

Tomlinson, J. (2022) The First World War in a 'women's town': Dundee 1914-1922. *Women's History Review*, 31(2), pp. 173-197. (doi: [10.1080/09612025.2020.1864886](https://doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2020.1864886))

The material cannot be used for any other purpose without further permission of the publisher and is for private use only.

There may be differences between this version and the published version. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite from it.

<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/227190/>

Deposited on 16 December 2020

Enlighten – Research publications by members of the University of  
Glasgow  
<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk>

The First World War in a “Women’s Town”: Dundee 1914-1922

Jim Tomlinson, University of Glasgow

KEYWORDS: women’s work; first world war; Dundee; jute

Abstract

This article re-examines long-standing arguments about the impact of the First World War on women’s lives by using the unusual, distinctive case of Dundee. By the late nineteenth-century Dundee had acquired the reputation as a ‘women’s town’. This designation was highly problematic, but it was based on the reality of the unusually high proportion of women employed in the city’s key industry, jute. This role in jute meant that women began the war in a very different employment position from most other parts of Britain. This distinctive starting point meant that the direct impact of the war on the pattern of women’s employment position was noticeably smaller than elsewhere in Britain. Most women continued to be employed in jute. Nevertheless, despite this relative stability in the distribution of employment, there is evidence of substantial enhancement of women’s civic and political engagement, up to and in the immediate aftermath of women’s parliamentary enfranchisement in 1918. The argument ends with the general election of 1922, when in a city with a majority of women voters Winston Churchill was defeated as a Liberal Party candidate.

Word count: 9, 687.

Jim Tomlinson is Professor of Economic and Social History at the University of Glasgow, having been Bonar Professor of Modern History, Dundee University, from 2004-2013. He has published widely on the historical political economy of modern Britain, most recently *Managing the Economy, Managing the People. Narratives of British Economic Life from Brexit to Beveridge* (Oxford University Press, 2017) and *Dundee and Empire: Juteopolis 1850-1939* (Edinburgh University Press, 2014). From 2021 to 2023 he has a Leverhulme Major Research Fellowship for a project on ‘Defeating Mr Churchill: the local and the global in the decline of liberal political economy, 1908–1929’.

[jim.tomlinson@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:jim.tomlinson@glasgow.ac.uk)

Economic and Social History,  
University of Glasgow,  
Lilybank House,  
Bute Gardens,  
Glasgow,  
G12 8RT.

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2206-3486>

Acknowledgements: I am very grateful for the exceptionally helpful comments from the journal’s anonymous referees in helping me refine the final version of this article.

### The First World War in a “Women’s Town”: Dundee 1914-1922

This article re-examines some of the long-running and diverse arguments about the impact of the First World War on women’s lives in Britain, using a case study of a highly distinctive city, Dundee. Recent scholarship has been highly sceptical about the argument that wartime changes in women’s roles had an ‘emancipatory’ effect on their lives.<sup>1</sup> Such claims originated long ago with Arthur Marwick, who claimed that ‘the absolutely central phenomenon in the changing position of women was their movement into new jobs’.<sup>2</sup> Subsequent work has not only been sceptical about the

---

<sup>1</sup> Lara Downs, ‘War work’ in *The Cambridge History of the First World War*, ed. Jay Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 75-77; Maggie Andrews, Alison Fell, Lucy Noakes and June Purvis, ‘Representing, remembering and rewriting women’s histories of the First World War’ *Women’s History Review* 27, no .4 (2018), 512.

<sup>2</sup> Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War* (London: Bodley Head, 1965); quote from Marwick, *Women at War* (London: Fontana, 1972), 12. For the foundational role of Marwick’s work in setting the agenda about the impact of the war on women, see Gail Braybon, ‘Winners or losers: women’s role in

longevity and scope of such changes in employment, but also gone much beyond that initial agenda, greatly expanding the range of assessments of the war's effects on women's lives, both public and familial.<sup>3</sup>

On employment, doubts have been expressed not only about the quantitative changes wrought by the war but also about any consequent attitudinal change. There is a continuing debate about women's work and the war, with, for example, Annmarie Hughes' study of Scotland stressing both the multiple work opportunities for women opened up by the war, but the limited impact this had on women's underlying labour market position, because of continued job segregation and lack of equal pay.<sup>4</sup>

Gail Braybon emphasized the absence of impact on men's attitudes to women's role: 'In fact, men's conception of women often remained precisely the same as it had been

---

the war story' in *Evidence, History and the Great War. Historians and the Impact of 1914-1918*, ed. Braybon (Oxford: Berghahn, 2003), 90-93.

<sup>3</sup> For an international overview of the issues, Susan Grayzel, 'Men and women at home' in Winter, *The Cambridge History of the First World War*, 96-120; for the diversity of issues: Maggie Andrews, Alison Fell, Lucy Noakes and June Purvis, 'Representing, remembering and rewriting women's histories of the First World War' *Women's History Review* 27, no .4 (2018), re-published as Andrews, Fell, Noakes and Purvis, *British Women's Histories of the First World War. Representing, Remembering and Rewriting* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020).

<sup>4</sup> Annmarie Hughes, *Gender and Political Identities in Scotland, 1919-1939* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 19-33.

before the war'... Indeed she goes further to argue that 'Working-class women wage earners in the 1920s had to face far more hostility than they had before the war'.<sup>5</sup>

Marwick's rather simplistic linking of employment change directly to women's broader roles has been challenged from a number of directions. Some investigation of women's wartime activities flowed from the question of what happened to the suffrage movement after 1914. Many continued to engage in a diverse range of civic activities, with Alberti's pioneering work showing the diversity of women's trajectories after 1914.<sup>6</sup> Another strand of investigation has been the scale and significance of women's role in various wartime political activities outside the employment relationship, such as rent strikes.<sup>7</sup> More broadly has been the question of how women related to the emergent 'consumer politics' brought about by the wartime

---

<sup>5</sup> Gail Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War* (London: Routledge, 1989), 157.

<sup>6</sup> Johanna Alberti, *Beyond Suffrage. Feminists in War and Peace, 1914-1928* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989); for one particularly important suffragette, see June Purvis, 'Emmeline Pankhurst in the aftermath of suffrage, 1918-1928' in *The Aftermath of Suffrage. Women, Gender, and Politics in Britain 1918-1945*, eds. Julie Gottlieb and Richard Toye (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 19-36.

<sup>7</sup> Joseph Melling, *Rent Strikes. People's Struggle for Housing in West Scotland 1890-1916* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1983); James Smyth, 'Rents, peace, votes: working-class women and political activity in the First World War' in *Women in Scottish Society 1800-1945*, eds. Esther Breitenbach and Eleanor Gordon (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), 174-196.

cost of living crisis, and the battles over the pricing and rationing of food and other consumer items, including housing.<sup>8</sup> Various authors have argued that across wartime Britain, a new politics of consumption arose, often spearheaded by women, and taking both official and unofficial forms.<sup>9</sup>

At the end of the war the great majority of women over 30 were granted the parliamentary vote. Many historians have examined the effects of this, and in particular, how far it went along with a broader extension of women's role in the public sphere. There is now a great deal of evidence that 'Party politics in the aftermath of suffrage era, moreover, was intrinsically connected to other forms of civil society activity'<sup>10</sup> A number of writers, including Breitenbach, Thane and McCarthy have shown that the extension of the suffrage did indeed go along with a

---

<sup>8</sup> June Hannam and Karen Hunt, *Socialist Women. Britain, 1880s to 1920s* (London: Routledge, 2002), 134-165.

<sup>9</sup> Frank Trentmann, 'Bread, milk and democracy: consumption and citizenship in twentieth century Britain' in *The Politics of Consumption*, eds. Martin Daunton, and Matthew Hilton (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 129-163; Matthew Hilton, 'The female consumer and the politics of consumption in twentieth century Britain' *Historical Journal* 45, no.1 (2002), 103-128; Karen Hunt, 'The politics of food and women's neighbourhood activism in First World War Britain' *International Labour and Working-Class History* 77, no.1 (2010), 8-26.

<sup>10</sup> Gottlieb and Toye, *The Aftermath*, 5.

flourishing of women's associational life.<sup>11</sup> This included Women's Citizen Associations, Women's Rural Institutes, Co-operative Women's Guilds, and a wide variety of single issue campaign groups. In Scotland temperance groups were particularly important in mobilising women.<sup>12</sup> The consensus of the historiography is that the story of women simply 'returning to domesticity' after 1918 is no longer sustainable.<sup>13</sup> As Hughes puts it, 'In the post-war years women were torn between

---

<sup>11</sup> Esther Breitenbach and Pat Thane, 'Introduction' in *Women and Citizenship in Britain and Ireland in the Twentieth Century. What Difference Did the Vote Make?* eds. Breitenbach and Thane (London: Continuum, 2010), 5; Thane 'The impact of mass democracy on British political culture' in Gottlieb and Toye, *Aftermath of Suffrage*, 54-69; Helen McCarthy and Pat Thane, 'The politics of association in industrial society' *Twentieth Century British History* 22, no.2 (2011), 217-229.

<sup>12</sup> Esther Breitenbach, 'Scottish women's organizations and the exercise of citizenship c. 1900-c.1970' in Breitenbach and Thane, *Women and Citizenship*, 63-77; on Scotland, see also Valerie Wright, 'Education for active citizenship: women's organizations in inter-war Scotland' *History of Education* 38, no.3 (2009), 419-36; Sarah Browne, *Making the Vote Count. The Arbroath WCA* (Dundee: Abertay Historical Society, 2007). On the Scottish Women's Co-operative Guild see Breitenbach, 'Scottish', 70-71. On temperance, John. Kemp, 'Drink and the labour movement in early twentieth-century Scotland with particular reference to Edwin Scrymgeour and the Scottish Prohibition Party' (Unpublished PhD dissertation, Dundee University, 2000).

<sup>13</sup> Adrian Bingham, "'An era of domesticity?'" Histories of women and gender in interwar Britain' *Cultural and Social History* 1, no.2 (2004), 225-233.



multiple and contradictory ideals of femininity, ranging from the wartime vision of the woman worker to the post-war re-establishment of the traditional ideal on womanhood'.<sup>14</sup>

Important questions remain about how far this flourishing was encouraged or constrained by the war itself, and whether the war had a major effect on women's political role, broadly conceived, even before they got the parliamentary vote.

This article seeks to further our understanding of employment changes and their effects, but also of these much broader issues concerning women's civic and political engagement, up to and in the immediate aftermath of women's parliamentary enfranchisement in 1918. To this end it uses a very distinct case, the city of Dundee.

Before 1914 Dundee was widely described as a 'women's town', especially because of the predominant role of women in employment in the city's key industry, jute. The designation 'women's town' is undoubtedly problematic, but it does register the distinctiveness of women's position in the town in respect of employment.

This role in the jute means that women began the war in a very different employment position from most parts of Britain. But how much did that matter to women's broader role, and what was the impact of the war on that role? This article investigates these questions, by focussing on the period from the beginning of the war down to the election of 1922, when Dundee, with a majority of women voters, shifted from a Liberal and Lib-Lab predominance to a strongly Labour city, at least at the

---

<sup>14</sup> Hughes, *Gender*, 19

parliamentary level. While the focus here is not primarily on parliamentary politics, that election provides a convenient terminal point from which to assess the shifts in the role of women in the city since 1914.

The discussion is divided into five sections. A brief summary of the background to the ‘women’s town’ up to 1914 is followed by an analysis of the impact of the war on women’s employment in the city. The third section looks at broader changes in women’s public and political life down to 1918, especially in relation to ‘consumer politics’. The fourth takes the argument to the election of 1922. The final section offers some conclusions.<sup>15</sup>

#### A ‘women’s town’?

The designation of Dundee as a ‘women’s town’ derives from their predominant role in the jute industry, itself by far the largest employer in the city. Eleanor Gordon’s pioneering study suggested: ‘...the female labour market was comprehensively dominated by jute which employed between three-quarters and two-thirds of Dundee’s working women in the years 1871 till 1911...Dundee was therefore a women’s town: women outnumbered men in the town by 3 to 2; they formed over 43

---

<sup>15</sup> For the impact of the *Second* World War on women in Dundee: Carlo Morelli and Jim Tomlinson, ‘Women and Work after the Second World War: a Case Study of the Jute Industry, Circa 1945-1954’ *Twentieth Century British History* 19, no.1 (2008), 61-82.

per cent of the total labour force: and 54.3 per cent of women aged over 15 were employed'.<sup>16</sup>

This female predominance, especially the significant role in the labour force played by married women, was much commented upon by contemporaries.<sup>17</sup> Adverse comment upon the effects of women's, and especially mother's, employment was common: 'Over-employment of women and under-employment of men are found associated with the highest infant death-rate in Scotland, a high illegitimate birth-rate and great poverty.'<sup>18</sup> Subsequent historical work has thrown doubt on such claims, and opened up a range of perspectives on the complex nature of women's lives in the city.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Eleanor Gordon, *Women and the Labour Movement in Scotland 1850-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 141,142.

<sup>17</sup> Dundee Social Union, *Report of Investigation into Social Conditions in Dundee* (Dundee: John Leng, 1905); Dundee University Archives (hereafter DUA) MS 134, D. Lennox, 'Working class life in Dundee for 25 years: 1878-1903' (unpublished manuscript, 1928).

<sup>18</sup> Mary Lily Walker, 'Work among women' in *British Association Dundee, 1912. Handbook and Guide to Dundee and District*, eds. A. Paton and A. Millar (Dundee: Winter and Son, 1912), 70.

<sup>19</sup> Emma Wainwright, 'Gender, space and power: discourses on working women in Dundee's jute industry, c.1870-1930' (Unpublished PhD dissertation, St Andrews University, 2002); Graham Smith, 'The making of a women's town: household and gender in Dundee 1890 to 1940' (Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of

But we know relatively little on how far women's prominent role in the labour market translated into a broader civic and political role for women before 1914. William Walker's important but idiosyncratic study saw the 'mill-girl' as an unruly presence, instinctively committed to a rigorous hedonism, hostile to the respectability of the nascent (and largely male) socialist politics of the city. 'Unruly, raucous, and madcap, the mill-girls were the despair of reformers and an embarrassment to employers and workers alike'.<sup>20</sup> Gordon effectively rescued Dundee's women from this peculiar form of condescension, whilst persuasively arguing against any notion of women's passivity as workers, stressing their involvement in a large number (if often small scale) industrial disputes, many of these spontaneous and led by women themselves. On the other hand, she stressed the limited role of the two jute trade unions, both of them with majority female membership, but with fewer than one woman in twelve enrolled in either of them.<sup>21</sup> For her, women's strikes could be interpreted 'as an

---

Stirling, 1996); Norman Watson, 'Daughters of Dundee. Gender and politics in Dundee: the representation of women 1870-1997' (Unpublished PhD dissertation, Open University, 2000); Valerie Wright, 'Jutepolis and after: women and work in twentieth century Dundee' in *Jute No More. Transforming Dundee*, eds. Jim Tomlinson and Chris Whatley (Dundee: Dundee University Press, 2011), 132-162.

<sup>20</sup> William Walker, *Juteopolis. Dundee and its Textile Workers 1885-1923*

(Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1979), 22, 30-31, 45.

<sup>21</sup> Gordon, *Women*, 169-211; on women and industrial unrest in Dundee, see also William Kenefick, 'An effervescence of youth: female textile-workers strike activity in Dundee, 1911-1912' *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations* 33 no. 1 (2012),

assertion of independence from the control of both employers and to some extent male-dominated trade unions.’<sup>22</sup>

But women did have a strong formal status in the biggest trade union, the DDUJFW, whose rules provided that half of its officials were women, and when it was founded in 1906 its provisional committee had fifteen women and ten men.<sup>23</sup> Union membership amongst both men and women was limited, but as was commonly the case union activity acted as a ‘transmission belt’ for a small number of women into socialistic politics, which in Dundee meant especially into the Independent Labour Party (hereafter ILP).<sup>24</sup> Alongside the growth of union and socialist activity in the Edwardian period, Dundee was also a major centre of suffragette agitation, with the

---

189-221. In 1911 women outnumbered men by four to one in the DDUJFW: Walker, *Juteopolis*, 49.

<sup>22</sup> Gordon, *Women*, 207.

<sup>23</sup> Dundee City Archives (hereafter DCA) GD JF 1/1 1 *Jute and Flax Workers Guide* (hereafter, *Guide*) March 1906, April 1906. The DDUJFW owed its existence partly to the efforts of the Women’s Trade Union League and its Secretary, Mary Macarthur: Walker, *Juteopolis*, 200-202. The other union, much smaller, but also with a predominantly female membership, was the Dundee and District Mill and Factory Operatives Union, founded and led by a clergyman, Henry Williamson, with an explicit aim of limiting industrial unrest: Gordon, *Women*, 105, 115, 124-5, 167-8.

<sup>24</sup> Kenefick, ‘Effervescence of youth’, 216.

Women's Freedom League playing a prominent role, as elsewhere in Scotland, though Watson suggests this was a predominantly middle class phenomenon.<sup>25</sup>

Opportunities for women to seek public office in Scotland began in 1872 when they became eligible for election to school boards, and this was extended to some parts of local government in the 1880 and 1890s, though they could not stand for town councils until 1907.<sup>26</sup> Rather little came of these opportunities in Dundee. There were two women parish councillors from 1901 (Agnes Husband and Mary Lily Walker)<sup>27</sup>. The first woman town council candidate, Margaret Steel, stood in 1913, but there was no successful woman candidate until Lily Miller in 1935.<sup>28</sup> Both the local ILP and

---

<sup>25</sup> Leah Leneman, *A Guid Cause. The Women's Suffrage Movement in Scotland* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1991); Watson, 'Daughters', 62-9, 90-91.

<sup>26</sup> Esther Breitenbach, 'Scottish women's organizations and the exercise of citizenship c. 1900-c.1970' in Breitenbach and Thane, *Women*, 65; Jane McDermid, 'School board women and active citizenship in Scotland, 1873-1919' *History of Education* 38, no.3 (2009), 333-347.

<sup>27</sup> Kenneth Baxter, 'Radical town or conservative city?' (Unpublished MA dissertation, University of Dundee, 2003), 4 For Walker see Eddie Small, *Mary Lily Walker. Forgotten Visionary of Dundee* (Dundee: Dundee University Press, 2013), and for Husband the entry in the *Biographical Dictionary of Scottish Women*, eds. Elizabeth Ewan, Sue Innes and Sian Reynolds (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006).

<sup>28</sup> Baxter 'Radical town', 19, 23; Baxter, "'Matriarchal' or 'Patriarchal'?" Dundee, women, and municipal party politics in Scotland c.1918-c.1939' *International Review of Scottish Studies* 35, no.1 (2010), 97-122.

Trades and Labour Council seem to have been poor at putting forward women for winnable council seats.<sup>29</sup>

Whilst of course at this time women didn't have a parliamentary vote, there was a thriving women's political culture within the two established political parties. Both of these had separate women's organizations, the Dundee Women's Unionist Association and Dundee Women's Liberal Association.<sup>30</sup> We know that women were numerically significant in local Liberal party activity, but with few leadership roles.<sup>31</sup>

More broadly, Dundee women were active in a range of civic associations before 1914. Most prominent of these was the Dundee Social Union (hereafter DSU), founded in 1888, and always dominated by women in its role of providing a range of social welfare activities, including housing, and facilities for children and infirm

---

<sup>29</sup> Gordon, *Women*, 274.

<sup>30</sup> David Thackeray, 'Home and politics: women and Conservative activism in early twentieth-century Britain' *Journal of British Studies* 49, no.4 (2010), 826-848

<sup>31</sup> Kenneth Baxter, "'Estimable and gifted"? Women in party politics in Scotland c.1918-1955' (Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Dundee, 2008), chapter 1. The Dundee Women's Unionist Association and The Dundee Unionist Association merged in 1918: DUA MS270/1/1 Dundee Unionist Association minutes 21 March 1918.

adults.<sup>32</sup> Some of this activity may have been influenced by the impact of the women-dominated labour market, for example in driving Dundee, prompted by the DSU, to be the first municipality in Britain to provide restaurants for working mothers.<sup>33</sup>

In general, there is no good evidence from the immediate pre-1914 period that the distinctiveness of Dundee in relation to women's employment translated into an unusual prominence of women in civic and political activity. The only possible exception is temperance, where women were very active, especially in the Women's Temperance Association.<sup>34</sup> Here there does seem to be a somewhat Dundee-specific trajectory, leading in 1922 to the election of the only prohibitionist ever to sit in the UK parliament, as discussed below.<sup>35</sup>

### Women and employment in wartime Dundee

In looking at the changes in women's employment during the war we can begin with the overall changes suggested by the Censuses of 1911 and 1921. The Census is the most systematic contemporary source we have, and the data it generated seems to

---

<sup>32</sup> DSU minutes at DCA GD/OC/GL; Watson, 'Daughters', 184-191; Susan Browne and Jim Tomlinson, 'Dundee women on the public stage' in Tomlinson and Whatley, *Jute No More*, 110-111.

<sup>33</sup> Kenefick, 'Effervescence', 216.

<sup>34</sup> DCA GD/OC/GL I DSU Minutes, 22 December 1914.

<sup>35</sup> Gordon, *Women*, 267, notes that nationally the pre-war Scottish Co-operative Women's Guild was strongly supportive of temperance.



have been broadly accurate.<sup>36</sup> But two big problems make this source less than ideal for current purposes. First is the change in categories used between the two Census dates, which explains the inescapable complexity of Table 1. Second, by 1921 Britain had entered a major economic slump, so we need to be aware that there is a cyclical as well as a trend element in comparisons involving this year. This post-war cycle was especially sharp in jute, so we need to be particularly careful in assessing what the trend was in this industry.

Table 1 brings out the great diversity of women's occupations before the war, though the quantitative predominance of jute and textiles generally is unambiguous. The data for intercensal change suggests a rise in the number of women in domestic service, the second most important category in 1911. After the war, the slump, in combination with pressure from the authorities to suspend benefit from those who refused this work, probably explains this small increase.

But much more important in understanding Dundee's female labour market is the strikingly low and long-standing proportion in this servant category compared with other Scottish cities. Census estimates show that in Dundee for the whole period from 1871 to 1911 the proportion of women domestics averaged less than 10 per cent, with Glasgow, the city in Scotland with the next lowest proportion, averaging over 20 per

---

<sup>36</sup> Tim Hatton and Roy Bailey, 'Women's work in census and survey, 1911-1931'

*Economic History Review* 54, no.1 (2001), 87-107.

cent, and Aberdeen and Edinburgh much higher.<sup>37</sup> This limited employment has usually been accounted for by the small size of the servant-employing middle class of Dundee—a ‘demand-side’ explanation for the low numbers.<sup>38</sup> But there may also have been ‘supply-side’ factors at work, with many young women preferring employment in the mill or factory to being a servant. While mill and factory work was regarded by many as a low status female occupation, it at least offered a degree of independence from the suffocating nature of most ‘indoor’ domestic work.<sup>39</sup> This very low proportion of domestic workers before the war meant there was little scope in Dundee for what Susan Grayzel has identified as one of the striking features of the war in many countries, the movement of women ‘from domestic service into more industrial or service sector employment’.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> Richard Rodger, ‘Employment, wages and poverty in the Scottish cities 1841-1914’ in *Perspectives on the Scottish City*, ed. George Gordon (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1985), 29.

<sup>38</sup> A.M. Carstairs, ‘The nature and diversification of employment in Dundee in the twentieth century’ in *Dundee and District*, ed. S. Jones (Dundee: British Society for the Advancement of Science, 1968), 322; for Dundee’s class structure, Nick Morgan and Rick Trainor, ‘The dominant classes’, in *People and Society in Scotland vol. II 1830-1914*, eds. W. Hamish Fraser and Robert Morris (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1990), 106.

<sup>39</sup> Jan Merchant, ‘“An insurrection of maids”: Domestic servants and the agitation of 1872’ in *Victorian Dundee*, eds. Christopher Whatley, Bob Harris and Louise Miskell, (Dundee: Dundee University Press, 2<sup>ND</sup>. edition, 2011), 112-133.

<sup>40</sup> Grayzel, ‘The role of women in the war’ in *The Oxford Illustrated History of the First World war*, ed. Huw Strachan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 153.

Table 1 Women's Occupations in Dundee, 1911 and 1921

	1911	1921
Jute workers	23368	22,969 (textiles)
Flax and linen	834	
Canvas/sailcloth	371	
Bleaching, printing, dyeing	203	
Indoor domestic	2155	2545
Charwomen/cleaners	381	758
Grocers	213	2,421 shop assistants, 790 proprietors or managers
Wigmakers/hairstylists	128	
Milk/dairy	136	
Drapers	540	
Clothiers/outfitters	910	
Tailors	319	
Dressmaker/milliner	273	

Greengrocers	110	
Shopkeepers (not otherwise specified)	210	
Bread/biscuit/cake makers	152	695 (makers of food, drink and tobacco)
Jam making	356	
Chocolate makers	127	
Costermongers/street sellers	61	
Commercial clerks	984	2,278 (clerks, not civil service or local authority)
Engineering and machinery making	20	106 (metals)
National government	69	142 (public administration and defence)
Schoolmasters, lecturers	512	711

Nurses and midwives	312	440
Total enumerated	74,71 2	93,636
Total occupied	36,83 6	38,850

Source: *Census, Scotland 1911 and 1921*.

Across the war there were big increases in some ‘white blouse’ occupations, most strikingly in nursing and teaching. This registered the acceleration of a pre-war trend, but one which of course was to be central to women’s employment and social mobility over the next century. Similarly, the rise of the number of women clerk’s was not new but seems to have been accelerated by the war, with its tendency to proliferate ‘paperwork’ of all kinds.

Also in line with experience elsewhere was a small increase in women’s role in the engineering industry, where having gained a foothold before 1914, wartime growth was never entirely ‘rolled-back’. There were wartime reports of ‘girls’ having jobs in the city’s Caledon shipyard, but no numbers or details were given, and this must have been a temporary phenomenon.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, in 1917 the jute manufacturers, Cox

---

<sup>41</sup> *People’s Journal* 31 March 1917 and 8 September 1917.

Brothers reported training four women in their mechanics shop, but it is unlikely they survived in this role when the soldiers returned.<sup>42</sup> One symbolically significant, if quantitatively trivial, innovation was the women in the police. When inaugurated in 1915 the system involved volunteer women, whose prime purpose was to try and regulate the behaviour of young women in public places. Eventually, one woman, Jean Thomson, was appointed as a ‘Police Sister’, the first established policewoman in Dundee.<sup>43</sup>

Finally, though this an area where the changing definitions make the trends especially hard to pin down, it seems that the retail sector continued to expand across this decade. Of course, some of this may have been the result of the slump of 1920/21, with women and men moving into this easily-entered sector as jobs in jute and other manufacturing shrank—a point which applies with especial force to ‘costermongers and street sellers’. Within this sector we know nothing about changes, though it would be interesting to know if bakers, a traditional male preserve (and a strongly trade unionised employment), were affected. Note that the total activity rates of women fell slightly compared with 1911, presumably largely as a result of the recession in 1921.

Not revealed by the decennial Census is the classic pattern of women being (sometimes reluctantly) recruited into pre-war ‘men’s jobs’, only to be largely ejected

---

<sup>42</sup> DUA MS 66/II/2/6 Cox’s letter book, letter to Dundee and District Spinners and Manufacturers Association, 16 February 1917.

<sup>43</sup> Linda Nicoll, *The Great War: Dundee and the Home Front* (Dundee: Friends of Dundee City Archives, 2018), 14-15.

at the war's end. This was evident in Dundee in the case of tram conductors, where 21 women were taken on in March 1917, mostly rural domestic servants, not from Dundee itself.<sup>44</sup> Similarly with railway clerks, with perhaps seventy jobs given to women during the war (out of 135), but with the number falling back to ten out of 268 by 1920.<sup>45</sup>

Jute continued to dominate women's work. Whilst the war had significant impact on production of the textile in the city, because of its strategic significance jute continued to be produced on a large scale, and overwhelmingly, indeed increasingly, by women workers. A UK-wide survey of the use of labour in the war in all textile industries shows that the *proportion* of women rose from 58 to 67 per cent, but with no overall increase in numbers, made up of a fall in cotton balanced by a rise elsewhere. Up to January 1918 there was a substitution of about 60,000 women for men across the sector, but there is no discussion of the specifics of jute.<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> *Advertiser* 29 March 1917. There was considerable resistance to women working on the trams, and the opposition to these was only overcome when the supply of discharged soldiers dried up: *People's Journal* 3 February 1917.

<sup>45</sup> Neil Glen, "'Of Myth and Men". Dundee women's experience working and organising for change on Juteopolis through the Great War and after' (Unpublished MA dissertation, University of Dundee, 1997).

<sup>46</sup> *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry*, Cmd 135, Parliamentary Papers, 1919. Appendices in Cmd. 167.

The best, if partial, information for jute arises from a detailed census in some firms related to a dispute over whether to use short-time working or cuts in jobs in response to reductions in imported raw materials in 1917. These reductions followed opposition by the jute employers to a proposed complete cessation of raw jute shipments. They pointed out that imports were down to 24,000 tons a month in 1917 and to 16,000 in January 1918, and that no exports were going out. Stocks were down to 45,000 tons. They said that they needed 13,000 tons a month for sandbags and sacks for foodstuffs, and 3,000 for other military needs.<sup>47</sup>

Table 2 suggests that in this company total employment peaked in 1917 before raw material controls further cut back output. It also shows the unsurprising pattern of loss of men focussed on the military age group, whilst the strongest recruitment of women was amongst younger age groups.

Table 2 Gender composition of jute workers in Bowbridge works, 1914 to 1918

	Male Under 18	Male Over 18	Proportion by gender	Female under 18	Male over 18	Proportion by gender
Oct 1914	131	229	28%	120	569	72%
April 1915	105	199		123	572	

---

<sup>47</sup> TNA: CAB 24/43/54 War Cabinet Secretary of State for War 'Cessation of shipments of jute' 27 February 1918.



April 1916	109	150		140	554	
April 1917	150	118		151	626	
May 1918	123	101		151	574	
Nov 1918	109	95	22%	171	549	78%

Source: Dundee University Archives MS66/IV/8/27 Grimond papers, 'Numbers employed in Bowbridge Works (1907-1919)'.

Table 3 suggests that pre-war there was relatively little gendered *horizontal* division of labour, but the most striking wartime change was how in what had been the largest

male preserve, calendering (a process of smoothing and finishing the material), women were able to make a major advance.<sup>48</sup>

Table 3. Employment at Cox's jute works, 1914 and 1917

	<u>July 1914</u>	<u>April 1917 = peak</u>
Batching	92	134
Preparing	498	503
Spinning	572	552
Spinning		
Bleaching/dyeing	8	18
Calendering	1	67
Labourers	0	7
<b>Total women</b>	2056	2298
<b>(Total men)</b>	1314	765

Source: DUA MS66/II/10/29 Cox's 'Census of labour, April 1917'.

---

<sup>48</sup> The secretary of the calenderer's union said that 1,600-2,000 of his 3,000 members had gone to fight the war. The other main male monopoly was tenting, and here there seems to have been little change—the union saying women 'won't do tenting'; TNA: NATS 1/1178 Meeting of representatives of the jute industry, 15 December 1917, 6.

Overall, Tables 2 and 3 suggest a clear displacement of men by women in the jute industry, the union estimated the proportion going from 75 to 80-90%'.<sup>49</sup> This displacement took place despite employers claims about the irreplaceability of men workers, and that substitution had gone as far as possible, a case they frequently made at Munitions tribunals.<sup>50</sup> Similar views were put forward by John Sime, the Secretary of the DDUJFW, who pressed for jute to be classed as a protected occupation, saying that so many men were being taken away 'machinery has had to be put off, with the result that female workers are being thrown idle'.<sup>51</sup>

After the initial dislocation when the war began demand for labour in jute was strong. Even when later in the war cuts in raw material supplies necessitated output reduction, this enhanced bargaining position helped to deliver a 40 hour (4-day week) from March 1918 with little wage cutting.<sup>52</sup> There was some competition with jute from the wages in the new munitions factories, which were attractive to women workers, though the numbers in the city were always small compared with those in textiles.<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>49</sup> TNA: TNA: NATS 1/1178 Meeting of representatives of the jute industry 15 December 1917, 4.

<sup>50</sup> *Advertiser* 30 March 1917; *Advertiser* 12 April 1917.

<sup>51</sup> *Guide* July 1917; the same sentiment can be found in the December *Guide*.

<sup>52</sup> In the pre-war period short-time working was recurrent, but went along with wage reductions.

<sup>53</sup> Jute employers tried to find ways to prevent women 'voting with their feet' and moving to jobs in munitions: *People's Journal* 24 February 1917. At the end of the

The National Shell Factory recorded 325 women at October 1918, but this may have been past the peak. At 1 March 1918, 544 women and 143 men were recorded at work on shells in Dundee. In addition, Acetone employed perhaps 40 women.<sup>54</sup> These numbers may be contrasted with the 15,000 workers (mainly women) employed at the National Filling Station at Georgetown near Paisley, which unsurprisingly had a big impact on the labour market.<sup>55</sup>

This means that Dundee's labour market for women was again atypical. Not only were there no great numbers of domestic workers to act as a 'reservoir' for attraction into employment in munitions, but because jute was regarded as a strategic industry, there was at most only small movement from textiles into the sector which in many other parts of Britain saw the most significant increase in employment for women workers.<sup>56</sup>

The supply of labour was added to by an *influx* of workers into Dundee from other parts of Scotland, most notably 2,000 'fishergirls' from the North East Coast, where North Sea herring fishing was disrupted by the war. They filled some of the jobs in

---

war it was noted how well paid munitions work was compared with all other occupations available to women: *Courier* 30 December 1918.

<sup>54</sup> TNA: MUN 5/98/350/1. Munitions Council Paper and Tables on estimated displacement of male and female labour on reduction of munitions programme, 1918. For details of these munitions works: Nicoll, *The Great War*, 42-44.

<sup>55</sup> Catriona Macdonald, *The Radical Thread: Political Change in Scotland. Paisley Politics, 1885-1924* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2000), 209-210.

<sup>56</sup> Braybon, *Women Workers*.

munitions. Their presence was responded to by hostility by some members of the DDUFW, who attacked them as ‘blacklegs’.<sup>57</sup> Parallel to this was an attack on munitions girls as ‘aliens’.<sup>58</sup> Partly offsetting this inflow, the city also saw women leaving to find munitions work in England, though no data on the scale of this migration seems to exist.

### Outside the mill

Wartime industrial relations in Dundee were turbulent, with considerable strife as workers sought to sustain their real wages in the face of big price increases. The biggest strike of the war in jute was in 1916.<sup>59</sup> This was an official strike called by the DDUFW and other jute unions, but some of the activity surrounding it is reminiscent of that noted (and complained about) in Walker’s account of the pre-war years. In March 1916 the newspapers reported ‘bands of young women parading the principle thoroughfares. Many of them are dressed up with paper hats of various hues, while one old woman was highly delighted that she was allowed to hold aloft a doll perched on a stick’.<sup>60</sup> Apparently the war had not completely suppressed the *carnavalesque* atmosphere of nineteenth-century juteopolis labour disputes. But undoubtedly official

---

<sup>57</sup> *Guide* July 1916; see the response to these attacks in the August issue.

<sup>58</sup> *Guide* Nov 1916 and December 1917.

<sup>59</sup> Walker, *Juteopolis*, 84-87.

<sup>60</sup> *Courier* 28 March 1916.

trade unionism became much more significant in the war, with unions like the DDUJFW acting as transmission mechanisms for their members into wider roles on a much bigger scale than in peacetime. We can see this happening for women during the War both in politics, in relation to the expansion of the role of the state, or in relation to ‘civil society’ organizations.

The DDUJFW was easily the most important union in city and grew rapidly during the war, with a peak membership in 1920. This membership of around 20,000 in a city whose total population was 170,000 meant it represented ‘albeit briefly, a formidable aggregation of power’.<sup>61</sup> Membership as before was predominantly female, and as noted women’s role in the union was entrenched from its foundation, with fifty per cent of committee members, and this rule kept to during war.<sup>62</sup> Undoubtedly the key role in the union continued to be played by Sime, the President at the union’s foundation, and later the paid Secretary.<sup>63</sup> But women’s role expanded as the union increased in size, with, for example both the vice-chair and Treasurer being women from May 1918, and it became usual for delegations to be equal in gender terms.<sup>64</sup> Jeanie Spence, the Vice-President, chaired many of the union’s wartime Committee meetings.

---

<sup>61</sup> Walker *Juteopolis*, 395.

<sup>62</sup> DCA: GD/JF/1/1 DDUJFW general meeting, 28 June 1917, 25 September 1919.

<sup>63</sup> Walker, *Juteopolis*,

<sup>64</sup> For example, DCA: GD/JF/1/9 DDUJFW general meeting 15 May, 12 June 1917.

In 1915 there were three women and two men delegates to a Labour Representation Committee (hereafter LRC) meeting to protest at the increased cost of living.<sup>65</sup> Both representatives to the Committee appointed in May 1918 were women, so even before achieving the franchise the parliamentary politics on the left were being influenced by women's actions. Trade unions were a key route into Labour party politics, and a branch of the Women's Labour League was formed in September 1917.<sup>66</sup> The evidence suggests that women were perhaps less well represented when issues were explicitly those of industrial relations rather than those with wider connotations. For example, in the negotiations on hours women made up only one from four in the DDUJFW, one from three amongst the calenderers, zero out of four from the power-loomers.<sup>67</sup>

---

<sup>65</sup> DCA:GD/JF/1/16 DDUJFW general meeting February 1915.

<sup>66</sup> *Guide* September 1917. Mary Brooksbank, who became Dundee's most famous woman communist (though later expelled from the Party), was not a trade union activist: Siobhan Tolland, "'Jist ae wee woman'" - Dundee, the Communist Party and the feminisation of Socialism in the life and works of Mary Brooksbank' (Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Aberdeen, 2005).

<sup>67</sup> DCA: DD/JF/1/2 DDUJFW general meeting 15 August 1919 (the last two of these had very few women members). On women's role in the Labour party elsewhere in Scotland see Jim Smyth, *Labour in Glasgow, 1896-1936: Socialism, Suffrage, Sectarianism* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2000). On women in Scottish politics more broadly, Catriona Burgess, 'Count up to twenty-one. Scottish women in formal politics 1918-1990' in Breitenbach and Thane, *Women and Citizenship*, 45-61.

A well-known feature of the war is the expansion of the state, especially in labour matters. This gave opportunities for women, usually again via the trade unions, to expand their roles. For example, as advisers to the local labour exchange, when a women's advisory committee was created.<sup>68</sup> Or as four out of fourteen employee members of the Jute Trade Board when it was created in 1919, with two on the (smaller) reconstructed Board 1921.<sup>69</sup>

It is easier to find evidence of women's enhanced role than it is to show that this role led to a higher priority being given to women's interests. One argument used against conscription by the union was that it would increase women's unemployment-but this could be regarded as a purely opportunist rhetoric.<sup>70</sup> The DDUJFW argued for equal

---

<sup>68</sup> TNA: LAB2/327/ED27615/1918 Meeting of Dundee local advisory committee, 11 February 1918. When it became clear the unions were appointing women to these roles, the employers decided they should replace the men previously nominated by women.

<sup>69</sup> TNA: LAB 2/237 Meeting with DDUJFW 20 June 1918. Four out of fourteen union representatives on the Trade Board were women, three from Dundee (Mrs. M. Nary, Miss J. Spence, Miss J. Steele), and one from Aberdeen: *Guide* December 1919.

<sup>70</sup> *Guide* December 1917; similar argument at DCA: GD/JF/1/2 DDUJFW committee meeting 2 November 1915.



pay, and this was formally agreed July 1915, but the employers said it didn't apply to wartime increases <sup>71</sup> This led to protests over differential rises in 1917. <sup>72</sup>

A whole new arena of activity was opened-up when the war eventually led to a national scheme of consumer control and rationing, under a Ministry of Food. <sup>73</sup> This arose as a central government response to widespread discontent over the cost of living, and to nationwide political agitation. <sup>74</sup> But this national policy was underpinned by widespread local action, encouraged by the War Emergency:

---

<sup>71</sup> DCA:GD/JF 1/9 DDUJFW committee meeting 22 June, 5 July 1915; GD/JF/1/2 DDUJFW general meeting 18 November 1917, 5 August 1918; GD/JF/1/10 DDUJFW general meeting 6 August 1918: *Guide* May 1917, November 1917, September 1918.

<sup>72</sup> DCA: GD/JF/1/2 DDUJFW general meeting 18 November 1917, 5 August 1918.

<sup>73</sup> L. Margaret Barnett, *British Food Policy During the First World War* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1985); William Beveridge, *British Food Control* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1928).

<sup>74</sup> Royden Harrison, 'The War Emergency Workers' National Committee' in *Essays in Labour History 1886-1923*, eds. Asa Briggs and John Saville (London: Macmillan, 1971), 211-259. David Swift, 'Labour and the War Emergency: the Workers' National Committee during the First World War' *History Workshop Journal* 81, no.1 (2016), 84-105. Food riots seems to have been confined to mining areas in otherwise rural districts: Anthony Coles, 'The moral economy of the crowd: some twentieth century food riots' *Journal of British Studies* 18, no.1 (1978), 157-176.

Workers' National Committee' (hereafter WE:WNC), and this action was very substantial in Dundee, especially in the areas of food and rents food.

Some of this early consumer-oriented agitation was closely linked to the DDUJFW. For example, in February 1915, three women and two men were appointed as delegates to the LRC to protest at increase in the cost of living.<sup>75</sup> A 'Special Committee' concerned with food supply and prices had been established in late 1916, and met with representatives of traders and the LRC.<sup>76</sup> Its discussions ranged widely, covering not only food but also key commodities like coke. Much of Dundee's food came from local sources, so that, for example, discussion of relaxing the controls governing pig and poultry keeping noted that there were 147 piggeries in the city, with 804 pigs.<sup>77</sup> It is notable that from the beginning Councillor Edwin Scrymgeour, later a victor in the 1922 election, was highly active in this area by, for example, pressing for relaxation of game laws through to calling for municipal shops to supply potatoes. The Dundee Trades Council (hereafter DTC) was also active in pressing for more controls, for example over sugar supplies.<sup>78</sup>

---

<sup>75</sup> DCA GD/JF/1/8 DDUJFW general meeting 16 Feb 1915.

<sup>76</sup> Dundee Central Library: Local History Collection (hereafter DCL: LHC) Minutes of Town Council 8 November 1916, 51-2.

<sup>77</sup> DCL: LHC Minutes of Town Council 1 February 1917, 317-8.

<sup>78</sup> DCL: LHC Minutes of Town Council 1 February 1917, 313; 23 March 1917, 454-6.

In April 1917 the DTC organised a public meeting with the LRC and the local shipbuilding and engineering unions calling on the government to take over entire control of the ‘production and distribution of the necessities of life’, and calling on the Council to petition for this. The Council had already agreed with the Board of agriculture a scheme for the allocation and maximum prices of potatoes.<sup>79</sup>

A meeting of the Special Food Committee in May 1917 supported the idea of setting-up a Food Control Committee, partly in response to pressure from central government concerned with labour unrest, partly in the light of the local manifestations of that discontent. One of its first discussions was about the desirability of establishing communal kitchens, one of the ideas being pushed by local labour organizations.<sup>80</sup> Local actions were linked to national activity: in June 1917 there were three women and three men delegates to a Conference on National Food Supply, held in the city.<sup>81</sup>

Local Food Control Committees (hereafter FCCs) were one of the key initiatives of the Ministry of Food in the summer of 1917. Initially these were made up mainly of tradesmen and farmers, but the Ministry insisted that there be one woman and one labour representative.<sup>82</sup> The Dundee one was established in August 1917. Under

---

<sup>79</sup> DCL: LHC Minutes of Town Council 5 April 1917, p.538; Meeting of Special Food Committee 24 April 1917, 596-9; *Prohibitionist*, 31 March, 7 April 1917.

<sup>80</sup> DCL: LHC Meeting of Special Food Committee 11 May 1917, 657-8, 14 June 1917 781-3.

<sup>81</sup> DCL: LHC Minutes of Town Council 12 June 1917.

<sup>82</sup> Barnett, *British Food Policy*, 115,126-7.

instruction from the Ministry of Food, its remit was to urge economising in food consumption, as well as applying regulations. The Council initially rejected the idea that trade unions and co-operatives be allowed to nominate members, but conceded this point the following month under pressure from central government.<sup>83</sup> The initial view of Lord Provost Don was 'Labour must be fully represented on the Committee, but he took up the ground that they all represented labour, and that no Councillor was entitled to say that he represented labour or capital any more than another'.<sup>84</sup>

Labour's unsuccessful calls for more representatives on the FCC eventually leads to their temporary withdrawal, and an inquiry into this by a Divisional Commissioner from Edinburgh. Labour wanted FCCs to have a majority of their members from external organizations, but the Council said it was legally bound to have a majority.<sup>85</sup> Initially there was one woman on the FCC, but with greater involvement in the complex of sub-committees that soon proliferated, with the Food Economy sub-committee having its own women's subcommittee convened by Miss Kynock, initially the only woman on the FCC.<sup>86</sup>

---

<sup>83</sup> DCL: LHC Minutes of Town Council 9 August 1917, 657-8, 14 September 1917, 1138; *Courier*, 27 August 1917; *People's Journal* 9 September 1917 says Jas Gordon, W. M. Crooks and John Sime added.

<sup>84</sup> *Courier* 10 August 1917.

<sup>85</sup> *People's Journal* 19 October 1918, 16 November 1918; *Courier* 13 November 1918; *Advertiser* 28 October 1918.

<sup>86</sup> DCL: LHC First Meeting of FCC 4 September 1917, 1109-1110; *Prohibitionist* 11 August 1917: in the first six months of their existence the FCC and its sub-committees

The activities of the FCC emphasize the fact that ‘consumption’ issues had become central to labour politics in a context where price rises and shortages were the biggest immediate threat to working class standards of life. The composition and actions of the FCC were a source of much dispute throughout its existence, until it was abolished in 1920.<sup>87</sup> The Trades Council and the LRC, in alliance with Scrymgeour and the small number of Labour Councillors constantly pushed for a more interventionist stance, including municipal control of key products and communal kitchens.<sup>88</sup> The DDUJFW was prominent in supporting these arguments, with Sime, along with Crooks from the co-ops and James Gordon from the DTC members of the Committee.<sup>89</sup>

Though the FCC was male dominated, it did include specific representation of ‘women’s interests’ as well as those of labour.<sup>90</sup> When a new committee was established in Dundee just as the war ended in November 1918, it consisted of sixteen

---

met over sixty times: DCL: LHC Meeting of Town Council 7 February 1918, appendix 339-342.

<sup>87</sup> DCL: LHC Minutes of Town Council 8 November 1920, 135.

<sup>88</sup> *Advertiser* 10 and 13 August 1917 and 7 September 1917; *Courier* 14 August 1917; *Telegraph* 6 Sep. 1917; *Courier* 3 Sep. 1918. Scrymgeour was highly active on this issue, being a Council member with responsibilities for regulation of the grocery trade.

<sup>89</sup> *Guide* September 1917.

<sup>90</sup> *Courier* 30 September 1918.

people, ten from the Council, two to represent women's interests, three Labour representatives. and one person from the Co-ops. The Labour representatives were nominated by the LRC, the ILP and the Dundee Trades Council, while the two women came from 'the two textile societies and the National Union of Women Workers'.<sup>91</sup> Thus the women were clearly there to represent working women not 'housewives'. Indeed, the terminology of 'housewives', while not entirely absent, was unusual in this period, a contrast with some of the experience of the Second World War.<sup>92</sup>

While political battles were being fought over the FCC, alongside this body, and encouraged by the WE:WNC a Food Vigilance Committee (hereafter FVC) was established, which later mutated into a Consumers League.<sup>93</sup> The FVC was an unofficial, labour movement based body that had a bigger role for women than in the local FCC. As elsewhere, the FVC appears to have given more space to women than the official and male dominated FCC. The DDUJFW appointed two men and two women to the FVC in 1917, two women and one man to the Consumers League in

---

<sup>91</sup> DCL: LHC Town Council meeting 23 October 1918; *Courier* 4 October 1918.

<sup>92</sup> Hunt, 'Politics of food', 19-20; 'Housewives' was used when Dundee Council set up an anti-profiteering committee in 1917, and one councillor moved that half of its members be ladies: 'to make it a success, they wanted good, practical housewives from various sections of the community': *People's Journal*, 27 September 1917.

<sup>93</sup> TNA: PRO 30/69/1833 Ramsay Macdonald Papers, WE:WNC 'Food Vigilance Committee' June 1917. These committees were widespread in Britain: Hunt, 'Politics of food', 14-15.

1918. Three women were sent to a League meeting in September 1918.<sup>94</sup> The League, while strongly supported by the union, was seen as aimed particularly at women.<sup>95</sup> An advert for the League in April 1918 was characteristically headed '20,000 women wanted'.<sup>96</sup>

In seeking to understand the dynamics of this new consumer politics, we can start with Frank Trentmann's argument that a major transformation in such politics took place across the war symbolised by a focussing on milk as a key commodity, rather than bread which historically had played a pivotal role. Whereas the issues surrounding bread had focussed largely on price, the supply of milk brought more complex issues concerning purity and distribution as well as how much the consumer had to pay. In his view the milk crisis towards the end of the war 'cast a shadow over the entire liberal system of markets and trade that had ruled before the war.'<sup>97</sup> In doing so it encouraged a more collectivist political response as the route to effective regulation of this commodity.

---

<sup>94</sup> DCA: GD/JF/1/9 DDUJFW committee meeting 2 October 1917; GD/JF/1/10 committee meeting 17 September 1918.

<sup>95</sup> *Guide* March 1918.

<sup>96</sup> *Guide* April 1918.

<sup>97</sup> Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation*, 200; Trentmann, 'Wealth versus welfare: the British left between free trade and national political economy before the First World War' *Historical Research* 70, no.1 (1997), 70-98.

If we approach the consumer politics of wartime Dundee in this light, we can see that indeed the ‘liquid politics’ of milk did come to play a central role. This is not to say that issues over the supply and price of bread were absent. Indeed, bread was a fraught political issue because the bakery workers formed one of the strongest trade unions in the city, so those seeking to regulate the commodity had to negotiate around multiple issues, including baker’s wages. Scrymgeour was chair of the bread sub-committee of the FCC and had to try and conciliate between the demand by bakers for higher wages and the demands to keep its price in check. In the summer of 1918 there was a strike by the bakers in pursuit of a wage demand in which the sub-committee unsuccessfully sought to mediate. When the strike was over the price of bread was raised, and the Consumers’ League protested that this was unnecessary to cover increases in baker’s wages. The issue became so heated over allegations that the Council was siding with employers in these disputes that it led to the temporary withdrawal of the Labour members from the FCC in August 1918.<sup>98</sup>

But alongside these battles over bread, late in the war milk supply rose to unprecedented prominence. It was a national issue from 1917, when a Committee under Lord Astor was set up and, following this, a central Milk Control Board was created.<sup>99</sup> But much was left to local initiative. In Dundee arguments about milk are evident from 1916. A key policy proposal from the left was for municipalisation of

---

<sup>98</sup> *Prohibitionist* 29 June, 13 July, 24 August 1918.

<sup>99</sup> National issue of milk in ‘Committee on Production and Distribution of Milk’ Cd. 9095 Parliamentary Papers, 1918, and papers in TNA: MAF60/472, ‘Milk Control’ 1917-1922; Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation*, 202-203.



the milk supply. Scrymgeour raised issue of milk supply by the Council to hospital, children, and if possible, the general community.<sup>100</sup> In April 1917 the DDUJFW journal was talking of a ‘Dundee milk scandal’.<sup>101</sup> In May 1917 a local milk supplier, Batchelors, was arguing that it could not supply at the prevailing controlled prices, and telling the Public Health Committee that the Council should take over its role.<sup>102</sup> Batchelors became part of a recurrent argument about the municipalisation of milk, repeating their argument that controlled prices made their company unviable, and that they should be allowed to sell-off their dairy.<sup>103</sup>

Many argued that municipalisation was the answer, and this became a recurrent objective of local left-wing politics for the rest of the war, though not one that was achieved.<sup>104</sup>

Non-socialists were convinced that this was the way forward, but it is notable that less partisan voices such as the *People’s Journal* published a great deal on the topic and, for example in January 1917, arguing that the city’s dairying system needs re-

---

<sup>100</sup> *Prohibitionist* 7 October 1916.

<sup>101</sup> *Guide* April 1917.

<sup>102</sup> *Prohibitionist* 12 May 1917.

<sup>103</sup> *Prohibitionist* 23 March 1918.

<sup>104</sup> In September 1918 the *Guide* argued that despite changes a year previously in the make-up of the FCC, this had little impact. For example, discussion of municipalisation of the milk trade, *Courier* 10 December 1918. Other issues relating to milk: prices: *Courier* 3 August 1918 and 17 September 1919; security of supply: *Courier* 7 June 1918; costs of distribution: *Telegraph* 16 May 1919.

organizing, and that if this didn't happen, there was a case for municipal intervention.<sup>105</sup> This continued into post-war period, with the *Journal* arguing in August and September 1919 that the trebling of the milk price since 1914 had put it out of reach of many children.<sup>106</sup>

A local Milk Control Committee was created, and in February 1918 the Committee reported that 'the question of Dundee's milk supply promises again to develop features which will give it a prominent place in local municipal politics'.<sup>107</sup> Pressure on milk eventually led to a Government committee of enquiry into Dundee's milk supply.<sup>108</sup> In June 1918 the *Advertiser* suggested that the average consumption per head of milk in Dundee was half a cup, and in particular argued that children were not getting enough.<sup>109</sup> The same month the paper argued that 'no one can pretend that the milk consumption, as revealed in the Food Committee figures, does not fall far short of what is desirable for the welfare of the consumers'.<sup>110</sup> The question of milk was not in any intelligible sense solely a 'women's issue'. But it was argued that in Dundee the peculiarity of extensive married women's labour supply gave milk issue special resonance: 'So long as the staple industry of the city depended upon the working

---

<sup>105</sup> *People's Journal* 13 January 1917, also 27 January 1917, 14 April 1917, 5 May 1917.

<sup>106</sup> *People's Journal*, 30 August, 20 September 1919, 6 December 1919.

<sup>107</sup> *Advertiser* 12 February 1918.

<sup>108</sup> *Prohibitionist* 27 April, 4 May 1918. *People's Journal* 27 April.

<sup>109</sup> *Advertiser* 7 June, 8 June 1918.

<sup>110</sup> *Advertiser* 10 June 1918.

mothers, and the cow was the foster mother of the child, it behoved the Town Council to do everything in their power to protect the milk supply.’<sup>111</sup>

Alongside the supply and price of food, the most contentious wartime ‘consumer’ issue in Dundee was rent. This of course was not unique: struggles over rent have long been recognised as one of the key issues in wartime discontent in several parts of Britain, but especially on Clydeside.<sup>112</sup> But such struggles were also important in Dundee, where there was a pre-war precedent in the rent strike of 1912.<sup>113</sup> Before the war Dundee had exceptionally overcrowded housing even by Scottish standards, but the cessation of housebuilding and the influx of workers underpinned a marked worsening of the situation in the war years. This was an issue around which trade unions and socialist activists were able to effectively mobilise in the city from 1915 onwards.<sup>114</sup>

The DDUJFW established a rents committee in 1915 partly to help with legal assistance for rent strikers. Benefits were paid to workers who left work to help prevent evictions and money was given to Rents committee to provide legal assistance

---

<sup>111</sup> Councillor Fraser, reported in *People’s Journal* 5 May 1917.

<sup>112</sup> Melling, *Rent Strikes*.

<sup>113</sup> Ann Petrie, *The 1915 Rent Strikes. An East Coast Perspective* (Dundee: Abertay Historical Society, 2008).

<sup>114</sup> Petrie, *The 1915 Rent Strikes*, 15-16, 30-38.

for rent strikers.<sup>115</sup> The strikes of 1915 encouraged a new ‘politics of housing’ in the city. For example, the Feb 1917 *Guide* says out of rent agitation came Dundee labour Housing committee, formed at beginning of 1915, gives housing advice and support. Housing issues figured prominently thereafter, and broader issues of housing provision were central to local (as well as national) politics around end of war. Post-war the DDUJFW continued to focus attention on the issue. In 1920 they called for a one day strike in support of ‘rent protest day’ (23 August 1920), against rent increases under new Rent Act.<sup>1</sup> A suggestion of the political passions aroused by the issue is in the resignation from his membership of the union by its President, Duff, because he worked on that rent-strike day: General meeting 23 Sep 1921

In relation to the rent strikes, Ann Petrie suggests that ‘for a city that was so dominated by women there is little direct evidence to suggest that women led the battle in Dundee’.<sup>116</sup> This contrasted with Glasgow, where women leaders emerged. Nevertheless, as she notes, there was evidence of widespread support from women for the strike, and it was commonly framed as an issue of especial interest to women, partly because of course, many men were away at the front, leaving women to cope with rent increases. For a typical framing in this way we can cite the ‘Town Council notes’ by ex-baillie John Reid ‘At the next meeting of the Housing and Town Planning committee, I am to recommend the co-option of a practical housewife to

---

<sup>115</sup> DCA: GD JF 1/1 general meeting 28 October 1915; other union activities on rents in 1915 are discussed in GD/JF 1/9 committee meetings 28 September, 26 October.

<sup>116</sup> Petrie, *The 1915 Rent Strikes*, 37.

assist us in preparing future Housing schemes. Women have had too little to say in the planning of houses, and it is largely a women's question'.<sup>117</sup>

Alongside women's participation in the new, multi-dimensional consumer politics of wartime Dundee, some other political and civic activities also thrived.

The coming of war led suffragists/ettes into many diverse wartime roles.<sup>118</sup> In Dundee activity related to the suffrage was largely suspended (though it revived later in the war). The Dundee Women's Suffrage Society continued to meet but focused its attention on war relief work.<sup>119</sup> Bodies specifically for relief were also created, notably the Dundee Women's War Relief Committee.<sup>120</sup> One of their successes was the organization of a communal kitchen serving 2,000 portions a week; those running it suggested that 'the demand arises not so much from the war conditions as from the normal conditions of work and domestic arrangements'.<sup>121</sup>

Anti-war politics were especially important in Dundee, not least because in 1922 the election winners were both men who had opposed the war. During the war conscientious objection on a significant scale went on alongside very successful

---

<sup>117</sup> *Guide* February 1920; Petrie, *The 1915 Rent Strikes*, 38.

<sup>118</sup> Alberti, *Beyond Suffrage*.

<sup>119</sup> Watson, 'Daughters', p.202; *Courier* 5 August 1916.

<sup>120</sup> Leneman, *A Guid Cause*, 210, 266; Nicoll, *Great War*, 13-14; Mary Henderson, previously secretary of the Suffrage Society became secretary of this new Committee

<sup>121</sup> *Advertiser* 14 June 1918.

recruitment into the army, especially into the Black Watch.<sup>122</sup> There was especially widespread agitation against conscription, which joined conscientious objectors with those who regarded compulsory military service as a violation of fundamental liberties. The Dundee Joint Committee against Conscription reputedly attracted 1,500 Dundonians to its meeting in 1916.<sup>123</sup> When Scrymgeour fought Churchill in a by-election in 1917, his campaign focused primarily on a pro-peace platform—and given the context, and the restricted franchise, achieved the support of a respectable 28 per cent of voters.<sup>124</sup> The election helped to transform Scrymgeour from being commonly viewed before the war as a cranky anti-alcohol fanatic, to some-one with a much more broadly supported stance combining ‘a concoction of pacifism, socialism and prohibitionism.’<sup>125</sup> But Scrymgeour was undoubtedly Scotland’s leading

---

<sup>122</sup> Baxter and Kenefick, ‘Labour politics’, 203-205; Kenefick, ‘War resisters and anti-conscription in Scotland: an ILP perspective’ in *Scotland and the Great War* eds. Catriona Macdonald and Elaine McFarland (Edinburgh: Tuckwell, 1998), 59-80; Julie Danskin, *A City at War. The 4<sup>th</sup> Black Watch Dundee’s Own* (Dundee: Abertay Historical Society, 2013).

<sup>123</sup> William Kenefick, ‘The impact of war and revolution-Dundee 1914-1918’ in *Tayside at War*, eds. William Kenefick and Derek Patrick (Dundee, Abertay Historical Society, 2018), 86-87.

<sup>124</sup> Kemp, ‘Drink’, 171-173; *Prohibitionist* 22 July; *Advertiser* 24 April, 27 April, 28 April 1917. In rhetoric to be echoed in the 1922 election, Churchill implausibly compared Scrymgeour to Lenin: *Prohibitionist* 4 August 1917; Samantha Bannermann, “‘The Scottish Lenin’ or reluctant resister?: Edwin Scrymgeour and the First World War’. (Unpublished MA dissertation, Dundee University, 2011).

<sup>125</sup> Bannermann, “‘The Scottish Lenin’”, 25.

prohibitionist, and the issue of drink was an especially prominent one in the city.<sup>126</sup> Support for temperance was strong in Dundee, especially amongst women, and seems to have been strengthened by the war. Amongst women Liberals, concern about drinking was a persistent theme, with, for example, in December 1917 a meeting of the Women's Liberal Association stressed that 'all the more pressing social problems had drink as their leading factor.'<sup>127</sup>

Another body active in the city was the Union for Democratic Control, whose aims were primarily to do with achieving parliamentary control over hitherto secret diplomacy, but was also a pro-peace body—and one founded by E.D. Morel, alongside Scrymgeour, a victor in the 1922 election. While the UDC gained support from both men and women, Dundee women such as Agnes Husband played a prominent role.<sup>128</sup>

---

<sup>126</sup> Kemp, 'Drink', 144-222.

<sup>127</sup> *Advertiser* 17 Dec 1917; see Iain Donachie, 'World War One and the drink question' *Scottish Labour History Society Journal* 17, no.1 (1982), 19-26. Lloyd George had famously asserted that drink was more damaging to the war effort than German submarines: *Hansard* (House of Commons) vol. 81 col. 864, 29 April 1915.

<sup>128</sup> *Advertiser* 29 March 1917.

The financial situation of women whose husbands were away in the armed forces was a major welfare problem in the First World War.<sup>129</sup> It was another area where national concerns were matched by local initiatives, with, in August 1918, the setting up in Dundee of an Association on separation allowances. There were calls for action on separation allowances from the local Labour Representation Committee, and a new association to campaign on these allowances was set-up.<sup>130</sup>

Dundee women were widely involved in activities in support of or responding to the war. In the Liberal party there was a clear alliance with Unionists to encourage the war effort, including recruitment.<sup>131</sup> Women had played a big role in the Liberal party pre-war, with a separate association, and many were drawn into involvement in actions in support of the war, evidence of support for war. For example, they supported a March 1915 recruitment meeting organized by the 'ladies of the city' featuring Clementine Churchill and a range of other prominent women.<sup>132</sup>

### Towards 1922

---

<sup>129</sup> Though it was claimed, with no evidence, that these allowances had reduced married women's labour supply in the city: TNA: NATS 1/1178 'Report on jute industry' 5 February 1918, 2.

<sup>130</sup> *Guide* August 1918.

<sup>131</sup> DCA GD/SM1/1 Liberal Association Organization committee meetings, 28 August 1914, 24 November 1914

<sup>132</sup> *Advertiser* 10 March 1915.



The 1918 election, fought on a franchise that had trebled in size in Dundee, shows no obvious evidence of radical change resulting from the war. As across the rest of Britain, the electoral outcome was framed by the impact of the Unionist backing given to supporters of the Lloyd George Coalition. In Dundee this meant Winston Churchill, Liberal MP for the City since 1908, and Alexander Wilkie., the Labour member since 1906. Churchill and Wilkie achieved respectively 66 and 64 per cent of the votes cast against opposition from Scrymgeour and James Brown, an Independent Labour Party candidate. The turnout was very low at 47 per cent. Women outnumbered men amongst ‘resident voters’ (because many men were still absent in the armed forces), but with no evidence of any clear impact on the outcome of the (very recent) enfranchisement of women.<sup>133</sup> Equally, there is no evidence in this election that Churchill’s antagonistic relationship with suffragettes significantly affected his support from women. This was despite the fact that he had equivocated over the enfranchisement of women dating back to the early 1900s. In the Edwardian years he had ‘developed a very personal antipathy to women’s suffrage ever since the militants began interrupting his perorations’.<sup>134</sup>

---

<sup>133</sup> Donald Southgate, ‘Politics and representation in Dundee, 1832-1963’ in *The Third Statistical Account of Scotland. The City of Dundee* ed. J. M. Jackson (Arbroath: The Herald Press, 1979), 302, 308: ‘resident electors’ in October 1918 numbered 34,000 women, and 20,000 men. The total electorate comprised 47,502 men and 38,742 women: *Courier* 1 July 1918.

<sup>134</sup> G. Searle, *The Liberal Party. Triumph and Disintegration, 1886-1929* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2001), 118.

Parallel to the situation analysed by Mary Hilson in her study of the 1918 election in Plymouth, in Dundee consumer and food supply issues figured much less in the election campaigns than might have been expected given wartime developments.<sup>135</sup> Instead, a focus on the outcome of the war, and issues about reparations underpinned a conservative victory—even if, as in Dundee, the party labels were non-Conservative. ‘Dundee shared fully in the post-war hysteria which demanded that Germany pay for the war’.<sup>136</sup> Julie Gottlieb and Richard Toye suggest that the election of 1918 ‘would be a false start for women on the starting line of parliamentary politics.’<sup>137</sup> They are referring specifically to women’s candidatures, but the point could be made more broadly that it was not until the next general election, in 1922, that the expansion of the electorate, especially the extension of the franchise to women, could be said to have radically re-shaped British (or Dundee) politics.

In local electoral politics in the aftermath of the war there was greater advance for the Left, and also some for women. In the November 1919 elections Labour won eight new seats on Dundee Town Council, but none of the victors (and none of the candidates) were women. However, at the same time four women were elected to the Parish Council (of whom two were Labour - Agnes Husband and Mrs

---

<sup>135</sup> Mary Hilson, ‘Women voters and the rhetoric of patriotism in the general election of 1918’ *Women’s History Review* 10, no.2 (2002), 325-347.

<sup>136</sup> Walker, *Juteopolis*, 450.

<sup>137</sup> Gottlieb and Toye, *The Aftermath*, 6-7.

M.E.Gordon).<sup>138</sup> As noted previously, Agnes Husband was a pioneer member of the Parish Council in 1901, and was an important figure in Dundee's political and civic life, including being prominent in the Dundee Women Citizens Association (DWCA) (see below).

Pat Thane has argued that the difficulties of women in making much headway in party politics after 1918 went along with a proliferation of their activity in civic associations of many kinds (though she also notes that associational activity was also vibrant amongst men in this period.)<sup>139</sup> The biggest women's organization in inter-war Dundee was the DWCA, which was founded in 1918 in expectation of the franchise extension.<sup>140</sup> This was part of a wider movement in Scotland, but certainly flourished in Dundee, with 800 members in its first year.<sup>141</sup> Its early agenda

---

<sup>138</sup> *Guide* November 1919; Baxter and Kenefick, 'Labour politics', 205-206; Labour did not run a woman in Town Council elections until putting forward Annie Lamont in 1924.

<sup>139</sup> Thane, 'The impact of mass democracy on British political culture, 1918-1939' in Gottlieb and Toye, *Aftermath*, 54-69; also Helen McCarthy, 'Parties, voluntary associations and democratic politics in inter-war Britain' *Historical Journal* 50, no.4 (2007) 891-912.

<sup>140</sup> Watson, 'Daughters', 197-222.

<sup>141</sup> For other WCAs see, for example, Sue Innes, 'Constructing women's citizenship in the interwar period: the Edinburgh Women Citizen's Association' *Women's History Review* 13, no.4 (2004), 621-646 and Sarah Browne, *Making the Vote Count: The Arbroath Women's Citizens' Association, 1931-1945* (Dundee: Abertay Historical

unsurprisingly focussed on securing women's voting registration, but beyond that housing was a key question. When the Association organised a meeting to press the candidates in the 1918 election on issues deemed crucial, housing was top of the list—with temperance fourth and equal pay fifth.<sup>142</sup>

The end of the war did not mark a complete change in the context of political and civic life in Dundee. The issues surrounding the prices of commodities such as milk and housing continued in the post-war boom, which after an economic lull that followed the end of the war, ran from 1919 to 1920. On the question of milk, the *People's Journal* argued in August and September 1919 that the trebling of the milk price since 1914 had put it out of reach of many children.<sup>143</sup> Issues surrounding milk rumbled on even as recession and falling prices engulfed the city, with a report on milk supply published in the summer of 1921, and the Council voting against the acquisition of its own dairy (by 15 votes to 9) in April of that year.<sup>144</sup>

The severity of the slump from 1920 needs emphasizing: it was the deepest recession in twentieth century Britain, and was felt particularly strongly in Dundee as demand for jute goods, many used as sacking to transport commodities, was hit especially

---

Society, 2007); for the most detailed study of Scotland, Valerie Wright, 'Women's organizations and feminism in interwar Scotland' (Unpublished PhD dissertation, Glasgow University, 2008).

<sup>142</sup> Browne and Tomlinson, 'Dundee women', 112.

<sup>143</sup> *People's Journal*, 30 August, 20 September 1919, 6 December 1919.

<sup>144</sup> *Guide* June/July 1921; *Prohibitionist* 9 April 1921, 23 April 1921.

hard by the decline in global trade. There ensued 'a fall in values took place which in its rapidity, extent and duration surpassed all previous experiences'.<sup>145</sup> The unemployment that followed was unprecedented and led to major episodes of sometimes riotous 'street politics' in 1921, with a prominent role played by the Communist Party and the National Unemployed Workers Committee Movement. These activities were immediately successful in getting the Parish Council, which was at this time then responsible for unemployment relief, to pay what were initially illegal levels of benefit. But more broadly, these episodes stimulated a growing movement amongst the Labour party and the mainstream left away from the rowdy and riotous politics of pre-1914 Britain to a much more electorally-focussed strategy, in part as an attempt to distinguish themselves from the Communist Party.<sup>146</sup> Contemporary observers suggested that women played a prominent part in these events,<sup>147</sup>

---

<sup>145</sup> W.R. Scott, 'The jute industry in Scotland during the war' in *Rural Scotland During the War* eds. David Jones and John Day (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), 290.

<sup>146</sup> Malcolm Petrie, 'Public politics and traditions of popular protest: demonstration of the unemployed in Dundee and Edinburgh, c.1918-1939' *Contemporary British History* 27, no.4 (2013), 490-513 (the NUWCM became the National Unemployed Workers Movement (NUWM) in 1929).

<sup>147</sup> Walker, *Juteopolis*, 426-429.

The 1922 election was a landmark in Dundee's history, involving the defeat of Winston Churchill and the end of traditional Liberal hegemony in the city.<sup>148</sup> The reasons for this outcome have been much debated. The focus of most discussion has been Churchill's defeat, but we can equally focus on the reasons for Scymgeour and Morel's success. In part this was in line with a general movement to the Left in Scottish politics, with a much higher turnout suggesting the impact of the newly enfranchised men and women whose participation had been limited in 1918.<sup>149</sup> Because Dundee was a two-member seat, with (potentially) two votes per elector, we can use the data in Table 4 to see how complex voter affiliations could be. It is striking, for example, how many voters only used one vote, 'plumping' for Scrymgeour. Many Communist voters were willing to also back Morel, but not Scrymgeour.

- 
- <sup>148</sup> William Walker, 'Dundee's disillusionment with Churchill' *Scottish Historical Review* 49, no.1 (1970), 85-108; Tony Paterson (1980), *A Seat for Life* (Dundee: David Winter, 1980); Seth Thevoz, 'Winston Churchill's 1922 general election defeat in Dundee' (Unpublished M. Phil. dissertation, Kings College London, 2009); Jim Tomlinson, 'Churchill's defeat in Dundee, 1922, and the decline of liberal political economy' *Historical Journal* 68 no. 4 (2020), 980-1006.

<sup>149</sup> For the broader Scottish picture: Smyth, *Labour in Glasgow*; Burness, 'Count up to twenty-one'.

Table 4. Results of the 1922 election in Dundee.

	Votes	'Plumper' votes	Accompanying votes
E. Scrymgeour (Prohibitionist)	32,578	5,015	21,621 for Morel; 1,490 for Pilkington
E. D. Morel (Labour)	30,292	1,018	21,621 for Scrymgeour; 4,813 for Gallacher
D.J. Macdonald (Coalition Liberal)	22,244	252	16,798 for Churchill; 2,315 for Pilkington
W.S. Churchill (Coalition Liberal)	20,466	587	16,798 for Macdonald; 1,661 for Scrymgeour
R. Pilkington (Independent Liberal)	6,681	381	3,113 for Churchill or Macdonald; 1,630 for Morel
W. Gallacher (Communist)	5,906	128	4,813 for Labour; 699 for Scrymgeour

Source: Donald Southgate, 'Politics and representation' in Dundee' in *The Third Statistical Account of Scotland. The City of Dundee*, ed. J. Jackson (Arbroath: The Herald Press, Arbroath, 1979), 302.

Despite the dire economic conditions in Dundee, Churchill focussed his rhetoric on international issues, not least the anti-war positions of Morel (and William Gallacher, the Communist, both of whom had been imprisoned for their opposition), with less attention paid to Scrymgeour, though he too had opposed the war. Strikingly, Scrymgeour in particular gained considerable support from ex-servicemen, on whose

behalf he had worked assiduously both as a town Councillor and a Parliamentary candidate.<sup>150</sup>

Scrymgeour had been a long-standing supporter of women's suffrage. In his first parliamentary election address, in 1908, the opening words were of regret that he could not address his electors as 'Ladies and Gentlemen', before promising his support for adult suffrage free of property qualification.<sup>151</sup> This background was used to contrast his stance with Churchill's pre-war equivocations on the issue. In so far as the 1922 result was the effect of antipathy to Churchill, this was likely strengthened amongst women by these equivocations, which had attracted significant protest at the time.<sup>152</sup> Morel also made strong, specific appeals to women, not least to those working in the jute industry.<sup>153</sup> Morel's strongly internationalist politics were emphasized by his endorsement of the International Federation of Trade Unions manifesto 'Women of the World'.<sup>154</sup> Thevoz argues that a key to the defeat of Churchill was his opponents appeal to the ex-serviceman's vote (despite their anti-war stance), but he also suggests that Scrymgeour in particular polled well amongst 'mill

---

<sup>150</sup> Kemp, 'Drink', 187, 171-172.

<sup>151</sup> Kemp, 'Drink', 191.

<sup>152</sup> Churchill's anti-suffrage position contributed to his defeat in Manchester in 1908, just before he came to Dundee: Paul Addison, *Churchill on the Home Front* (London: Jonathon Cape, 1992), 64.

<sup>153</sup> *Guide* August 1921.

<sup>154</sup> *Guide* June, 1922.



girls', and this is supported by the evidence of a significant increase in his vote in 1929 after women's enfranchisement was extended to 21 to 30 year olds.<sup>155</sup>

It would be wrong to ascribe the outcome of the 1922 election solely to the women's vote. We simply do not have the data on how far there was a gendered pattern to voting. And that election has to be put in the context of a weakening of liberalism and a strengthening of socialistic politics across Scotland. But at a minimum we can point to suggestive evidence that the stances of the winning candidates on 'consumer' issues like food prices and rent, on the question of housing, on the franchise, and in Scrymgeour's case, on drink, matched the mood of women whose experience had been so strongly shaped by the war at home.

### Conclusions

By drawing women into a wider range of jobs, the war made Dundee even more of a 'women's town' in employment terms than it had been in peace. But because the city started from such a high level of women's employment there was much less of a change than in places where women's pre-war industrial employment had been on a much smaller scale. Nor was there a great movement of women out of domestic service. Thus the broadening of women's work into a wider range of industries, either on a temporary or permanent basis, is much less evident in Dundee than elsewhere.

---

<sup>155</sup> Thevoz, 'Winston Churchill', 39-40, drawing on Donald Southgate, 'Edwin Scrymgeour' in S. Lythe, John Ward and Donald Southgate, *Three Dundonians* (Dundee: Abertay Historical Society, 1968), 16-22; Kemp, 'Drink', 190-191.

But the war entrenched women's role in the jute labour market, in turn allowing some of them to build on their activity in a (much expanded) DDUJFW. This facilitated participation in locally important bodies like the Employment Exchange and the Trade Board.

Beyond the labour market, the war, followed by the extension of the franchise, encouraged a very wide range of women's civic activism. Some of this necessarily ended with the war, such as relief work, but much of it, sometimes in mutated form, continued. For example, activism around consumer issues, such as milk supply and especially housing provision outlasted the war. Towards the end of the war the role of the DWCA became especially important in drawing women into a new kind of enfranchised citizenship. The DWCA reflected many Dundee women's views in supporting temperance.<sup>156</sup> This was a major mobilising issue in the 1920s. Under the 1913 Temperance (Scotland) Act, polls were held in the city on three occasions in this decade on whether a local option to ban alcohol should be exercised.<sup>157</sup> On each occasion the proponents of a ban lost, though around one third of those voting were in

---

<sup>156</sup> *Advertiser* 29 April 1917.

<sup>157</sup> A peculiarity of the debate in Dundee was that Scrymgeour and his prohibitionist party were opposed to the 'no licence' option because, in their fundamentalist perception, it fell short of total prohibition: William Walker, 'The Scottish Prohibition Party and the millennium' *International Review of Social History* 18, no.3 (1973), 353-379.

favour (on 60-70 per cent turnouts), and there was strong circumstantial evidence that support was especially strong amongst women.<sup>158</sup>

It would be wrong to exaggerate the breadth of women's activism in the city. For example, there was, surprisingly, no branch of the Scottish Co-operative Women's Guild in Dundee until the 1920, while elsewhere in Scotland 201 branches existed by 1918, and this can be seen as linked to the continuing weakness of women's position in local socialist politics.<sup>159</sup> Liberalism waned amongst both men and women in Dundee waned after the 1922 defeat, though the 1923 general election was close run, and a 'National Liberal' was elected in 1931 and 1935. Dingle Foot won on these two occasions alongside the Conservative Florence Horsbrugh, who thereby became Dundee's first woman MP, holding the seat until 1945. This is in line with the evidence that women's activity in Unionist politics, already important before the war, continued to be entrenched after 1918.<sup>160</sup>

Some of the impetus to women's action was linked to the undoubted and under-recognised wartime surge of consumer-oriented politics. But we need to be careful

---

<sup>158</sup> *People's Journal*, 27 November 1926; but note that in Glasgow and Edinburgh the proportions voting 'no licence' were higher: Kemp, 'Drink', 305, 359.

<sup>159</sup> Baxter and Kenefick 'Labour politics', pp.209-210. The weakness of the Guild was also linked to the long-standing unwillingness of the Eastern Co-operative Society in the city to be involved in politics.

<sup>160</sup> On women in national Conservative and Unionist politics in this period, Thackeray, 'Home and politics'

about suggesting any simple relationship between women and consumerist forms of politics. The Dundee evidence bears out Karen Hunt's argument that 'The British politics of food offered women new formal and informal political spaces, created in response to the crisis of "total war".' But she cautions that women's participation was limited by the ambiguous understanding of who constituted a "consumer" and thus who could speak for the "ordinary housewife".<sup>161</sup> That ambiguity was also evident in Dundee, where women's activism saw them acting as either workers or women, but often as both simultaneously.

The functioning of the FCC in Dundee also bears out the argument made by Hannam and Hunt that to a degree the rising cost of living at the beginning of the war made rising prices less of a 'women's issue': 'Food has shifted, not least in socialists minds, from being a gender issue to one of class'.<sup>162</sup> Nevertheless, like involvement in trade unions, involvement in consumer activism could be a pathway into other forms of civic or political participation: 'the politics of food drew a wider range of women into local politicized structures. This could then be capitalized on when significant numbers of women were enfranchised in 1918'.<sup>163</sup>

---

<sup>161</sup> Hunt 'The politics of food', 9.

<sup>162</sup> Hannam and Hunt, *Socialist Women*, 146; see also Karen Hunt, 'Negotiating the boundaries of the domestic: British socialist women and the politics of consumption' *Women's History Review* 9, no.2 (2000), 389-410

<sup>163</sup> Hunt, 'The politics of food', 21.

