

SCOTTISH UNIONISM: AN EAST WEST DIVIDE?

David Seawright

First, Gandercleugh is, as it were, the central part - the navel (*si fas sit dicere*) of this our native realm of Scotland; so that men, from every corner thereof, when travelling on their concernments of business, either towards our metropolis of law, by which I mean Edinburgh, or towards our metropolis of mart and gain, whereby I insinuate Glasgow, are frequently led to make Gandercleugh their abiding stage and place of rest for the night.

(Sir Walter Scott 1816)

In this journal, and elsewhere, I have argued that the cultural pillar of Unionism has too often been ignored. Scottish Unionism, through its historical development with Liberal Unionism and its emphasis on its Scottish identity and independence, has had the ability to maintain a Scottish distinctiveness which the term Conservative could not hope to achieve (Seawright 1996; Seawright and Curtice 1995). I argued that the loss of this distinctive identity had major implications for the party after 1965 and speculated about the extent of improvement in the party's fortunes if the term was restored, particularly now that the party faces Scottish Parliamentary elections in the not too distant future after the resounding 'Yes-Yes' vote in the referendum. Since those articles were published, there have been numerous reports of activist pressure for organisational reform (for example, **The Scotsman** 3 February 1997) - reform which may allow the party to revert back to its pre-1965 name of the Scottish Unionist Party. The increasing vociferous calls for reform have taken on greater urgency with the party's elected representation now numbering just 83 local authority councillors, out of a possible 1100, and the subsequent 'wipe out' at the 1997 general election.

David Seawright is lecturer in politics at the University of Lincolnshire and Humberside.

Scottish Unionism: an East West Divide?

Of course, in the wake of such a disastrous result in the general election the party in the UK have had to initiate a major re-think, which offers possibilities for autonomous action by the Scottish party. The party conference took the decision in June to set up a Commission under the chairmanship of Lord Strathclyde to overhaul the party organisation in Scotland; these were endorsed at a special meeting of the party in March 1998. Lord Strathclyde's views on changing the name of the party in Scotland have in fact become public through the pages of the press, where he allegedly used a colourful expletive to emphasise that, whatever the name of the party is in Scotland, it will always carry a negative imagery associated with the Tories (**Scotland on Sunday** 5 October 1997). In fact, recent survey evidence would suggest that this is indeed the case. To the survey question, 'would renaming the Scottish Conservatives to Scottish Unionist Party be more/less attractive?', only 16% of respondents felt it would be more attractive with 11% seeing it as less attractive, but a staggering 71% said it would make no difference (**The Scotsman** 27 June 1997).

But it must be pointed out that such survey evidence, coupled with Lord Strathclyde's views, may in fact be fundamentally flawed. It can be argued that the data is corrupted by the very wording of the question. The dreaded 'boo word' of 'Conservative' is still prominently displayed, borne out by the fact that 26% of Conservative identifiers found it less attractive. With the onset of a Parliament in Edinburgh, one would be intrigued to see the replies to a different phrased question, a question which omitted the dreaded anglicised term, such as, 'Is there a need for a Scottish Unionist Party to pursue right of centre ideals in the Scottish Parliament while safeguarding the Union? And would you vote for such a party?'. With due respect to Lord Strathclyde, one would suggest that only a small number of mature members from the old Glasgow Hillhead constituency are aware of his impeccable Scottish Conservative and Unionist lineage. If one may care to imagine Lord Strathclyde canvassing in the sprawling council estate of Drumchapel, in the new constituency of Glasgow Anniesland, then it is not hard to imagine a doorstep encounter of, 'Ma there's an Englishman at the door for you'. It is not just a name, it is the imagery and symbolism attached to the name and all its cultural concomitants like the politics of accent.

The party should be aware that the 1965 reforms did not just entail a change of name to Conservative but entailed also fundamental restructuring of the Scottish organisation. There was an inherent centralising tendency in the organisation after 1965 which ran counter to the decentralised structure of the Scottish Unionist Association. After 1965, the basic assumption was that the Scottish organisation would benefit from imitation and closer identification with the more professional and efficient centralised English party structure.

But the Scottish Party had a very different structure and its Unionist Association had a bifurcated system of Eastern and Western Divisional Councils (EDC and WDC). However, the subsequent strategy of imitating the English system of organisation had repercussions for a Party struggling to express a Scottish distinctiveness, part of which was always the idea of a jealously guarded independent organisation. We also find that the Scottish Unionist Association's bifurcated system of Eastern and Western Divisional Councils enhanced a Scottish distinctiveness by exemplifying the historical social division of Scottish society, between the professional, lawyer-oriented East and the commercial, industrial-centred West. This secured for the Unionists, particularly in the West of Scotland, a higher commitment and greater participation from influential and important activists than was ever encountered by the Conservatives after the Divisional Councils were abolished in 1965. Furthermore, there is a generally held view that these reforms were either accepted at the time without much demur (Urwin 1966) or were not so important as to warrant a mention (Stevens 1990); a contrary view is offered here. The public face of 'Conservative unity' hid fundamental objections within the Party to the 1965 reorganisation which left a feeling of resentment and disillusionment, especially within the ranks of the erstwhile activists who had worked for the dissolved Western Divisional Council.

In this article we find that power resided at different times in different geographical locations, within the different elements of the party organisation. The 1965 reforms had more of an impact upon the susceptibilities of local areas than any direct effect on the local constituency organisations per se. But the idea of autonomy of the local constituency was overstated. What mattered was the power of the WDC and EDC. The Chairman's Office in Edinburgh, which was effectively the Scottish Central Office, was a weak institution in organisational terms before 1965. The WDC and the EDC operated on the belief that greater efficiency emanated from greater knowledge of their local area and they resented outside interference from whatever quarter, whether it be from the Scottish 'Central office' or from London.

This article examines the historical organisational developments of the party in Scotland and, in light of the clamour for new organisational reform, speculates if votes could once again be harvested, particularly in such places as the West of Scotland, by a new decentralised Western Divisional Council, a decentralised WDC that is more in tune with their immediate electoral environment. To consider such an eventuality one must be aware of the necessary historical evidence which is set out below. In short, a successful future organisation can only be informed by the past, building on the strength of its history.

Scottish Unionism: an East West Divide?

UNIONIST ORGANISATION PRIOR TO THE 1965 REFORMS

When the Liberal Unionists amalgamated with the Scottish Tories in 1912 to form the Scottish Unionist Association (SUA), they were effectively absorbed into an existing organisational structure set up in 1893. This basic structure remained in effect until 1965 when, inter alia, the Party also reverted back to its pre-1912 Conservative appellation. The SUA had in theory six Divisional Committees: Eastern; Western; Tay District; North East District; Northern District; and South-West District. However, a distinction was made between these and a Committee which could support an effective branch office, as only such a Committee could collect subscriptions from individuals, administer its own finances and be termed a Divisional Council. It was the Divisional Councils therefore which appointed the party managers and employed the full time staff. There were two such bodies, the Eastern Divisional Council and the Western Divisional Council, whose importance increased to such an extent that by the post war era they had carved up the administration of the whole country and the other committees between them (see Urwin 1965, p.99, for a list of constituencies which were under the WDC and EDC control until 1965).

In reality, then, the two Divisional Councils based in Edinburgh and Glasgow were the real power base of the organisation in Scotland. The SUA had a central council which met in the Western Divisional Council offices in Glasgow but it was merely a talking shop, a liaison committee between East and West, and was effectively controlled by the two councils who sent delegates along to it. In contrast to England where the Central Office (Smith Square) hired the professional staff as area agents, thereby maintaining central control of the National Union of Conservative Associations, the Divisional Councils hired their own permanent secretaries who had direct contact with the London central office. The Divisional Councils performed the tasks in Scotland that were undertaken by the Central Office in England. Urwin makes a crucial point when outlining the importance of the Divisional Councils in this era: 'Furthermore, it must be emphasised that each Council raised its own fund, and that these were separate from those of the Chairman's office, which in fact received "allowances" from the Councils, and the London Central Office. There was no one central Scottish fund' (Urwin 1966, p.146).

There were in fact very few similarities with the 'English model'. The professional wing of the English structure with Smith Square at the apex worked in conjunction with the National Union. And Smith Square controlled both pyramidal structures through their appointed salaried staff. Urwin also stated that 'the two pyramids [in England were] close together at all levels,

assisting the process of integration, [but] such a parallel structure did not exist in Scotland'. The professional wing in Scotland as represented by the Chairman's Office was feeble compared with its English central office counterpart. The Divisional Councils greatly influenced the Chairman's Office through the allocation to it of 'allowances'. Sections of the Party, particularly the Scottish Parliamentary Party, resented its 'feebleness'; they wanted the professional centralised structure they saw in operation in London. The Party in Scotland may have shared the similarity with England of having its Chairman appointed by the leader of the Party. But in Scotland until 1963, that was in effect the Scottish Secretary of State who - because of his other Parliamentary duties - was perceived as an ex officio head of an office with no base. In Scotland the Eastern and Western Divisional Councils were the base but, with their salaried professional staff, they were also the apex.

ADVANTAGE OR DISADVANTAGE?

What, then, were the arguments in favour of retaining the bifurcated structure of the Unionist Party and the arguments of those advocating reform? One would be wrong - although it is entirely understandable - to assume that calls for reforming the organisational structure were as a direct consequence of the decline in the Party's fortunes in the electoral arena. The party's share of the popular vote fell from a post-war high of 50.1% in 1955 to 40.6% in 1964, and to just 17.5% in 1997. The agitation for reform was more to do with tensions between the different power blocs in the party and were long standing. In fact, the Parliamentary Party, the most vociferous protagonists for reform, were actively inquiring into such a possibility at the height of the Unionist success in Scotland in the mid fifties. The Scottish Unionist Members' Committee (SUMC: the Scottish MPs) wanted the Chairman of the Party, James Stuart (Secretary of State), to appreciate their concern and dissatisfaction about the state of the Unionist Party organisation. On the 15 June 1954 a minute recorded that they wanted Stuart to examine the existing machinery 'to see if its efficiency could not be improved in order to meet the challenge of the next election' (Bodleian Library Archive). This was one year before the Scottish Party's greatest electoral performance. No doubt their electoral success, securing 35 MPs in 1955, gave the Parliamentary Party not only the confidence but the necessary clout to campaign for internal reform.

The post war minute books of the Scottish Members at Westminster and the minutes of the organisation in Scotland are replete with references to the debate over organisational reform. The Parliamentary Party continually raised the subject of reform, with the organisation in Scotland continually defending their position. One caveat must be that minute books by their very nature at

Scottish Unionism: an East West Divide?

times conceal more than they reveal, but here they offer a valuable and fascinating insight into the tensions within the Scottish Party over reform, tensions certainly not meant for public consumption.

The Parliamentary Party believed that the dichotomy of the organisation in Scotland was anachronistic and reflected badly upon a modern party which had to appeal increasingly to the electorate through national radio and television. It is apparent that the MPs had little official contact with the SUA. When a delegation consisting of the President and Past President of the SUA along with the EDC and WDC Conveners held a crunch meeting with the Scottish Members at Westminster on the 9 June 1964, the MPs' Committee Chairman could refer to it as a unique event. In contrast the MPs had regular contact with Smith Square to elicit information from the research department for their parliamentary and constituency business. In the eyes of the MPs the English model with a professional trained staff, and a central fund used to achieve Party goals, appealed far more than the impotent Chairman's office in Scotland with two divisive monoliths controlling funds for their own ends.

Conversely, the SUA believed they were more attuned to the nuances of Scottish distinctiveness and Scottish localism. And they perceived the danger of an 'integrated English type' machinery. If centralising reforms permitted greater London control it might not have been long before the organisation appeared to the Scots electorate as a quasi-English one. Therefore the SUA continually stressed the fact that the 'the Scottish Unionist Association [was] financially and in its organisation independent of England' (SUA **Yearbook 1955**, p.22). The Divisional Councils' interpretation was one of healthy rivalry between the two divisions, and that the dichotomous structure, as mentioned above, fitted a socially and culturally divided Scotland. Behaviour which may have been perceived by some as puerile and contributing to organisational stagnation had a completely different gloss put on it by the activists working at the 'chalk face' in Scotland.

A typical example of such behaviour is to be found in the SUA Western Office minute book under an entry from the Education and Propaganda committee, dated 30 September 1953. The Western Office was concerned that leaflets published by the Eastern Divisional Council had been distributed in the Western Divisional Council area. The minute continued: 'After discussing these leaflets the Committee unanimously agreed that they were unsuitable for distribution in this area and that in future if the Secretary had any doubts as to the propaganda value of any publication he should bring it before the Committee before distribution to agents' (National Library of Scotland, Account 10424).

Admittedly, this action could be construed as churlish and sectional. Many Scottish MPs did believe that this was exactly the type of action that interfered with the efficiency of the Party in Scotland and would be overcome when overall control shifted to a powerful Scottish Central Office. The WDC rejected the charge that their actions were some sort of visceral reaction from an introverted and myopic group. For the WDC, if such actions were sectional, it merely reflected the truth that there were different communities with different interests within Scotland, and, therefore, the Party's approach and propaganda had to reflect such differences. Scotland was heterogeneous and the main fault line was the different social and cultural development between East and West.

The modernisers and reformers believed that any cultural difference reflected an archaic sectarianism and in particular the disproportionate influence of the anachronistic Orange Order in the west. However, the Western Divisional Council activists argued that the Orange legacy was overstated but that there were other sound reasons for continuing with the present decentralised structure. Mr Andrew Strang, the organising secretary of the Western Divisional Council from 1945 until its demise in 1965, stressed that it was beneficial in Scotland not only to boast of an organisation independent of London but to boast of an organisation independent of other areas in Scotland. Strang continually emphasised the point that prominent local activists felt they had a hands-on approach in the Divisional Councils which they thought would be lost in any organisational reform. For example, in the WDC area this 'local control' resulted in greater participation by those who mattered: that is, the people who bankrolled the Western Council were also the activists who oversaw the administration of the accounts, particularly expenditure. Strang stressed the fact that the WDC was a very powerful organisation compared to the EDC. It was generally more efficient and effective and had more money and more members. One reason for this was that Glasgow was a great industrial centre while Edinburgh was a professional centre. Glasgow had very powerful and influential people available to it, 'captains of industry', who were not only prepared to come in and work in the organisation but were prepared to be seen to be working in the organisation (interview with Mr Andrew Strang 19 February 1993).

A brief look at some of those 'captains of industry' neatly illustrates Strang's point. Sir Murray Stephen of the Clyde Shipbuilders was a prominent worker and Honorary Treasurer of the WDC. A member of the Lithgow family (shipbuilding magnates) was a President of the Bute and North Ayrshire constituency organisation. Vera Findlay, a President of the SUA, was the daughter of another shipbuilder and Unionist activist Peter Hutchinson (Ailsa Shipbuilders). The steel magnates, Colvilles, were also prominent Unionists,

Scottish Unionism: an East West Divide?

one member of the family being a Unionist MP in the thirties. There were also Francis Beattie (Beattie Bakeries) and Morris Bloch (whisky). Sir William Burrell (of the Burrell Collection fame) was also Honorary Vice President of the Glasgow Unionist Association. According to Andrew Strang there was hardly a firm in the West who were not connected in one way or another to the Unionists and the WDC.

Strang reiterates that this was a fundamental factor underpinning the success of the Party in the West in the fifties. These people participated in the WDC and the Glasgow Unionist Association because of the control they were afforded at the local level. They could raise their own funds, decide how to spend their own funds and make their own appointments; basically, they could run their own organisation. They were also encouraged to participate at the national level through the disproportionate influence the WDC exerted within the Scottish Party structure overall. True, indigenous Scottish industry was in such a state of decline by the mid sixties that support from it, and particularly finance, may well have dropped off in any case. However, Mr Strang holds steadfast to the view that after the 1965 reforms the opinions of those influential activists had become circumspect: 'why bother taking a position or office in the organisation, or be prepared to work for the organisation, when you don't have control over it and can't influence it in any way'. Evidence supporting this interpretation is to be found in the Conservative publication **Crossbow** of August 1973. Just eight years after the 1965 reforms, the once glorious Western Divisional Council area of the West of Scotland, Mr Strang's jewel in the Scottish Tory crown, is marginalised as a second rate outpost. Instead of it being the chief paymaster of the Scottish party, a derisory sum is now allocated to it by 'Central Office' in Edinburgh. R.E.Dundas, Tory candidate for Greenock 1966 and Glasgow Kelvingrove 1970, and former chairman of the UK Federal Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations, stated in **Crossbow**: 'From the Scottish Conservative Party's annual income of between £75,000 and £100,000 only £10,500 is allocated to the West of Scotland, where very few constituencies are self-supporting'.

Sir Teddy Taylor was a prominent and populist Glasgow Unionist MP at the time of the 1965 reforms (Local Progressive Councillor for Cathcart 1959-64 and MP for Cathcart 1964-79). It is useful to quote him at length here. First, his opinions share an uncanny resemblance to Mr Strang's. Second, it is an example which illustrates how important localism was to Scottish Tory politics:

I remember that we used to have a very strong and active office in Glasgow and basically decisions were made in Glasgow and I found it

was a great strength to campaigning in the West of Scotland. When, basically, it moved to Edinburgh and became a united national party, first of all we didn't have the direct access to the decision making and, secondly, I think there was a feeling that because the East Coast tended to be more of a, how could I put it, a class situation than it was in the West of Scotland, it didn't help us in the political battle. I was infinitely happier when we had the Western Divisional Council based in Glasgow and genuine power and responsibility there. I think this was one of many factors which made life difficult for us.

Andrew Strang and John Cranna [WDC organising secretaries] were absolutely super in getting money and getting the party well organised. I would say that there's no doubt at all that the West of Scotland was in fact the provider of the cash, I think no one denies that. But, in addition to that, by having John Cranna and Andrew Strang in the West of Scotland they were about the best political organisers that I have ever come across in my life and made a significant contribution.

In fairness, John George [the SUA Chairman 1963-65: see below] was a chap who had come in, had great ideas, wanted to turn everything upside down and one had a certain sympathy with him. But, certainly as far as I was concerned the loss of the West of Scotland office was very significant and the loss of Andrew Strang and that kind of person, switching over to the Edinburgh scene, was I think, a mistake.

I think you'll find when someone like John George comes along the Conservative party tend to accept advice given to them. The argument was that the advantage, just like the Common Market argument, that by becoming bigger, and more linked with London that all kinds of exciting things would happen and instead we unfortunately went down and down in consequence. But certainly one of the factors given was that the Party would become stronger, it would also have the access to this great power and money machine from England and the feeling was that instead of being an amateur party we would become a professional party. This was the argument put forward, let's become professional because the English do well don't they and if we get linked up to them, we shall somehow get their success. And it certainly didn't work. I think they were actually having a battle to solve a problem which didn't exist.

(interview with Sir Teddy Taylor, House of Commons, 30 June 1993)

Scottish Unionism: an East West Divide?

Sir Teddy Taylor's remarks are instructive in highlighting the underlying geographical tensions within the party which were best served by a decentralised structure - a structure which respected a Scottish distinctiveness, as well as a Scottish localism. And this structure was not given up lightly.

THE ROAD TO REFORM PAVED WITH POLITICAL CHICANERY

The story surrounding the 'battle for reform' begins in the early 1950s and continues until the Parliamentary Party's success in obtaining reform in 1965. The minute books of both the Scottish Unionist Members and the Scottish Unionist Association's WDC and EDC - along with reports in the press - highlight the constant struggle concerning the issue of reform of the party's organisation. Much of the manoeuvring from both sides surrounded the post of vice-chairman. It is perfectly clear that both sides understood the strategic importance of the proposed post of vice-chairman. The proposal envisaged the vice-chairman taking over the day-to-day running of the Scottish organisation, a task the present chairman did not have the time for as Secretary of State. For the Parliamentary Party it would be a significant breach of the SUA power base, which would - it was hoped - initiate an inexorable trend towards integration and centralisation, with professional executive control. For this reason the SUA consistently opposed any shift of power to the Chairman's office.

We see this opposition to a centralising trend once again reiterated at an important executive meeting of the SUA on 6 September 1954. The minute recorded the 'feeling that an appointment of a Deputy Chairman would affect the position of the President of the SUA and tend to increase the influence and authority at the centre at the expense of the Organisation in the country' (SUA, minute book, 6 September 1954). Another significant reason for this meeting was that Mr C.S.McFarlane (by this time President of the SUA) gave a report of a meeting with the SUMC (the MPs) over the previous May's debacle. He believed that the exchange of views had removed many misapprehensions and misunderstandings. Moreover, he was greatly encouraged by his reception and the assurances he had received of the Committee's goodwill and desire to co-operate in the Association's work. This assurance was tantamount to the proverbial assurance given by a football board of directors to their club manager. Over the ensuing decade, however, the SUA would mount stiffer opposition than the proverbial condemned football manager.

The extent of SUMC scheming is evident in a minute of the 20 February 1956. Once again the MPs are busy sniping at the SUA organisation in Scotland. It is worth quoting this minute at length because it clearly delineates the MPs' position while dispelling any ambiguity surrounding their ultimate goal concerning the organisation in Scotland.

Captain Duncan: said that Colonel Blair's office [Chairman's Office] in Edinburgh had produced and was producing a good deal of useful literature etc., but many constituencies either knew nothing about these services or did not bother to use them.

Sir Thomas Moore: Secretary of State should not also be Chairman of Party in Scotland, no time etc., for party organisation, vice chairman could be appointed for the purpose.

Sir Alan Gomme Duncan: agreed that a Scottish Central Office was needed. He said that he was pretty sure that Col. Blair would resign rather than agree to the appointment of a vice-chairman for the purpose that Members had in mind.

Mr Duthie: by any business analogy the office in Edinburgh was badly run and compared most unfavourably with the organisation in London built up by Lord Woolton.

Mr. Spencer Nairn and Mr Ian Clark Hutchinson: Col. Blair, excellent for 'inside work', but was not good at public relations.

Cmdr. Donaldson: said that in his view one cause of the trouble was that the West and East Councils were invariably working in different directions. A Central Office would resolve this problem by providing proper co-ordination.

Sir Ian Clair Hutchinson: The trouble was that any Central Office would have to be situated either in Edinburgh or Glasgow and this would prejudice its success from the start.

(SUMC Briefs, 20 February 1956, Bodleian Library)

The long-awaited opportunity to implement a change finally arrived with Colonel Blair's retirement in 1960. Viscount Stuart of Finhorn (James Stuart, the former Secretary of State who was elevated to the Lords in 1959) acquiesced under relentless pressure from the Parliamentary Party and appointed Sir Alick Buchanan Smith (Lord Balerno) as vice-chairman, with Jack McDonald Watson as political secretary. The appointment of Jack

Scottish Unionism: an East West Divide?

McDonald Watson reveals the wish to imitate the Smith Square model. Before the war McDonald Watson was a part time worker for the WDC. At the end of the war he managed to return from South Africa early and took over as head of the Junior Unionists. From there he went South to work in the Central Office in London, returning to Edinburgh to be successor to Blair in 1960. A portent of the future relationship between the Chairman's office and the SUA was the umbrage taken by the SUA over the use of the anglicised term 'Scottish Chief Agent' by **The Scotsman** newspaper to describe McDonald Watson's position. Overt hostilities re-commenced in 1961 when the SUA condemned both Buchanan Smith and McDonald Watson for usurping SUA authority by implementing a directive from the General Director in London that constituencies should be circulated through the Chairman's office. To add insult to injury the SUA reported that on three occasions members of the Chairman's office had visited constituency parties which, in the opinion of the SUA, were outside the Chairman's remit, as that office was only an advisory body (Stevens 1990, pp.82-3).

Furthermore, in 1963 the convention of appointing the Secretary of State as Chairman was broken when Sir Alec Douglas Home appointed Sir John George to the position. (Sir John George was a Fife pit boy who had made good as a coal and glass works director. He represented Glasgow Pollok from 1955 to 1964. Bob Kernohan, a former editor of the Kirk's **Life and Work** journal and leading Unionist and Conservative said of him in an interview on the 24 September 1992: 'He was given the job by London of moving things in Scotland but he was short tempered and irascible and he displayed all the characteristics later associated with Margaret Thatcher'.) He lost no time in preparing the final push which would eventually see the dissolution of the Divisional Councils. The cause of the Parliamentary Party was aided by the fact that their new leader Douglas Home was the MP first for South Lanark and then Lanark between 1931 and 1950. Moreover, on his succession to the House of Lords in 1950 he became a Minister of State at the Scottish Office until 1955. He was, then, well acquainted with the demands for change.

On the 9 June 1964 there took place an important meeting at Westminster between the SUMC (the MPs) and a delegation from the Unionist Party in Scotland consisting of Mr William Hunter, President of the Unionist Association, Mrs J.Vera Findlay, Convener of the Western Divisional Council, Mr T.Russell Fairgrieve, Convener of the Eastern Divisional Council, and a Past President Neil Pattulo. As we noted earlier, this was the first time such a meeting had taken place. From this lengthy minute, one gets the distinct impression that the SUA are on the defensive fighting a rearguard action to defend an already enervated position. Mr Hunter welcomed the appointment of Sir John George and the use that was now being made of a

Chairman's Committee which brought them all together. Mr Hunter and Mrs Findlay pointed out that the organisational framework was better than ever before but emphasised that organisation can only go so far and it was policy and leaders which count most. It was pointed out that the Party had suffered tremendous hammer blows in the shape of the pay pause, the dismissal of seven Cabinet members overnight, the Common Market failure, the Profumo and Vassal cases, the row over resale price maintenance, and the leadership crisis. All these had caused dismay and distress to the voluntary workers in Scotland.

It appeared that the SUMC had resorted to manipulating the press in order to undermine the SUA. The SUA delegation rejected allegations made in the article in the **Sunday Telegraph** that the organisation in Scotland was 'feudalistic' and that the West and East Councils were divided. With regard to this matter of the **Telegraph** article the Chairman (Cmdr Donaldson MP) on behalf of the MPs' Committee stated that, after an investigation, it had appeared that the article had been written by a Scottish press man, and doctored somewhat by a lobby correspondent. He also stated that the article, which purported to echo the views held in Unionist quarters in Westminster, did not in any way reflect the views of the SUMC Committee (SUMC, 9 June 1964, Bodleian Library). This was of course a rather disingenuous statement as this was the same Cmdr Donaldson who, as we saw earlier, complained in 1956 about the Councils working in different directions, and called for a Central Office to resolve the problem.

In the first quarter of 1965 the Divisional Councils bowed to the inevitable. Sir John George's proposals for reform were publicised in January 1965, and were finally accepted by the party Conference in April 1965. George worked so assiduously between January and April that by the time of the Party Conference the reorganisation was a fait accompli. Even before the Conference in April the Chairman had already appointed individuals to the most important posts in the proposed structure (Urwin 1966). However, the WDC had a last-ditch attempt to block the proposals for reform at a special private session of the Scottish Unionist executive committee in early March 1965.

The WDC believed that the EDC were just as much opposed to reorganisation as themselves. However, they appreciated the EDC's acute difficulty in that they shared an office with the Chairman in Edinburgh. On account of this they were not overly surprised to find that the EDC had been successfully coerced into acceptance, and that Ian Mowatt, the EDC organising secretary, had already accepted a lucrative resignation deal. Moreover, they were well aware of Sir John George's determination to force

Scottish Unionism: an East West Divide?

through reorganisation. At a previous encounter, believing they still held the ace card of finance, they were told in no uncertain terms by George that they could burn their money for all he cared as London would finance the whole scheme if necessary. Indeed it is rumoured that the SUA money of the period was placed in a trust fund and was never given to the new National Treasurer in the Central Office in Edinburgh. Even in the face of such adversity the WDC hoped they could orchestrate an eleventh-hour rethink at the special meeting. Vera Findlay (WDC Convener) in conjunction with Andrew Strang had worded a motion of opposition to change at the special meeting in March. At the crucial meeting they were astounded when Sir Gilmour Menzies Anderson spoke on behalf of reorganisation. There appeared to be no logical explanation for this change of heart: as President of SUA he had previously travelled to Westminster where he emphasised at a SUMC meeting on 19 July 1960 that: 'There was no demand within the Party in Scotland for a change to the sort of organisation which operated in London. And that the existing arrangements of East and West having their own separate collecting systems should be preferred to the SUMC's proposal of finance being collected centrally' (SUMC 19 July 1960, Bodleian Library).

Interestingly, in 1967, Sir Gilmour Menzies Anderson became Chairman of the Scottish Conservative Party. The cynic may suggest that it was in reward for the crucial intervention on behalf of reform in March 1965.

POST '65 AND FURTHER CENTRALISATION

In 1965, after 89 years, the Divisional Councils ceased to exist. The voluntary wing would now be known as the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Association. The new SCUA structure consisted of five regional councils: City of Glasgow; Highland (Inverness); North Eastern (Aberdeen); Central and Southern (Edinburgh) and South Western (Paisley). The new structure was ostensibly decentralised, but in reality the Chairman's office (now referred to as the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Central Office) had much greater authority over the regional councils than it had had over the Divisional Councils. This was achieved by appointing an 'area agent', answerable to the Chairman, to oversee each region, similar to the system operating in England from the 1940s. A single, centralised Scottish fund was established, and the 'National Treasurer' along with the Chairman were appointees of the Party Leader. Sir John George had achieved the objectives continually advocated at SUMC meetings. As Urwin found in 1966, the Scottish Conservative Party organisation was now linked far more closely to the English leadership and English organisation.

Under the guise of rationalisation the dynamic of reform was now towards even greater central control, both from Edinburgh and London. In 1969 the Highland and North Eastern regions combined as the 'Northern' area, and in 1972 a West of Scotland office swallowed up Glasgow and Paisley, leaving the three Area Councils which are still in existence today. The election results of 1974, which at the time were thought disastrous, occasioned a further examination of the Scottish organisation prompted by a new leader Margaret Thatcher. She set up a committee of enquiry on the Scottish organisation in 1976, headed by Russell Fairgrieve, MP for West Aberdeenshire. It was to be a comparative analysis, comparing the relationship between the National Union and Central Office with that between SCUA and the Chairman's Office in Scotland. Its presumption was to be one of further integration. Any differences between the two organisations would have to be justified. The Fairgrieve Committee reported in April 1977 (the report was attached to the 1977 Conference handbook as Appendix A) and proposed even further integration with Smith Square. But the report also recorded reservations similar to those voiced in 1965 by the WDC, over what they saw as the deleterious effects that centralisation would have on the fortunes of the Party.

For example, the late Professor Ward - the Scottish Tory historian and authority on the Scottish organisation - believed that the transition towards the Fairgrieve reforms was a smooth one, but then felt the need to qualify that view by stating that some activists were concerned 'that under the Fairgrieve Report Scotland would become a mere satellite of London' (Ward 1982, p. 41). The activists' cause for concern is clearly observed in the Fairgrieve recommendations. There would be a Scottish Director of Organisation in overall control of organisation, administration and finance who would work directly with the Central Office in London. This would free the Chairman and his deputies to concentrate on political activity. Because the party in Scotland was independent, and in order not to jeopardise the monies collected in Scotland, the office of National Treasurer in Scotland was continued. However, the Party's finances in Scotland would be controlled as in England by the Treasurer's Department in Smith Square. The Scottish Conservative and Unionist Association would align its constitution with that of the National Union. Any residual differences would be of form rather than of substance. Moreover, SCUA constituency affiliation fees would be paid directly to Central Office which would automatically affiliate the Scottish constituencies to the National Union. In short, the Scottish Party was now an integral part of the London machine, in stark contrast to the degree of autonomy which had characterised Scottish Unionism (Stevens 1990).

The length to which the integrationist road was subsequently travelled by the Party is evident in the astonishing admission by the deputy chairman Bill

Scottish Unionism: an East West Divide?

Hughes in the **Sunday Times Scotland** on the 12 August 1990: 'We are only a branch office of the UK party and are centrally funded from head office in London. We do not account independently and are not even registered for VAT in Scotland'. We can be reminded of how different this was from the protestations of the Scottish Unionists in their yearbook of 1955: 'The Scottish Unionist Association is financially and in its organisation independent of England, although it is represented in the Council of the National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations'. Crucially, then, the Fairgrieve reforms continued an integrationist process started by Sir John George in 1965 which considerably weakened the party's Scottish identity.

PARTY INTROSPECTION AND RETROSPECTION

The disastrous Scottish Tory performance of 1987 occasioned further examination of the Party's organisation. The professional wing took a unilateral initiative and declared a further shake up of organisation at the Scottish Central Office in August 1987. There were to be five new directors, with portfolios for finance, organisation, research, communication and campaigning. John MacKay (later Lord MacKay of Adbrecknish) was given a leading role in presentation as Chief Executive. Of greater significance was the loosening of financial control from London. It was declared that all monies collected in Scotland would be retained in Scotland (Stevens 1990).

This pre-emption by the professional wing was no doubt intended to deflect the mounting criticism from the voluntary party. Many on the SCUA executive council were concerned that the Central Office reorganisation had been an arrogant step, carried out without consulting SCUA (interview with Professor Ross Harper [ex President of SCUA], 4 August 1992). SCUA was also increasingly concerned about the loss of a Scottish identity, and in the first week of September 1987 (a week after Mrs Thatcher had visited Scotland) a confidential SCUA report was leaked to the press. This twenty-one page report entitled **The Policies, Questions and Options: The Way Forward** was a damning indictment of many aspects of the Scottish party. But it particularly concentrated on the party's perceived 'Anglicisation' in the eyes of the Scottish electorate. Significantly, it called for a return to the historical Scottish position that the Secretary of State become an ex-officio Chairman of the Party, although the authors of the report, both vice-presidents of SCUA, Mrs Margaret Walker and Mr John Purvis, may not have been conscious of the fact that they wanted to turn the clock back to pre-1965. This made an allowance for a radical proposal that the president of SCUA would be elected by the party and have responsibility for the

professional staff, thereby bringing together the voluntary and professional wings of the party (**The Scotsman**, 10 September 1987).

After the 1987 Election a 'post mortem' questionnaire was sent to constituency chairmen. The responses were very critical of the Scottish Central Office and exuded the general angst within the party organisation over the perception of being an 'English Party'. An example of such a response is that from Falkirk East. The constituency activists were not at all happy with the level of support from Edinburgh Central Office. There was not enough attention focused on Scotland. One example they gave was the lack of Scottish issue advertisements in the press. But, piquantly, the introspection concludes: 'This questionnaire by not having a place for the SNP sums up to our members exactly what many people are saying - that the Conservatives are becoming too much of an English oriented Party, and have written off Scotland. Not true we know but this conception is growing' (information given to author at interview with Professor Ross Harper).

CONCLUSION

It is the contention of this article that strengthening the Party's organisation by professional central control was at the expense of Scottish social and cultural ties, particularly at the local level. Panebianco (1982) makes the point that innovations in party organisation can have 'counter-intuitive' (unforeseen) effects. What was unforeseen by an expanding professional bureaucracy was the alienation of the Party activist from the increasing central directives from Edinburgh and London. The remoteness of, and unwanted intrusion of, the Edinburgh 'Central Office' and London left a wellspring of discontent and disillusion at the local level, particularly in the West. The evidence presented here by Mr Andrew Strang and Sir Teddy Taylor, combined by the revealing machinations of the minute books, dispute the long-held assumption that organisational reform was accepted with 'very little dissent' or 'without any real dissent'. A Dumfriesshire activist in the Glencairn Branch made the following prescient statement in opposition to the 1965 reforms: 'They are acting undemocratically and we are determined to see that members - who are after all the people who win elections - have a right to make any radical changes in the association without being rushed into them and without knowing exactly what the changes will involve in the future'. (**Glasgow Herald**, 23 February 1965).

A wellspring of discontent at the 'local level' for the Tories hindered the party's appeal to its electoral environment. It became a reinforcing alienation: as the party increasingly 'centralised' it lost the important local activists,

Scottish Unionism: an East West Divide?

spoken of by Mr Strang, who could assuage feelings of alienation at the local level. The fact that the WDC and EDC delivered victory in 1955 and 1959 no doubt contributed to their success in resisting change and pressure from the Parliamentary party. But the appointment of Douglas Home as leader in 1963, inculcated with the values of the Scottish Parliamentary party together with the subsequent defeat in the 1964 election, no doubt sealed the Divisional Councils' fate.

There has been a terminal decline in Scottish Party membership. The Party today operates around a projected figure of 40,000 members for Scotland overall (information given to author). Yet in 1953 the Western Divisional Council was not satisfied with the figure of 148,770 members for the West of Scotland. The WDC thought there were several constituencies where the figures could be substantially increased (National Library of Scotland, Account 10424, 26 May 1953). The consequence of this fall in party membership was a subsequent drop in the level of Party activism in Scotland, and the Party in the West of Scotland admitted as much when launching a new campaign on the 10 June 1991: 'At the campaign launch, officials revealed some Tory voluntary wings in the West of Scotland have not distributed General Election literature to households since the heady days of Harold Macmillan in the fifties' (**Glasgow Herald**, 11 June 1991). The evidence outlined above in conjunction with the quantitative data strongly suggests that this centripetal trend of Party organisational reform had an adverse effect on local Party activity and efficiency and, significantly, the Party's appeal to its electoral environment. The Parliamentary party may have won out in their quest to centralise the Party in Scotland, mimicking the 'English model', but was it a Pyrrhic victory? The fact that the Parliamentary party is no more may be as a direct result of reforms initiated by it in 1965. With the imminent closure of the Glasgow Office (**Scotland on Sunday**, 12 October 1997, the Party might like to take stock of the past and enquire into why the Eastern and, in particular, Western Divisional Offices worked so well. 'Post doomsday' may be the opportunity for the ghosts of the Western and Eastern Divisional councils to reassert local autonomy and control.

REFERENCES

- Bodleian Library Archive, **Conservative Party Archives: CRD 2/45**: Scottish Unionist Members Committee, SUMC, 1-27, (Oxford).
- National Library of Scotland, **Account 10424**, Documents / Minute Books etc., deposited by the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Association, (Edinburgh, July 1991).

- Panbianco, A. (1982) **Political Parties: Organisation and Power** , (Cambridge University Press).
- Scott, Sir Walter, (1985) **Old Mortality**, (Harmondsworth, Penguin Classics).
- Scottish Unionist Association, (1955) **Yearbook: A Political Reference Manual** (Edinburgh, SUA).
- Seawright, D. and Curtice, J. (1995) 'The Decline of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party 1950-1992', **Contemporary Record** Volume 9 No 2, pp319-342.
- Seawright, D. (1996) 'The Scottish Unionist party: What's In A Name?', **Scottish Affairs**, No 14, Winter 1996, pp. 90-102.
- Stevens, C. P. (1990) 'Scottish Conservatism - A Failure of Organisation', **Scottish Government Yearbook**, pp.76-89.
- Urwin, D. W. (1965) 'The Development of the Conservative Party Organisation in Scotland until 1912', **The Scottish Historical Review**, Volume XLIV No138, pp.89-111.
- Urwin, 'D.W. (1966) 'Scottish Conservatism: A Party Organisation In Transition' **Political Studies**, Volume 44, pp. 145-162.
- Ward, J.T. (1982) **The First Century: A History of the Scottish Tory Organisation 1882-1982** (Edinburgh, SCUA).

October 1997