4 (2007) 331

strong manufacturing component. The high wages and good working conditions they offered forced existing industries to improve pay and conditions in order to compete for labour, resulting in better living standards citywide.<sup>79</sup> Indeed, during the 1960s the city had the highest wage rates in urban Scotland.<sup>80</sup>

Alongside many British cities, Dundee experienced extensive state-led redevelopment in the postwar period. The overcrowded and dilapidated inner city was bulldozed, and the working class population rehoused in large estates around the periphery of the city.<sup>81</sup> This resulted in Dundee's physical expansion. By the 1970s, it covered nearly twice the area it had before the second world war, yet had the same number of people living in it.<sup>82</sup> Lord Provost William Fitzgerald's celebration of these changes in 1972 highlights the modernising vision that captivated the city's elites: 'many old areas have been swept away, new houses have arisen, a cleaner atmosphere provided, new streets have been created, a better road pattern established and partially implemented'.<sup>83</sup> Moreover, the 1960s witnessed a number of inspiring prestige projects. Work began on the state-of-the-art Ninewells Hospital, the University of Dundee gained its Royal Charter and the construction of the Tay Road Bridge and Dundee Airport greatly improved transport links with the rest of the country.<sup>84</sup> The city's leaders had sought after many of these developments for decades,

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<sup>79</sup> Jim Tomlinson, Carlo Morelli and Valerie Wright, *The Decline of Jute*

<sup>80</sup> W W Knox, *Industrial Nation: Work, Culture and Society in Scotland 1800-Present* (Edinburgh, 1999) 258

<sup>81</sup> Jim Tomlinson, 'Dundee and the World: De-globalisation, De-industrialisation and Democratisation', Jim Tomlinson and Christopher A Whatley (eds), *Jute No More: Transforming Dundee* (Dundee, 2011) 13

<sup>82</sup> 'Tayside', *Films of Scotland and Tayside Development Authority*, 1974

<sup>83</sup> DCA, GD/LP/WF/1/1, William Fitzgerald Papers, 'Newspaper Clipping', 1971

<sup>84</sup> Christopher A Whatley, David B Swinfen and Annette M Smith, *The Life and Times of Dundee* (Edinburgh, 1993) 178

with the 1940s Lord Provost Garnet Wilson noting that plans for a road bridge had first been mooted as early as 1921.<sup>85</sup>

These achievements bred an optimistic outlook for the city's future, even before hopes of involvement with North Sea oil rose in the 1970s. Ernie Ross, the Labour MP for Dundee West between 1979 and 2005, reminisced of this period in a report to his local Labour Party in 1978, explaining that the 'prospects for Dundee's future radiated optimism' in the 1960s.<sup>86</sup> A 1966 documentary depicted this spirit through its striking use of language, speaking of the ongoing 'Renaissance of the city', calling Dundee a 'boom city' and 'place of new hope' whilst looking forward to its future as the 'metropolis of the Tay'.<sup>87</sup> Such optimism was encouraged by central government. In 1966 Willie Ross, the Secretary of State for Scotland, beamed 'the general conditions and prospects of the Dundee area, and particularly the city itself, offer the most promising feature of the whole Northeast'.<sup>88</sup> Dundee's postwar success contrasted with Scotland's other cities. Glasgow, the nation's greatest industrial centre, spent the period in a state of depression that submerged positivity about the future. Its traditional industries ebbed away while it failed to attract new ones, leading to continuous economic decline.<sup>89</sup> While Aberdeen's robust service sector meant that it did not suffer as badly, in the decades prior to the discovery of North Sea oil it had been hit by the severe contraction of many of the old staples of its economy

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<sup>85</sup> Garnet Wilson, *The Making of a Lord Provost* (Dundee, 1966) 95

<sup>86</sup> Ernie Ross, *Dundee – 12 Years After the National Plan for Scotland* (Dundee, 1978) 2

<sup>87</sup> 'The Road and the Miles', *Scottish Television*, 1966

<sup>88</sup> Willie Ross in Jim Tomlinson, Carlo Morelli and Valerie Wright, *The Decline of Jute*

<sup>89</sup> Andrew Gibb, *Glasgow: The Making of a City* (London, 1983) 150

in fishing, shipbuilding and granite.<sup>90</sup> Even Edinburgh did not flourish in the postwar years, with its commercial resurgence not yet underway.<sup>91</sup>

Dundee's performance in this preceding period would make its descent into rapid deindustrialisation an especially traumatic experience. Between 1970 and 1980, the city lost half its manufacturing jobs while employment in services rose by around 40 per cent.<sup>92</sup> This decisively reoriented the Dundonian economy and created a great deal of economic and social dislocation in the process. As the first major job losses began to bite in 1971, a local trade unionist fittingly described the abruptness of this change 'only two years ago we used to be a boom town. Now suddenly we are a doom town'.<sup>93</sup> Many towns and cities went through a similar process of deindustrialisation to Dundee in this period. The portion of Britain's labour force involved in manufacturing fell by half between 1978 and 2000.<sup>94</sup> Across the developed world, industrial sectors contracted in the late twentieth century. Employment falling by between a third and a half from their peaks in the majority of Western countries by the turn of the millennium, with only a handful seeing a reduction of less than a fifth.<sup>95</sup> In its speed and completeness, the city's experience was a pronounced example of this global trend.

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<sup>90</sup> Richard Perren, 'Survival and Decline: The Economy 1918-1970', W Hamish Fraser and Clive H Lee (eds), *Aberdeen 1800-2000: A New History* (Edinburgh, 2000) 110

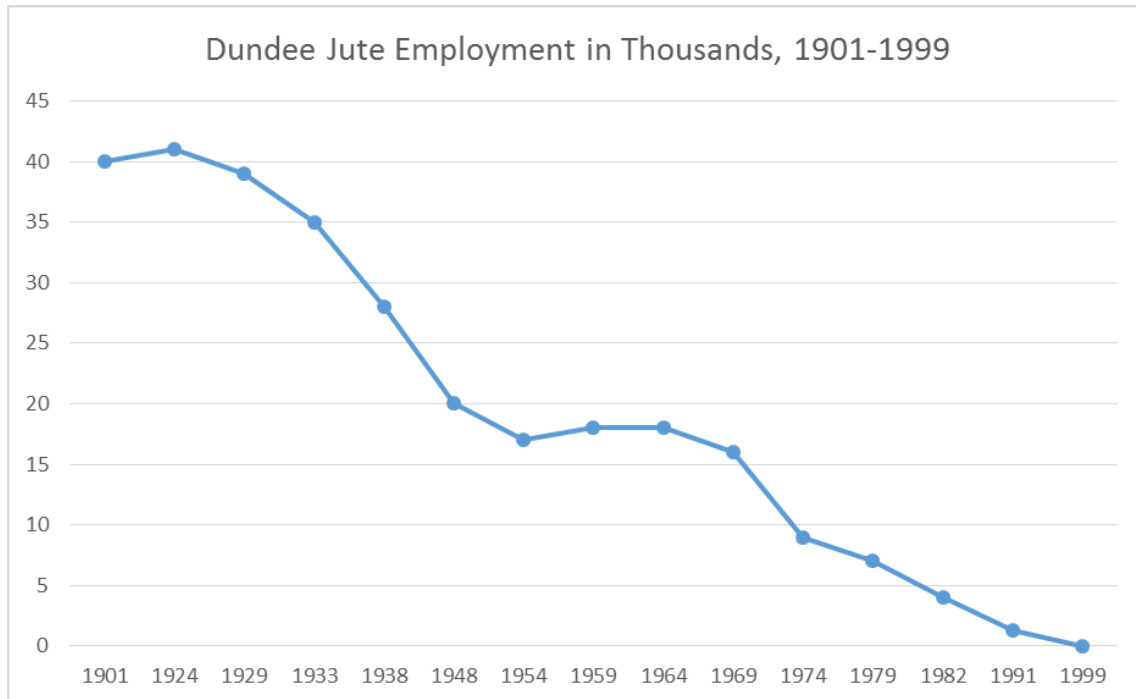
<sup>91</sup> Ray Hudson and Allan M Williams, *Divided Britain* (Chichester, 1995) 265

<sup>92</sup> Joe Doherty, 'Dundee: A Post-Industrial City', 25

<sup>93</sup> *Times*, 27 September 1971, 24

<sup>94</sup> Andrew Rosen, *The transformation of British life, 1950-2000: a social history* (Manchester, 2003) 12

<sup>95</sup> Charles Feinstein, 'Structural Change in the Developed Countries During the Twentieth Century', *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, Vol 15 No 4 (1999) 39



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Dundee's nineteenth century industries fell away rapidly. From the very end of the 1960s, the jute industry entered into a death spiral. An ominous 1973 *Courier* article, which pointed to signs of life in the sector, forebodingly accepted that 'without textiles the Tayside economy would be drastically weakened'.<sup>97</sup> Between 1969 and 1974, employment in jute almost halved, after a slower rate of decline in the following few years it nearly halved again during the 1979-82 recession. By the 1990s, jute firms employed barely 1,000 people, around one per cent of Dundee's workforce, and had ceased to play a major role in the city's economy.<sup>98</sup> The industry finally left completely when the last mill was shut down in 1999 and its equipment shipped to Calcutta.<sup>99</sup> The confectioners Keiller's closed their factory doors in 1988, before the company was wound-up in Dundee entirely in 1992, a full 195 years after its foundation.<sup>100</sup> More than a century of shipbuilding in the city was also

<sup>96</sup> Jim Tomlinson, Carlo Morelli and Valerie Wright, *The Decline of Jute*

<sup>97</sup> *Courier & Advertiser*, 8 March 1973, 6

<sup>98</sup> Jim Tomlinson, Carlo Morelli and Valerie Wright, *The Decline of Jute*

<sup>99</sup> Gordon Stewart, 'Endgame for Jute, Dundee and Calcutta in the Twentieth Century', Jim Tomlinson, and Christopher A Whatley (eds), *Jute No More*, 47

<sup>100</sup> *Evening Telegraph*, 5 March 1992, 5

brought to an end. In October 1981 British Shipbuilders revealed that the Robb Caledon yard 'had lost £12.8 million since nationalisation [in 1977] and is losing £250,000 a month and had been unsuccessful in obtaining work' and was therefore being closed down.<sup>101</sup>

Only journalism, through DC Thomson, survived from the old industries, although most of its titles had passed their sales peaks by the early 1980s, while employment by the company had also begun to slacken.<sup>102</sup>

The multinational firms attracted to Dundee in previous decades had predominantly built footloose assembly line works. These rarely required a developed skill base, with one senior manager at Timex snidely remarking 'I could get chimpanzees to do this job'.<sup>103</sup>

Neither did they depend on proximity to a specific resource that might have tied them to one place. As a result, they were especially prone to relocation at the first sign of difficulties, an issue exacerbated by the companies' lack of connection to the local area.<sup>104</sup>

They responded to the recessions of the period by either rapidly downsizing their Dundonian operations or leaving entirely. Having employed 6,500 workers at its peak in 1970, NCR had just 1,000 left on its payroll in 1980 although the company did not finally end its manufacturing operations in Dundee until 2009. Similarly, employment at Timex peaked in 1974 at 6,000, before undergoing successive waves of cuts, which left only 2,000 jobs by 1983.<sup>105</sup> The company shut down production in Dundee in 1993 following an intense and protracted industrial dispute described by an ITN reporter as 'the most bitter, and on occasion the most violent in Britain since the mid-1980s'.<sup>106</sup> Other multinationals

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<sup>101</sup> Andrew Murray Scott, *Modern Dundee*, 126

<sup>102</sup> Graham Ogilvy, *The River Tay and its People* (Edinburgh, 1993) 40

<sup>103</sup> Bill Knox and Alan McKinlay, 'The Union Makes Us Strong? Work and Trade Unionism in Timex, 1946-83', Jim Tomlinson and Christopher A Whatley (eds), *Jute No More*, 268

<sup>104</sup> James Mitchell, *The Scottish Question* (Oxford, 2014) 212

<sup>105</sup> Jim Tomlinson, Carlo Morelli and Valerie Wright, *The Decline of Jute*

<sup>106</sup> *ITN Source*, 29 August 1993

followed similar patterns, with all but a handful of the firms that had arrived in the postwar period gone by the 1990s.<sup>107</sup>

The worst of the economic decline occurred in a very short period during the 1970s and early 1980s. Through the next decade it endured a more gradual outward shift of jobs, as a government report noted upon the withdrawal of the city's full development area status in 1994: 'there has been no major shocks [in Dundee] as in Fife or Lanarkshire, just a slow, apparently inexorable, decline'.<sup>108</sup> This depiction was borne out by statistics that reveal that between 1984 and 1993 Dundee saw a relatively modest net loss of 5,310 jobs in manufacturing while gaining a net 980 in services.<sup>109</sup> Fast-paced industrial collapse was followed by a slow-burning and demoralising depression through to the end of the century. A fiasco surrounding the proposed opening of a large factory by the Ford Motor Company in the late 1980s encapsulated this dispiriting period in which hopes of a turnaround in fortunes were repeatedly let down. Towards the end of the decade, Ford had reached advanced stages in plans to open up a plant in Dundee, promising in a letter to Gordon Wilson that 'a new high tech plant will be constructed in Dundee representing an investment of \$65 million. When full production is reached the plant will employ 450 people'.<sup>110</sup> With the city having lacked an inward investment project on this scale since the opening of the Michelin factory in 1972, the Ford offer was seen to represent more than just new money and jobs for the local economy. It was regarded as a symbol showing that the city's decline could be arrested and the prosperity of the past restored.<sup>111</sup> Yet these

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<sup>107</sup> Jim Tomlinson, 'The Deglobalisation of Dundee, C. 1900-2000', *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies*, Vol 29 No 2 (2009) 131

<sup>108</sup> UD, MS 315/2/4, Dundee Economic Activities, 'Development Area – Briefing Note', Undated

<sup>109</sup> UD, MS 315/2/4, Dundee Economic Activities, 'Economic Activity in Dundee', Undated

<sup>110</sup> UD, MS 315/5/2/3, Ford 1987-88, 'Ford Government Affairs Manager Letter to Gordon Wilson', Undated

<sup>111</sup> UD, MS 315/2/4 Dundee Economic Activities, 'John Corrigan Letter to Gordon Wilson', 1996

dreams were dashed. After talks with trade unions broke down over opaque pay and demarcation disputes, the company withdrew its proposed investment entirely, a spokesman stating 'those jobs will be created, but they won't be in Britain'.<sup>112</sup> The result was a tremendous blow to the morale of the city that was widely lamented across party political lines.<sup>113</sup>

From the 1970s, state aid became increasingly important to the city. Yet, its share of this investment lagged behind other struggling areas, most of whose economies had been deteriorating for decades longer. Between 1975 and 1980, Dundee was thirty-third out of fifty-six areas in Scotland in terms of its receipt of Regional Development Grant money per head of population. Incredibly, when its economic circumstances were considered, it received less aid per head than either Edinburgh or Aberdeen, and around a half as much as Glasgow. Motherwell, the area with the largest proportional share, received more than fifteen times as much as Dundee per person.<sup>114</sup> During the 1980s, the government made a more concerted attempt to stimulate industrial recovery in the city. It was designated as an 'Enterprise Zone' and, to much fanfare, the 'Dundee Project' was announced. This funnelled £24 million into industry in the city through the Scottish Development Agency.<sup>115</sup> Yet, it continued to receive much less support than the other troubled parts of the country. In 1984, Dundee was given the equivalent of just one third of its population share of SDA investments.<sup>116</sup> Regardless of its specific inadequacies in Dundee, this financial support had

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<sup>112</sup> *ITN Source*, 31 March 1988

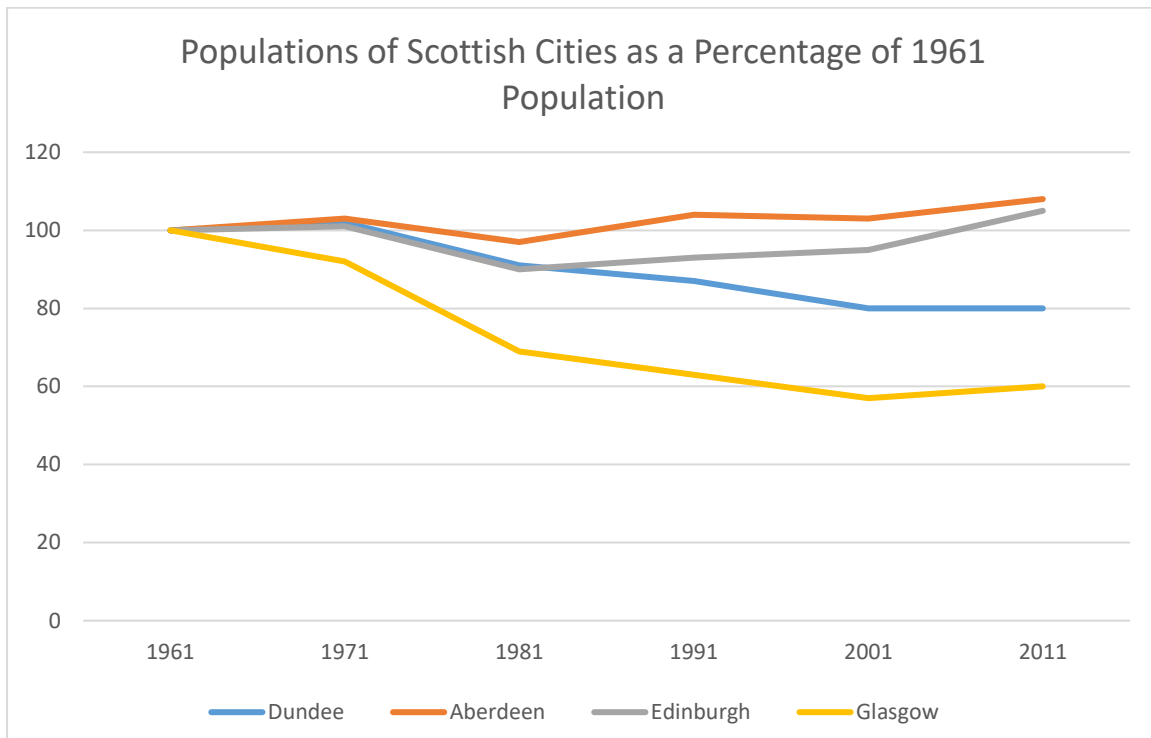
<sup>113</sup> *Courier & Advertiser*, 25 April 1988

<sup>114</sup> Brian Ashcroft, 'The Scottish Region and the Regions of Scotland', Keith P D Ingham and James Love (eds), *Understanding the Scottish Economy* (Oxford, 1983) 184

<sup>115</sup> Christopher A Whatley, David B Swinfen and Annette M Smith, *The Life and Times of Dundee*, 187

<sup>116</sup> Michael Keating and Robin Boyle, *Remaking Urban Scotland: Strategies for Local Economic Development* (Edinburgh, 1986) 93

a muted economic impact across Scotland, failing to stem industrial decline in either the city or the country at large.



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The collapse of the city’s manufacturing sector reintroduced it to permanent largescale unemployment for the first time since the great depression, a point of comparison that was emphasised by the local press.<sup>118</sup> Between 1969 and 1979 unemployment rose from 2.8 per cent to 9.3 per cent as it overtook the Scottish national average, before climbing to 15.5 per cent in 1981.<sup>119</sup> Gordon Wilson illustrated the desperation of the time, as he told Parliament in 1980 ‘jobs are vanishing from Dundee’.<sup>120</sup> Joblessness remained high during the following decade, peaking at 18 per cent in 1991 before beginning to fall thereafter.<sup>121</sup> Meanwhile, wages slumped from their lofty 1960s position to become the lowest in urban

<sup>117</sup> *Visions of Britain Through Time*

<sup>118</sup> *Dundee Standard*, 16 November 1979, 6

<sup>119</sup> Neil Hood and Stephen Young, *Multinationals in Retreat*, 112

<sup>120</sup> *House of Commons Hansard*, Deb 18 June 1980, Vol 986 Col 1625

<sup>121</sup> Jim Tomlinson, ‘De-globalisation, De-industrialisation and Democratisation’, 19

Scotland by the 1980s.<sup>122</sup> Dundee has had the worst average pay of any Scottish city ever since.<sup>123</sup> Deindustrialisation, and the failure of the service sector to grow rapidly enough to compensate for it, has created a legacy of poverty and emigration. Although the SNP's James Halliday was right when he asserted that Dundee was 'by no means the worst or most badly affected' part of the country by urban deprivation, its problems were still very serious.<sup>124</sup> Analysing a number of different indicators, the 2006 Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation revealed that 28.9 per cent of Dundee's population lived within neighbourhoods that were amongst the 15 per cent more deprived in Scotland. This placed the city behind only Inverclyde and Glasgow, where poverty was significantly more widespread, as one of the poorest council areas in the country.<sup>125</sup> Much of the city has been allowed to physically decay. The councillor Charles Farquhar commented on this desolation in 1987 when observing the profundity of the BBC's selection of an abandoned jute mill to represent war torn Berlin in a second world war documentary 'the TV crew's request to use [the site] for blitz background tells its own story'.<sup>126</sup> As a result of its economic problems, Dundee was afflicted by tremendous outward migration. Although this was a nationwide process across Scotland, the drop in Dundee's population was only outmatched by Glasgow.<sup>127</sup> Dundee's population fell by a fifth between 1971 and 2007, from 182,000 to 142,000, before beginning to recover. The majority of this drop occurred after 1981 as the city's long-term job shortage forced individuals to leave.<sup>128</sup> The contrast between Dundee and its fellow northeastern city of Aberdeen is illuminating. While the

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<sup>122</sup> W W Knox, *Industrial Nation*, 258

<sup>123</sup> *Dundee Economic Profile 2015* (Dundee, 2015) 19

<sup>124</sup> Scottish Political Archive, SPA/OH/REF/RR/37, Interview with Jimmy Halliday

<sup>125</sup> Jim Tomlinson, Carlo Morelli and Valerie Wright, *The Decline of Jute*

<sup>126</sup> *Dundee Extra!*, 30 May 1987, 1

<sup>127</sup> Ewen A Cameron, *Impaled Upon a Thistle*, 207

<sup>128</sup> Jim Tomlinson, 'City of Discovery? Dundee Since the 1980s', Jim Tomlinson and Christopher A Whatley (eds), *Jute No More*, 292

two had roughly equal populations in 1971, by 2001 Aberdeen, flush with oil wealth, was one and a half times the size of the Tayside city.<sup>129</sup>

Dundee has struggled to move past this experience of deindustrialisation, as the Labour councillor Kevin Keenan remarks 'Dundee has taken a lot of blows and it's never really got back over it'.<sup>130</sup> However, since the 1990s, with its manufacturing sector largely gone, the city has begun to show signs of regeneration as it has shifted towards the development of a modern, service-based, economy. In 2004, the then First Minister Jack McConnell pointed towards this change 'although Dundee still faces many challenges, the city is transformed from where it was only 10 to 15 years ago'.<sup>131</sup> Key to this has been higher education, which has grown rapidly and encouraged the development of associated industries. In 1981, the University of Dundee was still modestly sized, with 3,000 enrolled students.<sup>132</sup> Yet by the mid-1990s, Dundee was quickly becoming 'Scotland's univer-city' as, following the inauguration of Abertay University in 1994, its student population swelled to 13,000, or 9 per cent of the entire city, in 1995.<sup>133</sup> Between 1994 and 2008, both institutions continued to grow at pace, with Dundee University doubling in size. By 2006, their combined student population reached 23,000.<sup>134</sup> At 16 per cent of the city, this was one of the largest student populations per capita in the world and the highest in Britain.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> George Peden, 'A New Scotland? The Economy', 667

<sup>130</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Kevin Keenan

<sup>131</sup> *Scottish Parliament Official Report*, 2 December 2004, 12533

<sup>132</sup> Jim Tomlinson, 'City of Discovery? Dundee Since the 1980s', 296

<sup>133</sup> UD, MS 315/2/4, Dundee Economic Activities, 'Dundee City Council News Review', 1995

<sup>134</sup> *About Dundee 2008* (Dundee, 2008) 19

<sup>135</sup> Greg Lloyd, John McCarthy and Deborah Peel, 'The re-construction of a small Scottish city: re-discovering Dundee', David Bell and Mark Jayne (eds), *Small Cities: Urban experience beyond the metropolis* (Abingdon, 2006) 116

Taking advantage of these institutions' output of graduates, a number of sophisticated industries have clustered in the city. From the late 1980s, Dundee witnessed the growth of a burgeoning video games sector. After the success of pioneering developers who produced global hits in *Lemmings* and *Grand Theft Auto*, a number of firms have emerged. This has been aided by the specialised computing courses run by both Dundee's universities. Indeed, Abertay University was the first in the world to offer specialised computer games degrees.<sup>136</sup> This has in turn produced a stream of students with the skills these companies require. Although only contributing around 3 per cent of the city's jobs in 2007, these positions are well-paid and therefore have a disproportionate impact on the local economy.<sup>137</sup> The specialisation of the city in this creative industry has also allowed Dundee to promote a new, modern and positive image to the outside world. A similarly narrow specialism has emerged in life sciences. This extremely high-tech sector includes a variety of scientific companies involved in developing biotechnology, pharmaceuticals and medical devices amongst others. It is also closely linked to the universities and recruits extensively from them. These firms provide high-paying jobs for highly educated individuals, with a majority of those employed possessing PhDs. This has been another high growth sector, with employment rising from 1,100 in 1997 to 4,300 in 2007.<sup>138</sup> In common with the video games industry, good wages and big budgets ensures that life sciences play a larger role in the economy than these employment figures might indicate. By 2008, they accounted for a significant 16 per cent of Dundee's economic activity.<sup>139</sup>

The city has also built up a tourism industry that was virtually non-existent in 1980, through the creation of a number of attractions. The centrepiece to this development was the

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<sup>136</sup> Malcolm Archibald, *Dundee at a Glance* (Ayr, 2016) 2

<sup>137</sup> Jim Tomlinson, 'City of Discovery? Dundee Since the 1980s', 298

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 299

<sup>139</sup> *About Dundee 2008*, 13

return in 1986 of the RRS Discovery, the ship used by the celebrated Antarctic explorers Captain Scott and Ernest Shackleton in their famous expeditions to the South Pole, to the city where it was originally constructed.<sup>140</sup> The Discovery alone drew 50,000 visitors in 1992.<sup>141</sup> Alongside this, the 1980s and 1990s saw the opening of an award-winning museum dedicated to the city's industrial history in the Verdant Works, a revamp of the McManus museum and art gallery, the creation of the Dundee Contemporary Arts centre, the opening of a wildlife centre at Camperdown Park and the construction of a number of modern conference halls. Although it was worth markedly less than the city's population share of the industry across Scotland at £70 million per annum in 1999, it had emerged as a sizeable part of the local economy.<sup>142</sup> Tourism has continued to grow during the twenty-first century, with visitors pouring an estimated £100 million into the city in 2015.<sup>143</sup> This sector is expected to continue to develop as the city's reputation improves, led by excitement over the opening of a branch of the prestigious Victoria & Albert museum in 2018. In 2017, Dundee attracted international attention when it was labelled 'Scotland's coolest city' by the *Wall Street Journal*.<sup>144</sup> Meanwhile, the *Lonely Planet Guide* named it as the sixth best place to visit in Europe in 2018.<sup>145</sup>

Despite these successes, broader redevelopment has been hamstrung by a chronically weak private sector. These problems are shared across Scotland. The country has a very large public sector, contributing 50 per cent of its GDP in 2005 compared to 44 per cent across the United Kingdom, a level exceeded only by a handful of other European

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<sup>140</sup> Malcolm Archibald, *Dundee at a Glance*, 93

<sup>141</sup> Graham Ogilvy, *The River Tay and its People*, 28

<sup>142</sup> Graham Ogilvy, 'Dundee Delineated', Graham Ogilvy (ed.), *Dundee: A Voyage of Discovery* (Edinburgh, 1999) 25

<sup>143</sup> Gregor Stewart, *Dundee at Work*

<sup>144</sup> *Wall Street Journal*, 26 October 2017

<sup>145</sup> *Scotsman*, 22 May 2018

countries.<sup>146</sup> This is accompanied by a low level of business start-ups that has constrained private sector growth. Indeed, a 2000 survey found that Scots were the least likely people in the developed world to start a new business due to fears of failure.<sup>147</sup> The situation is especially poor in the Tayside city. The MP for Dundee West, Iain Luke, downplayed the severity of the situation in his admittance in Parliament that 'my constituency in Scotland has had a poor record in small business start-ups'.<sup>148</sup> A Scottish Enterprise report echoed this view in claiming that the Dundee City Region's economy suffered from a 'relative lack of "enterprise culture"'.<sup>149</sup> A 2008 survey of sixty-four British cities found that Dundee ranked sixty-third for the creation of new businesses per head of population, the second worst record in the United Kingdom and well behind Scotland's other cities.<sup>150</sup> This has forced Dundee to become heavily reliant upon the state, which has in turn taken an activist role in its development through the provision of funds and direction.<sup>151</sup> In 2006, 35.6 per cent of Dundonian workers were employed in public administration, education and health. This compared to a Scottish average of 30.4 per cent and a British average of 26.9 per cent and was significantly higher than Scotland's other cities where the figure stood at stood at 31.2, 30.1 and 26 per cent in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen respectively.<sup>152</sup> Public money has been the basis of the city's tentative recovery since the 1990s. The public sector proved to be the most important source of new jobs as the NHS and City Council became by far the biggest local employers, with investments in modernising Ninewells Hospital particularly significant.<sup>153</sup> Government, at both a local and national level, was extensively involved in supporting the tourist trade by funding various attractions around the city.

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<sup>146</sup> Ewen A Cameron, *Impaled Upon a Thistle*, 247

<sup>147</sup> T M Devine, *The Scottish Nation*, 642

<sup>148</sup> *House of Commons Hansard*, Deb 26 February 2003, Vol 400 Col 102 WH

<sup>149</sup> *Dundee City Region Economic Review* (Edinburgh, 2008) 21

<sup>150</sup> G C Peden, 'A New Scotland? The Economy', 667

<sup>151</sup> Greg Lloyd, John McCarthy and Deborah Peel, 'The re-construction of a small Scottish city', 113

<sup>152</sup> *About Dundee 2008*, 11

<sup>153</sup> Jim Tomlinson, 'The Deglobalisation of Dundee, C. 1900-2000', 131

Indeed the £1 billion development of the city's Waterfront that began in 2003, leading to the construction of the Victoria & Albert museum amongst a number of other high status buildings, drew most of its funding from the public purse.<sup>154</sup> Equally, both higher education and life science depend on state support for a large portion of their income, while also drawing funds from other sources including large national charities. Meanwhile, the video games industry could not have developed without its close relationship to the universities.<sup>155</sup> Vanishingly few growth areas were completely independent of public money.

Dundee's economic history over the past century has not uniformly followed the more well-known development of Glasgow and the West Coast of Scotland. Appreciating this situation is important to understanding the city's politics, especially in the period in which the SNP first entrenched themselves in the city. When the party began its local rise in the early 1970s, the city was at the beginning of a sharp deindustrialisation process in which multinational corporations played a prominent role, that had itself followed years of prosperity. In the same period, the West Coast economy was in the midst of a decades-long industrial depression. Meanwhile, the cities of the East Coast were in a more stable position, with Aberdeen witnessing the beginning of the oil boom. Although Edinburgh was not immune from social problems during this period, with its middle class image masking its own struggle with the collapse of its once-large industrial economy in the second half of the twentieth century, the strength of its service sector ensured that the city as a whole remained comparatively prosperous even before its finance-led revival took off in the 1980s.<sup>156</sup> These material conditions also had a key impact in shaping the wider character of

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<sup>154</sup> Gregor Stewart, *Dundee at Work*

<sup>155</sup> Jim Tomlinson, Carlo Morelli and Valerie Wright, *The Decline of Jute*

<sup>156</sup> Rebecca Madgin and Richard Rodger, 'Inspiring Capital? Deconstructing myths and reconstructing urban environments, Edinburgh, 1860–2010', *Urban History*, Vol 40 No 3 (2013) 526

the city, providing the context for a number of its peculiarities that shaped its population's attitudes and influenced its political preferences.

### *Poverty and Deprivation*

In the wake of the SNP's emergence in the 1960s and 1970s, commentators highlighted economic grievances as the central catalyst behind the Nationalist movement's rise.<sup>157</sup> The future Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher exemplified this tendency as she described Scottish Nationalism as being 'the result of economic difficulties'.<sup>158</sup> Various theories around this theme were postulated in these decades. Many saw SNP voting as a protest by Labour and Conservative aligned voters against these parties' poor management of the British economy in general, and Scotland's in particular.<sup>159</sup> Others went further along this line in proposing that the greatly enlarged role of the government in the economy had led to the discrediting of the British state itself in light of its failure to bring about the prosperity politicians had promised.<sup>160</sup> Michael Hechter put forward the controversial notion that Scotland was a victim of 'internal colonialism' in which the country's economy and society were subordinate to English domination, with the Nationalists arising in response as a national-liberation movement.<sup>161</sup> Many of these theories were framed around the idea that Scotland was suffering from relative deprivation, described by the political scientist Ted Robert Gurr as a condition in which reasonable expectations are not

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<sup>157</sup> Mark V Kauppi, 'The decline of the Scottish National Party, 1977-81: political and organizational factors', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol 5 No 3 (1982) 326

<sup>158</sup> Margaret Thatcher in David Torrance, *We In Scotland': Thatcherism in a Cold Climate* (Edinburgh, 2004) 17

<sup>159</sup> Hugh Berrington, 'Towards a Multi-Party Britain?', *West European Politics*, Vol 2 No 1 (1979) 35

<sup>160</sup> David McCrone, 'Explaining nationalism: the Scottish experience', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol 7 No 1 (1984) 136

<sup>161</sup> Michael Hechter, *Internal Colonialism*, 350

met by material reality.<sup>162</sup> Tom Nairn believed such a situation had been created by the growth of a 'development gap' between Scotland and England in the preceding decades when Scotland's economy had stagnated while the South of England boomed.<sup>163</sup> The preponderance of these perspectives was rooted in the dominant materialist outlook of the mid-twentieth century that sought to reduce all historical change and explanations of voting patterns to economic motivations and causes.

As one of Scotland's poorest areas, with a harsh experience of industrial decay, it follows that economic resentments would be more intense in Dundee than in less badly affected parts of the country, stimulating Nationalist advance. However, there was no correlation between different areas' economic deprivation and the level support for the SNP across the country. This is made clear by the party's failure to make a sustained breakthrough in West-Central Scotland, especially the poorest parts of it.<sup>164</sup> Deindustrialisation and the resulting impoverishment alone were not a source of strength for the SNP in Dundee or elsewhere. The influence of the city's economic problems was more complex. Dundee had been a victim of the postwar era's false promises and inflated expectations. The economic success of this era, and the wild claims of both local and national elites that prosperity would continue unabated into the future, a perspective reinforced by the discovery of oil in the North Sea, combined to create a situation in which Dundonians may have been led towards higher aspirations for the material wellbeing of both themselves and their communities. These bright visions of the future made the city's shift in fortunes from the 1970s appear especially abrupt. The sharpness of this change likely amplified its shock to society and may have made the population of Dundee more willing to look to the Nationalists and their

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<sup>162</sup> Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Boulder, 2011) 24

<sup>163</sup> Tom Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain*, 175

<sup>164</sup> William L Miller, Bo Sarlvik, Ivor Crewe and Jim Alt, 'The Connection Between SNP Voting and The Demand For Scottish Self-Government', *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol 5 (1977) 85

radical proscriptions for restoring the city's lost prosperity. Understandings of the role frustrated aspirations played in the rise of Scottish Nationalism have tended to focus upon individuals' perceptions of Scotland as a whole. Yet Dundee's economic history was distinct in its own right, with its quick turnabout from wealth to deindustrialisation. This made its population especially susceptible to feelings of relative deprivation. This was an ideal setting for the SNP to flourish. In contrast, the long-term depression of the Glaswegian economy likely encouraged a more conservative perspective that hoped to avoid a further worsening of the situation rather than pursue a dramatic turnaround. W G Runciman articulated the impact of such a situation on political aspirations 'if people have no reason to expect or hope for more than they can achieve, they will be less discontented with what they have, or even grateful simply to be able to hold on to it'.<sup>165</sup> On the West Coast of Scotland, this perspective was wedded to the Labour Party and its promises to protect dying heavy industries rather than the SNP and its riskier plans for rejuvenation through self-government.

Other areas of Scotland that experienced a similar pattern of disappointment also provided fertile soil for the Nationalists.<sup>166</sup> The new towns, established between 1949 and 1966, differed markedly from Dundee in most respects, yet they were also among the most buoyant parts of the Scottish economy during the postwar era, before industrial decline drastically curbed their success from the 1970s.<sup>167</sup> These settlements provided the SNP with unusually high levels of support in both local and parliamentary elections.

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<sup>165</sup> W G Runciman, *Relative Deprivation and Social Justice: A Study of Attitudes to Social Inequality in Twentieth-Century England* (Harmondsworth, 1972) 10

<sup>166</sup> P B Smith and J Brown, 'Industrial change and Scottish nationalism since 1945', J Anderson, S Duncan and R Hudson (eds), *Redundant Spaces in Cities and Regions: Studies in Industrial Decline and Social Change* (London, 1983) 256

<sup>167</sup> John A Agnew, *Place and Politics: The Geographical Mediation of State and Society* (Boston, 1987) 118

Cumbernauld in particular was the site of one of the party's earliest and most sustained breakthroughs as they controlled the council from the late 1960s until 1980 and the town formed the bedrock of the Nationalist vote that saw the party capture the East Dunbartonshire constituency in October 1974. Equally, the party flourished in parts of Scotland adjacent to the North Sea which anticipated benefits from oil development, but that did not gain economically from the establishment of the industry in the 1970s.<sup>168</sup>

Like Scotland as a whole, Dundee's economy bottomed out in the 1990s. The state of prolonged misery it reached had all but eliminated the aspirational mentality that had aided the Nationalists in earlier years. Drawing closer to the economic experience of Glasgow and the West Coast. In the same period, the SNP's electoral performance worsened in Dundee, converging with this part of the country. One of the influences of its unique success in urban Scotland had been lost. However, the turnaround of Dundee's economy that began in that decade and gained momentum in the new millennium, had favourable political consequences for the party. Dundee performed relatively well for a post-industrial city and, as its decline was arrested, the local electorate's ambitions correspondingly rose once again. Frustratingly for the bulk of the population, the city's strongest growth areas provided modest amounts of new employment. Their failure to bring prosperity to the city as a whole encouraged dissatisfaction with Dundee's tired Labour establishment. With the Nationalists being the only viable alternative, voters were drawn to back the party by similarly raised hopes and disappointed expectations that had affected them in the 1970s and 1980s.

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<sup>168</sup> Christopher Harvie and Peter Jones, *The Road to Home Rule: Images of Scotland's Cause* (Edinburgh, 2000) 110

## *Multinationals*

By the 1970s, multinational companies played a major role in the Scottish economy. Of all American companies established in Britain during the postwar decades, one third located themselves in Scotland.<sup>169</sup> The country had the second highest rate of per-capita US investment in the world after Canada.<sup>170</sup> Of Scotland's fourteen largest industrial employers, just three were Scottish-owned while four were American and the remaining seven English.<sup>171</sup> Indeed, in 1975, 59 per cent of Scotland's manufacturing workers were employed by non-Scottish firms.<sup>172</sup> The power of foreign companies over the national economy shaped the SNP's justification for self-determination. During the earlier part of the period it placed significant emphasis upon the desirability of home-grown 'economic control'.<sup>173</sup> In a 1975 press release, the parliamentary group proudly promised to support 'indigenous companies in Scotland and indigenous entrepreneurs'.<sup>174</sup> A 1979 general election leaflet made its suspicion of foreign capital clear as it promised to 'end the sell-out of Scottish land to Dutch speculators and Arab oil millionaires'.<sup>175</sup>

While Dundee benefited tremendously from the intervention of multinational companies during the postwar decades, their rapid withdrawal from the beginning of the 1970s soured relations. This greatly heightened sensitivities to the Nationalists' message and to the

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<sup>169</sup> P B Smith and J Brown, 'Industrial change and Scottish nationalism since 1945', 246

<sup>170</sup> Richard J Finlay, *Modern Scotland*, 324

<sup>171</sup> John Scott and Michael Hughes, 'Ownership and Control in a Satellite Economy: A Discussion from Data', *Sociology*, Vol 10 No 1 (1976) 25

<sup>172</sup> Richard J Finlay, *Modern Scotland*, 323

<sup>173</sup> NLS, Acc.13099/35, Correspondence, reports, memoranda and clippings relating to SNP strategy 1980-1981, 'Strategies for Self-Government by William Wolfe', Undated

<sup>174</sup> NLS, Acc.10754/14, Parliamentary Group Press Statements 1974-1977, 'Press Statement on Regional Development', 7 May 1975

<sup>175</sup> NLS, Acc. 12917/86, SNP Campaign Materials 1980-1998, 'SNP Leaflet 1979'

precarious nature of employment in these firms. An ITV report on the 1973 by-election reaffirmed the existence of simmering discontent towards the preponderance of American and English firms over the city's economy that was seen as responsive to the SNP.<sup>176</sup> Foreign firms were much less prominent in the rest of the country. In 1975, 30 per cent of manufacturing jobs in Tayside were provided by overseas companies, in Strathclyde the figure was 19 per cent while Grampian and Lothian lagged far behind at 12 per cent and 10 per cent respectively.<sup>177</sup> With such a large portion of the local economy controlled by multinationals, Dundee was very vulnerable to their flight. Although Glasgow and its hinterland suffered sharp contractions in multinational employment at the same time as Dundee, these industries were proportionally less significant than in the Tayside city. The other East Coast cities' experiences were far more positive. Between 1975 and 1981, foreign-owned industries increased their presence in Lothian, helping Edinburgh's economy as a whole remain secure.<sup>178</sup> Aberdeen meanwhile, relied upon international corporations to power its oil boom. These companies also proved far more rooted than Dundee's had done, as they formed a permanent cluster in order to guarantee their access to the North Sea's riches.<sup>179</sup> The different experiences of Scotland's other cities made it far more difficult than in Dundee to gain politically from attacks upon foreign ownership as a problem that required immediate redress.

By end of the twentieth century, multinational companies, once so prominent, had ceased to play a major role in the Dundonian economy. Indeed, in a process Jim Tomlinson describes as 'de-globalisation', the city has drawn away from international firms and

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<sup>176</sup> *ITV News*, 26 February 1973

<sup>177</sup> Neil Hood and Stephen Young, *Multinationals in Retreat*, 9

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 9

<sup>179</sup> William W Knox, 'Working Life in the City', W Hamish Fraser and Clive H Lee (eds), *Aberdeen*, 171

markets and come to base its economy around the public sector.<sup>180</sup> By 2006, the value of exports per head of population in Dundee and its environs stood at just 65 per cent of the Scottish average.<sup>181</sup> Although the acrimonious disputes that surrounded Timex's closure in the early 1990s prolonged memories of multinationals' unpopular behaviour, international companies and markets were no longer the key determinant of the city's economic wellbeing.<sup>182</sup> This disabled foreign ownership as a major political issue in the city. Regardless, the SNP itself had largely moved on from this issue by this time, making little effort to find political capital by attacking the unreliability of these companies. Indeed, by the late 1990s, multinationals were no longer regarded as a threat, but were seen by the SNP as a means of pushing the Scottish economy forward.<sup>183</sup> Having bolstered the local SNP with their presence during the 1970s and 1980s, the fading of multinational companies from relevance locally removed one potential source of Nationalist support.

### *Postwar Redevelopment*

Dissatisfaction with the reigning political elite was heightened by disillusionment with aspects of postwar redevelopment. The new housing built after the war was a clear improvement upon the badly overcrowded slums that it replaced.<sup>184</sup> However, much of it was constructed cheaply and to a low standard in the rush of local planners to rebuild the city. In 1971, 18 per cent of Dundee's housing lacked at least one basic amenity.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Jim Tomlinson, 'De-globalisation and its Significance: From the Particular to the General', *Contemporary British History*, Vol 26 No 2 (2012) 213

<sup>181</sup> *Dundee City Region Economic Review*, 23

<sup>182</sup> Catherine Di Domenico and Marialaura Di Domenico, 'Heritage and urban renewal in Dundee', 332

<sup>183</sup> *Yes we can win the best for Scotland: The SNP General Election Manifesto 1997* (Edinburgh, 1997) 9

<sup>184</sup> J M Jackson, 'Housing', J M Jackson (ed.), *The City of Dundee*, 363

<sup>185</sup> Joe Doherty, 'Dundee: A Post-Industrial City', 32

Raymond Mennie, a Communist and later Labour activist, decried that the buildings in his local area were 'very badly insulated' causing major problems during the winters.<sup>186</sup> The council even struggled to find residents willing to live in some recently built homes. A government report noted that the Skarne area of Whitfield, a relatively modern estate built in the late 1960s and early 1970s, quickly became 'deeply unpopular' with a very high turnover of residents and large number of vacancies. By 1988, a full 55 per cent of the homes in the area were unoccupied.<sup>187</sup>

The new buildings erected around Dundee also proved to be egregiously ugly. Colin Bell described how 'redevelopment has swept away the best of the old and replaced it with the worst of the modern ... if Hitler had achieved in Coventry what the Dundee local authorities have wrought the Reich would still be going strong'.<sup>188</sup> This image was captured by a Progressive-Conservative leaflet issued for a council by-election in the inner city Hilltown ward in 1978, in which the area was described as 'a demolition desert'.<sup>189</sup> Confirming this depiction in 2001, Dundee East's newly elected Labour MP Iain Luke described in his maiden speech to Parliament how his city had been the victim of '1960s city centre planning blight'.<sup>190</sup> Dundonian planners had remarkably little regard for the city's heritage. They tore down almost all of its ancient centre. This process included the demolition of the Royal Arch, a striking monument to Queen Victoria's visit in 1849, to accommodate slip roads for the new Tay Bridge.<sup>191</sup> It was replaced by a soulless 'concrete jungle' that badly

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<sup>186</sup> Bill Knox Interviews, Raymond Mennie

<sup>187</sup> *Internal Evaluation of the Whitfield Partnership* (Edinburgh, 1995) 25

<sup>188</sup> DCA, GD/LP/WF/1/4b, William Fitzgerald Papers, 'Scotsman Clipping', 13 March 1976

<sup>189</sup> Dundee Conservative Party Council Group Archive (hereafter DCPCGA), 1978 Hilltown By-election, 'Progressive-Conservative Leaflet for Hilltown 1978'

<sup>190</sup> *House of Commons Hansard*, Deb 26 June 2001, Vol 370 Col 860

<sup>191</sup> Charles McKean, 'Beautifying and Improving the City': The pursuit of a Monumental Dundee during the Twentieth Century', Jim Tomlinson and Christopher Whatley (eds), *Jute No More*, 85

damaged the city's aesthetics.<sup>192</sup> This was a familiar story around Britain. Similarly, Newcastle saw its classical architecture demolished and replaced by developments 'none of which are great adornments to the city', leaving behind a soulless centre.<sup>193</sup> Peter Shapely argues that across Britain, poor architectural choices taken during the postwar period heightened those communities' despondency with the industrial decline of the late twentieth century.<sup>194</sup> In Dundee, the American author Paul Theroux aptly captured this spirit of disillusionment in describing the city as 'an interesting monstrosity ... a prison-like city of stony-faced order that I associate with the future'.<sup>195</sup> These frustrations undermined faith in the postwar elites who had reshaped the city. In particular, it spread disillusionment with the Labour Party, who had controlled local government for most of the period, as was illustrated by the Dundee Tories' complaints about the damage done by 'years of socialist redevelopment'.<sup>196</sup> This undermining of faith in the Labour Party offered marginal benefits to all of their main rivals in the city, providing opportunities for both the Nationalists and Conservatives to gain greater public sympathy.

## Housing

Under Margaret Thatcher's government in the 1980s, Scotland underwent a revolutionary overhaul of its housing tenure. At its peak in 1977, the country had the largest share of public housing outside of the Communist states of Eastern Europe, with 54.4 per cent of

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<sup>192</sup> DCA, GD/LP/WF/1/2, William Fitzgerald Papers, 'Newspaper Clipping', 31 October 1970

<sup>193</sup> Alistair Moffat and George Rosie, *Tyneside: A History of Newcastle and Gateshead from the Earliest Times* (Edinburgh, 2005) 364

<sup>194</sup> Peter Shapely, 'Civic pride and redevelopment in the post-war British city', *Urban History*, Vol 29 No 2 (2012) 326

<sup>195</sup> Paul Theroux in Andrew Murray Scott, *Modern Dundee*, 96

<sup>196</sup> DCPCGA, 1978 Hilltown By-election, 'Progressive-Conservative Leaflet for Hilltown 1978'

the nation's homes under state ownership.<sup>197</sup> This situation marked Scotland out from England and Wales, where only 26 per cent of housing was in the public sector.<sup>198</sup> Indeed, Britain as a whole possessed one of the highest levels of owner-occupation in the world in 1981 at 59 per cent, compared to 47 per cent in France and 37 per cent in Germany, with the Scottish level standing at 34.7 per cent.<sup>199</sup> However, from 1980, this situation changed rapidly following the implementation of the Conservative Party's 'right to buy' scheme. This involved selling council houses at heavily discounted rates to tenants.<sup>200</sup> Given the previous situation in the country, this policy had a greater impact in Scotland than in any other part of the UK. By 1991, a fifth of Scotland's council housing stock had been sold and a majority of Scots were owner-occupiers.<sup>201</sup> This led to a convergence in tenure structures both north and south of the Border.<sup>202</sup> Council housing reached its nadir in the years prior to the 2008 economic crash, with just 15.1 per cent of the nation's homes being under public ownership in 2005.<sup>203</sup> Dundee's Labour-run council attempted to resist these changes in the early 1980s by refusing to sell its housing, as it 'dragged [tenants] through the courts to prevent them buying their houses'.<sup>204</sup> Yet, under pressure, the local authority was forced to relent by 1982. This allowed the city to experience the same shifts that affected the country as a whole. In 1981, around two thirds of the city's population lived in council housing.<sup>205</sup> Although this lagged behind some West Coast towns like Clydebank and Motherwell, where the level of public housing approached 80 per cent, it was only slightly lower than Glasgow, and far higher than almost any other settlement on the East Coast.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Gerry Hassan and Eric Shaw, *The Strange Death of Labour Scotland*, 6

<sup>198</sup> Andrew Gibb, 'Policy and politics in Scottish housing since 1945', Richard Rodger (ed.), *Scottish Housing in the Twentieth Century* (Leicester, 1989) 177

<sup>199</sup> M J Daunton, *A Property Owning Democracy? Housing in Britain* (London, 1987) 3

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 79

<sup>201</sup> David Stewart, *The Path to Devolution and Change: A Political History of Scotland under Margaret Thatcher* (New York City, 2009) 189

<sup>202</sup> Murray Pittock, *The Road to Independence? Scotland Since the Sixties* (London, 2008) 42

<sup>203</sup> Gerry Hassan, *Scotland the Bold* (Glasgow, 2016) 44

<sup>204</sup> *Courier & Advertiser*, 20 November 1980, 4

<sup>205</sup> Richard Parry, *Scottish Political Facts*, 32

<sup>206</sup> Andrew Gibb, 'Policy and politics in Scottish housing since 1945', 178

By the beginning of the new millennium, more than half the city's inhabitants were owner-occupiers, while just one third remained council tenants.<sup>207</sup> This process affected every part of the city. In the poor 'problem estate' of Fintry, where 95 per cent of homes had originally been council built, two fifths were owner occupied by 1994.<sup>208</sup>

It has been purported for generations that housing tenure has a major influence upon individuals' political attitudes. By securing even a small amount of property homeowners are seen to gain 'a stake in the system' and turn away from redistributive left-wing politics. This was the ideal described by Noel Skelton, a Scottish Tory MP, as a 'property owning democracy'.<sup>209</sup> Across Britain, homeowners have often tended to be more likely to support the Conservative Party, and council tenants Labour. In the 1983 general election the Tories won 59 per cent of owner-occupiers' votes compared to 42 per cent nationally, even among more Labour-leaning working class owner-occupiers the party secured 47 per cent of the vote.<sup>210</sup> The rapid change in housing ownership that took place in Dundee and Scotland from 1980 to the turn of the century, shifts that rivalled deindustrialisation in their transformative impact, might have been expected to have had a political impact. However, it did not bring about immediate change, failing to turn socialists into Conservatives as it had in England. Rather, the Labour Party remained electorally dominant, while the Tories continued their slide towards the margins of Scottish politics through the 1980s and 1990s. Yet, changes in housing tenure had a long-term impact upon Labour's ability to retain their grip over the nation's, and Dundee's, political life. Council house tenants have been one of the pillars of the Labour's historical electorate. At a local

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<sup>207</sup> Gerry Hassan and Douglas Fraser, *The Political Guide to Modern Scotland: People, Places and Power* (London, 2004) 125

<sup>208</sup> *Dundee North East Safer Cities Project 1994 Household Survey Report* (Edinburgh, 1994) 3

<sup>209</sup> M J Daunton, *A Property Owning Democracy?*, 70

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 82

government level, state housing was a valued source of patronage for administrations like Dundee's, as they controlled the distribution of homes. In local elections they promised to protect tenants' interests by keeping rents down and placing the burden of local taxation on the middle classes through the rates system.<sup>211</sup> This was particularly important in Scotland, where the culture of housing subsidisation was more deeply ingrained than in England and Wales.<sup>212</sup> This tactic was exemplified in a leaflet for the 1984 District Council elections that boasted 'rents in Dundee are the lowest in the whole country'.<sup>213</sup> Indeed, the city's rents were held at a stubbornly low level for decades with the average council house rent in the city standing at just three quarters of the Scottish average in 1962.<sup>214</sup> Although not transforming politics overnight, the nation's shift away from state owned housing severed this traditional underpinning of Labour support and made former council tenants more politically independent, as they no longer looked to Labour as a guarantor of the subsidisation of their housing costs. While most remained loyal to the Labour Party for years, a cornerstone of class-based voting had been permanently eroded making it easier for this group to later shed its old allegiances. This laid the foundations for the eventual drift of these voters away from Labour in the twenty-first century, and in many cases towards the SNP. However, the change in Dundee's housing structure was less radical than Glasgow's and far behind others parts of West-Central Scotland, where the SNP was also the main competitor to the Labour Party. While shifts in housing tenure were an important part in the Scottish Labour Party's national decline, they did not contribute towards the SNP's particular success in the city.

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<sup>211</sup> Gerry Hassan and Eric Shaw, *The Strange Death of Labour Scotland*, 10

<sup>212</sup> Richard J Finlay, *Modern Scotland*, 253

<sup>213</sup> Dundee Central Library (hereafter DCL), LHC 32 (6), The Lamb Collection, 'Labour Leaflet for Dundee 1984'

<sup>214</sup> *Minutes of Corporation of Dundee and its Committees*, '1962/3, Housing Committee', 14 June 1962

## The Women's Town

Dundee has developed a reputation as a 'women's town'. Although this standing has been overemphasised at times, the role of women in the city did diverge from patterns found elsewhere for much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This was based on the historically dominant jute industry's dependence on a largely female workforce, with three quarters of those it employed at the turn of the century being women.<sup>215</sup> The jute mills' labour demands led to an unmatched level of economic activity among Dundonian women.<sup>216</sup> At its peak in 1905, a quarter of Dundee households were dependent upon a single female wage earner, while a further half relied on multiple sources of income including at least one female wage.<sup>217</sup> The preponderance of job opportunities for women encouraged a large demographic disparity between the sexes. In 1901, there were one hundred and twenty-seven women for every one hundred men in Dundee.<sup>218</sup> As these conditions lasted long into the twentieth century, the number of Dundonian women and their economic power allowed them to assume a greater social weight than they did anywhere else in Scotland.<sup>219</sup> George Thomson, the Labour MP for Dundee East between 1952 and 1973, believed that this left an ingrained influence on the city's political culture. He observed of his years campaigning in the city 'when I knocked on voters' doors the woman of the house would tell you how she and her man were voting, in contrast to

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<sup>215</sup> Eleanor Gordon, *Women and the Labour Movement in Scotland 1850-1914* (Oxford, 1991) 142

<sup>216</sup> William W Knox, *Lives of Scottish Women: Women in Scottish Society, 1800-1980* (Edinburgh, 2006) 208

<sup>217</sup> Sarah Browne and Jim Tomlinson, 'A Women's Town?', Jim Tomlinson and Christopher Whatley (eds), *Jute No More*, 108

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, 107

<sup>219</sup> Esther Breitenbach, *Women Workers in Scotland: A Study of Women's Employment and Trade Unionism* (Glasgow, 1982) 7

Glasgow or Edinburgh where a housewife would say she would need to wait for her husband to come home'.<sup>220</sup>

For most of its history, the Scottish National Party's support among women has lagged behind men, and often by significant margins. The October 1974 Scottish Election Survey revealed that while it won 34.2 per cent of male votes, the SNP managed just 22.9 per cent of women's.<sup>221</sup> In successive elections through the period, at both Holyrood and Westminster, a substantial gender gap has endured. In the 1999 Scottish elections, the party won 32.8 per cent of men's constituency votes and 24.6 per cent of women's, while in the 2005 Westminster election it secured 20 per cent and 15.4 per cent of votes among men and women respectively.<sup>222</sup> This gap is understood to be a result of women's weaker inclination towards constitutional politics, and independence in particular, in comparison to their male counterparts.<sup>223</sup> The columnist Ruth Wishart tapped into this perspective as she insinuated that Dundee's status as a woman's town would make it particularly resistant to Nationalism, as she asserted during the 1973 Dundee East by-election that female electors were uninterested in 'whose contract was for which oil field'.<sup>224</sup>

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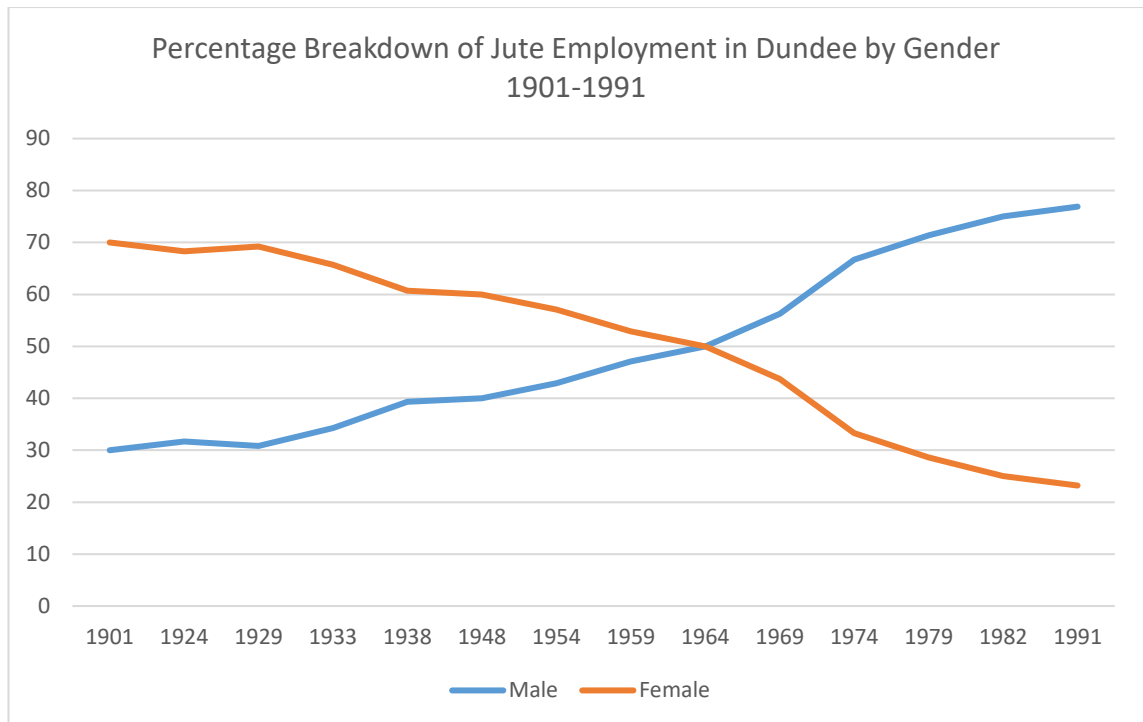
<sup>220</sup> University of Essex (hereafter UE), Box 9, Lord Thomson of Monifieth Papers, 'Story of Scotland by George Thomson', Undated

<sup>221</sup> Stephen W Kendrick, *Social Change and Nationalism in Modern Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1983) 40

<sup>222</sup> Rob Johns, Lynn Bennie and James Mitchell, 'Gendered Nationalism: The Gender Gap in Support for the Scottish National Party', *Party Politics*, Vol 18 No 4 (2012) 582

<sup>223</sup> Rob Johns, Lynn Bennie and James Mitchell, 'Gendered Nationalism', 592

<sup>224</sup> *Daily Record*, 28 February 1973, 10



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Yet by the 1970s, social changes were rendering Wishart's assumptions redundant. After the second world war, the already diminished jute industry, upon which Dundee's feminine reputation was built, began to attract more male workers, as men were drawn to the higher wages it had started to offer. In 1964, jute employed equal numbers of men and women for the first time, and by 1974 two thirds of its work force was male. Despite these changes, the preference of multinational manufacturers for women assembly-line workers, who tended to accept lower wages than men, perpetuated Dundee's unusually large female workforce into the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>226</sup> However, by the 1970s the portion of women working in Dundee had grown very close to the level of other Scottish cities, albeit remaining higher than the national average. In later decades, it continued to fall ever more closely in line with this mean.<sup>227</sup> Likewise, although women

<sup>225</sup> Jim Tomlinson, Carlo Morelli and Valerie Wright, *The Decline of Jute*

<sup>226</sup> Bill Knox and Alan McKinlay, 'Working for the Yankee Dollar: American Inward Investment and Scottish Labour, 1945-70', *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations*, Vol 1 No 7 (1999) 10

<sup>227</sup> Valerie Wright, 'Juteopolis and After: Women and Work in Twentieth-Century Dundee', Jim Tomlinson and Christopher A Whatley (eds), *Jute No More*, 107

have remained the majority in the city, as they have in Scotland as a whole, their relative numbers have declined in line the changes in the local labour market.<sup>228</sup> This meant that by the time of the SNP's arrival as an electoral force locally in the 1970s, the city had ceased to be a 'women's town' in any practical sense. While memory of this history remained important to Dundee's identity, any potential negative electoral impact on the SNP was no longer relevant. This aspect of its character continued to diminish through the period. However, its legacies left an imprint on Dundonian society. Particularly important was its impact upon trade unionism.

### **Trade Unions**

Dundee possesses a reputation as 'a labour movement city', with a proud industrial heritage and vocal trade unions.<sup>229</sup> Yet, organised labour in Dundee has long been weaker than in other industrial cities. Throughout its history, it lagged well behind the West Coast, whose coal mines, shipyards and steel mills teemed with militant unionised workers for generations.<sup>230</sup> While Dundee followed the country as a whole in experiencing a major advance in trade unionisation from 1924 to 1947, its share of Scotland's union membership fell in this key period from 6.3 per cent to 5.8 per cent.<sup>231</sup> Through its history, trade unionism had an unstable record in jute.<sup>232</sup> The mill workers, who made up the single largest part of its labour force until the 1960s, were notoriously difficult to recruit. Moreover, jute unions struggled to retain memberships in the face of periodic recessions in

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<sup>228</sup> J M Jackson, 'Population Growth', J M Jackson (ed.), *The City of Dundee*, 91

<sup>229</sup> *Herald*, 26 July 1978, 3

<sup>230</sup> Jim Tomlinson, 'De-globalisation, De-industrialisation, and Democratisation', 10

<sup>231</sup> J T Ward, 'Trade Unionism in Dundee', J M Jackson (ed.), *The City of Dundee*, 247

<sup>232</sup> William M Walker, *Juteopolis: Dundee and its textile workers 1885-1923* (Edinburgh, 1979) 286

the industry.<sup>233</sup> Instead, the mill girls preferred to conduct labour disputes through unofficial channels, taking part in unorganised and spontaneous activities.<sup>234</sup>

The multinational firms that arrived during the postwar decades built factories that were more conducive to labour organisation than the old jute mills had been. However, the predominantly American companies brought with them anti-trade union philosophies which were pervasive across the Atlantic. Indeed, around the United Kingdom, American owned firms tended to be less tolerant of trade union activity than those under domestic control.<sup>235</sup> In Dundee, they took active steps to undermine union power at every opportunity, attempting to weaken and bypass their influence, and expressing open hostility towards them.<sup>236</sup> Their preferences for a female assembly-line workforce also hampered efforts at unionisation. Although the 1993 Timex dispute made clear that women did participate in forthright industrial activity, with many highly visible on the picket line, they generally tended to be both harder to recruit, and less active within unions than their male co-workers.<sup>237</sup> While trade unions developed in these industries, and became more militant after management began to cut jobs and push excessively for productivity in the face of recessions beginning in the 1970s, these factors limited their growth.

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<sup>233</sup> Jim Tomlinson, Carlo Morelli and Valerie Wright, *The Decline of Jute*

<sup>234</sup> Eleanor Gordon, *Women and the Labour Movement in Scotland*, 169

<sup>235</sup> Peter J Buckley and Peter Enderwick, *The Industrial Relations Practices of Foreign-Owned Firms in Britain* (London & Basingstoke, 1985) 72

<sup>236</sup> Bill Knox and Alan McKinlay, 'Working for the Yankee Dollar', 25

<sup>237</sup> Ray Hudson and Allan M Williams, *Divided Britain*, 141

As it broke through in the 1970s, the SNP found trade union members to be more loyal to the Labour Party than other working class voters.<sup>238</sup> Within the traditional class-based two-party system, individuals with more intense alignments were found to be more likely to support one of the two main parties than voters with looser class identities.<sup>239</sup> Trade unions acted as influential advocates of the Labour Party in communities and work places, strengthening identification with the party and class politics in highly unionised areas. These institutions were strongest on the West Coast, suppressing the SNP's electoral potential there. Indeed, an internal SNP survey conducted in the late 1970s found that a much larger number of respondents in Glasgow identified the Nationalists as a middle class party than in other parts of the country away from Clydeside.<sup>240</sup> Dundee's comparatively lower levels of industrial trade unions left the Labour Party with a narrower base than they retained on the West Coast, and gave the SNP access to a larger pool of potential voters.

The structure of trade unionism changed markedly across the United Kingdom in the final decades of the twentieth century. Between 1979 and 1997, Scottish trade union membership fell by a third from 1,053,908 to 659,871. This represented a decline from representing more than half of the labour force to around a third of it.<sup>241</sup> The focal point of this membership also shifted from traditional manufacturing industries to the public sector, and from blue-collar to white-collar workers. While unions have become smaller and less influential, the SNP's relations with them have improved from the 1970s in the face of the party's leftward turn.<sup>242</sup> Indeed, Shona Robison, an influential leader within the Dundee

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<sup>238</sup> Roger Mullin, 'The Scottish National Party', H M Drucker (ed.), *Multi-Party Britain* (London, 1979) 124

<sup>239</sup> T M Devine, *The Scottish Nation*, 577

<sup>240</sup> NLS, Acc. 13099/42, General Election Correspondence 1978-1979, 'Report to NEC: Attitude Survey – How People View the SNP'

<sup>241</sup> Christopher Harvie, *No Gods and Precious Few Heroes: Scotland Since 1914* (Edinburgh, 1993) 170

<sup>242</sup> Peter Lynch, *The History of the Scottish National Party*, 134

SNP since the late 1990s, entered politics through the trade union movement.<sup>243</sup> Ken Guild, a longstanding SNP councillor in Dundee, notes that the party had grown increasingly comfortable working alongside them.<sup>244</sup> While Dundee's enlarged public sector has kept trade unionism alive in the city into the twenty-first century, the unions have been defused as a barrier to the SNP's electoral prospects.

### **The Catholic Population**

Since experiencing extensive Irish immigration in the nineteenth century, Dundee has possessed the largest Catholic community in Scotland outside the West Coast. In 1977, a total of 17.6 per cent of the city was Roman Catholic. Although this was much less than in Glasgow or the Strathclyde region as a whole, where the share was 30.6 per cent and 25.3 per cent respectively, it was substantially greater than the other cities of the East Coast with 9.1 per cent of Edinburgh and just 2 per cent of Aberdeen sharing the faith.<sup>245</sup> As the decades have passed, this has remained the case. Despite the dispersal of Scotland's Catholic population around the country, and the arrival of Eastern European immigrants of the same religion since the eastward expansion of the European Union in 2004, Dundee's Catholic population has remained by far the country's largest outside of Glasgow and its environs. In the 2011 census, it stood at 18.3 per cent of the city.<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Shona Robison

<sup>244</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Ken Guild

<sup>245</sup> John A Agnew, *Place and Politics*, 124

<sup>246</sup> *Scottish Census 2011*

In the early part of the period, this demography would appear to have been a serious impediment to the SNP's success. Religion played a notably more prominent role in determining party support in Scotland than in England throughout the twentieth century.<sup>247</sup> Across the country, the SNP tended to receive lower votes in areas with large Catholic populations.<sup>248</sup> As the political scientist William Miller observed, 'Catholics in all parts of the country showed an extreme reluctance to vote SNP' in comparison to their compatriots.<sup>249</sup> In 1970, the ratio of Protestants to Catholics voting for the Scottish National Party was nine to one. Through the decade, while its nationwide vote varied, its portion of Protestant voters remained solidly twice as great as its Catholic share.<sup>250</sup> This discrepancy was founded in the struggles of the community to wholly integrate into the Scottish nation, and their resulting fear of sectarian currents running through Scotland.

For centuries, the Church of Scotland was a cornerstone of Scottish identity and culture.<sup>251</sup> As late as 1978, David Martin was able to describe the country as the world's greatest 'coincidence of faith and nation', noting 'the main organ of Scottish identity was and is its church'.<sup>252</sup> While the country had substantially moved on by that date, religion was key to understandings of Scottishness at least until the mid-twentieth century. This unity produced a national character that was inextricably tied to Presbyterian Protestantism. Moreover, in the absence of a separate national language, faith assumed an outsized role in defining Scottish cultural identity.<sup>253</sup> This enforced a harsh barrier to Catholic

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<sup>247</sup> Bryan Turner, 'Marginal Politics, Cultural Identity and the Clergy in Scotland', *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, Vol 1 No 1 (1981) 104

<sup>248</sup> James G Kellas, *The Scottish political system* (Cambridge, 1984) 110

<sup>249</sup> William L Miller, *The End of British Politics?*, 196

<sup>250</sup> David Seawright and John Curtice, 'The decline of the Scottish conservative and unionist party 1950–92: Religion, ideology or economics?', *Contemporary Record*, Vol 9 No 2 (2008) 328

<sup>251</sup> Callum G Brown, *Religion and Society in Scotland Since 1707* (Edinburgh, 1997) 178

<sup>252</sup> David Martin, *A General Theory of Secularisation* (Oxford, 1978) 102

<sup>253</sup> Bryan Turner, 'Marginal Politics, Cultural Identity and the Clergy in Scotland', 93

assimilation, even after generations in the country. More pointedly, it made the community appear to be an existential threat to Scottish identity. These beliefs in turn fuelled anti-Catholic sectarianism that was ubiquitous through much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and was both more intense and longer lasting than typical anti-immigration sentiment.<sup>254</sup>

Unable to integrate, and threatened by the majority population, the Catholic community regarded itself as a vulnerable minority. In common with many such groups around the world, they have subsequently voted en bloc for the party they felt could best protect their interests from the majority. In twentieth century Scotland this was the Labour Party, which enjoyed over 70 per cent of the Catholic vote throughout the 1970s and 1980s, gaining its support at around twice the rate of the country as a whole.<sup>255</sup> Labour was seen as highly sensitive to the community's interests. It drew in disproportionately large numbers of individuals with Catholic roots. Dundee Labour followed this trend with three of its four MPs since 1979, in John McAllion, Jim McGovern and Ernie Ross, as well as the prominent organiser George Galloway, hailing from this background. Richard McCready, a Labour councillor from the same background, notes this group's disproportionate representation extended through the local party's council ranks as well.<sup>256</sup> Crucially, the party had built a hard-won reputation for commitment to defending the community and issues of importance to it since the early twentieth century, notably being the strongest supporters

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<sup>254</sup> Stewart J Brown, 'Outside the Covenant': The Scottish Presbyterian Churches and Irish Immigration, 1922-1938', *The Innes Review*, Vol 42 No 1 (1991) 26

<sup>255</sup> David Seawright and John Curtice, 'The decline of the Scottish conservative and unionist party', 328

<sup>256</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Richard McCready

of Catholic schooling following the passing of the 1918 Education Act.<sup>257</sup> This led to the development of deep historic loyalties that proved very difficult to break down.

Catholic reticence about Scottish self-governance was also motivated by fears that the country's dark impulses towards the community were only constrained by the power of the comparatively tolerant Westminster Parliament. From the earliest days of the Home Rule movement, concerns had been expressed that these attitudes would ensure that a self-governing Scotland would discriminate against Catholics.<sup>258</sup> Unflattering comparisons were drawn with Northern Ireland's history of autonomy between 1921 and 1972, which institutionalised an abusive Protestant ascendancy on the back of popular anti-Catholicism, fuelling scepticism towards Scottish Home Rule.<sup>259</sup> Even after sectarianism began to fade from Scottish society as the twentieth century wore on, the memory of prejudice remained a powerful motivating force in the community. The Nationalist movement itself has also been regarded with suspicion. Since its birth, the SNP has often been haunted by a whiff of anti-Irish bigotry, which has constrained its ability to appeal to Roman Catholic voters. Andrew Dewar Gibb, one of the SNP's founding fathers, was prone to flirt with the widespread anti-Catholic sentiment of mid-century Scotland, launching into invectives against the Hibernian 'foreign element'.<sup>260</sup> More portentously in the early 1980s, Billy Wolfe, who had led the party between 1969 and 1979, caused scandal with a series of inflammatory comments. In 1982, he lambasted the Papal visit to the country as 'a violation of the ... Protestant religion' adding that 'the aim of the Roman Catholic Church

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<sup>257</sup> W W Knox, 'Religion and the Scottish Labour Movement c. 1900-39', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol 23 No 4 (1988) 620

<sup>258</sup> Bernard Aspinwall 'The Formation of a British Identity Within Scottish Catholicism 1830-1914', Robert Pope (ed.), *Religion and National Identity: Wales and Scotland c. 1700-2000* (Cardiff, 2001) 270

<sup>259</sup> Jack Brand, *The National Movement in Scotland* (London, 1978) 130

<sup>260</sup> Andrew Dewar Gibb in Irene Maver, 'The Catholic Community', T M Devine and R J Finlay (eds), *Scotland in the Twentieth Century* (Edinburgh, 1996) 271

was and is world domination'. He then made matters worse in articulating his concern that the Falkland Islands might fall under the 'cruel and ruthless Fascist dictatorship of a Roman Catholic State' with a clear focus on the latter characteristic.<sup>261</sup> These declarations drew unwanted attention to bigotry within the SNP's ranks. However, Wolfe's statements appeared jarringly antiquated not only to society at large, but also to the SNP, whose leadership swiftly and categorically denounced them.<sup>262</sup> Yet this aspect of the movement was not fully expunged. A decade later, during the infamous 1994 Monklands East by-election, the party was accused of playing the 'sectarian card' by 'posing the question why does Roman Catholic Coatbridge get more done for it than non-Catholic Airdrie and the surrounding villages ... [and] discreetly [pointing] to the fact the Labour Party councillors were all Catholics'.<sup>263</sup> Furthermore, the eventually victorious Labour candidate Helen Liddell alleged that a Nationalist activist called her a 'Fenian bastard' and spat on her.<sup>264</sup> This history fed misgivings towards the SNP among Scotland's Catholics, resulting in lower levels of Nationalist support within the community.

Yet, it has been postulated that religious hatreds have been much less prominent in Dundee's public life than they were on Clydeside, with Jimmy Halliday claiming that the city was free of the West Coast's 'sectarian wars'.<sup>265</sup> Stewart Hosie, the Nationalist MP for Dundee East since 2005, similarly claimed that modern Dundee was 'mercifully free of the sectarian garbage that exists elsewhere in the country'.<sup>266</sup> The dominance of Glasgow over historical narratives of Scotland, and especially her Catholics, have obscured variations in their experiences in different parts of the country. Dundee failed to develop the poisonous

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<sup>261</sup> *Times*, 11 September 2010

<sup>262</sup> Ewen A Cameron, *Impaled Upon a Thistle*, 230

<sup>263</sup> Jimmy Allison and Harry Conroy, *Guilty by Suspicion*, 144

<sup>264</sup> Mark Stuart, *John Smith: A Life* (London, 2005) 392

<sup>265</sup> James Halliday, *Yours for Scotland*, 109

<sup>266</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Stewart Hosie

infrastructure of sectarianism to the same extent in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Much of this culture was introduced to Scotland by Protestant immigrants from Ulster, before disseminating into the wider population.<sup>267</sup> Correspondingly, William Walker claimed that during the nineteenth century Dundee had drawn proportionally fewer immigrants from the Protestant counties of Ireland than Strathclyde did, ensuring that 'no effective Orange outpost [developed] in Dundee' and established deep roots.<sup>268</sup> While Richard McCready counters that this is an exaggeration, as there were several Orange lodges active within the city in the second half of the nineteenth century, he admits that their influence in Dundee paled in comparison to their reach on the West Coast. They were rarely able to organise Orange Walks, cause disturbances or garner serious political influence.<sup>269</sup> The heavily female immigrant population attracted by Dundee's jute mills also differed significantly from the young men drawn to the coalfields and shipyards of the West, and was inevitably not as threatening to the native populace, therefore lessening tensions from an early stage.<sup>270</sup> Dundee's city leaders, immersed in the ideology of the hegemonic Liberal Party, exerted influence over intercommunal relations by making clear their opposition to overt religious prejudice through the century.<sup>271</sup> The city also failed to develop an anti-Catholic political movement at the height of the interwar period's nationwide anti-Irish hysteria. In these years, both Glasgow, with the Scottish Protestant League, and Edinburgh, with the Protestant Action Society, were home to successful parties formed on this basis, further highlighting the comparative weakness of sectarianism in Dundee.<sup>272</sup> As the decades passed, the social barriers between Catholics and Protestants in

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<sup>267</sup> Michael Rosie, *The Sectarian Myth in Scotland: Of Bitter Memory and Bigotry* (London, 2004) 32

<sup>268</sup> William M Walker, *Juteopolis*, 121

<sup>269</sup> Richard Blake McCready, 'The Social and Political Impact of the Irish in Dundee, c. 1845-1922', PhD thesis, University of Dundee (2002) 92

<sup>270</sup> John Agnew, 'Nationalism: autonomous force or practical politics?', Colin H Williams and Eleonore Kofman (eds), *Community Change, Partition and Nation* (Abingdon, 1989) 183

<sup>271</sup> William M Walker, *Juteopolis*, 122

<sup>272</sup> William Miller, 'Politics in the Scottish City 1832-1980', George Gordon (ed.), *Perspectives of the Scottish City* (Aberdeen, 1985) 201

the city remained weaker. In 1975, 17.5 per cent of the teachers in Catholic schools in the Strathclyde region were non-Catholics whilst in Tayside, where the Catholic population was almost entirely concentrated in Dundee, the proportion was twice as great at 38 per cent.<sup>273</sup> City leaders retained their hostility to bigotry through the twentieth century, as the Lord Provost William Fitzgerald, a Presbyterian kirk elder, condemned the Orange Order in 1972 and beamed that 'we in Dundee have lived in peace with a large Catholic population'.<sup>274</sup> These traditions fed into the city's politics. The Labour activist John McAuley claimed that by the 1970s 'Dundee [didn't] really have a Catholic and anti-Catholic vote', with voting patterns less religiously divided as on the West Coast.<sup>275</sup> This long history of comparatively healthy, although far from perfect, religious relations weakened the underpinnings of Catholic hostility towards the Scottish National Party in the city.

Yet, it would be an exaggeration to claim that Dundee was free of sectarian voting patterns. Just as they did elsewhere, the city's Catholics tended towards the Labour Party in sizeable numbers, limiting the SNP's potential reach. Labour had built up iron loyalties among the Catholic community in earlier decades, with the party winning 92.5 per cent of the city's Catholic vote in 1966.<sup>276</sup> Their distribution within the city was therefore key to the Nationalists' prospects in different areas. Its Roman Catholic population has traditionally been concentrated on the western side of Dundee.<sup>277</sup> Although David Morley's claim that the west was 60-65 per cent Catholic is a gross exaggeration, the citywide population not being nearly high enough to support such a total, it is clear that the community remained

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<sup>273</sup> James Darragh, 'The Catholic Population of Scotland 1878-1977', *The Innes Review*, Vol 29 No 2 (1978) 215

<sup>274</sup> DCA, GD/LP/WF/1/1, William Fitzgerald Papers, 'Newspaper Clipping', 1972

<sup>275</sup> Bill Knox Interviews, John McAuley

<sup>276</sup> J M Bochel and D T Denver, 'Religion and Voting: A Critical Review and New Analysis', *Political Studies*, Vol 18 No 2 (1970) 210

<sup>277</sup> Mike Watson, *Rags to Riches: The Official History of Dundee United* (Dundee, 1985) 13

grouped in this part of Dundee.<sup>278</sup> The spread of denominational schools highlights this. In 2007, there were just four of these schools to the east of the city centre, compared to eleven to the west.<sup>279</sup> The 2011 census puts the Catholic population in the west at 20 per cent, and the east at 14 per cent.<sup>280</sup> This disparity played an important role in supporting the Nationalists' greater success in the east of Dundee through the 1970s and 1980s, and marks the clearest demographic difference between the city's two parliamentary constituencies.

Hostility between Catholics and the Nationalist movement faded towards the end of the twentieth century. This was caused by changes in the nature of Scottish identity, of popular attitudes towards Catholicism and the strenuous efforts of the SNP itself to soften its image and enhance its appeal to the community. During this period, the nature of Scottish national identity was drastically altered in the wake of social change. From a deeply religious peak in the mid-twentieth century, Scottish society rapidly secularised. Church attendances plummeted from the 1960s, as did participation in religious marriages and baptisms.<sup>281</sup> Between 1950 and 2011, the membership of the Church of Scotland dropped from 1.3 million to 400,000. During the same period, attendance at Catholic mass halved.<sup>282</sup> The numbers of those identifying with no religion rose precipitously, standing at 47 per cent in the 2014 Scottish Households Survey.<sup>283</sup> Most pertinently, religion's influence over society, its informing of cultural, moral and political outlooks, has collapsed, creating a

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<sup>278</sup> David Morley, *Gorgeous George: The Life and Adventures of George Galloway* (London, 2007) 50

<sup>279</sup> *About Dundee 2008*, 15

<sup>280</sup> *Scottish Census 2011*

<sup>281</sup> Donald Smith, *Freedom and Faith: A Question of Scottish Identity* (Edinburgh, 2013) 37

<sup>282</sup> Michael Rosie, 'Religion and Nationalism in Scotland', Ferran Requejo and Klaus-Jürgen Nagel (eds), *Politics of religion and nationalism: federalism, consociationalism and secession* (Abingdon, 2014)

<sup>283</sup> '2014 Scottish Household Survey', *Scottish Government*

tremendous disconnect with the past.<sup>284</sup> At the same time, popular sectarianism has faded into the fringes of society. By the end of the twentieth century workplace discrimination against Catholics had largely come to an end, while the gap between Protestant and Catholic incomes closed.<sup>285</sup> Meanwhile, beyond the West Coast, where cultural institutions perpetuate their existence, openly anti-Catholic attitudes have become uncommon and have ceased to be a major force in national life.<sup>286</sup> In this context, Scottishness has become much less anchored to Protestantism, creating an identity that Catholics have been comfortable attaching themselves to. The 1997 Scottish Social Attitude Survey found that Catholics were no less likely than any other religious grouping to profess a Scottish national identity.<sup>287</sup>

The SNP itself also made a serious effort to engage with the community. In his 1994 party conference speech, SNP leader Alex Salmond elaborated upon an understanding of the Nationalist movement that was inclusive of Catholicism 'the Presbyterian tradition left us with the legacy of egalitarianism and democracy and a passion for education. The Catholic view of social justice informs our attitude to inequality in Scotland and internationally. These traditions have jointly helped forge our national identity'.<sup>288</sup> It has also directly appealed to the country's leading Roman Catholic clergymen, with great success. In 1998, Cardinal Thomas Winning blazed a trail by championing Scottish Nationalism as 'mature, respectful of democracy and international in outlook'.<sup>289</sup> Senior churchmen have continued

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<sup>284</sup> Callum G Brown, *Religion and Society in Scotland*, 174

<sup>285</sup> T M Devine, 'Then and Now: Catholics in Scottish Society, 1950-2000', T M Devine (ed.), *Scotland's Shame? Bigotry and Sectarianism in Modern Scotland* (Edinburgh, 2000) 263

<sup>286</sup> David McCrone, *Understanding Scotland: The Sociology of a Nation* (Abingdon, 1992) 25

<sup>287</sup> Alice Brown, David McCrone and Lindsay Paterson, *Politics and Society in Scotland* (London, 1998) 212

<sup>288</sup> Alex Salmond in Steve Reicher and Nick Hopkins, *Self and Nation: Categorization, Contestation and Mobilization* (London, 2001) 162

<sup>289</sup> *Herald*, 5 October 1998

to look favourably on the movement as eight years later another Cardinal, Keith O'Brien, spoke of 'the prosperity which self-determination can bring'.<sup>290</sup> More practically, the SNP has adopted many of the approaches that underpinned the Labour Party's long-standing alliance with the community, by both prioritising combating discrimination and steadfastly defending the community's contentious, but cherished, faith schools.<sup>291</sup>

The effect of these changes has been clear. By the end of the 1990s, the portion of Roman Catholic Labour supporters who identified the SNP as their 'second choice' reached 53 per cent, as the community grew significantly more comfortable with the party.<sup>292</sup> In the twenty-first century the SNP achieved the monumental task of overhauling the community's ingrained political loyalties, with the party winning a larger share of Catholics' votes than the Labour Party for the first time in the 2011 election.<sup>293</sup> This shift contributed to the flattening of SNP support across Dundee, with the more Catholic constituency growing more in line with the east during the 1990s. However, the impact of the trend was not as great in Dundee as it was on the West Coast. There, the Catholic community was both larger and, owing the greater strength of sectarianism, more alienated from the SNP. This allowed the SNP in Glasgow and its surrounds to gain greater benefit from the improved image of Scottish Nationalism among Catholics than the party did in Dundee.

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<sup>290</sup> *Scotsman*, 15 October 2006

<sup>291</sup> Martin Steven, 'The Place of Religion in Devolved Scottish Politics: An Interest Group Analysis of the Church of Scotland and Scottish Catholic Church', *Scottish Affairs* Vol 58 (2007) 97

<sup>292</sup> Michael Rosie, *The Sectarian Myth in Scotland*, 55

<sup>293</sup> Gerry Hassan and Eric Shaw, *The Strange Death of Labour Scotland*, 147

## National Identity

**Table 6.1 Trends in Moreno national identity, in Scotland, 1992–2012**

	92	97	99	00	01	03	05	06	07	09	10	11	12
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Scottish not British	19	23	32	37	36	31	32	33	27	27	28	29	23
More Scottish than British	40	38	35	31	30	34	32	32	30	31	30	33	30
Equally Scottish and British	33	27	22	21	24	22	22	21	28	26	26	23	30
More British than Scottish	3	4	3	3	3	4	4	4	5	4	4	5	5
British not Scottish	3	4	4	4	3	4	5	5	6	4	4	5	6
<i>Weighted base</i>	*	882	1482	1663	1605	1508	1549	1594	1508	1482	1495	1196	1229
<i>Unweighted base</i>	957	882	1482	1663	1605	1508	1549	1594	1508	1482	1495	1196	1229

Source: 1992, 1997: *Scottish Election Study*; 1999–2012: *Scottish Social Attitudes*

\*There is no weighting variable in this dataset

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The political scientists Stein Rokkan and Derek Urwin posited that in order for a minority nationalist movement like the SNP to develop, there first had to exist an established basis of cultural distinctiveness among the minority group.<sup>295</sup> In Scotland, that distinctiveness was founded upon a potent attachment to Scottish national identity, which was profoundly powerful long before political nationalism developed.<sup>296</sup> Almost all of the nation's population identifies as Scottish to some extent. Amongst those born in the country, this identification is close to universal.<sup>297</sup> Yet, there are substantial variations in the strength of

<sup>294</sup> 'Trends in national identity', *British Social Attitudes*

<sup>295</sup> Stein Rokkan and Derek W Urwin, *Economy, Territory, Identity: Politics of West European Peripheries* (London, 1983) 124

<sup>296</sup> Michael Rosie and Ross Bond, 'Who are the Nationalists? A Profile of Scottish National Party Supporters', Trevor W Harrison and Slobodan Drakulic (eds), *Against Orthodoxy: Studies in Nationalism* (Vancouver, 2011) 214

<sup>297</sup> Michael Rosie, 'Religion and Nationalism in Scotland'

that identity in relation to British identity. Studies indicate that between the 1970s and the end of the 1990s the popularity of British identification faded noticeably; however, a general pattern has held sway.<sup>298</sup> Social attitudes surveys consistently reveal that the bulk of the population recognises itself as either solely Scottish or more Scottish than British, but a substantial minority values both identities equally, with a smaller group displaying greater attachment to British than Scottish identity.<sup>299</sup> These identities have long been a key determinant of SNP support.<sup>300</sup> In the 1992 general election, the party won the largest share of the vote amongst those identifying as exclusively Scottish at 38 per cent, only 11 per cent of those seeing themselves as equally Scottish and British and just 4 per cent of voters claiming an exclusively British identity.<sup>301</sup> From the 1990s, the SNP has strived to adopt a 'civic nationalist' approach and downplayed identity politics.<sup>302</sup> Despite the adjustment of the party's message, stronger Scottish identification remained a fundamentally important determinant of SNP voting.<sup>303</sup>

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<sup>298</sup> Graham Walker, *The Labour Party in Scotland: Religion, the Union and the Irish Dimension* (London, 2016) 69

<sup>299</sup> 'Trends in national identity', *British Social Attitudes*

<sup>300</sup> Jack Brand, *The National Movement in Scotland*, 155

<sup>301</sup> Jack Brand, James Mitchell and Paula Surridge, 'Identity and the Vote: Class and nationality in Scotland', David Denver, Pippa Norris, David Broughton and Colin Rallings (eds), *British Elections and Parties Yearbook 1993* (London, 1993)

<sup>302</sup> Stephen Reicher and Nick Hopkins, 'Identities and Nationalism', Gerry Hassan and Simon Barrow (eds), *A Nation Changed: the SNP and Scotland ten years on* (Edinburgh, 2017)

<sup>303</sup> John Curtice, David McCrone, Nicola McEwen, Michael Marsh and Rachel Ormston, *Revolution or Evolution? The 2007 Scottish Elections* (Edinburgh, 2009) 108

*Country of Birth by per cent of the Population in 2011*

	Scotland	rUK	EU	Other
Dundee	83.7	7.2	3.8	5.2
Aberdeen	75	9	7	8.9
Glasgow	82	5.8	3.7	8.5
Edinburgh	70.2	13.8	6.9	9
Scotland	83.3	9.7	2.6	4

<sup>304</sup>

Dundee has drawn small numbers of migrants from both the rest of Britain and overseas. Within a country that has had less immigration than almost any other in the Western world, Dundee stands out for having the lowest rate of any Scottish city.<sup>305</sup> In 2011, 9 per cent of its population was born outside of the United Kingdom, compared to 12.2 per cent in Glasgow, and 15.9 per cent in both Aberdeen and Edinburgh.<sup>306</sup> This immigrant population is much less likely to closely identify as Scottish than the native-born population, and has consequently tended to display reduced interest in constitutional politics or SNP voting. The portion of the city's population born in the rest of Britain is also low, at 7.2 per cent in 2011 while nationally 9.7 per cent came from other parts of the UK. This was a significantly smaller portion of the population than in Edinburgh or Aberdeen, but was slightly higher than Glasgow's level of 5.8 per cent.<sup>307</sup> This group is traditionally much more strongly attached to British identity than any other demographic in Scotland, and is generally more hostile to the SNP than foreign immigrants and much more so than Scottish-born residents. Their small numbers have undoubtedly aided the Nationalists in establishing themselves in the city.

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<sup>304</sup> rUK indicates the rest of the United Kingdom.

*Scottish Census 2011*

<sup>305</sup> Richard J Finlay, *Modern Scotland*, 305

<sup>306</sup> *Scottish Census 2011*

<sup>307</sup> *Scottish Census 2011*

*National Identity by per cent of the Population in 2011*

	Scottish Only	Scottish & British	British Only
Dundee	65.5	16.6	6.5
Aberdeen	54.7	17.7	8.3
Glasgow	61.9	16.1	8.6
Edinburgh	48.8	18.5	11.4
Scotland	62.4	18.3	8.4

<sup>308</sup>

This history of immigration contributed towards the spread of national identities within the city. The 2011 census, questioning respondents' national identity for the first time, revealed the geography of identity within Scotland in a manner that had not previously been possible. It indicated that Dundee has one of the most ideal spreads of identities in the country for the SNP, and unquestionably the best in urban Scotland. It has a larger portion of its population identifying as 'Scottish only' than any other city in the country. Its level of 65.5 per cent compares to Glasgow at 61.9 per cent, Aberdeen at 54.7 per cent and Edinburgh at just 48.8 per cent.<sup>309</sup> Yet, this was lower than the bulk of West-Central Scotland, with West Dunbartonshire recording the highest level at 72 per cent, and was even marginally lower than the rural council areas of Angus and the Western Isles.<sup>310</sup> Crucially, the city also possesses the lowest level of British identification in the entire country with only 23.1 per cent of the population identifying as either 'Scottish and British' or 'British only'. This compared to 24.7 per cent in Glasgow, 26 per cent in Aberdeen and 29.9 per cent in Edinburgh.<sup>311</sup>

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<sup>308</sup> *Scottish Census 2011*

<sup>309</sup> *Scottish Census 2011*

<sup>310</sup> *Scottish Census 2011*

<sup>311</sup> *Scottish Census 2011*

This balance of identities undoubtedly improved the SNP's prospects in Dundee relative to the nation's other urban areas, with the city possessing a pool of voters more likely to be attracted to the party. The differences with Edinburgh and Aberdeen were especially stark, where substantially fewer residents are Scottish-born or identifying, presenting a limit to the SNP's potential reach in those cities. However, SNP voting cannot be explained through these statistics alone. There are numerous parts of Scotland outside of its major cities in which larger portions of the population hold strong Scottish identities. Equally, there is relatively little difference between the spread of nationalities identities in Glasgow and Dundee. Yet, the West Coast city do not have the same Nationalist political traditions as Dundee. While large numbers of Scottish-born and identifying voters might improve the SNP's chances of success, this factor in isolation does not determine the party's results in any given area.

### **Political Geography**

Geography is an underappreciated influence on political development. Dundee's location provided the SNP with a number of important advantages that set it aside from the rest of the country, and put it in a very different context to the industrial areas of West-Central Scotland that were most demographically similar to the city. Its proximity to the development of North Sea oil enhanced the power of the party's petro-nationalism; its isolation helped preserve an idiosyncratic political culture; while it was surrounded by a hinterland in which the Nationalists were unusually prominent. These factors each benefited the party's prospects, buttressing its prolonged success, even as they were not the decisive force behind it.

Dundee's location on the North Sea coastline fuelled wild speculation in the 1970s that the city would benefit tremendously from the emerging oil industry, pushing the issue to the forefront of public consciousness and building expectations of significant development. Politicians of all colours talked up the possibilities. In 1972, the Scottish Conservative chairman William Younger said 'Dundee is well placed to benefit from the development of North Sea oil'.<sup>312</sup> The Conservative candidate for Dundee West in February 1974 promised a transformation of the city's fortunes, avowing 'North Sea oil offered [Dundee] the greatest opportunity for industry and jobs since the Industrial Revolution'.<sup>313</sup> Labour made similarly grand promises of making the city a centre for the new industry.<sup>314</sup> Optimism was not limited to politicians, with an exuberant oil company representative igniting expectations as he emphatically described Dundee as 'an oil man's dream'.<sup>315</sup> Well-situated, facing out to the North Sea on the mouth of the Firth of Tay, possessing industrial infrastructure and one of the east of Scotland largest ports, its physical characteristics were promising.<sup>316</sup> Indeed, while Aberdeen's harbour had been constructed mostly to cater to smaller fishing vessels and required major investment to ready it for the oil industry, Dundee's was already equipped to deal with heavier industrial shipping after a long history of involvement in the international trade of manufactured goods.<sup>317</sup> The Secretary of State for Energy, Eric Varley, agreed with this assessment as he told Gordon Wilson, the Nationalist MP for Dundee East, after a visit to the city in 1974 that 'I was impressed with the facilities at the harbour' and anticipated that it would be a suitable location for oil development.<sup>318</sup> Expectations in the city were high. Between the two elections of 1974, the *Scottish Daily Express* was quick

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<sup>312</sup> DCA, GD/LP/WF/1/3, William Fitzgerald Papers, 'Courier & Advertiser Clipping', 23 February 1972

<sup>313</sup> *Courier & Advertiser*, 13 February 1974, 6

<sup>314</sup> DCPCGA, 1973 Municipal Elections, 'Labour Leaflet for Ward One 1973'

<sup>315</sup> *Courier & Advertiser*, 28 April 1973, 5

<sup>316</sup> Peter Lynch, *The History of the Scottish National Party*, 127

<sup>317</sup> Christopher Harvie, *Fool's Gold*, 164

<sup>318</sup> *House of Commons Hansard*, Deb 20 May 1974, Vol 874 Col 11W

to identify a heightened awareness of oil as a factor in determining variations in SNP support around the country ‘the pattern of Nationalist success may look like a patchwork quilt. But in fact it is a map of North Sea oil country or areas like Dundee and Clackmannan that would like to go into the oil business in a bigger way’.<sup>319</sup>

Yet, the relevance of the oil question in determining SNP support is uncertain. This is evidenced by the failure of the party to benefit from it in Aberdeen, which became Europe’s oil capital in the ensuing decades. There were certainly other factors that outweighed its relevance, with demography, economic structure and the interaction of political forces on the ground working against the Nationalists in the more northerly city. However, Aberdeen also related to the issue in a different manner. As the former Liberal leader Jo Grimond described, by the mid-1970s ‘Aberdeen, Peterhead and Lerwick [were already] full of supply boats and Texans’, while little development occurred in Tayside.<sup>320</sup> As Aberdeen and the Northeast saw its economy transformed overnight in the 1970s, ‘North Sea oil development by-passed Dundee’ almost completely.<sup>321</sup> In 1980, there were just 2,800 oil-related jobs in the entire Tayside region. This was 4.1 per cent of the Scotland-wide total and represented less than one tenth of the employment created in Aberdeen alone.<sup>322</sup> Indeed, despite its prime location, Tayside attracted fewer oil-related jobs per head of population than either Strathclyde or Fife.<sup>323</sup> Dundee’s expectations of development, derived from its location and enhanced by over-excited politicians and businessmen, were critically let down. Its disappointments were further amplified by close

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<sup>319</sup> *Scottish Daily Express*, 2 March 1974, 1

<sup>320</sup> NLS, Dep.363 Box 10/1, Speeches 1975, ‘Jo Grimond Speech’, 1 September 1975

<sup>321</sup> *Dundee Standard*, 23 November 1979, 3

<sup>322</sup> Stuart McDowell, ‘Coal, Gas and Oil: The Changing Energy Scene in Scotland, 1950-1980’, Richard Saville (ed.), *The Economic Development of Modern Scotland 1950-1980* (Edinburgh, 1985) 304

<sup>323</sup> Gerald Manners, David Keeble, Brian Rodgers and Kenneth Warren, *Regional Development in Britain* (Chichester, 1980) 411

proximity to the parts of the country that did benefit. Indeed, as early as 1972, the journalist John Kerr observed anxieties that Dundee was 'being neglected in development related to oil discoveries' with local groups petitioning the Scottish Office to guarantee that the city would secure its share of the new industry, ensuring a 'special impact' for the SNP's message.<sup>324</sup> Labour's George Galloway similarly believed that the lack of oil development in the city increased existing resentment and fuelled support for the Nationalists.<sup>325</sup> The oil question accentuated Dundonians' existing sense of relative deprivation and prolonged its relevance, encouraging them towards political rebellion in the form of SNP voting, as the Nationalists were able to feed upon the resulting disappointment.



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<sup>324</sup> *Guardian*, 14 November 1972, 8

<sup>325</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, George Galloway

The city's location has encouraged an idiosyncratic perspective that has set Dundonians apart from the rest of Scotland. It is situated within a large expanse of mostly prosperous, largely agricultural, rural territory in Tayside and Northeast Fife. Yet, its culture, politics and economic structure bears much greater resemblance to that of the populous and industrial West Coast, from which it is separated by great distances.<sup>326</sup> Far from the Central Belt, the journalist Kate Atkinson described the city as being 'on the road to nowhere'.<sup>327</sup> Although it is less physically remote than Aberdeen, Dundee was not as closely integrated with its surrounds than the more northerly city, with looser economic and cultural connections.<sup>328</sup> The results of this upon the city's character were well recognised 'this has isolated Dundee and it has had to develop as a self-contained city'.<sup>329</sup> Its historically export-orientated economy heightened a mentality that was detached from both Scotland and its region, as for many years it enjoyed far stronger economic links with overseas markets than it did with the rest of the country.<sup>330</sup> D S Riddell noted that these factors encouraged 'the Dundonian [to] identify very strongly with his city' and retain a proudly independent perspective.<sup>331</sup> This view has been popularly articulated by the press, as the Northeast's *Press & Journal* claimed that Dundonians 'undoubtedly favour parochialism'.<sup>332</sup> Another report described the city as 'clannish in many respects'.<sup>333</sup> Dundee's isolation sheltered it to an extent from general Scottish and British trends and encouraged its political individuality.

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<sup>326</sup> John Agnew, 'Place and nationalism in Scotland', 180

<sup>327</sup> *Observer*, 13 April 1997, 26

<sup>328</sup> James Naughtie, 'Introduction', W Hamish Fraser and Clive H Lee (eds), *Aberdeen*, 4

<sup>329</sup> *Dundee Standard*, 29 August 1981, 11

<sup>330</sup> N I Beckles, 'Textiles and port growth in Dundee', *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, Vol 84 No 2 (1968) 90

<sup>331</sup> D S Riddell, 'Social Structure and Relations', J M Jackson (ed.), *The City of Dundee*, 464

<sup>332</sup> *Press & Journal*, 26 February 1973, 9

<sup>333</sup> DCA, GD/LP/WF/1/1, William Fitzgerald Papers, 'Newspaper Clipping', 1972

Yet Dundee's separation from the surrounding area was far from complete. It remained integrated within Tayside, with which it shared a common press, local administrative institutions, as well as economic and cultural links.<sup>334</sup> The city has continued to draw closer to the region throughout the period, as its economy has 'de-globalised'. Over the course of the twentieth century, economic change has transformed Dundee from an export-orientated industrial city, into one that is far more closely involved with the local area and the state than the world economy.<sup>335</sup> The opening of the Tay Road Bridge played an important part in this process by greatly improving transport links between the city and its hinterland.<sup>336</sup> Indeed in 2008, it was estimated between 40 and 60 per cent of the inhabitants of southern Angus and the Tay Bridgehead in Fife travelled to Dundee to work whilst substantial portions of the population throughout Angus, North Fife and Eastern Perthshire were regular commuters.<sup>337</sup>

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<sup>334</sup> D C D Pocock, 'Dundee and its Region', S J Jones (ed.), *Dundee and District* (Dundee, 1968) 174

<sup>335</sup> Jim Tomlinson, 'The Deglobalisation of Dundee, C. 1900-2000', 137

<sup>336</sup> Jim Phillips, 'The 'Retreat' to Scotland', Jim Tomlinson and Christopher A Whatley (eds), *Jute No More*, 247

<sup>337</sup> *Dundee City Region Economic Review*, 13

*Percentage Vote Share Achieved in Constituencies within Dundee's Hinterland 1970-2017*

		SNP	Labour	Cons.	Lib.			SNP	Labour	Cons.	Lib.
1970	East Fife	11.8	24.6	54.6	9		South Angus	23.1	20.8	56.2	
Feb 1974		19.5	15	47.9	17.6			36.6	13.8	49.5	
Oct 1974		31.8	16.9	38.8	12.6			43.8	10.5	39.2	6.5
1979		14.1	19.9	43	23			41.5	10.1	43.6	4.8
1983	North East Fife	6.6	6.5	46.1	40.2		East Angus	36	8	44.1	11.4
1987		6.6	7.4	41.2	44.8			42.4	10.8	39	7.8
1992		8.6	5.5	38.5	46.4			40.1	12.6	38.1	8.2
1997		10.8	10.3	26.5	51.2		Angus	48.3	15.6	24.6	9.4
2001		10.4	11.4	23.6	51.7			35.3	23.4	25	14.3
2005		10.4	12.8	19.5	52.1			33.7	18	29.5	17.5
2010		14.2	17.1	21.8	44.3			39.6	17.2	30.9	10.8
2015		40.9	7.7	16.3	31.3			54.2	8.8	29	2.7
2017		32.9	9.6	24.1	32.9			38.6	13	45.2	3.3
1970	Kinross and West	18.6	15.2	57.4	8.9		Perth and East	17	23.8	52.1	7.2
Feb 1974	Perthshire	23.1	9.9	52.9	14		Perthshire	27.2	15.2	47.3	10.4
Oct 1974		41.5	7.7	41.7	9.2			40.8	13.7	38.9	6.7
1979		29.4	8.4	50.5	11.6			35.5	13.4	42	9.2
1983	North Tayside	24.3	5.5	51	19.2		Perth and East	25.1	9.9	40.3	23.9
1987		32.9	8.8	45.4	12.9		Kinross	27.6	15.9	39.6	16.9
1992		37.5	7.1	46.7	8.7			36	12.4	40.2	11.4
1997		44.8	11.3	32.5	8.2		Perth	36.4	24.8	29.3	8
2001		40.1	14.8	31.6	11.3			29.7	25.5	29.6	12.8
2005	Perth and North	33.7	18.7	30.4	16.1		Ochil and South	29.9	31.4	21.5	13.3
2010	Perthshire	39.6	16.4	30.5	12.3		Perthshire	27.6	37.9	20.5	11.4
2015		50.5	8.1	32.7	3.8			46	28.4	20.7	2.6
2017		42.3	10.4	42.3	5			35.3	20	41.5	3.2

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These networks connecting Dundee to the rest of Tayside have allowed the surrounding area's politics to influence the city, as its political culture has bled into Dundee. The political geographer John Agnew posits that there existed a 'Nationalist region' in Scotland stretching across the Northeast in which the SNP retained an unusually large and stable level of support, being the area's leading party or main opposition from the mid-1970s. Tayside in particular, was home to the consistently strongest Nationalist vote shares.<sup>339</sup> Not only were their votes high in this area, they tended to be much more resistant to national

<sup>338</sup> Cons. indicates Conservatives and Lib. indicates Liberal, Alliance or Liberal Democrat candidates.

The boundaries of the East Fife constituencies remained largely the same through the period. While there were significant changes in the Angus constituencies, the bulk of the population they represented remained unchanged. The boundaries of the Perthshire seats changed considerably. Until 1983, the region was divided into eastern and western seats, and thereafter into northern and southern ones. Moreover, the city of Perth was moved from the more southerly seat to the northerly one in 2005.

<sup>339</sup> John A Agnew, 'Place and political behaviour: the geography of Scottish nationalism', *Political Geography Quarterly*, Vol 3 No 3 (1984) 204

swings against the SNP than any other part of the country.<sup>340</sup> The inference of a 1986 election leaflet, that 'the SNP [was] firmly rooted in the local communities of Tayside' in a manner that it was not elsewhere in Scotland, carried a great degree of truth.<sup>341</sup> Even within the region, the slant of SNP support has been towards Angus, the nearest county to Dundee, which correspondingly holds the most direct influence over it. Since October 1974, constituencies based in the parts of Angus bordering Dundee, have been continuously controlled by the SNP with the exception of the periods between 1979 and 1987 and since 2017, when it fell into second place. In local elections, the party has been a force in the area since the 1970s. It took control of the Angus District Council in 1984 and did not lose its majority until 2007 when proportional representation allowed other parties and independents to make gains. Nonetheless, Angus joined Dundee as one of just two councils of which the SNP seized absolute control between 2012 and 2017. The county is the only part of Scotland in which the Nationalists have enjoyed an extended period of local government control.<sup>342</sup>

Perthshire, larger, more sparsely populated and rural than Angus, has a slightly weaker SNP tradition. Yet, at least one of its parliamentary constituencies has been SNP controlled between October 1974 and 1979 and again since the 1995 Perth & Kinross by-election. In local contests, the Nationalists have been competitive since the 1980s and retained the largest group on the council, although rarely with a majority, from 1995 to 2017.

Furthermore, the rural Tayside seats have only ever elected SNP representatives to the Scottish Parliament. Unlike Angus and Perthshire, the Northeast of Fife has a relatively

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<sup>340</sup> Nicola McEwen, 'Adapting to Multi-Level Politics: The Political Parties and the General Election in Scotland', *Scottish Affairs*, No 53 (2005) 128

<sup>341</sup> DCL, LHC 15 (28), The Lamb Collection, 'SNP Leaflet for Sidlaw/Longforgan ward 1986'

<sup>342</sup> Neil McGarvey, 'The SNP and Local Government', Gerry Hassan and Simon Barrow (eds), *A Nation Changed*

weak Nationalist tradition. Although the SNP won credible results in the East Fife constituency in the elections of 1974, running the Tories close in October, their vote in subsequent elections has been very low and they did not win a parliamentary seat in the area until their 2011 Holyrood landslide. Instead, the Liberals have tended to be very strong, taking on the third party vote and pushing the SNP to a more marginal role in the area's politics. However, this situation is outweighed by the SNP's strength in Tayside-proper.

The political outlook of this region placed Dundee in a far more favourable setting for the SNP than any of Scotland's other cities. Both Edinburgh and Glasgow existed beyond Agnew's 'Nationalist region', with only isolated pockets of high SNP support in their vicinity. Even Aberdeen's Grampian region trailed behind Tayside. Moreover, while the parts of Tayside closest to Dundee also retained the strongest SNP traditions, they were much weaker in the Aberdeenshire countryside nearest to the city than in the remoter parts of the Northeast. The SNP happily leant on their strength in these outlying areas to reinforce their relevance, with election materials used in Dundee pointing to the fact they were 'big in Tayside' as well as their positive record in administering neighbouring council areas.<sup>343</sup> The Labour councillor Richard McCready pointed to this influence, as he admitted that the Nationalists' credibility in Dundee was enhanced by the presence of 'competent' SNP MPs in the surrounding Tayside seats.<sup>344</sup> This enriched the Nationalists' electoral competitiveness in Dundee, as the countryside exerted its influence over the city.

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<sup>343</sup> DCPCGA, 1988 District Elections, 'SNP Newsletter for Gowrie 1988'

<sup>344</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Richard McCready

However, this situation was not solely positive for the party. Local tensions and jealousies have periodically pitted the interests of the city against those of its hinterland, creating difficulties for the SNP. In 1974, Scottish local government was reorganised into a two-tier format that placed the Dundee District within a larger Tayside Region. The Labour Party had very little support outside of the city, finding it difficult to compete with the Conservatives for control of the Region. In response to this, the city's political left relentlessly attacked the existence of the Regional authority, claiming that 'Tayside is an artificial geographical unit'.<sup>345</sup> They asserted that the authority harmed the city and used accusing language in relation to its conservative rural counties 'regionalisation has proven a disaster for Dundee. The city cannot afford Tories from Angus and Perthshire deciding what is best for Dundee any longer'.<sup>346</sup> Indeed, the party portrayed the rural parts of the region as directly exploiting the city 'there has been a systemic rip-off by the Tayside country Tories of Dundee's assets and standards'.<sup>347</sup> After Labour won control of the Region in 1986, this situation was reversed as the Conservatives protested that their opponents had formed a 'Dundee dictatorship' which favoured the city over the countryside.<sup>348</sup> This territorialisation of political conflict created a degree of awkwardness for the SNP, whose support traversed both rural and urban Tayside to a much greater extent than their rivals. This issue reached the peak of its influence in the mid-1990s when the SNP briefly took control of Tayside through the support of rural councillors. The Labour Party then attacked the Nationalists along the same lines as they had the Conservatives before them 'only one of [the SNP's] councillors represents a Dundee seat – and it shows ... [they are] totally biased against Dundee'.<sup>349</sup>

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<sup>345</sup> *Dundee Standard*, 16 November 1979, 2

<sup>346</sup> *Dundee Standard*, 7 December 1979, 2

<sup>347</sup> DCL, LHC 441 (25), The Lamb Collection, 'Labour Leaflet for Dundee 1982'

<sup>348</sup> *Herald*, 26 April 1989, 12

<sup>349</sup> DCPCGA, 1995 Council Elections, 'Labour Leaflet for Dundee 1995'

During the 1990s, a dispute emerged over the boundaries of the newly formed unitary authorities, with the Labour-controlled Dundonian authorities wishing to include prosperous commuter-towns in southern Angus that had been a part of the Dundee District within the city's new council area in order to bolster council tax revenues, while SNP-administered Angus staunchly opposed them. This was expressed in sharply party-political terms in 'a long-running game of tit-for-tat regarding boundaries that Dundee Labour and Angus SNP have been waging'.<sup>350</sup> The argument raged for years after the 1995 reorganisation, with Labour's John McAllion demanding in the Scottish Parliament in 2003 that Dundee's boundaries be redrawn.<sup>351</sup> In contrast to the earlier quarrels, the SNP openly and actively participated in the disagreement and took sides against Dundee, making it a less than trivial matter for the party. This allowed their opponents to portray themselves as the city's champions and the Nationalists as an anti-Dundee, rural-interest party. This occurred during a time in the mid-1990s when the SNP were at their lowest ebb in Dundee. The difficulties associated with balancing the demands of town and country was not shared by the Labour Party, the SNP's main rivals in Dundee, and was a clearly negative consequence of the city's situation in an area of Nationalist strength.

Nonetheless, the SNP has generally been aided in Dundee by the city's geography. It has brought the key campaigning issue of North Sea oil to greater public prominence, contributed towards an individual political culture that partially shielded it from nationwide trends, and most importantly located it within an area in which the SNP was unusually strong and influential. This was a clear advantage over the situation in both Glasgow and

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<sup>350</sup> *Evening Telegraph*, 5 May 1999, 16

<sup>351</sup> *Scottish Parliament Official Report*, 16 January 2003, 14104

Edinburgh, where none of these characteristics were present. While Aberdeen's geography is not directly analogous to Dundee's, offering fewer opportunities for the SNP to benefit from, the similarity of the two cities' features brings the relevance of this geographical approach into question. While location had a clearly positive influence on the SNP in Dundee, it was patently not central to determining their electoral support.

### **Political History**

The journalist Arnold Kemp claimed 'Dundee has a quirky and honourable place in Scottish history as a radical city'.<sup>352</sup> It has developed traditions of political unconventionality and militancy over the course of hundreds of years, the Labour MP Iain Luke claiming that Dundee 'was a truly radical city – outside Glasgow, perhaps at times the most radical in the UK'.<sup>353</sup> In his memoir, *Breaking the Fetters*, the local Communist politician Bob Stewart traced his hometown's unruly politics to the eighteenth century 'Dundee was a politically radical city and had been so ever since the days of the Jacobins'.<sup>354</sup> Indeed, sympathisers with Revolutionary France had made calls for the overthrow of the state in the midst of riots in 1795.<sup>355</sup> For the next century, Dundee became a bastion of radical Liberalism. George Kinloch, the first MP to represent Dundee alone, was elected in 1832 and set himself out as a staunch reformer and republican, setting a clear tone for the city's development. He was even briefly outlawed and forced into exile from Britain in 1819 for democratic agitation.<sup>356</sup> Concerns about the city's rebelliousness were so serious that it was

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<sup>352</sup> Arnold Kemp, *The Hollow Drum: Scotland Since the War* (Edinburgh, 1993) 97

<sup>353</sup> *House of Commons Hansard*, Deb 26 June 2001, Vol 370 Col 860

<sup>354</sup> Bob Stewart, *Breaking the Fetters: Memoirs of Bob Stewart* (London, 1967) 42

<sup>355</sup> Christopher Whatley, 'Roots of 1790s Radicalism: Reviewing Economic and Social Background', Bob Harris (ed.), *Scotland in the Age of the French Revolution* (Edinburgh, 2005) 36

<sup>356</sup> Graham Ogilvy, 'The Radical Toun: Dundee Politics', Billy Kay (ed.), *Dundee Book: An Anthology of Living in the City* (Edinburgh, 1990) 91

deemed necessary to station a military garrison in it in 1837 to retain order.<sup>357</sup> Dundee also experienced serious Chartist activism in the middle of the century.<sup>358</sup> Electorally, the Whigs and their Liberal successors dominated politics, as they did across urban Scotland. Their strongest opposition tended to come from other Liberals, as there was no continuously active Conservative Association in Dundee until 1882.<sup>359</sup> Through this period, the city proved resistant to national swings against the Liberals, and did not come close to electing parliamentarians from any other party until 1906.<sup>360</sup> In that year, it elected one of Scotland's first two Labour MPs, albeit a safely moderate figure in Alexander Wilkie. As it moved away from its old allegiances, Dundee saw the Liberal vote evaporate more rapidly than any other city as the left came to prominence.<sup>361</sup>

After the first world war, Scotland experienced a wave of radical socialist activity centred on Glasgow and famously labelled 'Red Clydeside'.<sup>362</sup> In these years, Dundee fizzed with rowdy political fervour, witnessing mass demonstrations, periodic rioting and marching by the unemployed.<sup>363</sup> Mary Brooksbank, a mill worker who emerged as a Communist activist in the 1920s, described a tangible shift in the city's mood in this period, describing 'a definite upsurge of political awareness amongst the mass of the people; and the need for independent political working class representation'.<sup>364</sup> At the same time, there was a clear electoral shift away from the moderate political figures that had predominated in the city

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<sup>357</sup> Christopher A Whatley, 'The Making of 'Juteopolis'', Christopher A Whatley (ed.), *The Remaking of Juteopolis*, 11

<sup>358</sup> Graham Ogilvy, 'The Radical Toun', 100

<sup>359</sup> D G Southgate, 'Politics and Representation in Dundee', J M Jackson (ed.), *The City of Dundee*, 295

<sup>360</sup> Tony Paterson, *Churchill: A Seat for Life* (Dundee, 1980) 23

<sup>361</sup> Michael Dyer, *Capable Citizens and Improvident Democrats: The Scottish Electoral System 1884-1929* (Aberdeen, 1996) 67

<sup>362</sup> Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside* (Edinburgh, 1983) 1

<sup>363</sup> Malcolm Robert Petrie, 'Public Politics and Traditions of Popular Protest: Demonstrations of the Unemployed in Dundee and Edinburgh, c.1921-1939', *Contemporary British History*, Vol 27 No 4 (2013) 494

<sup>364</sup> Mary Brooksbank, *No Sae Lang Syne: A Tale of This City* (Dundee, 1973) 20

before the war.<sup>365</sup> The period was shaped by the prominent activism of three influential left-wing groups in Labour, the Prohibitionists and the Communists.<sup>366</sup> Labour built upon its pre-war breakthrough to establish a strong party tradition in the city. It controlled one of Dundee's two Members of Parliament from 1906 until 1931 and became an influential force on the council, overcoming a system that significantly overrepresented the prosperous and solidly right-wing Broughty Ferry, to briefly take control of local government for the first time in 1935.<sup>367</sup>

The Scottish Prohibitionist Party professed a brand of moralist, evangelising Christian socialism that placed the prohibition of the sale of alcohol, a cherished tenet across the Scottish left, at the centre of its programme.<sup>368</sup> While nominally a national organisation, it was only seriously active in Dundee, where it played an important role in left-wing politics.<sup>369</sup> Indeed, in its early years it rivalled Labour as the leading force in Dundee radicalism. After first entering the town council in 1905, the party rose to two representatives in 1908, the same number as the Labour Party.<sup>370</sup> The party also ran the *Scottish Prohibitionist* newspaper out of the city, which regularly sold thousands of copies in the years before and after the war.<sup>371</sup> Its firebrand leader, Edwin Scrymgeour, then led it into Parliament after famously ousting Winston Churchill to become Britain's only ever Prohibitionist MP between 1922 and 1931. After Scrymgeour's defeat, the party rapidly

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<sup>365</sup> William M Walker, 'Dundee's Disenchantment with Churchill: A Comment on the Downfall of the Liberal Party', *The Scottish Historical Review*, Vol 49 No 147/1 (1970) 108

<sup>366</sup> Dave Phillips, *The Hungry Thirties: Dundee Between the Wars* (Dundee, 1981) 27

<sup>367</sup> Kenneth Baxter and William Kenefick, 'Labour Politics and the Dundee Working Class c. 1895-1936', Jim Tomlinson and Christopher A Whatley (eds), *Jute No More*, 210

<sup>368</sup> Thomas A W Stewart, 'Vote as you pray' - the success of the Scottish Prohibitionist Party in Dundee during the interwar period', *International Journal of Regional and Local History*, Vol 13 No 2 (2018) 105

<sup>369</sup> *People's Journal*, 30 November 1918, 7

<sup>370</sup> William M Walker, 'The Scottish Prohibitionist Party and the millennium', *International Review of Social History*, Vol 18 No 3 (1973), 354

<sup>371</sup> *Scottish Prohibitionist*

dissipated and was disbanded in 1935.<sup>372</sup> The Communist Party was also heavily involved in Dundee. With the party identifying Dundee as one of their best prospects in Scotland, they deployed two of their most high profile members to contest parliamentary elections in the city. The future MP for West Fife, Willie Gallacher was Dundee's Communist candidate in 1922 and 1923, while the local man and future British representative to the Comintern, Bob Stewart, ran in 1924 and 1931. Although neither came close to victory, the party won between 3.6 per cent and 10.1 per cent of the vote in each election during the period and engaged in highly visible extra-parliamentary action.<sup>373</sup>

The boundaries between these organisations were porous. This was, at least in part, a reflection of a broader trend in Scottish politics that lasted up until the 1920s, in which the distinction between different parties of the left on a local level were sometimes unclear, a tendency that had largely ceased by the 1930s.<sup>374</sup> In Dundee, individuals frequently moved from one party to another.<sup>375</sup> Indeed, Bob Stewart shifted from the Prohibitionists to the Communist Party, via his own short-lived Prohibition and Reform organisation, without drastically changing his worldview.<sup>376</sup> As the city's 1940s Lord Provost and Liberal Party stalwart Garnet Wilson recalled, Labour's decision to only run one candidate in the city's two-member constituency was accompanied by 'the tacit invitation' that its supporters cast their second ballot for the Prohibitionists, encouraging links between the city's radical organisations to develop.<sup>377</sup> These parties enjoyed serious electoral success. When leftist

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<sup>372</sup> D G Southgate, 'Edwin Scrymgeour, Prohibitionist and Politician', *Three Dundonians* (Dundee, 1968) 22

<sup>373</sup> D G Southgate, 'Politics and in Dundee', S J Jones (ed.), *Dundee and District* (Dundee, 1968) 348

<sup>374</sup> Malcolm Petrie, *Popular Politics and Political Culture: Urban Scotland, 1918-1939* (Edinburgh, 2018) 20

<sup>375</sup> John Kemp, 'Red Tayside? Political change in early twentieth century Dundee', Louise Miskell, Christopher A Whatley and Bob Harris (eds), *Victorian Dundee: Image and Realities* (Edinburgh, 2000) 235

<sup>376</sup> William M Walker, *Juteopolis*, 66

<sup>377</sup> Garnet Wilson, *The Making of a Lord Provost*, 86

candidates won a little under a third of the popular vote across Scotland, and a little over a third in Glasgow at the 1922 election, they managed almost half of it in Dundee.<sup>378</sup> They retained this level of popular support in each successive general election until 1931. This radical era was brought towards a close in the 1930s when the Conservative-led National Government swept away the city's left-wing parliamentarians in its landslide victories of 1931 and 1935. Yet even then, Dundee blazed a trail with the election of Scotland's first female Tory MP in Florence Horsburgh.<sup>379</sup>

Dundee's political culture was also influenced by its unusually long history as a two-member constituency. Using this system, the city's electors retained two votes used to choose two individual Members of Parliament in Westminster elections between 1868 and 1945. Too large to be represented by just one MP, but not of adequate size for two single member constituencies, this system remained in place much longer in the city than it did elsewhere. With the exception of the irregular university constituencies, whose electorates were widely dispersed, Dundee was the only dual-member seat that survived in Scotland after 1885 and one of just twenty-four around the United Kingdom. This number fell to fifteen following a further redistribution of seats ahead of the 1918 election.<sup>380</sup> This institutional basis guided city politics away from inflexible party-partisanship. From 1906 until breaking its pattern in 1945, when it elected two Labour MPs, Dundee did not elect two members from the same party but instead appointed pairs of ideologically similar candidates hailing from separate organisations. These varied from Liberal and Labour members between 1906 and 1922, through Prohibitionist and Labour from 1922 to 1931 and finally the Liberal and Tory representatives of the National Government from 1931 to

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<sup>378</sup> John Kemp, 'Red Tayside?' 217

<sup>379</sup> Graham Ogilvy, 'Dundee Delineated', 17

<sup>380</sup> D J Rossiter, R J Johnston and C J Pattie, *The Boundary Commissions: Redrawing the UK's map of Parliamentary constituencies* (Manchester, 1999) 21

the end of the second world war.<sup>381</sup> It proved more difficult to agree to a continuation of the alliance following the division of the city into two constituencies, although this tendency did not dissipate immediately. In the 1950 election, both the Liberals and Unionists stood candidates in Dundee West, dividing the anti-Labour vote. Yet, as late as 1951, the two parties were able to reach an understanding in which the Unionists stood in Dundee East, and the Liberals in Dundee West, although Labour were ultimately victorious in both seats.<sup>382</sup> The pact was effectively discontinued by the next election in 1955, with the Liberals ceasing to regularly stand candidates. Nonetheless, the decision to continue with the same approach even after the institutional basis of the alliance between the parties had been abolished highlights the resilience of the spirit the two-member seat had fostered. This history developed a political culture in the city in which voters were comfortable looking beyond party labels to achieve the electoral outcomes they desired. As the journalist John Linklater identified, when the SNP sought to encourage tactical voting in their favour a generation later during the 1970s and 1980s, they were able to tap into memories of this aspect of the city's political past 'tactical voting is embedded in the history of Dundee'.<sup>383</sup>

While Prohibitionism did not survive into the 1940s, Dundee's Communist Party remained one of the most active in the country through the Cold War era, providing an echo of the previous decades' radical culture. They ran a candidate in Dundee West in every election between 1951 and 1987, with the exception of 1983, and received credible votes of between 1,000 and 1,500 in each contest until 1966.<sup>384</sup> This made Dundee West one the

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<sup>381</sup> F W S Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results 1918-1949* (Glasgow, 1969) 577

<sup>382</sup> Malcolm Petrie, 'Anti-Socialism, Liberalism and Individualism: Rethinking the Realignment of Scottish Politics, 1945-1970', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Vol 28 (2018) 207

<sup>383</sup> *Herald*, 16 April 1979, 6

<sup>384</sup> Jim Tomlinson, 'De-globalisation, De-industrialisation and Democratisation', 7

five constituencies in Scotland they most regularly contested.<sup>385</sup> More prominent than its electoral activity, the city's Communists were 'influential [and] well respected' for their involvement in the city's trade union movement, and among certain socialist circles, where they often took on leadership roles and provided training for shop stewards of all political colours.<sup>386</sup> George Galloway and John McAllion recall the influence Communists had on Dundee's Labour left into the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>387</sup> Despite this Communist presence, the city slipped into the two-party competition which punctuated British politics as a whole after the second world war. Labour became the city's leading force, monopolising its Westminster representation from 1945 until 1974, and dominating the local council from 1946. However, Labour's power was not monolithic and the Unionists, rebranded as the Conservatives in 1965, enjoyed a stronger record than would have been expected in a predominantly working class city. After the abolition of the city's long-standing dual-member constituency in time for the 1950 general election, the Tories were competitive in both Dundee seats through the 1950s and 1960s. In 1959, they came within 714 votes of winning Dundee West, while their vote held up consistently around 45 per cent in Dundee East from 1950 until 1970.<sup>388</sup> The Progressives, a loose alliance of local right-wing and anti-Labour forces who contested council elections in much of Scotland up to the 1970s when the Conservative Party began to run candidates in their own name, and their Tory successors also interrupted Labour's control of the council on three occasions after 1946, until Labour resumed unbroken control in 1980.

Although the SNP, at least up to the mid-1980s, was ideologically moderate in Dundee, it still identified as a 'radical alternative' to the political establishment, as the party did

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<sup>385</sup> P B Smith and J Brown, 'Industrial change and Scottish nationalism since 1945', 255

<sup>386</sup> Bill Knox Interviews, Raymond Mennie

<sup>387</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, George Galloway and John McAllion

<sup>388</sup> D G Southgate, 'Politics and Representation in Dundee', 326

nationally.<sup>389</sup> Its peculiar strength in the city appears as a continuation of Dundee's radical political traditions and of its individuality.<sup>390</sup> However, it was not the only manifestation of this during the period. In 1980, the city elected an unabashedly far-left Labour council, which became a hotbed for new-left ideas and Communist influence.<sup>391</sup> Meanwhile, just as they had during the interbellum, strikes and rallies became commonplace, fostering a heated atmosphere.<sup>392</sup> As a result of the radicalisation of the local Labour Party, Dundee elected some of Parliament's most brazenly extreme MPs, most notably John McAllion who represented Dundee East at Westminster between 1987 and 2001 and the Scottish Parliament from 1999 to 2003 and subsequently left Labour to join the far-left Scottish Socialist Party. Likewise Ernie Ross, serving Dundee West between 1979 and 2005, was described by Henry Drucker as being one of just a handful of 'dependable supporters of Mr Benn' in the ranks of Scottish MPs in 1983.<sup>393</sup> His overtly left-wing politics earned him the nickname 'the MP for Nablus West or Moscow Central' in his early years in office, before he drifted towards the right of the party and became a firm supporter of Tony Blair and New Labour in his later years.<sup>394</sup> These traditions were continued as the city assumed its place at the forefront of Scottish Nationalism's assault upon Labour fortresses across the country in the twenty-first century, a process capped by the 57 per cent vote in favour of independence it provided in 2014.

Over the course of generations, this history has imprinted onto Dundee's memory of itself. Indeed, the popular McManus Museum included a section looking back to the city's past as

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<sup>389</sup> NLS, Acc.13099/35, Correspondence, reports, memoranda and clippings relating to SNP strategy 1980-1981, 'Extract from SNP Chairman's Report to the Special Strategy Meeting', 11 February 1981

<sup>390</sup> Christopher A Whatley, David B Swinfen and Annette M Smith, *The Life and Times of Dundee*, 192

<sup>391</sup> Gerry Hassan and Eric Shaw, *The Strange Death of Labour Scotland*, 30

<sup>392</sup> Bill Knox Interviews, Raymond Mennie

<sup>393</sup> Henry M Drucker, 'The curious incident: Scottish party competition since 1979', *The Scottish Government Yearbook*, (1983) 25

<sup>394</sup> Gerry Hassan and Douglas Fraser, *The Political Guide to Modern Scotland*, 128

a 'radical toun' in its 'Making of Modern Dundee' gallery.<sup>395</sup> These memories have contributed to the development of a unique political culture that has tended to be more resistant to the pull of national trends and inclined against the establishment than that of other cities in the country. Although its impact was not decisive, this culture aided the Scottish National Party in its development as a powerful political force in Dundee. By fitting into these traditions, the party associated itself with memories of radical movements of the past, which continue to hold weight in the city. In doing so, it helped to excite the Dundonian electorate's rebellious spirit and channel it into support for Scottish Nationalism.

### **The Local Press**

Dundee has long possessed an especially localised press. The newspaper industry was dominated by the home-grown DC Thomson publishing house to such an extent that many regarded it as a 'monopoly press'.<sup>396</sup> The company's titles enjoyed a strong connection to the city as they were both owned and produced in Dundee. This was unusual, as DC Thomson's publications were the only major newspapers in Scotland that have had a continuous history of domestic ownership.<sup>397</sup> Its flagship daily paper, the *Courier & Advertiser*, is proudly localist as its editor Adrian Arthur described 'we described ourselves as a regional newspaper and our region is within a 50-mile radius of Dundee'.<sup>398</sup> With very few readers outwith this area, it enjoyed heavy coverage in Dundee, across Tayside and in the North of Fife.<sup>399</sup> While the claims of a 1968 survey that the *Courier* was read by 75 per

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<sup>395</sup> *The Making of Modern Dundee* (Dundee, 2006) 17

<sup>396</sup> *Dundee Standard*, 2 November 1979, 2

<sup>397</sup> Maurice Smith, *Paper Lions: The Scottish Press and National Identity* (Edinburgh, 1994) 149

<sup>398</sup> Adrian Arthur in *Ibid.*, 158

<sup>399</sup> Ewen A Cameron, *Impaled Upon a Thistle*, 313

cent and the *Evening Telegraph* by 72 per cent of the city's electorate appear exaggerated, it is clear that a large portion of Dundonians regularly received their news through DC Thomson's papers.<sup>400</sup> In 1974, the *Courier's* sales stood at 128,000, more than a quarter of the population of its circulation area. In raw sales, this outmatched the prestigious Central Belt broadsheets, with the *Glasgow Herald* selling 96,000 and Edinburgh's *Scotsman* 87,000, while Grampian's *Press & Journal* sold 110,000. Only the nationally oriented mass-market *Daily Record* and *Scottish Daily Express* surpassed its Scottish sales figures.<sup>401</sup> In terms of the portion of its circulation area it reached, the *Courier* vastly outstripped the Central Belt broadsheets, matched the *Press & Journal* and even edged the national tabloids. The company's grip over the local media extended further. It also published the popular *Evening Telegraph*, more confined to Dundee but retaining a robust following. On top of this, DC Thomson printed the *Sunday Post*, which catered to a much larger audience, with a readership across Scotland, while retaining a slant towards Dundee. Such was its popularity, that at the onset of the period the *Sunday Post* entered the *Guinness Book of Records* for achieving the highest level of per capita newspaper readership on earth with sales equivalent to 80 per cent of Scotland's adult population.<sup>402</sup> However, this level of reach has not been sustained. Print media has declined significantly since the late twentieth century, with the Scottish newspaper sales falling to a fraction of their early 1990s level by the end of the 2000s.<sup>403</sup> Local papers have suffered particularly badly in this process. Yet the *Courier's* sales have been more resilient than many of its counterparts around Britain, and its influence in Tayside has remained strong.<sup>404</sup> The *Sunday Post* has not fared as well. Although remaining one of the country's leading publications, its sales have

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<sup>400</sup> Raymond Chalmers, 'Labour Party Politics in Dundee', 23

<sup>401</sup> I G C Hutchison, *Scottish Politics in the Twentieth Century*, 101

<sup>402</sup> *The Guinness Book of Record 1970* (London, 1970) 96

<sup>403</sup> Peter Geoghegan, 'The SNP and the Press', Gerry Hassan and Simon Barrow (eds), *A Nation Changed*

<sup>404</sup> *The Courier: Making of a great daily newspaper* (Dundee, 2016) 98

plummeted. Yet even then, its readership still stood at around 1.8 million each week in 1993, while it has persisted as the second highest selling Sunday paper in Scotland to the present day.<sup>405</sup>

Although the *Sunday Post* had a separate staff and office, all three publications shared stories, manpower and a particular worldview.<sup>406</sup> Speaking of the *Sunday Post* in his history of the Scottish press, the journalist Harry Reid described this as ‘a homely, pawky, kailyard idea of Scotland’.<sup>407</sup> A pamphlet published by the Aberdeen University Scottish Nationalist Association reaffirmed this depiction as they described the ‘publications of DC Thomson in Dundee’ as the most ‘remarkably durable [part of] kailyard Scotland’.<sup>408</sup> Traditionalism permeated the company’s ethos. It claims that the *Courier* was the world’s last newspaper to carry advertisements rather than news on its front page, as it continued in the Victorian style until 1992.<sup>409</sup> Christopher Harvie described its perspective in more political terms, as ‘ferocious Toryism’.<sup>410</sup> Through the early part of the period, the papers invariably endorsed the Conservative Party in general elections.<sup>411</sup> While their broad political outlook remained largely the same, it gave much less overt backing to the party as the Tories’ popularity declined into the 1990s. The Conservative councillor Donald Hay pointed to this shift ‘I think maybe twenty years ago, thirty years ago, things were more favourable for us [in the DC Thomson press] than they were later on ... even in the 80s it was still reasonably

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<sup>405</sup> Maurice Smith, *Paper Lions*, 170

<sup>406</sup> Ron Thompson, ‘Ron Thompson’, Ian MacDougall (ed.), *Voices of Scottish Journalists: Recollections by Twenty-Two Veteran Scottish Journalists of their Life and Work* (Edinburgh, 2013) 424

<sup>407</sup> Harry Reid, *Deadline: The Story of the Scottish Press* (Edinburgh, 2006) 80

<sup>408</sup> UD, MS 343, Newspaper Clippings, Leaflets and Pamphlets, ‘The Gomerall Winter Special 1974’, 1

<sup>409</sup> *Making of a great daily newspaper*, 82

<sup>410</sup> Christopher Harvie, *Scotland and Nationalism: Scottish Society and Politics, 1707-1977* (London, 1977) 211

<sup>411</sup> *Evening Telegraph*, 2 May 1979, 2

favourable'.<sup>412</sup> Yet even in earlier decades, the company was never as dutifully attached to the Tory Party as Harvie indicates. Indeed, a 1982 letter from the Dundee Conservative Party to its councillors revealed that the party was frustrated by the company's refusal to report on its activities uncritically and simply print its press releases.<sup>413</sup> Rather, the papers favoured tradition and localism above ideological Conservatism. This was exemplified by their palpable excitement in 1973 at the prospect of Tayside coming under the 'non-political control' of a coalition of Independent councillors.<sup>414</sup> The papers were, however, consistent in their disdain for those political currents that clashed with their general worldview.

They were firmly opposed to Scottish Nationalism from the movement's outset.<sup>415</sup> As Gordon Wilson noted in a private letter, these papers were 'not exactly a friend of the SNP' for most of its history.<sup>416</sup> He described the company as being 'completely and utterly hostile to any form of self-government, it was Unionist, it was right-wing'.<sup>417</sup> While much of the nation's press, none more so than the *Scotsman*, expressed some degree of sympathy with Nationalism during the 1970s, DC Thomson made no concessions. The group's views were captured by a 1977 *Courier* editorial which labelled independence as a 'danger' that 'would raise a long list of problems' including economic catastrophe and the domination of 'West-Central Scotland. To the detriment of the rest of the country'.<sup>418</sup> During the 1979 devolution referendum, the *Courier* stoutly promised to defend the nation from the danger

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<sup>412</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Donald Hay

<sup>413</sup> DCPCGA, 1982 Regional Elections, 'Dundee Conservative Party Letter to Conservative Councillors', 22 April 1982

<sup>414</sup> *Courier & Advertiser*, 28 March 1973, 5

<sup>415</sup> Jack Brand, *The National Movement in Scotland*, 141

<sup>416</sup> NLS, Acc.10754/12, SNP Parliamentary Group Correspondence, 'Gordon Wilson letter to Bill Robertson', 8 February 1978

<sup>417</sup> Scottish Political Archive (hereafter SPA), SPA/OH/REF/NAT/YES/3, Interview with Gordon Wilson

<sup>418</sup> *Courier & Advertiser*, 6 May 1977, 12

that 'Scotland would have an Assembly thrust upon it'.<sup>419</sup> In 1987, the *Sunday Post* argued that despite parties favouring some degree of self-government achieving three quarters of their votes, Scots 'don't really want separatist Home Rule'.<sup>420</sup> Even as the nation as a whole swung towards devolution in the late 1990s, the *Courier* continued to express its scepticism.<sup>421</sup> While these anxieties faded after the Scottish Parliament's inauguration, the papers did not cease to proudly proclaim their Unionism: 'Scottishness is complemented, not diluted by our links with the rest of the United Kingdom'.<sup>422</sup> Resultantly, this attitude translated into continued suspicion of the SNP's aims, the *Sunday Post* warning its readers that independence was 'what they [would be] voting for if they vote SNP' ahead of the 2007 Holyrood elections.<sup>423</sup>

Although DC Thomson has not wavered in its opposition to these goals, its attitude towards the SNP in party political terms has clearly thawed. The SNP councillor Willie Sawers explains that as the Conservatives lost ground and the SNP came to represent a large part of the wider Tayside area in the 1990s, the party was able to develop a much closer and friendlier relationship with the DC Thomson's newspapers in which the Nationalists enjoyed more favourable coverage than they had in the past.<sup>424</sup> Nigel Don, who served on Dundee City Council between 2003 and 2007 before becoming an MSP for the Northeast region and later the Angus North & Mearns constituency, commented that he had experienced a 'good working relationship [between] the *Courier*' and the SNP across a number of different parts of Tayside in the 2000s and 2010s.<sup>425</sup> Indeed, Stewart Hosie

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<sup>419</sup> *Courier & Advertiser*, 23 February 1979, 10

<sup>420</sup> *Sunday Post*, 14 June 1987, 5

<sup>421</sup> *Courier & Advertiser*, 9 September 1997, 10

<sup>422</sup> *Sunday Post*, 9 May 1999, 6

<sup>423</sup> *Sunday Post*, 29 April 2007, 16

<sup>424</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Willie Sawers

<sup>425</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Nigel Don

testifies that the Dundee SNP's bond with the local press had become one of the best in Scotland 'from what I hear from colleagues in other parts of the country it is substantially healthier than it might be in other locations'.<sup>426</sup>

DC Thomson's papers were even more staunchly opposed to left-wing politics than they ever were to Scottish Nationalism.<sup>427</sup> This provoked particular hostility from the left within the city. In 1980, the *Dundee Standard* put forward the accusation that 'DC Thomson is misusing the press for political purposes'.<sup>428</sup> Socialist activists had established this paper as a propagandistic counterpoint to the perceived distortion of reality in DC Thomson's publications, which were believed to be undermining the left locally. The distrust between Labour and the company was illustrated by George Galloway's belief that the DC Thomson took deliberate 'monopolistic' action to prevent the publication from being sold in shops.<sup>429</sup> John Letford explained that in Labour circles 'there was a perception that DC Thomson were Tory, anti-Labour and that a "them and us" culture was the order of the day'.<sup>430</sup> The recollection of Iain Luke, a Labour councillor in the 1980s and 1990s and later MP for Dundee East between 2001 and 2005, of the *Courier's* reaction to Labour's victory in the 1980 District Council elections reaffirms the siege mentality many in party held on to in relation to the press 'I always remember the DC Thomson press printed this picture like "this is your enemy, these are" you know, with the Labour councillors who were elected'.<sup>431</sup> This perspective endured the moderation in Labour's policies in the following decades, as was reflected in a bitter leaflet for the 1990 Regional elections in which the party grumbled

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<sup>426</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Stewart Hosie

<sup>427</sup> *Courier & Advertiser*, 28 February 1974, 10

<sup>428</sup> *Dundee Standard*, 8 February 1980, 2

<sup>429</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, George Galloway

<sup>430</sup> John Letford, *Fae the Boatyard to Buckingham Palace*, 83

<sup>431</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Iain Luke

that 'the *Courier* and *Tele* will give publicity to anyone who is anti-Labour'.<sup>432</sup> The Labour councillor Kevin Keenan observed the continued uneasiness in the relationship into the twenty-first century 'there would be a number of people in the party that would think that wasn't a particularly great relationship ... my own take on it is that if I put out a press statement, if I play with fire I could get burnt'.<sup>433</sup>

Undoubtedly, the publishing house's coolness towards Scottish Nationalism was outweighed by its disdain for the Labour Party, which it saw as unfit to govern at any level.<sup>434</sup> As late as 1992, it flatly asserted that Labour 'cannot be trusted'.<sup>435</sup> Indeed, the company had opposed the Labour movement ever since the general strike of 1926, standing against industry norms by rejecting any involvement of trade unions in its business thereafter.<sup>436</sup> Recalling his time working as a journalist for the company, George Thomson related that immediately after the second world war it had forced all its employees to sign an agreement that they would not join a union or face redundancy.<sup>437</sup> This hierarchy of opposition was critical. Although the group supported neither party, in the context of Dundee's core political struggle between Labour and the Nationalists, the latter were regarded as the lesser evil. Indeed, the leftists around the *Dundee Standard* accused them of waging 'a campaign in support of the SNP and the Tories against the Labour Party' due to the weight of their antagonism towards Labour during the 1980 District Council elections.<sup>438</sup> George Galloway similarly claimed that Gordon Wilson enjoyed 'objectively the support of the DC Thomson press' throughout his parliamentary career.<sup>439</sup> Indications that

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<sup>432</sup> DCPCGA, 1990 Regional Elections, 'Labour Leaflet for Downfield/St Mary's 1990'

<sup>433</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Kevin Keenan

<sup>434</sup> *Courier & Advertiser*, 28 February 1974, 10

<sup>435</sup> *Courier & Advertiser*, 6 April 1992, 10

<sup>436</sup> Maurice Smith, *Paper Lions*, 159

<sup>437</sup> UE, Box 9, Lord Thomson of Monifieth Papers, 'Story of Scotland by George Thomson'

<sup>438</sup> *Dundee Standard*, 8 February 1980, 2

<sup>439</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, George Galloway

the company favoured the Nationalists over Labour continued into the twenty-first century. Iain Luke suspected the company's papers favoured the SNP's Stewart Hosie over him in the key 2005 election 'he got all the press, because the press were keen to see him do well'.<sup>440</sup> DC Thomson's stauncher opposition to the Labour Party therefore inadvertently favoured the SNP at their expense.

However, these critics greatly overestimated the ability of the press to shape public opinion. Contrastingly, the history of DC Thomson in Dundee illustrates the limits of the local press's power in this respect. Throughout the period, the city's voters emphatically rejected the company's preferred brand of conservative politics in favour of Labour and the Nationalists, who have together won more than 70 per cent of the city's votes in all but one general election since February 1974. Even beyond Dundee, the papers' influence was clearly finite. Although Labour did not flourish anywhere else in '*Courier* country', the area around Tayside and northern Fife in which DC Thomson's press held sway delivered significant support to the SNP long before the company's attitude towards the party softened. A study of the constitutional preference of a selection of the largest Scottish newspapers' readerships revealed that opinions did not closely follow the papers' editorial lines, indicating that readers' views were not determined by the paper they read.<sup>441</sup>

The DC Thomson press' style contributed to its limited influence on public opinion. The *Courier* was well known for its stolidly even-handed political reporting, with Adrian Arthur claiming that it stuck to the straightforward reporting of facts in which 'there was no

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<sup>440</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Iain Luke

<sup>441</sup> William L Miller, *The End of British Politics?*, 113

slant'.<sup>442</sup> These claims were widely echoed, as Gordon Wilson praised 'when it came to news coverage it was very old fashioned. It would cover both sides ... they were very fair that way'.<sup>443</sup> Even a deeply partisan SNP research bulletin reporting on the 1973 Dundee East by-election noted that 'the press were extremely fair as a whole', despite the *Courier's* open endorsement of the Conservative candidate.<sup>444</sup> The papers pointedly separated charged ideological polemic within editorials and opinion pieces from largely neutral political reports, which sought to report facts in a passionless manner. John Berridge and Mona Clark observed that while it made its opposition to the Scottish Assembly very clear in its editorials during the 1979 devolution referendum campaign, it offered almost the exact same number of column inches to descriptions of both sides of the debate and even published slightly more letters in favour of a yes vote than against it.<sup>445</sup> This style contributed towards a further limitation on these papers' ability to shape the political perspectives of their readers and in doing so sway opinion in Dundee.

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<sup>442</sup> Adrian Arthur in Maurice Smith, *Paper Lions*, 158

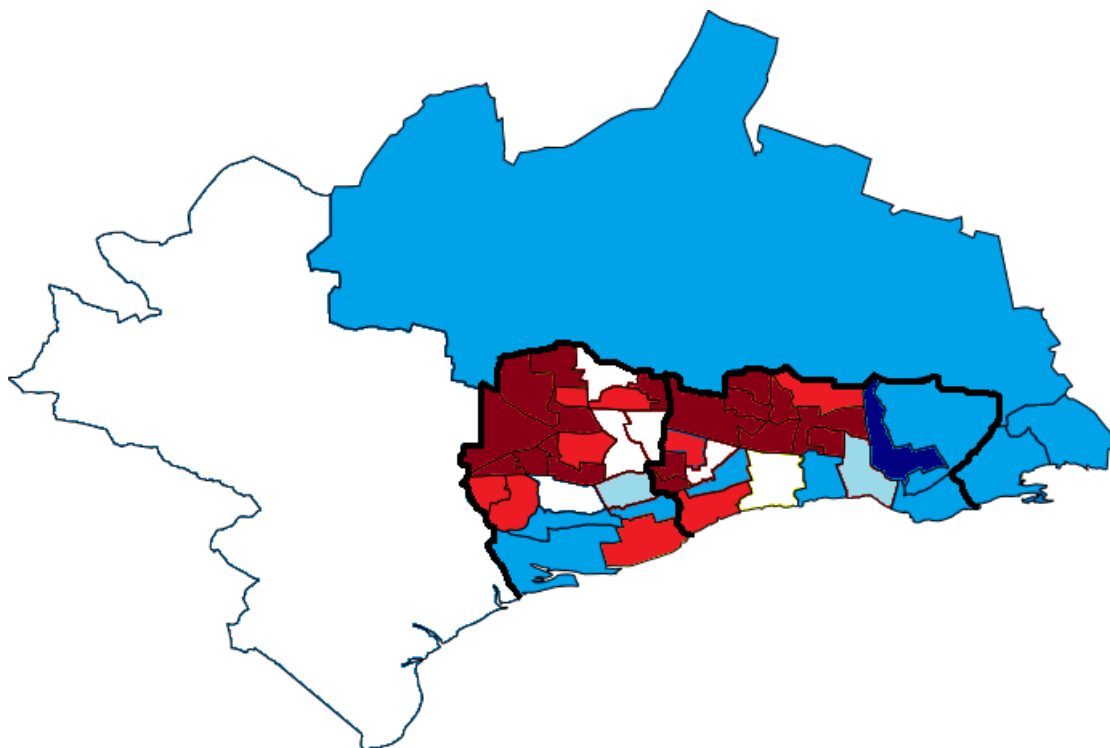
<sup>443</sup> SPA, SPA/OH/REF/NAT/YES/3, Interview with Gordon Wilson

<sup>444</sup> NLS, Acc.13099/97, Research Bulletins 1970-1974, 'Research Bulletin April 1973'

<sup>445</sup> John Berridge and Mona Clark, 'Campaigns in the Cities: Dundee', John Bochel, David Denver and Allan Macartney (eds), *The Referendum Experience: Scotland 1979* (Dundee, 1981) 75

## Differences within Dundee

Social Class in Dundee by Ward in 1981



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Accounting for Dundee's distinctive political history, with the significant divergence between its two constituencies in the 1970s and 1980s, requires an understanding not only of the character of the city as a whole but differences within it. Ernie Ross' request in Parliament for a ward-by-ward breakdown of data from the 1981 census presents a particularly detailed picture of socio-economic distinctions around the city in the late twentieth century.<sup>447</sup> The bulk of Dundee's working class population were concentrated in socially-homogenous peripheral housing estates, mostly constructed in the postwar period, around the western and northern rim of the city. A smaller, tightly-packed and almost exclusively working class area, punctuated by large tower blocks that are rare elsewhere in

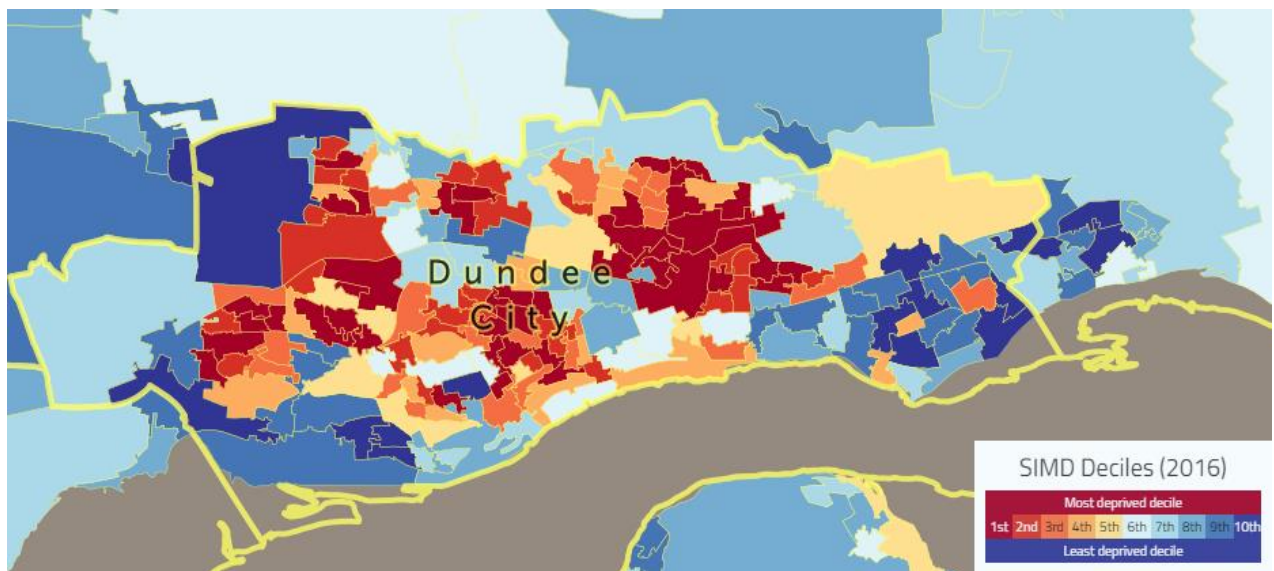
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<sup>446</sup> Dark Red – over 75 per cent manual workers, Red – Between 55 and 75 per cent manual workers, White – between 45 and 55 per cent manual workers, Light Blue – Between 40 and 45 per cent manual workers, Blue – Between 25 and 40 per cent manual workers, Dark Blue – Less than 25 per cent manual workers.

The black line marks the boundaries of Dundee's two parliamentary constituencies.

<sup>447</sup> *House of Commons Hansard*, Deb 24 February 1987 Vol 111 Col 161W

the city, is found in the inner-city Hilltown. It is built on a steep incline, rising from the city centre and suffering from especially intense deprivation. Dundee has two prosperous areas at either end of the city with predominantly middle class populations. These are the West End or Riverside area in the southwest, and the larger area in and around Broughty Ferry in the east. Broughty Ferry was historically a separate town, but gradually evolved into a Dundee suburb as the city expanded. However, it has retained a distinct identity. With the exception of the Hilltown, the neighbourhoods in and around the city centre were generally more socially mixed, with large numbers of both working and middle class residents. Despite its steep population decline since 1981, and efforts to regenerate the city since the 1990s, this internal pattern has remained largely unchanged. Although the rise of creative industries have brought some change to the city, gentrification had a more limited influence in transforming working class neighbourhoods than in other cities in the 1990s and 2000s.<sup>448</sup> The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation makes clear that poverty and wealth remained concentrated in the same parts of the city in 2016, as it had been in 1981.



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<sup>448</sup> Sarah Glynn, 'Regeneration in interesting times: a story of privatisation and gentrification in a peripheral Scottish city' in Gary Bridge, Tim Butler and Loretta Lees (eds), *Mixed Communities: Gentrification By Stealth* (Bristol, 2012) 204

<sup>449</sup> Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2016

Although there were significant differences within the city, its two constituencies possessed remarkably similar demographics. The inclination of individuals like John McAllion to characterise Dundee East as more middle class and prosperous, owing to the presence of Broughty Ferry, and using this to explain the SNP's greater success in the seat are based on misconceptions.<sup>450</sup> Many of the poorest parts of the city lay in the eastern constituency, while there are substantial prosperous areas in the west. Aside from Dundee West's notably larger Catholic population, the two halves of Dundee have been very closely comparable by almost any socio-economic measure throughout the period, despite the tremendous changes caused by deindustrialisation and largescale emigration. The 2001 census highlights this, as almost identical proportions of the labour force in either constituency were engaged in each of the nine identified categories of employment.<sup>451</sup> Through the period, Dundee West has had a slightly higher portion of its population in social housing. In 1981, 66.6 per cent of the west and 64 per cent of the east were council tenants.<sup>452</sup> The revolution in property ownership that swept Scotland from the early 1980s did not affect this situation. By the peak in home ownership recorded in the 2011, 48 per cent of households in Dundee City West were owner-occupiers and 30.2 per cent lived in social housing, while the figures for Dundee City East were 52.8 and 29 per cent respectively.<sup>453</sup> While unemployment has varied significantly along with the city's economic fortunes, it has usually been consistently evenly spread around the city. In 1981, Dundee East had a slightly higher rate of unemployment at 18.3 per cent, compared to 15.3 per cent in Dundee West.<sup>454</sup> This small gap subsequently closed, as less than 1 per cent separated the unemployment rate in the two seats in both the 2001 and 2011 censuses.<sup>455</sup>

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<sup>450</sup> Bill Knox Interviews, John McAllion

<sup>451</sup> Scottish Census 2001

<sup>452</sup> Richard Parry, *Scottish Political Facts*, 32

<sup>453</sup> Scottish Census 2011

<sup>454</sup> Richard Parry, *Scottish Political Facts*, 32

<sup>455</sup> Scottish Census 2001 and 2011

Likewise, residents' levels of education, an increasingly important signifier of social class, were similar on both sides of town. In 2001, the two seats had similar proportions of their population between 16 and 74 with no educational qualifications, at 36.4 per cent in the east and 33.1 per cent in the west, and educated to degree level or higher at 17 and 18 per cent respectively.<sup>456</sup> There are also modest differences in the national origins of the two seats' residents. In 2001, 85.7 per cent of Dundee West and 89.8 per cent of Dundee East were Scottish-born. The fact such alike constituencies produced completely different electoral outcomes from one another between the 1970s and the 1990s makes clear that social and economic characteristics were not the sole determinant of political behaviour in Dundee or elsewhere.

One of the few notable divergences between the two seats emerged in the 1990s. With the rise of its universities, Dundee acquired a large student population that has had an even greater demographic impact on the city than overseas immigration. These students were not evenly spread across the city but instead concentrated around the universities themselves, making up the majority of the population in the neighbourhoods surrounding them.<sup>457</sup> With both institutions situated to the west of the city centre, this meant that this population was concentrated in the Dundee West constituency. In 2001, full-time students made up twice as great a proportion of the population between 16 and 74 of Dundee West as they did in Dundee East at 17.4 and 8 per cent respectively.<sup>458</sup> This disparity remained, even as the student population continued to rise, reaching 22.7 per cent in Dundee City West and 10.2 per cent in Dundee City East in 2011.<sup>459</sup> Counterintuitively, this divergence in the two seats occurred at a time when their political outlooks were coming to resemble

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<sup>456</sup> Scottish Census 2001

<sup>457</sup> Scottish Census 2011

<sup>458</sup> Scottish Census 2001

<sup>459</sup> Scottish Census 2011

one another far more closely than they had in the 1970s and 1980s. Young people tend to vote in lower numbers than the general population. Indeed, their lack of interest in politics and propensity to abstain from elections reached its highest point during the 2000s.<sup>460</sup> Moreover, large numbers of students are from overseas, and therefore ineligible to vote in British elections, or are registered in their home constituencies rather than their term-time address, meaning that they do not cast their ballots in Dundee's constituencies. This reduced their potential impact on the city's politics. Nonetheless, the number of students was so large that they have invariably contributed a sizeable and growing portion of the votes in elections in the city since the 1990s. The failure of this new body of voters to encourage any variance in the political culture of the city's constituencies further emphasises shortcomings of explanations of electoral peculiarities that focus on demographic factors.

## **Conclusion**

Politics in an individual city cannot escape the character and history of that locality. Dundee's particular circumstances provided an environment in which Scottish Nationalism had the potential to succeed. It witnessed a sudden shift from prosperity to rapid deindustrialisation, which coincided with the SNP's emergence as a major force in its politics in the 1970s, and differed markedly from Glasgow's experience of long-term decline and the comparative prosperity of Aberdeen and Edinburgh. While Dundee was home to a venerable trade union tradition and a large Catholic community, these

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<sup>460</sup> Janine Dermody, Stuart Hanmer-Lloyd and Richard Scullion, 'Young people and voting behaviour: alienated youth and (or) an interested and critical citizenry?', *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol 44 No 3/4 (2010) 422

demographics did not provide the same degree of resistance to the SNP's advance as they did in Glasgow and its environs. The city's high concentration of Scottish-born residents with weak British identification provided a slight structural inclination towards Nationalist politics. Its unique geography, which isolated it as an industrial city enveloped by the heart of rural Scotland, cut it off from the mainstream of Scottish society in the Central Belt, left it surrounded by the SNP's political heartland and placed it close to the North Sea and its oil but far from the wealth it produced, benefited the party. The city also had a longstanding historic inclination towards radical politics, while its anti-Nationalist press did not seriously hinder the party. The confluence of these factors provided a more favourable context for the SNP than was available in any other part of urban Scotland. While each individually had a marginal impact, together they played an important part in making the party's electoral accomplishments possible, and certainly more likely than in any other city in the country. However, the level of success the party achieved and the variations in support it experienced between different periods and parts of the city are not adequately explained by these factors. They cannot account for the scale of its divergence from national averages, and the political histories of Scotland's other cities. In particular, they offer no convincing reason for the development of very different political ecologies in its two constituencies in the 1970s and 1980s. Instead, the SNP's fate in Dundee depended upon the agency of local political actors, upon the merits and limitations of both the Nationalists and their competitors at different points through the period.

## Part Two: Party Competition in Dundee

The importance of grassroots politics to shaping electoral results has often been downgraded by researchers regarding it as inconsequential relative to national campaigns. The political scientists David Butler and Dennis Kavanagh exemplified the prevailing belief among scholars for much of the twentieth century when they asserted in 1988 that 'the constituency campaign, meanwhile, has come to be regarded by most observers as little more than a ritual'.<sup>461</sup> Yet this perspective was never completely unchallenged. Through an experiment that looked at two Dundee tower blocks in the 1970 local elections, John Bochel and David Denver highlighted that canvassing demonstrably increased turnout and even the vote share of the active party.<sup>462</sup> Since the late 1980s and early 1990s, the dominant view has been more concertedly challenged, with the importance of local parties gaining much greater appreciation. Patrick Seyd and Paul Whiteley were at the forefront of this process as they established a clear link between the size and activity of Labour Party memberships and the scale of the swing towards the party in the 1987 general election.<sup>463</sup>

This section of the thesis will demonstrate the central role local actors have played in Dundee's politics since the 1970s, not only in their organisation and campaigning capacity, but even more decisively by shaping the image of their parties in the city. It is questionable how fundamental the actions, strengths and weakness of these individuals and organisations were to establishing parties' base levels of support, which generally followed parties' national popularity. Yet, it is clear that both the local SNP and their opponents

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<sup>461</sup> David Butler and Dennis Kavanagh, *The British General Election of 1987*, 211

<sup>462</sup> J M Bochel and D T Denver, 'Canvassing, Turnout and Party Support: An Experiment', *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol 1 No 3 (1971) 269

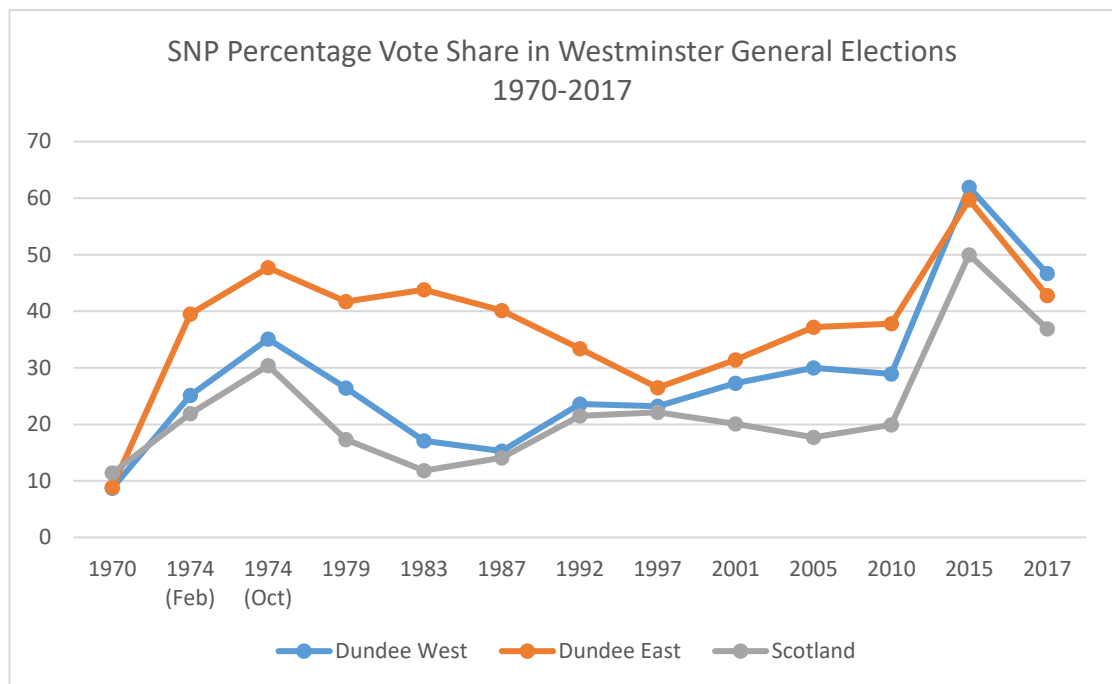
<sup>463</sup> Patrick Seyd and Paul Whiteley, *Labour's Grassroots*, 186

were able to influence electorally decisive shifts at different times that were resistant to, and at times independent of, Scottish and British political trends. Indeed, there has been an observable correlation between the relative condition of the local SNP and Labour parties and the outcome of the electoral competition between them. The SNP outperformed national trends in the 1970s, early 1980s and 2000s when their organisation was especially strong and Labour's was vulnerable. When the SNP weakened and Labour strengthened in the intervening period, the Nationalists were much less successful relative to the rest of the country than they were before or after. At the same time, the shortcomings of the city's Liberal, Conservative and radical left political parties were imperative to the SNP's ability to engage Labour in two-party competition as they ensured that the Nationalists emerged as Dundee's most viable opposition.

## **Chapter Two: The Dundee SNP**

This chapter will examine the development of the SNP in Dundee from the 1970s to the beginning of the 2010s. Throughout this time, the changing condition of the local party had a critical influence on its electoral fortunes in the city. Its experience varied more from national patterns than the city's other political parties, at times running in complete opposition to the Scotland-wide direction. In the 1970s and the early 1980s, the SNP in the east of the city became very strong. It was able to overcome a vulnerable Labour Party and root itself deeply in the Dundee East constituency while achieving significantly less in the city's other parliamentary seat, where the local party was much weaker. From the mid-1980s into the 1990s, the SNP in Dundee East declined, leaving it unable to resist Labour's reassertion of dominance and leading to the levelling of Nationalist electoral outcomes across the city. Since the end of the 1990s, the SNP have become a far more impressive

organisation on both sides of Dundee, allowing the party to outrun national swings and take almost complete control of city politics in the 2000s.



### The First Period, 1973 to the mid-1980s

These factors were at their most critical during the 1970s and 1980s, when politics in Dundee were more resistant to national trends than at any time since the second world war. This was most apparent in Dundee East. After running Labour close in the 1973 by-election, the SNP took the seat in February 1974 and retained it until 1987, with their vote scarcely affected by the plunge in the party's national vote in 1979 and 1983. Although Dundee West did not show the same pattern, the Nationalists consistently registered credible support ranging from 3.2 to 9.2 per cent above the national average between the elections of February 1974 and 1983, despite falling to fourth behind the SDP in the latter contest. The SNP's relative electoral success was supported by a local party that was in formidably good health. Yet it was lopsided, being far more active and effective on the eastern side of the city, where its support became increasingly concentrated. It was replete

with capable individuals and was both well organised and financed, making it an especially effective campaigning machine. It adopted an unusual approach to local government, refusing to stand candidates anywhere in the city through most of the 1970s and only tentatively engaging with these contests in the early 1980s. This aided the party in its chief aim, retaining Dundee East, but stored up problems that had to be confronted further down the line. Crucially, the party enjoyed a rare degree of ideological unity behind a coherent centrist perspective that held strong against the instability that afflicted the SNP across Scotland in the early 1980s. This aided the party in Dundee East in holding together a broad-tent electoral coalition for years after its support had begun to break-up through the rest of the country.

### *The Role of Individuals*

In his memoirs, Jimmy Halliday reminisced that in the early 1970s ‘the party in Dundee enjoyed the great fortune of having a group of talented and competent members coming forward’ from the grassroots upwards.<sup>464</sup> The group of individuals who emerged around this time were invaluable to the SNP’s successes in the ensuing decade and a half. Halliday himself, who had led the SNP in his younger days between 1956 and 1960 and continued to occupy senior positions in the national hierarchy thereafter, arrived in Dundee at the end of the 1960s.<sup>465</sup> He quickly became a key player in the city’s Nationalist politics, being mostly active in the eastern constituency where he lived. While predominantly a backroom organiser, Halliday possessed keen political skills, as Robert MacIntyre described when

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<sup>464</sup> James Halliday, *Yours for Scotland*, 97

<sup>465</sup> Paula Sommerville, ‘James Halliday’, James Mitchell and Gerry Hassan (eds), *Scottish National Party Leaders*, 202

recommending him for a function: 'he is a very good speaker and debater'.<sup>466</sup> His organisational role was highly valued, with his eventual resignation from his post in 1986 being identified by the Dundee East Constituency Association as one of the central reasons for its loss of direction in the mid-1980s.<sup>467</sup> Alan McKinney was another valuable activist working behind the scenes. Having been a founding member of the SNP's Broughty Ferry branch, inaugurated in the aftermath of the 1967 Hamilton by-election, his abilities eventually led him to the party's headquarters where he served as National Organiser between 1977 and 1990.<sup>468</sup> Honing his logistical talents in Dundee, he served as Gordon Wilson's election agent through the three pivotal contests in Dundee East in the twenty months between March 1973 and October 1974. Billy Wolfe observed the importance of McKinney to the party's breakthrough in this period, as he began to work tirelessly to marshal the local party into good shape from the moment the by-election was announced in late 1972.<sup>469</sup> The presence of a figure of his calibre helped the party construct a dependable base in Dundee East that served it well in consolidating its parliamentary toehold.

Even in Dundee West, where the Nationalists were much less successful, they were still able to attract well-known candidates. Jim Fairlie stood for Dundee West in three successive elections between 1974 and 1979. He was a prominent voice who served on the NEC from the 1970s and would eventually rise to the Deputy Leadership from 1981 to 1984, before resigning from the party in 1990 in protest against its adoption of the

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<sup>466</sup> NLS, Acc.10090/137, General Correspondence 1970-79, 'Letter to David A Graham from Robert MacIntyre', 29 September 1971

<sup>467</sup> UD, MS 315/3/5, Dundee East: General Election 1987, 'Dundee East Constituency Association – Minutes of Annual General Meeting', 8 March 1987

<sup>468</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Alan McKinney

<sup>469</sup> Billy Wolfe, *Scotland Lives*, 158

'Independence in Europe' strategy.<sup>470</sup> Although residing in nearby Perth, he raised his reputation in Dundee by standing in successive contests. This was highlighted by the Nationalists in a 1979 election leaflet that pointed out that 'Jim Fairlie worked in the [Dundee West] constituency consistently for five years'.<sup>471</sup> Standing in 1983, the Dundee-born Jim Lynch had a swathe of experience having served the SNP in Peterhead and later Edinburgh since the mid-1960s and standing as a parliamentary candidate in Edinburgh North in the two elections of 1974 and then Central Fife in 1979. Furthermore, in the 1983 election he won a £500 award from the *Sunday Standard* newspaper for publishing the best-designed election address in the country.<sup>472</sup> The presence of such credible campaigners bolstered the SNP in the constituency in these years, despite its organisational shortcomings in this part of the city.

Yet undoubtedly the most significant individual to the Nationalists' fortunes during this period was Gordon Wilson. He carried a tremendous influence over the politics of Dundee in the 1970s and 1980s that has been recognised in all quarters. A Glasgow-born lawyer, after first joining the SNP in the 1950s, he made his name in the party through his involvement with a pirate radio station named Radio Free Scotland.<sup>473</sup> In the 1960s, he took on a critical bureaucratic role in shaping the party's wider organisation from a number of administrative positions.<sup>474</sup> As he described, 'I sat at my desk and ran the party by paper ... I was really a functionary'.<sup>475</sup> He reached the political frontline in the 1970s after being the

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<sup>470</sup> James Mitchell, 'Member State or Euro-Region? The SNP, Plaid Cymru, and Europe', David Baker and David Seawright (eds), *Britain for and Against Europe: British Politics and the Question of European Integration* (Oxford, 1998) 118

<sup>471</sup> DCPCGA, 1979 General Election, 'SNP Leaflet for Dundee West 1979'

<sup>472</sup> DCPCGA, 1983 General Election, 'Sunday Standard Clipping', 12 June 1983

<sup>473</sup> Gordon Wilson, *Pirates of the Air: the Story of Radio Free Scotland* (Stirling, 2011)

<sup>474</sup> Robert MacKay Crawford, 'The Scottish National Party, 1960-1974: An investigation into its organisation and power structure', PhD Thesis, University of Glasgow (1982) 141

<sup>475</sup> SPA, SPA/OH/REF/NAT/YES/3, Interview with Gordon Wilson

key figure behind the formulation of the lauded oil campaign, and in doing so earning the moniker 'Mr Oil' for his enthusiasm and expertise on the subject.<sup>476</sup> After standing for public office for the first time in the 1973 Dundee East by-election, taking advantage of an opportunity to test out the oil strategy first-hand, he became tied to the city's politics, going on to win election to Parliament in February 1974.<sup>477</sup> He quickly rose to become a politician of national standing as he became deputy leader of the SNP group at Westminster and its oil and energy spokesman. After being left as one of just two surviving SNP parliamentarians in the aftermath of the 1979 general election, he rose further to take on the party leadership. Despite not being the most well-known or telegenic Nationalist at his ascension to the office, a survey revealed that he had overtaken Winnie Ewing and Margo MacDonald to become the SNP's most recognisable politician by 1983. The same survey indicated that over two thirds of the electorate viewed Wilson as either fairly or very effective, highlighting his dependable reputation at a time when the SNP itself sorely lacked the public's confidence.<sup>478</sup> Wilson retained the leadership until 1990, three years after falling out of Parliament due to his 1987 defeat to Labour's John McAllion.

James Mitchell expresses a widely held view when he states that Wilson possessed a large 'personal vote', and was the main reason for the SNP's sustained success in Dundee East after national politics turned against the party in the late 1970s and early 1980s.<sup>479</sup> Many contemporaries in the press agreed with this perspective, with the *Courier* describing his victory in 1983 as 'a personal triumph'.<sup>480</sup> Participants in the city's politics in these years,

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<sup>476</sup> *Broughty Ferry Guide & Carnoustie Gazette*, 4 March 1974, 1

<sup>477</sup> Billy Wolfe, *Scotland Lives*, 157

<sup>478</sup> NLS, Acc.13099/103, A Presentation of the Main Findings on a Study of Scottish Political Attitudes, August 1983

<sup>479</sup> James Mitchell, 'From Breakthrough to Mainstream: The Politics of Potential and Blackmail', Gerry Hassan (ed.), *The Modern SNP*, 36

<sup>480</sup> *Courier & Advertiser*, 10 June 1983, 13

coming from all major parties, uniformly highlight the fundamental importance of his presence to the party's electoral success in Dundee.<sup>481</sup> Gordon Wilson was not an especially charismatic or rousing politician, as Arnold Kemp pointed to 'in his mannerisms he is precise and lawyerish. He hates excessive displays of emotion'.<sup>482</sup> Yet he possessed a raft of qualities that made him a formidable force. These were ubiquitously praised by both colleagues and opponents. The Labour MP Tam Dalyell exemplified this in noting that Wilson was 'a serious, skilful, upright, hard-nosed and determined politician'.<sup>483</sup> Meanwhile, the long-serving Nationalist MP for the Western Isles, Donald Stewart, confessed that he 'used to envy Gordon [Wilson's] seemingly inexhaustible supply of energy and his prodigious perseverance'.<sup>484</sup> His assiduous work ethic and devotion to representing Dundee was widely admired in the city itself. Between the by-election and his victory in February 1974, he 'nursed the constituency with personal visits and meetings', helping to cultivate support for the SNP and build a deeper connection to the city.<sup>485</sup> Importantly, and in contrast to his predecessor as MP George Machin, he moved to Dundee permanently shortly after his election in 1974, and remained very active locally to negate the potential negative effects of his outsider origins. He earned the respect and praise of the press for his 'proven local record' of working ceaselessly to fight Dundee's corner in Westminster.<sup>486</sup> His lobbying in favour of the city's economic interests during this period of steep industrial decline won sincere appreciation across party divides.<sup>487</sup> He also addressed less glamorous concerns 'stepping in when redundancies are threatened, or when a sub-Post Office is needed, when there's a hitch at a local primary school or when a favourite

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<sup>481</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Joe FitzPatrick, George Galloway, Ken Guild, Donald Hay, Iain Luke, John McAllion, Alan McKinney, Willie Sawers and Helen Wright

<sup>482</sup> Arnold Kemp, *The Hollow Drum*, 96

<sup>483</sup> Tam Dalyell, *The Question of Scotland*, 31

<sup>484</sup> Donald Stewart, *A Scot at Westminster* (Sydney, 1994) 115

<sup>485</sup> *Courier & Advertiser*, 29 February 1974, 6

<sup>486</sup> *Herald*, 16 April 1979, 6

<sup>487</sup> *Courier & Advertiser*, 3 April 1980, 5

hostelry is under fire' creating a more personal relationship with the city's residents.<sup>488</sup> The SNP councillor Willie Sawers described how he engaged with everyday voters 'he had a good record of, I suppose, cutting through red tape and bureaucracy and getting results for ordinary people' on a quiet and individual basis.<sup>489</sup> As early as October 1974, the *Whitfield News*, a traditionally Labour supporting Church-run newsletter serving a troubled estate in Dundee East, declared that 'Gordon Wilson has managed to arouse the admiration of the vast majority of his constituents' with his impressive parliamentary activism.<sup>490</sup> He was seen as approachable, and ensured that he actively engaged with voters as John McAllion observed 'Wilson would get on buses and talk to people'.<sup>491</sup>

The SNP heavily emphasised these individual qualities in its election materials locally. This course was set from the first election Wilson contested as an incumbent, as in October 1974 the party issued a leaflet that drew attention to his hard work in Westminster over the short months since the February election.<sup>492</sup> A 1979 advert boasted that he 'worked tirelessly for his constituents' having 'made 139 speeches ... [and] asked 1,057 Parliamentary Questions' and had 'become so respected in Parliament, that the *Sunday Times* named him one of the eight top MPs of his generation'.<sup>493</sup> When the SNP waned nationally, this became even more apparent. As Willie Sawers described, into the 1980s its parliamentary campaigns in Dundee East leant heavily on his personality 'it was very much promoting Gordon', with less emphasis on his party label.<sup>494</sup> This was reflected in election literature, a 1983 party newspaper declared 'the record speaks for itself' in reference to his

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<sup>488</sup> *Evening Telegraph*, 20 April 1979, 5

<sup>489</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Willie Sawers

<sup>490</sup> UD, MS 315/3/2, Election File October 1974, 'Whitfield News', October 1974, 1

<sup>491</sup> Bill Knox Interviews, John McAllion

<sup>492</sup> NLS, Acc.13687/11, SNP leaflets, flyers, newsletters, ephemera and badges, 'SNP Leaflet for Dundee East October 1974'

<sup>493</sup> *Broughty Ferry Guide & Carnoustie Gazette*, 14 April 1979, 7

<sup>494</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Willie Sawers

achievements as an MP.<sup>495</sup> A leaflet from 1987 went so far as to claim that Wilson was 'popularly regarded as one of the best MPs the city has ever had' while praising his 'reputation for common sense and for getting things done'.<sup>496</sup> Some materials left out party colours, symbols and even name in favour of an exclusive focus on Wilson.<sup>497</sup> The party also attempted to use his standing in campaigns in Dundee West, with a 1983 leaflet noting 'Dundee already gets a great deal from having Gordon Wilson representing the city', concluding that a second Nationalist MP would double these benefits.<sup>498</sup>

However, the reality that this approach was based on began to change from 1979. Wilson acknowledges that his attentiveness to his seat and local party was compromised after his ascension to the SNP leadership in 1979.<sup>499</sup> In 1987, the Conservative Party attacked him for a drop in his activity in Parliament and in the city.<sup>500</sup> This was a critique that Alan McKinney shared 'I don't think Gordon devoted enough time to Dundee East at all'.<sup>501</sup> Taking on additional responsibilities as leader, the amount of time he could spend in the city and with addressing local concerns was greatly constrained.<sup>502</sup> His role also drastically limited the time he was able to devote to his own campaigns in Dundee during general elections, as he was called away to tour target constituencies in every corner of the country as well as heading the nationwide campaign.<sup>503</sup> In contrast, Donald Stewart, the only other Nationalist MP to retain his seat from 1979 to 1987, drew criticism for refusing to campaign

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<sup>495</sup> UD, MS 315/3/4, General Election: Dundee East 1983, 'Dundee East Gazette', June 1983, 1

<sup>496</sup> NLS, Acc.13687/10, Gordon Wilson election campaign literature, 'SNP Leaflet for Dundee East 1987'

<sup>497</sup> Acc.13099, 1983 General Election, 'SNP Leaflet for Dundee East 1983'

<sup>498</sup> SPA, SPA/GA/PP/1/EM/8010/23, SNP Election Material, 'SNP Leaflet for Dundee West 1983'

<sup>499</sup> Gordon Wilson, *The Turbulent Years*, 232

<sup>500</sup> DCPCGA, 1987 General Election, 'Conservative Leaflet for Dundee East 1987'

<sup>501</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Alan McKinney

<sup>502</sup> NLS, Acc.10754/12, SNP Parliamentary Group Correspondence, 'Report from Gordon Wilson MP, Chairman, to meeting of the National Council', 1 March 1980

<sup>503</sup> NLS, Acc.13099/45, The 1987 General Election, 'SNP Press Release', 1987

outside of his constituency at all during elections.<sup>504</sup> While Gordon Wilson retained his hard-won reputation in Dundee, it was at least partly undermined by his changed circumstances during his final eight years in Parliament, despite the SNP's even greater use of this image at election times.

Indeed, such was the strength of his respect, that it endured long after his retirement from active politics. Shona Robison remarked that decades after Wilson's loss of Dundee East in 1987, there were many voters 'who had a great regard for Gordon. His name regularly comes up on the doorsteps' in her analogous Holyrood constituency.<sup>505</sup> At an even more localised level, Willie Sawers attested that the deep personal attachment Wilson developed in the Whitfield area, which Sawers has represented on the council since 1992, was the most important factor behind the development of an entrenched SNP tradition in the ward.<sup>506</sup> He clearly played an important role in bolstering the Dundee SNP, although his influence was mostly limited to his own seat. However, his presence was far from the only factor underpinning the party's achievements during the 1970s and 1980s. Indeed, studies estimate that while attentive MPs like Wilson are often able to amass substantial personal support, this would rarely result than more than a few thousand additional votes at elections.<sup>507</sup> This number was not nearly large enough to account for the SNP's achievements in Dundee East. These depended on more than simply an able candidate and a few capable individuals behind him, but relied on a very strong local party and a particular strategy that differed from that which the party adopted in most of the rest of Scotland.

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<sup>504</sup> NLS, Acc.13099/43, General Election 1979, 'Letter from Colin Bell to Stephen Maxwell, Helen Davidson, Donald Stewart, William Wolfe and Gordon Wilson', 6 April 1979

<sup>505</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Shona Robison

<sup>506</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Willie Sawers

<sup>507</sup> Pippa Norris, *British By-Elections: The Volatile Electorate* (Oxford, 1990) 177

*Organisation and the 1973 Dundee East By-election*

*1973 Dundee East By-election Result*

	Percentage Vote Share	Percentage Change from General Election
Labour	32.7	-15.6
SNP	30.2	+22.2
Conservative	25.2	-17.2
Liberal	8.3	+8.3
LPS	3.2	+3.2
Independent	0.4	+0.4

By-elections often leave little trace. It is common, even after spectacular results, for constituencies to revert to politics as usual when national trends exert themselves once more at general elections.<sup>508</sup> The SNP did not manage to defend a by-election gain until Roseanna Cunningham held on to Perth & Kinross in 1997. Yet, they are vital opportunities for smaller parties like the SNP to garner national attention and gain credibility through strong performances ahead of general elections.<sup>509</sup> The Nationalists have often been able to develop a party tradition in these seats after the contests that saw them win above-average levels of supports for decades afterwards.<sup>510</sup> In West Lothian, having not previously contested the constituency, the party developed a strong organisation and won large portions of the vote in successive elections after rising to a surprise second place finish in the seat's 1962 by-election. As was the case with Dundee East, this highlighted that parties

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<sup>508</sup> Donley T Studlar and Lee Sigelman, 'Special Elections: A Comparative Perspective', *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol 17 No 2 (1987) 248

<sup>509</sup> Frank B Feigert and Pippa Norris, 'Do By-Elections Constitute Referenda? A Four-Country Comparison', *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, Vol 15 No 2 (1990) 185

<sup>510</sup> William L Miller, *The End of British Politics?*, 1

can benefit from good showings, even when falling short of victory. Elsewhere, the party's celebrated successes in Glasgow Govan in 1973 and 1988 contributed towards the constituency's tendency to provide the Nationalists with a greater share of the vote than in other parts of Glasgow, although rarely high enough to challenge Labour's control of the seat at general elections until well into the twenty-first century. Meanwhile, the Liberal Party and their successors in the Alliance and Liberal Democrats were particularly successful at consolidating local strongholds in the aftermath of strong by-election results. Indeed, a third of the Alliance's MPs elected in the 1987 general election had originally entered Parliament through by-election triumphs.<sup>511</sup> Peter John Loewen and Frédéric Bastien pinpointed a similar ability for Canadian parties to greatly enhance their long-term prospects in given constituencies after fine by-election results. They note that after surging from a distant third place to take the Outremont constituency in the Quebec, the centre-left New Democratic Party consolidated its grip to hold on to the seat in each subsequent federal election.<sup>512</sup> With a capable team that had a great deal of organisational nous in Dundee East prior to the 1973 contest, which was further bolstered by the arrival of Gordon Wilson, the local SNP was ideally placed to take advantage of the opportunities that by-elections present. They were able to use the contest to construct the party infrastructure and develop traditions of support that were fundamental to its continued successes in the 1970s and 1980s possible, if only in one half of the city.

Rather than marking the culmination of years of development, the by-election kick-started a transformation of the SNP's local organisation. This in turn paved the way for a decade and a half of success in the eastern constituency and allowed the Nationalists to

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<sup>511</sup> Pippa Norris, *British By-Elections*, 128

<sup>512</sup> Peter John Loewen and Frédéric Bastien, '(In)significant Elections? Federal By-elections in Canada, 1963-2008', *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, Vol 43 No 1 (2010) 102

permanently establish themselves as a force in Dundee politics. Prior to the contest, the local party was in a disastrous state. The city had seen some level of SNP activity in the postwar years.<sup>513</sup> It had even been able to stand in by-elections in Dundee East in 1952 and Dundee West in 1963, although the Nationalists' performance in the latter contest was particularly disappointing as they won 7.4 per cent of the vote despite an uptick in their results in other parts of the country. Yet the party had become largely inactive in Dundee by the mid-1960s.<sup>514</sup> While this oversight was remedied when the party returned to activity in the city during the Nationalist surge of the late 1960s, the new organisation was deeply troubled in its early years. Jimmy Halliday was first 'sent by the NEC [in 1967] to investigate a dispute among party members' in Dundee and found that it was riddled by chronic infighting. Amid the acrimony, he discovered that a faction of the local party were engaged in a 'Fascist-type coup attempt' to seize complete control.<sup>515</sup> While this group was forced out, it formed its own organisation called the Labour Party of Scotland which contested elections in the city until the mid-1970s. The LPS remained troublesome for some time. Notably, its leader, George McLean, played an unlikely role in bringing down the SNP leader Arthur Donaldson. On a visit to Dundee in 1969, Donaldson received assault charges after punching McLean at a public meeting in response to the LPS man's goading taunts relating to his wife.<sup>516</sup> In electoral politics, the SNP's margin of defeat at the 1973 by-election was less than the vote won by the LPS, whose platform was almost identical. Although, as an SNP research bulletin points out, it is unclear whether the party took more votes from the SNP in light of their political similarities, or from the Labour Party as a result of confusion

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<sup>513</sup> Robert MacKay Crawford, 'The Scottish National Party, 1960-1974', 67

<sup>514</sup> Jack Brand, *The National Movement in Scotland*, 290

<sup>515</sup> James Halliday, *Yours for Scotland*, 82

<sup>516</sup> *Ibid.*, 83

over the almost identical names of the two parties and of their candidates, George Machin and George McLean respectively, on the ballot paper.<sup>517</sup>

Disputes did not end there. As the SNP did across the country, the Dundee party attracted a number of right-wingers. The local political scientist Michael Masterson noted of one candidate for the 1968 municipal elections that 'were he not SNP, I think [he] would be a Progressive'.<sup>518</sup> In Dundee, clashes between those on the right and left became a debilitating concern. In 1969, the national leadership suspended one of the city's branches.<sup>519</sup> Halliday notes that the 'constituency association [had] disintegrated' in Dundee West ahead of the 1970 general election in the face of arguments over whether the party should endorse capital punishment and Enoch Powell's uncompromising immigration policies.<sup>520</sup> Furthermore, the party lacked the professionalism of a credible force. A 1968 local election leaflet was filled with sloppy grammar and presentation. It also provided a bizarre focal point around the slogan 'good caravan sites make good profits', which rivalled or surpassed all other policy points in its prominence.<sup>521</sup> Although Alan McKinney claims that these issues, and particularly the problems with infighting, were concentrated in the western constituency party, they undoubtedly contributed towards the SNP's struggles to establish itself electorally across the city. Taking this into account, Gordon Wilson described Dundee East as 'objectively, a seat to avoid' prior to 1973.<sup>522</sup>

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<sup>517</sup> NLS, Acc.13099/97, SNP Research Bulletins 1970-1974, 'Research Bulletin April 1973'

<sup>518</sup> UD, UR-SF 45/5/3, Party political election material and articles for the Scottish National Party (S.N.P) and the Conservative Party, 'Municipal Election Meeting Notes', 30 April 1968

<sup>519</sup> Gordon Wilson, *The Turbulent Years*, 92

<sup>520</sup> James Halliday, *Yours for Scotland*, 90

<sup>521</sup> SPA, GR/SN/SNP, George Robertson, 'SNP Leaflet for Riverside 1968'

<sup>522</sup> Gordon Wilson, *The Turbulent Years*, 93

The subsequent turnaround was in large part a legacy of the by-election. Wilson himself observed the energisation the campaign brought to the local party as it benefitted from an injection of confidence and belief.<sup>523</sup> With national attention on Dundee East's organisation, the amateurism of the past was done away with. Alan McKinney describes how this was achieved. He notes that in 'large parts of the place, of the constituency, [the party was] not particularly efficient', so members from his Broughty Ferry branch 'moved into these other areas, strengthened their organisations' to provide an effective structure across Dundee East.<sup>524</sup> The *Daily Record*, expressing a sentiment held by most observers, praised the party for 'waging the most professional campaign' of the by-election.<sup>525</sup> McKinney explained that the experience of the by-election, and the two general elections of 1974, had had a tremendous impact on the local SNP as it had gone through 'two years of straight campaigning' by October 1974, during which time it had been 'gaining momentum', leaving it very well drilled.<sup>526</sup> Indeed, he claims that the Dundee East party had begun campaigning for the by-election three times a week from October 1972 and simply continued this process thereafter through the general elections.<sup>527</sup>

The party developed on the foundations it had built in the first half of the 1970s for around a decade. It became highly effective in both financing its activities and campaigning at election times. The SNP-produced *Dundee East Gazette* beamed that 'our financial position is in a very healthy state' in 1976 with five branches across the eastern constituency housing a large and active membership.<sup>528</sup> Wilson noted that at the end of the decade the

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<sup>523</sup> Ibid., 86

<sup>524</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Alan McKinney

<sup>525</sup> *Daily Record*, 26 February 1973, 4

<sup>526</sup> *Broughty Ferry Guide & Carnoustie Gazette*, 12 October 1974, 1

<sup>527</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Alan McKinney

<sup>528</sup> SPA, SPA/GW/EM/1, Gordon Wilson Papers, 'Dundee East Gazette', October 1976, 6

party in Dundee East 'was at that stage a very good organisation'.<sup>529</sup> George Galloway pointed towards this basis in explaining the SNP's retention of the seat in 1979, observing that by the end of the 1970s the SNP had 'dug in, [it] had built up a machine'.<sup>530</sup> The Nationalists opened the 1314 social club in 1979, named after the date of the medieval Battle of Bannockburn in the Scottish Wars of Independence, which encouraged a community spirit among members and brought in cash for the party.<sup>531</sup> While the SNP lurched into financial crisis across the country, Gordon Wilson cheerfully celebrated Dundee East for having 'been extremely successful in fund-raising' in 1981.<sup>532</sup> This was at a time when the national party's finances were in a perilous state, having run deficits as high as £31,500 per annum in 1979 and 1980.<sup>533</sup> In a post-election autopsy following the calamitous 1983 results, SNP election agents praised the party for their innovative tactics, highlighting the value of 'the Dundee East bus' in promoting visibility and providing a meeting site for activists and the public.<sup>534</sup> Joe FitzPatrick, who joined the SNP in Dundee East as a teenager in 1983, saw that membership had stayed resilient in the seat despite the party's chronic difficulties across Scotland in the early 1980s 'it was quite a big membership at that time'.<sup>535</sup>

The structure of the party in the city reflected the pattern of its electoral success, with the situation in its two constituencies being almost unrecognisable. As Alan McKinney describes, the two associations functioned completely separately, depicting their

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<sup>529</sup> SPA, SPA/OH/REF/NAT/YES/3, Interview with Gordon Wilson

<sup>530</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, George Galloway

<sup>531</sup> *Focus*, February 1979, 3

<sup>532</sup> UD, MS 315/2/1, Files relating to political and policy issues, 'Dundee East Review by Gordon Wilson', 16 January 1981

<sup>533</sup> Gordon Wilson, *The Turbulent Years*, 201

<sup>534</sup> NLS, Acc.13099/44, Post General Election review, correspondence and related papers, 'Report on the Election Agents Conference', June-August 1983

<sup>535</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Joe FitzPatrick

relationship as being 'same as with Angus, you know, they did their bit and we did our bit' despite sharing a compact and closely integrated city.<sup>536</sup> This point was underlined by Gordon Wilson's admission that he was completely unaware of how the SNP approached the 1979 devolution campaign in Dundee West, despite being intimately involved in his own constituency.<sup>537</sup> Ken Guild, a member of the party in Dundee West in the early 1980s before becoming a councillor in Dundee East's Broughty Ferry ward in 1984, went so far as to claim there was mutual hostility 'Dundee East sort of looked down on Dundee West and Dundee West resented the fact that Dundee East had an MP'.<sup>538</sup> This meant that the party in the west gained very little from the successes of the Dundee East SNP. Alan McKinney complained that it lacked the same spirit 'I had difficulty going to Dundee West and getting, engendering any enthusiasm' during his time as National Organiser between 1977 and 1990.<sup>539</sup> Ken Guild more bluntly labelled the Dundee West party a 'shambles'. Going into detail, he described how 'this idea of canvassing ... [was] just completely alien' with almost no doorstep work being undertaken during elections whilst the party was making a consistent weekly loss in its key fundraising activities.<sup>540</sup>

An analysis of membership records from 1988 reinforces these descriptions as it illustrates the stark difference between Dundee's two SNP organisations. In that year, Dundee East had six active branches, well above the national average of around four per constituency. In contrast, Dundee West was one of only twelve constituency branches, with one branch for the entire seat, in the whole of Scotland. Even more striking, and valuable in assessing the sizes of the constituency parties, were the raw membership statistics. In February,

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<sup>536</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Alan McKinney

<sup>537</sup> SPA, SPA/OH/REF/NAT/YES/3, Interview with Gordon Wilson

<sup>538</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Ken Guild

<sup>539</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Alan McKinney

<sup>540</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Ken Guild

admittedly just two months into the year, Dundee West had an unimpressive ten fully paid-up members while Dundee East had one of the largest paid memberships of any constituency. It had two hundred and thirty members, making it one of only four in the country to possess more than one hundred.<sup>541</sup> These statistics were all the more remarkable in that by 1988, the Dundee East SNP was already years in decline from its high point in the 1970s and early 1980s. Recalling his time in Dundee West in the early 1980s, Guild indicates that there had been a great gulf in numbers of members and activists between the seats in earlier years as well.<sup>542</sup> The remarkable difference between the SNP in the two parts of the city was one of the central causes of the divergence in the party's electoral fortunes in Dundee's otherwise very similar seats. The Nationalists in Dundee East enjoyed the benefits of a large and effectively drilled membership, which can allow political parties to be at their most effective in marshalling the greatest possible support at election times. This base also reinforces parties' claims to local credibility, aiding the Dundee East SNP's efforts to establish itself as the only effective alternative to the Labour Party.<sup>543</sup>

### *Local Government*

Gordon Wilson thought that the SNP tended to fare better in parliamentary elections in constituencies in which it maintained 'a lower council profile'.<sup>544</sup> This view was shared by other key members of the local party, with Alan McKinney stating his belief that avoiding these contests would 'hold the [SNP] vote together' for parliamentary election which were

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<sup>541</sup> Alan McKinney Papers, 'Membership Sale Records Analysis'

<sup>542</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Ken Guild

<sup>543</sup> Justin Fisher, 'Small Kingdoms and Crumbling Organisations: Examining the Variation in Constituency Party Memberships and Resources', *British Elections and Parties Review*, Vol 10 No 1 (2000) 135

<sup>544</sup> Gordon Wilson, *The Turbulent Years*, 149

viewed as being far more important 'I didn't see local government elections as being crucial from the SNP point of view'.<sup>545</sup> Consequently, the Nationalists developed a different relationship with local government in Dundee than they did in many other parts of the country during the 1970s. Although they had fought in local contests prior to the 1973 by-election, electing a councillor in 1968, they abstained from running candidates between 1973 and 1978, and only slowly began to engage thereafter.

This policy flew in the face of orthodox views of how political parties, and particularly third party challengers like the SNP, can best consolidate their position and cultivate party identification with voters. Viewing council politics as a bridge to parliamentary success had been a key part of Liberal and later Liberal Democrat strategy since the 1950s.<sup>546</sup> Indeed, their famous victory at the 1962 Orpington by-election had been preceded by concerted involvement in local elections.<sup>547</sup> Localism grew ever more in vogue in the party during the 1970s, after it adopted a 'community politics resolution' that focussed its attentions even more intently.<sup>548</sup> The SNP national leadership in the mid-1970s held a similar perspective. Gordon Murray, the Lord Provost of Cumbernauld and Interim Convenor of the party's Local Government Committee, issued a call to arms in 1973 in which he claimed that the only way to 'consolidate the upsurge in public support' the party was enjoying was to become 'an appreciable force in local government'.<sup>549</sup> This had been the basis of Murray's own success in Cumbernauld, where the party built up its support in local elections during the 1960s and took control of the council. There, it won 47.7 per cent of the vote in the

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<sup>545</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Alan McKinney

<sup>546</sup> David Cutts, 'Local Elections as a 'Stepping Stone': Does Winning Council Seats Boost the Liberal Democrats' Performance in General Elections?', *Political Studies*, Vol 62 (2014) 363

<sup>547</sup> Ken Young, 'Orpington and the 'Liberal Revival'', Chris Cook and John Ramsden (eds), *By-elections in British Politics* (London, 1997) 159

<sup>548</sup> Tudor Jones, *The Revival of British Liberalism*, 59

<sup>549</sup> NLS, Acc.10754/8, SNP Local Government 1966-1975, 'Report by Gordon Murray', 3 August 1973

local elections of 1971, the SNP's largest share in the country.<sup>550</sup> Cumbernauld then formed the bedrock of the Nationalist vote as they narrowly took the East Dunbartonshire constituency in October 1974. Many in the party shared Murray's views. The National Secretary Rosemary Hall made clear that the leadership as a whole felt the same, 'the Executive does consider that the Party should participate in local government, and that the extent of this should be as far as practicable'.<sup>551</sup> Alan McKinney highlights that 'there was quite a lot of people on the council, on the executive, who saw local government as the route' and that Dundee was outside the mainstream in shunning this approach.<sup>552</sup>

To an extent, the city was a part of a broader divide between SNP strategy in the Central Belt and the Northeast, with the party expressing greater reluctance to become involved with local government across the region.<sup>553</sup> Having already been involved in council politics in a number of localities in the 1960s and early 1970s, the party stood large numbers of candidates across the Lothian, Strathclyde, Fife and Central authorities in the 1974 council elections and won dozens of seats. Meanwhile, despite being strong enough to win five parliamentary seats in the area in October 1974, the SNP contested less than 6 per cent of the Regional and District wards in the whole of Tayside and Grampian.<sup>554</sup> This did not merely represent a divide between the apolitical local government traditions of rural Scotland and urban party politics, with both the Northeast's main cities adopting the same approach.<sup>555</sup> This points to a broader regional perspective on local government strategy.

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<sup>550</sup> NLS, Acc.10754/8, SNP Local Government 1966-1975, 'Local Election Results 1971 – Summary'

<sup>551</sup> NLS, Acc.10754/8, SNP Local Government 1966-1975, 'Letter from Rosemary Hall to Gordon Murray', 24 January 1973

<sup>552</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Alan McKinney

<sup>553</sup> Taym Saleh, 'The Decline of the Scottish Conservatives in North-East Scotland, 1965-1979: A Regional Perspective', *Parliamentary History*, Vol 36 No 2 (2017) 240

<sup>554</sup> J M Bochel and D T Denver, *Scottish District and Regional Elections 1974: Results and Statistics* (Edinburgh, 1975)

<sup>555</sup> Hugh Bochel and David Denver, 'Minor Parties and Independents in Times of Change: Scottish Local Elections 1974-2007', *Local Government Studies*, Vol 34 No 5 (2008) 590

Yet Dundee held on to the tactic longer. The rest of the Northeast saw a notable increase in the numbers of wards contested by the SNP at the 1977 District Council elections, albeit with the party standing fewer candidates than in the Central Belt, while they continued to abstain in Dundee until the following year and increased its activity at a slower pace into the 1980s.<sup>556</sup>

Despite widespread scepticism over the tactic from the national leadership, the party benefited from it in the short-term. It allowed the Dundee SNP to remain above the world of Dundee's particularly murky local politics. This was a sentiment Willie Sawers referred to 'if we become a part of it, you know, we might get tarred with the same brush'.<sup>557</sup> It also allowed the Dundee party to escape some of the issues faced by the SNP elsewhere in Scotland. Since the party had begun to elect large numbers of councillors from the late 1960s, their poor behaviour and amateurism had been a frequent source of embarrassment.<sup>558</sup> Billy Wolfe supported this in a memorandum analysing the 1979 general election, arguing that 'groups of members portrayed the party in an inept and unreliable way ... in local government'.<sup>559</sup> A further internal review written the same year complained that 'some councillors have little or no knowledge of the details of SNP policies' and possessed serious problems with 'discipline', while 'disputes within council groups are becoming common'.<sup>560</sup> The political scientists John Bochel and David Denver concurred that this was adversely affecting the party electorally. They pointed to the poor performance of the large number of SNP councillors elected in 1977 as playing a part in the Nationalists'

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<sup>556</sup> J M Bochel and D T Denver, *Scottish District Elections 1977: Results and Statistics* (Edinburgh, 1977)

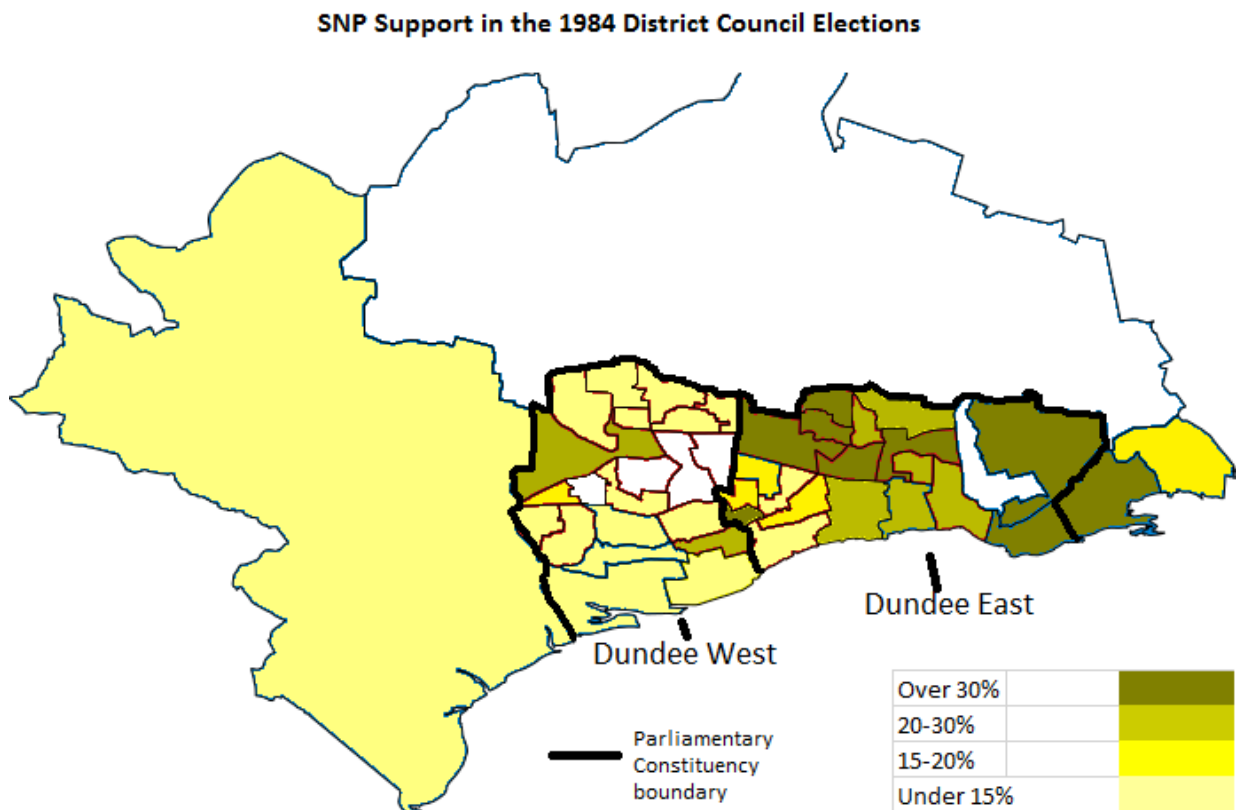
<sup>557</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Willie Sawers

<sup>558</sup> James Mitchell, *Strategies for Self-Government*, 211

<sup>559</sup> NLS, Acc. 13417/21, Memorandum of Billy Wolfe analysing SNP results at the UK General Election, 'Comment on SNP Results and Matter Affecting Them', 12 May 1979

<sup>560</sup> NLS, Acc.10090/144, Local Government Policy Papers, 'A Review of SNP Activity in Local Government', January 1979

slump in popularity at the end of the decade.<sup>561</sup> William Miller even inferred that there was an inverse relationship between areas in which the SNP enjoyed success in local elections and those where it performed well at general elections.<sup>562</sup> By standing aside, the Dundee party was also able to avoid such difficulties and remain aloof from the divisive tasks of administration.



Even after the party reversed its policy, they entered into council politics hesitantly. Daniel Hood, an SNP candidate for the 1980 District Council elections, noted that the party in Dundee and Angus had a deliberate policy of limiting the number of seats they contested in an effort to improve the quality of candidates they selected.<sup>563</sup> The seats that were fought continued to direct the party's focus to the east. This both strengthened the Nationalist

<sup>561</sup> J M Bochel and D T Denver, 'The Regional Elections of May 1978', *The Scottish Government Yearbook*, (1979) 154

<sup>562</sup> William L Miller, *The End of British Politics?*, 202

<sup>563</sup> *Courier & Advertiser*, 14 April 1980, 8

tradition in Wilson's constituency and took advantage of the party infrastructure that had already been built there. However, it was also motivated by the scepticism of activists in the west of the value of fighting these elections, which Ken Guild saw persist longer than in the eastern constituency.<sup>564</sup> In the 1980 District election, twice as many candidates were put up within the boundaries of Dundee East as in Dundee West. Although they eventually extended their activity westward, the party remained far more successful in the east. This was illustrated by the results of the 1984 election. Contesting all but one ward in Dundee East, the party's average vote stood at a credible 30.6 per cent. Yet in Dundee West, where it failed to contest four wards, the Nationalists' average even fell below that of the Alliance at just 11 per cent in the wards it fought. The mirroring of the divergence in the SNP vote in the two parts of the city at local as well as parliamentary elections makes clear that the differences between the seats extended deeper than the personal appeal of Gordon Wilson, which was of much less relevance in council elections than in parliamentary contests.

The SNP's generally poor performance in these early contests were used by their opponents to undermine the Nationalists and bolster their own confidence ahead of parliamentary votes, partly justifying local reticence. Gearing up for the coming general election, Labour's George Galloway postulated in 1978 that 'Gordon Wilson must be shaking in his shoes. He personally endorsed all the SNP candidates – and all of them have been emphatically rejected'.<sup>565</sup> He was joined in this by Teddy Taylor, a leading Scottish Conservative MP, who sought to use the same results to undermine the Nationalists' claim to be Labour's leading challengers in the city 'on the basis of the superb Regional Council

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<sup>564</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Ken Guild

<sup>565</sup> *Courier & Advertiser*, 3 May 1978, 5

results in Dundee East, I'm confident we can win in Dundee East [at the next general election]'.<sup>566</sup>

Despite some advantages, the party's local government policy had an adverse effect on the enthusiasm of the party's activist base. By leaving them without any elections to fight for an extended period, the Nationalists allowed members' passions to dampen and interest to fade, undermining the momentum that had previously been built up.<sup>567</sup> They also lost the valuable opportunity to use these contests to build up a stronger identification between themselves and the electorate, a strategy that had aided the SNP in other parts of the country, and many other parties elsewhere. Furthermore, they neglected the chance to use the council as a means of developing local leaders who could succeed the generation that had buttressed Gordon Wilson's initial breakthrough in the mid-1970s. Although it aided the SNP in the short term, the policy undermined Dundonian Nationalism's efforts to put down lasting roots, contributing to its weaker performance after its initial successes began to fade.

### *Ideology*

The Dundee SNP, at the very least in the east of the city, enjoyed a level of ideological coherence that the Nationalists possessed in few other parts of Scotland. As they rode to their greatest successes in the mid-1970s, the party had left the infighting of the previous decade behind. It was unified around a relatively consistent, politically moderate,

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<sup>566</sup> *Evening Telegraph*, 1 May 1979, 10

<sup>567</sup> Andrew Murray Scott, *Modern Dundee*, 123

consensus that held into the 1980s. In large part, this ideology was derived from Gordon Wilson, whose opinions set a course for the wider party. George Galloway recalls the way in which the party as whole took its lead from him ‘the SNP in Dundee was overwhelmingly like [Wilson] and supported him’.<sup>568</sup> Wilson’s ideology was often misinterpreted as Conservative-leaning by their Labour opponents, with John McAllion claiming that ‘the role [the SNP] played in Dundee at that time was pretty right-wing’.<sup>569</sup> Similarly, the Labour MP George Foulkes described Gordon Wilson as hailing from ‘the reactionary wing of his party’.<sup>570</sup> Although his comments were intended to be disparaging, George Galloway’s portrayal of Wilson’s politics as ‘localism, populism, anti-Labourism’, was closer to the truth.<sup>571</sup> His localist identity, derived from an unrelenting advocacy of Dundee’s interests in Parliament, was a common characteristic of third party MPs seeking to consolidate their positions. The populist and anti-Labour features described by Galloway formed a centrist ideology that in Dundee was primarily aimed against the city’s dominant Labour Party. Nationally, Wilson was one of the SNP’s leading moderate figures and a perennial critic of those seeking to fix the party to either a left or right-wing identity. He studiously set out a centrist course for the party, attesting ‘the SNP stood on neither the left nor the right’.<sup>572</sup> Between 1974 and 1979, while a part of the SNP’s large parliamentary group, he maintained precise records to prove the party’s even-handedness in voting as often with the government as they did with the opposition.<sup>573</sup> The *Evening Telegraph* approvingly agreed that he was ‘regarded as “middle of the road” politically’.<sup>574</sup> His leanings were illustrated by criticism he received from the left in his own party. William Wolfe, the SNP’s leader during the 1970s and a standard-bearer of the Nationalist left, criticised Wilson for

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<sup>568</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, George Galloway

<sup>569</sup> Bill Knox Interviews, John McAllion

<sup>570</sup> *House of Commons Hansard*, Deb 3 March 1983, Vol 38 Col 447

<sup>571</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, George Galloway

<sup>572</sup> *Courier & Advertiser*, 19 February 1974, 8

<sup>573</sup> Gordon Wilson, *The Turbulent Years*, 129

<sup>574</sup> *Evening Telegraph*, 18 May 1983, 9

his 'dismissal as irrelevant the class struggle'.<sup>575</sup> The leftist 79 Group were particularly damning, addressing him sarcastically as 'our glorious leader' and mocking his perceived conservatism.<sup>576</sup>

The ascendancy of Wilson's ideology in the Dundee SNP was accentuated by the fact that his views were in tune with other leading party members. While James Halliday stood further to the left, he shared many of the same views as the Dundee East MP. Throughout his career he condemned class politics and loudly announced his support for NATO, going against the grain of many within the party.<sup>577</sup> Indeed, during the 1980s, he was one of the earliest supporters of the Campaign for Nationalism, a grouping established to combat factionalism and any diversion from the aim of independence threatened by the likes of the 79 Group.<sup>578</sup> Alan McKinney's politics were even more closely aligned with Wilson's, as he decisively rejected a left-wing vision for the SNP either nationally or in Dundee.<sup>579</sup> Jim Fairlie was also at home with the Gordon Wilson approach. He joined other leading lights in Dundee as he denounced left-wing 'utilitarian Nationalism' in favour of a traditionalist 'freedom for its own sake' perspective. His eventual exit from the SNP was in part motivated by the former's rise within the party.<sup>580</sup>

This perspective went further than the leadership. In 1980, the SNP branch in Tayport, a commuter town adjacent to Dundee across the Tay, described the 79 Group and their

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<sup>575</sup> NLS, Acc.13099/3, Political Correspondence November 1971 – June 1973, 'Letter from William Wolfe to Gordon Wilson'

<sup>576</sup> NLS, Acc.11565/23, 79 Group Papers 1979-82, '79 Group News', July-August 1981, 6

<sup>577</sup> UD, MS 315/4/4, Dundee District Councillors 1987, 'Senior SNP official resigns over defence policy', 21 October 1986

<sup>578</sup> Paula Sommerville, 'James Halliday', 211

<sup>579</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Alan McKinney

<sup>580</sup> SPA, SPA/GW/STRAT/3, Gordon Wilson Papers, 'SNP Pamphlet by Jim Fairlie'

socialist ideals as ‘repugnant to the peoples of Scotland’.<sup>581</sup> A 1979 leaflet produced in the city denounced ‘the class war’ as well as ‘ideologies’ in general, promoting the local leadership’s centrist perspective.<sup>582</sup> The contrast between the Dundee and Glasgow parties’ attitudes towards protest movements was also telling. While in Glasgow the SNP enthusiastically participated in demonstrations against Margaret Thatcher’s government and public spending cuts, the Dundee party maintained a policy of only appearing on ‘non-political’ platforms until the early 1980s.<sup>583</sup> John McAllion recalls that in the late 1970s, the local SNP showed no interest in recruiting himself or other members of the collapsing Scottish Labour Party, a short lived but well-publicised left-wing nationalist splinter from the Labour Party proper, who instead went over en-block to the Dundee Labour Party.<sup>584</sup> This approach marked it out from other parts of the country where the SNP brought in many prominent Scottish Labour Party members, including its leader Jim Sillars and the future Scottish Government minister Alex Neil.<sup>585</sup> The local party also showed limited interest in Sillars’ civil disobedience campaign of the early 1980s, that had called for physical resistance to the government and its refusal to grant Scotland devolution, with activists warning that this campaign risked giving the SNP a ‘harsh uncongenial image’.<sup>586</sup> An embittered former SNP councillor who defected to Labour during the strife of the 1980s played upon this image of the party ‘the SNP in Tayside are nothing more than Tories’.<sup>587</sup> As Alan McKinney describes, the dominance of this moderate perspective was based on the

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<sup>581</sup> Andrew Marr, *The Battle for Scotland*, 189

<sup>582</sup> DCPCGA, 1979 Scottish Assembly Referendum, ‘SNP Leaflet for Dundee 1979’

<sup>583</sup> *Dundee Standard*, 18 March 1980, 2

<sup>584</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, John McAllion

<sup>585</sup> Gerry Hassan, ‘Jim Sillars’, James Mitchell and Gerry Hassan (eds), *Scottish National Party Leaders*, 416

<sup>586</sup> NLS, Acc.13099/44, Post General Election review, correspondence and related papers, June-August 1983, ‘Letter from Neil R MacCallum to Gordon Wilson’, 24 June 1983

<sup>587</sup> DCL, LHC 373 (17), The Lamb Collection, ‘Labour Leaflet for Dundee East 1983’

continued involvement of a core of 'activists in Dundee that were still from the time [he] was there' in the 1970s through into the following decade.<sup>588</sup>

Importantly, the party's unity behind a moderate ethos shielded it from the vicious factionalism that griped the SNP in the years after 1979, when radicals of both the left and right in the form of the 79 Group and Siol nan Gaidheal plagued the party across much of Scotland. As Jimmy Halliday remarked, 'Dundee East was not worst affected by this blight'.<sup>589</sup> Although Gordon Wilson admits that these disruptive factions, of both the left and the right, did have a presence in the city, they were weaker in Dundee than they were in much of the rest of the country.<sup>590</sup> Indeed, Ken Guild observed that 'there wasn't any great support for either the 79 Group or Siol nan Gaidheal in either of the Dundee constituencies'.<sup>591</sup> Both factions were predominantly rooted in the Central Belt, as Donald Stewart observed when discussing the rise of these groups 'I have the impression that members and branches from outside the Central Belt of Scotland have little idea of what's going on in the Central Belt, where the population and foolishness are'.<sup>592</sup> Stewart's intuition was supported by the records of both factions. In 1981, 118 of the 79 Group's 160 members lived in the Strathclyde and Lothian Regions, with just 7 in the whole of Tayside.<sup>593</sup> Similarly, by 1980 Siol nan Gaidheal had developed branches in Ayr, Prestwick, Glasgow, Edinburgh and Stirling but had none in the North of the country, with its activities

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<sup>588</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Alan McKinney

<sup>589</sup> James Halliday, *Yours for Scotland*, 118

<sup>590</sup> Gordon Wilson, *The Turbulent Years*, 209

<sup>591</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Ken Guild

<sup>592</sup> NLS, Acc.13099/8, Political Correspondence 1980-1981, 'Letter from Donald Stewart to Gordon Wilson', 9 February 1981

<sup>593</sup> NLS, Acc.11565/23, 79 Group Papers 1979-82, '79 Group Secretary's Report', September 1981

concentrated on the West Coast in particular.<sup>594</sup> With this infighting reduced, the party was able to function more effectively than most other local SNP associations.

Crucially, it also allowed it to campaign on a clear, consistent and unambiguously moderate platform in elections. Aping the language of the Liberals, a 1979 campaign leaflet for Dundee East assured voters that ‘the SNP is free of the extremism of the left and right now found in both the Labour and Tory parties’.<sup>595</sup> This was emphasised at all levels of government, and in every part of the city. A local election leaflet for prosperous Broughty Ferry claimed ‘the modern SNP is a moderate, left-of-centre party’ in 1980.<sup>596</sup> In the working class Hilltown, the party portrayed itself as a sensible ‘real alternative to the “Loony Left” Labour administration in charge of the District Council, imploring moderate electors to rally behind them in 1984.’<sup>597</sup> In the same year, this message was also deployed in Midmill, the poorest ward in the city, where the SNP claimed to be the sole party to ‘represent the Moderate Left of Scottish Politics’.<sup>598</sup> This vision was closely aligned to the language that Gordon Wilson had used to describe the SNP on a national level after becoming leader in 1979.<sup>599</sup> The clarity of the public image the Nationalists portrayed at this time was crucial to their ability to fulfil a centrist political space in Dundee that allowed it to rally opposition to the city’s radicalised Labour Party around itself.

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<sup>594</sup> NLS, Acc. 13099/19, Siol nan Gaidheal 1979-1982, ‘Report on SNG’, 1980

<sup>595</sup> NLS, Acc.13687/10, Gordon Wilson election campaign literature, ‘SNP Leaflet for Dundee East 1979’

<sup>596</sup> SPA, SPA/GW/EM/1, Gordon Wilson Papers, ‘SNP Leaflet for Broughty Ferry 1980’

<sup>597</sup> UD, MS 325 Box 10, Dundee City Labour Party Papers, ‘SNP Leaflet for Hilltown 1984’

<sup>598</sup> NLS, Acc.13687/11, SNP leaflets, flyers, newsletters, ephemera and badges, ‘SNP Leaflet for Midmill 1984’

<sup>599</sup> James Mitchell, *Strategies for Self-Government*, 232

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, devolution was a point of fierce contention within the SNP. This had the potential to cause internal problems in Dundee, especially in light of the activity of Jim Fairlie. He was one of the SNP's most committed critics of the scheme presented in the 1979 devolution referendum, as Gordon Wilson noted 'Jim Fairlie was completely and utterly hostile to devolution'.<sup>600</sup> However, possible conflict was diminished by the dimmer passions of the city's devolutionist wing. Across Scotland, the greatest enthusiasts for the Scottish Assembly tended to be those on the party's social-democratic left.<sup>601</sup> Their comparative weakness in Dundee meant that this issue did not prove as divisive as it might otherwise have been. The prominence of equivocating language in its literature for the 1979 referendum highlighted the lack of enthusiasm in the local party.<sup>602</sup> The Dundee East constituency party chairman observed that the party was able to mobilise far fewer activists for the referendum than during general election campaigns and that members appeared to have only limited interest.<sup>603</sup> Gordon Wilson notes that, while supporting devolution himself, he deliberately led the party in Dundee East away from the issue during the 1979 general election, at a time when the policy had grown controversial among activists following the referendum months before.<sup>604</sup> This contrasted with the party's national campaign, which centred itself around a narrative of betrayal over Labour's handling of the issue.<sup>605</sup> This was partly due to concern among activists that devolution was a distraction from the pursuit of independence. But it also reflected an understanding that the SNP's electorate in Dundee encompassed many individuals who backed the party despite its Nationalist politics rather than because of them, as Gordon Wilson pointed out 'there was a lot of hostility among the electorate to devolution, including some people who

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<sup>600</sup> SPA, SPA/OH/REF/NAT/YES/3, Interview with Gordon Wilson

<sup>601</sup> Jim Phillips, *The Industrial Politics of Devolution*, 171

<sup>602</sup> DCPCGA, 1979 Scottish Assembly Referendum, 'SNP Leaflet for Dundee 1979'

<sup>603</sup> John Berridge and Mona Clark, 'Campaigns in the Cities: Dundee', 67

<sup>604</sup> Gordon Wilson, *The Turbulent Years*, 197

<sup>605</sup> Peter Lynch, *The History of the Scottish National Party*, 155

would vote for me'.<sup>606</sup> By putting less emphasis on the issue, the Dundee SNP further flattened the party's radical image and made it easier for moderate voters to support them, regardless of their opinions on self-government.

### *Conclusion*

From the mid-1970s to the early 1980s, the Dundee SNP was in a very healthy state. It housed a collection of highly capable individuals, was enviably well organised, largely avoided the difficulties associated with local government and was unified around a clear and consistent message which informed its strategy and carved out a fruitful electoral role. These local advantages were the foundation of the Nationalists' achievements through this period. The correlation between the party's pattern of electoral support within the city, with a far better record in the east than the west, and its focus of talents, interest and energy is telling. Although Dundee West and Dundee East were not identical, they processed very similar social compositions and shared all the same peculiarities and experiences that mark Dundee out from the rest of Scotland. The scale of the divergence between the two can only be adequately explained by the interaction of political forces on the ground and in this the presence of both Gordon Wilson and a particularly good party structure in Dundee East and weak one in Dundee West, both results of the 1973 by-election, are the most decisive.

The party's achievements during this period laid critical foundations that underlined all subsequent successes that the SNP have managed to achieve in Dundee, marking the

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<sup>606</sup> SPA, SPA/OH/REF/NAT/YES/3, Interview with Gordon Wilson

beginning of a dependable local Nationalist tradition. The echoes of the 1970s and early 1980s were pointed to by local political actors in the twenty first century. Fraser MacPherson, Dundee's leading Liberal Democrat councillor, points out how the SNP 'had credibility' among the electorate as a result of its previous history of electoral achievement that survived the less auspicious years that followed.<sup>607</sup> Meanwhile, Shona Robison notes that the Wilson years left behind a positive memory of the party that she latched upon as the SNP reasserted itself as a challenger for power in the city: 'there was a residual respect for the SNP that Gordon Wilson had built up. So we weren't starting from zero. There was a history of people voting SNP'.<sup>608</sup> The party's rise from the end of the 1990s would have been far more precarious without this inheritance.

### **The Second Period, mid-1980s to the late 1990s**

From the mid-1980s, the once excellent condition of the SNP in the Dundee East constituency noticeably deteriorated. Talented individuals either retired or moved away and were succeeded by less able replacements, and with them went much of the party's organisational basis. Its late arrival to the world of Dundee local politics also meant that they were faced with many of the teething issues that most of the rest of the country had dealt with in previous decades, at this much later stage. The ideological conflicts that had been averted in the past hit with force from the middle of the 1980s, leading to strife and tactical confusion as the party reoriented its ideology and approach, at the same time witnessing a transition in its electoral base. These local difficulties, and the Dundee party's struggles to adjust to changes in the SNP occurring at a national level, led to a flattening of

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<sup>607</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Fraser MacPherson

<sup>608</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Shona Robison

the Nationalists' support across the city and a decline in its parliamentary results in Dundee East relative to the rest of Scotland from the late 1980s through the 1990s. In this period, some of the exceptional aspects of the city's politics faded, and it moved more closely in line with the political patterns of Labour-dominated West-Central Scotland.

### *The Role of Individuals & Activism*

As the old guard that had cemented the SNP in Dundee East left active politics, the individuals that came to the fore were rarely of the same ability. John McAllion highlighted this problem as being important to his own party's successes in the period 'there was no recognisable other character [after Gordon Wilson] ... there was no one really locally you could stand out and say they represent the SNP'.<sup>609</sup> Ken Guild struck a similar note as he observed that although there remained talented members in the city party, there was 'no obvious person coming through the ranks locally' who could take on this frontline role.<sup>610</sup> Figures of the calibre of Gordon Wilson and Jimmy Halliday in particular would have been difficult to replace in any context, yet there is an indication that trouble extended deeper. Gordon Wilson lamented 'there had been no infusion of new talent' in the Dundee party after its mid-1970s successes at either the leadership level or among lower ranking activists.<sup>611</sup> He further posits that this was partly a result of the city's ongoing depopulation at this time, which led to many individuals moving away.<sup>612</sup> Yet emigration was an issue faced across much of industrial Scotland in this period. Indeed, the situation was markedly more serious in Glasgow, as its population dropped by 37.2 per cent between 1971 and

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<sup>609</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, John McAllion

<sup>610</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Ken Guild

<sup>611</sup> Gordon Wilson, *The Turbulent Years*, 232

<sup>612</sup> *Ibid.*, 232

2001 while Dundee's fell by 21.3 per cent. Yet few other local parties experienced the same sort of decline that Dundee East endured.

The rise of David Coutts to become one of the most senior Nationalists in the city by the early 1990s, following his election to the council in 1984, typified the deterioration in the quality of local leadership. Leading the party's council group from 1984, he soon emerged as the second most recognisable figure in the city party after Gordon Wilson himself.

Coutts went on to stand as the SNP candidate for Dundee East at the 1992 general election, at a time when the seat was regarded as one of the party's best prospects in Scotland and at an election in which their vote share rose markedly.<sup>613</sup> Requiring a swing of just 1.2 per cent to win the seat, the SNP would have won it comfortably had the Dundee result come close to matching the national trend. He certainly bore some responsibility for the failure at this crucial juncture, as the Nationalists were not only unable to retake the constituency, but saw their vote plunge by 6.7 per cent. His opponent, John McAllion, described Coutts as a 'very bad candidate for the SNP', identifying him as key to Labour's victory.<sup>614</sup> Ken Guild, who worked alongside him in the tiny SNP District Council group between 1984 and 1992, cuttingly labelled him an 'embarrassment'.<sup>615</sup> Coutts had been involved in a number of small scandals during his time on the council that together promoted an unscrupulous picture of himself and his party.<sup>616</sup> In 1984, Ernie Ross had written to Gordon Wilson to complain that Coutts retained 'an association with common criminals' after he worked alongside the ex-Labour councillor James L Stewart, recently released from prison after being convicted for corruption in 1980, in distributing anti-Labour propaganda.<sup>617</sup> Having

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<sup>613</sup> *Herald*, 2 April 1992, 4

<sup>614</sup> SPA, SPA/OH/REF/NAT/YES/9, Interview with John McAllion

<sup>615</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Ken Guild

<sup>616</sup> *Courier & Advertiser*, 31 March 1988

<sup>617</sup> UD, MS 315/4/1, Dundee District Councillors 1984, 'Ernie Ross Letter to Gordon Wilson', 25 September 1984

raised the ire of the Labour Party, Coutts was barraged by personal attacks. One councillor raged that 'Mr Coutts is a thief. He was convicted of theft in 1980. He was convicted of vandalism in 1981'.<sup>618</sup> While these charges were explained away by the SNP as minor offences that were the result of youthful indiscretions, the reputational impact had already been made. Helen Wright, a Labour councillor since 1980, noted that his actions became a convenient tool with which Labour could muddy the Nationalists' clean-cut image, which had previously been an important part of their political identity in Dundee.<sup>619</sup> Coutts also held polarising opinions, John McAllion pointing to his opposition to attempts to give Nelson Mandela the freedom of the city.<sup>620</sup> Joe FitzPatrick, whose first involvement in politics was through the 1980s anti-Apartheid movement, described this as 'a strange position' that was not widely shared in the SNP.<sup>621</sup> He even contrived to provide the Labour Party with a simple line of attack when he moved away from the city but refused to resign his council seat for two years, as a 1994 leaflet intoned 'which party's councillor deserted his constituents?'<sup>622</sup>

Coutts was one of very few leaders to emerge in the Dundee party during this period, as it struggled to either discover talent locally or attract prominent national figures as it had in the past. Guild confessed that Coutts' selection in 1992 had been a symptom of the party's weakness: 'we didn't have all that many people with high profiles at that time'.<sup>623</sup> The only other councillor elected alongside Coutts in 1984, Neil MacAlinden, resigned before the end of the year having struggled to cope with his position.<sup>624</sup> Ken Guild, who retained the

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<sup>618</sup> UD, MS 315/4/1, Dundee District Councillors 1984, 'Courier & Advertiser Clipping', September 1984

<sup>619</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Helen Wright

<sup>620</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, John McAllion

<sup>621</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Joe FitzPatrick

<sup>622</sup> DCPCGA, 1994 Regional Elections, 'Labour Leaflet for Dundee 1994'

<sup>623</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Ken Guild

<sup>624</sup> *Courier & Advertiser*, 13 December 1984, 5

seat for the SNP in the resulting by-election, confessed that MacAlinden had been 'out of his depth' pointing to an incident in which he made himself an open target for the party's opponents by expressing sympathy for Basque separatists who were then engaged in a long running terrorist campaign.<sup>625</sup> Guild himself eventually developed into one of the leading members in the local party and led the SNP's administration on Dundee City Council between 2009 and 2017. Yet his potential role in this earlier period was limited by his parliamentary ambitions elsewhere, which saw him stand without success in Gordon in 1983 and North Tayside in 1987. In the latter contest, he stood in one of the SNP's top target seats, with the party openly predicting a victory in the lead-up to the election that would have seen him leave Dundee politics forever.<sup>626</sup> Guild's position in the council group was later disrupted by the loss of his Broughty Ferry seat to the Conservatives between 1992 and 1995. Even as the party consistently built up its vote in local elections through the 1980s and 1990s, it struggled to win seats under first-past-the-post. Many of the small handful of representatives it elected were left overstretched in trying to keep the party operational to attempt to present themselves as leaders.

The Nationalists' electoral success was also constrained by the organisational decay of the party in Dundee East. In a pre-election meeting conducted in 1987, the Dundee East Constituency Association warned 'in general, the constituency was in bad shape', faced with a lack of organisation, little action by its activists and the loss of capable individuals, with Jimmy Halliday's resignation doing the greatest damage.<sup>627</sup> In his report to the SNP NEC, Alan McKinney pointed to a clear and substantial drop in activity 'the situation was so serious, that they had closed the campaign rooms to put as many people on the street as

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<sup>625</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Ken Guild

<sup>626</sup> DCPCGA, 1987 General Election, 'SNP Pamphlet 1987'

<sup>627</sup> UD, MS 315/3/5, Dundee East: General Election 1987, 'Dundee East Constituency Association – Minutes of Annual General Meeting', 8 March 1987

possible. On a good night there had been 12 to 18 people out working and that was on average 5 fewer than in the '83 election'.<sup>628</sup> Indeed, a consistent drop in party membership had concerned him in the years leading up to Gordon Wilson's loss, blaming ideological tensions for driving away older members.<sup>629</sup> This process continued, with Willie Sawers pointing to 'a general decline in activism' in the years after that defeat and into the 1990s that left those few that remained involved working a 'pretty lonely furrow'.<sup>630</sup> Joe FitzPatrick supports this description, claiming that 'in the early 90s [membership] was probably at its lowest'.<sup>631</sup> The political machine of previous years was coming to a shuddering halt. Critically, this limited the party's campaigning ability in elections and put significant strain on its remaining activists.

These changes principally affected the east of the city. In the west, the contrast to the preceding period was much less severe. Although the constituency did not draw the candidates of national standing it had enjoyed in general elections in the 1970s and early 1980s, the Nationalist organisation there had been much weaker to begin with and did not face the loss of stalwart members of the level seen in Dundee East. Meanwhile, although the constituency parties stayed distinct, Ken Guild observed that the years after Gordon Wilson's defeat in 1987 saw the easing of tensions between them and the tentative beginning of Dundee-wide co-operation.<sup>632</sup> The smoother transition the SNP in the west of the city experienced during this period was the chief factor that led to the levelling off in the disparity in the SNP's fortunes across Dundee. Even as the party's electoral support remained higher in the east and most of its councillors elected during this period hailed

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<sup>628</sup> Alan McKinney Papers, 'Presentation to the NEC', 20 June 1987

<sup>629</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Alan McKinney

<sup>630</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Willie Sawers

<sup>631</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Joe FitzPatrick

<sup>632</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Ken Guild

from the seat, the two were more balanced than they had been at any point since the 1973 by-election.

### *Local Government*

Although Ken Guild claims that arguments over the value of contesting local elections persisted through the decade, the SNP entered council politics in force in the 1980s.<sup>633</sup> From the 1982 Regional elections onwards, they contested almost all of the city's wards in each local election. Through the 1980s and 1990s, their share of the vote in these contests rose substantially. However, this did not result in a great rise in its number of elected representatives in Dundee. Having won two councillors at the 1984 District elections, its first since the 1960s, the party's progress was slow. It won six in the 1992 District election but just three in 1995, the first election to the new City Council. This was mirrored at the Regional level, as the party won a single seat in 1986 before losing it in 1990 and winning three in the final Regional elections in 1994, during which it won brief control of the Tayside Region prior to its abolition the following year. However, only one of these seats was in the city of Dundee proper, with two of the SNP's 1994 councillors representing rural areas that had been peripheral to the Dundee District and were transferred to Angus when local government was reorganised in 1995. Overall, despite winning substantial shares of the vote in council elections through this period, the party had just a handful of councillors. This lack of representatives left the Dundee SNP cut off from a key means of developing local leaders, and undermined their ability to connect with issues within communities.

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<sup>633</sup> Ibid.

With its delayed entry into council politics, the Dundee SNP also experienced the same growing pains that many other local parties had passed through in the 1970s. After his election in 1984, Neil MacAlinden admitted that he and David Coutts were totally 'unprepared' for involvement in local government. He called for the party to professionalise its selection processes and offer to train candidates for office.<sup>634</sup> These two councillors were unfortunate to enter office at a time when the SNP's support for local government representatives was at its absolute weakest point, following on from its steep electoral decline. In the absence of any older councillors who could provide advice and direction, and were invaluable to training Nationalist representatives elected elsewhere in these years, MacAlinden and Coutts were left especially unsupported.<sup>635</sup> Initiatives to turn around these issues aided the party's maturation in local elections over the following years, a process that could have begun much sooner. As Wilson had predicted in the 1970s when justifying the Dundee party's abstention from local elections, full participation in this level of governance 'forced [the SNP] to implement unpopular measures' and take sides in polarising disputes.<sup>636</sup> The most serious such incident occurred in 1989, when the Nationalist group on the Tayside Regional Council caused controversy both internally and in the press over their decision to 'back Tories in awarding a cleaning contract to an English firm which brought job losses'.<sup>637</sup> This decision was seen as a necessity in governing the region, but cracked open divisions in both the party and its voter base, putting stress on both its internal unity and electoral coalition in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

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<sup>634</sup> UD, MS 315/4/1, Dundee District Councillors 1984, 'Letter from Dundee District Council SNP Group', 24 June 1984

<sup>635</sup> Clive Martlew, *Local Democracy in Practise: The Role and Working Environment of Councillors in Scotland* (Aldershot, 1988) 142

<sup>636</sup> UD, MS 315/4/5, Local Government 1988-1990, 'Tayside Region Press Release by Dan Hood', 21 June 1989

<sup>637</sup> *Courier & Advertiser*, 26 April 1990, 12

### *Factionalism and Ideological Change*

While the ideological conflicts that nearly tore the SNP apart in the early 1980s were to some extent postponed in Dundee, the city party felt the full force of bitter internal conflict later in the decade. This had a destructive impact on its electoral appeal, preventing it from benefiting from the improvement in the national party's image through the late 1980s and early 1990s. During the 1980s, the SNP had undergone a significant transition across Scotland as its nationwide membership and leadership group grew increasingly left-wing, defining themselves in opposition to the Conservative government in Westminster. By 1985, Jim Fairlie warned that 'the self-styled left' had come to dominate even the upper echelons of the party, noting that 'of the ten elected members [of the National Executive Committee] seven were quite definitely in the [left-wing] Sillars camp'.<sup>638</sup> This was reflected in the adoption of centre-left policies, as the party began to assume an explicitly social-democratic identity. The new position was most clearly underlined after the adoption of a militant policy calling for the non-payment of the poll tax, the controversial form of local taxation introduced to Scotland in 1989.<sup>639</sup> This was an approach that was rejected as too radical by all other major parties and civic organisations in the country, including the Labour Party.<sup>640</sup> Former members of the 79 Group reached lofty positions in the party, with Alex Salmond succeeding Gordon Wilson as leader in 1990 and Jim Sillars becoming his Deputy in 1991. It was during this period that Scottish Nationalism moved away from its

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<sup>638</sup> NLS, Acc.13417/16, Correspondence 1975-2008 concerning political matters, 'Jim Fairlie Letter to Gordon Wilson', 14 October 1985

<sup>639</sup> NLS, Acc.13491/2, SNP committee meeting notes, 'SNP Poll Tax Leaflet'

<sup>640</sup> Ewan Gibbs, 'Civic Scotland versus Communities on Clydeside: poll tax non-payment c.1987-1990', *Scottish Labour History Society*, (2014) 95

history as a disparate and ill-defined ideology in favour of a dominant centre-left orthodoxy.<sup>641</sup>

As this wider shift to the left asserted itself locally the party in Dundee began to change. As a result, the centrist local party establishment felt threatened and disenfranchised, as it clashed with a new generation of enthusiastic left-wing activists. In his report to the NEC examining the loss of Dundee East, Alan McKinney bemoaned that by 1987 'the level of aggression from one Nationalist to another was simply deplorable' in the constituency party.<sup>642</sup> Jimmy Halliday lamented the changing character of the local party in the mid-1980s and reinforced McKinney's depiction, as he claimed his 'role as Dundee East Constituency Association Chairman was becoming increasingly unpleasant. I had to accept that the really active members did not share my opinions'. Instead, the left had become increasingly powerful.<sup>643</sup> Alan McKinney warned that conflicts had led to a situation in which many previously active members 'simply stopped attending meetings'.<sup>644</sup> Meanwhile, Willie Sawers admits that younger activists like himself were frustrated with the divergence between their own perspective and that of the aging local leadership, noting of Halliday that he was 'clearly a very different generation to people like myself, but people had different views on how the party should progress'.<sup>645</sup>

From the late 1980s into the 1990s, many testify to the severity of the conflicts afflicting the local party. Councillors, grandees and rank and file members were divided over the

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<sup>641</sup> Ben Jackson, 'The Political Thought of Scottish Nationalism', *The Political Quarterly*, Vol 85 No 1 (2014) 50

<sup>642</sup> Alan McKinney Papers, 'Presentation to the NEC', 20 June 1987

<sup>643</sup> James Halliday, *Yours for Scotland*, 124

<sup>644</sup> Alan McKinney Papers, 'Presentation to the NEC', 20 June 1987

<sup>645</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Willie Sawers

extent the SNP should primarily be anti-Conservative, or hold the two main parties in equal contempt. The *Courier* described 'differences between SNP factions in Dundee and the districts' during the 1986 Regional elections as indicating 'signs of disarray'.<sup>646</sup> Willie Sawers testifies that the situation was gravely exacerbated by Gordon Wilson's defeat in 1987, which led to 'some bitter disputes' and recriminations, meaning that 'the constituency was not a great place for a few years'.<sup>647</sup> This defeat also, inevitably, further undermined centrists within the party, whose authority had been underpinned by the MP's prestige. In 1989, the Tayside councillor Frances E Duncan worried that 'the "split" within the SNP in my opinion has gone too far' and warned that the Tayside Council group was on the verge of breaking down.<sup>648</sup> Labour's John Letford saw these problems continue into the 1990s through his role as a Tayside Regional councillor, describing 'an SNP group who were all over the place at times and disagreed, sometimes more times with each other, than they did with us'.<sup>649</sup>

These tensions caused tactical problems. The Dundee SNP struggled to outline a clear and consistent position through the late 1980s and early 1990s, as they had in the past, instead jittering between left and right. In 1986, the SNP granted its support to the Labour Party in forming its first administration for the Tayside Region, as a means to emphasise their rejection of the Conservatives. This move had negative consequences for the party in Dundee. It clashed with the city party's historic anti-Labour position, contributing to the local electorate's uncertainty about the Nationalists' political role. It also allowed John McAllion, the prospective Labour candidate for Dundee East, the visibility gained from

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<sup>646</sup> *Courier & Advertiser*, 6 May 1986, 8

<sup>647</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Willie Sawers

<sup>648</sup> UD, MS 315/4/5, Local Government 1988-1990, 'Councillor Frances E Duncan Letter to Gordon Wilson', 19 June 1989

<sup>649</sup> John Letford, *Fae the Boatyard to Buckingham Palace*, 34

being leader of the Regional Council. This boosted his chances in the next general election against Gordon Wilson, who was not informed of the decision. Jimmy Halliday identifies this choice, and the lack of communication surrounding it, as symptomatic of the breakdown of the local party 'when [the councillors were] asked why they had not consulted Gordon, the answer was "why should we?" That says it all really'.<sup>650</sup> Indeed, the SNP's Tayside council group leader Frances Duncan admitted to the *Courier* that she was unconcerned by the possibility of McAllion's new position affecting the contest in Dundee East.<sup>651</sup>

In the 1988 District election, the SNP's strategy in Dundee was particularly confused. Gordon Wilson outlined a plan in a memorandum to the city party that aimed the Nationalists' attacks almost entirely against the Labour administration, shunning national message that focussed on opposition to the Conservatives and the forthcoming poll tax.<sup>652</sup> On the ground, it is clear that tactics differed from ward to ward. In a leaflet issued in the largely working class Wellgate ward, a full page of a two-page document was devoted to the anti-poll tax policy.<sup>653</sup> Conversely, in prosperous Broughty Ferry, the poll tax issue was dealt with in a small paragraph of the same size as a section on dog fouling and dwarfed by attacks on the Labour council's left-wing policies.<sup>654</sup> Ken Guild indicates that there were limits to the extent that differentiation in local messaging could change the party's ideological hue from ward to ward, as he blamed association with the poll tax campaign for the eventual loss of his Broughty Ferry seat to the Conservatives in 1992.<sup>655</sup> At the 1992

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<sup>650</sup> James Halliday, *Yours for Scotland*, 124

<sup>651</sup> *Courier & Advertiser*, 17 May 1986

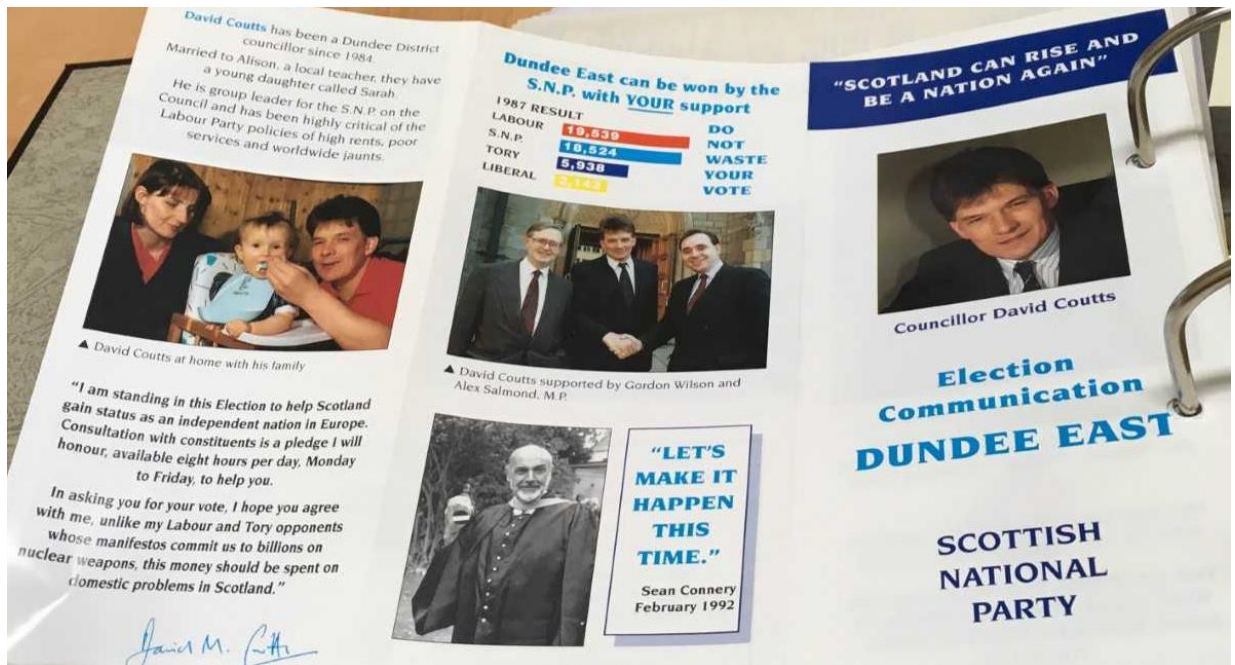
<sup>652</sup> UD, MS 315/4/4, Dundee District Councillors 1987, 'Memorandum to SNP Dundee District Association from Gordon Wilson', 1987

<sup>653</sup> UD, MS 315/4/4, Dundee District Councillors 1987, 'SNP Wellgate Leaflet 1987'

<sup>654</sup> UD, MS 315/4/4, Dundee District Councillors 1987, 'SNP Broughty Ferry Leaflet 1987'

<sup>655</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Ken Guild

general election in Dundee East the party employed a full-blooded anti-Labour message, attempting to return to the tactics that buttressed Gordon Wilson’s campaigns for so many years. It outlined its strategy succinctly in a leaflet that proclaimed ‘vote [for the SNP candidate] David Coutts and keep Labour out of Dundee East’.<sup>656</sup> They also hurled suspicion at the Conservative candidate, the former Labour councillor Steve Blackwood, for being an ‘ex-socialist’.<sup>657</sup> The most remarkable aspect of this campaign was a particular leaflet that abandoned traditional SNP designs to employ a deep blue colour scheme that mimicked Tory literature. This appeared to be an appeal directly towards Conservative sympathisers.



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Having separate messages in different areas and elections was not a new tactic for the SNP in Dundee or elsewhere. In 1979 Jimmy Reid had denounced the party for attacking Labour in middle class areas and the Conservatives in working class ones.<sup>659</sup> Kevin Keenan levelled similar charges at the party’s activity in the twenty first century ‘in one area it’s very much

<sup>656</sup> DPCPGA, 1992 General Election, ‘SNP Leaflet for Dundee East 1992’

<sup>657</sup> Ibid.

<sup>658</sup> Ibid.

<sup>659</sup> *Courier & Advertiser*, 30 April 1979, 5

it'll be a kind of right-wing politics that they'll offer and I suppose in another area they can offer a fairly, you know, a fairly left-wing'.<sup>660</sup> However, its opponents exaggerated the degree to which its message changed around the city at different points in time. The dissonance in its message in different neighbourhoods in the late 1980s and early 1990s was greater than it had been before or has been since. These inconsistencies further strained the fraught internal stability of the party and undermined the credibility of its message in the eyes of the city's voters, who were presented with a party whose local identity seemed ambiguous.

### *The SNP's Changing Electorate*

These ideological changes occurred in a wider context in which the SNP's electorate was shifting across Scotland. During the 1960s and 1970s, the party's voters had been very socially mixed, with largely uniform support across classes.<sup>661</sup> This changed drastically over the 1980s. By the early 1990s, the SNP's vote had become predominantly working class. Indeed, its social composition was remarkably close to that of the Labour Party, having resembled the Liberals in the 1970s.<sup>662</sup> This was a process observed in Dundee, as Ken Guild remembers from the mid-1980s 'we lost some right-wing voters, especially in the Ferry ... [but what] we started to do was make inroads into the housing schemes, where we had been pretty much at a loss before'. The party's leftward development was seen as a key motor behind this process.<sup>663</sup>

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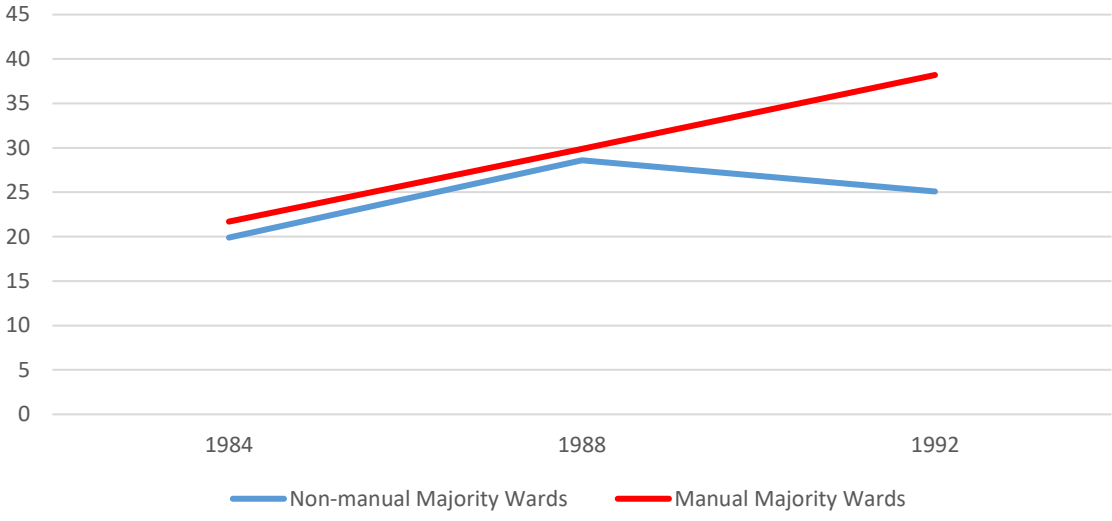
<sup>660</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Kevin Keenan

<sup>661</sup> William L Miller, *The End of British Politics?*, 184

<sup>662</sup> Jack Brand, James Mitchell and Paula Surridge, 'Social Constitution and Ideological Profile: Scottish Nationalism in the 1990s', *Political Studies*, Vol 42 (1994) 619

<sup>663</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Ken Guild

### SNP Percentage Vote Share in Dundee District Elections 1984-1992 by Type of Ward



SNP Percentage Vote Share in Dundee District Council Elections by Ward 1984-1992

Manual Majority Wards					Non-manual Majority Wards				
		1984	1988	1992			1984	1988	1992
<b>Dundee West</b>					<b>Dundee West</b>				
	Ardler	9.5	23.2	36.2		Ancrum	9.4	20.5	25
	Blackshade	20	22.8	40.7		Central	27.9		16.9
	Gillburn	8.8		48		Downfield	4.9		21.4
	Gourdie	18.5	22.1	36.9		Fairmuir		18.6	19.8
	Lochee East		21.5	28.1		Law	9.7		18.1
	Lochee West	6.8	28.1	40.9		Logie	8.6	17	11.7
	Maryfield	12.9	20.1	23.9		Riverside	5.6		13.3
	Rockwell		17.9	25.9	<b>Dundee East</b>				
	St Mary's	13		50.9		Balgillo		33.3	21.5
	St Ninians	11.1	34.8	43.3		Baxter Park	15.2	24	25.9
	Menzieshill	6.9	18.8	28.4		Broughty Ferry	45.8	55.9	38.4
	Pitalpin		30.4	51.6		Craigie Barns	22.9	32.3	25
	Trottick	8.2	40.9	27.2		Eastern	39.8	50.4	40.8
	Wellgate	13	42.5	47.9		West Ferry	23.1	22.3	6.8
<b>Dundee East</b>					<b>Outside Dundee constituencies</b>				
	Caird	37.5	24.7	41.7		Gowrie	13.7	29.2	35.2
	Clepington	16.7	12.2	16.4		Sidlaw			40.2
	Coldside	18.9	29.1	33.6		Monifieth East	15.7	31.3	35.9
	Craigie Bank	21.8	37.5	36.9		Monifieth West	36.9	36.8	30.1
	Douglas	28.1	25.3	33.7					
	Drumgeith	30.8	41.7	38.5					
	Dudhope	10.9		28					
	Fintry North	39.4	32.8	38.1					
	Fintry South	42.9	35.6	39.9					
	Hilltown	49.6	50.2	47.3					
	Longhaugh	26	32	44					
	Midmill	38.6	24.5	42.2					
	Whitfield	29.8	48.4	61.3					

The trend is observable through an analysis of local election results made possible by Ernie Ross' request in Parliament for local data from the 1981 census.<sup>664</sup> The figures released included statistics on social class. They revealed that in seventeen of the forty-four wards in the Dundee District a majority of workers were employed in non-manual occupations, corresponding to the wealthier parts of the city, while twenty-seven wards had majorities of manual workers. In 1984 and even in the 1988 election, there was almost no difference in the average SNP vote in the wards they contested in either type of area. Furthermore, the wards with the highest SNP support were evenly balanced between the two categories,

<sup>664</sup> *House of Commons Hansard*, Deb 24 February 1987 Vol 111 Col 161W

with the leafy suburbs of the Ferry, the peripheral council estates of the northeast in Whitfield and Fintry and the deprived inner city Hilltown giving the Nationalists their strongest votes. However, in 1992 there was a sea change, as a chasm opened between the middle and working class areas. SNP support dropped overall in the majority non-manual areas. This was mostly confined to Dundee East, where its average vote in these wards fell from 36.4 to 26.4 per cent, and especially those in and around Broughty Ferry where the party had previously been so successful. Despite this fall, the SNP vote in the wealthier areas of Dundee East remained clearly higher than in Dundee West's richer wards, where the party had never secured significant support. At the same time, the Nationalist vote soared in the majority manual wards. It strengthened in many parts of Dundee East in which it was already robust, rising from 32.8 to 38.6 per cent. Yet the greatest change was in Dundee West, where the Nationalists' average vote in majority manual areas leapt up from 26.9 to 37.9 per cent between 1988 and 1992, having stood at just 11.7 per cent in 1984 as the party's electoral fortunes in the two sides of Dundee converged in council as well as parliamentary contests.

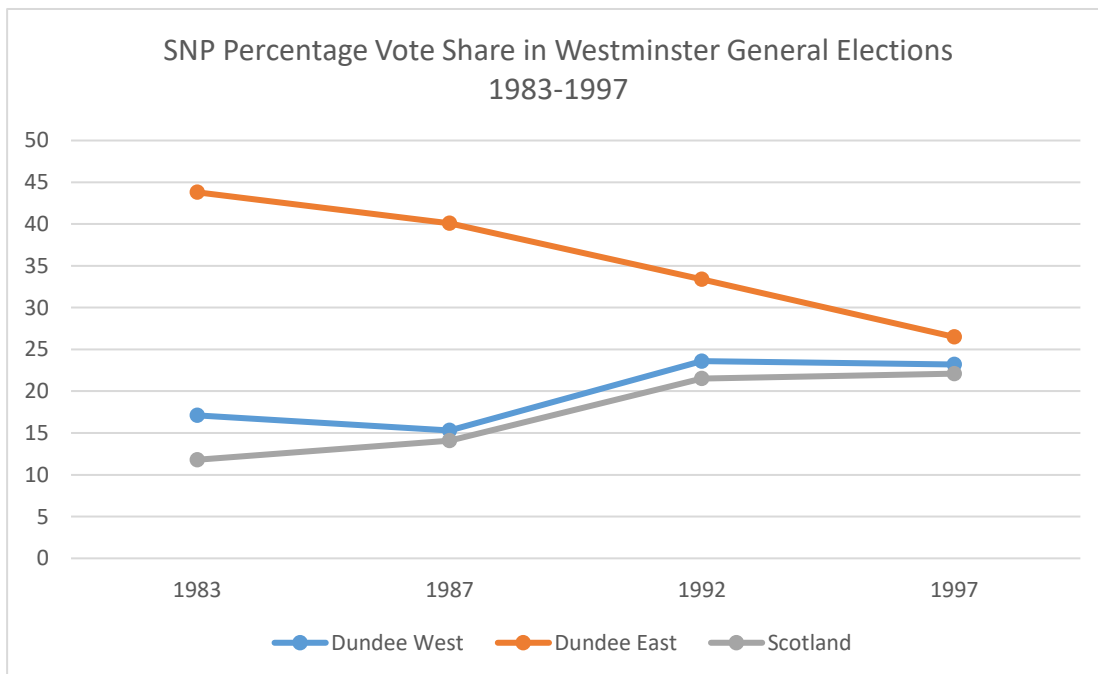
This pattern has held ever since, and is indicative of changes that swept over the party in both Dundee and Scotland as a whole. Although Donald Hay claims that the Nationalists continued to hold on to many middle class anti-Labour voters well into the twenty-first century, this made up a much smaller portion of the Nationalists' coalition than they had previously.<sup>665</sup> From then on, the SNP became entrenched in working class neighbourhoods while it consistently found less success in richer areas. Richard McCready described the way in which this transformation led to an SNP electorate in the twenty-first century that was qualitatively different to that which had won the party Dundee East in the 1970s and

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<sup>665</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Donald Hay

1980s: 'I don't think the resurgence of the SNP in Dundee from say '99, or wherever you want to put it, is a resurgence in the Gordon Wilson vote. Because I think they're virtually opposed to each other'.<sup>666</sup> This transition rendered the anti-Labour approach of the Wilson years obsolete, and contributed towards the party's ideological disarray in this period as it struggled to adapt to an appropriate local political strategy for its new electoral base.

*Conclusion*



Despite all the issues that afflicted it during this period, the Dundee SNP's electoral performances did not collapse. Its support in local elections rose, while its general election vote share fell by a relatively modest amount, from 30.2 per cent in 1983 to 25 per cent at its 1997 low point. This did not represent a uniform decline. Nationalist support became much more evenly distributed around the city, even as the party remained marginally stronger in Dundee East. Between 1983 and 1997, the SNP vote rose slightly in Dundee

<sup>666</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Richard McCready

West from 17.1 to 23.2 per cent whilst falling drastically in the east from 43.8 to 26.5 per cent. These shifts occurred in a wider context in which the SNP gained tremendous ground, rising from 11.8 per cent of the national vote in 1983 to 22.1 per cent in 1997, and making particularly strong gains in more working class Labour-facing constituencies across Scotland.<sup>667</sup> In 1997, these changes led to the Dundee SNP registering their lowest vote share relative to the party's nationwide results in any parliamentary election since 1970. The weakening of the local party clearly had a key role in the dramatic fall in SNP support in Dundee East. There, the Nationalists lost the valuable leadership of Gordon Wilson, a wider successful activist structure and crucially, their ideological identity as the moderate counterpoint to an untrustworthy local Labour Party. They were no longer able to rely upon their historic catchall electorate, with the SNP's support in Dundee East coming to mirror the shape of the Nationalist vote in the rest of Scotland. In the west, the party was not disorientated in the same way and was better able to harness the benefits of the SNP's nationwide resurgence. In particular, it lacked a substantial middle class electorate that could be alienated by the party's leftward turn in the 1980s, as occurred in Dundee East. Although even then, its vote rose by only slightly more than half the amount in the constituency as it did across the country between 1983 and 1997, highlighting that the western constituency was not completely immune to the problems that confronted the Dundee SNP in these years.

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<sup>667</sup> David Butler and Dennis Kavanagh, *The British General Election of 1992* (London, 1992) 342

### **The Third Period, since the late 1990s**

In the final period, from late 1990s to the 2010s, the SNP's local fortunes improved dramatically. The Dundee party once again outperformed national results, leading towards its domination of city politics. This resurgence took place alongside the party's ascent towards the status of Scotland's leading party from the second half of the 2000s. Yet, the Dundee party began its rise earlier than the Nationalists did in the rest of the country, with the party's early 2000s dip in support having little impact in Dundee. This in turn led to a string of successes. The SNP gained the Dundee East Holyrood constituency in 2003, secured the accompanying Westminster seat in 2005, took Dundee West in the Scottish Parliament in 2007 and won control of the council following a local by-election victory in 2009. These victories culminated in an extraordinary peak as the party won a 61 per cent of the citywide poll at the 2011 Scottish elections, the highest vote share achieved by any party at any level in Dundee since the nineteenth century. It then gained majority control of the council the following year, in an election in which the Nationalists underperformed around the country.

The positive results the SNP achieved at the Scottish and local elections held on the same day in 1999 acted as a key catalyst behind this revival, just as the 1973 by-election did previously. In many countries around the world, sub-state nationalist parties have tended to enjoy greater support in devolved rather than state-wide general elections.<sup>668</sup> Scotland has followed the same pattern, with the SNP consistently performing best at Holyrood

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<sup>668</sup> John Osmond, 'Welsh civil identity in the twenty-first century', David C Harvey, Rhys Jones, Neil McInroy and Christine Milligan, *Celtic Geographies: Old Cultures, New Times* (London & New York, 2002) 86

contests, with the remarkable 2015 UK general election held in the charged aftermath of the independence referendum being the only exception.<sup>669</sup> This was not simply a result of increases in the support of an opposition party at mid-term elections in between Westminster contests. The Scottish Social Attitude survey found that voting intentions for the SNP have been on average 9 per cent higher for Holyrood than for Westminster since 1999.<sup>670</sup> The inaugural Scottish Parliamentary elections saw this process at work for the first time, with the SNP securing its best results since the 1970s across the country. The party performed exceptionally well in Dundee. The swing against Labour in Dundee West was the fourth largest in the country when compared to the 1997 general election.<sup>671</sup> While the gap between the SNP's vote share in the city and the country as a whole had closed to 2.9 per cent in 1997, it rebounded to 6.9 per cent two years later. At the same time, the party made large advances on the council, with half of the SNP's nationwide seat gains and 15.7 per cent of Labour's losses taking place in the city.<sup>672</sup>

This progress was not achieved through any specific local message, which had contributed to the victories in Dundee East in the 1970s and 1980s, but by solely by virtue of a rejuvenation in the local party's organisation and leadership across the city. The 1999 result itself saw the party acquire a notably larger council presence than it had ever possessed before, which allowed it to consolidate its base in a more sustainable way than the party had in Dundee East under Gordon Wilson. Dundee's Nationalists benefited from the selection of capable young candidates in the form of Shona Robison and Stewart Hosie,

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<sup>669</sup> John Curtice, David McCrone, Nicola McEwen, Michael Marsh and Rachel Ormston, *The 2007 Scottish Elections*, 4

<sup>670</sup> John Curtice, 'The Party and the Electorate', Gerry Hassan and Simon Barrow (eds), *A Nation Changed*

<sup>671</sup> Dundee West had the third largest swing if the Falkirk West result is excluded, where the popular Dennis Canavan secured the largest swing in the country. However, his candidacy was unusual as he had won the seat as a Labour candidate in 1997 but stood as an independent in 1999.

<sup>672</sup> UD, MS 325 Box 13, Dundee Labour Party Papers, 'Election Results 6 May 1999'

who were drawn in from outside the city just as Gordon Wilson had been in 1973. At the same time, valuable talents emerged out of the council group to give the Nationalists the leadership they had lacked since the 1980s. The 1999 elections also built up a sense of forward energy that was repeatedly reinforced by incremental electoral gains. This in turn attracted the national party's attention, as it began to target Dundee's constituencies more aggressively after 1999. Importantly, the becalming of the SNP's ideological tensions by the late 1990s was reflected locally. This allowed the party to proceed on a united and consistent basis once more.

#### *Organisation and the Rise of the Dundee West SNP*

In 2010, the *Courier* described how 'SNP has built up a formidable campaigning machine across the city of Dundee over the last decade'.<sup>673</sup> This was brought about by a deliberate and structured attempt that began in the late 1990s to reshape the way in which the party contested elections. Willie Sawers recalls that after Shona Robison's selection for Dundee East at the 1997 general election 'we were more targeted, more focussed, we just went about things in a more methodical manner'.<sup>674</sup> Joe FitzPatrick echoes Sawers, as he speaks of a 'leaner organising machine' developing from this point.<sup>675</sup> This involved a transformation in the way in which campaigns were fought. Ken Guild describes how there was a renewed stress on activity from the end of the 1990s when explaining the 1999 breakthrough 'we had been canvassing, and we had been leafletting, we had been doing street theatre, we were piling stuff into the press. It was sheer hard work'.<sup>676</sup> The Dundee

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<sup>673</sup> *Courier & Advertiser*, 21 April 2010, 9

<sup>674</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Willie Sawers

<sup>675</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Joe FitzPatrick

<sup>676</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Ken Guild

West MSP Joe FitzPatrick points to an emphasis on face-to-face canvassing which was seen as highly effective 'we started to do the work in terms of speaking to people as well as just delivering leaflets. There was maybe a history of just paper through the door'.<sup>677</sup> This was a much more effective means of supporting the party electorally, with an experiment carried out by political scientists in the United States finding that face-to-face canvassing boosted turnout among the targeted group more than any other form of campaigning.<sup>678</sup> Moreover, it improved the Nationalists' connection to their electorate and offered opportunities to attempt to win over new voters to their cause. The party's opponents noticed the change, as Helen Wright highlighted that Labour were wrong-footed by the 'fresh approach' the SNP brought to the 1999 elections.<sup>679</sup> These organisational changes were the primary force behind the party's 1999 breakthrough, as they made it a far more effective campaigning force.

Its new structure remained in place in the 2000s and proved an invaluable component of the SNP's victories through the decade. FitzPatrick illustrates the party's efforts, as he describes how between his selection to contest Dundee West at Westminster in 2004 and his victory in the Scottish Parliamentary constituency of the same name in 2007 'two thirds of the electorate were personally spoken to, directly spoken to on the doors'.<sup>680</sup> The efficiency of the party was further improved by the opening of a permanent office which was used as a 'one-stop shop' as both a constituency office for the city's Nationalist parliamentarians and acted as a centralised campaigning headquarters.<sup>681</sup> The SNP's Nigel Don recalls how it was used as a base from which activists could be assembled and directed

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<sup>677</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Joe FitzPatrick

<sup>678</sup> Alan S Gerber and Donald P Green, 'The Effects of Canvassing, Telephone Calls and Direct Mail on Voter Turnout: A Field Experiment', *American Political Science Review*, Vol 94 No 3 (2000) 661

<sup>679</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Helen Wright

<sup>680</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Joe FitzPatrick

<sup>681</sup> DCPCGA, 2003 Scottish and Council Elections, 'SNP Parliamentary Report', 2003

to particular parts of the city.<sup>682</sup> This physical infrastructure was far from common around Scotland, with around three quarters of SNP local parties having no permanent access to an office or meeting space of their own in the 2000s.<sup>683</sup>

In contrast to the Gordon Wilson years, this later resurgence of the Nationalists' organisation was much more even across Dundee. Nigel Don, whose Ninewells ward was on the western edge of the city, commented that he noticed little difference between the SNP on either side of Dundee.<sup>684</sup> At the same time FitzPatrick, who came from Whitfield in the east but would represent Dundee West in the Scottish Parliament from 2007, described how in the 2000s the SNP 'became a unit which was equally strong right across the city', making the point that 'membership's probably about equal now across the two constituencies'.<sup>685</sup> The 1999 election itself was a part of this process as it saw Dundee West gain a large number of SNP councillors for the first time. This allowed the westerly party to share in the benefits of having elected members, with four of the Nationalists entering the council in 1999 representing wards that were wholly or partly within the constituency. While the two parties remained distinct from one another, there were also more concerted attempts to build cooperation across the city than there had been in the past. Joe FitzPatrick explains that after the election 'team Dundee became much more' with the party working together throughout the city.<sup>686</sup> Ken Guild goes so far as to describe the creation of a city association as 'the best thing we ever did'.<sup>687</sup> With a healthier membership, a council base and cooperation with the Dundee East party, the SNP in

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<sup>682</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Nigel Don

<sup>683</sup> Alistair Clark, 'Local Parties, Participation and Campaigning in Post-Devolution Scotland', PhD Thesis, University of Aberdeen (2003) 89

<sup>684</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Nigel Don

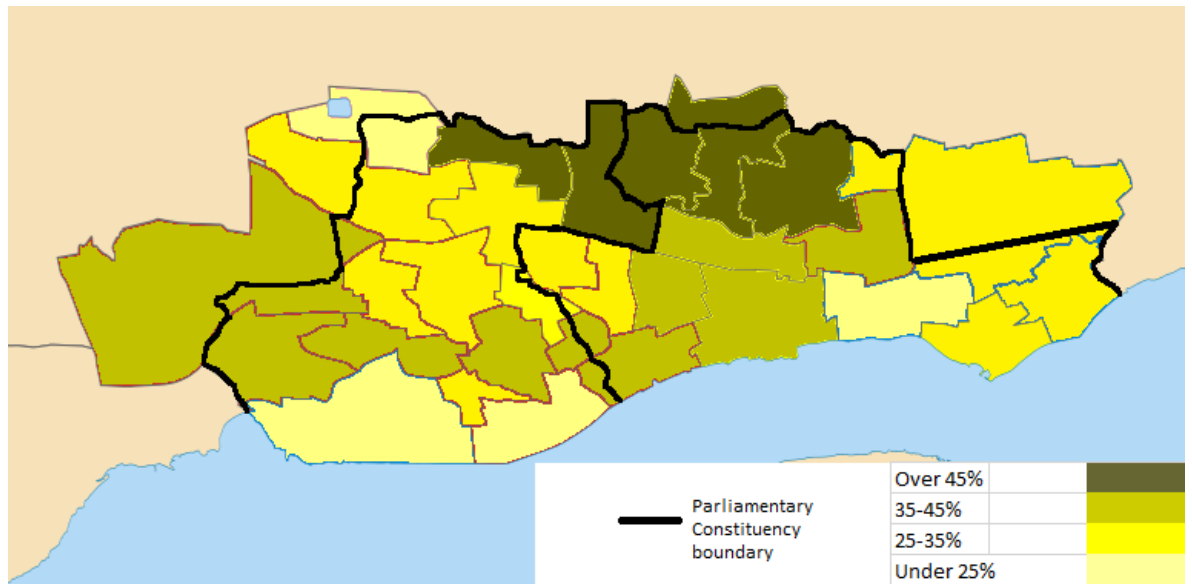
<sup>685</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Joe FitzPatrick

<sup>686</sup> Ibid.

<sup>687</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Ken Guild

Dundee West was better equipped to challenge than it had ever been before. The rise of the local party in the west allowed the SNP to threaten incumbents in almost every part of the city.

SNP Percentage Vote Share in 2003 City Council Elections by Ward



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This in turn altered the balance of politics in Dundee, making it impossible for Labour to concentrate their resources in the east and treat the west as a safe seat. FitzPatrick recalls how the SNP's advance in Dundee West during the 1999 election, when they came within one hundred and twenty one votes of taking the constituency, had gone 'under the radar' of the Labour Party which was focussed on getting John McAllion elected in the east.<sup>689</sup> With the threat made clear, Labour was forced to divide its energies thereafter. David Denver and Iain MacAllister observed that by 2001 Labour had started to see the defence of Dundee West as a high priority.<sup>690</sup> This marked a tremendous shift in mentalities over a

<sup>688</sup> The Parliamentary boundary marks the Dundee East and Dundee West constituencies at Westminster between 1997 and 2005 and Holyrood between 1999 and 2011.

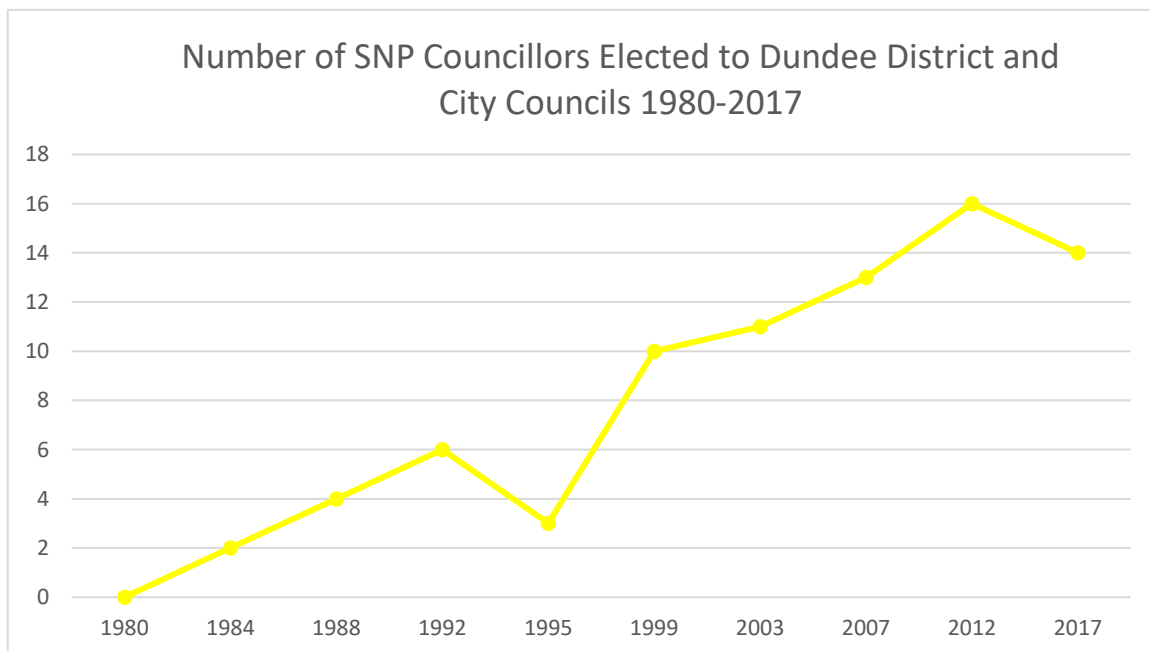
<sup>689</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Joe FitzPatrick

<sup>690</sup> David Denver and Iain MacAllister, 'Constituency Campaigning in Scotland at the 2001 General Election', *Scottish Affairs*, No 42 (2003) 131

constituency that had been regarded as completely safe only a few years before.<sup>691</sup>

Concerns over the party's grip in Dundee West persisted through the decade. Iain Luke pointed to the impact on his 2005 campaign to defend his Dundee East seat as he revealed that 'people in Dundee West were worried' and refused to send activists across the city to aid him.<sup>692</sup> With its resources more stretched, the incumbents found it more difficult to address the SNP's advances.

### Local Government



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While the Dundee SNP gained ground in local elections through the 1980s and 1990s in terms of votes, it was not until 1999 that they achieved a breakthrough in seats. Prior to that contest, they had never won more than a handful of seats to any tier of local government in Dundee, and never more than the Conservatives. Yet after securing ten of

<sup>691</sup> *Courier & Advertiser*, 15 April 1997, 8

<sup>692</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Iain Luke

<sup>693</sup> From 1980 until 1992 there were 44 councillors elected, in 1995 there were 36 elected, and since 1999 there have been 29 elected.

the twenty-nine seats on the City Council in 1999, they held twice as many as the Tories and only slightly fewer than Labour's fourteen. Having continued to advance since, they have retained this much enhanced position in local politics. By securing a large council group, the SNP firmly established its electoral credentials to the public at large, heightened its attentiveness to local issues and created an avenue for developing leaders.

In contrast to the local party's position in the 1970s, the SNP of the 1990s and 2000s viewed this new prominence in local politics as an important asset. Following his capture of Dundee East in 2005, Stewart Hosie highlighted the importance of the party's council platform, 'the SNP's credibility in Dundee has been built on the foundation of having strong representation on the City Council'.<sup>694</sup> Willie Sawers describes how the larger grouping transformed the activity of SNP councillors from isolated figures to an effective administration in waiting 'previously it's a bit like being a guerrilla fighter, you're just pick off this, or try pick off that. [But now] you've got a whole structure, you know, you've got people who can shadow everything the council is doing'.<sup>695</sup> The Nationalists benefited from a greater level of local prominence than they had enjoyed since losing Dundee East in 1987. This made it clear to the city's voters that the SNP were once again a serious and indeed, following the decline of the Conservative party in local elections, the only challenger for power at all levels in the city. The Nationalists were keen to draw attention to this reality 'don't let Labour dominate Dundee – vote SNP'.<sup>696</sup> This attracted people towards the party that might have otherwise gone elsewhere, and simply wanted to see an alteration in power. One resident's comments on the Nationalists' assumption of power on the City Council in 2009 demonstrated this sentiment 'I'm not an SNP supporter, but a new broom

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<sup>694</sup> *Evening Telegraph*, 6 May 2005, 15

<sup>695</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Willie Sawers

<sup>696</sup> DCPCGA, 2001 General Election, 'SNP Newsletter for Dundee', 2000

sweeps clean'.<sup>697</sup> Nigel Don exemplified similar feelings. He entered politics in 2000 with little interest in the SNP's core objective 'it wasn't entirely obvious to me whether Scotland should be independent or not'. Yet he joined the Nationalists because it seemed clear that 'the SNP was the party that was going, potentially in time, to make a difference in Dundee'.<sup>698</sup> Without the credibility drawn from the 1999 elections, the SNP would have found it far more difficult to present itself in this way and broaden its electoral appeal.

These councillors also enriched the Dundee SNP's grassroots awareness of opinion within the city's neighbourhoods, Willie Sawers pointing out that 'much more of the ordinary public had a link with the SNP' after 1999.<sup>699</sup> Stewart Hosie explains that these connections strengthened the party's political activity by developing its 'ability relate to local communities, to pick up local issues' and use them in their campaigns.<sup>700</sup> Shona Robison elaborates on how the SNP took advantage of this situation 'we picked up on issues, we did a lot of community consultations around issues, we put out surveys and asked people what they thought about things. So we were really doing a lot of connecting to people'.<sup>701</sup> The most well publicised of these surveys was completed ahead of the 2003 elections, and was described by the Nationalists as 'the largest survey of opinion ever carried out by a political party in Dundee'.<sup>702</sup> Experience in the council chambers also gave individuals the opportunity to develop into more effective politicians, thereby providing the party with a more reliable supply of local leaders than it had had in the twentieth century.

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<sup>697</sup> *Evening Telegraph*, 24 May 2009, 3

<sup>698</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Nigel Don

<sup>699</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Willie Sawers

<sup>700</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Stewart Hosie

<sup>701</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Shona Robison

<sup>702</sup> DCPCGA, 2003 Scottish and Council Elections, 'SNP Leaflet for Pitkerro 2003'

### *The Role of Individuals*

The Dundee SNP's impressive record since the late 1990s would have been impossible without the contribution of a number of key personnel. Importantly, no single figure possessed the outsized influence over the party's development that Gordon Wilson did during the 1970s and 1980s. Instead, a broader base of leading members emerged that each contributed to the Dundee SNP's success. Notably, the party imported two of the rising 'bright young stars' of the SNP who were emerging out of the Young Scottish Nationalists organisation in the 1990s in the form of Shona Robison and Stewart Hosie. They were seen as a step above the candidates the party had been able to muster in the preceding years.<sup>703</sup> This gave the SNP a vital edge, as Stewart Hosie remarked, 'with a credible candidate and a good campaign we could actually take Labour on in so called heartlands, and beat them'.<sup>704</sup> These two became the Dundee SNP's first full time politicians since Gordon Wilson's lost his seat in 1987, giving it a level of professional leadership it had long lacked. A number of effective local activists, mostly developing through the council group, also played invaluable parts in the party's rise in these years as both leaders and organisers.

Shona Robison arrived in the city to contest Dundee East at the 1997 general election. Although as an outsider coming from Glasgow she was completely unknown when she was first selected as prospective candidate, she quickly became deeply immersed in the local party.<sup>705</sup> She was thought very highly of by members, with Willie Sawers praising, 'she was

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<sup>703</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Ken Guild

<sup>704</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Stewart Hosie

<sup>705</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, John McAllion

very motivational and people would work for her and work hard for her'.<sup>706</sup> Joe FitzPatrick similarly comments on her work ethic as being an inspiration to activists who had grown used to a lower ebb of campaigning before her arrival, identifying her a catalyst for the wider energisation of the party's activities in the late 1990s.<sup>707</sup> Although she saw the SNP drop to its worst vote share in Dundee East since 1970 in 1997, Robison retained the confidence of the local party. She continued to season her abilities during a failed attempt on the same constituency in the 1999 Scottish parliamentary elections. Over this time, she became an increasingly recognisable face locally. Although losing to John McAllion in 1999, Robison was elected as a regional MSP for the Northeast of Scotland and proceeded to take advantage of this position to extensively target the city. Describing herself as a 'Dundee based' MSP, she 'covered Dundee West, Dundee East, and I think I did stuff in Angus as well' and made sure to increase her local prominence 'I was at everything, I turned up at everything ... just built a profile and, you know, was in the media a lot and running on different issues'.<sup>708</sup> As she noted in a leaflet for the 1999 elections, this allowed her to speak 'to thousands of electors' individually.<sup>709</sup> This frustrated her opponents, who recognised the effectiveness of her actions, John McAllion complaining 'she was never out of Dundee East'.<sup>710</sup> Iain Luke saw this targeting as 'a very crafty campaign', which undermined the benefits of incumbency McAllion enjoyed going into the 2003 election.<sup>711</sup> Her razor-thin victory in that election was the SNP's first parliamentary triumph in the city since 1983. Robison's skills have since been highlighted, and her profile advanced, by a subsequent rise up the national party hierarchy. In 2009, two years after the formation of the SNP's first Holyrood administration, she was named a Junior Minister. She was then promoted to the

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<sup>706</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Willie Sawers

<sup>707</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Shona Robison

<sup>708</sup> Ibid.

<sup>709</sup> DCPCGA, 1999 Scottish and Council Elections, 'SNP Leaflet for Dundee East 1999'

<sup>710</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, John McAllion

<sup>711</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Iain Luke

rank of full Cabinet Secretary in 2014. Her position was further reinforced after her 'close friend and ally' Nicola Sturgeon became First Minister later that year, making Robison one of the most senior members of the Scottish Government until leaving her post in 2018.<sup>712</sup>

Despite being born in Dundee, Stewart Hosie made his name in the party far away from Tayside, before he was invited to return as an outside candidate whose political skill helped the party in key elections in the early 2000s. Described as 'hyper-articulate' by the journalist Jason Cowley, he was widely seen as a skilled political communicator.<sup>713</sup> Even Iain Luke, his opponent in the 2001 and 2005 elections, grudgingly recognised this competence.<sup>714</sup> Having been involved in a number of roles in the national party and fighting two general in 1992 and 1997, and then a Scottish election in 1999, in Kirkcaldy, he was already an 'experienced campaigner' prior to being selected to contest Dundee East in 2001.<sup>715</sup> He was undermined that year by the fact that 'he did not live in the area, [and] he didn't give any indication that he would move', which allowed Iain Luke's Labour campaign to present him as a carpetbagger.<sup>716</sup> However, by the next election in 2005 he had become a familiar figure and neutralised this concern by relocating to the city. Indeed, the party was even able to turn Luke's past rhetoric around on him by remarking that 'Stewart Hosie is the only candidate selected who actually lives in the constituency', with the incumbent MP residing across town in Dundee West.<sup>717</sup> With his standing greatly enhanced after entering Westminster, Hosie became one of the better-known members of the party's small group of MPs. Like Robison, he proved himself by eventually rising to a high position in the SNP,

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<sup>712</sup> Richard Parry, 'The Scottish Government Under the SNP', Gerry Hassan and Simon Barrow (eds), *A Nation Changed*

<sup>713</sup> *New Statesman*, 5 June 2017

<sup>714</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Iain Luke

<sup>715</sup> DCPCGA, 2001 General Election, 'SNP Newsletter for Dundee', 2000

<sup>716</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Iain Luke

<sup>717</sup> DCPCGA, 2005 General Election, 'SNP Leaflet for Dundee East 2005'

as he became the party's Deputy Leader between 2014 and 2016 and was a leading figure in the large SNP group elected in 2015 as Economics Spokesperson from 2015 until 2017, before scandal derailed his career.

The development of several valued figures through the council highlighted the importance of establishing a base at this level. The most prominent of these was Joe Fitzpatrick who entered the City Council in 1999, having narrowly missed out in 1995. He played a prominent role in the SNP group between 1999 and 2007, as it drew ever closer to power. Nigel Don pointed to the qualities he brought to the party 'Joe was and always has been very wise, again, effective contributor, good organiser'.<sup>718</sup> Fitzpatrick then stood unsuccessfully for Dundee West in 2005 before winning the corresponding Holyrood seat in 2007. While not achieving the rank of Stewart Hosie or Shona Robison, Fitzpatrick has nonetheless served as a Junior Minister in the Scottish Government since 2012, adding to the Dundee SNP's growing ranks of parliamentarians. Furthermore, he was the first professional politician the party had ever elected in Dundee West, contributing to the SNP's continued development in the west of the city. FitzPatrick was one of a number of influential figures to emerge from the council group. A number of other long-serving councillors, including Ken Guild, who led the SNP's council administration between 2009 and 2016, Bob Duncan, the Lord Provost from 2012 to 2016, John Corrigan, a long-time group leader, Jim Barrie and Dave Beattie, Also contributed towards the party's maturation.<sup>719</sup> Perhaps the most important individual to emerge from the group was Willie Sawers, who has sat in the District and later City Council since 1992. Nigel Don picked him out for his direction of the SNP group during his time on the council in the mid-2000s

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<sup>718</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Nigel Don

<sup>719</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Joe FitzPatrick, Ken Guild and Stewart Hosie

‘Willie was a fine leader’, highlighting his close attention to the concerns of citizens and his ability to marshal opposition to the sitting administration.<sup>720</sup> Far more important were Sawers’ organisational talents, whose importance to the party was identified by Joe FitzPatrick, Ken Guild and even Labour’s John McAllion.<sup>721</sup> He was the key architect of the reinvigoration of the party’s grassroots activism from the late 1990s, with his impact on Nationalist politics in Dundee being just as profound as that of higher profile leaders.

### *National Attention*

After greatly outperforming expectations across the city in 1999, the SNP’s central leadership’s interest in Dundee grew notably, with leaders sensing an opportunity to make a much sought after breakthrough in urban Scotland: ‘SNP strategists believe Dundee will be the first city to fall to them’.<sup>722</sup> From then, the Dundee constituencies were given special attention.<sup>723</sup> Dundee West was ‘elevated to a top SNP target’, while attention in the eastern constituency was renewed.<sup>724</sup> While Dundee East had attracted the interest of the national party since the mid-1970s, it had slipped from the top tier of targets. By 1997, it was ranked a relatively modest seventh on the party’s list of winnable constituencies, having been one of only two SNP seats just a decade before.<sup>725</sup> Meanwhile, Dundee West had never been viewed in the same way, helping the party achieve a more even spread of success across the city. The importance of the city to the SNP’s electoral strategy in the early 2000s is clear, a *Courier* editorial noting that in the 2005 general election the

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<sup>720</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Nigel Don

<sup>721</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Joe FitzPatrick, Ken Guild and John McAllion

<sup>722</sup> *Courier & Advertiser*, 14 May 2001, 9

<sup>723</sup> David Denver and Iain MacAllister, ‘Constituency Campaigning in Scotland at the 2001 General Election’, 131

<sup>724</sup> *Courier & Advertiser*, 15 May 2001, 9

<sup>725</sup> *Courier & Advertiser*, 15 April 1997, 8

Nationalists' ambitions did not extend further than defending their existing constituencies and 'taking both Dundee seats'.<sup>726</sup> Jim McGovern, the victorious Labour MP for Dundee West, revealed that his campaign 'knew [the SNP] were pouring resources in Dundee West' during the 2010 election as the party sought to make good on their openly held ambition to 'make Dundee Scotland's first totally SNP city'.<sup>727</sup>

Through the 1990s and into the 2000s central parties across the United Kingdom had deepened their involvement in key seats, ensuring that this factor played a greater role than ever before.<sup>728</sup> In a study of the 1997 general election, David Denver, Gordon Hands and Simon Henig found that these newly focussed targeting efforts measurably improved the active party's prospects.<sup>729</sup> Despite the party's failure to take Dundee West, the benefits gained from being target seats were valuable in closely fought contests. Stewart Hosie commented on its practical importance to securing his narrow victory in Dundee East in 2005 'one of the key things was support on the day. Particularly in terms of making sure we knocked up our supporters ... there was something in the order of a hundred and forty SNP activists involved in one way or another in the knock up in 2005'.<sup>730</sup> The interest also has longer-term effects, as it drew a degree of direction to the project of building a well-drilled and effective political organisation in the city. This interest also boosted the confidence of the activist base, ensuring that it was energised ahead of the key elections of the period even as morale fluctuated in other parts of Scotland.

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<sup>726</sup> *Courier & Advertiser*, 18 April 2005, 10

<sup>727</sup> *Evening Telegraph*, 7 May 2010, 5

<sup>728</sup> Justin Fisher, David Denver and Gordon Hands, 'The relative electoral impact of central party co-ordination and size', *Electoral Studies*, Vol 25 No 4 (2006) 666

<sup>729</sup> David Denver, Gordon Hands and Simon Henig, 'Triumph of targeting? Constituency campaigning in the 1997 election', *British Elections and Parties Review*, Vol 8 No 1 (1998) 185

<sup>730</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Stewart Hosie

## *Ideology*

By the turn of the millennium, the strained ideological disputes of the late 1980s and early 1990s that had badly damaged the Dundee SNP were in the past. The generation of traditionalists who had overseen the victories in the 1970s and early 1980s had almost entirely retired from active politics. Nationally, the party had united behind a consistently centre-left platform. By the 2000s, the SNP used the term 'social-democracy' more frequently than the Scottish Labour Party.<sup>731</sup> This ideological change was reflected in Dundee, where the party did not pursue an independent political approach. As Stewart Hosie recalled, 'it was a pretty mainstream social-democratic thread that ran through the party in the city'.<sup>732</sup> Shona Robison chimed with this description, noting 'my politics were on the left' continuing that this was 'probably representative of the SNP in Dundee' by 1997.<sup>733</sup> This was illustrated by the tenor of its campaign material, which emphasised the party's left-wing policies and accused the Labour Party of drifting to the right: 'New Labour equals old Tories'.<sup>734</sup> The results of this unity were described by Nigel Don: 'it was a happy ship ... there were very few tensions'.<sup>735</sup> Ken Guild expressed a similar sentiment, claiming 'there was no sort of factionalism in the SNP group' during the 2000s.<sup>736</sup> While electoral success was the basis of this relative serenity, the absence of the ideological rancour that had afflicted the party so severely in earlier decades was an undoubted boon. It allowed the Dundee SNP to escape from the image of division it had portrayed in the past and benefit from the united efforts of its activists. Even after the party moved away from its

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<sup>731</sup> David McCrone and Michael Keating, 'Social Democracy and Scotland', Michael Keating (ed.), *Scottish Social Democracy: Progressive Ideas for Public Policy* (Brussels, 2007) 17

<sup>732</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Stewart Hosie

<sup>733</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Shona Robison

<sup>734</sup> DCL, LHC 373 (10), The Lamb Collection, 'SNP Leaflet for Dundee East 1997'

<sup>735</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Nigel Don

<sup>736</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Ken Guild

long history of opposition to take on the potentially divisive task of governing both nationally in 2007 and locally in 2009, this apparent harmony was not disturbed.

### *Conclusion*

From the end of the 1990s, the Dundee SNP regained the vibrancy that underlined its earlier accomplishments. Sparing the disputes of the past, the party embarked on an effort to turn itself into a more effective campaigning organisation. With the aid of able candidates and councillors, this was a great success, allowing the SNP to out-compete its rivals on the ground across Dundee. The watershed 1999 election result facilitated the tremendous growth of the party's council base and local credibility and the beginning of a compelling sense of forward momentum that carried it on to more than a decade of steady gains. It also drew new national attention that accelerated its forward march. During the 1970s and 1980s, the SNP had planted deep roots in the city that provided a platform which eased the path to its later accomplishments. From this position of strength, the party was much better placed to compete effectively in electoral contests. This gave the Nationalists the ability to take advantage of a weakening of the Labour Party to overtake it over the course of the 2000s. While it was especially well led and organised, the party pursued the same political approach in Dundee that it did across Scotland in these years. This meant that while it was able to outperform the national party, it followed the SNP's general national direction much more closely than it did during the Gordon Wilson years.

## Conclusion

The development of the SNP in Dundee was the main cause of the city's unusual electoral history and its emergence as Scotland's 'Nationalist city'. It presents a compelling illustration of the ways in which local political parties can significantly influence electoral outcomes, while also highlighting the limits to their ability to resist the forces of national politics. The variation in the SNP's vote relative to its national support in the city's two constituencies appears to have been heavily affected by the condition of the local party in both parts of Dundee. Having been weak across the city prior to the 1973 by-election, the Nationalists' record was uniformly poor. Yet the development of a very strong organisation in Dundee East from 1973, which was consolidated around a popular parliamentarian in Gordon Wilson, and most importantly the success of this party in promoting a clear and attractive political identity, offers the most serious explanation for the divergence of the party's vote in the city's two seats in the 1970s and 1980s. The Dundee East party was able to foster a political micro-climate in the constituency that allowed it to resist the national swing against the SNP in the 1979 and 1983 elections, while the party in the west was not strong enough to do the same. However, this had only been possible in the specific context of the period in which the SNP's ideology was both loosely defined and internally contested, presenting significant room for local figures to define the party in their own image within their home constituencies.

In the late 1980s the Dundee East party saw many of its previous strengths fall away. It lost key leadership figures, not least Gordon Wilson, experienced a decline in activism and suffered from internal division that undermined the strategy it had brought it great success in the past. At the same time, the SNP began to adopt a more clearly defined centre-left

ideological identity than it had in the past, a position at odds with the anti-Labour strategy of the party in Dundee. While it would have been difficult for the Dundee East party to resist the pull of these national changes and maintain its unique appeal in any circumstances, it proved impossible for it to do so without the strong structure, leadership and unity it had previously enjoyed. As a result, through 1990s the fates of the two Dundee seats converged, with the SNP in Dundee East losing the distinctive electorate that it maintained in the 1970s and 1980s.

By the end of the millennium there was no longer any room for local parties in the SNP to pursue their own specific political approach. While this was largely a result of the party's ideological development, it followed a nationwide trend in which national leaderships offered much less room for local parties to diverge from a disciplined message established at headquarters. However, with an emphasis on good organisation, energetic activism and competent leadership, the Dundee SNP was able to outperform the party's Scotland-wide results once again in the 2000s. Even within changed political culture of the era that limited the possibility of pursuing a distinctive ideological position locally, the Dundee SNP was still able to exert an influence on the party's electoral performance, albeit in a more modest way than it had in the 1970s and 1980s. The rest of the city's political landscape also played a major role in shaping Dundee's electoral development, but no other factor was as decisive in the emergence of the city's Nationalist tradition as changes within the local SNP itself.

### **Chapter Three: The Dundee City Labour Party**

The experience of the Labour Party in Dundee was much more representative of national patterns than that of the city's SNP. During the 1970s and early 1980s it faced a series of debilitating problems that constrained its electoral reach, before returning to health in the late 1980s and 1990s and then beginning to degenerate once again from the end of the 1990s. This followed the history of local Labour Parties across Scotland and the United Kingdom as a whole. However, these issues were often felt in an extreme form in Dundee, making the party slightly more vulnerable to the SNP than other local organisations during the early and later periods, but leaving it in a firm position to resist them during the middle period. This chapter will highlight that even a more marginal divergence between local and national political developments can influence electoral outcomes in key ways.

#### **The First Period, 1973 to the mid-1980s**

George Galloway posits that the advance of the SNP into Labour territory in the 1970s had 'as much to do with the decay of local Labour Parties, as an actual swing to nationalism'.<sup>737</sup> With his close personal experiences of the Dundee Labour Party during the 1970s and 1980s, his statement was likely shaped by its troubled nature. During this period, Dundee's Labour establishment was riven by problems that adversely effected its ability to compete with the Nationalists. It was in visible decline, suffering from a level of incompetence, corruption, factionalism and extremism that set it apart even at a time when similar issues

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<sup>737</sup> SPA, SPA/OH/REF/RR/5, Interview with George Galloway

confronted Labour throughout the country.<sup>738</sup> These problems left it vulnerable, and provided the SNP with a political opportunity that it was very well placed to exploit.

### *Candidate Selection*

It is commonly argued that parliamentary candidates make little difference to constituency results, which are largely determined by party labels alone. They are believed to be especially unimportant in general elections, in which they receive much less scrutiny than in by-elections.<sup>739</sup> Yet in Dundee East through the 1970s and 1980s, Labour's ability to face down the Nationalist challenge was undermined by a succession of unsuitable candidates who influenced the shape of elections. George Machin, who narrowly won the 1973 by-election before losing the following year's two general election contests, started from a disadvantaged position. He was replacing George Thomson, the seat's well-known MP for twenty-one years and a former shadow cabinet minister. Thomson had become one of Britain's first European Commissioners at the controversial EEC, which the United Kingdom had just joined, and possessed a high local profile that Machin could never hope to match.<sup>740</sup> Yet, he proved himself to be a particularly woeful choice on his own merits. As a *Sunday Post* article aptly put it 'even some Labour voters rubbed their eyes in surprise at the party's choice' following Machin's first selection.<sup>741</sup> Being a Yorkshire-born-and-bred trade unionist, he was seen as an outsider, with contemporaries like Tam Dalyell, who took part in the by-election campaign, noting their awareness of popular disdain for his carpet-bagging candidature.<sup>742</sup> Machin himself pointed to Anglophobia as the root of this hostility

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<sup>738</sup> Roger Levy, *Scottish Nationalism at the Crossroads* (Edinburgh, 1990) 44

<sup>739</sup> Anthony Mughan, *Party Participation in British Elections* (London, 1986) 75

<sup>740</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 5 October 2008

<sup>741</sup> DCA, GD/LP/WF/1/1, William Fitzgerald Papers, 'Sunday Post Clipping', 1972

<sup>742</sup> Tam Dalyell, *The Question of Scotland*, 30

during his maiden speech to Parliament in 1973 ‘it may have been one of the issues of the election – the fact I am an Englishman’.<sup>743</sup> George Galloway similarly identified his nationality as an electoral liability ‘choosing an Englishman was almost a disaster’.<sup>744</sup> Although Alan McKinney categorically denies any hint of prejudice, ‘I was not aware of any anti-English feeling’, he admits that the SNP’s Gordon Wilson found it easier to find acceptance ‘because ... you could say he’s a Scot’.<sup>745</sup>

Machin’s problems were exasperated by his inability and unwillingness to engage with the particularities of politics in Scotland and Dundee. McKinney saw his failure to get to grips with the city as his worst flaw, ‘the big problem from his point of view was that he didn’t know the town’.<sup>746</sup> Meanwhile, Jimmy Allison, a key Scottish Labour organiser of the time, complained that he had a weak understanding of the country, ‘Machin did not have a clue about Scottish politics’.<sup>747</sup> During the by-election, both Labour and Machin were criticised for their blinkered refusal to engage with particular concerns, as they instead largely focussed on national issues, they ‘might as well [have been] running in any constituency in the country on the same programme’.<sup>748</sup> His selection had been unpopular with much of the party, who balked at the powerful Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers’ use of its financial muscle to impose Machin on them, souring already strained relations between the different factions of the party.<sup>749</sup> His personal politics alienated the right at a time when it remained the dominant wing of the party locally, George Galloway describing Machin as

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<sup>743</sup> *House of Commons Hansard*, Deb 8 March 1973, Vol 852 Col 656

<sup>744</sup> George Galloway, *Street Fighting*

<sup>745</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Alan McKinney

<sup>746</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>747</sup> Jimmy Allison and Harry Conroy, *Guilty by Suspicion*, 171

<sup>748</sup> *Daily Record*, 26 February 1973, 4

<sup>749</sup> David Butler and Dennis Kavanagh, *The British General Election of February 1974* (London, 1974) 246

being 'a Communist fellow traveller'.<sup>750</sup> These deficiencies were especially damaging to Labour in the context of a by-election, which drew substantially greater focus to Machin as an individual than he would have endured in the more anonymous setting of a general election.<sup>751</sup> Even after winning election, he did not inspire confidence, taking part in scarcely any parliamentary actions. This allowed the SNP to question both his and the Labour Party's commitment to representing Dundee, as they contrasted his idle eleven-month tenure to Gordon Wilson's frenzied activity between February and October 1974.<sup>752</sup>

In the critical 1979 general election, at which the SNP lost nine of its eleven seats and would have been comfortably defeated in Dundee East on the national swing, Labour selected the glamorous ex-Communist and Clydeside shipbuilder Jimmy Reid, who was 'known nationally and internationally', to contest the seat.<sup>753</sup> Through a mixture of poor fortune and a lack of commitment by those previously selected, Reid was the third individual to be chosen as Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate and was left with little time to acquaint himself with the constituency.<sup>754</sup> With his fame, charisma and popular standing, Reid transfixed many. The future Dundee East MP John McAllion, then a recent recruit to the Labour Party, recalled the draw he had for young left-wing activists like himself.<sup>755</sup> Meanwhile, George Galloway pointed towards his awe for Reid's ability to 'pack in huge crowds at election rallies' and captivate his audience.<sup>756</sup> The party expected his reputation would be a major boost at the polls, and brought attention to it at every

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<sup>750</sup> George Galloway, *Street Fighting*

<sup>751</sup> Pippa Norris, *British By-Elections*, 177

<sup>752</sup> NLS, Acc.13687/11, SNP leaflets, flyers, newsletters, ephemera and badges, 'SNP Leaflet for Dundee East October 1974'

<sup>753</sup> *Evening Telegraph*, 20 April 1979, 5

<sup>754</sup> *Courier & Advertiser*, 28 April 1979, 10

<sup>755</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, John McAllion

<sup>756</sup> George Galloway, *Street Fighting*

opportunity in its election literature.<sup>757</sup> Yet some doubted his enthusiasm for normal electoral politics. Raymond Mennie, then standing as a Communist candidate in Dundee West but soon to join the Labour Party, related ‘there was a feeling that he didn’t put his heart and soul into the campaign in Dundee East, that he could have done better’.<sup>758</sup> More damagingly, his fire-eating reputation galvanised support for his SNP opponent. In its post-election report, the *Courier* explained ‘there was a strong feeling among local observers that the Socialists had made a wrong choice in fielding Reid against the hard-working Gordon Wilson .... It was thought too, that a number of Conservatives had voted for Gordon Wilson in a bid to keep Reid out of Parliament’.<sup>759</sup> His background in the Communist Party, which he had only left a few years previously, was readily deployed by the Nationalist campaign: ‘Mr Reid has been a Communist for 25 years ... When leaving the Communist Party he restated his beliefs “I am still a Marxist Socialist ... I want to say this without qualification I don’t want anyone to vote for me today who would not vote for me last week. For I have not changed my views, my beliefs, my ultimate aims in any way”’.<sup>760</sup> John McAllion pointed towards the centrality of Reid’s past to the SNP message, and its effectiveness in mobilising opinion against him ‘the Communist thing, [the SNP] just used that. Wilson just “Communist, Communist, Communist” ... that Communist thing, he just couldn’t, there was a lot of Catholics who wouldn’t vote for a Communist’.<sup>761</sup>

The impact of these worries is emphasised by a letter sent by a Dundonian factory owner to the Conservative Party Central Office in London in which he stated ‘I am naturally concerned at the candidature of Jimmy Reid’ and implored that it would be ‘in the best

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<sup>757</sup> DCPCGA, 1979 General Election, ‘Labour Newsletter for Dundee East 1979’

<sup>758</sup> Bill Knox Interviews, Raymond Mennie

<sup>759</sup> *Courier & Advertiser*, 4 May 1979, 15

<sup>760</sup> DCL, LHC 441 (11), The Lamb Collection, ‘SNP Leaflet for Dundee East 1979’

<sup>761</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, John McAllion

interests of the constituency to allow Mr Wilson a free run against Mr Reid'.<sup>762</sup> Although the Tory leadership could not countenance standing their candidate down for a Nationalist, the suggestion that they should highlights the willingness of Conservative-inclined voters to treat Jimmy Reid's potential entrance into Parliament as an exceptional threat, providing a powerful impetus towards tactical voting in favour of the moderate sitting SNP MP. Indeed, the Tory activist Ian Stevenson admitted during the campaign 'we're aware many of our supporters intend to vote tactically to get Labour out – but we're appealing to them not to'.<sup>763</sup> Reid himself publically blamed this tactical voting for his defeat.<sup>764</sup> Like Machin before him, Reid's selection was deeply divisive internally. Not only did he alienate many on the right as a result of his Communist background, he also divided the left; as George Galloway described, 'there were people who worried that Jimmy Reid would be too Communist, whereas some of us worried that he wouldn't be Communist enough'.<sup>765</sup> A faction of the left grouped around George Galloway instead supported the trade union backed candidature of Daniel Chisholm, leaving behind residual resentment at Reid's imposition.<sup>766</sup>

The selection of Charles Bowman in 1983 was not as problematic as his two immediate predecessors, as he came through the ranks of the City Council group and proved to be less contentious within the party. As Iain Luke remembers from his time working as a sub-agent for Bowman, this resulted in a smoother Labour campaign than the party had run four years previously.<sup>767</sup> Yet he lacked the charismatic appeal of Jimmy Reid and carried similarly

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<sup>762</sup> UD, MS 315/3/3, Dundee East 1979, 'Letter to Tory Central Office', 1979, 1

<sup>763</sup> *Sunday Post*, 29 April 1979, 5

<sup>764</sup> *Broughty Ferry Guide & Carnoustie Gazette*, 5 May 1979, 1

<sup>765</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, George Galloway

<sup>766</sup> Bill Knox Interviews, John McAuley

<sup>767</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Iain Luke

provocative left-wing politics.<sup>768</sup> His period as leader of the radical Labour council administration of the early 1980s tarred him by association with both its controversial positions and concerns about local government corruption.<sup>769</sup> The SNP's Willie Sawers went so far as to describe him as 'probably the worst person they could have selected' for this very reason.<sup>770</sup> John McAllion concurred that baggage derived from his time on the administration gave the Nationalists a simple message with which to attack his candidacy, 'Charlie Bowman just had the council thing that they could hang on his neck'.<sup>771</sup> Although Bowman himself protested that 'the result had nothing to do with that' and was merely a reflection of the national swing against Labour, it is clear that the Nationalists took advantage of his background during the election.<sup>772</sup> They published a leaflet that sought to combine public concerns over the council's actions with Bowman: 'remember – who was the leader of the Administration in Dundee District ... [that] made a fool of Dundee all round the world because of their extremist policies? The Labour candidate'.<sup>773</sup> Both George Galloway and Iain Luke also believed that associations with his cousin David Bowman further tainted his candidacy. David Bowman had forged a strong connection in local popular consciousness between the Bowman name and Communism after standing for the CPGB in every election in Dundee West between 1951 and 1966, becoming a recognised figure in the city's politics.<sup>774</sup> In light of these concerns, the Conservative councillor Donald Hay saw the continued tendency of right-wingers to vote tactically against Labour: 'many Tory voters felt that [Gordon Wilson] was a more palatable option than having a Labour MP, so in their thousands they transferred and tactically voted for the SNP'.<sup>775</sup> Although the

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<sup>768</sup> *Courier & Advertiser*, 19 May 1987, 8

<sup>769</sup> *Evening Telegraph*, 18 May 1983, 9

<sup>770</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Willie Sawers

<sup>771</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, John McAllion

<sup>772</sup> *Courier & Advertiser*, 10 June 1983, 13

<sup>773</sup> DCL, LHC 373 (17), The Lamb Collection, 'SNP Leaflet for Dundee East 1983'

<sup>774</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, George Galloway and Iain Luke

<sup>775</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Donald Hay

selection of these candidates in Dundee East between 1973 and 1983 were not the fundamental reason for Labour's underperformance in that decade, they added to the party's worsening public image and, in the case of Machin and Reid, put stress on its fragile internal unity.

In Dundee West, the candidates proved less troublesome. Peter Doig, first elected at a by-election in 1963, enjoyed the benefits of long-term incumbency before the Nationalists began to seriously challenge in Dundee from the mid-1970s. Doig was not an especially effective MP, rarely active in parliamentary debates and being described by George Galloway in his memoirs as a 'hapless, monosyllabic former bakery driver ... the classic donkey in a red rosette'.<sup>776</sup> Undoubtedly Galloway's view of the MP was soured by time and especially by his 'betrayal and defection to the SDP' in the 1980s.<sup>777</sup> In 1978, his assessment was less damning as he praised the MP's 'tenacious concern for constituents' and willingness to defend Dundonian interests.<sup>778</sup> Despite his faults, the MP was well dug-in in Dundee West, contributing to Labour's ability to hold onto the seat despite the SNP's surge in support in 1974. Doig's succession as Labour MP by Ernie Ross in 1979 was handled far more smoothly than George Thomson's had been six years previously. While Ross was undoubtedly on the party's radical wing at this time, he possessed strong local and working class roots, having come out of the trade union movement in the city's Timex factory and did not carry the associations with an unpopular council administration that bedevilled Bowman in 1983.<sup>779</sup> Consequently, Ross did not draw the same degree of personal ire that his colleagues in Dundee East faced. At the same time, the high profile of Jimmy Reid's campaign across town drew focus away from his own candidacy, distracting

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<sup>776</sup> George Galloway, *Street Fighting*

<sup>777</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, George Galloway

<sup>778</sup> George Galloway in Raymond Chalmers, 'Labour Party Politics in Dundee', 53

<sup>779</sup> *Evening Telegraph*, 1 June 1987, 13

the sort of negative scrutiny that might have hindered his first entrance into Parliament. In the years after 1979, Ross had the opportunity to consolidate his position as a sitting MP and establish a tighter grip on the seat. Indeed as soon as the next election, the Labour campaign had begun to use his incumbency, making proud assertions that he was 'Britain's busiest MP' in 1983.<sup>780</sup>

### *Factionalism and Radicalism*

The degree of factionalism that afflicted the Dundee Labour Party in the 1970s and 1980s was often crippling, and seriously hampered its campaigning ability. Although conflict along ideological lines, between moderates and the radical left, afflicted Labour across Britain in these years, squabbles had generally been less severe in Scotland.<sup>781</sup> Yet in Dundee, they were very pronounced. Through most of the postwar period, the right had dominated the Dundee Labour Party. Both its council leadership and MPs were consistently drawn from this wing of the party. Indeed, both of the city's sitting MPs at the beginning of the 1970s, George Thomson and Peter Doig, later defected to the Social Democratic Party after its split from Labour in 1981.<sup>782</sup> Yet through the 1970s, their control of the party began to break down in the face of the rising influence of a 'new red guard' of radical left-wing activists who gained control of the party over the course of the decade.<sup>783</sup>

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<sup>780</sup> DCPCGA, 1983 General Election, 'Labour Leaflet for Dundee West 1983'

<sup>781</sup> Frances Wood, 'Scottish Labour in Government and Opposition, 1964-1974', Ian Donnachie, Christopher Harvie and Ian S Wood (eds), *Forward! Labour Politics in Scotland 1888-1988* (Edinburgh, 1989) 160

<sup>782</sup> George Galloway, *Street Fighting*

<sup>783</sup> *Ibid.*

In the early 1970s, the MP for Dundee East, George Thomson, had been viciously denounced by the rank and file for his passionate Europeanism. After going against the Labour whip to support Britain's entry into the EEC in 1971, the city party had received a raft of letters from trade unionists and supporters condemning the MP, calling for his deselection and even expulsion from the Labour Party. They drew focus not just to his rebellion on the European issue, but also to his broader right-wing political identity.<sup>784</sup> Indeed, in August 1972, just months before resigning his seat to take up his new role as a European Commissioner, Thomson had been forced into pleading with his local party not to consider a formal motion demanding his immediate deselection.<sup>785</sup> This was a very serious and divisive threat faced by a number of pro-European Labour MPs, predominantly from the party's right-wing, around Britain in the early 1970s. Indeed, after taking the same action as Thomson, the Lincoln MP Dick Taverne had been deselected, leading to his defection alongside a large minority of local party members in his constituency.<sup>786</sup>

The conflict in Dundee escalated further in the middle of the decade, as tense ideological disputes meshed together with grievances over the local party's alleged illegal practises.<sup>787</sup> Questions of improper behaviour had been a source of internal strain for years by the mid-1970s, with the *Scottish Daily Express* hinting in 1974 that 'there had been difference within the Dundee City Labour Party over controversial land dealings'.<sup>788</sup> However, it was only after claims of corruption were thrown into the open by ITV's *World in Action* investigation of the council in 1975 that they came to the fore of the party's factional

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<sup>784</sup> UE, Box 9, Lord Thomson of Monifieth Papers, 'Letter from the third Dundee branch of the AUEW to George Thomson', 1 November 1971

<sup>785</sup> UE, Box 11, Lord Thomson of Monifieth Papers, 'Letter from George Thomson to Alf Stewart', 16 August 1972

<sup>786</sup> Dick Taverne, *Against the Tide: Politics and Beyond a Memoir* (London, 2014) 176

<sup>787</sup> *Guardian*, 13 April 1977, 2

<sup>788</sup> *Scottish Daily Express*, 2 March 1974, 7

struggle. The documentary gave Dundee's Labour radicals the opportunity to brazenly use the allegations for political advantage in their internal struggle. They purged much of the party's old guard, seeking to strengthen their own position and remove those associated with corruption.<sup>789</sup> Galloway admits that this purge had a strong ideological component, with right-wingers targeted regardless of whether they were involved in the scandal.<sup>790</sup> In October 1976, Ian Borthwick, a long-term stalwart of the city's moderate councillors and one of just a handful to survive these purges, had sent a report to the General Secretary of the Labour Party in which he observed 'that non-elected left-wing activists in Dundee had sought a decisive influence over council policy' by tightening their local grip on the local party and undermining internal opposition.<sup>791</sup> This process reached its denouement at the District Council elections the following year. Fraser MacPherson described how the moderates were permanently crippled by the replacement of six senior councillors with candidates of the left's choosing ahead of the elections: 'there was a night of the long knives in 1977 when Labour effectively deselected a big load of their longstanding and pretty frankly, and in my opinion, pretty good councillors'. He noted that a number of these individuals subsequently joined the Social Democratic Party after its foundation in 1981.<sup>792</sup> This ruthlessness contributed towards the especially poisonous atmosphere that surrounded the party. Notably, James L Stewart, who had risen from the factory floor to become a star of the Dundee party and lead the Labour council group, felt he had been brutally treated after being expelled and disowned by the party and was the only one of three councillors convicted in 1980 not to be released upon appeal. Following the end of his sentence, he became ardently committed to attacking the Dundee Labour Party and promoting discord within it.<sup>793</sup> George Galloway believed that Stewart was in a strong

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<sup>789</sup> David Morley, *Gorgeous George*, 25

<sup>790</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, George Galloway

<sup>791</sup> *Scotsman*, 26 January 1977

<sup>792</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Fraser MacPherson

<sup>793</sup> David Morley, *Gorgeous George*, 64

position to cause harm, claiming 'he was the spider at the centre of a web' of journalists through which he was able to spread damaging rumours and accusations about the party.<sup>794</sup>

The Labour left itself was also riddled by internecine conflict, in large part originating in clashes between combustible personalities. A struggle between two of its most prominent figures, George Galloway and Harry McLevy, one of many ex-Communists involved in the local party, caused 'a split on the left' during the early 1980s.<sup>795</sup> Although George Galloway downplays its significance, John McAllion affirmed that the strain caused was severe 'the party split really badly over that'.<sup>796</sup> This followed earlier disagreements over Jimmy Reid's candidacy in Dundee East at the 1979 election. Obvious disunity tarnished the party's public image. In the 1977 District Council election, the Progressive-Conservatives made use of it as evidence of Labour's unfitness to govern, 'the Dundee Labour Party has been at war with itself and washed all its dirty linen in public'.<sup>797</sup> Backbiting also affected the mechanics of political campaigns. Tam Dalyell observed that elements of the party that opposed George Machin's candidacy in 1973 'just sat on its hands' during the by-election.<sup>798</sup> Equally, Raymond Mennie claimed 'the likes of [George] Galloway' who had been against Jimmy Reid's selection 'took a bit of a backseat' in the resulting election campaign.<sup>799</sup>

The left-wingers who came to control the party by the late 1970s possessed radical views, even by the standards of the day. As John McAllion described, 'it was a very far-left Labour

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<sup>794</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, George Galloway

<sup>795</sup> Bill Knox Interviews, John McAuley

<sup>796</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, George Galloway and John McAllion

<sup>797</sup> DCPCGA, 1977 District Elections, 'Progressive/Conservative Leaflet for Lochee East 1977'

<sup>798</sup> Tam Dalyell, *The Question of Scotland*, 30

<sup>799</sup> Bill Knox Interviews, Raymond Mennie

Party in Dundee at that time'.<sup>800</sup> Despite his youth, George Galloway rose to become the figurehead of this wing, succeeding the future Kilmarnock MP Willie McKelvey, and led it towards dominance during his spell as the Dundee Labour Party's fulltime organiser between 1977 and 1983. His politics were widely known in the city, with the *Courier* describing him as a 'Marxist' at every opportunity.<sup>801</sup> During his ultimately unsuccessful, and only, attempt to gain election to the District Council in 1977, he was notoriously denounced from the pulpit of the Catholic Church in Gilburn for his vocal Marxist sympathies and public criticisms of the institution of marriage.<sup>802</sup> He worked together with a number of other key left-wing activists in the North East Debating Society or NEDS. The group was described by one activist as a 'cell-like' organisation exercising tight internal discipline and thereby able to have a disproportionate influence over the city's Labour politics.<sup>803</sup> Galloway noted that it functioned along Communist-inspired principles of 'democratic centralism', facilitating a high level of coordination that allowed it to command Dundee Labour politics.<sup>804</sup> Iain Luke attests to this description, accepting that Galloway and his clique were 'very influential' in the party. His power was not only rooted in organisation, but also his rising prestige among members that resulted from his growing nationwide reputation.<sup>805</sup> Indeed, in 1977 he became the first member of the Scottish Executive of the Scottish Council of the Labour Party from Dundee since 1961.

The Communist Party, traditionally strong in Dundee, enjoyed real sway in Labour circles in these years. Mervyn Rolfe, a future Labour Lord Provost, witnessed this cohabitation:

'Labour and Communist Party members would sit around the same table, there were few

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<sup>800</sup> SPA, SPA/OH/REF/NAT/YES/9, Interview with John McAllion

<sup>801</sup> *Courier & Advertiser*, 4 May 1977, 7

<sup>802</sup> *Courier & Advertiser*, 1 March 1977

<sup>803</sup> Ian McLintock in Raymond Chalmers, 'Labour Party Politics in Dundee', 32

<sup>804</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, George Galloway

<sup>805</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Iain Luke

boundaries'.<sup>806</sup> Galloway himself was very close to the Communists, advocating their national affiliation to Labour.<sup>807</sup> He claimed the membership of the powerful North East Debating Society 'had the same kind of worldview and the same attitudes to the great issues of the day with the Communist Party'.<sup>808</sup> Yet, this bond predated the left's establishment of supremacy; as Raymond Mennie notes, 'the relationship between the Labour Party and the Communist Party in Dundee has always been a good relationship'.<sup>809</sup> John McAllion makes a similar observation as he recalls that the large-scale involvement of both parties in trade unionism in the city meant that personal connections between members were common.<sup>810</sup> In 1960, George Thomson, then the MP for Dundee East, had compiled a report that accused the local party of being infiltrated by Communists.<sup>811</sup> Rumours continued to swirl periodically, with rivals claiming that the party was coming under 'Communist control' during the 1973 Dundee East by-election campaign.<sup>812</sup> Nonetheless, the left did not take hold of the party leadership until the second half of the 1970s and were not able to shape the city's governance until the 1980s.

Having overthrown the Labour right, 'the most radical administration in recent times' won control of the District Council from the Tories in 1980, giving the Labour left a platform to air their views beyond the esoteric world of internal socialist politics.<sup>813</sup> At the same time, other radical left-wing Labour administration gained control of a number of local authorities around Britain in the early and mid-1980s, most prominently in Liverpool,

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<sup>806</sup> Mervyn Rolfe in David Morley, *Gorgeous George*, 27

<sup>807</sup> NLS, Acc.13417/5, News Cuttings, 1932-1984 & Undated, 'Scottish Marxist Clipping', November/December 1981

<sup>808</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, George Galloway

<sup>809</sup> Bill Knox Interviews, Raymond Mennie

<sup>810</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, John McAllion

<sup>811</sup> *Courier & Advertiser*, 17 November 1960

<sup>812</sup> *Times*, 28 February 1973, 4

<sup>813</sup> *Dundee Standard*, 9 May 1980, 8

Sheffield and the Greater London Council in England.<sup>814</sup> In Scotland, similar leftist councils achieved more fleeting control in Edinburgh and Stirling.<sup>815</sup> George Galloway makes clear that the Dundee Labour Party saw itself as a part of this wider wave.<sup>816</sup> These administrations took on very different forms in each location, varying from the cosmopolitanism of the London new-left to the confrontational Trotskyism of the Militant Tendency in Liverpool.<sup>817</sup> The Dundee council's socialist perspective was more traditional and class-based than many of the others arising across the country, described by one member as 'Stabianism, combining Stalinism and Fabianism' and uninterested in the liberal left 'trendy Hillhead politics' that typified many of the left-wing Labour administrations elsewhere in Britain.<sup>818</sup> Like many of these radical councils, the Dundee administration earned a prominent reputation that constrained Labour's electoral reach.

Belief that Labour was both influenced by and behaving like a Communist organisation pervaded the way other parties spoke about them from 1980. Jack Barnet, a Conservative councillor, pointedly described the Labour administration as the 'most extreme left-wing group in Scotland', claiming that his constituents had taken to calling city hall 'the Kremlin'.<sup>819</sup> The normally more restrained Alliance adopted similar language, as they depicted a 'Soviet-like Dundee Labour Party' in 1984.<sup>820</sup> At the same time, the SNP happily labelled them as 'loony left' in their election literature through the decade.<sup>821</sup> A 1984 SNP leaflet was more specific in its complaints, as it accused the local Labour Party as having

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<sup>814</sup> Geoff Green, 'The new municipal socialism' in Martin Loney (ed.), *The State and the Market: Politics and Welfare in Contemporary Britain* (London, 1987) 203

<sup>815</sup> Hilary Wainwright, *Labour: A Tale of Two Parties* (London, 1987) 94

<sup>816</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, George Galloway

<sup>817</sup> James E Cronin, *New Labour's Pasts*, 258

<sup>818</sup> Gerry Hassan and Eric Shaw, *The Strange Death of Labour Scotland*, 30

<sup>819</sup> Jack Barnet in David Morley, *Gorgeous George*, 61

<sup>820</sup> DCPCGA, 1984 District Elections, 'Alliance Leaflet for Law 1984'

<sup>821</sup> UE, MS 325 Box 10, Dundee City Labour Party Papers, 'SNP Leaflet for Hilltown 1984'

been wholly taken over by Communists and their sympathisers. It pointed towards the senior roles played by ex-Communists and outré leftists in the party, mentioning Harry McLevy, Raymond Mennie and George Galloway by name.<sup>822</sup> As Mennie, who had stood for the Communist Party in Dundee West in 1979 before joining Labour soon afterwards, revealed, these figures and their views were not disguised 'everyone knew I was a Communist, but you're in the Labour Party so it's acceptable to vote for you'.<sup>823</sup> Meanwhile, McLevy had been the public face of Dundee Communism for years. Succeeding David Bowman, he stood for the party in Dundee West in 1970 and the two general elections of 1974, built up his profile on a national level and earned a reputation locally for ceaseless and noisy activity in Dundee itself.<sup>824</sup> Although George Galloway lacked the same background, his leftist inclinations and close involvement with individual Communists tarred him with a similar image. He admits to being 'a fellow traveller' in these years, taking undisguised inspiration from the movement.<sup>825</sup> The party itself did very little to assuage concerns that it held Communist sympathies. In 1980 the senior councillor Colin Rennie stated his belief that Dundee 'should twin with cities more in line with our political persuasion' by establishing a relationship with the Soviet port of Riga, again publically highlighting the sympathies with the USSR held by local Labour figures.<sup>826</sup>

Dundee joined its fellow radical councils around Britain in coming into direct conflict with the national government on a number of issues in these years.<sup>827</sup> Having unsuccessfully resisted the implementation of right to buy legislation, the council rejected the

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<sup>822</sup> NLS, Acc.13687/11, SNP leaflets, flyers, newsletters, ephemera and badges, 'SNP Leaflet for Midmill 1984'

<sup>823</sup> Bill Knox Interview, Raymond Mennie

<sup>824</sup> George Galloway, *Street Fighting*

<sup>825</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, George Galloway

<sup>826</sup> *Courier & Advertiser*, 25 November 1980, 4

<sup>827</sup> Martin Boddy 'Local councils and the financial squeeze', Martin Boddy and Colin Fudge (eds), *Local Socialism? Labour Councils and New Left Alternatives* (Basingstoke, 1984) 215

government's efforts to corral local administrations into strict fiscal guidelines. During the financial year ending in 1982, Dundee led the way amongst a group of Labour councils that refused to limit their spending, with the city having the highest overspend in Scotland at 150 per cent of the mandated amount.<sup>828</sup> This in turn led to huge increases in local taxation through the rates.<sup>829</sup> These policies caused great concern among many Dundonians, particularly the middle classes who were most directly affected. The council's radicalism extended beyond fiscal policy. It also engaged in flamboyant expressions of solidarity with Palestine, twinning Dundee with the West Bank city of Nablus, inviting its controversial mayor to visit and drawing international attention by flying the Palestinian flag over city hall.<sup>830</sup> George Galloway contentiously asserts that this policy was rooted in his own force of personality 'older comrades were happy to follow my guidance on the Palestinian issue'.<sup>831</sup> In contrast, Iain Luke and Helen Wright, both Labour councillors from 1980, claim that it was the testimony of West Bank-born students attending the University that won the party over.<sup>832</sup> Regardless, the Dundee Labour Party became enmeshed with the issue long before it became a central cause célèbre of the left in Britain more generally. Senior members of the party, including Galloway himself and the recently elected Dundee West MP Ernie Ross, went as far as to meet members of the PLO in person and travel to the West Bank in 1980.<sup>833</sup>

Galloway admits that Labour 'underestimated the backlash' this would provoke, having done little to test public opinion beforehand.<sup>834</sup> Indeed, the Palestinian issue drew

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<sup>828</sup> Gerry Hassan and Eric Shaw, *The Strange Death of Labour Scotland*, 26

<sup>829</sup> David Stewart, *The Path to Devolution and Change*, 163

<sup>830</sup> Andrew Murray Scott, *Modern Dundee*, 132

<sup>831</sup> George Galloway, *I'm Not the Only One*, 33

<sup>832</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Iain Luke and Helen Wright

<sup>833</sup> *Dundee Standard*, 4 July 1980, 5

<sup>834</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, George Galloway

controversy from the first, with the Conservative councillor Jack Barnett describing the administration's actions as 'a diabolical stunt that is obviously motivated by the Palestinian Liberation Organisation', highlighting the common accusation that Labour were expressing support for the terrorist group.<sup>835</sup> Labour's John Letford recalls how the Palestinian question became deeply divisive in the city through the 1980s.<sup>836</sup> Members of the party exacerbated the issue by employing ferocious anti-Israel rhetoric, with the councillor Colin Rennie declaring 'it is the Israelis who are the real terrorists'. This in turn led to accusations by Jewish groups that the party was encouraging anti-Semitism locally, with incidents involving racist graffiti being drawn on the city's synagogue deployed as evidence.<sup>837</sup> Irrespective of the truth behind these claims, the council's grandstanding was a source of bemusement for many within Dundee, as one constituent objected, 'international affairs are no concern of a local council'.<sup>838</sup> Helen Wright, a member of the administration, accepted that this perspective was common, 'a lot of people didn't like it, they thought we should stick to Dundee business and not go anyplace else'.<sup>839</sup> A *Courier* article highlighted that these issues were becoming an electoral liability in the early 1980s, stating that Labour were 'getting some stick on the doorstep about Nablus and rates increases'.<sup>840</sup>

The SNP eagerly turned the Palestinian question into a campaigning issue, regarding it as an ideal means of painting the council as both overly ideological and distant from day to day worries in its reckless pursuit of fringe concerns. At a local by-election in 1983 they mocked the administration's obsession 'Dundee must have the only District Council in Scotland with

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<sup>835</sup> *Courier & Advertiser*, 18 November 1980, 11

<sup>836</sup> John Letford, *Fae the Boatyard to Buckingham Palace*, 79

<sup>837</sup> Nathan Abrams, *Caledonian Jews: A Study of Seven Small Communities in Scotland* (London, 2009) 92

<sup>838</sup> *Dundee Standard*, May 1982, 2

<sup>839</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Helen Wright

<sup>840</sup> DCA, GD/LP/WF/1/5, William Fitzgerald Papers, 'Courier & Advertiser Clipping', 30 October 1981

a foreign policy!<sup>841</sup> At the general election later that year, they took aim with a leaflet that decried that the council had ‘hung the flag of the terrorist PLO in the City Chambers and made fools of Dundee all round the world because of their extremist policies ... [it] has been more interested in the West Bank of the Jordan than in the North Bank of the Tay’.<sup>842</sup> In a newsletter published in the months after the 1984 district elections, the newly elected Nationalist councillor Neil MacAlinden, made it clear that his party valued this issue highly as he placed central focus on the fact that ‘the SNP raised this matter at the full council meeting ... our motion read that the twinning between Dundee and Nablus be ended forthwith’.<sup>843</sup> The local Labour Party’s decision to embed themselves so deeply with the Palestinian cause offered them no electoral advantage, yet provided their SNP opponents with readymade and effective propaganda.

The council’s reputation was blamed for exacerbating Dundee’s economic problems. Labour’s opponents were quick to damn them along these lines. A 1984 SNP pamphlet claimed that ‘blame [for Dundee’s economic decline] also rests on the peculiar, if not eccentric, way in which the city has been managed ... Dundee looks dangerously eccentric in the eyes of the world’.<sup>844</sup> Outlining a potential strategy for the 1988 District elections, Gordon Wilson put forward the same theme, claiming that the council ‘destroyed job opportunities through giving the city political “body odour”’.<sup>845</sup> In his study of the North Sea oil industry, the historian Christopher Harvie suggests that many companies passed on the possibility of investing in Dundee due to their wariness of its troubled politics.<sup>846</sup> The

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<sup>841</sup> DCPCGA, 1983 Central By-election, ‘SNP Leaflet for Central 1983’

<sup>842</sup> UD, MS 315/3/4, General Election: Dundee East 1983, ‘SNP Leaflet for Dundee East 1983’

<sup>843</sup> UD, MS 315/4/1, Dundee District Councillors 1984, ‘The Independent Newsheet’, June 1984

<sup>844</sup> UD, MS 315/4/1, Dundee District Councillors 1984, ‘SNP Pamphlet for Dundee 1984’

<sup>845</sup> UD, MS 315/4/4, Dundee District Councillors 1987, ‘Memorandum to SNP Dundee District Association from Gordon Wilson’, 1987

<sup>846</sup> Christopher Harvie, *Fool’s Gold*, 164

Conservative MP Bill Walker provided anecdotal evidence to support this view, as in 1981 he claimed that 'I have been told by the chairman of an international oil corporation that they decided against a development in Dundee because of the city's image and the way the Labour administration behaved in office'.<sup>847</sup> Walker continued to repeat this diagnosis of the city's ills throughout the decade, claiming in 1990 that 'with such leadership companies will not come'.<sup>848</sup> Ken Pye posits that Liverpool suffered comparable economic consequences from the reputation it earned during the same period, as the Militant Tendency rose to prominence and made it appear that 'Liverpool was "closed for business"'.<sup>849</sup> It is difficult to assess the real economic impact of political image in Dundee or elsewhere. In a study of areas of Italy, France and Britain with long radical traditions throughout the twentieth century Philip Cooke found these reputations had little impact on their economic development.<sup>850</sup> Certainly, Dundee's decline in the 1980s did not markedly differ from other industrial areas of Britain. Regardless of the economic reality, public perceptions that the Dundee Labour Party was contributing to the city's ongoing deindustrialisation were strong, and further damaged the party's image.

Problems with factionalism and extremism peaked in the early 1980s, at a time when Labour was under severe strain across Britain. In Dundee, they were especially visceral and damaging. They decisively weakened the party, disrupting its electoral machine and holding it back from reclaiming Dundee East despite the favourable national headwinds present in 1979 and 1983. More damagingly, its issues fostered an image of the city Labour Party as being dangerous and extremist. This made them an ideal foil for the SNP, whose ability to

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<sup>847</sup> *Herald*, 6 April 1981, 1

<sup>848</sup> *House of Commons Hansard*, Deb 8 February 1990, Vol 166 Col 1047

<sup>849</sup> Ken Pye, *Liverpool: The Rise, Fall and Renaissance of a World-Class City* (Amberley, 2014) 177

<sup>850</sup> Philip Cooke, 'Radical Regions? Space, Time and Gender Relations in Emilia, Provence and South Wales', Gareth Rees, Janet Bujra, Paul Littlewood, Howard Newby and Teresa L Rees (eds), *Political Action and Social Identity: Class, Conflict and Ideology* (London & Basingstoke, 1985) 22

define themselves as Labour's antithesis was central to their electoral strategy. This approach would have achieved much less resonance against a more moderate Labour Party.

### *Corruption*

The damaging spectre of corruption, indelibly associated with the Labour Party, loomed over local politics in Dundee through much of the mid and late twentieth century, having become a serious issue during the era of postwar urban redevelopment. Municipal corruption was not unique to the city. Across Scotland, Labour had been 'repeatedly undermined by the uncovering of local government corruption and malpractice'.<sup>851</sup> Neither did these issues end at the border, as the Labour administration in Newcastle was engulfed by scandal and arrests during the 1970s, with one party official and councillor conceding the widespread nature of local government sleaze while on trial, 'all this sort of business goes on. So if I am corrupt, half the country is corrupt'.<sup>852</sup> Yet, few rotten burghs held the notoriety of Dundee, which earned the moniker 'the Chicago of the North'.<sup>853</sup> As Jimmy Halliday lamented, 'control of Dundee council, by the sad tradition of the time, was considered of great material benefit for the party's councillors, their colleagues, their families, their friends'.<sup>854</sup> The scale and variety of the practises allegedly engaged in by the city's local politicians was astounding. The police had first set up a 'Dundee Dossier', tracking corruption in the city, in 1964.<sup>855</sup> Indeed, members of the Progressive group had

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<sup>851</sup> *Guardian*, 16 April 1977, 10

<sup>852</sup> Andy Cunningham in Alistair Moffat and George Rosie, *A History of Newcastle and Gateshead*, 363

<sup>853</sup> *Courier & Advertiser*, 2 April 1966

<sup>854</sup> James Halliday, *Yours for Scotland*, 87

<sup>855</sup> *Herald*, 1 February 2000

openly aired accusations concerning the Labour administration in 1966, even as legal proceedings were not brought forward.<sup>856</sup> In 1968, the Labour councillor Bill Roberts was arrested after his attempts to cajole Tom McFettridge, the SNP's recently elected and only Dundee councillor, into sabotaging a Nationalist campaign in a Labour seat were uncovered by the police.<sup>857</sup> Far more common was financial malpractice in the form of cronyism in the distribution of jobs, improper payments, embezzlement and conflicts of interest in the awarding of public contracts, particularly for construction projects.<sup>858</sup> These activities offered great opportunities for those involved to enrich themselves. In 1973, the then Lord Provost Tom Moore had drawn attention by making suspiciously large profits through land speculation.<sup>859</sup> Meanwhile, a number of senior councillors grew wealthy from flourishing businesses that were deeply involved in public projects. A member of the building trade in the city pointed to this relationship in *World in Action's* 1975 documentary 'you could not distinguish between certain companies and the corporation ... they are synonymous'.<sup>860</sup> This exposé, which labelled Dundee a 'mafia town', revealed the details of these activities to the public for the first time.<sup>861</sup> It contributed towards a major police investigation that led to the arrest of a number of the leading lights of the Dundee Labour Party in 1977 and their conviction in 1980.<sup>862</sup>

Although John McAllion testifies that the left's clear-out of the worst offending councillors at the end of the 1970s rid the party of its corruption problems, suspicions continued to swirl into the 1980s.<sup>863</sup> Indeed, McAllion's entry onto the Tayside Regional Council through

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<sup>856</sup> *Courier & Advertiser*, 6 January 1966

<sup>857</sup> James Halliday, *Yours for Scotland*, 88

<sup>858</sup> Alan Doig, *Corruption and Misconduct in Contemporary British Politics*, 323

<sup>859</sup> *Sunday Times*, 1 July 1973

<sup>860</sup> 'The Dundee Dossier', *World in Action*, 14 April 1975

<sup>861</sup> Gerry Hassan, *Scotland the Bold*, 33

<sup>862</sup> David Morley, *Gorgeous George*, 24

<sup>863</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, John McAllion

a by-election in 1984 was facilitated by a scandal in which the sitting Labour councillor, Jack Stewart, had been caught 'fiddling with his taxes' and was forced to resign.<sup>864</sup> A 1985 political poem alluded to the perceived problems, 'while voters sweat to pay their rates, the Labour leaders treat their mates'.<sup>865</sup> The muckraking *Dundee Independent* newsletter, produced by the scorned James L Stewart, revealed that in the space of four months in 1984 just four Labour councillors had charged the city for one hundred and thirty five bottles of spirits.<sup>866</sup> Dundee's reputation remained lamentable, continuing to draw national attention. In 1986, the satirical magazine *Private Eye* contributed to this crooked image as it compared the council leader Ken Fagan to 'Al Capone'.<sup>867</sup> Meanwhile, in 1987 the Conservative MP Bill Walker took pleasure in airing accusations in the House of Commons, as he pointed to 'allegations [against the District Council] that large sums of money have disappeared'.<sup>868</sup> The party's reputation was also adversely affected by the controversies that surrounded its attempt to establish a number of social clubs around working class areas of the city in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Designed to raise funds for the party, all the clubs provided substantial donations before running up large debts and closing down by the middle of the decade.<sup>869</sup> Although there were few claims that individuals gained personal benefit from the clubs, public accusations were made that funds had been misused while local communities were left bitter at their perceived mistreatment. The closures raised enough controversy to become the subject of a 1987 Channel 4 *Dispatches* documentary that added to the city's existing lamentable reputation.<sup>870</sup>

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<sup>864</sup> SPA, SPA/OH/REF/NAT/YES/9, Interview with John McAllion

<sup>865</sup> UD, MS 324/3/1, Broughty Ferry Branch of the SNP, 'Poem entitled Ken the Ranter', January 1985

<sup>866</sup> UD, MS 324/2/2, Broughty Ferry Branch of the SNP, 'The Dundee Independent', 28 September 1984, 1

<sup>867</sup> *Private Eye*, 13 June 1986

<sup>868</sup> *House of Commons Hansard*, Deb 12 November 1987, Vol 122 Col 561

<sup>869</sup> David Morley, *Gorgeous George*, 77

<sup>870</sup> 'In the Red', *Dispatches*, 6 November 1987

Corruption and malpractice was not solely associated with the Labour Party. Alex MacKenzie, who served as a rare Progressive Lord Provost between 1967 and 1970, admitted that he had an awareness of unethical activities being engaged in by ‘cliques of power-drunk amateur politicians’ from both Labour and his own party.<sup>871</sup> Popular perceptions of corruption were not necessarily party-political, with the citizenry possessing ‘a general assumption that the council is a den of thieves’ in its entirety.<sup>872</sup> Yet, Labour’s electoral dominance ensured that their association with the problem was far stronger than any other party. This was a serious blow to its standing, and identified it in the eyes of many as a vested interest to be brought down. With the SNP not electing any councillors between Tom McFetteridge’s unfortunate tenure in the late 1960s and the 1984 District elections, the Nationalists were perfectly placed to pose as a clean-cut alternative that was above the mire of city hall.

### *Conclusion*

The myriad weaknesses of the Labour Party during this period were critical to the SNP’s strong performances, particularly in Dundee East. Their poor candidate selection, internal divisions and unsavoury public image as both extreme and corrupt put the city Labour Party at a disadvantage in competing for votes with their rivals. Moreover, such was the revulsion its activities caused, it provided a catalyst for centrist and right-leaning electors to abandon their personal party preferences in search of an alternative. As Alan McKinney recalled, this created a large ‘anti-Labour vote’ that was not loyal to any one party and was drawn towards the SNP in Dundee East where it was undisputedly Labour’s chief

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<sup>871</sup> Alex MacKenzie, *And Nothing But The Truth*, 10

<sup>872</sup> DCA, GD/LP/WF/1/4b, William Fitzgerald Papers, ‘Scotsman Clipping’, 13 March 1976

opponent.<sup>873</sup> Although Labour faced similar issues across Scotland and the United Kingdom, until finding their feet by the end of the 1980s, they were severe in Dundee. However, the problems that assailed the party only benefitted the SNP by virtue of their local strength, which gave them the ability to take advantage of the opportunities presented to them. In a city in which Labour had never enjoyed majorities on the scale it achieved in Glasgow and the surrounding area, the combination of a highly effective Nationalist organisation in Dundee East and a vulnerable local Labour Party created a political balance that did not develop anywhere else in urban Scotland. This in turn kept Gordon Wilson in Parliament until 1987, and fostered a permanent SNP tradition in the city with a significance that would long outlast those directly involved with either party in this earlier period.

### **The Second Period, mid-1980s to the late 1990s**

The late 1980s and 1990s marked the golden age of Scottish Labour. Recovering from the 1983 election debacle much more quickly than in England and Wales, it replaced the instability of the preceding years with a dominance over Scottish politics that was not effectively challenged until the rise of the SNP to power in the mid-2000s. In Dundee, the party was in very good health. Labour cemented its electoral supremacy at all tiers of government, creating what the SNP's Shona Robison described as a 'sea of red' through the city.<sup>874</sup> Following Gordon Wilson's defeat in 1987, Labour built up a large lead over the SNP in Dundee East to complement that which they already held in the western constituency. This was reflected in local elections, with the party reaching its peak at the 1995 City Council elections when it won twenty eight of thirty six seats and fifty four per cent of the

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<sup>873</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Alan McKinney

<sup>874</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Shona Robison

vote. Labour benefited from the strong leadership of long-established and effective Members of Parliament in Ernie Ross and, from 1987, John McAllion, who were comfortable making use of nationalist political language. While the party did not entirely move past its long history of internal strife, these problems were not nearly as debilitating either locally or nationally as they had been in the 1970s and early 1980s. Labour also built up a strong local party structure, enjoying the benefits of a large and efficiently organised membership. While Labour's rejuvenation across Scotland and later Britain was the principal force behind the party's electoral achievements in these years, local actors complemented these national trends and accentuated its success in Dundee.

### *The Role of Individuals*

The Dundee Labour Party was blessed during this period by the presence of capable leading figures in the form of its MPs for Dundee East and Dundee West, John McAllion and Ernie Ross respectively. Iain Luke and Richard McCready both contend that the quality of these two individuals was a critical component of their party's strong record during these years.<sup>875</sup> As Joe FitzPatrick argues, McAllion, who finally retook Dundee East in 1987, easily outshone previous Labour candidates for the seat.<sup>876</sup> Rooted in Dundonian politics, he was 'a well-established local campaigner' who benefited from the public exposure and credibility that his time as convenor of the Tayside Regional Council had lent him.<sup>877</sup> This was widely seen as a key advantage. Labour claimed that the convenorship had 'given him the status and credibility of any MP'.<sup>878</sup> An *Evening Telegraph* report on the contest

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<sup>875</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Iain Luke and Richard McCready

<sup>876</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Joe FitzPatrick

<sup>877</sup> *Broughty Ferry Guide & Carnoustie Gazette*, 30 May 1987, 10

<sup>878</sup> DCPCGA, 1987 General Election, 'Labour Leaflet for Dundee East 1987'

highlighted his council position as contributing to his success, claiming that it 'may have been a factor in the campaign as it robbed Mr Wilson of the normal advantages of greater publicity accruing to the sitting MP'.<sup>879</sup> In his post-election report to the SNP NEC, Alan McKinney was able to quantify the effect it had on press reporting 'checking the *Courier*, *Telegraph*, *Dundee Extra* and *Sunday Post* for January and February showed the Labour Candidate had achieved more coverage than the Labour MP in Dundee West and almost as much as Gordon Wilson'.<sup>880</sup> Meanwhile, his three-year spell on the Tayside council had been so brief that there had been little opportunity to sully his public image in the manner of Charles Bowman before the 1983 election, as he noted 'you can't do much damage to your reputation in that time'.<sup>881</sup> McAllion's left-wing politics, which he shared with previous Labour candidates, did not become a key election issue, with his lack of an inflammatory governing record or Communist background making it more difficult for his opponents to pin him down on these grounds. In contrast to the weary Gordon Wilson, who had by 1987 been MP for fourteen years and the SNP's leader for eight, McAllion appeared to be an energetic alternative, as Willie Sawers observes 'he was relatively young, he was fresh faced'.<sup>882</sup> Indeed, his image as a youthful 'family man' was the main focus of Labour election literature.<sup>883</sup> Moreover, as a powerful speaker and effective campaigner, he was widely identified as a gifted politician. Lamenting McAllion's eventual defection to the Scottish Socialist Party in 2003, the Labour councillor Kevin Keenan made clear how highly the MP was regarded, 'John was a potential shadow minister, he was very prominent in politics, he was more than capable of, you know, changing the lives of people'.<sup>884</sup> With

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<sup>879</sup> *Evening Telegraph*, 12 June 1987, 12

<sup>880</sup> Alan McKinney Papers, 'Presentation to the NEC', 20 June 1987

<sup>881</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, John McAllion

<sup>882</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Willie Sawers

<sup>883</sup> DCPCGA, 1987 General Election, 'Labour Leaflet for Dundee East 1987'

<sup>884</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Kevin Keenan

these talents, and a platform to gain recognition prior to the election, McAllion was well equipped to finally unseat Gordon Wilson.

Thereafter, he solidified Labour's hold on the constituency and built up the advantages of incumbency that Ernie Ross had been accruing since 1979. This was a substantial boost to the party through the ensuing decade. Notably, McAllion identified his unswerving and vocal support for the striking workers in the seminal 1993 Timex dispute as a key moment in his cultivation of a high profile among Dundonian voters.<sup>885</sup> The local press was confident that he had developed a strong 'personal following' through his years in office that supported him above his party label. This vote was vital to his ability to retain large majorities in the seat in the 1990s, suppressing the SNP's support in a constituency in which they had previously enjoyed such great success.<sup>886</sup> An analysis of the list and constituency votes in the 1999 Scottish election indicates that McAllion did indeed carry notable personal support. In its report on the elections, the local Labour party highlighted that in Dundee East their constituency vote exceeded their list vote by 8.1 per cent, with the SNP even securing a marginally higher share of the list vote than Labour. Meanwhile, the difference in Dundee West was just 1.2 per cent, where Labour ran an unpopular council leader in Kate MacLean.<sup>887</sup> Furthermore, Labour's poor performance in Dundee West infers that Ernie Ross had similarly been able to cultivate a sizeable following over the course of his long years of services in Parliament that failed to transfer to MacLean.

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<sup>885</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, John McAllion

<sup>886</sup> *Evening Telegraph*, 4 June 2001, 19

<sup>887</sup> UD, MS 325 Box 10, Dundee City Labour Party Papers, 'Election Results 6 May 1999'

Nationally, the Scottish Labour Party became increasingly enthusiastic in its pursuit of devolution in the face of long years of Conservative government as the 1980s wore on. The shift in the party extended further than devolution policy, as it increasingly adopted nationalist rhetoric and more disruptive political tactics. Central to this was the bold claim that, despite their parliamentary majority in Westminster, the Conservative had no mandate to rule Scotland given their weak support in the country.<sup>888</sup> The adoption of this new patriotic pose, described as Tartanisation by Jack Geekie and Roger Levy, marked a significant transformation in the party's image from the 1970s.<sup>889</sup> By the 1990s, Labour's election materials focussed intently around this message. In a four-page campaign newspaper released in Dundee East for the 1992 election, the whole of the front page was taken up by the headline 'A Scottish Parliament Now!' and explanations of this aim.<sup>890</sup> Similarly, the creation of a Scottish Parliament was placed first in a list of pledges a Labour Government would institute published on a leaflet for the 1997 election issued in Dundee West.<sup>891</sup> The party even officially changed its name to the Scottish Labour Party in 1994.<sup>892</sup> Gordon Wilson recognised the threat this posed to the SNP in a lecture he delivered at Dundee University in January 1988, just months after losing his parliamentary seat, 'Labour masquerades as a Scottish Party. With its support for a Scottish Assembly, it has partly succeeded in stealing the SNP's tartan clothing'.<sup>893</sup>

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<sup>888</sup> Nicola McEwen, 'Pragmatic Nationalists? The Scottish Labour Party and Nationalism', Gerry Hassan (ed.), *The Scottish Labour Party* (Edinburgh, 2004) 164

<sup>889</sup> Jack Geekie and Roger Levy, 'Devolution and the Tartanisation of the Labour Party', *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol 42 No 3 (1989) 409

<sup>890</sup> DCL, LHC 289 (1), The Lamb Collection, 'Labour Newspaper for Dundee East 1992', 1

<sup>891</sup> DCL, LHC 343 (29), The Lamb Collection, 'Labour Leaflet for Dundee West 1997'

<sup>892</sup> Jonathon Hopkin and Jonathon Bradbury, 'British Statewide Parties and Multilevel Politics', *Publius*, Vol 36 No 1 (2006) 137

<sup>893</sup> SPA, SPA/GW/STRAT/3, Gordon Wilson Papers, 'Lecture by Gordon Wilson', January 1988

In Dundee, Labour had moved in this direction ahead of the national party. When Labour was divided over the issue across Scotland, the party in Dundee overwhelmingly supported the yes campaign in the 1979 Scottish Assembly referendum, with only a handful of prominent exceptions, including the outgoing MP Peter Doig.<sup>894</sup> Both Iain Luke and George Galloway reaffirm that there were very few active opponents of devolution in the local party by this point.<sup>895</sup> In the early 1980s, it displayed a willingness to weld a Scottish nationalist appeal onto its rhetoric. This was most clearly illustrated at the 1983 general election, when a leaflet boasted that Charles Bowman, standing against Gordon Wilson in Dundee East, was ‘a world authority on the life and works of Scotland’s bard – Robert Burns ... “there’s no-one in this election going to be more Scottish than me” says Charlie’.<sup>896</sup> George Galloway admits that Labour activists believed that an emphasis on Bowman’s Scottishness and love of Burns would attract voters directly from the SNP.<sup>897</sup> Although this highlights a shallow understanding of the appeal of nationalism on the part of the local Labour Party, its intent was clear. With a more nationalist approach already accepted in Dundee in the early 1980s, the local party eagerly continued on this line as Labour changed nationally, with its parliamentarians leading the way.

Although Ernie Ross was not one of the most prominent advocates of a Scottish Parliament, he illustrated his willingness to associate himself with the growing pro-devolution consensus within his party. In 1985, he published an article in *Radical Scotland* that outlined a vision in which ‘Labour can comfortably accommodate the nationalism of the

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<sup>894</sup> John Berridge and Mona Clark, ‘Campaigns in the Cities: Dundee’, 68

<sup>895</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, George Galloway and Iain Luke

<sup>896</sup> DCPCGA, 1983 General Election, ‘Labour Leaflet for Dundee East’

<sup>897</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, George Galloway

Scottish working class'.<sup>898</sup> Iain Luke further highlighted Ross's devolutionist credentials by pointing towards the MP's involvement in the cross-party Constitutional Convention in the 1980s and 1990s: 'Ernie was quite strong [in his support for a Scottish Parliament], quite influential, Ernie Ross that is, in the Convention'.<sup>899</sup> His fellow Dundee MP was more emphatic in his convictions. In the 1980s and 1990s John McAllion was known as 'one of the most fervent supporters of devolution' in his party, and was strongly associated with Labour's nationalist wing.<sup>900</sup> Following the Conservatives' victory in the 1992 general election, he took part in a controversial Scotland United rally that brought together Labour and SNP activists and proclaimed in striking terms 'it is time to bring [Labour and SNP] banners together, because it is only through unity we stop Scotland becoming a desert'.<sup>901</sup> In this, he referred to the slogan 'Scotland, free or a desert', which originated in the Radical War of 1820 and has subsequently been tightly associated with Nationalist politics.<sup>902</sup> The meaning behind these words was well understood, with the defeated Conservative candidate for Dundee East from that year's election describing the Labour MP as having engaged in 'extreme nationalistic action'.<sup>903</sup> McAllion would go on to resign his position as shadow housing spokesman in protest at the Labour leadership's decision to change its devolution policy from promising the create a Scottish Parliament if elected to government, to calling for a referendum to take place before any devolution scheme would be implemented.<sup>904</sup> By embracing an approach that imitated key aspects of the SNP's nationalist appeal with such vigour, the Dundee Labour Party was in an especially strong position to attract voters who might otherwise look towards their main local rivals, a particular advantage in direct competition with the Nationalists.

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<sup>898</sup> *Radical Scotland*, December/January 1985, 8

<sup>899</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Iain Luke

<sup>900</sup> *Evening Telegraph*, 12 September 1997, 12

<sup>901</sup> John McAllion in Steve Reicher and Nick Hopkins, *Self and Nation*, 196

<sup>902</sup> Gordon Pentland, *The Spirit of the Union: Popular Politics in Scotland 1815-1820* (London, 2011) 1

<sup>903</sup> DCPCGA, 1992 General Election, 'Our Whitfield', April 1992

<sup>904</sup> SPA, SPA/OH/REF/NAT/YES/9, Interview with John McAllion

## *Factionalism*

Problems with factionalism were not wholly done away with. John Letford admits that ‘intrigue and backstabbing was never far away with the Labour Party’, throughout his lengthy career in Dundee politics, persisting even at the height of the party’s electoral success.<sup>905</sup> This was exemplified in the abrupt end of Ian Borthwick’s career in the party. Having sat as a Labour councillor in the city since 1963, he was expelled from the party in 1986 over his decision to run against John McAllion for the Tayside convenorship, regarding him as too inexperienced and left-wing to lead the authority, before continuing his long-lived career in local politics as an independent councillor for a further three decades.<sup>906</sup> Yet these difficulties were undoubtedly less severe than they had been in the 1970s and early 1980s, as many of the key factors that had made the party so unstable in previous years had receded. Personality clashes and internal power struggles remained endemic, yet many of the most combustible individuals in the local party had moved away, with George Galloway leaving Dundonian politics behind for good after taking up a position at the War on Want charity in late 1983 and being elected as the MP for Glasgow Hillhead in 1987.<sup>907</sup>

Meanwhile, the crucial overarching ideological struggles that had previously threatened to rip Labour apart across the United Kingdom had moved towards a resolution. During Neil Kinnock’s tenure as leader between 1983 and 1992, the extreme elements of the Labour left had retreated from prominence, allowing the party to put the worst of its infighting behind it.<sup>908</sup> However, it is clear that some radicals were deeply uncomfortable with the

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<sup>905</sup> John Letford, *Fae the Boatyard to Buckingham Palace*, 48

<sup>906</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, John McAllion

<sup>907</sup> David Morley, *Gorgeous George*, 92

<sup>908</sup> Eric Shaw, *The Labour Party Since 1979*, 161

centrist drift of their party that accelerated after Tony Blair took the leadership in 1994 and embarked on his New Labour project.<sup>909</sup> The situation in Dundee was no different. Most prominently, John McAllion was never at home with this direction. However, his criticism of the party leadership in these years was not as sharp and persistent as it became after Labour took the reins of government at Westminster in 1997 and Holyrood in 1999. He did little to disrupt the party's internal unity.

Across the country, the grassroots appeared much happier. Tony Blair had received 58.2 per cent of members' votes in the 1994 leadership election, illustrating the breadth of his support. Meanwhile, his totemic proposal to amend Clause Four of the party constitution, which committed Labour to pursuing 'common ownership of the means of production' and was fiercely defended by the left, was approved overwhelmingly by two thirds of the membership.<sup>910</sup> The party in Dundee followed the national trend. Although McAllion professes that it never abandoned its left-wing identity, he notes there 'there was a distinct, I thought, acceptance of New Labour in the ranks locally', with very few challenging the national party's policy agenda.<sup>911</sup> Both Helen Wright and Richard McCready similarly made note of the rank and file membership's acceptance of the Blair leadership.<sup>912</sup> Moreover, McAllion observed that a number of local leaders 'were getting more conservative' as they sought to adopt a business-friendly approach. The Lord Provost Mervyn Rolfe, once a Communist-sympathising left-winger, joined the Chambers of Commerce while there was a concerted effort to tone down traditional socialist rhetoric wherever possible.<sup>913</sup> The same drift affected John McAllion's fellow Dundee MP Ernie

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<sup>909</sup> Eric Shaw, *The Labour Party Since 1945* (Oxford, 1996) 198

<sup>910</sup> Andrew Thorpe, *A History of the British Labour Party*, 248

<sup>911</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, John McAllion

<sup>912</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Richard McCready and Helen Wright

<sup>913</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, John McAllion

Ross, whom Richard McCready observed was an enthusiastic supporter of Tony Blair and New Labour 'from day one', despite his past militancy.<sup>914</sup> Kevin Keenan claims that the party enjoyed a strong degree of unity during the 1990s 'the New Labour project that put Blair in, people were very comfortable with'.<sup>915</sup> Certainly, the promise of returning Labour to government after such a lengthy period of Conservative rule focussed minds: 'people were very interested in gaining that level of power'.<sup>916</sup> This aided in the suppression of internal ideological strains in the early New Labour years. Moreover, with Labour's government still young even as the 1990s came to a close, there had not been a chance for widespread disillusionment with the Blair project to take hold.

The City Council's reputation for corrupt practises, forged during the period of postwar redevelopment and still present into the 1980s, had been another source of persistent concern. It was not expunged entirely, with Ken Guild asserting that the city's reputation for 'dodgy councillors' was still in place through the 1990s.<sup>917</sup> Equally, the *Dundee Independent* continued to draw attention to frequent, mostly expenses-related, scandals afflicting the city Labour Party.<sup>918</sup> Yet the worst excesses had been stamped out, leaving high profile embarrassments for the party less common. John McAllion claimed that by the time of his victorious 1987 campaign 'all the corruption stuff had gone away', with most of the individuals who had been involved with it in previous decades having moved out of active politics 'this was a different generation'.<sup>919</sup> Without the legal problems of the past, a

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<sup>914</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Richard McCready

<sup>915</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Kevin Keenan

<sup>916</sup> Ibid.

<sup>917</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Ken Guild

<sup>918</sup> DCPCGA, Dundee District Elections 1988, 'Dundee Independent', 1988

<sup>919</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, John McAllion

major pressure on the unity of the party, and a stain on its public image, was no longer a pressing issue.

### *Organisation and Membership*

The Dundee Labour Party possessed a thriving grassroots organisation through the late 1980s and most of the 1990s. Much of this strength was based on the party's size. Iain Luke recalls that during his time as recruitment officer in the late 1980s, the local party received an award for achieving the greatest increase in party membership anywhere in Scotland.<sup>920</sup> One national Scottish Labour staffer praised that the party was 'incredibly active' in the city in the 1980s.<sup>921</sup> It remained very strong through the following decade, benefiting from the Labour's nationwide resurgence, with membership rising substantially up to the party's return to government in 1997.<sup>922</sup> Kevin Keenan describes his party as 'reasonably buoyant' in these years with a large number of energetic activists.<sup>923</sup> Joe FitzPatrick admits that the SNP was badly outgunned by Labour's activists in the 1990s, claiming 'they were everywhere'.<sup>924</sup> Willie Sawers pointed to the practical impact this had on election campaigns, noting that at the 1997 general election 'the Labour Party had the ability to deliver a leaflet across the whole city in a weekend', greatly outstripping the SNP's capacities.<sup>925</sup>

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<sup>920</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Iain Luke

<sup>921</sup> Gerry Hassan and Eric Shaw, *The Strange Death of Labour Scotland*, 234

<sup>922</sup> Justin Fisher, 'Small Kingdoms and Crumbling Organisations', 135

<sup>923</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Kevin Keenan

<sup>924</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Joe FitzPatrick

<sup>925</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Willie Sawers

Resources were also efficiently marshalled in election campaigns, with the party coordinating across the city. The weakness of Labour's grip in Dundee in the 1970s and early 1980s had brought a new focus to the party, as its leaders realised that it could not win elections in the effortless fashion that it did in seats in which it possessed unsurmountable majorities. Looking back to his victory over Gordon Wilson in 1987, John McAllion beamed that it had been a 'beautifully organised campaign'.<sup>926</sup> Iain Luke recalls 'we were hugely organised and we virtually left the West' as activists flooded the eastern constituency to tip the balance in the party's favour.<sup>927</sup> Alan McKinney also identified Labour's ability to pool resources from across the city as an important factor in his report on the campaign.<sup>928</sup> Luke continues to outline how there had been major improvements over the course of the 1980s, 'the organisation in '83 was okay, but in ['87] we were hugely organised' and that this remained the case through the 1990s.<sup>929</sup> The local SNP was aware of this shift. At a meeting held four months ahead of the 1987 election, Dundee East members expressed concern that 'the Labour Party has been working hard to take Dundee East', bringing a degree of relentless campaigning energy that the city has not seen from them in years.<sup>930</sup> Richard McCready points out that the legacies of this 1987 election were important to the strength of Labour's political machine in the next decade, as the structures put in place to unseat Gordon Wilson continued to benefit the party.<sup>931</sup> However, as the Labour Party's lead over its rivals extended in the 1990s on the back of its nationwide popularity, the city was left with few close contests in which campaigning was key. As a result, organisation became less highly valued by the local party as it

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<sup>926</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, John McAllion

<sup>927</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Iain Luke

<sup>928</sup> Alan McKinney Papers, 'Presentation to the NEC', 20 June 1987

<sup>929</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Iain Luke

<sup>930</sup> UD, MS 315/3/5, Dundee East: General Election 1987, 'Dundee East Constituency Association Minutes of Annual General Meeting', 8 March 1987

<sup>931</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Richard McCready

appeared unnecessary. This shift in the party's culture from the mid-1990s planted the seeds its later decline.

### *Conclusion*

Riding upon the success of the party across Scotland and later Britain, the Dundee Labour Party was at the pinnacle of its strength from the mid-1980s through to the late 1990s. The national tide behind Labour was the basis of this success, but the party in Dundee was itself in very good shape, leaving it well positioned to capitalise on the broader trend. It possessed an impressive local leadership, which was well in tune with Labour's nationalist message of the time. It had also begun to move away from many of the issues that had hampered its competitiveness in the 1970s and early 1980s, with the promise of bringing Labour back to power at Westminster aiding in the suppression of internal conflict. Crucially, it had also developed a large and well-directed activist base that could easily outstrip its rivals on the ground in any election in the city. These factors combined to ensure that Labour was able to establish an electoral grip on Dundee that for a time appeared unbreakable, bringing the city's politics closer to the mainstream of industrial Scotland that was characterised by almost unchallenged Labour control.

### **The Third Period, since the late 1990s**

From 1999, the Labour Party's hegemony over Dundee politics was brought to an end. Following the party's fate across Scotland, the shape of its electoral decline was different at the various tiers of government. Its support dipped from the peak it had reached in

Westminster elections during its high tide. The 40 per cent of the city vote it won in both 2005 and 2010 was notably lower than the 46.5 to 52.5 per cent it had won in elections between 1987 and 2001, admittedly under the more favourable constituency boundaries. However, this was close to the results it had achieved from 1974 to 1983, when it won between 37 and 41.6 per cent of the city's votes. In Scottish elections the decline was more pronounced, as Labour's support across the city dropped successively in each Holyrood contest from 40.5 per cent in 1999 to 27 per cent in 2011. The 36.1 per cent they secured in the council elections in 1999 marked their worst performance in a local election in Dundee since the second world war, and was followed by a slump that saw the Labour vote reach as low as 29.4 per cent in 2007. This, combined with the rising tide of SNP support, brought the city's politics back into contention. Although specific changes in the city accentuated its problems, the Dundee Labour Party faced many of the same difficulties as the party did across Scotland and Britain in this period, as the successes of the early New Labour years receded. Losing key leaders, undergoing organisational decay and ideological discomfort, it was left exposed to the advances of an especially well-oiled Nationalist opponent that was able to overturn it as the city's leading politics force years before the 2014 independence referendum decisively broke Labour's grip over other parts of post-industrial Scotland.

### *Individuals and Local Government*

In the early 2000s, the veteran leadership of the Dundee Labour Party moved towards retirement. Ernie Ross resigned his seat after twenty-six years in Parliament ahead of the 2005 general election, while John McAllion left the Labour Party entirely after he lost Dundee East to the SNP at the 2003 Holyrood election and then joined the far-left Scottish

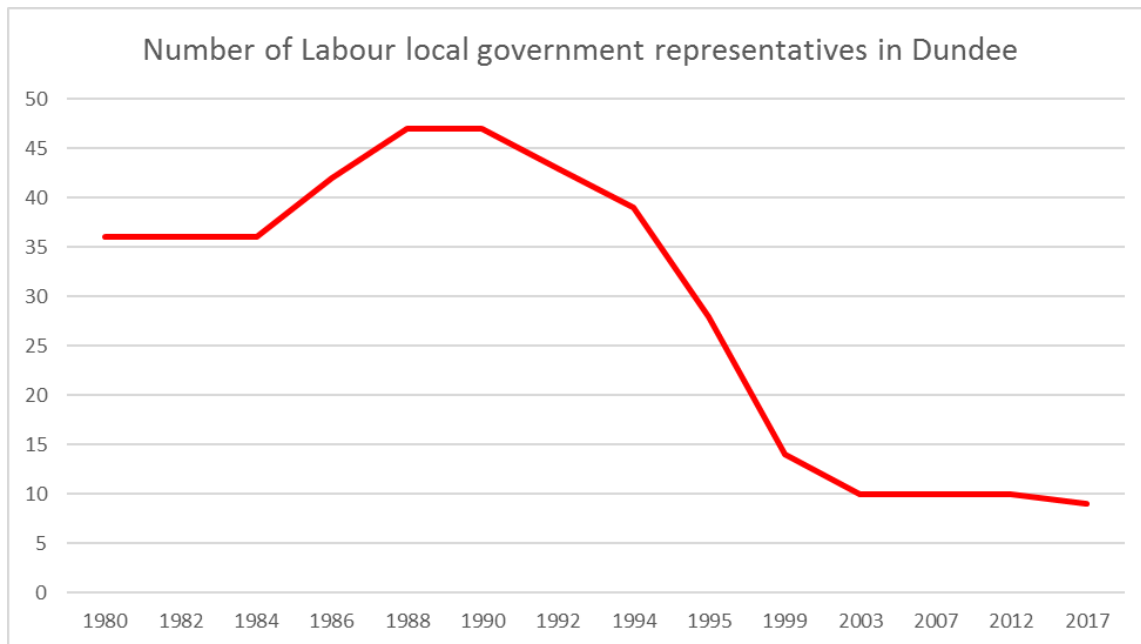
Socialist Party. As in the case of the Dundee SNP following the retirement of Gordon Wilson, Labour struggled to replace these elder statesmen. It has since failed to produce any new politicians of national stature. Neither Iain Luke, who served as MP for Dundee East between 2001 and 2005, Jim McGovern, succeeding Ernie Ross in Dundee West from 2005 to 2015, nor Kate MacLean, who represented Dundee West at the Scottish Parliament from 1999 until 2007, ever came close to ministerial positions nor the development of a national profile. There has been a sense that the quality of candidates the party put forward during this period slipped, Stewart Hosie remarking biting that the Labour opponents he had faced over the years 'have not been of the calibre I suspect that the electorate would be demanding'.<sup>932</sup> Iain Luke further questions the stomach of his fellow Labour parliamentarians for the political struggle that ensued, pointing towards Kate MacLean's decision not to contest the 2007 election 'she gave up ... she knew she wasn't going to win, or she had a really good idea she wasn't going to win'.<sup>933</sup> As Richard McCready notes, although MacLean 'was not a hugely popular MSP', Labour's loss of incumbency in Dundee West ahead of the 2007 election, which resulted from her decision to step down, contributed to their defeat to the Nationalists in the seat.<sup>934</sup>

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<sup>932</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Stewart Hosie

<sup>933</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Iain Luke

<sup>934</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Richard McCready



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The reorganisation of Scottish local government in 1995 caused a raft of difficulties for the Labour Party in Dundee. It contributed towards a weakening of the organisational structures of the local party. Despite falling to its lowest vote share in any Dundee District elections in 1992 and then achieving their strongest ever council election result in 1995, Labour's number of local representatives fell from thirty nine District and Regional councillors to twenty eight City councillors. This was a result of the council reorganisation that had substantially reduced the overall size of the city's local government representation from sixty six District and Regional councillors to 36 City councillors. With the size of the City Council being further reduced ahead of the 1999 elections, and Labour's own appeal dipping, these numbers halved to fourteen. In less than a decade its number of councillors had fallen to a third of its prior level. Labour's large local government presence had underlined its success in the previous period. Its striking hollowing-out weakened the party's connections to the communities it represented and reduced the number of activists

<sup>935</sup> Prior to 1994, there were 44 District and 22 Regional councillors elected in the Dundee District, in 1994 the number of Regional councillors was reduced to 20. In 1995 there were 36 City councillors elected, the number was then reduced to 29 in 1999.

the party could mobilise, as previously active councillors and their families became less involved.<sup>936</sup> Individuals who had played an important role in the party's organisation were also pushed away from active politics. Iain Luke pointed to the retirement of the skilled organiser John Henderson as being especially damaging.<sup>937</sup> Willie Sawers also saw this as an important turning point, remarking that 'if you take a couple of key folk out, the organisation collapses unless somebody else steps in to fill the breach'.<sup>938</sup> The quality of Labour's personnel has continued to deteriorate since. Fraser MacPherson pinpoints 2007, two years before the Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition controlling the City Council finally fell to the SNP, as a key moment: 'lot of the big beasts of the Labour group were gone. Didn't stand in 2007 ... Sea change in 2007. New folk and perhaps less experienced folk'.<sup>939</sup>

From the late 1990s, association with a troubled council administration became a more serious issue for the Labour Party than it had been since the early 1980s. The problem flared after the 1995 local government reorganisation. The reform removed some wealthier peripheral areas of the Dundee District from the unitary City Council that succeeded it. This contributed to a shortfall in council tax revenue and serious financial problems for the new authority, as Fraser MacPherson points out 'Dundee in particular were left with some very difficult financial challenges. The boundary changes had not been helpful'.<sup>940</sup> With Labour dominating the council with a large majority, they faced a great deal of the public resentment that resulted from the cuts and steep council tax increases they passed through in the following years. This played a part in Labour's dreadful performance at the key 1999 elections, in which it was forced to explain its failure to live up

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<sup>936</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Richard McCready

<sup>937</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Iain Luke

<sup>938</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Willie Sawers

<sup>939</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Fraser MacPherson

<sup>940</sup> Ibid.

to its previous election promises.<sup>941</sup> Following her unexpectedly narrow victory in Dundee West at that election, Kate MacLean 'acknowledged that having been leader of the City Council administration may have worked both for and against her'.<sup>942</sup> The SNP had been attempting to make political gain from this financial restraint for years, with a leaflet from a 1996 local by-election lambasting 'Labour's savage cut backs in services'.<sup>943</sup> Joe FitzPatrick highlighted that his party's criticism of a large number of unpopular school closures became a resonant issue during the 1999 elections, being central to the SNP's breakthrough.<sup>944</sup> Richard McCready notes that these closures in particular dampened the enthusiasm of the party's own activists and supporters as they 'made it harder for some people to support, to actively campaign for Labour'.<sup>945</sup>

Labour's council administration limped into the next decade, losing its majority in 2003 and being forced into a minority coalition with the Liberal Democrats that depended upon the support of the Conservative Party, which the SNP gleefully dubbed an 'unholy alliance'.<sup>946</sup> This collaboration with the Tories, was seen to be 'a bad bad message for Labour', causing a degree of discomfort amongst their voters and giving the SNP another line of attack to pursue against them.<sup>947</sup> Furthermore, Ken Guild points out that the alliance was unpopular among some party members with these frustrations contributing to the resignation of councillor Joe Morrow in 2009, which caused the by-election that triggered the SNP's takeover of the council.<sup>948</sup> The Nationalists continuously confronted this administration with accusations of timidity with increasing force as the years went on. As Shona Robison

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<sup>941</sup> DCPCGA, 1999 Scottish and Council Elections, 'Labour Newsletter for Dundee 1999'

<sup>942</sup> *Evening Telegraph*, 7 May 1999, 3

<sup>943</sup> DCPCGA, 1996 Broughty Ferry By-election, 'SNP Leaflet for Broughty Ferry 1996'

<sup>944</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Joe FitzPatrick

<sup>945</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Richard McCready

<sup>946</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Shona Robison

<sup>947</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Willie Sawers

<sup>948</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Ken Guild

asserted, 'it was a kind of dead administration, it just didn't want to do anything. They were desperately trying to hold on to power and they had no ambition'.<sup>949</sup> The clearest illustration of this was the council's reluctance, which eventually gave way, to seize on the opportunity to bring a branch of the Victoria & Albert Museum to the city. Both Shona Robison and Ken Guild describe a meeting that they saw as encapsulating the council's attitude in which Kevin Keenan, then the leader of the administration, remarked 'I don't mind the V & A coming to Dundee, as long as it doesn't cost us anything'.<sup>950</sup> This council leadership undermined Labour across the city and put great impetus behind the SNP as they edged closer to finally removing it from power.

#### *Organisation and Complacency*

Many of the issues that left Labour ill-prepared to face down the Nationalist threat of the period were founded in a complacency that had taken hold during the party's past dominance. Gerry Hassan and Eric Shaw claim that in Scotland, safer Labour seats tended to have low and inactive constituency party memberships, with the reverse being true in more competitive areas. The easy victories of the 1990s had brought about a shift in the political culture of the Labour Party in Dundee, as its character began to more closely resemble the local parties in the West of Scotland.<sup>951</sup> Descriptions of the party as over secure in power are ubiquitous. Shona Robison depicts a sense within the Dundee Labour Party that they 'thought it was going to be in power forever'.<sup>952</sup> The Conservative councillor Donald Hay believed that the party suffered under an illusion that their grip over the

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<sup>949</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Shona Robison

<sup>950</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Ken Guild and Shona Robison

<sup>951</sup> Gerry Hassan and Eric Shaw, *The Strange Death of Labour Scotland*, 234

<sup>952</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Shona Robison

traditional working class communities of the city was unbreakable, leaving them unconcerned at the SNP's gradual advances there.<sup>953</sup> Even Kevin Keenan, one of the most senior figures in the city party, was willing to admit that 'there was an arrogance' in the Labour Party that had taken hold during its best years. He is clear that the repeated defeats the party endured in Dundee 'came as a surprise to the Labour Party', which had done nothing to prepare for this challenge. Yet, there was no indication that they did anything to address this shortcoming, as he continued 'there wasn't a sort of strategy of how you overcome [the SNP] ... probably not even today'.<sup>954</sup> Ken Guild saw that in 2012, after more than a decade of retreat, 'Labour [still] thought there were going to get it all back' and that the Nationalists' triumphs would simply be a temporarily blip before the natural order was restored.<sup>955</sup>

This assumption of victory had a palpable impact on the party's effectiveness. Nigel Don claims that these views contributed towards a disconnect between the Labour Party and the city's populace from the council downwards, noting 'a number of [Labour] councillors could fairly have been described as lazy ... they were not engaged with their constituents, they didn't know what was going on and they assumed they were going to be re-elected'.<sup>956</sup> Shona Robison pointed out how this feeling held the party back from campaigning as vigorously as it might have, observing that 'Labour didn't think they had to knock a door, so they had no identified support'.<sup>957</sup> Richard McCready saw this overconfidence first hand, as he found it difficult to 'convince other members that we were up against it' at the 2003 Scottish election, with activists believing that a concerted

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<sup>953</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Donald Hay

<sup>954</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Kevin Keenan

<sup>955</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Ken Guild

<sup>956</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Nigel Don

<sup>957</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Shona Robison

campaign wasn't necessary to keep John McAllion ensconced in Dundee East.<sup>958</sup>

Meanwhile, Stewart Hosie noticed that Labour's attempts to defend Dundee East in 2005 were undermined by unprofessionalism: 'the whole campaign struck me as being a complete and utter shambles'.<sup>959</sup> Having become accustomed to effortless victory, the Dundee Labour Party paid little attention to the organisational details that decided many of their closest contests with the SNP in the mid-2000s. Even after they began to lose real ground, they proved alarmingly sluggish in addressing these shortcomings, giving the Nationalists a decisive advantage.

Labour's struggles during this period were not solely based on a particular outlook that had taken hold, but were exacerbated by a degeneration of the party which left it with a troubling shortfall of manpower. In this, Dundee was far from unique, with the Labour Party across Britain suffering a drastic slump in both numbers and activity of its membership after the turn of the millennium, fuelled by growing dissatisfaction with Tony Blair's government and concern over the Iraq War.<sup>960</sup> Even before the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the Scottish party's membership had fallen by around a third from its 1997 peak.<sup>961</sup> In 2006, the party recorded its lowest British-wide membership since figures had first been published in 1928 at 198,000.<sup>962</sup> Iain Luke observed this process in Dundee: 'shrinkage of activists, people leaving the Labour Party'.<sup>963</sup> Kevin Keenan also attests to the same concerning decline in membership.<sup>964</sup> This damaged the party's electoral competitiveness. Luke complains that, despite having healthy finances, his 2005 re-election campaign was

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<sup>958</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Richard McCready

<sup>959</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Stewart Hosie

<sup>960</sup> Justin Fisher and David Denver, 'Evaluating the Electoral Effects of Traditional and Modern Modes of Constituency Campaigning in Britain 1992-2005', *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol 62 No 2 (2009) 197

<sup>961</sup> Alistair Clark, 'Local Parties, Participation and Campaigning in Post-Devolution Scotland', 119

<sup>962</sup> Andrew Thorpe, *A History of the British Labour Party*, 280

<sup>963</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Iain Luke

<sup>964</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Kevin Keenan

hamstrung by a chronic lack of ‘bodies on the ground’ and he identifies this as the ultimate reason for the loss of his seat.<sup>965</sup> Having outgunned its rivals in the past, the Dundee Labour Party found it increasingly difficult to keep up with the ground activity of its Nationalist opponent. As Helen Wright attests, ‘when we were struggling to get people to go to stick leaflets out, they never seemed to be short of people’.<sup>966</sup> As the 2000s wore on, the situation continued to worsen. Yet, despite the realisation that Dundee was becoming a tightly-fought battleground, the national leadership did little to support the ailing local party. Most stridently, Iain Luke bitterly asserts that in the 2005 election ‘the actual support [he] got from the Labour Party nationally was pitiful’.<sup>967</sup> Richard McCready points to wide dissatisfaction in the help the party received in Dundee, claiming there existed ‘a belief that, you know, we should have got more help from central organisation that wasn’t really forthcoming’ and that the Scottish Labour leadership was overly focussed on its West Coast heartland: ‘they do need to look beyond the boundaries of Glasgow’.<sup>968</sup>

### *Ideology*

When the New Labour project started to lose some of its popular appeal by the early 2000s, and particularly after the Iraq War began in 2003, the cleavages within the Labour Party between left and right became more severe than they had been since the 1980s.<sup>969</sup> In the Dundee Labour Party, with its history of radicalism, this came to the fore around the figure of John McAllion, whose ideological discomfort partly counteracted the benefits he brought to his party in Dundee East. The long-serving parliamentarian was a notorious

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<sup>965</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Iain Luke

<sup>966</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Helen Wright

<sup>967</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Iain Luke

<sup>968</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Richard McCready

<sup>969</sup> Andrew Rawnsley, *The End of the Party: The Rise and Fall of New Labour* (London, 2010) 310

rebel who became more vocal from the late 1990s. His radicalism encouraged unease in parts of the electorate while creating a dissonance with his party's national New Labour brand and the actions of its government. The 2003 election took place just weeks after the fall of Baghdad, when the controversial Iraq War enjoyed its highest levels of public approval.<sup>970</sup> Yet, McAllion was an uncompromising opponent of the operation and admitted that this might have hurt his chances 'if the anti-war position and stance on social issues I took alienated people then that is tough'.<sup>971</sup> He lamented that his high-profile opposition to the conflict upset many within his own party, badly damaging his re-election campaign: 'all the activists were told to go out to Dundee West and help Kate MacLean, nobody went into Dundee East. But some of the main party people wouldn't even vote for me'.<sup>972</sup>

He also received the public endorsement of the Scottish Socialist Party, then a serious political force that elected six MSPs to the Scottish Parliament that year, as 'the SSP urged their supporters to vote for Mr McAllion because, they claim, he is far more in tune with their policies than those of his own party'. The *Evening Telegraph* highlighted the possibility that the vocal backing of such a fringe party 'could prove a two-edged sword if it alienated some of the traditional Labour supporters'.<sup>973</sup> The *Courier* posited that these issues were important to an observable Labour underperformance in prosperous Broughty Ferry.<sup>974</sup> Despite his later association with the Socialists, McAllion accepts that their endorsement hampered his chances '[it] hurt me probably I'd think. Because the number of people that vote SSP are not that many but the number of people who are put off by the SSP is a lot

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<sup>970</sup> Steven Kettell, *Dirty Politics? New Labour, British Democracy and the Invasion of Iraq* (London & New York, 2006) 114

<sup>971</sup> *Evening Telegraph*, 2 May 2003, 10

<sup>972</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, John McAllion

<sup>973</sup> *Evening Telegraph*, 28 April 2003, 6

<sup>974</sup> *Courier & Advertiser*, 2 May 2003, 1

more than that'.<sup>975</sup> As important to his ninety-vote defeat, was the fact that the SNP tended to lose a greater portion of its vote to the SSP in constituencies across the country than Labour did during the Scottish Socialists' brief breakthrough at the turn of the millennium.<sup>976</sup> In line with this pattern, Richard McCready detected that SSP voters in Dundee showed little inclination towards his party, even with the endorsement.<sup>977</sup> It is likely that individuals who would have otherwise voted for the Socialists turned to the SNP in greater numbers than Labour, costing McAllion his seat.

The contradiction between McAllion's politics and his party's leadership was more persistent. Stewart Hosie recalled how the SNP were able to take advantage of this situation 'when he took decisions that were out of kilter with his party in Scotland or in London it was simply highlighting the divisions and inconsistencies'.<sup>978</sup> During the inaugural elections to the Scottish Parliament in 1999, the Nationalists delighted in drawing attention to his condemnation of private finance initiatives, a method of using private money to fund public sector infrastructure, which were supported by Labour and opposed by the SNP.<sup>979</sup> Shona Robison frequently attacked him during her election campaigns along these lines. During the 2003 election she published materials, which highlighted McAllion's vicious condemnations of the Scottish Executive alongside his call for it to be re-elected in his election leaflets, under the heading 'candidate confusion' to highlight the gulf between his noisy opposition and continued loyalty to the party.<sup>980</sup> She believed this had a genuine

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<sup>975</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, John McAllion

<sup>976</sup> David Denver, 'A 'Wake Up!' Call to the Parties?', 40

<sup>977</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Richard McCready

<sup>978</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Stewart Hosie

<sup>979</sup> *Evening Telegraph*, 30 April 1999, 10

<sup>980</sup> DCPCGA, 2003 Scottish and Council Election, 'SNP Leaflet for Dundee East 2003'

influence on voters, helping to tip the closely fought campaign: 'people actually commented on how effective the message was'.<sup>981</sup>

The Dundee Labour Party was an increasingly unhappy place in these years. John McAllion's embarrassing defection to the Socialists did not end disputes. Indeed, McAllion claims that he was aware that infighting intensified in the time after he left the party.<sup>982</sup> Active members unhappy at the direction of the party locally and nationally drifted away, with ex-MP Iain Luke among them.<sup>983</sup> The feelings of John Letford, who served as Labour's last Lord Provost from 2001 to 2009 before defecting from the party and supporting an SNP council administration as an Independent, served as an extreme example of more general feelings of disillusionment sweeping over the party: 'it seems to me that [Labour's] heart and soul has been abdicated in favour of the SNP'.<sup>984</sup> Certainly, the later New Labour years saw disillusionment spread widely among Labour members all over Britain. Jimmy Reid, the ex-Communist firebrand and onetime candidate for Dundee East, expressed similar sentiments to John Letford after ending his long association with the party following Tony Blair's entry into government. In 2005 he joined the SNP, with the party publicising his criticism that 'Labour had lost touch with its roots forever'.<sup>985</sup> This issue was particularly acute in Scotland, where the party tended to be more uneasy about the policies of the government than the party at large, but found itself too constrained by loyalty to the leadership to set out a more independent course.<sup>986</sup>

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<sup>981</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Shona Robison

<sup>982</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, John McAllion

<sup>983</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Iain Luke

<sup>984</sup> John Letford, *Fae the Boatyard to Buckingham Palace*, 53

<sup>985</sup> SPA, SPA/GA/PP/1/EM/8010/21, 'SNP Leaflet for Glenrothes by-election 2008'

<sup>986</sup> Gerry Hassan and Eric Shaw, *The Strange Death of Labour Scotland*, 185

## *Conclusion*

The Dundee Labour Party began to degenerate during this period, paving the way for the SNP's takeover of the city's politics. Its experience of generational change, as the likes of John McAllion and Ernie Ross left politics and were replaced by less capable successors, saw the party lose its most reputable leaders. Yet, while still active, John McAllion's radical politics created a number of issues for the local party as he found himself at odds with Labour's national leadership and undermined many of the benefits he had brought in the past. The City Council also endured a torrid period, shackled by austerity imposed by local authority boundary changes in the 1990s and then caught in a state of inaction in the following decade. Fuelled by complacency and dissatisfaction with the realities of Labour governance, the party decayed organisationally and lost political direction. Yet, while these problems were debilitating, many of the same issues were faced by Labour in other parts of Scotland and the United Kingdom. Richard McCready claims that, having been involved in campaigns in many other parts of Britain, he found that 'the Labour Party in Dundee is actually relatively well organised'.<sup>987</sup> The weakening of the party left it vulnerable, yet its political power only unravelled at the speed at which it did due to the strength of its SNP rivals in the city.

## **Conclusion**

It is impossible to understand the success of a political party without accounting for the opposition it faced. In Dundee, the SNP's fortunes since the 1970s have been closely tied to

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<sup>987</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Richard McCready

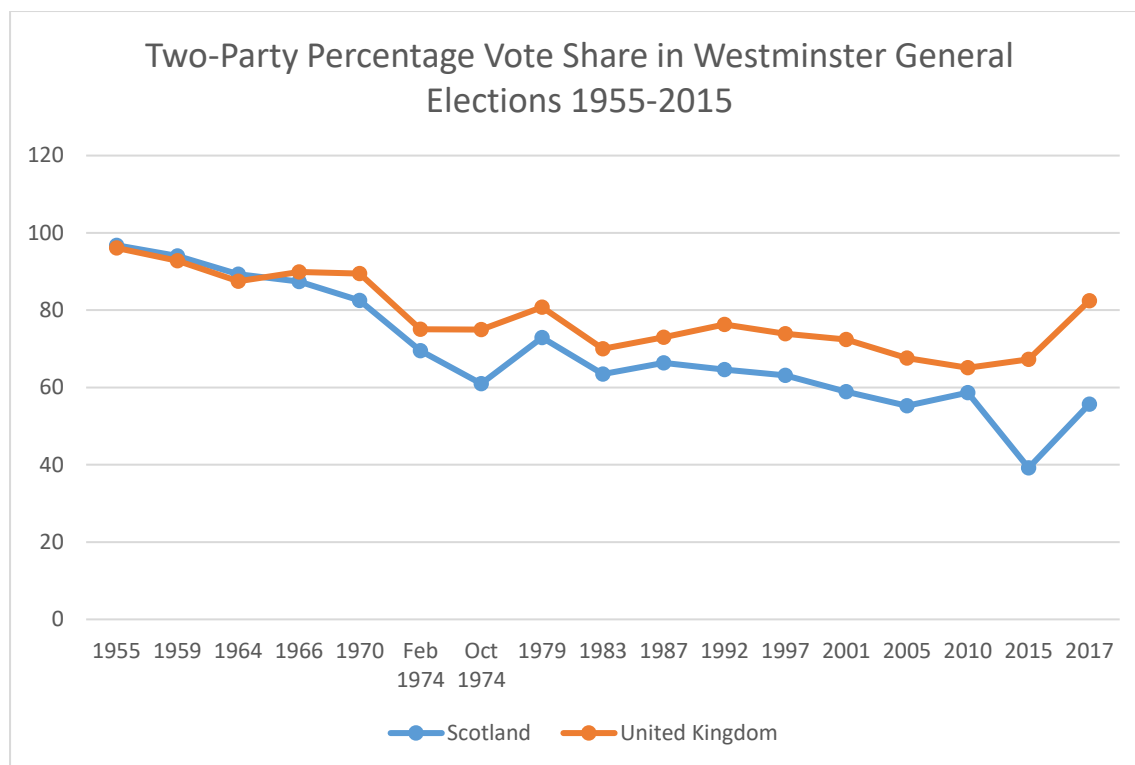
the various strengths and shortcomings of the Labour Party in the city. Through these decades, the interplay between local and national politics within the Dundee Labour Party has been different to the city's SNP. While the SNP at times behaved almost independently of national developments, the Labour Party was much more closely tied to British and Scottish-wide developments. Nonetheless, even while following broader patterns, specific localities invariably experience trends in distinct ways. In the 1970s and early 1980s, the city Labour Party was weakened by internal factionalism, local government corruption, political extremism and infighting. These were issues that affected Labour across Britain, but were especially severe in Dundee. Their prominence provided the SNP with a key organisational advantage in closely contested elections, and crucially allowed it to define itself in opposition to the local Labour Party in a manner than won it the backing of a wider electoral coalition. This would have been impossible had the ructions afflicting the Dundee Labour Party during this period been more modest. The improvement in the Labour Party's position through the late 1980s and 1990s had an important influence on Dundee's politics. Not only did the local Labour Party grow more cohesive and effective in campaigning, the party's ideological development played a key role in rendering the SNP's previous political strategy redundant. It became increasingly impossible for the Nationalists, who were themselves being drawn to the left, to pose as the city's protectors from an increasingly moderate Labour Party. Meanwhile, a particularly sharp drop-off in the local party's effectiveness around the turn of the millennium, just as the shine began to wear off the New Labour project across the United Kingdom, provided the room for the SNP to make their early breakthrough in Dundee during the early 2000s. This history indicates that difference at a local level do not need to be as striking as those of the Dundee SNP to affect local political developments in key ways. In more marginal constituencies, even slight differences can have a decisive impact.



## **Chapter Four: Dundee's Other Parties**

The competition between the SNP and Labour has been central to Dundee's political life since the 1970s. Yet, the shifting condition of these two parties does not fully explain why the Nationalists have been able to present such a persistent challenge. Throughout the period, neither Scotland nor Dundee possessed a simple two-party system. In the latter decades of the twentieth century, they operated under uneven four-party competition between Labour, the SNP, Conservatives and the Liberals and their successors. Since the advent of the Scottish Parliament, this has expanded further as the Greens, and for a short time the Scottish Socialist Party, became realistic electoral threats. The development of Dundee politics, with its especially strong SNP, depended on the ability of the Nationalists to assemble to a wide coalition of support. This involved appealing to constituencies that tended to back different parties in other parts of Scotland. This chapter will assess the strengths of these other parties in Dundee, and highlight the ways in which their respective shortcomings aided the SNP in assembling the votes it needed to compete with the Labour Party. The weakness of the local Liberal Party and its successors have allowed the Nationalists to rally the great majority of third party votes behind their banner since the 1970s. Meanwhile, Gordon Wilson's encouragement of anti-Labour voters to support him in the 1970s and 1980s depended on a diminished Tory party surrendering its own claim to that role. Less decisively, the Dundee SNP has also benefited since the turn of the millennium from the failure of the radical left to establish anything more than a tenuous foothold in the city's political life. This has in turn left the Nationalists with less competition for anti-establishment voters.

*The Liberal and the Third Party Vote*



Prior to its development as a social-democratic party, the SNP rooted itself in the radical centre, moderate in its politics but rebelliously opposed to the established order. As Donald Stewart memorably intoned, it was ‘a radical party with a revolutionary aim’.<sup>988</sup> In the second half of the twentieth century, it formed a part of a realignment of Scottish and British politics that saw third parties grow from obscurity to become a large part of the national scene. Across the United Kingdom, the bipolar contest between the Labour Party on the left and the Conservatives on the right that punctuated the postwar era was replaced by a more complex multi-party electoral geography.<sup>989</sup> After securing 90 per cent of all votes cast in 1970, the Labour and the Conservatives Parties’ combined share fell to 75 per cent in the two elections of 1974, a level they have exceeded on only one

<sup>988</sup> Donald Stewart in Eilidh MacPhail, ‘Donald Stewart’, James Mitchell and Gerry Hassan (eds), *Scottish National Party Leaders*, 434

<sup>989</sup> Rob Johns and James Mitchell, *Takeover*, 4

succeeding occasion. In Scotland, this process was even more acute, with the two parties falling from 97 per cent in 1955, to 83 in 1970 and 61 in October 1974. Although the gap between the Scottish and British two-party vote share closed in 1979, their support has remained decidedly lower than across the United Kingdom as a whole in every general election since then.<sup>990</sup> Electoral studies indicate that the strength of partisan identification with the two also loosened as the portion of the electorate who identified 'very strongly' with one of the two main parties slipped from 44 per cent in 1970 to 26 per cent in 1974 and 19 per cent in 1983.<sup>991</sup>

The voters leaving the two main parties behind were not drawn to a diverse array of different parties, but largely to two groups. Across Britain, and especially in England, the Liberals and later the Alliance saw their support rise markedly. Meanwhile, in Scotland and Wales nationalist parties in the form of the SNP and Plaid Cymru became major players. A number of contemporaries saw the emergence of these parties as being the part of the same process. Voters were believed to be using whichever vehicle was most appropriate in their given area to protest against the political establishment. The three by-elections held on 1 March 1973 pointed towards the different means the electorate could employ to this end. The Dundee East contest occurred on the same day as elections in the English seats of Lincoln and Chester-le-Street. All three saw substantial swings away from the main parties as the SNP in Dundee, the moderate Labour defector Dick Taverne in Lincoln and the Liberals in Chester-le-Street surged.<sup>992</sup> There were important differences between these

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<sup>990</sup> Roger Levy, 'The disunited kingdom: the territorial dimension of British politics', Lynton Robins and Bill Jones (eds), *Half a century of British politics* (Manchester, 1997), 201

<sup>991</sup> Paul Webb, 'Party Responses to the Changing Electoral Market in Britain', Peter Mair, Wolfgang C Müller and Fritz Plasser (eds), *Political Parties and Electoral Change: Party Responses to Electoral Markets* (London, 2004) 23

<sup>992</sup> Richard Jay, 'Lincoln and the Liberal Surge, 1972-1973', Chris Cook and John Ramsden (eds), *By-elections in British Politics*, 199

groups, yet these were exaggerated by figures like the journalist David Watt who wrote in the *Financial Times* that 'there is nothing in common between Mr Taverne in Lincoln and the semi-Poujadiste Liberal in Chester-le-Street, or the Scottish Nationalist in Dundee, and to suggest that some valid principle unites them and justifies a blanket support for them is really demented'.<sup>993</sup> Others were quick to identify the ideological continuities between the three 'Liberal or Liberal-type candidates' and the likeness of the demographics they attracted.<sup>994</sup> Despite a lack of cohesion amongst this 'third force', voters appeared willing to support the best-placed alternative in their home seat, regardless of the minutiae of political differences.<sup>995</sup>

During the 1960s and 1970s, the SNP was able to tap into a third party vote that the Liberal Party, and later the Alliance, relied on in England. It won analogous cross-class and less ideologically partisan support from a middle of the road position.<sup>996</sup> Electoral studies revealed that both the Liberal Party in England and the SNP were especially attractive to individuals who disagreed with the policies of their 'natural' class-based party. This meant that they had greater success among left-leaning middle class and right-leaning working class voters.<sup>997</sup> In Scotland, the two crowded over similar terrain. The Scottish Liberals were passionate advocates of Home Rule, although they opposed outright independence, and posed as non-socialist agents of change in much the same way as the Nationalists.<sup>998</sup> The closeness of the parties was emphasised in a speech delivered during the 1973 Dundee East by-election campaign by the Liberals' highly respected former leader Jo Grimond. As

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<sup>993</sup> UD, MS 315/3/1, Dundee East By-Election 1973, 'Financial Times Clipping', 21 March 1973

<sup>994</sup> UD, MS 315/3/1, Dundee East By-Election 1973, 'Sunday Times Clipping', 4 March 1973

<sup>995</sup> *Scotsman*, 2 March 1973, 1

<sup>996</sup> Ivor Crewe and Anthony King, *The Birth, Life and Death of the Social Democratic Party*, 291

<sup>997</sup> Denis Philip Van Mechelen, 'The Growth of Third Party Support in Britain: a comparative study of the electoral bases of the Liberal and Scottish National Parties' success during the 1970s', PhD Thesis, London School of Economics (1981)

<sup>998</sup> Jack Brand, *The National Movement in Scotland*, 41

he outlined his party's priorities, his rhetoric appeared almost indistinguishable from that of the Nationalists 'there are three areas in which Scotland in particular badly needs a third alternative. First self-government ... Secondly, oil ... Thirdly, economic policy'.<sup>999</sup> Such was their unity of vision; the two parties came close to agreeing to an electoral pact during the 1960s, at a time when both were marginal forces in general elections.<sup>1000</sup> Although the SNP's decision to contest every seat in mainland Scotland at the 1970 general election made any nationwide alliance impossible, elements in both parties kept the idea under serious discussion into the 1970s.<sup>1001</sup> Even as the Nationalists rose towards their peak, the Orkney and Shetland SNP Constituency Association agreed to stand aside and support Jo Grimond in the February 1974 election, stating 'we feel that the interests of Orkney and Shetland and Scotland would be served best if our members helped to secure Mr Grimond's re-election'.<sup>1002</sup> Meanwhile, the North Aberdeen Liberal Association went so far as to call for a merger between the two parties at the 1973 Scottish Liberal conference, advocating 'a single united party, both Liberal and National in its aspirations'.<sup>1003</sup> This kind of thinking fell away as the SNP's national popularity greatly outstripped the Liberals. In the October 1974 election, the SNP ran a candidate against Grimond in Orkney and Shetland, finishing in second place, while talk of national alliances became much less common. Yet on a local level, the two parties' politics remained close. In a leaflet issued for the Dundee District Council elections in 1977, the Liberals deliberately highlighted their political similarities with the Nationalists, as they pointed towards the close resemblance of their own policies and the SNP's, and their great differences with the major parties.<sup>1004</sup> Into the

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<sup>999</sup> NLS, Dep.363 Box 10/1, Speeches 1973, 'Jo Grimond Speech', 19 February 1973

<sup>1000</sup> Catriona M M MacDonal, *Whaur Extremes Meet*, 219

<sup>1001</sup> Graham Watson, 'Scottish Liberals, Scottish Nationalists and Dreams of a Common Front', *Liberal Democrat History*, No 22 (1999) 8

<sup>1002</sup> NLS, Dep.363 Box 15/11, General Election Campaigns 1974-9, 'Letter from Orkney and Shetland SNP Constituency Association to Jo Grimond', 11 February 1974

<sup>1003</sup> NLS, Acc.10090/153, Scottish Liberal Party, 'Scottish Liberal Party 1973 Annual Conference Agenda'

<sup>1004</sup> DCPCGA, 1977 District Elections, 'Liberal Leaflet for Dundee East 1977'

1980s, some activists continued to see commonalities even as the parties diverged, as the Dunbartonshire SDP organiser Bob Sawyer privately wrote in 1984 '[people] wonder why we have not extended [the electoral pact with the Liberals] to include the SNP and so, I must confess, do I'.<sup>1005</sup>

Across Scotland, the Liberals were unable to surpass the SNP as the nation's third party beyond a few scattered rural holdouts in the 1970s. However, after the formation of the Social Democratic Party by Labour defectors and their entrance into the SDP-Liberal Alliance in 1981, the situation changed.<sup>1006</sup> Many, both in the media and within the SNP, initially doubted that the Alliance was a direct threat to the Nationalists. Gordon Wilson displayed this sentiment in a 1981 internal party report, 'the emergence of a centre or social-democratic party will have little impact in Scotland ... largely because the SNP has fulfilled that role in the past'.<sup>1007</sup> Through the 1980s, the SDP was mocked as a 'party for England' with no relevance to the country.<sup>1008</sup> The results of the 1983 election proved these views wrong. An SNP report analysing the contest found that 'the areas where we had done well in the past the SDP picked up this time'.<sup>1009</sup> In that year, a fifth of the SNP's already diminished 1979 vote opted for the Alliance.<sup>1010</sup> As the Nationalist MEP Winifred Ewing lamented, 'the Liberal/SDP Alliance stole our clothes', eating into the electoral space the SNP had occupied in the 1970s.<sup>1011</sup> The Alliance fell back from this peak through the

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<sup>1005</sup> Glasgow Caledonian University, SDPAR 2/2.2, Correspondence, 'Letter from Bob Sawyer to David Owen', 22 August 1984

<sup>1006</sup> Peter Lynch, *The History of the Scottish National Party*, 163

<sup>1007</sup> NLS, Acc.13099/35, Correspondence, reports, memoranda and clippings relating to SNP strategy 1980-1981, 'Extract from SNP Chairman's Report to Special Meeting', 11 February 1981

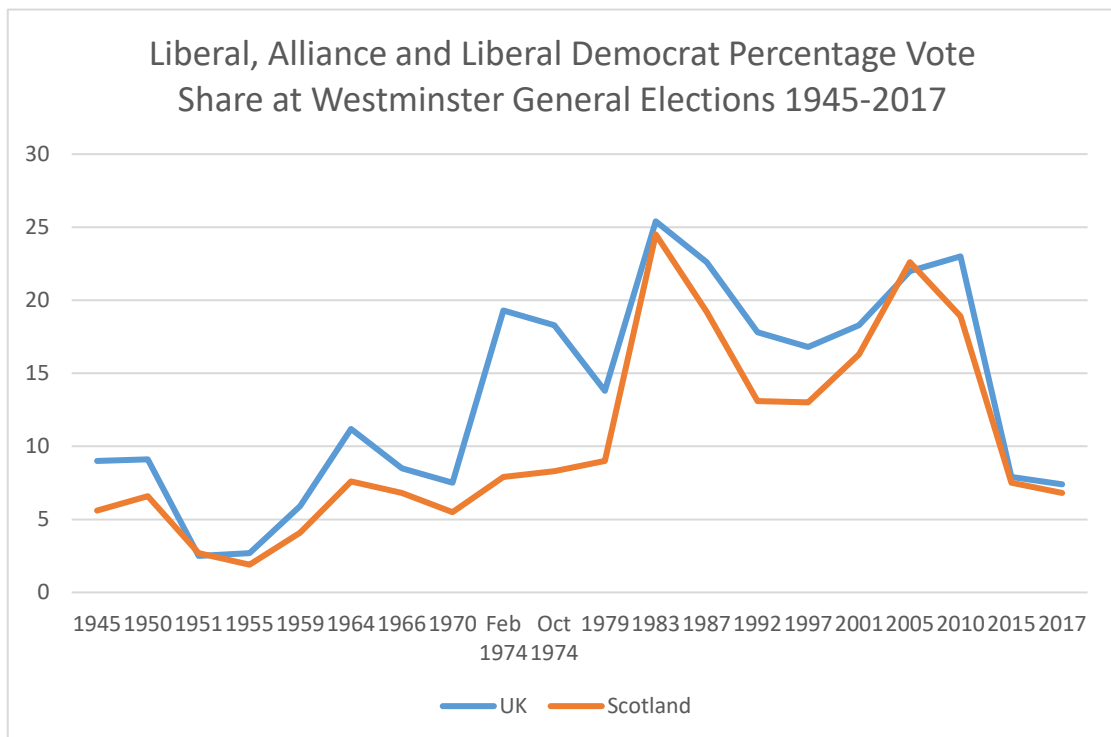
<sup>1008</sup> DCPCGA, 1986 Regional Elections, 'SNP Leaflet for Douglas/Drumgeith 1986'

<sup>1009</sup> NLS, Acc.13099/44, Post General Election review, correspondence and related papers, June-August 1983, 'Report on the Election Agents Conference'

<sup>1010</sup> Peter Lynch, *The History of the Scottish National Party*, 178

<sup>1011</sup> NLS, Acc.13099/44, Post General Election review, correspondence and related papers, June-August 1983, 'Letter from Winifred Ewing to Gordon Wilson', 22 June 1983

1980s, and continued to shed support following its painful merger and transformation into the Liberal Democrats at the end of the decade. During this period, it was forced to compete for a time with a continuing SDP and was even briefly threatened by a short-lived surge in support for the Green Party.<sup>1012</sup> At their lowest point, Paddy Ashdown, the unified party's first leader, observed that they were within the margin of error of registering no support at all in opinion polls.<sup>1013</sup> Yet these troubles were temporary. In the long run, the Liberal Democrats were consistently stronger than the pre-Alliance Liberal Party had been. Through the 1990s and 2000s, they were once again a viable alternative for Scottish third party voters to gather around, competing with the Nationalists for their support even when the two parties drifted apart ideologically following the SNP's shift to the left.



<sup>1012</sup> John Stevenson, 'Liberals to Liberal Democrats', D N MacIver (ed.), *The Liberal Democrats* (Hemel Hempstead, 1996) 32

<sup>1013</sup> David Walter, *The Strange Rebirth of Liberal England* (London, 2003) 153

Over the course of the 1990s, with an emphasis on localist 'community politics', the Liberal Democrats became increasingly prominent.<sup>1014</sup> Although they remained fourth in the number of votes cast, the party became Scotland's second largest in terms of seats at Westminster after the 1997 general election, a status they retained until 2015. The party won further prestige and credibility in Scotland by entering into a governing coalition with Labour at Holyrood between 1999 and 2007, while their Scottish leader Jim Wallace twice took on the position of acting First Minister following the tragic death of Donald Dewar in 2000 and then Henry McLeish's abrupt resignation the next year.<sup>1015</sup> Despite concerns that entering government might be harmful at the ballot box, participation as the junior partner in a coalition appeared to do little damage to the party's popular appeal.<sup>1016</sup> Under the national leadership of the charismatic Scot Charles Kennedy, the Liberal Democrats reached the peak of their influence in Scotland. In 2005, it came close to matching the Alliance's 1983 vote share while capturing the largest number of Liberal seats in Scotland since 1929. This was achieved despite the reduction of the country's allocation of constituencies from 72 to 59. At the same time, its share of the Scottish vote exceeded that which it won in Britain as a whole for the first time since 1951. The party's exuberance was captured in a 2010 leaflet that made a disingenuous claim to local relevance in Dundee by pointing towards the party's second place finish in the previous general election 'it's the Liberal Democrats or Labour across Scotland'.<sup>1017</sup> The Liberal Democrats and SNP also began to converge towards similar ideological positions once more. From the mid-1990s, the Liberal Democrats moved away from the strategy of maintaining 'equidistance' between the two main parties and instead began to define itself as belonging to the anti-Conservative

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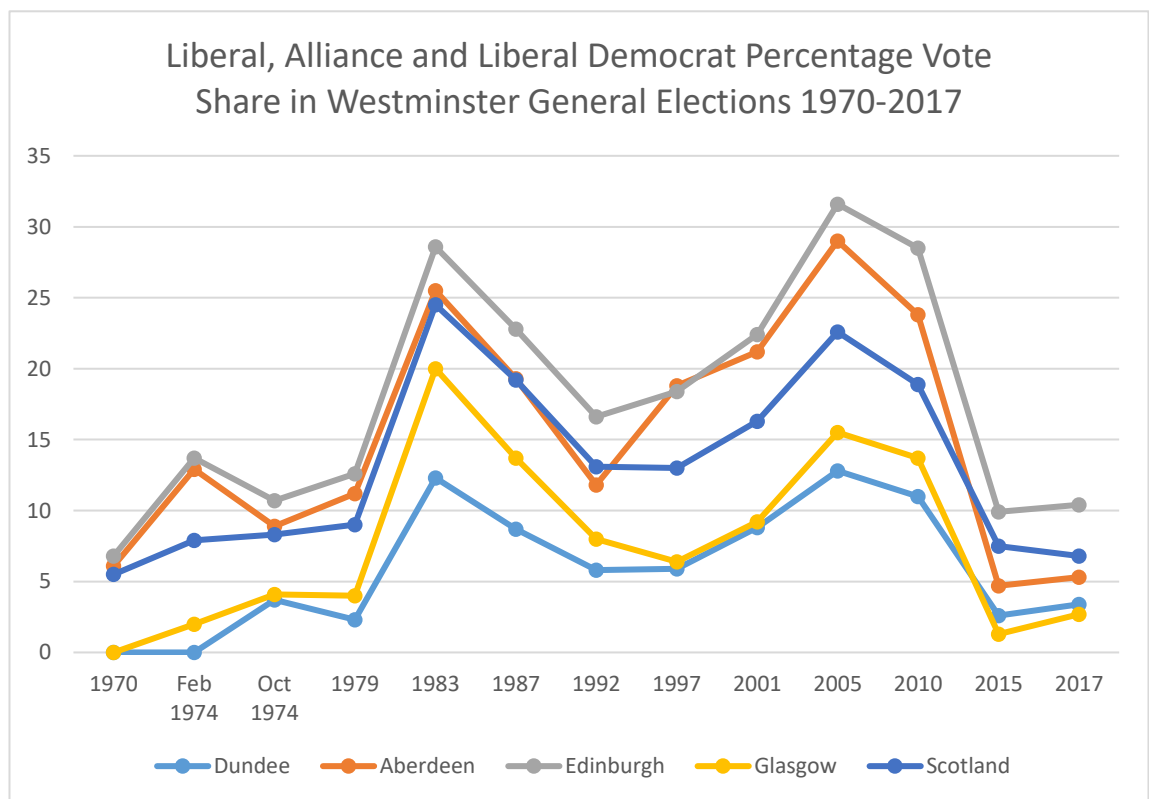
<sup>1014</sup> David Cutts, 'Local Elections as a 'Stepping Stone'', 363

<sup>1015</sup> Andrew Russell and Edward Fieldhouse, *Neither Left nor Right? The Liberal Democrats and the Electorate* (Manchester, 2005) 47

<sup>1016</sup> Martin Laffin, 'The Liberal Democrats in Power: The Scottish Liberal Democrats', *The Political Quarterly*, Vol 78 No 1 (2007) 147

<sup>1017</sup> DCPCGA, 2010 General Election, 'Liberal Democrat Leaflet for Dundee West 2010'

centre-left. This shift continued under Charles Kennedy, with particular resonance in the middle of the 2000s as he joined the SNP in opposition to the Iraq War.<sup>1018</sup> The two parties even discussed forming a governing alliance in Holyrood after the 2007 Scottish election produced a hung parliament.<sup>1019</sup> The Liberal Democrats' strength at this time contributed towards disappointing Nationalist performances in elections in the first half of the 2000s. Meanwhile, the collapse of the party's support following their entry into coalition with the Conservatives at Westminster in 2010 was vital to the SNP's landslide victory in the 2011 Scottish election, as former Liberal Democrat voters switched to the Nationalists in large numbers.<sup>1020</sup>



<sup>1018</sup> Andrew Russell and Edward Fieldhouse, *Neither Left nor Right?*, 179

<sup>1019</sup> Iain MacWhirter, *Road to Referendum* (Glasgow, 2014) 282

<sup>1020</sup> Christopher Carman, Robert Johns and James Mitchell, *More Scottish than British? The 2011 Scottish Parliamentary Election* (Basingstoke, 2011) 44

Iain Hutchison claims that the Liberals have lacked appeal in urban Scotland, only achieving strong results in rural and suburban areas.<sup>1021</sup> However, the party's record was relatively strong in some cities. Since the 1970s, they have enjoyed particular success in Aberdeen and Edinburgh, with their support in these cities often running ahead of the national average. In parliamentary elections, they achieved between twice and three times the vote share they managed in Dundee in every election since they began regularly contesting large numbers of constituencies in the 1970s. They were often in close competition for seats, although Edinburgh West between 1997 and 2015, and again since 2017, is the only constituency in these cities that has provided them with an MP. At a local level, Liberals comfortably outmatched the Nationalists in both cities, where they emerged as the leading third party. In Edinburgh, they secured a larger council presence than the SNP in every District and City Council election from 1974 until 2012, with the exception of 1977, and served as either the second or the largest party on the council from 1999 to 2012. In Aberdeen, the disparity has been even greater. The SNP finished behind the Liberals and their successors in every single council election from 1974 to 2012 and the Liberal Democrats were the council's second largest grouping from 1988 until 2003, before becoming the single largest party until 2012. Meanwhile, the Liberal Party's fortunes in Glasgow had been just as unimpressive as in Dundee in the 1960s and 1970s, with Chris Cook identifying the city and the industrial seats of the West of Scotland that surrounded as the party's weakest area in Britain. Indeed, in the few constituencies it was able to contest, it was only able to secure derisory shares of the vote.<sup>1022</sup> However, this changed during the 1980s as the Alliance made a serious impression in Glaswegian politics. Roy Jenkins won the Hillhead constituency in a 1982 by-election, before defending it at the following general election in 1983, while it took one in five Glaswegian votes across the city

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<sup>1021</sup> I G C Hutchison, *Scottish Politics in the Twentieth Century*, 144

<sup>1022</sup> Chris Cooks, *A Short History of the Liberal Party 1900-1976* (London, 1976) 160

that year. At a local government level, the Liberals and Alliance won more council seats than the SNP in each District Council election between 1980 and 1988, although their relative success did not continue after their merger into the Liberal Democrats.

*Liberal, Alliance and Liberal Democrat Percentage Vote Share  
in Westminster General Elections 1970-2017*

	Dundee West	Dundee East	Scotland	United Kingdom
1970			5.5	7.5
1974 (Feb)			7.9	19.3
1974 (Oct)	4.6	2.8	8.3	18.3
1979		4.6	9	13.8
1983	17.1	7.7	24.5	25.4
1987	12.7	4.6	19.2	22.6
1992	7.5	4.1	13.1	17.8
1997	7.7	4.1	13	16.8
2001	9	8.6	16.3	18.3
2005	14.4	11.4	22.6	22
2010	11.4	10.6	18.9	23
2015	2.4	2.9	7.5	7.9
2017	3.1	3.8	6.8	7.4

Despite a credible record in much of urban Scotland, neither the Liberals, the Alliance nor the Liberal Democrats became an electoral force in Dundee at any point. At their two peaks in nationwide support in 1983 and 2005, they managed just 12.3 per cent and 12.8 per cent of the citywide vote respectively. The latter contest marked the only occasion in which they secured the third largest share of Dundee’s vote at any level since the 1960s, after they narrowly pipped the Conservatives. Through the rest of the period, their support across Dundee has remained derisory, surpassing 10 per cent in just one other general election, in 2010. They consistently won a lower share of the vote in Dundee than in in any other city until 2015. The Liberal Democrats’ record in Scottish elections has been similarly poor. The

party's best result saw them win 8.5 per cent of the city's vote in 1999. This parliamentary record is reflected in local elections. While they won two District Council seats in 1984, when the Alliance's popularity was near its highest point, they were otherwise unrepresented in Dundee's council chambers until the turn of the millennium. Then, the Dundee Liberal Democrats were able to gain a foothold in a few isolated pockets, most notably the wealthy West End area, winning council representation for the first time in two decades after a local by-election in 2001. They subsequently became involved in governing Dundee in coalition with Labour from 2003 until 2009. However, the party has remained electorally marginal through most of the city.

The lack of an effective party organisation has contributed to this electoral underperformance. As a *Guardian* report looking ahead to the 1973 Dundee East by-election observed, the party had enjoyed notable success in the city within living memory: 'historically the Liberals have a stronger claim than the Nationalists in Dundee'.<sup>1023</sup> Its last Liberal MP had only been defeated in 1945, while one of its most well regarded Lord Provosts, Garnett Wilson, had hailed from the party and served between 1940 and 1946. Yet by the 1970s, Liberalism's roots in the city had become very shallow. The Liberal Democrat councillor Fraser MacPherson, whose own history with the Liberal Party goes back to 1979, revealed that 'there was a great Liberal tradition in Dundee which, frankly, died out after the second world war ... the Liberals lived on in Dundee in a very small form through the 50s and 60s' with only a handful of active members.<sup>1024</sup> George Galloway supports this description 'the Liberals had never had a base [in Dundee], not since Churchill was turned over'.<sup>1025</sup> The party ran a parliamentary candidate in Dundee on only one

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<sup>1023</sup> *Guardian*, 9 January 1973, 12

<sup>1024</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Fraser MacPherson

<sup>1025</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, George Galloway

occasion between 1951 and 1973, and saw its local structure wither. Observing the Liberals' return to Dundee politics at the by-election, the press noted that 'the Liberal party had previously been inactive in the constituency'.<sup>1026</sup> This was not merely a reflection of the party's poor state across the country. The 1973 Scottish Liberal Party annual conference agenda admitted that there was only a 'small band of Dundee Liberals', and that the city party's small size meant that it was the only urban Liberal association in Scotland that had not assured its affiliation by paying its dues.<sup>1027</sup> In the February 1974 election, they were unable to select a candidate for either Dundee seat, despite a major increase in their coverage across Britain. The nationwide Liberal effort to revive defunct constituency associations before the second election of the year allowed the party to field candidates in Dundee's two constituencies in October.<sup>1028</sup> However, it achieved very poor results in both seats with 4.6 per cent of the vote in Dundee West and 2.8 per cent in Dundee East. In 1979, the Liberals again achieved very limited support in Dundee East while Dundee West was one of just 46 seats on mainland Britain that the party did not contest.

As the Social Democratic Party disrupted existing political structures across Britain at the beginning of the 1980s, SDP allowed the Alliance to gain a foothold in some areas in which the Liberals had previously been weak, most notably in Glasgow. Yet the excitement around the Alliance did little to overcome the weakness of Dundee Liberalism. Although improving upon the support the Liberal Party had amassed in the city on its own, the Alliance struggled to replicate the success it achieved elsewhere. The party in Dundee was unable to profit from the defections of the veteran ex-MPs Peter Doig and George Thomson to build up its profile in the city. The SDP in Scotland developed a stronger

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<sup>1026</sup> DCA, GD/LP/WF/1/2, William Fitzgerald Papers, 'Newspaper Clipping', 19 March 1973

<sup>1027</sup> NLS, Acc.10090/153, Scottish Liberal Party, 'Scottish Liberal Party 1973 Annual Conference Agenda'

<sup>1028</sup> Chris Cooks, *A Short History of the Liberal Party*, 158

organisational basis on the West Coast, where almost half of its membership resided in June 1981.<sup>1029</sup> Yet even compared to other parts of the East Coast, the Dundee party was particularly weak. By October 1981, membership in the city lagged substantially behind all of Scotland's other cities, standing at around half the level of Aberdeen.<sup>1030</sup> In both Edinburgh and Aberdeen, it quickly built up a more professional structure, with fixed offices from which it could coordinate its activities from an early stage.<sup>1031</sup> While the Alliance increased its share of the Scottish vote by 15.5 per cent in 1983, and by similar amounts in each of the nation's other cities, in Dundee it rose by a much more modest 10 per cent. Furthermore, this increase was almost entirely the result of the SDP standing in Dundee West, which the Liberals had not contested in 1979. In direct competition with Gordon Wilson in Dundee East, the Liberal Party increased their vote by 3.1 per cent in one of their smallest rises in Britain. This underperformance persisted. Strikingly, at the 1987 general election, Dundee East was the only constituency of the 633 the Alliance fought in which they lost their deposit.<sup>1032</sup>

Poor election results were complimented by a degree of amateurism in their campaigns. Despite the Alliance enjoying unprecedented strength in 1983, activists in Dundee East even issued a template leaflet in which they failed to write-in the name of their candidate 'I urge you to vote for your alliance candidate (insert name)'<sup>1033</sup> They also struggled to adapt their rhetoric to Dundee's particular political terrain. Most importantly, they made little effort to address the SNP in their election materials, despite the party's obvious importance

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<sup>1029</sup> Calum Aikman, 'The Birth of the Social Democratic Party in Scotland', *Contemporary British History*, Vol 3 No 27 (2013) 326

<sup>1030</sup> NLS, Acc.13662/2, Social Democratic Party, Edinburgh Area, 'Scottish Democrat', October 1981

<sup>1031</sup> GCU, SDPAR 1/8, Social Democratic Party Minutes, 'West of Scotland Coordinating Committee Meeting Minutes', 29 June 1981

<sup>1032</sup> Richard Parry, *Scottish Political Facts*, 7

<sup>1033</sup> DCL, LHC 373 (10), The Lamb Collection, 'SDP-Liberal Alliance Leaflet for Dundee East 1983'

in the city. In October 1974, with the Nationalists at the height of their influence, the Liberal candidate Charles Brodie did not mention them at all in his campaign address, even as he faced an SNP incumbent in Dundee East.<sup>1034</sup> This was a common feature of the party's literature for years. In the 1982 regional elections, while standing in a ward in which the Nationalists were by far the leading challengers to Labour, Alliance literature again neglected to mention the SNP, although they made room for detailed denunciations of both the Conservative and Labour parties.<sup>1035</sup> This reluctance to engage with the existence of the SNP and its local importance was in part a result of their organisational underdevelopment. Such was the small size of the Liberal and SDP organisations in the city, they tended to rigidly rely on centrally produced materials and arguments that didn't account for the local situation. Moreover, Gordon Wilson's SNP was particularly difficult for the party to address. Its ideological similarity, and obviously greater strength, left the Liberals and Alliance with few clear arguments for voters to support them above the SNP. Tellingly, one of the very few Liberal leaflets of this period that addresses the SNP specifically was issued at a contest in which the Nationalists did not stand any candidates, the 1977 District elections. It played upon the closeness of the two parties in policies and aims, offering the Liberals as a proxy for the absent SNP.<sup>1036</sup> Yet regardless of their reasons, the failure of the Liberal Party to adequately confront the SNP made it impossible for them to make a concerted challenge to the Nationalists' control of Dundee's third party centre ground.

After the constituent parties of the Alliance merged into the Social and Liberal Democrats in 1988, soon renamed the Liberal Democrats, their support slid downwards both in

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<sup>1034</sup> *Courier & Advertiser*, 4 October 1974, 8

<sup>1035</sup> DCL, LHC 441 (25), The Lamb Collection, 'Liberal/SDP Alliance Leaflet for Whitfield/Longhaugh 1982'

<sup>1036</sup> DCPCGA, 1977 District Elections, 'Liberal Leaflet for Dundee East 1977'

Dundee and across the United Kingdom. However, during the 1990s the Dundee Liberals 'built up the party organisation' in the city and laid the foundations for a more permanent presence.<sup>1037</sup> These efforts paid dividends as the party cultivated support in the prosperous districts on the western side of the city. This led to the Liberal Democrats' capture of the long Labour-held Tay Bridges ward in 2001, and then the increase of the party's council representation to two in 2003. These were their first council seats since the high tide of the Alliance in the early 1980s. Having achieved a foothold, the party's councillors worked assiduously to consolidate it, as they engaged in the well-worn 'pothole and pavement' initiatives that had characterised Liberal engagement with local politics for half a century.<sup>1038</sup> Fraser MacPherson, the Tay Bridges victor, made clear that this was a conscious strategy 'very localised, very local issues, very active in the local community ... I am a very much into community politics'.<sup>1039</sup> Labour's Iain Luke admitted this was an area in which Dundee's Liberal Democrat councillors were at their most effective.<sup>1040</sup> They industriously engaged with neighbourhood concerns and published very regular and widely dispersed newsletters.<sup>1041</sup> There was also an enthusiastic engagement with new technology for similar purposes, with MacPherson maintaining the most regularly updated blog of any of the city's politicians, which covers similar topics as the *FOCUS* newsletter.<sup>1042</sup> The success of these initiatives was made clear in the 2012 local elections. As Liberal Democrat support collapsed around Scotland, Dundee as a whole followed suit. Yet, in the party's key West End stronghold, it topped the poll and even increased its share of the vote.

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<sup>1037</sup> 'Dr Liz Dick', *Dundee Liberal Democrats*, 2 July 2008

<sup>1038</sup> John Stevenson, *Third Party Politics since 1945*, 54

<sup>1039</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Fraser MacPherson

<sup>1040</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Iain Luke

<sup>1041</sup> 'Dundee City Centre FOCUS', *Dundee Liberal Democrats*, August 2006

<sup>1042</sup> *Dundee West End*

Despite seeing the party established as a force in city politics for the first time in half a century, the activities of its councillors did little to further the Liberal cause beyond local elections in an isolated part of the city. There were few attempts to advance the Liberal Democrats' political brand. The apolitical nature of the party's council activity was reflected in its election materials, with leaflets issued in 2012 for the West End making no use of the Liberal Democrat name, colours or symbols.<sup>1043</sup> The results of this were seen in general elections. There were high hopes that the party could substantially advance in the western constituency in 2005, as a leaflet asserted that 'the Liberal Democrats are the real alternative to Labour in Dundee West'.<sup>1044</sup> However, the party's support rose by less in the constituency than it did across the rest of Scotland, with its increase in Dundee East being lower still. As before, the Liberal Democrats remained side-lined from Dundee's political mainstream, gaining little party political support from their councillors' activism.

Peter Lynch notes that the vacuum created by the absence of Liberal activity in certain areas was particularly important in aiding the SNP in establishing themselves as the principal third party there.<sup>1045</sup> Observing this trend at the 1964 general election, the renowned political scientists David Butler and Anthony King went so far as to describe the Nationalists' support as a 'disguised Liberal vote'.<sup>1046</sup> This has been a persistent feature of Scottish politics, with the two parties developing strong traditions in the same location in only extremely rare exceptions like Argyll.<sup>1047</sup> This trend was observable in the only two urban seats in Scotland that fell to third parties in the 1970s and 1980s. Roy Jenkins' experience in Glasgow Hillhead offered a mirror image to Gordon Wilson's in Dundee East,

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<sup>1043</sup> DCPCGA, 2012 Council Elections, 'Liberal Democrat Leaflet for the West End 2012'

<sup>1044</sup> 'Liberal Democrat Leaflet for Dundee West 2005', *Dundee Liberal Democrats*, August 2006

<sup>1045</sup> Peter Lynch, 'Third Party Politics in a Four Party System: The Liberal Democrats in Scotland', *The Scottish Government Yearbook*, Vol 22 (1998) 17

<sup>1046</sup> D E Butler and Anthony King, *The British General Election of 1964* (London, 1965) 356

<sup>1047</sup> I G C Hutchison, *Scottish Politics in the Twentieth Century*, 121

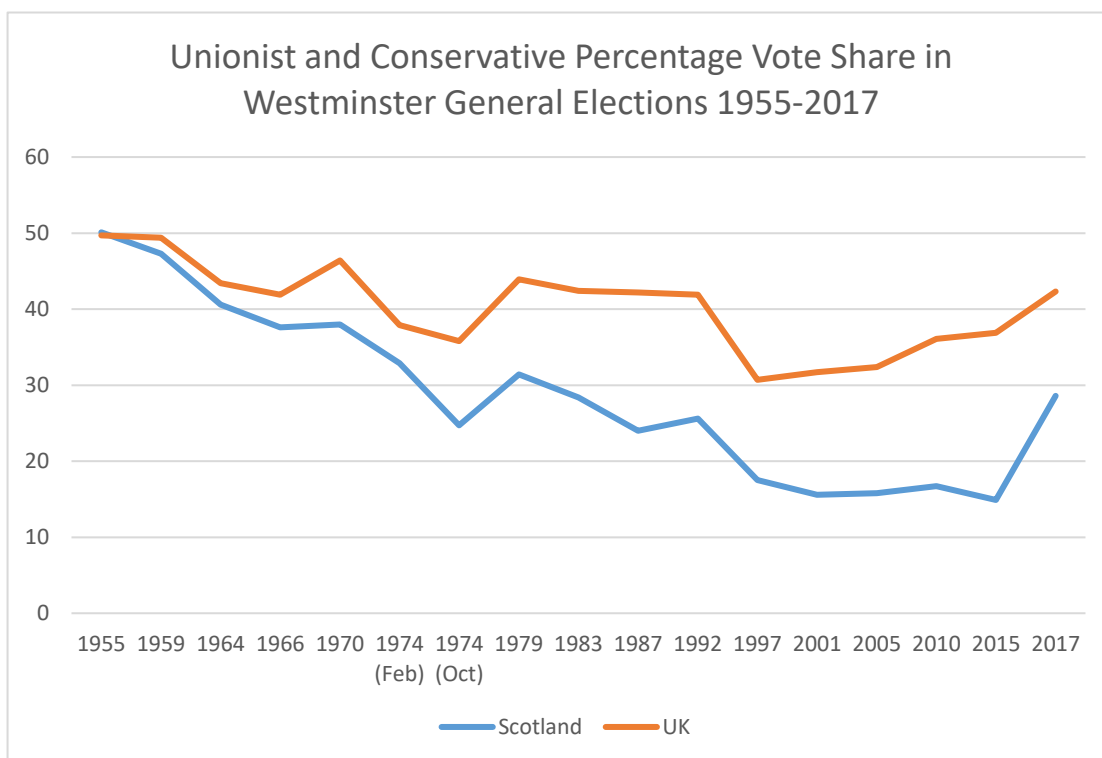
a parallel the Nationalist MP recognised.<sup>1048</sup> In Hillhead, the Alliance leader's success depended on his ability to suppress the SNP's vote, pointing to the collapse of Nationalist support in the constituency as vital to his prospects.<sup>1049</sup> Even in Dundee itself, the wards that the Liberal Democrats achieved council representation in during the 2000s were in the middle class areas of Dundee West in which the SNP vote had persistently been significantly lower than in any other part of the city. Across Scotland, the success of third parties has required one or the other to emerge as clearly the stronger. In Dundee, the failure of the Liberals and their successors to present a credible challenge allowed the Nationalists to monopolise the support of those electors opposed to both the Conservative and Labour parties. This enabled it to entrench itself in this political position to a far greater extent than in any of the country's other cities. These votes were an important part of the SNP's electoral coalition in Dundee throughout the period, without which its sustained success would have been impossible.

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<sup>1048</sup> Gordon Wilson, *The Turbulent Years*, 233

<sup>1049</sup> Roy Jenkins, *A Life at the Centre* (London & Basingstoke, 1991) 557

### *The Conservative Party and Anti-Labour Voting*



During the 1970s and 1980s, one of the most important aspect of the SNP's political appeal in Dundee was its ability to pose as the antithesis to the Labour Party. This was central to Gordon Wilson's strategy in Dundee East as he sought to broaden his support. The Nationalists were able to replace the Conservative Party as the leading force capable of overcoming the city's powerful, and ideologically radical, Labour establishment at a parliamentary level. In doing so, they attracted the votes of moderate and right-leaning electors, building a more conservative coalition than they did in other parts of the country. The SNP's rise to fill this role in the city was facilitated by the withdrawal of Conservatism from urban Scotland generally and the specific weaknesses of Dundee's Tories in particular.

The popularity of Scottish Conservatism reached its height in 1955, when the Unionist Party and its National Liberal allies won a fraction over half the popular vote. The National

Liberals had their origins in a split within the Liberal Party over support for the Conservative-dominated National Government in 1931. They subsequently drew closer to the Conservatives – merging on a constituency level in 1947. While they had largely faded away as an independent force by the early 1960s, finally dissolving into the Conservative Party in 1968, the National Liberals helped the Conservatives to expand their appeal beyond their historic base to a broader anti-Labour electorate that included many former Liberal voters.<sup>1050</sup> Their presence was important in Scotland, where they held a significant number of seats, mostly in areas of traditional Liberal strength and Unionist weakness, up until the 1964 election. As this alliance fell away, the Scottish Tories began a fifty year-long recession. Their support fell steadily through the second half of the twentieth century, with short-lived upticks in 1979 and 1992 failing to halt the long-term tide, eventually leading to the loss of all the party's MPs at the 1997 general election and the stagnation of its vote at a low base for the next two decades. They dropped furthest in Scotland's cities. The Conservatives were weakened by organisational reforms, but also by broader changes in attitudes towards class, faith and nation that buffeted Scottish society in the second half of the twentieth century. In 1965, the Unionist Party rebranded and reorganised as a part of the UK-wide Conservative Party. Many of its structures were moved away from localities in different parts of Scotland and centralised at head offices in Edinburgh and London. This hampered its responsiveness to local issues.<sup>1051</sup> The Glasgow Cathcart MP Teddy Taylor admitted the negative impact: 'when decisions were made in Glasgow I found it was a great strength in campaigning in the West of Scotland'.<sup>1052</sup> Although identification with social class remained strong, voting patterns became more loosely tied to these identities in the

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<sup>1050</sup> David Dutton, 'A Stepping-Stone for Wavering Radicals': Conservatives, National Liberals and Denbighshire 1947-64', *Contemporary British History*, Vol 22 No 1 (2008) 117

<sup>1051</sup> David Seawright, 'Scottish Unionism: An East West Divide?', *Scottish Affairs*, No 23 (1988) 55

<sup>1052</sup> Teddy Taylor in David Seawright, *An Important Matter of Principle*, 16

second half of the century.<sup>1053</sup> This reduced the reflexive devotion of the middle classes to the party and allowed the SNP, alongside the Liberals, to take advantage. In the mid-twentieth century, religion had an influence over the Scottish electorate that rivalled class. In the 1968 local elections in Dundee, 40 per cent of Protestant manual workers had voted for the Conservatives while just 6 per cent of working class Catholics did the same.<sup>1054</sup> This was challenged by the rapid process of secularisation, which saw Scottish church attendances collapse from the 1960s onwards, with the Conservative-aligned Protestant churches being the worst affected, and religious influence go into hasty retreat.<sup>1055</sup> The receding of the traditional Presbyterian worldview with which the Conservatives had been closely associated slackened the party's attachment to the Protestant vote and opened the group to the advances of other parties, with the SNP enjoying the greatest success.<sup>1056</sup> The Tories were also historically the party of both British nationalism and pro-imperial Scottish patriotism, which formed an important part of their popular appeal.<sup>1057</sup> Although these sentiments retained a powerful force through the middle of the century, their grip over Scottish society was undermined by anxieties over Britain's perceived national decline.<sup>1058</sup> Ideas that Britain was in decline had been present for much of the country's modern history, yet they reached their apogee during the 1960s and 1970s at a time when its economy was falling behind many of its Western European competitors, it withdrew from its colonial Empire and the country faced a series of social problems.<sup>1059</sup> Economically, the issue of decline was particularly acute in Scotland, where the loss of the nation's traditional

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<sup>1053</sup> Richard J Finlay, 'Patriotism, Paternalism and Pragmatism: Scottish Toryism, Union and Empire, 1912-1965' David Torrance (ed.), *Whatever Happened to Tory Scotland?*, 30

<sup>1054</sup> T M Devine, *The Scottish Nation*, 582

<sup>1055</sup> Callum G Brown, 'The secular decade: what the 1960s have done to the study of religious history', Hugh McLeod and Werner Ustorf (eds), *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe 1750-2000* (Cambridge, 2003) 34

<sup>1056</sup> W W Knox, *Industrial Nation*, 299

<sup>1057</sup> Richard J Finlay, 'Scottish Toryism, Union and Empire, 1912-1965', 30

<sup>1058</sup> Mark Veblen Kauppi, *Scottish Nationalism: A Conceptual Approach* (Boulder, 1980) 87

<sup>1059</sup> Jim Tomlinson, 'Inventing 'Decline': The Falling behind of the British Economy in the Postwar Years', *The Economic History Review*, Vol 49 No 4 (1996) 732

industries reverberated especially strongly across society.<sup>1060</sup> Another key facet of this decline, the end of the British Empire, has been widely put forward as a central reason for the unravelling of these identities.<sup>1061</sup> Although Jimmi Nielsen and Stuart Ward caution against drawing a direct causation between the loss of Empire and decline in identification with Britain, they accept that it played an important part in the weakening of the Unionist worldview.<sup>1062</sup>

Equally, from the 1960s the Tories became increasingly associated with an unpopular, effete and anglicised image.<sup>1063</sup> Its politicians tended to be drawn from a very different background to its middle class electorate, as an SNP research bulletin chides 'there was a time when an Eton and Oxford education was almost essential for a prospective Tory candidate in Scotland'.<sup>1064</sup> Alex Mackenzie, the Progressive Lord Provost of Dundee between 1967 and 1970, agreed with the notion that the Conservative Party had grown detached from Scottish society, labelling the Scottish Tory leadership as 'almost farcically out of touch' with the country.<sup>1065</sup> A 1966 paper for the Conservative Research Department pointed to the party's own awareness of these problems as it admitted that it 'sometimes gives the impression of being a predominantly English party'.<sup>1066</sup> Suspicions over Conservative fidelity to Scotland intensified during the 1980s. Margaret Thatcher's government was widely perceived to be neglectful of, and even hostile to, Scottish

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<sup>1060</sup> Jim Phillips, *The Industrial Politics of Devolution*, 187

<sup>1061</sup> H J Hanham, *Scottish Nationalism* (London, 1969) 212

<sup>1062</sup> Jimmi Østergaard Nielsen and Stuart Ward, 'Three referenda and a by-election: the shadow of empire in devolutionary politics', John MacKenzie and Bryan S Glass (eds), *Scotland, Empire and Decolonisation*, 220

<sup>1063</sup> Michael Keating and David Bleiman, *Labour and Scottish Nationalism* (London, 1979) 150

<sup>1064</sup> NLS, Acc.13099/97, Research Bulletins 1970-1974, 'SNP Research Bulletin April 1970'

<sup>1065</sup> Alex MacKenzie, *And Nothing But The Truth*, 30

<sup>1066</sup> Chris Patten in James Mitchell, *Hamilton 1967: The by-election that transformed Scotland* (Edinburgh, 2017) 44

interests.<sup>1067</sup> The party's controversial record over eighteen years in power under Margaret Thatcher and later John Major, and their unerring refusal to respond to growing support for devolution, did much to tarnish the Conservative brand.<sup>1068</sup> Under John Major's premiership in the 1990s, the Conservative Party's British-wide image was badly damaged by its internal divisions over the European Union, perceptions of government 'sleaze', economic difficulties and the emergence of a more viable alternative government in Tony Blair's New Labour project.<sup>1069</sup> A 1995 autopsy by the Scottish central office on the disastrous results of the council elections that year squarely blames 'national issues', and highlights the party's anxious awareness that they could not escape the consequences of the government's growing unpopularity.<sup>1070</sup> Ultimately, this slump led to the Tories losing every single one of their Scottish MPs and their vote share falling to just 17.5 per cent at the 1997 general election. After standing alone against devolution in the 1997 referendum, the party sought to refashion its image and move forward in a different direction with promises that it was 'listening and learning'.<sup>1071</sup> Yet, as Alan Convery notes, the party struggled to adapt to the new political realities brought about by the creation of the Scottish Parliament in 1999.<sup>1072</sup> In the two decades after its 1997 wipe-out, its support remained stagnant. Even as Conservative electoral fortunes improved in England, and to an extent in Wales as well, the Scottish party failed to better its 1997 result in either Westminster or Holyrood elections until 2016, although its position did not deteriorate much further. With just one MP between 2001 and 2017, the Conservatives' status as a

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<sup>1067</sup> Gerry Hassan, 'It's only a Northern song': The Constant Smirr of Anti-Thatcherism', David Torrance (ed.), *Whatever Happened to Tory Scotland?*, 78

<sup>1068</sup> David Butler and Dennis Kavanagh, *The British General Election of 1987*, 30

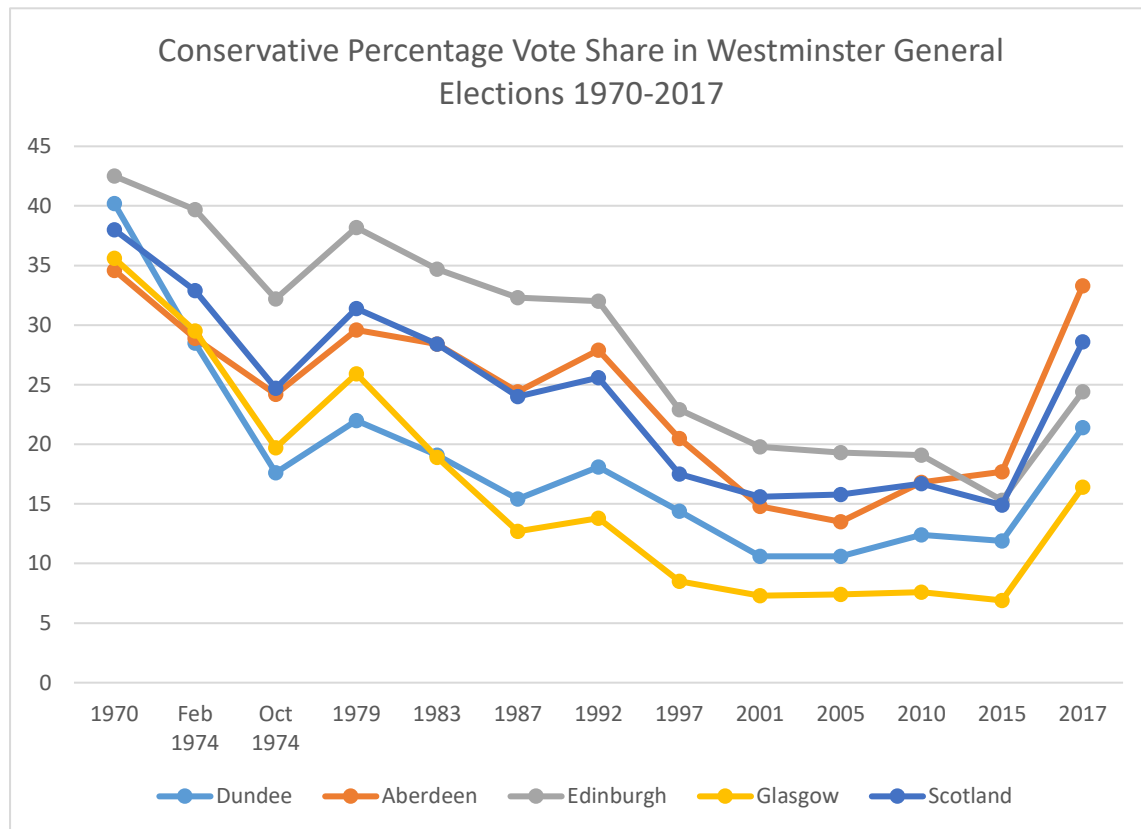
<sup>1069</sup> Philip Norton, 'History of the party III: Heath, Thatcher and Major', Philip Norton (ed.), *The Conservative Party* (Hemel Hempstead, 1996) 66

<sup>1070</sup> DCPCGA, 1995 Council Elections, 'Letter from the Scottish Conservative & Unionist Central Office', 7 April 1995

<sup>1071</sup> DCPCGA, 1999 Scottish and Council Elections, 'Conservative Pamphlet', 1999

<sup>1072</sup> Alan Convery, *The Territorial Conservative Party: Devolution and party change in Scotland and Wales* (Manchester, 2016) 45

mainstream political force in Scotland was in large part preserved by its ability to win a respectable number of MSPs through the Scottish Parliament’s system of proportional representation.



The decline of Scottish Conservatism was especially sharp in Dundee. Having achieved the second highest vote share of any Scottish city in 1970, Dundee’s Tory vote fell rapidly. Prior to the rise of the SNP, the Conservatives consistently secured greater support in the city than the national average, winning more votes than in either Aberdeen or Glasgow, and only slightly less than in Edinburgh. In these postwar years, it appeared notably more Conservative-inclined that its predominantly working class demography would have predicted. However, following the rise of the SNP in the 1970s, the party’s support quickly contracted in Dundee. Between 1970 and 1979, the Conservatives’ vote share fell by 18.2 per cent in the city. The erosion of the party’s support was much more modest in Aberdeen and Edinburgh during the same period, at 5 and 4.3 per cent, while it dropped by 9.7 per

cent in Glasgow. Between February 1974 and 1979, the Tory vote was lower in Dundee than any other city. Even after the Conservatives' catastrophic showing in Glasgow in 1983, in which it lost a quarter of its support, the Tory vote was only 0.2 per cent higher in the Tayside city. Meanwhile, in Aberdeen and Edinburgh the Conservatives were much more resilient. In both cities, they won the second largest share of the vote in each general election until 2001. They remained a more credible electoral force in these cities up to the end of the 1990s. Correspondingly, the Conservatives retained parliamentary representation in Glasgow, Aberdeen and Edinburgh until 1982, 1987 and 1997 respectively. The Dundee Conservatives' especially rapid descent relative to the nation's other cities was largely the result of the SNP's success. The Nationalists were able to win over a particularly large part of the Tory electorate during the mid-1970s and then defended these gains, at least in Dundee East, from the Conservatives' 1979 resurgence in a manner that proved impossible elsewhere. Indeed, in 1979 the Tory vote in Dundee rose by less than a third of the rate it did nationally, leaving their support very close to the low they had reached in October 1974. The Nationalists' 1970s successes had allowed them to replace the Conservatives as the best placed party to keep Labour out of the city's parliamentary seats, and especially Dundee East.

Yet the Conservatives' underperformance in Dundee was not solely a result of the SNP's external competition. As was the case with the Liberals, it was exacerbated by a local party that earned a reputation for being weak, ineffective and disorganised. They were widely reported to be desperately lacking in ideas and direction by the 1970s.<sup>1073</sup> There was also little energy among campaigners, as one party figure admitted 'Tories are not such active

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<sup>1073</sup> *Scotsman*, 28 February 1973, 1

political animals'.<sup>1074</sup> This contributed to the problem of activists being notably 'thin on the ground' in the city.<sup>1075</sup> Such was the party's lack of manpower, that in 1973 'an Annual General Meeting of the Dundee East Constituency Association had to be adjourned because an insufficient number of members had turned up'.<sup>1076</sup> Moreover, an unnamed source within the Dundee East Conservative Association claimed that shambolic organisation and poor leadership in the city party was directly responsible for the Tories' failures in parliamentary elections during the 1970s.<sup>1077</sup> This depiction was supported by an investigation undertaken by the Young Conservatives in the aftermath of the party's unexpectedly poor showing in the 1973 Dundee East by-election. It found that 'organisationally Dundee was "bad" with the local association having paid nothing in the last two years of its quota of £700 to Central Office'.<sup>1078</sup> Donald Hay admitted that the Tories already had 'a small association' when he first joined the Dundee Conservatives in 1980, and that it proceeded to steadily decline for a further three decades.<sup>1079</sup>

Highlighting the weakness of the city's Conservatives formed a cornerstone of SNP campaigns through the 1970s and 1980s across the city. The Nationalists made every effort to prove themselves to be the most competent and effective opponent of the Labour Party in Dundee. In a council by-election after the general election of 1979, the SNP proudly announced that the 'Tories are still Dundee's insignificant third party!'<sup>1080</sup> A leaflet for Dundee West in 1983 carried the same message, the SNP boldly claiming that not only were the Tories not as well placed as them to take the seat, but that the Conservatives

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<sup>1074</sup> *Daily Record*, 3 November 1972, 2

<sup>1075</sup> DCA, GD/LP/WF/1/2, William Fitzgerald Papers, 'Newspaper Clipping', 19 March 1973

<sup>1076</sup> Alex MacKenzie, *And Nothing But The Truth*, 28

<sup>1077</sup> UD, MS 315/3/4, Dundee East 1979, 'Newspaper Clipping', 1979

<sup>1078</sup> DCA, GD/LP/WF/1/2, William Fitzgerald Papers, 'Newspaper Clipping', 19 March 1973

<sup>1079</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Donald Hay

<sup>1080</sup> DCPCGA, 1979 Logie By-Election, 'SNP Leaflet for Logie 1979'

were ‘only “showing the flag”’, effectively running a paper candidacy.<sup>1081</sup> This came despite the SNP slumping below both the Conservatives and even the Alliance in Dundee West that year. As he outlined a strategy for the 1988 District elections, Gordon Wilson advised that the local party take care to ensure that ‘the Tory organisation should be branded as weak and inefficient’, encouraging their voters to turn to the more effective SNP.<sup>1082</sup> The purpose of this message was to convince centrist and centre-right leaning voters that no other party could overcome Labour in the city. A 1983 leaflet for Dundee East displayed this message ‘a vote for the Tories is a wasted vote; a vote for the Alliance is a wasted vote’.<sup>1083</sup> This approach was used across the city and leaned on the SNP’s proven ability to win parliamentary contests, as a leaflet for Dundee West from the same year illustrated ‘the SNP is the only party to break the Labour hold on Dundee since 1945 ... the contest in Dundee West is between the SNP and an extreme leftwing Labour Party’.<sup>1084</sup> A leaflet issued in the Hilltown ward in 1984 crystallised the message in particularly clear terms ‘if you want Labour out, vote SNP’.<sup>1085</sup> The Nationalists’ success in propagating this message accelerated the Conservatives’ decline in Dundee, separating them from the part of the electorate that was principally anti-Labour rather than ideologically Conservative. The support of these voters was fundamental to Gordon Wilson’s victories in the 1970s and 1980s. This anti-socialist approach, focussed on squeezing out the Conservatives and becoming the primary opposition to the Labour Party, was successfully employed by third parties elsewhere in Britain during this period. Most notably, the Liberal Party achieved a similar feat in Liverpool after breaking through in local elections in 1973 to win control of

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<sup>1081</sup> DCL, LHC 373 (14), The Lamb Collection, ‘SNP Leaflet for Dundee West 1983’

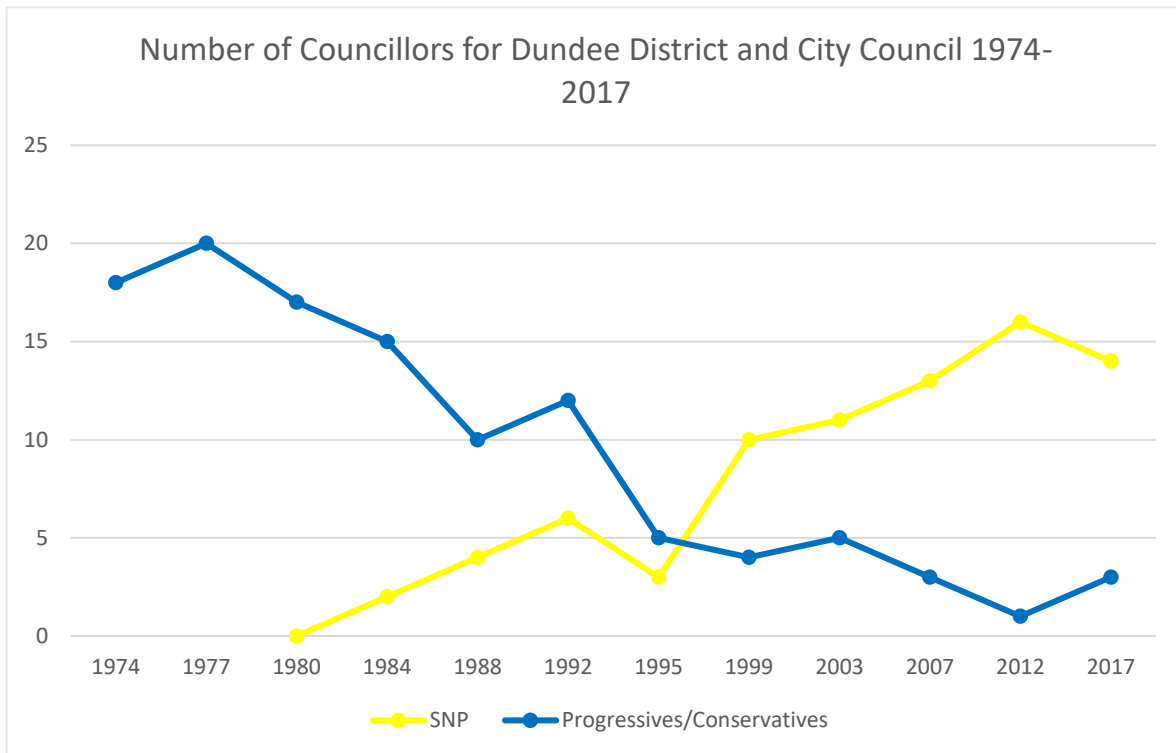
<sup>1082</sup> UD, MS 315/4/4, Dundee District Councillors 1987, ‘Memoranda to Dundee District Association SNP from Gordon Wilson’, 1987

<sup>1083</sup> UD, MS 315/3/4, General Election: Dundee East 1983, ‘SNP Leaflet for Dundee East 1983’

<sup>1084</sup> DCL, LHC 373 (14), The Lamb Collection, ‘SNP Leaflet for Dundee West 1983’

<sup>1085</sup> UD, MS 315/4/1, Dundee District Councillors 1984, ‘SNP Leaflet for Hilltown 1984’

the city's council. Thereafter, they shifted the narrative of the city's politics to present it as a two-way contest between themselves and Labour in which the Tories were irrelevant.<sup>1086</sup>



While the SNP were successful with this strategy at parliamentary elections, the Conservatives remained stronger at a local government level. Helen Wright points out that the Conservatives were regarded as Labour's main opponent in council elections into the 1990s.<sup>1087</sup> This was in part a result of the SNP's delayed engagement with local politics in Dundee. During the 1970s, the SNP's abstentionist policy ensured that two-party competition endured until the end of the decade. The Progressives and later the Conservative Party were extremely successful in local elections during this period. They administered the city between 1967 and 1973, before regaining control of the council with almost half the vote in 1977, eventually losing power for the last time in 1980. This was achieved despite the, at times painful, merger of the city's Progressives into the

<sup>1086</sup> David Jeffrey, 'The strange death of Tory Liverpool: Conservative electoral decline in Liverpool, 1945-1996', *British Politics*, Vol 12 No 3 (2017) 398

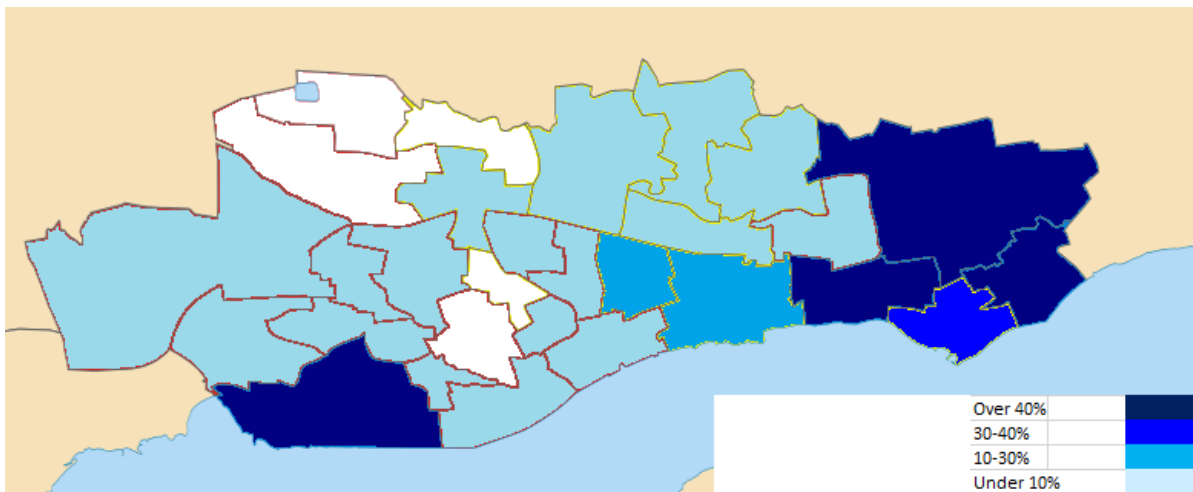
<sup>1087</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Helen Wright

Conservative Party in 1975. This process, repeated across Scotland, drew the condemnation of the former Lord Provost Alex MacKenzie as being 'detrimental to the right-wing cause in Dundee' by undermining the broad non-party anti-socialist front the Progressives had sought to present.<sup>1088</sup> This recent record gave the Tories a clear credibility advantage over the SNP once the Nationalists began to concerted challenge in local elections in the 1980s. The SNP were faced with an entrenched rival. When the Nationalists won their first two District Council seats in 1984, the Conservatives secured 15, while they also held a further 11 Tayside Regional seats within the boundaries of the Dundee District. Their support was also much more efficiently concentrated around the city than the SNP's, with heavy backing in middle class wards. This allowed them to convert similar shares of the vote to the Nationalists into significantly more seats through the 1980s and 1990s. In both the 1988 and 1992 District elections, the SNP won marginally more votes than the Conservatives. Yet in both years the Tories won around twice as many council seats. Even at the first City Council elections in 1995, the Conservatives won more seats than the Nationalists despite securing almost half as many votes. The Conservative Party was much better placed to compete for anti-socialist support at this level than they were in Westminster contests. As a result, they consistently won a higher share of the vote in local elections and retained the second largest council group in the city until the SNP's breakthrough in 1999.

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<sup>1088</sup> Alex MacKenzie, *And Nothing But The Truth*, 26

Conservative Percentage Vote Share in 2003 Dundee City Council Election by Ward



As the city moved into the 1990s and beyond, the anti-socialist aspect of SNP's coalition in Dundee became less important. Following the Nationalists' shift towards the centre-left, the party became increasingly unattractive to Conservative-inclined voters. It instead focussed on appealing to working class Labour-supporting areas both locally and nationally. At the same time, the Labour Party's moderation further reduced the incentive for pro-SNP tactical voting by greatly easing fears of their radicalism that had been potent in the 1970s and 1980s. Meanwhile, as the Tories themselves retreated towards their nationwide nadir, they ceased to be a viable alternative, allowing the SNP to pay much less attention to competition with them. In Dundee, they slipped towards almost complete irrelevance beyond a handful of prosperous areas. The results of the 2003 local elections made this clear. While the Tory vote was high in the five wards it won, they only managed to surpass ten per cent in two others across the rest of the city. In line with its nationwide decline, the Conservatives' organisation in the city had withered away. The party had traditionally maintained the highest membership of any party in Britain, with well over a million members in the 1970s and early 1980s. However, by 1997 it had been overtaken by Labour,

falling to around 400,000 before dropping by half again in the 2000s.<sup>1089</sup> In Scotland, this process was particularly severe, with membership collapsing from 40,000 to 10,000 between 1992 and 2011.<sup>1090</sup> It was also an ageing party, with 43 per cent of members over the age of 66 in 1994.<sup>1091</sup> Donald Hay observed how these trends sapped the life out of the Conservative Party in Dundee, as its membership slumped from 'at least twelve hundred' in 1980 to 'about a hundred brave souls struggling on' by the twenty-first century, many of whom were elderly.<sup>1092</sup> Meanwhile, financial constraints had forced it to move away from the professional structure it once had. Hay notes that in the 1980s 'we actually had an office and we had a part-time paid secretary, which is just a fantasy for us now'.<sup>1093</sup> The party remained at this low ebb until the independence referendum and its aftermath began to reinvigorate Conservatism around Scotland from 2014.<sup>1094</sup>

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<sup>1089</sup> Peter Dorey, Mark Garnett and Andrew Denham, *From Crisis to Coalition: The Conservative Party, 1997-2010* (Basingstoke, 2011) 137

<sup>1090</sup> David Torrance, 'The Wilderness Years', David Torrance (ed.), *Whatever Happened to Tory Scotland?*, 108

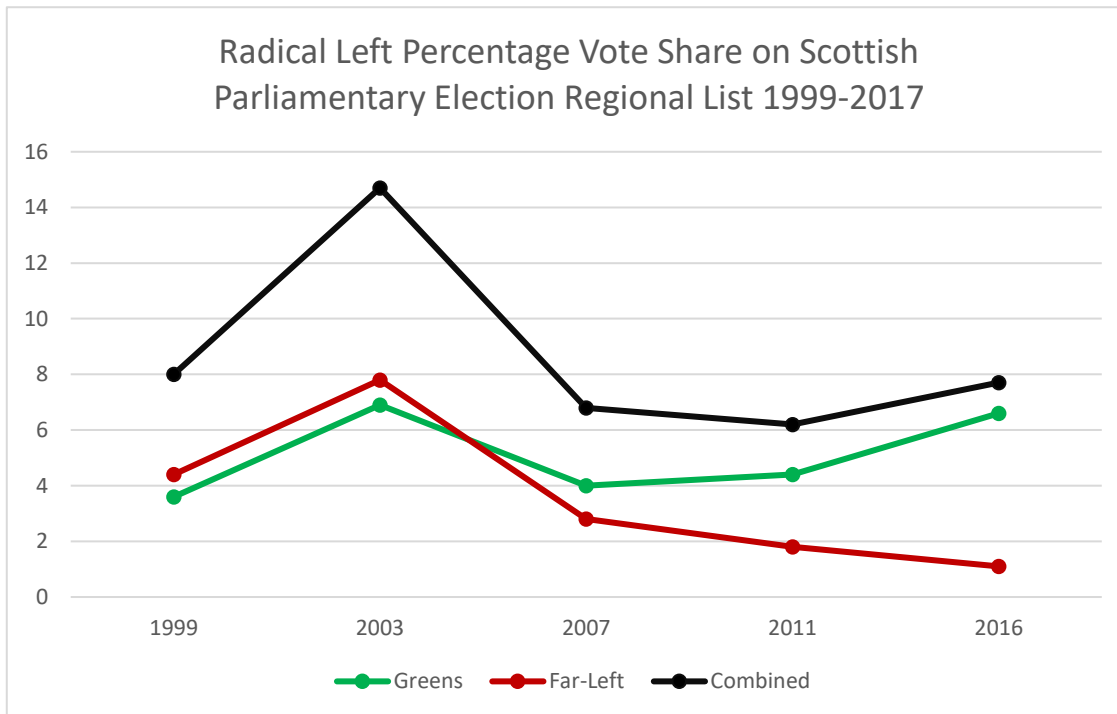
<sup>1091</sup> Paul Whiteley, Patrick Seyd and Jeremy Richardson, *True Blues*, 43

<sup>1092</sup> Thomas Stewart Interviews, Donald Hay

<sup>1093</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1094</sup> *Ibid.*

### The Weakness of Radical Left Parties



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Like most Western nations, Scottish politics is home to a number of organisations professing radical left-wing ideas at the fringes of its political life. This part of Scottish politics features a variety of far-left and anti-capitalist socialist parties that have participated in elections under a number of different formations.<sup>1096</sup> It also includes the Greens, whose philosophy is centred on environmentalism but who have grown more ideologically leftist through the 1990s and 2000s.<sup>1097</sup> They had long had a close relationship with the socialist left, and entered into negotiations over the possibility of standing joint lists in the first Scottish election in 1999, although they ultimately chose to maintain their political independence.<sup>1098</sup> Additionally, both groups, with varying degrees of enthusiasm,

<sup>1095</sup> The following groups were defined as far-left: Scottish Socialist Party, Socialist Labour Party, Solidarity, Respect, RISE, Trade Union and Socialist Coalition, Communist Party of Britain and Socialist Equality Party.

<sup>1096</sup> Lynn Bennie and Alistair Clark, 'Towards moderate pluralism: Scotland's post-devolution political system, 1999-2002', *British Elections and Parties Review*, Vol 12 No 1 (2003) 141

<sup>1097</sup> James Dennison, *The Greens in British Politics: Protest, Anti-Austerity and the Divided Left* (Basingstoke, 2017) 15

<sup>1098</sup> NLS, Acc.12144/77, Scottish Greens, 'Results of Questionnaire on Cooperation with the Scottish Socialist Alliance for Scottish Green Party Council and Executive Members', 5 March 1998

have largely supported Scottish independence since the late 1990s. The call for an 'Independent Socialist Republic' has been a pillar of most of Scotland's largest far-left parties since the creation of the Scottish Socialist Party in 1998.<sup>1099</sup> The Greens have been more equivocal on this question, with their first MSP, Robin Harper, openly advocating a no vote in the 2014 independence referendum and observing that 'a significant minority' of Greens opposed independence.<sup>1100</sup> Nonetheless, the party has held firm to the policy and at times strayed into openly nationalistic language, with a 1992 newsletter calling upon Scotland to 'rise now and be a nation again'.<sup>1101</sup> Despite the mainstream politics of the SNP, the radical left often competed for votes directly with the Nationalists, hampering the party's prospects most visibly in the early 2000s. The comparative weakness of these groups in Dundee played an important part in facilitating the party's successes in the city since the turn of the millennium.

The Scottish radical left emerged as a serious electoral threat after the adoption of forms of proportional representation, first in the Scottish Parliament from 1999 and then in local elections after 2007.<sup>1102</sup> This made it possible for fringe groups to achieve political representation, and greatly enhanced their public profile. The Scottish Green Party has benefited from an absence of irreconcilable internal splits since its foundation as a separate organisation from the UK-wide party in 1990. Struggling to survive in its early years, it developed into a mature political organisation after entering the Scottish Parliament in 1999.<sup>1103</sup> The party has never been completely unrepresented at Holyrood since electing a single member in 1999, and peaked at seven in 2003. Its modest share of the regional vote

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<sup>1099</sup> UD, MS 270/4/5, 2007 Election Leaflets, 'Solidarity Leaflet for North East Scotland 2007'

<sup>1100</sup> *Scotsman*, 3 December 2013

<sup>1101</sup> NLS, Acc.12144/77, Scottish Greens, 'Campaign Newsletter Tayside', 1992

<sup>1102</sup> I G C Hutchison, *Scottish Politics in the Twentieth Century*, 154

<sup>1103</sup> Lynn Bennie, *Understanding Political Participation: Green Party Membership in Scotland* (Aldershot, 2004) 1

has varied steadily between a low of 3.6 and a high of 6.9 per cent. Since 2007, the party has also begun to elect a small number of councillors that has grown at each successive contest.

The history of the socialist far-left has been much more complex and unstable. Scattered across dozens of small, ideologically sectarian organisations, the Scottish far-left achieved a degree of unity in the late 1990s as large parts of it coalesced into the Scottish Socialist Party. Yet even then, divisions remained with a number of significant far-left groups declining to participate.<sup>1104</sup> Indeed, in the 1999 Scottish election the Socialist Labour Party, a group led by the former National Union of Mineworkers leader Arthur Scargill, won a slightly higher share of the regional vote than the SSP nationwide. Nonetheless, the SSP's charismatic leader Tommy Sheridan won election to the Scottish Parliament as the party's only MSP, and for a short time became one of Scotland's most recognisable politicians.<sup>1105</sup> Riding the surge of support for fringe parties in 2003, the Socialists rose to 6.7 per cent of the vote and elected six MSPs. Unlike the Greens, they were unable to consolidate this position, as they instead collapsed amid scandal and acrimony. In the midst of legal disputes and recriminations, Tommy Sheridan was deposed as leader and formed the breakaway party Solidarity in 2006, before eventually being sentenced to jail in 2011.<sup>1106</sup> After the split, support for both the SSP and Solidarity collapsed and both parties lost all their seats at the 2007 election. Since then, these groups have stood under a variety of frequently shifting alliances and umbrella titles including the Trade Union & Socialist Coalition and RISE, with George Galloway's Respect Party briefly aligning with Solidarity in the 2011 election. Yet, regardless of the front they present to the public, the far-left vote

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<sup>1104</sup> NLS, Acc.12144/77, Scottish Greens, 'Communist Party of Britain – Scotland, Position Statement', November 1997

<sup>1105</sup> Alan McCombes, *Downfall: The Tommy Sheridan Story* (Edinburgh, 2011)

<sup>1106</sup> *Ibid.*

has plummeted and remained split across several groups, leaving parliamentary representation, or any sort of relevance, desperately out of reach.

Both groups appealed to a similar part of the electorate. However, their vote was not exactly analogous. The Greens have consistently drawn much higher levels of support in predominantly middle class areas; while the far-left's best results during the height of its success came in more deprived parts.<sup>1107</sup> In both cases, they have presented their strongest electoral challenges in cities. In Edinburgh, the Green Party, and in Glasgow first the far-left and then the Greens, have asserted themselves as credible competitors. Edinburgh has proven to be the heartland of the Scottish Greens, with the most receptive voters and effective local party.<sup>1108</sup> The Lothian electoral region, despite seeing Edinburgh's vote diluted alongside less favourable outlying areas, has consistently provided the party with its highest support in Holyrood elections, alongside an MSP in every contest and two at its best elections in 2003 and 2016. In local elections, the party has had real success in the capital since it began to stand candidates in 2007. Able to contest every ward in each election, it has become a stable council presence, with a robust vote that has reached over 20 per cent in some areas.

Yet in Glasgow, socialists were a greater threat during the 1990s and much of the 2000s. Competing against the weight of first-past-the-post, far-left parties, under various guises, retained a toehold in the city's council chambers from 1992 until 2012. After electing Tommy Sheridan in 1999, the SSP won two Glasgow MSPs and secured over fifteen per

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<sup>1107</sup> John Curtice, 'A Chance to Experiment?', Catherine Bromley and John Curtice (eds), *Has Devolution Delivered?* (Edinburgh, 2006) 116

<sup>1108</sup> Lynn Bennie, *Green Party Membership in Scotland*, 30

cent of the vote in both the Holyrood regional list and council elections in 2003. This saw the party come within 1.9 per cent of overtaking the SNP on the list, narrowly denying it the chance to achieve the second highest share of the vote in the city after the dominant Labour Party. Although the collapse of the Scottish Socialists hit the far-left in Glasgow as elsewhere, their vote did not disappear completely. Tommy Sheridan and George Galloway were able to run serious, although ultimately unsuccessful, campaigns for election in the city on the list in 2007 and 2011 respectively. However, by the 2016 elections the far-left dropped completely out of contention in the city. Despite the socialists' decline, Glasgow has retained its proclivity for the radical left, with the Glasgow Greens enhancing their position relative to the rest of the country. Just as in Edinburgh, the party has been able to contest each of the city's wards since 2007, despite its dismal support in Glasgow's sprawling impoverished districts, and has elected a permanent council presence. In Scottish Parliamentary elections, its results have risen more rapidly than the party's nationwide support. Its co-convenor Patrick Harvie was even able to achieve a second placed finish and a quarter of the vote in the Glasgow Kelvin constituency in 2016, an unprecedented result for the party in a first-past-the-post contest in Scotland.

Across Europe, radical parties of this type tend to have a strong appeal to young voters and students.<sup>1109</sup> Having become home to a large population of university students by the turn of the millennium, Dundee's demography appeared well suited to these parties. Yet neither the Greens nor the far-left have made a lasting impression. The Greens have been especially weak. In a 1996 national council meeting, it was noted that the party's activist base was far smaller than in Edinburgh and the Lothians.<sup>1110</sup> It has often found it difficult to

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<sup>1109</sup> Nicola Maggini, *Young People's Voting Behaviour in Europe: A Comparative Perspective* (London, 2017)

<sup>1110</sup> NLS, Acc.12144/12, Scottish Greens, 'Scottish Green Party Council Meeting Minutes', 6 January 1996

field candidates at all. In parliamentary elections, although both Dundee seats were fought by the Greens in 1992, the party did not stand again in any part of the city until contesting Dundee East in 2010. In both the 2007 and 2012 council elections, the Greens stood in just one of Dundee's eight multiple-member wards. This West End ward, with its large number of students and middle class electors, had been explicitly targeted by the local party since the 1990s.<sup>1111</sup> Yet even there, they achieved unimpressive shares of first preference votes at around 5 per cent in both years. This was similar to the level of support that the party registered in the most unfavourable parts of Edinburgh. Such a record left the party even more marginal than in Aberdeen, where the Greens have fought around half of the city ward in each council election since 2007. The far-left have not been in such a poor state relative to the rest of the country. SSP and later TUSC candidates were present in both Dundee constituencies in every single Westminster election between 1997 and 2015, even as their vote share has remained limited to the low hundreds. At the SSP's peak in 2003, the party enjoyed a modest following in the city. It won between 5 and 10 per cent of the vote in most of the council seats it contested. This was close to the level of support the party gained in the wards it fought in Edinburgh and Aberdeen, albeit well behind its results in Glasgow. However, it was able to contest a slightly higher portion of seats in Dundee than in Edinburgh and substantially more than in Aberdeen. Yet the party limited its influence in that year's Holyrood election through its decision to stand aside in favour of John McAllion in Dundee East. After McAllion left Labour to join the Socialists following his defeat that year, the SSP made extensive use of his high profile in its election materials.<sup>1112</sup> However, with the party's national decline setting in it was not able to benefit from his presence or achieve any sort of foothold in the city.

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<sup>1111</sup> NLS, Acc.12144/11, Scottish Greens, 'Dundee Green Party Meeting Minutes', 1 March 1995

<sup>1112</sup> DCPCGA, 2007 Scottish and Council Elections, 'SSP Leaflet for North East Scotland 2007'

Since the turn of the century, the radical left has been a serious contender for electoral support in one form or another in both Edinburgh and Glasgow. In these cities, their strength has hamstrung the SNP, offering fierce competition on the Nationalists' left flank. This was a particularly important influence at the radical left's peak in the early 2000s, when between them they were able to win larger shares of the regional vote than the SNP in both Glasgow and the Lothians at the 2003 Scottish elections. The absence of this concern in Dundee was a clear advantage for the SNP. It opened up the votes of an important minority of the electorate, and contributed to the party's ability to begin to make progress in the early 2000s at a time when it was struggling through much of the country. The absence of this threat also allowed the Dundee SNP to focus its energies on appealing to mainstream political opinion, rather than competing against the radical fringe.

## **Conclusion**

The development of Dundonian politics into two-party competition between the SNP and Labour since the 1970s was made possible by the shortcomings of the city's various smaller political parties. In order to effectively compete with Labour, the SNP required a broad electoral coalition that included voters that in other contexts might have supported one of these parties. The comparative weakness of these groups was therefore central to the Nationalists' success in the city. The SNP's status as a third party, with an appeal that holds many parallels to the Liberals and their successors, is underappreciated. Yet, despite the ideological differences between the two, the Nationalists and Liberals have spent much of their history competing over the same political space. The consistent failure of the Liberal

Party, Alliance and Liberal Democrats to make a major impression on city politics throughout Dundee's postwar history has allowed the SNP to almost monopolise the third party vote since the 1970s, gaining an important advantage in Dundee that the party did not benefit from in the nation's other cities. During the 1970s and 1980s, the Dundee SNP's political strategy in parliamentary elections relied upon its ability to assert itself as the best conduit for voters to oppose the Labour Party. This involved replacing the Conservatives as Labour's main opponent in the city, and targeting traditionally Conservative-leaning voters. The Nationalists success with this approach depended upon both the actual failings of the Tory organisation in the city, and the successful propagation of perceptions of Conservative weakness among by the local electorate by the SNP. Although on the fringes of national politics, the parties of the radical left, principally the Greens and SSP, have been a serious threat to the SNP in many urban areas of Scotland since the opening of the Scottish Parliament in 1999, attracting a sizeable portion of the party's electorate. The failure of these groups to develop strong roots in Dundee, with the Greens being especially unsuccessful, neutralised a potentially damaging threat to the party. At different points in the past half century, the limitations of each of these groups has disarmed a significant threats to the SNP's support base in Dundee, providing key contributions to the party's electoral achievements in the city.



## Conclusion

### **The Success of the SNP in Dundee**

This thesis has sought to explain the Scottish National Party's sustained electoral strength in Dundee since the 1970s. The nature of the city and its development played a part in determining this political history, as it provided a more favourable setting for the Nationalists to advance than could be found in the rest of urban Scotland. The city's experience of deindustrialisation, that saw it transform in a short time beginning in the 1970s from a prosperous manufacturing centre to a site of high unemployment and urban decline, contributed to a frustrated mentality that aided the SNP during the period in which it ingrained itself locally. Other aspects of the city also favoured the Nationalists. A larger share of its population is Scottish-born and identifying than any other city. While the concentration of Scottish-identifiers has not precisely matched the areas in which the SNP has secured its greatest successes, these voters tend to support the party in larger numbers than the country as a whole. This therefore gave the party a slight structural advantage in Dundee over the nation's other cities. Its geography, to an extent, insulated it from trends shaping the Central Belt mainstream of Scottish society and placed it among a swathe of rural counties with their own rooted SNP-traditions that in turn strengthened the party's credibility in Dundee itself. Meanwhile, the city's location on the North Sea coastline built up strong expectations of oil development during the 1970s that, in contrast to Aberdeen, were sorely let down when the industry failed to develop locally. This left behind a pool of dissatisfaction that the SNP were very well placed to tap into.

Dundee's electoral history, stretching back into the nineteenth century, contributed to a local political culture that was conducive to the party's success, with traditions of tactical voting, radicalism, and resisting national trends imbedded in the city. Dundee's press was dominated by the papers of DC Thomson, a company whose output was shaped by a conservative ideology that was strongly opposed to any concessions to self-government and by extension the SNP. However, in spite of this anti-Nationalist ethos, the negative impact of the city's media landscape on the party was relatively limited, as DC Thomson's aversion towards the SNP was outweighed by its hostility towards their main local rivals in the Labour Party. The only aspect of Dundee's character that had a strong dampening influence on the SNP's prospects was the city's large Catholic population. During the 1970s and 1980s, this group was much less willing to move over to the Nationalists than their compatriots, until this gap began to close at the end of the twentieth century. Yet, within Dundee, a large majority of this community lived in the west of the city, partly explaining the failure of the SNP in Dundee West to match its achievements in Dundee East, where their numbers was much more modest.

Collectively, these factors gave the SNP a greater chance of success in Dundee than in any of Scotland's other cities. They were most significant during the critical period in the 1970s and 1980s when the Nationalists broke through in Dundee East and consolidated their grip on the constituency. However, these patterns did not set Dundee completely aside from the rest of Scotland, with many individual factors being shared with other parts of the country. These differences were important, but their political impacts were not sufficient to account for the scale of Dundee's divergence from national politics. Furthermore, they do not offer a compelling explanation of the contrasting electoral patterns of the city's two parliamentary constituencies in the 1970s and 1980s. The SNP's achievements in Dundee

were not the result of the character of the city itself, but were brought about by the interaction of political forces on the ground as individuals, party machines and strategies shaped its politics and allowed a durable Nationalist party tradition to develop over time.

Dundee began its development into a bastion of SNP support in earnest at the 1973 Dundee East by-election. The consequences of the contest, coming despite the SNP's narrow defeat, bring attention to the extraordinary transformative potential key by-elections can have on local political parties.<sup>1113</sup> Having previously been home to a ramshackle structure that produced comparatively poor election results, the Dundee East SNP benefited from the focus brought by the by-election to greatly improve its organisation, enhance its relevance in the eyes of the electorate and introduce the figure of Gordon Wilson to city politics for the first time. This created the opening that allowed the Nationalists to ease to victory at the forefront of the rising Scotland-wide tide of SNP support at the following year's general election, and then assiduously consolidate their position in the seat in the years thereafter. This infrastructure then allowed the Nationalists to hold out against unfavourable national swings until 1987, causing a large gap to open up between the party's results in the city's two constituencies.

Although strong in its own right in Dundee East, the SNP would have been unable to achieve the results it managed had its main local rival, the Labour Party, not suffered from a number of key weaknesses in the 1970s and 1980s. It selected poor parliamentary candidates, was disrupted by repeated internal squabbles and, most significantly, possessed a tarnished public image that energised opposition towards them from much of

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<sup>1113</sup> Thomas A W Stewart, 'By-Elections and Political Change in a Local Context: The Case of the 1973 Dundee East By-Election and the SNP', *Parliamentary History*, Vol 38 No 2 (2019)

the city's electorate. In the mid-1970s, the party had been confronted by a high-profile corruption scandal, which left a lingering air of suspicion around the party for years thereafter. Partly as a result of the machinations that followed this scandal, the local Labour Party came under the authority of a militant left-wing leadership that proceeded to cause a number of major controversies after it won control of the District Council in 1980. These two issues drew heavy attention from the local press and galvanised Labour's opponents to support the city's largest opposition party. The SNP proved itself highly adept at taking advantage of these faults, and rallied diverse opposition to Labour together. It appealed beyond its core Nationalist constituency by presenting itself as the only viable alternative to the left's power in Dundee, and in doing so attracted a broad and durable anti-Labour coalition that held together despite the steep decline of the party across Scotland in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Both the Liberals, and later SDP-Liberal Alliance, and the Conservatives were able to attract parts of this electorate elsewhere. Yet in Dundee, and specifically Dundee East, the Nationalists had key advantages in organisation and relevance.

During the mid-1980s the basis of the SNP's earlier victories in Dundee East faded away. The Nationalists saw their party infrastructure slow down and many of its key individuals move out of politics. Crucially, the party's nationwide adoption of a more left-wing image over the course of the decade made it increasingly difficult to maintain unity locally behind the anti-Labour strategy of the past. At the same time, the local Labour Party benefited from the improvement of its fortunes nationally in the late 1980s and 1990s, moving past its previous issues and re-exerting its dominance over the city's politics. The result of this was the steep drop in the SNP vote in Dundee East, as following Gordon Wilson's defeat in 1987 its vote share in the seat steadily fell towards the national average. Despite this

decline, two important factors remained in place to provide the Nationalists with the basis for future successes. With both the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats in poor condition, the SNP endured as the strongest alternative to Labour in the city. Meanwhile, the party's recent record left behind an SNP-supporting tradition that ensured that Dundonians were more open to shifting their support to the party in subsequent elections than voters were elsewhere.

These factors created solid foundations that allowed the SNP to make rapid progress once it began to concertedly challenge again from the end of the 1990s. The trigger for its revival in this period were improvements in the local party's organisation and the quality of its parliamentary candidates. The SNP had developed into a more ideologically focussed party over the preceding decades, making impossible the sort of localised political strategy that the Dundee party had employed during the Gordon Wilson years. The city's Nationalists instead relied on their party structure and local history to make progress in the early 2000s. With Labour showing its first signs of weakness in many years, as it moved past its peak in the early years of Tony Blair's leadership, the SNP was able to start to win elections in Dundee again. This process accelerated once the party began its ascent towards nationwide power in the late-2000s, seeing it to ride to victories across the city.

These local party-political factors, far more than the nature of the city itself, were the reason that the SNP were able to perform so strongly in Dundee over an extended period of time. The party structure, individuals and political strategy, taking advantage of the condition of the city's other parties, that formed in the Dundee East constituency after the 1973 by-election allowed the SNP to become ingrained as a part of Dundee's wider consciousness and firmly established it as the primary alternative to Labour. This sense

outlasted the political context of the 1970s and 1980s, the careers of those who had been involved in this period and even the dramatic social changes that transformed the face of Dundee in the late twentieth century. It proved fundamental to the party's later resurgence, presenting a platform that was not available to the SNP in most of the rest of Scotland and none of its other cities. While organisational improvements and key individuals drove its electoral achievements in these later years, this would have been far more difficult to achieve had the party not been building on an existing base.

## **Conclusions**

With its detailed study of four decades of politics in Dundee, this thesis has addressed a number of larger historical questions. It has enriched understandings of the interaction of the local and national in explaining political change, issues with relevance far beyond the specific context of Dundee or even the United Kingdom. Its historical approach and intimate focus on a single area has encouraged a greater appreciation of the part played by individual grassroots actors in these wider processes. These are key factors that are sometimes forgotten in larger national studies, or those with a statistical focus. More directly, it has shone light upon a number of important questions in Scottish and British political history since the 1970s. It has provide a localised perspective on the development of Scotland's party system in the past half century, particularly on the SNP and Labour, observed this system's place within British politics and questioned the role of local parties in electoral competition. Its focus on the SNP as a party-political phenomenon, rather than one principally driven by the desire for self-government, demands that the party's initial breakthrough into the mainstream during the 1960s and 1970s should not be understood as a solely Scottish political phenomenon, but as a part of the wider breakdown of Britain's

two-party system. As both the SNP and Liberals across the United Kingdom advanced, they won the backing of similar parts of the electorate while putting forward comparable messages. The closeness of the two parties meant that they found it very difficult to thrive in the same areas, as there appeared to exist a sizeable third party vote that would support the best-placed group to oppose the major parties in their given locality regardless of the minutiae of their political differences.<sup>1114</sup> In Dundee, this led to the almost complete suppression of the Liberal vote in favour of the Nationalists. Such was the ability of the local party to cater to this electorate, it retained its overwhelming backing into the 1980s, overcoming the pull of the new SDP-Liberal Alliance and the danger of its own internal battles pushing third party voters away. In other parts of the country, these factors had critically undermined the party's performance. This crucial part of the Nationalists' coalition was drawn to the SNP primarily as a means of opposing the two main parties rather than to express its support for self-government. This aspect of the SNP's character has often been obscured by scholars' focus on Scottish-specific factors and the appeal of political nationalism. Yet, it is critical to understanding why the party was able to make its breakthrough in the 1960s and 1970s and what motivated the broad electorate that it assembled.

Similarly, the centrality of anti-Labourism to the Dundee SNP's strategies, and their success in attracting centrist and centre-right voters, points to the important role they played in bringing about the particularly rapid decline of the city's Conservative Party. The SNP were able to replace the Tories as the main opposition to the Labour Party at a parliamentary level in the city in the 1970s. This role as the antidote to Labour's power had been vital to

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<sup>1114</sup> Thomas A W Stewart, "A disguised Liberal vote'? – third-party voting and the SNP under Gordon Wilson in Dundee during the 1970s and 1980s', *Contemporary British History*, Vol 33 No 3 (2019)

the Conservatives' ability to hold together the electoral coalition it maintained in the postwar two-party era. Once challenged for this position, the party's prospects were badly damaged. Although the SNP was less adept at appealing to anti-Labour voters in other parts of the country, similar realignments occurred on a smaller scale across industrial Scotland through the period, with the Nationalists taking on a large part of the former Conservative vote in many working class seats. Often, these voters were driven by the same anti-socialist tactical concerns that powered the party to victory in Dundee, rather than a specific affinity with the SNP and its aims. This in turn played a critical role in accelerating the decline of Scottish Conservatism. In England, in the absence of a comparable alternative, the Conservative Party's position was not threatened in the same way, contributing to the widening of the gap between the fates of the Conservatives on either side of the Border.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the SNP suffered a steep electoral decline that saw them lose almost two thirds of their votes between October 1974 and 1983 and took them to the margins of political relevance for a time. The success of the party in Dundee East in these same years acts as a counterpoint to this wider history. The differences between the constituency and the national experience point to some of the key forces behind the Nationalists' troubles. More importantly, the Dundee party avoided the levels of infighting and open disunity that hampered the ability of the national party to campaign, make decisions or put forward a presentable image. Closely related to this was the ability of Dundee's Nationalists to establish a focussed political identity and purpose beyond the question of self-government. Their anti-Labour stance allowed them to survive the shift in the public mood against constitutional politics after the 1979 devolution referendum, and gave them an appeal that did not depend solely on the strength of their own political

brand. Scotland-wide, the SNP had struggled to define itself in this way. After its 1974 election breakthrough secured it a sizeable body of parliamentarians for the first time, greater public attention was brought to its stances on left-right issues and its position relative to the major parties. Yet, the diversity of opinion within its own ranks meant that it failed to unite behind a clear position on these questions. Divisions grew markedly worse in the aftermath of the 1979 referendum and subsequent general election as factional conflict racked the party. These difficulties made the SNP appear politically unreliable and made it even less obvious to the electorate what it stood for. The rise of the Alliance in the 1980s was a serious existential threat to the SNP, as it drove its support to dangerously low levels by moving into the third party political space the Nationalists had occupied in the previous decade and took on a large part of its 1970s vote. In Dundee, the party was spared from this same challenge. This was partly a result of the relative weakness of the Alliance parties in the city, but was also caused by the ability of Dundee's Nationalists to avoid alienating the moderates who had first been attracted to the party in the 1970s.

The character of the party in Dundee went through a particularly drastic shift through the 1980s and early 1990s, swept away in the wider transformation of the SNP in this period. While the transition from the ideologically-diverse, and at times divided, organisation of the 1970s and early 1980s occurred more gradually in the national party, in Dundee the changes came suddenly from the mid-1980s as the politically moderate old guard of activists who had been at the centre of the victories in Dundee East during the Gordon Wilson years were shuffled away in a short space of time. The figures who went on to lead the party in the 1990s were largely drawn from the social-democratic mainstream that had come to dominate it throughout the country. In the same period, it experienced a significant electoral realignment as its support base shifted from one that collected votes

evenly from across the socio-economic spectrum, to one that was principally working class. While the Dundee party of the 1970s and early 1980s could have credibly been labelled as 'Tartan Tories', or at least 'Tartan Liberals', by the mid-1990s it had emerged as a qualitatively different political force led by a younger generation of individuals, with a different perspective and public image and reliant on a new electoral base. The contrast with the past was particularly stark in Dundee, but the same process occurred across Scotland to leave behind a transformed party.

By the 2000s, the SNP had developed into a mature political organisation capable of targeting its campaigning resources in key areas like Dundee and was largely free of the ideological fissures that had afflicted it in earlier decades. The return of Alex Salmond to the party leadership in 2004, after four years out of office, allowed it to benefit from his charismatic leadership once more. Most importantly, devolution had changed the context of Scottish politics, to the SNP's tremendous benefit. Firstly, it created a greater public platform than had hitherto been available to the Nationalists, in which it possessed a large body of parliamentarians and was inherently more politically relevant than it had ever been at Westminster. Furthermore, as the only viable alternative to a Labour-led administration in the Scottish Parliament, it was ideally placed to take advantage of disgruntlement with the party that had held power in both the UK government and, as the leading coalition partner in Scotland's devolved administration, the Scottish Executive during the 2000s. The history of Dundee indicates that the success the Nationalists achieved in this decade was not based on competing directly with Labour for its voters. Rather, the key was the SNP's ability to gather together the votes of non-Labour, although still anti-Conservative, Scotland. This was achieved at a very early stage in Dundee, in large part due to the weakness the radical left and Liberal Democrats, and allowed it to begin to seriously

challenge Labour's power from the turn of the millennium. It took longer for the SNP to threaten in the same way elsewhere in the country where these groups were much stronger, with the Nationalists struggling against the SSP in Glasgow and the Liberal Democrats in Edinburgh and Aberdeen through much of the 2000s. It took until the collapse of the radical left vote in 2007 and the Liberal Democrats in 2011 for the SNP to achieve the same sort of position nationwide, allowing it to take on Labour in its urban heartlands while also winning control of the rural constituencies that had always supported other parties.

While the development of the Dundee SNP was often noticeably different from the general pattern found elsewhere in Scotland, the Dundee Labour Party was far more typical of the party's experience across the United Kingdom. This thesis has provided an opportunity to explore the changes Labour went through in the four decades from 1970 at a local level. Through the 1970s and early 1980s, the city Labour Party was afflicted by a wave of infighting that saw the most radical elements within it seize control of much of its leadership in the late 1970s. This bore a closer resemblance to developments in many of England's cities than to the rest of Scotland, where the radical left struggled to exert itself in the Labour heartlands around Glasgow and achieved comparatively fleeting success in Edinburgh and Stirling. Although the precise content of each area's radical left politics differed, wherever they achieved power they adopted programmes that were clearly out of step with public opinion.

Concurrently with its ideological struggles, during the mid-1970s the Labour Party in Dundee was at the centre of a prominent corruption scandal that offers an opportunity to analyse the effect of such events on party politics. Despite the widespread coverage it

received, the scandal did not repulse Labour's existing voters away from the party in large numbers, as its vote largely held together. It had a much greater effect on the local party's internal dynamics, as it discredited its right-wing leadership and facilitated the left's takeover. While the presentation of fresh faces appeared to have been adequate to sate the bulk of Labour's own voter base, it did not address the concerns of those who were already opposed to the party. Confirming their existing negative opinions, it galvanised the opposition and contributed towards the SNP's ability to motivate them to unite behind their MP in Dundee East in order to keep Labour out. This had a very similar influence to the concerns over Labour's infighting and extremism that loomed over the city in the same period, as these issues had a limited influence on Labour's support but energised opposition voters. Partisan opinions heavily shaped the manner in which voters viewed the controversies that surrounded Labour in this period, with supporters overlooking them and opponents using them as rallying cries.

Despite its radical history, the Dundee Labour Party moved with ease to accept the modernising agenda of the national leadership through the late 1980s and 1990s. This makes clear that although the reform of the party in these years was largely a top-down process, the change of course had the consent of a willing grassroots that was focussed not merely on winning contests locally, and retaining ideological purity, but returning the party to government. Yet, while these reforms succeeded in their goal of bringing Labour back into national office, they ultimately played a part in the breakdown of Labour power in Scotland. Shortly after its peak at the 1997 election, the party began to see its membership figures drop and the enthusiasm from both activists and voters fade. Over Labour's years in government, these trends continued to progress at pace. In Scotland, the party also lost the sense of mission, and the opportunity to prove its patriotism, that the campaign for

devolution had given it after the 1997 referendum gave the Scottish Parliament a ringing endorsement. The experience of Dundee illustrates the consequences of these processes in a more palpable way than aggregated national data can, as the local party was hollowed out by a declining membership and growing sense of disillusionment, finding itself increasingly outmatched on the ground by their SNP rival. This reversed the situation in the 1990s, when local Nationalists had expressed awe at the Dundee Labour Party's campaigning capacity.

With the same trends affecting Labour around Britain, it was left with weaker political machines that were vulnerable to the sort of energetic challenge the SNP began to provide in Scotland from the middle of the 2000s. Yet, although this gave the Nationalists an edge, it was not the central cause of Scottish Labour's decline. Even after it began to lose elections to the SNP from 2007, Labour retained the larger part of its own electoral base with the Nationalists winning by drawing votes from other parties. However, broader societal changes undermined the cohesion of the Labour electorate and paved the way for its more dramatic collapse after the 2014 independence referendum. By the new millennium the old industrial economy, and with it much of the nation's trade union infrastructure and proletarian identities, had been swept away, Scotland had transitioned from being a country of social-housing tenants to one of owner-occupiers, while society had secularised to an extent to which the Catholic community no longer felt the need to depend upon their historic guarantors. These long-term changes combined with Labour's short-term political problems to create an electorate that was much more loosely tied to its traditional party, and had grown increasingly alienated from it. These voters remained inertly attached to it for years until the ructions of the independence referendum and its

aftermath became the catalyst that facilitated a large-scale realignment and the downfall of Labour Scotland.

This shift has parallels to political changes far beyond Scotland. Social-democratic and labour parties have seen their support fall markedly in the twenty-first century in countries around the world, and become increasingly decoupled from their historic working class electorates in communities like Dundee. While many aspects of Dundee's political history covered in this thesis are particular to Britain, Scotland or even the city, this is a far more universal development. Every country's experience has been shaped by its own circumstances and political history; the history of the Labour Party in Dundee does not offer a common model for the decline of social-democracy internationally. Nonetheless, there are far-reaching changes that weakened the centre-left's ties to its traditional vote in many different countries. The effects of ideological changes, and the social shifts wrought by deindustrialisation, on Dundee in particular offer localised insights into this international trend. There is less continuity in the groups that have risen to replace the centre-left as the leading forces in post-industrial areas, with the SNP being directly comparable to few other parties around the world. Yet, this distinctiveness draws attention to the crucial importance of non-ideological dynamics in political competition. Local credibility and grassroots strength were critical to the SNP's success in overcoming the Labour Party in Dundee during the 2000s. While broader forces have influenced the centre-left's decline across much of the developed world, these factors have played an under-appreciated role in determining the identity of the parties that have risen to replace them.

Above all else, this thesis has highlighted the power of local parties to shape electoral outcomes within their localities. Nationwide factors tend to be the primary drivers of wider

political change, but how these are felt in given areas is often contingent on grassroots activity. Good leadership, organisation and campaigning nous can produce modest, but observable, electoral shifts. In the context of first-past-the-post elections, in which the concentration of local support rather than broad national appeal is necessary, these factors can be decisive. Dundee confirms the view that they can observably improve parties' electoral performance relative to national patterns. Such factors are especially invaluable to third parties, which often struggle to build the geographically concentrated support that they need to survive under first-past-the-post. This was best illustrated by the victories of the SNP after 1999, as it marginally outdid Scotland-wide results to begin to win seats, often by narrow margins, as a direct result of its local campaigning edge over the city Labour Party. However, Dundee's history in the 1970s and 1980s points to the ability of local parties to shape politics in a specific area to a much greater extent. The emergence of a political culture in Dundee East that was distinct from both nationwide patterns and even the neighbouring Dundee West constituency was a consequence of Gordon Wilson's incumbency, the very strong SNP campaigning organisation behind him and the political strategy the party adopted. Popular sitting MPs, particularly those hailing from smaller parties, are often able to build entrenched positions for themselves within their seats. However, the degree to which the Dundee SNP developed a separate ideological identity was more unusual. This had been made possible in the context of a period in which the national party lacked a clear image, and became unsustainable once its internal ideological debates moved towards resolution in the late 1980s. Nonetheless, the Dundee experience makes clear that in the right circumstances local parties can have a more radical influence over electoral behaviour than has previously been appreciated.



## **Appendix**

The Following appendix includes a list of prominent figures in Dundee politics during the period covered by this thesis that are mentioned by name in the text.

### **Scottish National Party**

David Coutts

Coutts was elected to the Dundee District Council in 1984 and quickly became a senior figure in the Dundee SNP. Despite causing a number of minor controversies during his tenure on the council, he was selected to contest Dundee East at the 1992 general election. After his defeat he moved away from Dundee, but retained his council seat until standing down at the 1994 local elections.

Jim Fairlie

Born in 1940, Fairlie joined the SNP at the age of 15. A senior figure in the party in Perth, he contested the Dundee West constituency for the SNP in the general elections of February 1974, October 1974 and 1979 but fell short on each occasion. He subsequently stood for constituencies elsewhere in the country in 1983 and 1987. During the 1970s and 1980s, he

held a variety of high ranking positions within the SNP. He resigned from the party in 1990 in protest at its adoption of the 'Independence in Europe' strategy.

#### Joe Fitzpatrick

Born in 1967, Fitzpatrick joined the SNP in Dundee as a student in the 1980s. He was elected to the Dundee City Council in 1999. He stood unsuccessfully for the Dundee West Westminster constituency in 2005, but was elected to the Scottish Parliament for Dundee West in 2007. He has defended his seat in two subsequent elections in 2011 and 2016. Since 2012 he has served a minister in the Scottish Government.

#### Ken Guild

Guild was elected to the Dundee District Council in 1984 at a by-election that followed the resignation of Neil MacAlinden. During the 1980s he possessed parliamentary ambitions – standing as a candidate in general elections for Gordon in 1983 and the top SNP target seat of North Tayside in 1987. In 1992 he lost his council seat, but was re-elected to the newly formed City Council in 1995. As the longest serving figure in the SNP group, he led the party's administration on the City Council between 2009 and 2017 before retiring from politics.

## Jimmy Halliday

Jimmy Halliday was born in 1927 and joined the SNP in 1943, becoming its leader at the age of 29 in 1956. Holding the reins through some of its leanest years, when its total membership struggled to fill a small meeting hall, he stood down in 1960 but continued to hold important organisational positions in the national hierarchy into the 1980s. He arrived in Dundee in 1967 and spent the next two decades acting as a key figure behind the scenes in the Dundee East constituency association, before resigning in 1986 in frustration at the rise of the left in the party both locally and nationally. He died at the age of 85 in 2013.

## Stewart Hosie

Having been born in Dundee in 1963, Hosie moved away from the city as a young man. He stood for election in Kirkcaldy at the 1992 and 1997 general elections and at the 1999 Scottish election. He returned to Dundee politics after being selected for the Dundee East constituency ahead of the 2001 general election. Although he was defeated, he returned to fight the same seat in 2005 and was elected to the House of Commons. In 2014 he became the Deputy Leader of the SNP and occupied senior positions within its Westminster parliamentary group. However, following a scandal in his personal life he resigned as Deputy Leader in 2016. He remains MP for Dundee East. He was married to Dundee East MSP Shona Robison between 1997 and 2016.

Neil MacAlindin

MacAlindin briefly served as an SNP District councillor for Broughty Ferry for several months in 1984, before resigning due to stress.

Tom McFetteridge

McFetteridge became Dundee's first SNP councillor in 1968 for the Camperdown ward. He accused Labour councillors of exerting illegal pressure on him to either defect or step down. He was not re-elected, although remained in place until 1971.

Alan McKinney

McKinney joined the SNP in Broughty Ferry in 1967, following the Hamilton by-election. He played an important organisational role in the Dundee East constituency for the next decade. He moved to Edinburgh to take on the role of National Organiser in 1977, holding the position until 1990.

Shona Robison

Born in 1966, Robison did not become involved in Dundee politics until she stood for Parliament for Dundee East at the 1997 general election. Although she was comfortably

beaten, she was selected to contest the same seat at the first Scottish parliamentary election in 1999. She was again unsuccessful in the constituency vote, but was elected through the regional list system. In the following Scottish election in 2003, she won the Dundee East constituency. In 2009 she began a ministerial career, rising to the status of Cabinet Secretary in 2014 and retaining her post until a government reshuffle in 2018. She was married to Dundee East MP Stewart Hosie between 1997 and 2016.

#### Willie Sawers

Sawers was elected to the Dundee District Council in 1992 for the Whitfield ward and has continued to represent the same area on the City Council ever since. In the late 1990s, he was the key figure in carrying out a number of organisational reforms in the local party that increased its effectiveness and became a senior figure in the SNP council group.

#### Gordon Wilson

Born in 1938, Wilson joined the SNP in the 1950s and took on a number of administrative roles in the party through the 1960s and early 1970s. In 1973, he entered Dundee politics for the first time when standing for the Dundee East by-election, where he finished in second place behind the Labour candidate. He won the seat in the February 1974 general election, retaining it until his defeat in the 1987 election. Between 1979 and 1990, he served as the leader of the SNP. After 1990, he mostly moved out of active politics, although he stood unsuccessfully for the European Parliament in 1999. He passed away in 2017.

## **Labour Party**

Ian Borthwick

Borthwick was born in 1939 and is the longest serving councillor in Dundee's history, having represented the same area of the city at various tiers of local government since 1963. After being elected to the Town Council for the Labour Party in 1963, he moved over to the Tayside Regional Council in 1975. He was one of the few right-wing figures in the Dundee City Labour Party to survive the takeover of the radical left in the late 1970s. However, he was expelled from the Labour Party in 1986 after he chose to run against the party's official candidate, John McAllion, for the Tayside Region convenorship. Thereafter, he continued his council career as an independent and moved over to the City Council after the reorganisation of local government in 1995. He stood for the Scottish Parliament in the Dundee West constituency in 2003 as an independent, finishing third, before standing unsuccessfully for the Scottish Senior Citizens Unity Party in the Northeast Region in 2007. In 2017, he became Dundee's Lord Provost, after reaching an agreement to support an SNP minority administration in the city.

Charles Bowman

Following a career as a District councillor, and a spell leading Dundee's famously radical administration in the early 1980s, Bowman was selected to contest the Dundee East constituency in 1983. However, he performed more poorly than expected and was defeated by the SNP's Gordon Wilson.

## Peter Doig

Born in 1911, Doig served on Dundee's council before being elected to Parliament at the 1963 Dundee West by-election. He retained his seat until retiring in 1979. Always on the right of the Labour Party, he joined the Social Democratic Party in the 1980s. He died in 1996.

## George Galloway

One of the most famous figures to come out of Dundee politics, Galloway emerged as a major figure within the Dundee City Labour Party in the mid-1970s while in his early 20s, having been born in 1954. Between 1977 and 1983 he took on a powerful leadership position within the local party as its organiser, despite not holding any publically elected office. He left the city in 1983, for a role at the War On Want charity. In 1987 he was elected as the Labour MP for Glasgow Hillhead, unseating the SDP's former leader Roy Jenkins. He would go on to become one of the party's most well-known MPs. After being expelled from the Labour Party for his opposition to the 2003 invasion of Iraq, he formed the Respect Party and won the Bethnal Green and Bow constituency in London under its banner in the 2005 election. He lost his seat in 2010, and unsuccessfully stood on the Glasgow Regional list in the 2011 Scottish Parliamentary election. However, he returned to the House of Commons following victory in the 2012 Bradford West by-election before losing his place in Parliament for a second time in 2015. He has run for the London

Mayoralty in 2016 and the Manchester Gorton constituency at the 2017 general election, but was defeated in both instances.

Kevin Keenan

Coming from a Labour movement background, Keenan was elected to the City Council in 1997 and quickly became a senior figure within the Labour group. He was Labour's last leader on the City Council, before the SNP took control in 2009. After which, he has continued to serve as the leader of the Labour Group.

Iain Luke

Born in 1951, Luke was a member of the Dundee District and City Council between 1984 and 2001. During his time as a councillor he served in a number of senior roles in the city administration. He was elected as MP for Dundee East in 2001, but lost his seat in 2005 following a narrow defeat to the SNP. He has since left the Labour Party.

George Machin

Machin spent most of his life as a trade unionist in Sheffield, where he was born in 1922. He came to Dundee to stand in the 1973 Dundee East by-election, and successfully defended the constituency for Labour. He lost his seat in the February 1974 general

election to the SNP, and stood again in October 1974 but was defeated for a second time. He then retired from politics, passing away in 1989.

Kate MacLean

Born in 1958, McLean came through the ranks of Dundee's Labour-run council, leading the administration prior to being elected as the MSP for Dundee West in 1999 by an unexpectedly narrow margin. After serving in the new Scottish Parliament for eight years, she stood down ahead of the 2007 election and left electoral politics behind.

Raymond Mennie

A well-known trade unionist and Communist activist during the 1970s standing in Dundee West at the 1979 general election, Mennie left the CPGB to join the Labour Party in Dundee and served as a Tayside Regional councillor between 1982 and 1994.

John McAllion

Born in Glasgow in 1948, McAllion did not arrive in Dundee until his adulthood. His first involvement in politics was with the Scottish Labour Party splinter group in the city, during the mid-1970s. When the SLP began to fall apart, he moved over to the Labour Party proper. He was elected to the Tayside Regional Council and became its convenor in 1986. In

1987, he won the Dundee East constituency. He remained MP for the seat until 2001, when he stood down to focus on the Scottish Parliament. Always an outspoken left-winger and strong supporter of devolution, he briefly served on Labour's frontbench under Tony Blair but resigned his position over concerns that the party was diluting its commitment to a Scottish Parliament. In 1999, he was elected to the Scottish Parliament, but lost his seat to the SNP in 2003. He subsequently left Labour to join the SSP, but never returned to elected office.

Jim McGovern

A trade unionist born in 1956, McGovern was elected to Westminster for Dundee West in 2005 and retained his seat until stepping down prior to the 2015 general election.

Willie McKelvey

Born in 1934, McKelvey played a prominent role in the internal politics of the Labour Party in Dundee during the 1970s. Serving as a Dundee District councillor, party official and trade unionist, he acted as the figurehead of the local party's left-wing for much of the 1970s – mentoring many of the individuals who went on to take control of the party at the end of the decade. In 1979 he was elected as MP for Kilmarnock, and from 1983 Kilmarnock & Loudon, representing his constituency until retiring from politics in 1997. He died in 2016.

## Jimmy Reid

Born in 1932, Reid rose to fame across Scotland in the early 1970s for the part he played as a trade union leader in the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders work-in. He was elected Rector of Glasgow University between 1971 and 1974. A long-time Communist, he stood for the party in Central Dunbartonshire at the two general elections of 1974 before defecting to the Labour Party in 1975. He stood for Labour in Dundee East in 1979, but failed to unseat the sitting SNP MP. He subsequently became a journalist. He left the Labour Party in 1998, supporting the Scottish Socialist Party for a time before eventually joining the SNP in the last years of his life. He passed away in 2010.

## Ernie Ross

Born in 1942, Ross was a trade unionist working at Dundee's famous Timex factory before he was elected to Parliament for Dundee West in 1979. Initially a strong supporter of Tony Benn and the radical left leadership of the Dundee City Labour Party, his views shifted over the years as he became a firm ally of Neil Kinnock and then Tony Blair and their modernising projects within the Labour Party. He stood down from Parliament ahead of the 2005 general election.

## James L Stewart

James L Stewart was a star of the Labour Party in Dundee during the 1960s and early 1970s, rising from the factory floor to become one of its best known councillors. He was only narrowly defeated in the selection contest for the 1973 Dundee East by-election by George Machin. However, following the release of an ITV investigative documentary in 1975 that accused him and a number of other councillors of corruption, he was arrested and expelled from the party. In 1980, he was convicted and served a short jail sentence. After his release, he published the *Dundee Independent* newsletter that attacked the City Labour Party at every turn through much of the 1980s.

## George Thomson

Born in 1921, George Thomson was initially a journalist before moving into politics, being elected as MP for Dundee East in 1952. Between 1967 and 1970 he held a number of ministerial posts in Harold Wilson's government. Between 1970 and 1972, he was Labour's Shadow Secretary of State for Defence. In late 1972, it was announced that he would stand down from Parliament to become one of Britain's first European Commissioners as it entered the EEC. This led to the 1973 Dundee East by-election. His time on the European Commission ended in 1977, and he was elevated to the House of Lords. He joined the newly formed SDP in 1981, and remained an active member after its merger into the Liberal Democrats. He was politically active until his death in 2008.

## **Conservative & Unionist Party/ Progressives**

Steve Blackwood

Blackwood for originally a Labour member, and was elected to Dundee District Council for the party in 1977 before defecting to the Conservatives in the mid-1980s. He stood for the Conservative Party in Dundee East at the 1992 general election, finishing in third place.

William Fitzgerald

Born in 1901, William Fitzgerald was a well-known butcher in Dundee prior to becoming involved in politics. He was elected as a Dundee councillor for the Progressives in the 1960s and served as Lord Provost between 1970 and 1973. In 1973, he contested the Dundee East by-election on behalf of the Conservative Party but finished a disappointing third behind the SNP and Labour. He remained involved in local politics, representing Dundee on the Tayside Regional Council from 1975 until his retirement in 1990. He died just one year later in 1991.

Donald Hay

Having stood regularly without success at council elections since the 1980s, Hay was elected as a councillor for the West End ward in 2007. Although he lost his seat in 2012, he returned to the City Council in 2017, representing the same area he had previously.

Alex MacKenzie

MacKenzie was a long-serving Progressive councillor, with his local government career leading to his appointment as Lord Provost between 1968 and 1970. He was strongly opposed to the absorption of the local Progressive association into the Conservative Party in the 1970s, and left active politics.

Allan Stewart

Born in 1942, Stewart had an academic career before becoming involved in politics. He stood unsuccessfully for Dundee East in 1970, but was later elected as MP for East Renfrewshire between 1979 and 1983 and Eastwood between 1983 and 1997. During this time he served in a number of roles in the Scottish Office. He retired from politics in 1997, and died in 2016.

Bill Walker

Born in the city in 1929, Walker spent much of his life in Dundee and contested Dundee East at the October 1974 general election. He was elected as MP for Perth and East Perthshire in 1979, and represented much of the same area as Tayside North until being defeated at the 1997 election. Throughout this time, he maintained an interest in the politics of Dundee. He was subsequently Deputy Chairman of the Scottish Conservatives between 2000 and 2008. He died in 2017.

#### **Liberal Party/Alliance/Liberal Democrats**

Chic Brodie

Born in Dundee in 1944, Brodie was the Liberal Party candidate for Dundee East at both the October 1974 and 1979 general elections. He continued to stand for the Liberals and later Liberal Democrats in a variety of constituencies elsewhere at each general election until 2001. He defected to the SNP in 2010 and served as an MSP for the South Scotland region between 2011 and 2016, leaving the party in 2017.

## Fraser MacPherson

MacPherson is one of the longest-standing members of the Liberal Democrats in Dundee, having joined the Liberal Party in the late 1970s. In 2001, he unexpectedly won a local government by-election in the Tay Bridges ward, to enter the City Council as his party's first councillor since the SDP-Liberal Alliance lost its last seats in 1988. He has retained his position on the council ever since.

## Garnett Wilson

Wilson was born in 1885 in Fife. He became a major figure in Dundee and the surrounding area following a successful business career that saw him open one of Dundee's largest department stores. In the interwar period, he became involved in politics. He served as a Liberal councillor in Newport, in the north of Fife, between 1919 and 1929 and then Dundee from 1930 under 1935 and then again from 1937 until 1946. He served as Lord Provost of Dundee between 1940 and 1946, during which time he was knighted, played a part in convincing the NCR company to build its United Kingdom headquarters in Dundee and helped to establish the city's airport. Between 1952 and 1960 he was chairman of the Glenrothes Development Corporation, contributing to the establishment of Fife's only new town. He died at the age of 90 in 1975.

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