THE POLITICAL STRUCTURE
OF THE
WOLVERHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL SINCE 1900

by

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C.M.	Council Minutes	
E.&S.	Express and Star	
M.C.C.	Minutes of the Conservative Caucus	the same body
M.C.G.	Minutes of the Conservative Group	
M.L.G.	Minutes of the Labour Group	
M.L.L.P.	Minutes of the Local Labour Party	
M.M.C.	Minutes of the Management Committee of the West Wolverhampton Conservative Association	
M.R.S.	Minutes of the Wolverhampton (Penn Ward) Ratepayers' Society	
W.C.	Wolverhampton Chronicle	

ABSTRACT

The Political Structure of the Wolverhampton Borough Council since 1900

(Chapters 1 and 2) In 1900 parties did not contest municipal elections in Wolverhampton nor compel their members on the Council to vote together as blocks. All candidates, save the few Labour representatives, called themselves Independents, despite their well-known loyalties to the major national parties. Parties were not involved in the Council's political process, because their purpose was to gain and sustain support for an M.P. and not to have the Council implement a distinctive party municipal policy. Conservatives and Liberals shared the Parliamentary representation of the town and therefore had no incentive to fight municipal elections to assist their General Election campaigns. Their Councillors were a fairly homogeneous group, not seriously divided by economic or social issues. The divisions which occurred in the Council did not produce a constantly recurring cleavage between the same two blocks. Over each controversy there was a fresh coalition of members.

After 1900 parties impinged more and more on the Council. When it took over the responsibility for

education in 1903, the partisan and sectarian strife which had split the School Board was transferred to the Council, and the alliances formed over this topic persisted for others. When the sitting Conservative M.P. was ousted by the Labour candidate in 1906, the Conservatives began officially and systematically to contest municipal elections to aid their Parliamentary prospects. The local Labour Party evolved a municipal policy, and fought elections as a party and pressed its Councillors to act in concert to achieve its implementation. As the number of Labour members grew in the interwar years, the non-Labour members were forced to co-ordinate their tactics on the Council through an informal "caucus", which, after Labour had gained a majority in 1945, became more formal and committed to an alternative programme to Labour's. After 1948 the Conservatives urged that all non-Labour candidates should adopt the official Conservative label, and within 7 years all Independents had been eliminated from elections and the Council. In 1964 candidates at municipal elections are nominees of the major parties, and members of the Council are either Conservative or Labour.

This involvement of parties in municipal affairs has increased the amount of public participation in local government. Because the franchise has been considerably

widened, a higher proportion of the population are eligble to vote, and because more seats are contested, the electorate has more opportunities to use the vote. Growing party involvement has meant that even safe wards are fought to help the parties' Parliamentary chances. A far wider range of people become Councillors now than in 1900, for the Labour Party has been the vehicle for bringing to the Council groups which had previously not been represented.

(Chapter 3) In 1900 each ward had its own unique voting pattern. In 1964 the wards can be categorised into 3 types, each with a distinct socio-economic structure which correlates with its voting behaviour. Safe Conservative wards have little industry and are inhabited by middle class people in private houses. Safe Labour wards are industrial, where the working class live in Council houses or pre-1914 rented property. Marginal wards are of mixed social composition. The swing in municipal elections is now remarkably similar over the whole town both in general direction and size, and the share of the vote gained by the parties is the same as in a General Election. In 1900 there was not such uniformity; local issues and candidates significantly affected the result; and voting did not correlate so closely with economic status; religion was also a determinant.

Fewer Councillors now live and work in the wards they represent, and this is more true of Labour than Conservative members. Conservatives have nothing to correspond to Labour's Borough Party, responsible solely for municipal affairs and for drawing up a panel of approved candidates, to which Labour ward parties are restricted when selecting candidates. Conservative ward parties have more autonomy, and tend to select people from their own wards, while Labour ward parties, who have had the opportunity through the Borough Party of meeting people from other parts of the town tend not to select people from their own wards. Service to the party is the main criterion for selection as a Labour candidate, while Conservatives usually make their reputations in extra-party activities. These different selection processes have another significant consequence. Labour members are more devoted to their party than Conservatives to theirs, and they value more highly the involvement of party in municipal matters. In 1900 the conflict between wards produced many divisions on the Council; now the conflict has been subsumed by that between the parties.

(Chapter 4) The polarisation of the Council into two parties reflects a polarisation of the occupational composition of the Council. In 1900 it comprised a fairly

homogeneous group of manufacturers, professional men and shopkeepers. The latter have remained a constant element, but the first two have declined, replaced by working men, women and retired people, who are predominantly Labour, while the others are Conservative. (Chapter 5) These political and occupational groups occupy different social worlds too, for the members of each party belong to distinct sets of associations. There is less social intermingling of the Councillors than in 1900.

(Chapter 6) Complaints that the calibre of the Councillors has declined are old and have not always blamed parties as is the case today. It is hard to find objective criteria by which to assess a Councillor's quality. Both good and bad are to be found in all occupations, age groups and types of educational experience. A personal assessment suggests that the number of first class Councillors has fallen, the useless category has remained constant and the moderately competent has increased. The key factor determining whether a Councillor will be effective is the time he can devote to Council work. Generally, the more he can give, the more effective will he be. In 1964 more is demanded of a Councillor than in 1900, since the responsibilities of the Council have increased tremendously. A Councillor's work is harder now than in 1900.

(Chapter 7) The Labour Party invented the Group, the meeting of members of the Council of the same party to concert their action in the Council. Before 1945 it was an informal meeting, but after the Labour Party gained a majority, it became a formal session before each full Council meeting. It is not so highly developed in Wolverhampton as in some other towns. It lives from Council agenda to Council agenda, devising its tactics for each Council meeting and determining the Group's attitude to policies drawn up elsewhere. It does not plot ahead, initiate or formulate policy. It arbitrates between committees, acts as an information centre for Councillors about the work of committees on which they do not sit, decides who will be Mayor, Aldermen and Chairmen and ensures that its members vote the same way. Attempts to transform it into a policy-making body failed because the Chairmen were reluctant to submit their committees' operations to the scrutiny of a strengthened Group. (Chapter 8) The Conservatives adopted the Group system as the only means to resist the Labour Group. It performs similar functions, but since it is an opposition Group, it has had less to do, and since its members are not Chairmen, it has been more eager to be forged into an instrument for making policy. Thus it is a more developed institution than the Labour Group. Also it is less concerned to impose formal discipline on its

members; in practice however members of each party vote for their party's position not because they are compelled but because they agree with it. (Chapter 9) These two parties monopolise the political process of the Council; other groups, which flourished for a time like the Ratepayers' Association, have been squeezed out.

(Chapter 10) Over the period Council committees have been the workshops of the Council, subject to an overriding review by the Council. The key man on the committee has always been the Chairman, although he is less able to rule his committee as his petty empire than in 1900. He is in a more influential position than other members of his committee, since he is a permanent and not rotating Chairman, concentrating on one committee and closest in touch with his officials. In 1900 when the work of the committees was less technical and complex than now, the Chairmen were not so dependent on their officials. Socially too the Chairmen were superior to the mere employees of the Corporation. Horizontal committees, like the Finance Committee, had little restraint over the spending committees; nor did party Groups set a framework of policy within which the committees had to operate. In 1964 the Chairman is very dependent on his officials. Socially he is inferior to them, especially after the Labour Party took all the Chairmanships. The powers of the Finance Committee to

interfere in the activities of the other committees have grown over the period, beginning with the aftermath of the Varley scandal of 1917 and then Bantock's 21 years tenure of its Chairmanship. The party Group also severely limits the Chairmen's freedom of manoeuvre, especially since their continuation in office depends on their party's support.

(Chapter 11) In 1900 the Mayor performed three functions. As their ceremonial head he regaled the town and Council with patronage; he presided over the Council meetings and was its political leader. Ceremonial duties still abound, but no longer are they financed by the Mayor himself. As Labour members qualified to be Mayors, the office became salaried, financed from the rates. He still presides at Council meetings, but his role as leader has been taken over by the leader of the majority Group. The Mayor is expected to be above politics, even to resign from all political commitments during his term of office. Since the Mayoralty is now salaried, a single term of office is all that is feasible, while in 1900, when a man could be found willing to indulge the town, he would have many terms of office. The Mayor like the Aldermen is how chosen by the party Groups, while in 1900 a committee of ex-Mayors chose the Mayor and the General Purposes Committee chose the Aldermen. When the majority Group has decided which Group

shall have the office, that latter Group selects the individual on the basis of seniority of service. This explains why the average ages of the Mayors and Aldermen are so much higher than in 1900 when other considerations were important. No agreements have been reached between the parties about sharing these offices. Each vacancy is considered as it arises. The Aldermanic bench has always contained some of the leading figures on the Council, only a few have been too old to be effective. A seat on the bench is not so secure as it was before 1945, for many Aldermen have not been re-elected when a party wished to consolidate its majority by increasing its numbers of Aldermen.

(Chapter 12) The chief official of the Corporation, the Town Clerk, is more limited in 1964 than in 1900. The personalities have altered, from the haughty arrogance of Horatio Brevitt to the matey sociability of Ron Meddings. The former was a "Town Governor": the latter wants to keep the Town Hall administration working efficiently. But even if today's Town Clerk had the assertiveness of Brevitt he would be unable to impress his will on the Council as his predecessors had done before 1930. The other officials of the Corporation are now more independent and less willing to submit to the Town Clerk. The work of the Corporation

has so increased in size and technicality that a single solicitor cannot keep control of all departments. Party Groups restrain the Town Clerk from imposing his own policy.

(Chapters 13 and 14) In 1900 divisions occurred in the Council over the competing claims of Chairmen and their committees, wards, economic groups and individual members. In 1964 divisions occur between party Groups, and the older conflicts are contained within the party battle. Around each party have coalesced distinct sets of occupational groups, who before fought each other in a spasmodic fashion. The rise of the Labour Party, representing primarily trades unionists, forced the other interests to ally within the Conservative Party. Thus the contest at local level is not artificial and imposed from above, but reflects local antagonisms. The national battle has grown out of the local context, for the same people and parties fight both municipal and Parliamentary elections.

It is possible to propound from a study of Wolverhampton only one general theory about the political structure of a Town Council, namely that the political process of each Council is unique, dependent on the geographic, economic and social environment of the town, its political history, the problems it has had to face and most of all on the personalities who have been engaged in the process.

INTRODUCTION

Wolverhampton is a county borough in the West Midlands in the south west of Staffordshire. It lies, 13 miles from Birmingham, on the north west extremity of the Black Country. The town centre is 530 feet above sea level on the top of the north west end of a sandstone ridge which runs north to south and divides the watersheds of the Severn and the Trent. To the east the ridge slopes down to the conurbation of the Black Country, an industrial area built up all the way to Birmingham, while to the west it spreads out to the lush farming country of the Shropshire plain. Geology and geography have put the town half in and half out of the Black Country, for its south-eastern part rests on coal, ironstone and limestone, while in the north and west the earth is rich fertile clay.[1.]

In 1750 the town's population was 7,454, rising by 1801 to 12,565.[2.] Around the turn of the century it was already an industrial manufacturing town and no longer merely a centre for marketing rural produce, especially wool, which it had been in the Middle Ages. Its chief

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1. The sources for the geological, geographic, economic and social characteristics of the area are given in the bibliography on pp. 794-797.

2. See Table i.

products were small metal goods[1] and japanned iron and papier mâché ware,[2] which all demanded a high degree of skill and were made either in the homes of craftsmen or in small workshops. From the 1820s the exploitation of the coal and iron deposits around the town began on a more massive scale and the population of the town soared, from 18,380 in 1821 to 49,985 in 1851. From the 1820s to the 1860s the town flourished as a manufacturer of iron sheets and bars and of heavy crude iron products.[3] It also turned out finished articles of metal, a variety of cast and wrought iron household goods, and it was famed as the centre for the manufacture of the highly decorated japanned tin plate ware.[4] The blast furnaces, forges, foundries, mills, factories and workshops belched out the flames and smoke which gave the Black Country its name.

By the 1870s the coal and iron seams were largely exhausted or difficult to tackle because of flooding and subsidence. Foreign competition and tariffs, and competition from other parts of Britain, particularly the

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1. e.g. locks, buckles, screws, thimbles, watch chains, whistles, metal toys, jewellery and buttons.
2. e.g. snuffboxes and coal scuttles.
3. e.g. bridges, girders, rails, axles, spikes, pulleys, anchors, cables, chains, wheels, tubes, gates and fences.
4. e.g. trays, caddies, dishcovers, boxes for bread, cake, jewellery and cards, workboxes and inkstands, vases, tea urns and coffee pots.

new steel areas, hit hard the iron masters of the town. Firms closed; some moved away to more convenient sites. The town concentrated less on the heavier products and more on finished metal goods, like edge tools,[1] hollow-ware[2] and brassware;[3] a wide variety of metalware and ironmongery, cast, wrought, turned, enamelled or galvanised; household, industrial and agricultural implements for use both at home and abroad.[4]

In 1871 the population was 68,291; in 1891 it had risen to 82,662, a slower increase than had taken place in the early and middle years of the century. But the old pace revived in the 1890s, for by 1901 the population was 94,187. The 1890s were boom years again for the town; buildings rose at an unprecedented rate; suburbia emerged as the tramways pushed out from the town centre, especially to the western part of town; new industries took root in the town and the older industries once again adapted themselves to changed economic conditions. Change was forced

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1. e.g. hoes, axes, spades, shovels, picks, trowels.
2. e.g. pots and pans, kettles, baths, buckets, watering cans, troughs, churns.
3. e.g. taps, pipes, washers, pumps, engine fittings.
4. e.g. anvils, hammers, rivets, bolts, nuts, hooks, hinges, latches, files, springs, pins, nails, door knockers and scrapers, wire netting, grates, fenders, fire irons, bedsteads, screwdrivers, locks, keys, safes and strongrooms, chests, corrugated iron roofing, enamelled signs for railways, streets and notice boards, boilers and tubes for gas, water and steam, tanks and gasometers.

on them by dwindling markets due to increased foreign competition and tariffs, and by the increased difficulties and expense of obtaining raw materials. Wolverhampton became a town making electrical apparatus,[1] vehicles of all kinds,[2] the accessories and components of vehicles, engineering equipment and the machine tools needed to produce the finished articles.[3] The town became an engineering centre. In 1901 16% of the male workforce were occupied in the manufacture of metal goods, 11% in engineering and 9.5% in the building industry. The rest were scattered among other industries; the railways, particularly the G.W.R. which had a works for the manufacture and servicing of locomotives in the town; the chemical industries, producing the acids for the metal trades, the paints, oils and varnishes for the finished articles and fertilisers and artificial manure; the boot and shoe industry, the rope, twine and sacking industry and the breweries. Wolverhampton had a very diversified economy.

From 1901 to the first World War the growth of the town slackened. The 1900s were not so dynamic as the 1890s.

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1. e.g. switchgear, generators, motors, conduits, fans, batteries.

2. e.g. cars (Sunbeam, Star, Clyno), cycles and motor cycles.

3. e.g. presses, lathes, drills, dies.

By 1911 the population had risen to 95,328, an increase of only 1.2% on 1901. During the war the town's engineering and metalware industries were of great significance in the war effort, especially for the manufacture of munitions and tanks. In the interwar years the car industries vanished, bankrupt and overtaken by other towns like Oxford and Coventry, but new industries established themselves too, the manufacture of artificial fibres,[1] rubber tyres,[2] aluminium foil[3] aircraft and their components.[4] Engineering enterprises expanded as did those industries concerned with the making of composite articles demanding skilled labour. The older industries making cruder products contracted. In 1921 the population of the town was 102,342; by 1933 following two extensions of the borough boundaries it was 138,622. The census of 1951 showed the town at its peak of 162,672; however, during the 1950s as the slums were cleared and the people rehoused beyond the boundary, the population fell, to 150,825 in 1961.[5]

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1. Courtaulds.
2. Goodyears.
3. Star Aluminium.
4. Boulton Paul.
5. If the Local Government Commission's proposals for the West Midlands Special Review Area are accepted by the Government then the population of Wolverhampton in the future will be 250,000.

The town in the 1950s as in 1900 was not dependent on a single industry. 17% of the workforce were engaged in the manufacture of metal goods, 13% in making electrical apparatus and in the engineering industry and 10.5% in the manufacture of vehicles and their accessories and components. The rest were spread over the rayon and nylon industry, the rubber tyre, chemicals and building industries and the railways. Wolverhampton is reputed to be a town of over 150 trades.[1] This diversified economy enabled the town to weather the depression years without large-scale unemployment. In the 1920s and 30s it attracted workers from the depressed areas of the North and Wales; in the late 1940s many East Europeans came to the town, and in the 1950s and 60s it was a magnet for West Indians, Indians and Pakistanis. The economic variety of the town and the possession of a large source of skilled labour have enabled Wolverhampton to adapt itself successfully to changing economic conditions throughout its history.

At the end of the nineteenth century the heavier and cruder products were manufactured in the eastern part of the town, where the coal and iron had been mined and through which three railway companies had driven their lines and two canals flowed to bring to the town its raw materials

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1. See Table ii for a list of some of the main trades of the town.

and to take away its finished products. The lighter and smaller articles were made in this area too, but also in an industrial ring which encircled the town centre and contained a large number of small factories. Most of the working men of the town lived in the courts and alleys of the east, and among the workshops of the inner industrial circle. The more skilled workmen, the artisans and the middle classes lived in the west; the more prosperous living further from the centre and the industrial area than the less well off. The most prosperous men of the town, the manufacturers, professional and commercial men, lived in the far west of the town among the trees, fields and parks at Penn Fields, Goldthorn Hill, Merridale and by the Tettenhall Road.

The east is still an industrial area, although in the course of the 1950s and 1960s the Council has pulled down many of the old factories and slums, reclaimed the land left derelict by the mines and furnaces, and levelled the pit mounds and slag heaps to provide municipal housing estates. In the north east, close to the railways and canals, the new industries of the 1920s sited themselves and were followed by numerous engineering and electrical apparatus firms. Here also the Council built huge housing estates at Low Hill and Bushbury in the 1930s and 1940s and 1950s. The west is still less industrialised than the east,

but more residential than in 1900. The fingers of suburban terraced housing, which pushed out to the western countryside of the 1890s, were in the 1920s and 1930s surrounded and then in the 1950s and 1960s extended by both Council estates and, preponderantly in Penn and Merridale, by private estates. In the industrial ring around the town centre, the slums were cleared away in the 1930s and 1950s, and in the 1960s the factories have been removed, relocated and concentrated in a zone in the south west at Blakenhall, whilst on the reclaimed land, high blocks of Council flats have been built, together with offices, shops and a new Retail Market Hall.

The present town centre is largely a creation of the 1880s, following the acquisition by the Corporation of the decaying mediaeval centre, its demolition and rebuilding and the redesigning of its street patterns. Between then and the 1960s the centre was little altered save for some street widenings in the 1920s. But in the 1960s its face is being drastically renovated as urban renewal and redevelopment start to get under way. This area is still, as it was 60 years ago, the administrative, judicial, business, commercial, professional, shopping, religious, cultural and entertainment centre of the town.

In 1964 the town is still divided into a western and an eastern half, but the split is not so glaring as in 1900.

The west is mainly a residential area, chiefly of private owner-occupied estates, with occasional Council estates and a pocket of industrial activity. The east is basically an industrial area, containing larger enterprises than in the west, with growing Council house estates and very little private housing.[1.]

This economic and social division has had political consequences. From 1832 to 1885 the borough returned two M.P.s usually Liberals of the Radical type. In 1885 the borough was divided into two constituencies, East and West Wolverhampton.[2.] The former returned Liberal M.P.s to 1945, while the latter returned Conservatives, except when Labour was successful in 1906, 1929 and 1945.[3.] The Parliamentary boundaries did not coincide with municipal boundaries until 1948. Before then the East Division comprised only 3 of the 15 wards of the borough plus a large area beyond the boundaries at Wednesfield and Willenhall. The West Division contained 9 wards and a little area at Ettingshall. The other 3 wards lay in the Cannock division of Staffordshire. In 1948 however the

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1. Chapter 3, pp.115-147 analyses the characteristics of each ward in more detail.

2. South Wolverhampton contained no part of the municipal borough. It was later renamed the Bilston division. It comprised Bilston and Sedgley.

3. See Table V.

whole municipal borough was divided between the North East and the South West constituencies. Since then the former has returned a Labour M.P. and the latter a Conservative.[1.]

Thus the whole of the borough of Wolverhampton has never been within the boundaries of one Parliamentary constituency. This factor has had important consequences for the organisation of the major political parties of the town. The Liberals and Conservatives have had a similar pattern. Their basic unit was the ward party which sent delegates to the constituency association, one for each constituency. The Labour Party is the same, but in addition it has had an organisation covering the municipal borough to deal with municipal affairs, which has been called at various times the Central, the Municipal or the Borough Labour Party. It comprised delegates from all the wards into which the borough was divided and from the constituency organisations. In the Conservative and Liberal Parties municipal affairs were the responsibility not of a special organisation but of the constituency associations. Further, both the Labour and Conservative Parties have Groups, i.e. the meetings of their members of the Town Council to plan the policy and tactics of the

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1. The implications of these facts are examined in Chapters 1 and 2.

parties on the Council. Labour introduced this system and it was later adopted by the Conservative Party.[1.]

For local government an Act of 1777 created Town Commissioners to be responsible for the good order and government of the town. In 1848 Wolverhampton received a royal charter of incorporation as a Municipal Borough; in 1888 it was one of the original county boroughs. From 1848 to 1927 the Council numbered 48 members, 12 Aldermen and 36 Councillors. Increases in the area of the borough in 1927 and 1933 resulted in a Council numbering 60, 15 Aldermen and 45 Councillors. From 1848 to 1896 the town was divided into 8 wards; 12 from 1896 to 1927; 13 from 1927 to 1933, and 15 from 1933.[2.]

The Council is divided into committees, each responsible for administering a particular service and each reporting to the full Council about its activities.[3.] In 1900 there were 15 standing committees of the Council and 15 sub-committees with 2 special temporary committees.[4.]

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1. See Chapters 7 and 8.
2. The new Wolverhampton is to have 20 wards, and a Council of 80 members, 20 Aldermen and 60 Councillors.
3. A more detailed discussion of the powers of the committees appears in Chapter 10.pl.
4. Lists of the committees in 1900 and in 1963 are given in Tables iii and iv.

The normal size of a committee was 13, and each member of the Council sat on between 3 and 5 committees; 3 members sat on over 5 committees, 2 on 6 and 1 on 7. In 1963 there were 26 standing committees and 23 sub-committees.[1.] The normal size of a committee was 10 and each member sat on between 3 and 5 committees; a few members sat on 6, although some of these committees were minor like Rating and Payments. A comparison of the lists of Council committees in 1900 and 1963 shows the great increase which has taken place in the Council's activities over the period, and that, although the Council has lost some functions,[2.] it has gained far more.[3.] To meet this increase in responsibilities without increasing proportionately the number of Councillors, the size of the committees has been reduced; they meet less often and many have been amalgamated.[4.] The number of full-time servants of the Corporation has been increased. Tables v and vi show the chief officials of the Corporation and their departments in 1900 and 1963, and a comparison of these two lists shows the great increase both in the functions of the

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1. The Council also nominated to 31 positions on 19 other bodies.
2. e.g. Electricity and hospitals.
3. e.g. Care of Children, Education, Welfare Services, Housing, Town and Country Planning.
4. e.g. Free Library and Art Gallery in Cultural and Entertainments.

Council and in the Chief Officers of the Council. Around 1900 the Corporation employed around 100 to 200 people but in March 1963 it employed 7,183 including 1,147 teachers.[1.]

In the middle of the nineteenth century the main functions of the Council were to provide services to property and to enable trade to flow freely. The town was paved, lighted, cleaned and drained. A police force gave law and order. The fire brigade gave protection, and the markets were regulated. In the 1860s the Corporation bought out the Water Company to ensure that the water of the town was pure, and it undertook a great scheme of deep drainage and sewage disposal to make the town more healthy; at the same time it established a Free Library. In the 1870s a new Town Hall was built and the Corporation purchased the baths to be run as a municipal concern. The 1860s and 1870s were the years when H. H. Fowler, later Lord Wolverhampton, was the great municipal leader, urging Corporation enterprise before Joseph Chamberlain at Birmingham.[2.] In the 1880s an Improvement Scheme was adopted, which resulted in the modernising of the town centre. The racecourse was converted into a public park

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1. Letter to the author from the Town Clerk 2.7.1964.

2. E. H. Fowler, The Life of Henry Hartley Fowler, 1912 London.

and an Art Gallery and Museum was established. The latter came about through the generosity of a leading citizen, Philip Horseman, who gave the land and money to set up the Gallery and Museum.[1.] The 1890s saw another large public park formed out of some derelict land in the east.[2.] Municipal enterprise was extended to the manufacture of electricity which was used to light the town, and the tramways were purchased and then electrified by the Corporation with a revolutionary new system.[3.] A new covered Wholesale Market, Cold Stores and Abattoirs were constructed. Existing services were improved and extended to the growing suburbs.[4.] In 1903 the Council took over the elementary schools from the School Board and later a School Medical Service was set up. The 1900s and up to the war saw little new activity by the Council, other than consolidating existing functions, improving Queen's Square, laying out anew St. Peter's Churchyard and erecting a new refuse destructor. After the war the Council became deeply involved in slum clearance and the building of houses. A drive was made to substitute the water

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1. In the late 19th century many wealthy citizens donated money to establish various institutions in the town. It was a great era of municipal patriotism. See W. H. Jones, The Story of the Municipal Life of Wolverhampton, 1903 London
2. A donation of Alfred Hickman. See Chapter 1, pp.42-43.
3. See Chapter 1, pp.51-55.
4. e.g. Libraries, sewers, water, electricity.

carriage system of excrement disposal for the pan system. Personal welfare services grew, a midwifery service was introduced, maternity and child welfare clinics set up and the Council became responsible for the care of the blind and the mentally defective. In 1929 the responsibilities of the Board of Guardians were transferred to the Corporation, and, although in 1934 unemployment relief became a Government responsibility, the duty of providing general relief to the needy remained with the Council and was the foundation on which was later laid the Welfare Services Committee. The boundaries of the borough were extended twice. The streets of the centre were widened. Trolley buses replaced trams. A new Public Hall, the Civic Hall, was built next to the old Town Hall. A Municipal Aerodrome was opened. The Cemetery Company was bought by the Council. Existing services were further improved and extended to the new housing estates and to the recently acquired areas. After the Second World War the Council's tasks increased further. Slum clearance and the building of new estates sped on quickly. Under Town and Country Planning legislation the Council formulated a town development plan; urban renewal began to make its impact; an inner ring road began to get under way; the old Retail Market Hall was

demolished and a new one built on a new site. The Council's responsibilities for welfare services increased. It had to care for children in need, old people, the handicapped and the mentally ill. Home Helps, Health Visitors and a Municipal Chiropody Service were under the wing of the Council. The education system was expanded; new schools were built on the new estates and new types of educational institutions opened, bi-lateral schools, the Wulfrun College and the Day Teachers Training College. A fine Sports Stadium was erected. All the time existing services were being carried out, improved and extended. Many of the activities of the Council were forced on it by Government legislation, or stimulated by Government grants, particularly the percentage grant, but many too were undertaken on the initiative of the Council itself.[1]

Thus the Council of 1963 has far more responsibilities than the Council of 1900. There is far more work for the Councillors. The area of the borough has grown from 3,525 acres to 9,126. Its population has risen from 94,187 to 150,825. Its rateable value in 1900 was £362,592; in 1963 £7,343,693. The Corporation's rate raised in 1900

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1. The sources for the growth of the Council's services are given in the bibliography on pp. 796-798.

£79,188 and in 1963 £2,844,727. Government grants in 1900 totalled £8,994; in 1963 £2,203,105.[1] The Council in 1963 has responsibility over a greater area, a larger number of people and a more varied range of services than in 1900. It raises and spends more money and employs more staff, and yet the number of its elected members has increased by only 12.

This study examines the elected members of the Wolverhampton Borough Council from 1900 to the 1960s; who they were, why they went onto the Council, how they were organised and what they did. Chapters 1 and 2 consider the political background in the town, the growth of the involvement of political parties in local government, the interaction between their Parliamentary activities and their municipal interests and the changing role of municipal elections. Chapter 3 surveys the wards over the period and relates the types of Councillor elected with the social and economic characteristics of the wards and with the different methods used by the parties to select their candidates. Chapter 4 examines the changing

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1. The financial figures are taken from the Wolverhampton Red Book for 1901; the Council Minutes for 1900-01 and 1963-64; and the Municipal Yearbook for 1963.

occupational composition of the Council over the period, and relates it to the changes in the parties' strength in the Council. Chapter 5 looks at the various associations to which the elected members were attached. Chapter 6 considers whether the calibre of the elected members has declined over the period. Chapter 7 examines the origins, development and the present working of the Labour Group, Chapter 8 does the same for the Conservative Group, while Chapter 9 looks at the other parties who have fought municipal elections and have had Councillors. Chapter 10 examines the role of the Chairmen of the Council committees, their relationship with their parties, their colleagues, the officials and the other elected members, and the growth to pre-eminence of the Finance Committee and its Chairman. Chapter 11 considers the functions of the Mayors and Aldermen over the period, and Chapter 12 looks at the Town Clerks, their personalities, their conceptions of their roles and their changing relationships with the elected members and other chief officers of the Corporation. Chapters 13 and 14 discuss the conflicts which have divided the Council, and what each group of Councillors was trying to make the Council do, what the political battle was about and what the contestants were aiming at. The Epilogue tells the story of the

controversy of 1961-2, which bitterly split the Council, provoked a High Court action and almost paralysed the work of the Council for a year. This episode shows the present political process under strain.

This thesis therefore is a political study of the elected members. It treats the Town Council as a political institution and examines its political process. It is not a legal or an administrative study. It does not deal with the growth of services, the administrative history of the Corporation, central-local relations, or the relations of the Council with surrounding authorities. Each of these topics would require a separate thesis, if the same time-scale were to be adhered to.

It is valuable to go back to the turn of the century, since the contrasts between then and the present are more striking and significant than between say 1945 and the 1960s. To have considered the Council only from 1945 would have produced a thesis dealing in greater depth with certain aspects, but it would have lacked any emphasis on the really important developments which have taken place in the working of the Council. The important changes can be emphasised only by going into the past. The 1890s are the last years of a traditional style of politics on the Council, which reaches back to its foundation in 1848,

but they also see the beginnings of new developments, particularly the growth of the Labour Party, bringing with it onto the Council new techniques, new aims and a new style. The roots of the modern political process on the Council lie in the years at the turn of the century. To understand how it now operates, its history must be examined.

This study asks the same questions as one would of the central political process. But to study local politics presents certain difficulties not encountered by students of national politics. The student of national politics has a general framework about his subject. Certain dates have significance like 1906, 1931 and 1945. He has an opinion about statesmen like Ramsey MacDonald or Lloyd George or Harold MacMillan. He knows roughly who were the leading men, when they were decisive and what they did. Certain important statutes are well known. And he also has similar studies to guide his researches. There is some type of accepted conceptual framework to guide his studies. The student of the politics of a local authority has no such guides. His subject has not been written about extensively by local people. There are no clear significant dates, or people, or events, or Council decisions, until he has unearthed them. And since there

are no comparable studies, he has no conceptual framework to follow or attack.[1.]

His source material too presents difficulties not experienced by the student of national politics. The people involved in the process rarely keep full diaries, do not write memoirs of their activities, produce no autobiographies, have no biographies written about them, and keep no papers and letters which would assist scholars to gauge their work. The institutions in the process, the Council itself, the parties, and the interest groups rarely hoard their past records; they are too much concerned with their present activities to store what they regard as the jumble of the past, especially when space is so short. The Council and committee minutes which have been saved record only the decisions reached, the resolutions, motions and amendments, their movers and seconders and who voted for and against when a division was called for. The arguments used are not recorded. There is no official local authority "Hansard". No records of the Liberal Party survive; they vanished when the party collapsed after 1945. But the Labour and Conservative Parties have saved some of their records back to the 1900s, although

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1. The Bibliography on pp. 810-812 lists what studies have been made and this point is further discussed in the Conclusion on pp. 687-688.

they were not expertly written and kept. To rely therefore on written original material would deter one from ever embarking on a study of local politics. But two sources remain which can supplement the original material - personal interviews and the press. This study depends to a great extent on a large number of interviews and conversations with people who were involved in the Council and its political process.[1] Human recollection however is not infallible, so these interviews have to be treated with caution; faulty memory, special pleading and self justification have to be taken into account. Their statements can be checked to some extent against the Council and party records which remain, but especially against the local press, particularly for the early years of the period.

At the turn of the century the daily evening paper, the Express and Star, devoted a large amount of space to local politics; Council meetings were extensively reported, speeches were printed verbatim, and the proceedings were covered in one slab of long unbroken paragraphs with few cross headings. Party and election meetings were similarly fully covered. Committee reports were often

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1. Details of those interviewed are given on pp. 803-807.

printed in full; much background material about particular schemes was given, and detailed biographies appeared about the local politicians. The face of the paper in the 1950s and 60s is quite different. The print is larger;[1.] cross headings and headlines are more prominent; more national news is carried; photographs are frequent. Council meetings are not fully covered nor speeches produced verbatim. The topics which come up at a Council meeting are broken up into separate "newsy" stories of a few lines, and fragments of speeches are reported only if some scandal or row has broken out. Hardly ever is much background material given, or an interview with or a biography of a member of the Council. Once a week the local government correspondent is allowed a few paragraphs to talkabout a local government topic, usually from an administrative and rarely from a political angle, and he often deals with authorities other than Wolverhampton. An editorial occasionally considers some project of the Council's and a few letters to the Editor will show that a few members of the public follow the work

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1. To read the old newspapers one required "good eyesight and abundant leisure". H. Small and J. M. Farlan, Mr. Small's Book, a typescript of a B.B.C. broadcast commemorating the 60 years in Wolverhampton journalism of William Small. 11.3.1953.

of the Council.

The two World Wars appear to have been important factors in the decline of the coverage of Council affairs. Then newsprint was short; the size of the paper was reduced; reporters were not easily available; the Council did little of note and the press got out of the habit of reporting fully Council affairs. But other developments have been of greater significance. In 1900 the Express and Star was truly a local Wolverhampton paper concentrating on the affairs of Wolverhampton. But the quest for increased circulation has encouraged the paper to cater for an audience in an area wider than the town itself. Its daily circulation in 1900 was 41,287 and in 1963 232,208.[1] The majority of its sales, 61.22%, were made beyond the boundaries of Wolverhampton, in the Black Country at Bilston, Walsall and Dudley, and in Staffordshire and Shropshire at Stafford, Wellington and Bridgnorth.[2] The local government correspondent is not responsible for covering solely the Wolverhampton Council, as he was 60 years

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1. Table vii. From July to December 1963 its circulation was 235,347, which enabled it to claim that it was "the fastest growing evening newspaper in the country other than those which have been merged." Express and Star 7.1.1964. From January to June 1964 the circulation was 243,297, and it was calculated that it served over 620,000 readers every evening. Express and Star 8.7.1964.
2. Table viii.

ago, but he has to cover the County, District and other Councils in thewide area where the paper sells. The reporting of Wolverhampton news has been crowded out. In addition the local government correspondents of the 1950s and 60s have not been of the standing of the reporters of 60 years ago.[1.] The position is not an important one in the newspaper world, but is regarded as a jumping off point for a comparative newcomer to a better position in the paper or other papers. Recent correspondents have not been natives of the town, or lived for a long time there, nor have they stayed above two years as the local government correspondents. But from the 1900s to the 1950s one reporter William Small concentrated completely on the affairs of the Town Council and got to know intimately the local officials and politicians. It is little wonder that today's coverage of the Town Council is sparse, often inaccurate and usually dull.

The local political correspondent suffers from certain disadvantages not experienced by his national counterparts. The latter deal with men who often want to appear in the press, who seek publicity, and who are used to the press intruding into their activities and discussing

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1. The life of the reporters is taken from Mr. Small's Book op. cit. and interviews with the journalists, R. Foster and H. W. Small.

them. But the local politicians are suspicious of the press and shun publicity.[1] Where the national correspondent is able to personalise politics, the local man is inhibited. He has to live with the Councillors in a small community. If politics were personalised in the press, it is likely that life for the Councillors would be difficult, so close are they to their constituents, while the reporter would see his sources and contacts become very reluctant to talk to him at all. For him to carry out his very limited tasks as it is he depends to a great extent on the good will of the local officials and politicians. If he were to rub them up the wrong way, he would be unable to present what news he does. Further, the reporter of 60 years ago was not so dependent on the Council for official handouts and press releases as he is today. Then he would have to do much digging out of stories himself, but today with the pressure of work so much more intense, he is grateful to the Council for predigesting so much of his material. For all these reasons therefore the local paper is a much more valuable

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1. This factor was quite apparent from the many interviews with members of the Council of both parties. Only one Councillor regularly gave the press complete versions of his speeches, and he was not a leading member.

source for the study of local politics before the First World War than it is for the study of contemporary events.[1.]

Despite the difficulties of finding adequate source material, it is still a worthwhile task to make use of what is available in order for the first time to present a survey of the political structure and process of a town Council over a period of more than 60 years.

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1. Other difficulties with the source material are considered on pp. 115, 164, 211, 232 and 528.

CHAPTER 1

The Political Background to 1919

In 1900 all the 48 members of the Wolverhampton Town Council, except the 4 Labour Councillors, called themselves Independents. They did not owe their seats to the support of any national or local political party.[1] Nor inside the Council did they vote together in permanent groups. Their election addresses rarely mentioned their national party allegiances. Newspaper reports of nominations for Council seats gave more prominence to the candidates' occupations, religion and places of residence than to their party political inclinations. Councillors and candidates agreed that national political parties were inappropriate in municipal affairs, since their purpose was to gain and sustain support for a Member of Parliament and not to promote municipal candidates and to advocate and implement policies for the town. There were, therefore, strictly no Conservative nor Liberal members of the Council and no Conservative nor Liberal municipal policies. Even the Labour members represented in a vague way only the working-classes and in particular some local trades unions;

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1. There was no "Independents'" association.

there was as yet no national Labour Party. Municipal and Parliamentary affairs were separate.

But all the non-Labour members of the Council supported either the Liberal or the Conservative Parties, as voters and members, and many indeed held official positions in the local constituency and ward organisations of their parties. When these connections are taken into account, it can be said that in 1900 the Wolverhampton Town Council consisted of 25 Conservatives, 15 Liberals, 4 Labour and only 4 whose allegiances are unknown.[1.] A comparison of this analysis with that of the Council in 1889 shows that during the course of the 1890s the Conservatives gained 2 seats, the Liberals lost 6 and Labour made its first appearance.[2.]

The way in which these Councillors entered the Council was quite different from that of the 1950s and 1960s.[3.] To become a member of the Council the aspirant has to win an election, as does every Councillor after having served

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1. See Table I. Details of the political affiliations of members of the Council are taken from newspaper sources, mainly obituaries, reports of election contests and Council debates, and occasional articles and letters. The "unknowns" were insignificant men who made no mark on the Council nor in the town generally, and thus never merited much newspaper attention.

2. Table I. In 1889 the Council comprised 23 Conservatives, 21 Liberals and 4 unknown.

3. See Chapters 2, pp.108-113 & 3, pp. 150-159.

for a period of 3 years. These elections took place annually in November,[1] and in Wolverhampton at this time each year 12 seats became vacant. Actual contests between competing individuals however were exceptional. Between 1849 and 1902 only 1 or 2 contests took place each November. The greatest number of seats contested in a November election was 4, and these occurred only in the 2 years 1878 and 1897. During the 1880s there were 3 years when there were no November contested elections.[2] Many wards never witnessed a contest, for example between 1896 and 1902 6 wards had no November fights.[3] Competition therefore for both nominations to and for a seat on the Council was not intense.[4]

Only a small proportion of the town's population were given the chance to participate in electing Councillors. In 1900, when 1 seat was fought, 959 people voted, a mere 1% of the town's inhabitants. In 1897 there were 4 contests in which 4% of the population voted, and in 1903, when there were 9 fights, 10% of the population were engaged. These low figures are explained by the small

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1. From 1949 May was the election month.
2. See Table II, F and G.
3. See Table III.
4. Between 1888 and 1902 there were 27 contested elections in November: unopposed returns totalled 153. During the same period there were 54 new members of the Council.

number of actual contests and by the small number of those eligible to vote: in 1897 only 15% of the town's population were eligible and in 1903 18% These percentages of the town's population are a more realistic measurement of the amount of public participation in the elections than the percentages of the actual electorate of the particular ward who voted. In 1897 and 1903 there were turnouts of between 70% and 80% in the contested wards, but these large figures conceal the fact that only a small proportion of the population was eligible to vote.[1.] The years 1897 and 1903 were chosen deliberately, because more contests occurred then than was usual, yet even at these high peaks of electoral activity very few of the inhabitants of Wolverhampton took part in choosing their town's governors.[2.]

Fighting an election contest was not the typical means by which a Councillor gained or retained his seat. Usually he was nominated by a group of colleagues, sometimes business or professional acquaintances, neighbours from the same area as his home or work, fellow worshippers at his chapel or church, or members of his political party and club.[3.] Teams of canvassers would tour the ward urging

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1. See Table II G(i)
2. See Table IV.
3. See Wolverhampton Chronicle (abbreviated later to W.C.) 30.10.1889, 28.10.1891., 31.10.1894., and 27.10.1897 for examples of nominations.

the electors to support their candidate; rivals might attempt to discover if another candidate stood any chance. If his cause appeared hopeless, he would withdraw,[1] and thus the first in the field would enter the Council unopposed. The small size of the electorate would enable the canvassers to discover what support their candidate could command far more easily than when the electorate had grown larger. This factor may partly explain the paucity of contests, since the early soundings would give a more accurate picture of the electorate's opinions than would be possible today.

If however the rival did not withdraw, then the canvassers pressed all the harder the claims of their candidates.[2] Committee rooms and canvass headquarters were established in private houses, commercial premises,[3] especially in public houses,[4] and in the political clubs.[5] Clergy of all persuasions, Anglican, Nonconformist and Catholic, urged their flocks to support a particular

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1. W.C. 30.10.1889
2. They might even use on the doorsteps arguments, which they would not dare to air on a public platform. W.C. 28.10.1890
3. An undertaker put his premises at the disposal of the Radical Liberals. Interview with W. Lawley.
4. W.C. 3.11.1897
5. Express and Star (abbreviated later to E.&S.) 22.10.1890 24.10.1890., 2.5.1891, 9.5.1895.

candidate, and the churches and chapels provided bands of eager helpers.[1] Business and professional men spurred their employees to support the man of their choice.[2] The drink trade, brewers and licensed victuallers, rallied to the publicans' candidate;[3] lawyers and their clerks turned out to help the solicitors' candidate.[4]

Public meetings were held in the ward for the candidate to explain his policy and for his supporters to praise his qualities.[5] Their speeches were reported almost verbatim in the press: its correspondence columns were full of letters about the election, and the paper itself often took sides, advocating from its leader columns the return of a specific individual.[6] Finally on election day the canvassers called on the voters to fulfil their promises; anything "from a milk float to a carriage and pair".[7] were used to transport the electors to the polling booths. To depart from this style of campaigning invited

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1. E.&S. 20.10.1890, 2.11.1894, 26.2.1900, 1.11.1902, W.C. 5.11.1890., 3.11.1897.
2. W.C. 8.11.1893, 7.11.1894.
3. W.C. 7.11.1894, 3.11.1897., E.&S. 9.5.1895.
4. W.C. 5.11.1890.,
5. These meetings were invariably held in halls attached to schools or places of worship. W.C.22.10.1890 E.&S. 13.3.1900.
6. E.&S. 20.10.1890., 31.10.1890., 3.11.1890., W.C. 7.11.1894.
7. E.&S. 1.11.1900.

comment. In 1894 one candidate proclaimed his contempt for his opponent by refusing either to canvass or to hold public meetings, but he took care on polling day to have 40 vehicles at his disposal.[1.] Labour found itself hampered in its early contests by its lack of committee rooms and vehicles.[2.]

This style of campaigning is perhaps a partial explanation of the high percentage turnout of the electorate in the individual wards. Since so few contests were fought each November, attention would be concentrated on those few where the battles were taking place. Eager helpers of a particular candidate would converge on the ward from all over the town. That an election was soon to take place could not be missed in this atmosphere of drama. These factors, plus the fact that the electorate was restricted to the more wealthy, better educated, more politically conscious and civic minded groups in society, go far to explain the high turnout figures for the few wards where contests did occur.

All the candidates used these similar campaign methods, and the appeals, which they made to the electorate through the election address and at the public meeting, were cast in a similar fashion. First, the personal qualities and

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1. W.C. 7.11.1894.
2. W.C. 5.11.1890.

special experience of the candidate were displayed as fitting him to serve on the Council. For the sitting member seeking re-election service on the Council itself was deemed an adequate qualification.[1] But the experience which was most constantly stressed was knowledge of business. The businessman, it was claimed, was skilled in management and finance, accustomed to looking five years ahead, possessed of the ability to make a good bargain and the opportunity to assist the working man far more than could the working man himself; he had the time to devote to the Council and was a man of integrity and straightforwardness.[2] The second desirable attribute was a close connection between the candidate and the ward which he sought to represent. A long residence,[3] in the ward, even a life-long residence,[4] and being a large ratepayer or an employer of labour there[5] enabled the candidate, it was said, to promote more effectively the interests of the ward. Promises to advance the welfare of the ward constituted the third part of the appeal, especially in the wards of the East end of the town, which

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1. W.C. 30.10.1901.
2. W.C. 25.10.1890., E.&S. 1.8.1890.,3.10.1890., 21.3.1901.
3. E.&S. 22.4.1891., 7.5.1895., 3.11.1896., 7.3.1900.
4. E.&S. 1.11.1888., 1.11.1901.
5. E.&S. 22.4.18911, 7.5.1895., 1.11.1900., 30.10.1901.

many candidates claimed were neglected by the Council composed chiefly of "West-End swells".[1] Branch libraries, reading rooms, baths, laundries, improved lighting, cleansing and roadmending were the amenities sought for what was called the "worst-lighted and worst-cared-for area in the town".[2] The fourth element of the appeal was to take up a position over some current topic of controversy, the issue of the moment, which varied from year to year. Candidates would be for or against the Lorain system of tramway propulsion,[3] the construction of the Municipal Cold Stores,[4] a Municipal Tram Service,[5] compulsory vaccination,[6] the pan system of excrement disposal,[7] or the Corporation's devices to treat sewage effluent.[8] The final part of the appeal was to denigrate the opponent as lacking the requisite personal qualities and experience, as being out of touch with the ward and neglectful of its interests, and as proposing the wrong

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1. E.&S. 27.10.1893.
2. E.&S. 31.10.1890., 1.11.1894., W.C.6.11.1901., See Chapter 3 pp. 161-163.
3. E.&S. 30.10.1901., 1.11.1901.
4. E.&S. 1.11.1900.
5. W.C. 3.11.1897.
6. W.C. 3.11.1897.
7. W.C. 31.10.1894.
8. E.&S. 31.10.1893.

policies.[1]

The leading characteristics of the appeal to the electorate were its highly personal nature and its concentration on the interests of the ward. Noticeably absent were any references to political parties and any comprehensive Municipal Programme. The specific policies advocated varied from candidate to candidate, from year to year and from ward to ward. During the early 1890s the nearest approach to a consistent policy came from the Radical Liberal temperance reformers. In 5 of the annual elections between 1885 and 1897 the teetotallers campaigned to reduce the numbers of licensed houses; for drink, they argued, was the cause of the appalling social conditions in the East end of the town.[2] This cause was promoted by a group of Radical Nonconformists and can be called the earliest example of a municipal programme. But the Labour candidates were responsible for the first comprehensive municipal programme, covering numerous aspects of the Council's work. During the 1890s a Labour policy was gradually evolved which all Labour candidates advocated in whatever ward and at whatever election they stood. They pressed for a municipal cemetery, tramway

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1. W.C. 30.10.1901.
2. 1885, 1888, 1890, 1891, 1897.

service and gasworks, the construction of low-rent Council houses for artisans, the speedier abolition of the pan system and improved wagesand conditions for the Corporation employees.[1.]

Thus, with these 2 exceptions, elections were not contested by local organised groups which over a period of time were seeking to promote distinctive sets of policies. In this sense then the elections were "non-political". But the most common meaning of "non-political" was that national political parties did not put forward candidates bearing the label of the national party, backed by the organisation of that party and championing the particular policies of that party. It is true that a candidate who supported one national party might be nominated by a supporter of another party, even to fight against a member of the nominator's party.[2.] Members of one party might appear on the public platform as supporters of a candidate who belonged to the other party,[3.] and occasionally in by-elections members of the same party might fight each other for a seat on the Council.[4.]

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1. W.C. 22.10.1890, 7.11.1894, 27.10.1897, 31.10.1901. E.&S. 1.11.1900, See chapter 14.
2. e.g. in 1892 the Liberal, S. T. Mander, nominated W. G. Allen, a Conservative, who was opposing a Liberal, S. Larkinson.
3. E.&S. 21.3.1900.
4. E.&S. 25.1.1897, 7.3.1900.

Candidates stressed the non-political nature of their campaigns,[1] proclaimed their refusal of the help of political parties.[2] and criticised any candidate who tried to introduce politics into a campaign.[3] And once on the Council they asserted that in local affairs, as far as Council work was concerned, they did not recognise political parties.[4] Despite these examples there was covert party political influence at work, for example in general a candidate was nominated, supported on the public platform and assisted in his campaign by colleagues of the same political persuasion as himself.[5] His campaign headquarters was most often a political club; for the Liberals, the Liberal Club was a centre: the Conservatives used their Deanery Club and their working mens' clubs, and the Labour Party had its base too in its clubs.[6] Never

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1. E.&S. 23.10.1890, 25.4.1891, 31.10.1893.
2. W.C. 7.11.1894.
3. E.&S. 1.8.1890.
4. W.C. 9.11.1889, 15.11.1893, 16.11.1895.
5. In 1927 a correspondent to the local paper looked back on 45 years as a voter in the borough and said: "There have always been cliques of Liberals and cliques of Tories fighting each other for seats on the Council." E.&S. 14.3.1927.
6. W.C. 3.11.1897, E.&S. 22.10.1890, 24.10.1890, 2.5.1891, 9.5.1895.

in a November election did members of the same party compete for office. The candidates, sitting members and aspirants save for the most insignificant, had well-known national party allegiances, and very often held high office within the constituency organisations. It is clear that those people who took an active interest in national politics tended also to be active in municipal affairs and Council politics. Thus it could always be argued that one side or the other had introduced party politics into an election, for a well-known political figure had only to seek election and receive the help of his colleagues, and he would meet this kind of criticism, whether or not he had put his national politics on his election address. To do that was regarded as making an open bid for party support and was deprecated by the opposition.[1] One election during the years 1888 to 1902 stands out as being the most openly political. In 1892 "the Liberals have asked the Irish electors to vote for Phillips and Larkinson who are supporters of Gladstone and Home Rule: Stanton and Gough Allen being put down as supporters of Balfour and Coercion,"[2] and local Conservative

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1. E.&S. 1.11.1888, 1.8.1890, 7.8.1890, 9.8.1890.
2. E.&S. 1.11.1892.

M.P.s lent their carriages to the Conservative candidates.[1] Such a blatant political campaign was exceptional; most of the elections for the Town Council at the turn of the Century, compared with those of the 1950s, were non-partisan, more personal battles than party conflicts. Parties based locally or nationally did not fight municipal elections in a systematic and organised manner. The contestants were individuals or informal and unofficial groups without permanent organisations behind them.

That party politics, as regards the Council, were comparatively in the background during this period has numerous explanations. One is that neither the Liberal nor the Conservative Party possessed a distinctive and coherent municipal policy which it wished to implement through the Council; the parties opposed each other over issues other than municipal affairs. The work of the Council did not give rise to the kinds of issues which divided Conservatives from Liberals. There were no opportunities for solid groups of party adherents to face each other, and thus there was no constantly recurring cleavage. The Councillors, of roughly the same social standing whose families intermarried, members of similar

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1. ibid.

associations and possessed of a common ethos[1]. were not divided in the context of the Council by any ideological or political differences. In Council they voted on issues, not with a group with whom they always voted, but now with some members and now with others. On each division, over each issue, there was a new combination of Councillors.

There was also little incentive for the parties to organise for and fight local elections in order to improve their positions at the General Elections, for on the Parliamentary level at the turn of the century very little divided the bulk of the Liberals from the extreme Conservative Party. They shared the Parliamentary Representation of the town.[2] In East Wolverhampton the Liberal M.P. was Sir H. H. Fowler, a solicitor, who had married into the family of a leading local ironmaster. In the West the Conservative M.P. was Sir Alfred Hickman, himself a prominent local ironmaster.[3] These similar substantial men worked in harmony; indeed Fowler was closer to Hickman than to the Radical members of his own

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1. See below Chapters 4 and 5.

2. See Table V. In 1900 both candidates were returned unopposed.

3. Fowler was M.P. 1880-1908 and Hickman 1885-86, 1892-1906. For Fowler see E. H. Fowler, The Life of Henry Hartley Fowler, London, 1912.
There is no biography of Hickman but see Wolverhampton Journal, March 1902 and W.C. 16.3.1910 for newspaper sketches of his life.

party. These Radical Liberals were temperance reformers, opposed to the Boer War, idolising Lloyd George, and their religious persuasion was extreme Nonconformity, Primitive Methodism, and Baptism in particular. Fowler however was not a temperance reformer; he was a foremost Liberal Imperialist and a Wesleyan Methodist of conservative inclinations, who lived in a large house to the West of the town. He was not the ideal M.P. for the Radical Liberals who lived in the squalid Eastern parts of the town and earned their living from grocery. But he was well suited to appeal to the more wealthy Liberals, especially the manufacturers who were not teetotal, extreme Nonconformists or worried about social conditions in the Eastern wards. Only one thing divided these men from their Conservative counterparts and that was religion. The former were on the whole Nonconformists and the latter Anglicans. There was no other significant difference between these manufacturers, industrialists, merchants and businessmen. Since the late 1880s some of them had slipped over to the Conservative Party,[1] disillusioned with the Liberal Party's adherence to Home Rule, disliking the raucous Radical element in the Party, but above all believing that Protection for the depressed Midland iron

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1. See Chapter 4.

and metal industries would more likely come from the Conservative than the Free Trade Liberal Party. That the transference of support was not large before say 1908 can be laid at the feet of Fowler, who was not associated with Home Rule, Radicalism or Free Trade to any extent. It is noticeable that after 1908, when the Radical G.R. Thorne replaced Fowler as M.P., the Liberal Party became primarily the party of the shopkeepers; the industrialists had gone over to the Conservatives.

This sketch of the Parliamentary situation in the Town has revealed factors which had important implications for the development of party politics on the Council. The M.P.s were similar; the leading elements in their local parties were not really divided socially and economically; both sides were in a position of power and influence in the Council and in the town. The present position was to their liking. Such an atmosphere was not conducive to party political activity in municipal elections. There was no incentive to upset the balance either at the Parliamentary or municipal levels.[1.]

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1. It is significant that the most 'political' of the municipal elections of this period, that of 1892, occurred in the same year as the election of Hickman for West Wolverhampton, when he defeated the Liberal Plowden. The intensity of the Parliamentary campaign spilled over into the municipal.

Two groups however were dissatisfied with this harmony and wished to break the monopoly. The Radical Liberals and Labour Party were disruptive forces seeking to end the easy-going alliance of Conservatives and conservative-Liberals. These two groups initiated the majority of the election contests for the Council between 1888 and 1902. From 1888 to 1894 8 of the election fights were between Conservatives and Radical Liberals: 2 were between Conservatives and Labour and only 1 was between the Liberals and Labour. But from 1895 to 1902 Conservative v. Labour contests rose to 8, while Conservative v. Radical Liberal fights fell to 3, and there was still only 1 Liberal v. Labour contest.[1] Thus in the early 1890s the political battles at the municipal elections were mainly between the Conservatives and Radical Liberals, while in the late 1890s the chief contests were between the Conservatives and Labour. The issues in the elections of the early 1890s were the plans of the temperance reformers and their efficacy in improving the social conditions of the Eastern wards; while those of the later 1890s were Labour's schemes of municipalisation and most of all its proposals to improve the wages and

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1. Between November 1888 and November 1902 at the annual municipal elections 27 seats were contested. 4 were not straight fights.

over

conditions of the Corporation employees. But in this period before 1903 the battles were sparse and spasmodic. There were few contests and little consistent sustained pressure to advance any particular municipal policy. Then in 1903 the tempo of local politics suddenly quickened.

In the early 1900s party first became a leading feature of Council politics. Conservatives and Liberals became bitterly opposed to each other over items of Council policy. The radical Liberals formed a Progressive Party to oppose the implementation of the Education Act of 1902 and to attack what they regarded as the expensive projects conceived by the Conservative majority at a most inopportune time when the town was suffering from trade depression and unemployment; Nonconformity and economy were the Progressive Party's slogans. The Labour Party was growing stronger. It would eventually cause the Conservative and Liberal Parties to unite. But at first the Liberals were not hostile to Labour which was mainly fighting the Conservatives. These latter quickly appreciated the threat from Labour, for in 1906 Hickman was unseated by the Labour candidate. The stimulus from this defeat stirred the Conservative Party to mount an onslaught against Labour not only in the Parliamentary but in the local government field too.

In the November municipal election of 1903 9 wards were contested, the highest number since the incorporation of the town in 1848, never to be surpassed until 1927, and after that not until 1945 and the years following. After 1903 more seats were fought each November than before.[1.] Education was the topic which sparked off the conflagration. In 1902 the Liberal Nonconformist members of the Council protested against the Education Bill. They proclaimed that education should be "national, free, unsectarian, efficient and under direct popular control;" they objected to the composition of the proposed Education Committee and to "the use of public funds for the maintenance of schools over which they will not have full control."[2.] In the following year they attacked the composition of the committee responsible for drawing up Wolverhampton's scheme on the grounds that there were on it too many Anglicans and that the Nonconformists were unrepresentative of the views of their congregations. One, it was said, "outheroded Herod in his views". Bantock, the leader of the objectors, said that, if the Church Party would not come to terms, "it meant war in

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1. See Tables II.(F) and (G).
2. Council Minutes (abbreviated later to C.M.) 13.10.1902 W.C. 15.10.1902.

the town".[1] When the scheme had been completed the Nonconformists attacked the system of co-opting onto the committee individuals nominated by the Voluntary Schools. It was claimed that they would watch over the interests of their own schools and not of education in general, and that what was required was for the Council "to obtain the best men and women from the standpoint of Education."[2] The Nonconformists, defeated at every stage, accused the Catholic and Anglican leaders in the Council of dragooning their supporters into voting by the "use of whips" and of concocting their schemes in the Deanery Club.[3]

In the election education became the main issue. In November "the real fight was between the ill-assorted union of the forces of the Protestant Church of England with those of what is alleged to be the elder branch of the Christian faith whose foundations are laid in Rome, aided by the equally strong, ever dominant power of the 'trade' - These were pitched against what is termed the 'Chapel influence'".[4] Feelings ran so high that one

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1. C.M. 9.2.1903. W.C. 11.2.1903.
2. C.M. 16.3.1903. W.C. 19.3.1903.
3. W.C. 29.4.1903.
4. E.& S. 2.11.1903. In two bye-elections earlier in the year the Nonconformist candidates had fulminated against the Anglican and Catholic alliance. W.C. 27.5.1903, 8.7.1903.

Councillor refused to pay his rates for the upkeep of denominational schools[1] and had his goods distrained.[2]

The education issue, though new to the Council, was an old topic in the town. Sectarian and party conflict over the composition of the School Board and its policy went back to the days of the first School Board in 1870.[3] Elections for the School Board were always contested by parties. All candidates had a sectarian label; Liberal Nonconformists stood against Anglican Conservatives, while the Catholics hovered in a state of Independence though leaning to the Anglican position.[4] School Board elections were fought more bitterly than Town Council elections; there was no lack of candidates and there was more public participation in these elections than for the Council elections. In 1894, 1897 and 1900 around 10% of the population voted, compared with 3%, 4% and 1% for the corresponding Council elections.[5] The explanations for the greater interest shown in the School Board elections than in the Council elections are many. Education was an issue which touched

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1. W.C. 25.2.1903
2. E.&S. 12.1.1939
3. W.C. 23.11.1870
4. W.C. 28.11.1888, 13.11.1891, 21.11.1899, 24.11.1897, 28.11.1900.
5. See Table VI.

off violent passions and religious prejudices. The electoral procedures had important consequences. School Board elections were not annual but triennial, and all the seats on the Board were declared vacant, thus every three years there was an opportunity to elect a fresh Board, which would be in control for three years. More was at stake (the work of the Board for three years ahead could be decided at one election) than in the Council elections, when each year the electorate chose only one third of the Councillors who composed only a quarter of the Council, since the Aldermen comprised also a third of the Council. Also for the Board election the town voted at large and not by wards, thus everyone qualified to vote, could vote and was not disqualified because a particular ward was not contested, as happened with the Council elections. And finally, since each voter for the Board had as many votes as there were vacancies, the parties had an incentive to organise the voting so that their supporters would concentrate their votes on their candidates and not spread them. Thus it is not surprising that there was more public interest in the Board elections than in the Council elections.[1] In

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1. The Wolverhampton Journal of October 1903 noted that before 1903 a Council contest had sunk to the level of a purely personal nature.

1903 the explosive subject of Education became the responsibility of the Council, which then became rent by the divisions which had once split the School Board.[1.]

Education was not the only issue, however, which inflamed the passions of the Councillors and split them into competing blocks. In 1902 and 1903, at the same time as the debates on Education were taking place, the Councillors were quarrelling over the method to be adopted by the Corporation for propelling the Municipal Trams. The division lists on this topic reveal an almost identical voting pattern to that on Education, but with some significant exceptions. The Chairman of the Transport Committee, the Conservative varnish manufacturer Sir Charles T. Mander, was an advocate of the American Lorain system of surface contact which propelled the trams by means of electrical impulses picked up by the tram through an arm fixed to the underneath of the tram which came into contact with plates set in the middle of the tramway tracks. The champions of this method proclaimed that it would avoid the unaesthetic cluttering of the

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1. It is significant that in the 1903 Council elections 10% of the population voted; a similar figure to that voting in the Board elections. See Tables IV and VI. Thus for the first time Council elections produced the same degree of participation as had the School Board Elections of the 1890s.

streets with overhead wires; it would be safer, since there were no wires to fall down; it was the latest development, whose adoption would make Wolverhampton a renowned pioneer; and this system would enable the town to escape from the monopoly of the British Electric Traction Company which controlled the tramways of the surrounding areas.[1] Mander persuaded the Council to give the system a trial. If it fulfilled certain stipulations the Corporation bound itself to adopt it. After a trial period Mander argued that, although all the conditions had not been precisely fulfilled, it was a success.[2] But the opposition alleged that the system was too costly to install and maintain, and that it would burden the ratepayers far more than would the overhead method. It was dangerous too, they claimed, since humans and animals received shocks from the plates in the track, and cyclists and carriages found them a nuisance. It was feared that, since no other town in the country had adopted the system, it might be a costly and risky experiment, soon to fall obsolete; far better, they said, to rely on the tried and trusted British methods and not American gambles. And most important of all they

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1. W.C. 15.5.1901, 20.5.1903, 27.5.1903, 23.9.1903, 14.10.1903.
2. W.C. 6.5.1903.

complained that Wolverhampton would be isolated from her neighbours who possessed the overhead method: inter-communication would be impossible and fewer people would come to Wolverhampton, whose trade would languish.[1] The trial period, they claimed, had proved all their fears. But Mander stated that, if the Council refused to adopt the system, the Lorain Company would take the case to arbitration, which would involve the Corporation and ratepayers in expensive litigation. The verdict was likely to be in favour of the Company, and the Corporation would still have to accept the system.[2] His view eventually prevailed, but a substantial minority was very embittered at what they regarded as the devious way in which they had been tricked into adopting the system.[3]

The Lorain question "keenly divided the Council and the Town"[4] and was "one of the most momentous public questions which they had ever considered in Wolverhampton"[5].

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1. W.C. 15.5.1901, 12.7.1901, 23.7.1902, 6.5.1903, 15.5.1903, 27.5.1903, 14.10.1903.
2. W.C. 27.5.1903, 24.6.1903, 23.9.1903.
3. W.C. 23.9.1903.
4. W.C. 14.10.1903.
5. W.C. 15.5.1903. One Councillor said "I never remember being present at a meeting of this Council at which I have heard language so strong."

But on the surface it was not an issue which would produce a division along party lines, yet it did. In the final vote on whether or not to accept the system 25 were in favour and 15 against. Of those for, only 3 were Liberals, the other 22 were Conservatives: of those against, only 2 were Conservatives, the other 13 were Liberals and Labour.[1.] This analysis is similar to the divisions on the Education issue which were taking place at the same time. For instance when a vote was taken on whether or not to accept the scheme for the composition of the Education Committee, 29 were in favour and 16 against. All the 16 were Liberals and Labour, all Nonconformists: 27 of the others were Conservatives and Anglicans, the remaining 2 were Liberals but Roman Catholics.[2.] Never before 1903 had men of the same political party voted together so consistently. Never had the Council been divided on such political lines.

The explanation why the Lorain question became a party political issue is perhaps twofold. The division on the School Board was transferred to the Council, and the polarisation on this issue remained for other issues. Men accustomed to work together for one cause quickly found themselves involved in others. And secondly, Mander was

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1. C.M. 21.9.1903.
2. C.M. 28.4.1903.

the leading Conservative of the town[1]. and this factor was likely to encourage fellow Conservatives to accept his judgment on the Tramway question, especially when his main opponents were such leading Liberals as A.B. Bantock and P. Lewis; while the Liberal rank and file would be likely to follow their leaders also. Since the issue was concerned with technical detail, the ordinary Councillors, those who were not members of the Transport Committee, had to rely on their estimates of the judgments of the main contestants. Unable to judge the issues themselves, they followed their leaders.

At the election the quarrels continued. The Liberals formed a Progressive Association, really the radical Liberals organised for municipal purposes, whose aims were to "check extravagance, achieve efficiency in municipal government and to fight for a fair free national system of education".[2]. More seats were contested in the November elections than before 1903, 7 in 1904 and 5 in 1905.[3]. The Party agents, S. Bowers the Conservative and W. Meggit the Liberal, organised the campaigns of their

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1. It can be argued that he was the leading man in the town since his Mayoralty 1892-6 was the longest in the history of the town. In 1896 he was said to have surpassed all other Mayors. W.C. 11.11.1896. See Chapter 11, pp.455, 463
2. E.&S. 30.10.1906.
3. See Tables II (F) and (G).

candidates.[1] In 1908 it was reported that "the office of the local Conservative Association has apparently directed the Tory candidates," and that Sir Alfred Hickman "after the manner of a political chief" sent an encouraging telegram to the Conservative candidates.[2] But by 1909-10 the force of the Progressives was spent. They were never able to gain a majority on the Council, their leader Bantock had become part of the "Establishment", a Committee Chairman and a Mayor, and was no longer a driving force behind the Radicals. As a party they had never possessed a positive municipal policy; they were a negative defensive group, - defending Nonconformist education against Anglicans and vaguely opposing municipal expenditure.[3] Thus as the Education controversy evaporated and since the Council entered upon no more large enterprises, there was nothing to keep the momentum of the Progressives in being. They were also finding that they had much more in common with the Conservatives

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1. E.&S. 1.11.1905.
2. E.&S. 2.11.1908.
3. From 1898 the Corporation had undertaken some costly schemes, the construction of a new Sewage Disposal Unit, extension to the Waterworks, a new Wholesale Market, Cold Stores and Abbatoir. After 1903 the Council embarked on no more such enterprises. The prosperity of the late 1890s gave way to the depression of the middle and late 1900s. See Introduction, pp. 4-5, 14.

than with the Labour Party which was growing and asserting itself.

Thus ended the Liberal Revival, a temporary phenomenon stimulated by the Education controversy of 1902-3. But for this issue the Liberals might have declined much more quickly as a political force than they did. In 1902 it was widely expected that the Liberal Club would close through lack of support. After the Liberal-Unionists had left the Club in the 1880s, "its fortunes have been on the wane."[1] The Education issue however, although provoking a revival of Liberalism, also showed that the Liberal Party was eventually doomed. The only topic capable of raising Liberal fortunes was a sectarian issue. Such religious issues were anachronistic in an age when social questions were coming to the fore. It was clear that a party whose raison d'être was the defence of the interests of a sect or group of sects would not remain for long as a significant force when the main battle was between capital and labour. Between 1903-13 there were 45 seats contested at the November elections. From 1903-08 the majority of the fights had been between the Conservatives and the Liberals, 21 out of 25. But from 1908-13 most were between the Conservatives and

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1. Wolverhampton Journal, August 1902.

Labour, 12 out of 20.

The call for Labour representation on the Town Council was first heard in the 1890s, when both Liberals and Conservatives wooed the working man. In 1890 the Chairman of the East Wolverhampton Liberal Association, Councillor W. M. Fuller, an artificial manure manufacturer, urged the need for Labour representation.[1.] The Conservative licensed victualler, Councillor Levi Johnson, was instrumental in getting the Council to adopt a "fair wages clause" to prevent sweating by Corporation contractors,[2.] and he was keen to denounce breaches of the clause.[3.] Indeed the first working man to enter the Council was a Conservative, Abiathar Weaver, a clicker, who was elected in 1891.[4.] He was, however, not regarded as a genuine working man by the Trades Council and Labour Representation Committee, since he refused to join a Trade Union.[5.] Wolverhampton's Labour Party has its origins in the Trade Union movement, in the Labour Representation Committee established by the Trades Council

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1. W.C. 22.10.1890.
2. C.M. 14.9.1891, 10.10.1892. W.C. 16.9.1891, 12.10.1892.
3. C.M. 13.8.1894. W.C. 15.8.1894.
4. E.&S. 2.5.1891.
5. E.&S. 30.4.1891.

to achieve Labour representation on the Council.[1] In 1890 the Trades Council first attempted to obtain seats on the Council when it financed the campaigns of two trade union candidates, both Liberals in national politics, against Conservative opposition.[2] Its first success came in 1891 one month after Weaver had entered the Council, when James Stevenson, a boot finisher, was elected, independent of either party - representing Labour alone.[3] By 1898 their numbers had increased to 5, and remained around 4 or 5 until 1908 when the Conservatives mounted an attack on the Labour seats and reduced their representation to 2.[4] By the outbreak of the First War they had regained only one seat.

The reason for the Conservative attack on Labour was not because of any issue of Council policy but because of Parliamentary considerations. In 1900 the Trades Council had tried to find a Parliamentary Labour candidate, but

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1. The Trades Council in 1890 comprised 40 delegates representing 3-4,000 trade unionists. Its objects were "to bring all trade disputes to an amicable settlement, by bringing the contending parties together for the purposes of deliberation and to advance the social position of the working men by legislation, whether Imperial or local." E.&S. 3.11.1890.
2. W.C. 5.11.1890.
3. E.&S. 5.6.1891.
4. Table I.

had failed since it had not the money to finance his campaign.[1] In 1903 the Trades Council selected T. F. Richards of the Boot and Shoe Operatives Union as "the trades unionist candidate for one of the Parliamentary constituencies of Wolverhampton."[2] His union promised to pay his election expenses[3] and to continue to pay him a salary if elected.[4] His official position in the union was as "Parliamentary Agent", for which he was paid £300 a year.[5] Hickman's seat was chosen as the battle-ground; no Liberal candidate came forward, and in 1906 Richards defeated Hickman by a majority of 168.[6] The loss of the seat spurred the Conservatives to fight hard to regain it. They realised that their enemy was not the Liberal Party but Labour. The Conservative Association was reorganised, new rules devised, new officers chosen and a new candidate selected. He was Alfred Bird, the head of the Birmingham custard powder

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1. W.C. 26.9.1900.
2. W.C. 18.2.1903. A biographical sketch of Richards appeared in Wolverhampton Journal, February 1903.
3. W.C. 18.2.1903.
4. Wolverhampton Journal, May 1905.
5. Wolverhampton Journal, February 1903.
6. See Table V.

concern.[1] His money kept the Conservative Association in being: he paid the full-time agent's salary and expenses, the rent of the Headquarters and its maintenance; he financed the renovation of the Conservative Clubs in the town and helped to keep going the Conservative newspaper the Midland Evening News and at the end of each year made up any deficiencies in the Association's accounts.[2] The Subscription Book of the Conservative Association shows that he gave £150 in 1908, £200 in 1909 and 10, and £326 in 1911, 12 and 13. This was in addition to the "abnormal expenditure" of the Association which he paid off.

With a Parliamentary candidate and a revitalised organisation the Conservatives began to use municipal elections as part of their strategy to regain the Parliamentary seat and then to retain it afterwards. Their new attitude was shown in a resolution passed by their Management Committee in 1908, "It is desirable in the interests of the Conservative and Unionist Party in West Wolverhampton that Municipal Elections be fought politically unless there be some special reasons to the

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1. Minutes of the Management Committee of the West Wolverhampton Conservative Association (abbreviated later to M.M.C.), 17.3.1908, 25.3.1908, 1.4.1908, 8.4.1908, 6.5.1908, 11.10.1909.

2. M.M.C. 11.5.1909, 12.6.1909, 7.12.1909, 18.6.1912, 22.10.1919, 29.1.1921.

contrary."[1] What this cryptic resolution meant was explained by the President of the Association in 1913: "the policy of contesting Municipal Seats has to be considered purely with relation to the effect that may be produced upon our Parliamentary prospects and nothing else."[2] In practice this policy meant that in one ward in June 1912 it "was better to leave it to the Liberal and Labour to oppose one another, thus still further widening the breach between these two parties, which from a Parliamentary standpoint operates to our advantage."[3] In October 1912 in one ward no candidate was adopted, since to do so, it was feared, "would be the means of bringing the Liberal and Labour Parties together."[4] In 1913 the Liberal Prospective Parliamentary candidate withdrew, and therefore the Conservatives expected that they would be engaged in a straight fight with Labour. The Conservative agent calculated that "we

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1. M.M.C. February 1908.
2. ibid. 16.9.13. Between 1908 and 1913 the Association had been divided over the question as to whether or not they should oppose sitting Councillors' re-election. Generally sitting Conservatives were hostile to the idea since it might provoke opposition to their re-election. By 1913 Parliamentary considerations were deemed more important than the anxieties of Conservative Councillors about their seats.
3. ibid. 11.6.1912.
4. ibid. 14.10.1912.

shall possibly receive a certain amount of support with votes from the Liberal Party, therefore it is inadvisable to oppose either Pinnock (Park Ward) or Henn (Dunstall Ward),"[1] both Liberals. The Association decided "whenever possible to oppose the retiring Socialist Councillors."[2] The supremacy of Parliamentary considerations had the full support of Bird, whose attitude is illustrated in a letter which he wrote to the President of the Association, and which deserves to be quoted in full.

"12th October 1912.

My dear Marston,

With respect to our conversation on Monday evening, whilst maintaining the attitude of neutrality I have always observed in municipal politics, I may say that it seems to me the policy of contesting seats has to be considered with relation to the effect that may be produced upon our Parliamentary prospects, and nothing else.

As a broad principle, attack is generally the truest strategy, even in defence. Municipal elections in politics are the equivalent of Autumn manoeuvres in military affairs; they are the best means we possess of keeping our fighting forces in the highest efficiency.

Therefore, when certain ward Committees are keen on a contest, have a good candidate, and are able to produce satisfactory evidence of probable success, to deprive them of a chance of a fight must have a disastrous influence upon our forces and bring about certain discouragement and slackness when a Parliamentary election comes along.

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1. ibid. 16.9.1913.
2. ibid.

On the other hand it would be unwise to countenance futile contests, where there was only a remote possibility of success either from the unsuitability of the candidate or other causes.

As to the question of finance: that is not a difficulty which need weigh in the matter.

Yours sincerely,

Alfred Bird." [1]

The Conservatives struck first in the Municipal Elections of 1908. Their plan was seen as a "preliminary canter to ascertain in some degree the prospect of the Unionist candidate for Parliamentary honours."[2] In Graiseley Ward the brother of the President of the Conservative Association challenged a Labour Councillor who had represented the ward for 12 years, while in a neighbouring ward a Conservative publican was run against another sitting Labour Councillor in order to disperse the energies of the Labour supporters.[3] Labour not only

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1. Preserved in M.M.C. The underlining is Bird's. It is significant that Bird came from Birmingham, and that the agent Sam Bowers had worked with Joseph Chamberlain, Chamberlain had from the 1870s fought Council and School Board Elections not only to promote his particular policies but also to assist his Parliamentary position. Interview with Sam Bowers and see A. Briggs, The History of Birmingham, Vol.II 1952.

2. E.&S. 2.11.1908.

3. Interview with Mrs. J. F. Myatt, wife of the Conservative publican.

lost seats on the Council, but the Parliamentary seat too, for in 1910 Bird defeated Richards.[1] For the second General Election of 1910 Labour was unable to obtain a candidate: Richards refused to stand again and the Osborne judgment restricted the flow of Union funds to the Party. Not until 1913 did the Party recover - with the reversal of the Osborne judgment by the Trade Union Act, with the adoption of a new Parliamentary candidate and with the emergence in the town of some local issues which enabled the Labour Party to head a movement of protest against both Conservative and Liberal Parties.

In the early months of 1912 Labour adopted as Prospective Parliamentary candidate, A. G. Walkden, the General Secretary of the Railway Clerks Association.[2] This union took over "the financial responsibility of working and fighting the Constituency."[3] By 1913 £500 had been spent on Walkden's candidature, only one-tenth of which had to be raised by the local party.[4] An agent was appointed for the first time on a full time basis;[5]

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1. See Table V.
2. A biographical sketch appears in W.C. 14.2.1912.
3. Minutes of the Local Labour Party (abbreviated later to M.L.L.P. 12.2.1912.
4. M.L.L.P. 12.8.1913.
5. ibid. 20.3.1912.

a Labour monthly journal, the Wolverhampton Worker, was established;[1] offices were rented in the town centre.[2] Walkden visited the Labour organisations of the town, brought national figures to speak, overhauled the organisation, appointing street captains for each street and setting up a Ladies Labour League.[3] Walkden provided for the Labour Party a similar kind of support and stimulus to that provided for the Conservative Party by Bird. Its renewed vigour was shown in 1913 when it contested 5 seats in the November Municipal Elections, the highest number ever fought by Labour, and its candidates stood against both Conservatives and Liberals.

Two local issues, in addition, helped to galvanise the Labour Party. In 1913 many landlords who were members of the Wolverhampton Property Owners Association, increased the rents of all their properties. In opposition to these simultaneous and dramatic increases the Labour Party formed a Tenants Defence League, whose leaders were prominent Labour Councillors, J. Whittaker and J. Walsh.[4] Walkden himself spoke at two great mass

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1. ibid. 20.1.1913.
2. ibid. 13.5.1912.
3. ibid. 29.2.1912, 5.3.1912. Wolverhampton Worker, May 1913.
4. Wolverhampton Worker, May 1913.

protest meetings in the Market Place.[1] The second controversy in which the Labour Party was to the fore concerned the minimum wage of Corporation employees. At a Council meeting in June 1912 the Labour members pressed that the minimum wage of all Corporation employees should be 25/- a week.[2] The matter was referred to the Finance Committee, which six months later recommended that the wage be 24/-, but only for those actually working within the borough. Again Labour pressed for a 25/- wage for all employees, including those working beyond the borough in the sewage farm and waterworks, but they were defeated.[3] These two controversies, although ending in defeats for the Labour Party, encouraged in the Party a great sense of confidence. As an independent body it was now of age. It had been pitted against the industrialists, shopkeepers, rentiers, landlords and solicitors, and it had shown itself as the champion of organised labour, of the wage earner and of the tenants in the town against both Conservatives and Liberals, who had been seen as accomplices in the "minimum wages fraud" and of increasing the rents of working mens' houses.

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1. Ibid. June 1913.
2. C.M. 10.6.1912. W.C. 12.6.1912.
3. " 9.12.1912. " 11.2.1912.

The political composition of the Town Council at the outbreak of the First World War resembled that of 1900.[1] The Conservatives still had 15 members; the Liberals had increased their representatives by 1 to 16, while Labour had lost 1 to total 3. This straight comparison however neglects the large shifts in the party strengths during the intervening years, and secondly it is not an accurate reflection of the trends as revealed at the elections. The framers of the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835 wished to insulate Town Councils from sudden changes of opinion by the electorate. For this reason only a third of the Councillors were to seek election each year; thus it would take 3 years before all Councillors had come before the electorate. In addition the creation of the Aldermanic bench to be elected every six years not by the electorate but by the Councillors was a further defence against what was expected to be the dangerous Radical views of the electorate. These devices served to buttress the status quo and prevented the views of the electorate from drastically re-shaping the composition of the Council in any one year. Thus the composition of the Council in 1914 does not really reflect the trends of the years 1910-11 to 1914. An examination, however, of the changes in the

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1. See Table I.

political composition of the Council during the years 1900-1914 does confirm the general movements outlined above.

The Liberal figure of 15 in 1900 represents a decline in Liberal membership from the late 1880s, when for instance in 1888 they possessed 21. They were revived by the clash over Education, which brought them by 1906 to 22 members, the peak of their strength. The Education issue rallied together both the radical and conservative elements in the Liberal Party, who were divided about social questions. But when this controversy died, so did the binding force of the party. Its only distinctive policy seemed to be the defence of Nonconformity, an anachronistic position for a party to be in at a time when social questions were becoming more prominent. From 1907 their numbers dropped steadily year by year to the 16 of 1914.

Other local factors contributed to the Liberal decline before the First World War. Their very success in the East Wolverhampton constituency assisted their fall. In that seat they were safe from being unseated by either Conservatives or Labour, none of whom ever represented the seat or ever came close to doing so.[1] Facing no significant opposition they had little incentive to organise

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1. Save in 1908. See Table V.

and fight Municipal Elections to safeguard their position.[1] The East Wolverhampton constituency, in addition, comprised only 3 of the 12 wards of the municipal borough; it stretched beyond the town to take in places like Willenhall, Heath Town and Wednesfield. This meant that the Liberal Party's attentions were not solely concentrated on Wolverhampton, and thus its Town Council and its elections were not for the Liberals such a key factor as for their opponents. In the West Wolverhampton constituency the Liberals had really abdicated at the turn of the century to the Conservatives, and they were unable to regain a strong foothold later when Conservatives and Labour fought each other. The competition between these two parties kept their organisations keen, especially since they were so evenly balanced and victory seemed near. For these the Town Council and its elections were important factors in their battle for Parliamentary supremacy, since the West Wolverhampton constituency comprised nothing but the remaining 9 wards of the borough;[2] thus the attention of these two parties, unlike the Liberals, was concentrated on the town. Parliamentary and municipal interests

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1. See below Chapter 2, pp.76-78for an assessment of the position in the Eastern Division.

2. Except for the small area of Ettingshall beyond the borough boundary.

converged in the West but not in the East. And finally a most important cause of the Liberal decline was that they never received anything like the stimulus and support which the Conservatives received from Bird and his eustard powder profits or which the Labour Party received from Walkden and his union contributions. Thus the Liberal Party was weaker than the other parties; it lacked the incentives which they had to fight municipal elections, and its attention was dispersed and not focused on the town. Also its basic unifying theme, the defence of Nonconformity, was increasingly inappropriate at a time when politics were being polarised into a fight between capital and labour, and when the parties representing these groups began to develop a distinctive policy at municipal as well as Parliamentary levels.

The Labour Party's period of growth was from 1891 to 1899, when it increased from 1 to 5 members of the Council. Between 1899 and 1908 it marked time, maintaining its position, but was pushed into the background by the controversy between the Liberals and Conservatives. From 1908-11 its fortunes slipped as the Conservatives mounted an attack specifically on Labour, but from 1912 Labour began to advance again, only to be checked by the Great War. Once that barrier was removed Labour surged ahead. The reason for Labour's rise was that it

was voicing the real grievances of wage earners and tenants against two parties who increasingly represented the opinion of employers and landlords. It was encouraged in its efforts, by winning the seat in the West in 1906 and later by the assistance of Walkden and his union.

The Conservatives in this period maintained their position, save for their temporary setback in the middle when they lost the seat in the West and when their membership of the Council dropped to only 19 in 1906, as against 25 in 1900. Their quick recovery after 1908 was due not only to the assistance of Bird, but also to the fact that the Conservative Party was being seen as the main opposition to Labour. In addition the Conservative Party in the town was strongly Protectionist, and this appeal attracted from the Liberal Party many manufacturers who had lost faith in Free Trade as foreign competitors cut into their markets at home and overseas.

Between 1903 and 1914 parties came to be involved in the Town Council to an extent to which they had not been in the 1890s. The first explanation is that the Education Act of 1902 transferred to the Council the controversies which had previously divided the School Board. Secondly, the Conservatives began after 1908 to fight Municipal Elections not to promote a particular Conservative

Municipal policy but to assist their Parliamentary campaign. And thirdly, the Labour Party was evolving a distinctive Municipal policy which provoked Conservative and Liberal opposition. These three factors changed the style of Town Council politics.

CHAPTER 2

The Political Background, 1919-64

The trends observable on the outbreak of the War in 1914, the revival of the Labour Party, the decline of the Liberal Party and the consolidation of the Conservative Party, continued after the end of the War with greater intensity. By 1926, the date of the last Council before the extension of the Borough boundaries, Labour had increased its membership of the Council from 3 to 13, the Liberals had fallen from 16 to 9, and the Conservatives had fallen slightly from 25 to 21.[1] Labour was clearly gaining at the expense of the Liberals, and the most dramatic illustration of this development occurred in the November election of 1919, when a Labour candidate, fighting his first municipal election, defeated a Liberal Councillor who had represented the ward for 25 years.[2] Other wards, which previously had returned Liberal members, increasingly in the 1920s sent Labour members to the Council.[3]

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1. See Table I.

2. Alan Davies, a railwayman, defeated the fruit merchant, Fred Evans, in Dunstall Ward. E.&S. 3.11.1919.

3. In St. Mary's Ward in 1920, J. W. Kennedy (Labour) defeated W. Hodgson (Liberal) who had represented the ward since 1897. St. Matthew's Ward in 1924 and 1925 returned Labour candidates and after 1927 St. George's ward became a safe Labour ward. All these wards before 1914 had been predominantly Liberal seats.

Liberals and Conservatives drew closer together. After 1919 no Conservative ever fought a Liberal in a municipal election. In October 1919 the minutes of the Management Committee of the West Wolverhampton Conservative Association record that "The Secretary intimated that Alderman Bantock, on behalf of the Liberals, and the Secretary on behalf of the Association had agreed not to oppose one anothers Candidates, but to work as a coalition to assist each others candidates." His action was approved.[1.] Their alliance was more positively cemented for the Municipal "general" Election of 1927. For the first time in the history of the Borough its boundaries had been extended; the size of the Council was increased from 48 to 52; and elections were held for all the seats on the Council in March 1927. The Labour Party decided to contest every seat,[2.] thus making a bid to gain control of the Council which the Express and Star called an attempt at "political dictatorship."[3.] Opposing the Labour Party were what were called the "anti-Socialist" candidates, an amalgamation of Conservatives and Liberals, who had pooled their resources, planned their election campaigns together

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1. M.M.C. 22.10.1919.
2. Minutes of the joint meeting of the executive committees of the East and West Wolverhampton Labour Parties. 19.1.1926.
3. 14.3.1927.

together and had issued a common election address. In November 1926 the Management Committee of the West Wolverhampton Conservative Association had appointed a sub-committee of 3 members of the Council to confer with the agent and the Liberal Party about the election.[1.] They reported to the next meeting, "indicating agreement between Alderman Bantock (Liberal Leader) and ourselves, in regard to the general position and as to individual Conservative, Liberal and Independent members of the present Town Council, contesting wards in the West Division."[2.] Final arrangements were made at a meeting of the Management Committee in January 1927, when the Liberal Municipal Committee, comprising four Liberal members of the Council, arrived to confer about the individual candidates and to draw up the election address.[3.] They partitioned the town into spheres of interest. In the West Division the Conservative organisation sustained the campaigns of the anti-Socialist candidates, while the Liberals concentrated their activities in the East.[4.]

This division of the town suggests that Parliamentary considerations were to the fore in the Conservatives'

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1. M.M.C. 5.11.1926.
2. ibid. 10.12.1926.
3. ibid. 31.1.1927
4. E.&S. 3.3.1927.

strategy. They accepted that the Eastern Division would be represented by a Liberal. Indeed the Conservatives have never represented the Eastern Division of the town.[1.] Their organisation there was almost non-existent. L. S. Amery, who in 1908, fought the seat as a Conservative, said of the organisation "I hardly expected so little as I found... beyond the score or so who had adopted me, there were very few traces."[2.] The only function of the Conservative Association there was to select a Parliamentary candidate, which it did with difficulty only very close to the elections.[3.] What little organisation there was was maintained by the donations of the Wolverhampton pump manufacturer J. O. Evans.[4.] In 1929 there was a move to close down the Association, it being explained that "ours was an industrial division and our subscribers in the past simply consisted of about 25-30 and were not spread over the division".[5.] With such a hopeless task in the East, it was to the Conservative interests in the West to admit its

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1. See Table V.
2. L. S. Amery, My Political Life, Vol.I, 1953,pp.276-7.
3. Minutes of the East Wolverhampton Conservative Association 13.8.1918. 26.10.1918, 2.4.1924, Annual Reports of the Association 1929, 1930, and its Minutes for 2.6.1931. 25.7.1934, 7.1.1937.
4. ibid. 2.4.1924, 31.3.1925, 17.5.1928, 19.4.1929, 28.5.1933, 11.4.1938.
5. ibid. 27.6.1929.

hopelessness and to leave it to the Liberals, who would thus be obliged not to intervene in the West and present the Conservatives with a fight against both Labour and Liberals.

In the West the Liberals honoured their part of the bargain. For the 1924 election no Liberal candidate opposed the Conservative candidate,[1] and Bantock, the Leader of the Liberals, wrote to the Conservative candidate, "As a Liberal I have no hesitation in saying that my views are much more in accordance with those expressed in your address than the views which are being expounded by the Labour candidate. I shall record my vote at the election in your favour, and I do not hesitate to advise all Liberals in the division to do likewise."[2] But in 1929 the Liberals were divided; a group of younger Liberals rebelled against the leadership[3] and invited a Liberal candidate to stand at the General Election.[4] The Liberal members of the Council urged Liberals to vote for the Conservative candidate in order to keep out the Labour man.

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1. See Table V.
2. E.&S. 17.10.1924.
3. The Young Liberal Association in the town sent the following resolution to the Head Office "That under no circumstance should any pact be entered into between the Liberal and other parties in either Parliamentary or Local Government elections." Minutes of the Young Liberal Association 24.1.1928.
4. E.&S. 26.1.1929.

But the anti-Socialist vote was split and in 1929 the Labour Party for the second time provided an M.P. for the Western Division.[1] Thus the Conservative strategy had been proved correct. It could only maintain its hold on the Western half by keeping the Liberals out of the contest and involved in the East. But for the revolt of the Young Liberals the defeat of the Conservatives in 1929 would not have occurred.

As Alfred Bird before 1914 had encouraged the Conservative Association to contest Municipal Elections as part of a general Parliamentary strategy, so did his son, Sir Robert Bird, who replaced his father as M.P. for West Wolverhampton on his death in 1922.[2] Like his father, Sir Robert was the financial mainstay of the Association promising on his adoption to contribute £500 per annum to the Association,[3] and at the end of each year clearing up the debts of the Association[4] and its clubs.[5] Just as Bird and his custard profits spurred the Conservatives to fight municipal elections with the Parliamentary struggle in mind, so was the Labour Party

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1. See Table V.
2. M.M.C. 13.2.1922, 20.2.1922. There is no biography of Sir Robert Bird, but for a sketch of his life see E.&S. 29.10.1935.
3. M.M.C. 19.6.1922.
4. ibid. 18.12.1929, 13.1.1932.
5. ibid. 13.11.1933, 27.3.1934, 14.12.1934.

encouraged in the same policy by its Parliamentary candidates. A. G. Walkden retired as the candidate in 1923 and was replaced by W. J. Brown, General Secretary of the Civil Service Clerical Union, which financed the running of the local party.[1] Thus the two main protagonists in the Western Division of the town possessed party machines backed by substantial resources. And they were further stimulated by the prospect of victory, since the election contests were very close, Brown managing in 1929 to defeat Bird.[2] Every incentive therefore was present for the parties to organise to their fullest extent and contest municipal elections in order to strengthen their position in the Parliamentary elections.

Parliamentary considerations were not the only factors which spurred the Labour Party to contest municipal elections on party lines. Alone of all the parties it had a distinctive Municipal Policy, a comprehensive programme for the town as a whole. To implement this programme it had sought to gain control of the Council in 1927. Labour's policy had been advocated by all Labour

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1. M.L.L.P. 5.4.1923, 27.4.1923. 14.5.1923, 15.5.1923, For Brown's career see E.&S. 25.5.1923, 5.2.1931, 17.4.1936, and his aautobiography So far...., 1943, London.
2. See Table V.

candidates in all the elections since 1918.[1] It had been revised in readiness for the 1927 election; sub-committees, each of two party members, had been delegated the task of drafting policy for such topics as municipal trading, public health, housing, municipal banking and insurance, electricity development and care of the mentally defective.[2] These groups reported to the party,[3] which sent the programme to the ward parties for affirmation.[4] Thus the party possessed a programme for Wolverhampton. Labour's attitude was that "municipal affairs could only be successful when there was a united party to carry forward a pronounced programme".[5]

The anti-Socialist groups however still possessed no distinctive policy. Neither the Liberals nor the Conservatives had a Municipal Programme, and even in 1927 the joint election address proposed no positive anti-Socialist alternative policy. It contained general statements about the need to resist Socialist dictation and to oppose "wild and extravagant schemes", which might have the effect of gaining for Wolverhampton a reputation

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1. E.&S. 31.10.1919, 15.10.1920, 28.10.1921.
2. M.L.L.P. 24.1.1926.
3. ibid. 20.2.1926.
4. ibid. 4.3.1926.
5. E.&S. 14.3.1927.

similar to that of West Ham and Poplar.[1] The anti-Socialist Express and Star complained of the vagueness of the anti-Socialist's case: "it might have been more precisely stated what particular policies as related to Wolverhampton are regarded as wild and extravagant."[2] Each candidate was left free to campaign for his own pet scheme. A. E. Beardmore, a dentist, wanted a further demolition of slum property; a solicitor, F. R. W. Hayward, wanted more branch libraries, street improvements and economy; J. Haddock, a publican, wanted "the right eye on efficiency, the left eye on efficiency and both eyes on economy." R. E. Probert, a butcher, said he would make no rash promises, keep an open mind and adopt a business attitude; and E. E. Wood, a commercial traveller, called for "sound economic government on progressive lines unhampered by the party spirit."[3]

These representative attitudes illustrate the nature of the anti-Socialist appeal. It was not a municipal programme which they were advocating. They relied on the traditional individual approach, pressing for the interests of the wards and making general remarks about

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1. E.&S. 4.3.1927.
2. ibid.
3. E.&S. 9.3.1927, 10.3.1927.

the running of the town. In policy they were concerned to keep the rates low and were opposed to municipal expenditure for social services especially if they had a redistributive effect. They opposed "Party", particularly party discipline on members of the Council, and its attempts to control the Council. They still believed that the source of policy was the Council, its committees especially, and not a Party. They were defending a traditional style of politics, the status quo, and traditional concepts. Since they were in a safe majority they had no incentive to organise as a block to resist Labour policies inside the Council; since also they had no programme to implement, they had no stimulus to act as a solid group and maintain discipline; and thus they had no reason to think in terms of "controlling" the Council. Their position was secure. Against this traditional and secure system Labour was bringing jarring policies, disturbing techniques and new concepts. Labour had a municipal programme especially designed to favour the less well-off sections of society; it believed that the programme could be carried out only by a party which acted as a solid group, and gained control of the Council.

The growth of the Labour representation on the Council is due chiefly to the extension of the franchise in 1918, when the local government vote was extended to all

men or women who had occupied any property in the borough for six months and to the wife of an occupier if she was over 30 years of age. The Act also abolished the disqualification of those in receipt of poor relief.[1] These extensions doubled the Burgess roll, which increased from 18,987 in 1914 to 37,512 in 1919. In 1912 19% of the town's population were eligible to vote: in 1921 the figure was 38%[2]. The newly enfranchised were the heads of working-class households and their wives, who were no longer inclined to the Liberal Party but supported the Labour Party. Its policies were designed to win their support. The extension of the franchise increased not only the number of voters but also the number of those qualified to be elected to the Council, since the qualification for election was being on the Burgess roll. Thus not only were Labour supporters enfranchised in 1918, but they were given wider opportunities to enter the Council itself.

Labour also benefited from the extensions of the borough boundaries in 1926 and 1932, which added to the area of the town 5,601 acres and to the population about 30,000, to make by 1933 the acreage of the town, 9,126 and

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1. 7 and 8 Geo.V c.64.
2. See Table IV.

its population 138,000. By 1933 the total membership of the Council was 60. Five new wards had been produced out of the reorganisation of the boundaries following these expansions.[1] Two, Bushbury and Low Hill, were predominatly Labour. They were situated to the North East of the town, largely estates of Council houses for those who had moved from the slums of the centre of the town and were railway or rubber workers at the nearby yards and factory. Low Hill from 1933-45 elected but one Independent: the rest were Labour. From 1945 only Labour Councillors represented the ward. Bushbury from 1927 returned only Labour members. Heath Town Ward, also in the East, was a former Urban District, an industrial village, incorporated wholesale into the town in 1927. From then to 1938 it returned Independents who had been members of the U.D.C.: in 1938 it returned its first Labour Councillor who had been a member of the U.D.C. Only from 1955 did it return solidly Labour members. But in the West of the town Penn and St. Philip's Wards returned Ratepayer Councillors up to the 1950s and from then Conservative members. These preserves of the middle class owner occupier have never sent a Labour representative to the Council. The extensions to the franchise and to the boundaries worked to the advantage

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1. See Chapter 3.

of the Labour Party for by 1939 they comprised 19 members, an increase of 6 on 1926.[1.]

The composition of the Council in 1939 presents a different picture from that of 1926. The Conservatives seem to have fallen slightly from 21 to 18; the Liberals to have dropped from 11 to 8 and the Independents to have made a great increase from 3 to 15.[2.] These crude comparisons however conceal some significant developments and do not reflect the rhythm of the leading trends of the period.

Labour's rise from 13 in 1926 to 19 in 1939 was mainly a phenomenon of the late 1930s, since even with the extension of the boundaries Labour in 1933 possessed only one more member than in 1926. Only after 1935 did Labour again increase steadily. The early 1930s then were a setback to the rapid progress which the Labour Party had made in the early 1920s. This poor showing is explained by events which had their origin at Westminster. There W. J. Brown supported Mosley and his New Party. His resignation from the Parliamentary Labour Party was treated by the local Labour Party "as a resignation from the Labour Party", and it was resolved that "we cannot have any further communication with him."[3.] But the local Party was split; although a majority decided to

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1. See Table I.
2. ibid.
3. M.L.L.P. 25.3.1931.

"stand firm" to our National Party,[1] 10 members of the Executive Committee resigned to follow Brown.[2] He founded the Independent Labour Association financed by his Union; he fought the 1931 General Election under its banner and lost to Bird.[3] After the election Brown still thought he might regain the seat and announced that the I.L.A. was going to carry on as a "political body financially self-supported."[4] This latter word was not strictly accurate, for his Union assured him of £1,000 for his campaign.[5] In the General Election of 1935 Brown again fought and lost as an I.L.A. candidate, and this time he faced an official Labour candidate, whom he comfortably defeated;[6] one of the few occasions when a rebel has been able to defeat an official candidate. After this defeat Brown severed his connections with the town, and the I.L.A., deprived of its head and financial support, and indeed of its raison d'être (since its function was to act as an electoral organisation to get Brown into Parliament) disbanded, and its individual members slowly returned to

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1. ibid. 2.3.1931.
2. ibid. 7.5.1931.
3. See Table V.
4. E.&S. 5.1.1932.
5. E.&S. 20.9.1933.
6. See Table V.

the official Labour Party.[1]

These splits and upheavals severely disrupted the local Labour Party. It had lost its dynamic M.P. and candidate, a number of its energetic though extremist members and its financial support. Thus weakened it could not, even in the 1935 election, run a candidate to defeat Brown. In Council politics too the repercussions were felt, since the I.L.A. and Labour Party fought each other for representation on the Council. In 1932 for instance the I.L.A. opposed the official Labour candidates in 3 wards, and in one ward defeated the sitting Labour member.[2] The I.L.A. in the period of its existence managed to send 4 of its members to the Council from the 2 wards of St. James' and St. Matthew's in the Eastern half of the town. Here the main efforts of the I.L.A. had been concentrated with regards to Council affairs. Especially assiduous in this local campaign had been William Lawley, who was unemployed and thus had time to devote to nursing these wards. He had appreciated that these were the areas of the town most hit by unemployment, where social conditions were at their most unpleasant. Almost daily he appeared in the wards,

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1. The E.&S. 20.1.1938 reported that the I.L.A. had ceased to exist and that the members had transferred themselves to the Co-operative Party, whereby returning to the Labour fold.

2. E.&S. 1.11.1932.

offering help and representing people in their appeals against the meagre amount of Unemployment Relief paid to them.[1] His work in these wards was the foundation of the I.L.A. membership on the Council, for the other 3 I.L.A. Councillors were on the whole insignificant individuals, who gained membership of the Council only through being associated with Lawley and his work.[2] Lawley's energies in these eastern wards worked in the long run to the advantage of the official Labour Party. It had never been able to establish a firm foothold in these wards, which were the centres of Liberal strength in the town. Where the official Labour Party had failed, Lawley's unorthodox Association succeeded, and for the first time the Liberal strongholds were captured. They were retained for Labour when the I.L.A. members returned to the Labour Party. Thus Lawley and the I.L.A. achieved the first Labour breakthrough in the Liberal wards in the east of the town.

In the short run, however, the squabbles between the I.L.A. and the Labour Party impeded the cause of Labour representation. The advance of the 1920s had been halted. The quarrels however took place only in respect to

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1. Interview with W. Lawley.

2. E.T. Bradley joined the Fascist Party, B. Dagnan the Conservative Party and J. Hill remained in the Labour Party, but his only contribution to the Council was in connection with the Small Holdings and Allotments Committee.

Parliamentary and national affairs, at Parliamentary and municipal elections,[1] but not in the Council. There it is impossible to distinguish I.L.A. from Labour members. They voted together; they spoke for the same motions; one from one side would second a motion proposed by one from the other side. A common alliance on the Council in the 1930s was between Lawley and H. E. Lane, who contested the East Wolverhampton seat as official Labour candidate in 1935. These two proposed and seconded motions and amendments together on the Council during the same time as the I.L.A. and the Labour Party were at variance over Brown. Lane said "Lawley loaded the gun and I fired the bullets."[2] Thus over municipal policy there was no divergence between the I.L.A. and the Labour Party: their only bone of contention was W. J. Brown. Once he had abandoned the town unification was quite simple. Then Labour began to advance again, from 13 members of the Council in 1935 to 19 in 1939.[3]

The Conservatives, consisting of 25 in 1919, had apparently lost support in the 1920s and 30s, since in 1939 they possessed only 18 members of the Council. Their

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1. Although they fought each other for Council seats there was little difference in their programmes, E&S 26.10.1932.
2. Interview with H. E. Lane. See Council Minutes for 1933-38.
3. See Table I.

decline however is illusory, since the group called Ratepayers and Independents comprised individuals whose national allegiance was to the Conservative Party but in local affairs preferred not to bear openly the party label and to receive open assistance from the party machine. This group, 6 in 1919, consisted of 15 in 1939; thus making the true Conservative total not 18 but 33.

These Independents[1] represented three types of ward; first the wards in the West, Penn and St. Philip's, where there grew up a flourishing Ratepayers Association in the 1930s, narrowly confined to promoting amenities for their wards; secondly Heath Town Ward, members of whose U.D.C. came onto the Council as Independents. They were mainly concerned with protecting the interests of Heath Town. And thirdly various other wards usually returning Labour members, but which occasionally sent to the Council a well-known ward figure such as a priest or a publican. For instance St. Mary's Ward, which in 1927 had elected 3 Labour Councillors, returned T. Brady, a publican, and F. Lockett a Catholic priest as Independent Councillors from 1928 and from 1930 respectively until 1945 when the ward again sent Labour men to the Council.[2]

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1. See below Chapter 3 and Chapter 9.

2. Similarly for Low Hill Ward, T. W. Glynn, a publican, represented the ward from 1933-45, while his colleagues were all Labour Councillors.

"Independent" in these cases can be seen as an electoral device, since a candidate standing openly as a Conservative would have had little opportunity of victory: it allowed anti-Socialist individuals to insinuate themselves into what were normally Labour strongholds. The Independents therefore were either Councillors concerned particularly with the interests of their wards or else people infiltrated into safish Labour seats to reduce Labour membership of the Council.

There was no organisation for the "Independents"; they were not a coherent party with an electoral machine covering the town, nor did the Independent Councillors meet as a caucus for planning their activities in the Council. In national politics they were Conservative supporters and in municipal elections they never faced official Conservative opposition. In Council affairs they voted with the Conservatives and were indistinguishable from them.

A leading feature of the appeal of the Independents was that they were not connected to a political party; a position which they contrasted with the situation in the Labour Party. Conservatives too criticised the Labour Party for bringing party politics into municipal affairs, and explained that they, though fighting elections

openly as Conservatives, dropped their political affiliations once on the Council and in an Independent manner judged each issue on its merits. The Labour Party was accused of demanding from its Councillors a rigid adherence to a party line. For instance in 1930 the Conservative agent, Sam Bowers, said "In Wolverhampton the Socialist Party candidates had to subscribe to the Socialist Party programme. If they deviated from it when elected they were subject to Party discipline. The Conservative Association supported its nominees for election to the Town Council, but with this difference - that if elected they were not subject to any party discipline or interference by the Conservative Association. They are there solely to exercise their judgement in the best interests of the ratepayers."[1]. Hostility to Labour united the Conservatives and Independents, and the Liberals too.

The Liberals in the interwar years were indistinguishable as regards voting in the Council from other anti-Socialist Councillors. They too stressed their objection to party politics and their desire to judge issues on their merits. Although their national affiliation was well-known, at municipal election time it was not emphasised. They never stood openly as Liberals, but

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1. E.&S. 23.12.1930.

called themselves Independents.[1] More and more they came to be limited to two wards in the Eastern half of the town, which the Conservatives allowed them to keep and which Labour did not really invade until the I.L.A. and Lawley made the breakthrough. In crude terms their decline does not appear all that sharp, a fall from 11 in 1919 to 8 in 1939, but of the 8 in 1939, 5 were Aldermen of long-standing and only 3 were Councillors. Thus it was clear that the Liberals had not been recruiting fresh support, for example the Young Liberals wound up their Association in 1929 through lack of interest.[2] The decline of the Liberals was due to their irrelevancy at a time when the main battle was between the Labour and Conservative Parties. The Liberals were not an adequate opposition against either. Squeezed between the two, they merged with the Conservatives, at first through electoral pacts which then led to closer connections. As an independent body the Liberals let their organisation run down, and relying on Conservative sufferance and

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1. e.g. W. Rooker in St. Matthew's Ward in 1928. E.&S. 2.11.1928, and J. Haddock and F. Jennings in St.Matthew's and St. James' Wards in 1929, E.&S. 2.11.1929. They have not been included in the Independent group in the Tables, since they were really a separate set of men, whose Liberal allegiances were well known.

2. Minutes of the Young Liberal Association Last entry for 1929. Interview with Mr. R. Lewis.

assistance they faded away.[1.]

All these anti-Socialist groups, Conservatives, Liberals, Independents and Ratepayers possessed a common ethos - hostility to the Labour programme and to Labour's means to implementing their proposals. Even as late as 1939 none of these groups had a distinctive, positive, constructive and comprehensive programme for the town as a whole, nor did the anti-Socialists as a group possess one. Their raison d'être was essentially negative and defensive, a protection of the status quo and the methods of the 1890s. Their ethos was that electors should choose not measures but men; not a policy and programme but individuals who would tackle each problem as it arose on the Council in the best interests of the town.

In 1945 Labour gained for the first time an overall majority, holding 32 seats against the Conservatives' 13 and the Independents' 15.[2.] In the Parliamentary sphere too Labour triumphed with John Baird's victory in East Wolverhampton over the Liberal Geoffrey Mander who had held the seat since 1929; and in the West H. D. Hughes defeated the Conservative candidate J. Beattie who had been chosen as candidate after Bird had declared his

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1. See Chapter 9, pp. 392-395.
2. See Table I and E. & S. 2.11.1945 and 8.12.1945.

intention not to seek re-election.[1] Labour was in command of both the Parliamentary and municipal representation of the town.

The Liberals were a spent force: they had run only two candidates in the November elections as Independents and both had lost.[2] The Conservatives did not campaign openly as Conservatives but as Progressives. Before the election the anti-Socialist members of the Council had met to plan their election strategy. They decided to drop the label "Conservative" since they reckoned that it was very unpopular with the electorate, having regard to their large Parliamentary defeat in June. Such a move was also in accord with their opposition to partisanship over Council affairs.[3] Their election address, similar to that of 1927, stressed hostility to Socialist measures which they called ill-considered and liable to raise the rates. As in the past they made no distinctive and positive proposals.[4] They were soundly defeated; only 8

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1. See Table V and E.&S. 25.6.1945.
2. F. Birch at Heath Town and C.M. Walsh at St. Mary's Ward
3. Interview with W. J. Rawlins, Secretary of the Progressive Group, and C. M. Walsh.
4. Election address of the Progressive Group, 1945. In 1950 Sir Robert Bird said "after the 1945 election, the party in West Wolverhampton was in disarray and it was not easy to see how it could be restored." E.&S. 20.4.1950.

of their 26 candidates were elected.

The Conservatives in Wolverhampton were stunned by the defeats,[1] but only temporarily; a new agent was appointed in the West; a new Parliamentary candidate, Enoch Powell, was chosen and the organisation was overhauled for the first time since the defeat in 1906. One of the main changes was that the Constituency Association was no longer dependent on financial contributions from its candidate to maintain the organisation. The agent reported in 1946 that "in the past this Association has relied on the generosity of its former M.P. Sir Robert Bird: now it is the members themselves who are responsible for the financial obligations of the upkeep of the Constituency H.Q. and for maintaining and furthering the Conservative Party throughout the District. This followed the remodelling of the Constituency on democratic lines as laid down by Central Office."[2] Money was sought primarily by appealing to local businesses; a circular was sent to local firms asking for assistance.[3]

Not only had the Party to go out to find money, it had to persuade people to vote for the Conservative candidate, and to Powell's mind that meant, as it had to Alfred Bird

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1. Interview with J. Beattie.
2. The Agents Report for 1946 and E.& S. 7.9.1946.
3. Papers of the Conservative Association.

in 1912, using the municipal elections as the "summer manoeuvres" for the Parliamentary battle.[1] He urged that all non-Socialist candidates for the Council should stand openly as Conservatives, and that the titles of Progressive, Ratepayer and Independent should be dropped, so that all anti-Socialists could rally behind the Conservatives and the Party could know where Conservative support really lay. He also argued that this change would redound to the benefit of the Council, for the Independent, he said, with no party machine to guide and help him had no possible chance of representing his electorate satisfactorily in the increasing intricacies of local government. Party labels were a great help. They enabled the electorate to understand what line a candidate would take on the point at issue.[2] Most of the Councillors followed his advice. The only resistance came from Penn Ward, where the Ratepayers Association possessed a genuine Independent existence, distinct from the local Conservative Association.[3] Bitterness between the two bodies was so intense that in the Municipal Election of 1950 the Ratepayers' Councillor of Penn had to face not only a Labour but a Conservative candidate, and

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1. He said that local elections should be used as "a public platform on which the party's national policy can be expounded." E.&S. 17.4.1950.

2. Report of a speech at the town's Wulfrun Hall. E.&S. 2.5.1950.

3. See below Chapter 9.

he defeated them both.[1.] By 1955 however the Conservatives had won; in the election of that year the Ratepayers's candidate came bottom of the poll.[2.] They could find no other candidate prepared to finance his own campaign;[3.] their former Councillors had accepted the Conservative label;[4.] support dwindled and the Association was dissolved.[5.] Most of the other Independents accepted the Conservative label,[6.] although a few preferred to retire from the Council.[7.] From now on all anti-Socialist members of the Council attended the Conservative "caucus", the group which conferred before a Council meeting to concert action there.[8.] At the height of the crisis over the position of the Independents, an Independent caucus had almost been formed, but such a split had been avoided by the diplomacy of the Conservative leader J. Beattie and by the recognition of the harsh

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1. A. Baker (R.P.) 2211
   S. Tatem (Con.) 1834
   A. Eaton (Lab.) 1400 E. & S. 13.5.1950.
4. M. P. Birch (Con.) 2614
   Mrs. G. Brazier (Lab.) 1070
   L. A. Hayward (R.P) 890 E. & S. 13.5.1955.
3. Interview with A. A. Rogers and F. W. Mason, Chairman and Secretary of the Penn Ratepayers Association.
4. e.g. M. P. Birch and A. Baker.
5. Minutes of the R.P. Association, May 1956.
6. e.g. J. C. Homer, W. J. Rawlins, J. H. Coleman, A. Byrne-Quinn.
7. e.g. H. H. Mould, Mrs. E. M. C. Hayton, A. L. Kitching.
8. See below Chapter 8.

political reality that the Labour Party could only be kept out of control by common action by the Conservatives and Independents.[1] Again Parliamentary considerations had intervened in the politics of the Council, this time to cause the elimination of the Independents.

Labour's victory in 1945 heralded a new style of political process on the Town Council. Party became more significant than before in the actual work of the Council. When Labour had been in opposition, its Group meetings of Councillors had been informal and irregular, called to deal with specific items, and they were not a permanent feature. In power, however, frequent and regular Group meetings were held to concert policy and tactics in the Council chamber. The Labour Party in Wolverhampton tried to act with regard to the Council as the Labour Party did nationally with Parliament; namely a governing party with a majority facing a minority opposition party; one party in office and responsible for policy, the other without any office.[2] This situation was not finally reached until 1955; for at first, from 1945-49, Labour did not take all the Chairmanships of the Council committees; in opposition from 1949-52 they refused to

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1. Interviews with J. Beattie and J. Ireland; and E.&S. 9.5.1950.
2. See below Chapter 7.

accept any offered to them by the Conservatives; in 1952-55 again they shared them, then from 1955 they took them all. Labour regarded the Chairman as analagous to the Minister; and to allow members of different and opposing parties to share these offices, it was felt, would detract from the concept of the collective responsibility of a single party for the policy of the whole Council.[1.] Conservatives at first protested at the imposition on local government of Parliamentary techniques, which they argued, were inappropriate in the context of a Town Council with a Committee structure. Yet by the late 1950s, realising that they could not defeat Labour or indeed run the Council along the traditional lines of sharing office and responsibility, the Conservatives had adopted these very techniques and had even perfected them more intensely than the Labour Party. Regular Group meetings were held at the same time as Labour's; shadow Chairmen watched their opposite numbers in the Labour Party, and a policy committee was established to act as a kind of Shadow Cabinet. The Conservatives had become an alternative government poised to take over from Labour when a majority was won.[2.] The traditional style of running the Council, which was in operation at the turn

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1. ibid. and Chapter 10.
2. See below Chapter 8.

of the century, finally vanished in the 1950s.

In the 1950s partisanship in the Council was far more rife than it had been in the interwar years, mainly because the parties were so evenly balanced. Labour had a majority of never more than 10 from 1945-49; the Conservatives were in a majority from 1949-52; then Labour regained control, which it has kept into the 1960s. In 1961-63, however, the parties were equal with 30 members of the Council apiece.[1] This balance was a feature of the Parliamentary representation too. J. Baird maintained his seat in the East, while J.E. Powell in 1950 defeated the Labour member, H.D. Hughes, and has retained the seat, increasing his majority at each election.[2] This representation was not accepted by the Labour and Conservative Parties with such equanimity as the Liberal and Conservative Parties had accepted the division of the town's Parliamentary representation at the turn of the century. In each Division both parties have strong organisations. None has abdicated from any Division.

Municipal elections have reflected the antagonism between the two competing parties. Independents have

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1. See Table I and the Epilogue.

2. See Table V.

stood no chance, whether it was a Ratepayer challenging a Conservative[1]. or an ex-Labour Councillor expelled from the Labour Party challenging her former party.[2]. The Liberals began to make a tentative reappearance, fighting safe Conservative wards in the 1960s.[3]. The Communists have fought some safe Labour wards too.[4]. But the main clash at the elections has been between the Conservative and Labour Parties. This partisan conflict has, so it is sometimes argued, produced apathy amongst the public and is responsible for low polls at municipal elections since the voters cannot see the relevance of this kind of political struggle for the Town Council. In Wolverhampton however there is no evidence that party politics has contributed to an increase in public apathy; rather it points to the opposite tendency.

There have been more contested elections since parties took an interest in municipal politics, and especially since the Labour Party entered the scene.[5]. During the 1920s at the November elections never fewer than 4 seats were fought, and in 3 years 8 seats were contested. In the 1930s when the Labour Party was

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1. The Penn Ward election of 1955. E.&S. 13.5.1955.
2. Heath Town Ward, 1960. H. Bowering (Lab) 1333
   Mrs. M. Cattell (Ind) 1260
   E.&S. 13.5.1960.
3. Chapter 9.
4. ibid.
5. See Table II (E) and (G).

somewhat weaker there were slightly fewer fights each year, but after 1945 there were never fewer than 8 contests at each election. In 1 year all 15 seats were fought; in 3 years 14 and in 4 years 13. More contests meant that more people had the opportunity to participate in the elections than in the days when contests were few. Their opportunities were further widened because of the extensions of the franchise, not merely in 1918[1]. but also in 1945 when the municipal franchise was made as good as equal to the Parliamentary franchise.[2]. In 1939 the Burgess roll totalled 73,222; in 1945 106,245. In 1932 46% of the town's population were eligible to vote; in 1952 68%, the same percentage as in 1960. In 1932 10% of the town's inhabitants voted in the election; in 1952 29%. Thus just under a third of the population participated, whereas at the turn of the century it rarely rose above 3% or 4%; and in the interwar years it was about 10%.[3].

As the percentage of the population voting has risen, so the percentage of the electorate voting has fallen. Before 1914 polls of 60-80% were typical; in the 1920s 50-60% polls were common; in the 1930s 30-40% became

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1. See above page 84.
2. 8 and 9 Geo.VI c.5. See below Chapter 4 pp.187-189
3. See Table IV.

usual. After 1945 polls of 30-40% remained normal.[1.] These figures, relating to the individual wards, are more meaningful than figures for the town as a whole which level out the large variations between wards.[2.] The reasons for the drop in the percentage of the electorate voting are mainly two; first, the extension of the franchise to people not owning property and possessing little wealth and little education, lacking knowledge, awareness and interest in politics and local government. The narrower electorate of the 1890s was more concerned with the Town Council and its policies than the wider, basically working-class, electorate after 1918. And second, the parties' habit of contesting hopeless seats has pulled down the figures for the turnout, - since the safe seats have the lowest poll.

Three related factors determine whether turnout will be large or small: the socio-economic composition of the ward,[3.] the safeness of the seat and the intensity of party activity. Between 1958 and 1964 turnouts of under 30% were recorded for 24 contests. All took place in safe Labour wards. Turnouts of under 20% occurred in 5 fights and 4 of these were straight fights between Labour and Communist candidates. The highest turnouts

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1. See Table VII and Table II G.
2. See Table VIII.
3. See Chapter 3.

took place in marginal wards. In this period 11 contests produced turnouts of over 50%; 8 were in marginal wards and the other 3 were in safe Conservative wards, where 3 cornered contests were held between Conservative, Labour and Liberal candidates. Safe Conservative wards witnessing straight fights between Labour and Conservatives had larger turnouts than safe Labour wards where there were straight fights between Labour and Conservative candidates.[1]

Therefore the working-class who predominate in safe Labour wards have not the same inclination to vote as the middle class who predominate in safe Conservative wards. The latter group, better educated, more civic minded and politically conscious, perhaps feel more intensely than the former that it has a duty to vote. The level of party activity is a significant factor too, for the Conservative Party in safe Conservative wards is much more active on election day than the Labour Party in safe Labour wards. The Conservatives are apt to stay in their ward and not go out to help in the marginal seats, while the Labour members make only a token showing in their safe wards and concentrate on the marginals, especially when they face only Communist opponents in their safe wards. In addition, low polls here are easily explained

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1. See Table II G(ii) and refer back to Table II B. The same generalisations apply to the period 1945-1957.

by the lack of Conservative candidates; without a candidate to support, the Conservative voters stay at home. This factor explains the high polls in Conservative seats when the Liberals entered the fray against both Conservatives and Labour. Previously the Liberal voters had had no candidate to support. When they had, they turned out. The importance of party in influencing the turnout can be seen in the marginal wards; here party activity is concentrated, for these wards hold the key to control of the Council. More intense party activity produces a higher poll.

If the parties were solely concerned with the Town Council, they would fight no other seats but the marginals; however, since they have Parliamentary aspirations too they have fought in hopeless seats to keep in trim their Parliamentary organisation and to activate their supporters there. Because these hopeless seats are fought, the percentage of the turnout for the town has been reduced. Therefore the entry of party politics into local government elections has given more people than before the opportunity to cast a vote; it has enabled a higher proportion of the inhabitants of the town to take part in choosing the town's governors; but the price paid for this has been a lower percentage turnout of those eligible to vote.

The appeal of the candidates at election time since 1945 differed sharply from the style around 1900. Now each candidate is a party candidate. His name is not as important as the party behind him. His helpers are party workers, more committed to the party than to him personally. His committee rooms are festooned with party posters and literature. The Parliamentary agents manage the campaigns. The election address is common for all candidates, drawn up by the party to emphasise party policy, with only a small space for the candidate to make a personal appeal, calling attention to his experience, connections with the ward, personal interest and adherence to the proposals of his party. The parts of the address written by the parties possess a similarity of approach. When in power it justifies and praises its record, seeks support to carry on its sound programme and attacks the opposition for negative obstruction and for advocating misguided proposals. In its election addresses for 1961 and 1962 the Labour Party listed its achievements and future plans for Health, Education, Housing, Welfare, Town Development, Care of Children and Open Spaces. It attacked the Conservative Government's high interest rates and the Conservative Group's policy of "selling out Wolverhampton

to the private speculator."[1]. In opposition the party condemns the failure of the administration, which it accuses of pursuing unnecessary and expensive schemes, which have raised the rates and produced no public benefit. They urge the adoption of alternative proposals, more economical and efficient than those of the majority party. In its election addresses for 1961 and 1962 the Conservative Party complained of lavish expenditure which had increased the rates: it attacked Socialist Party puppets who badgered and interfered. It called for consultation and not dictation with people affected by slum clearance. It opposed what it called Labour's plans to municipalise "taxis, laundries, printing, catering and petrol stations", and its plans for Comprehensive Schools which would injure the town's Grammar School. It called for a differential rent scheme, the sale of Council houses to tenants, and encouragement to private builders and developers, attacking Labour's hostility to these proposals.[2]. The election has become a clash not of personalities but of parties and the Conservatives during the course of the 1950s have evolved a distinct municipal policy, an alternative to Labour's. As the Labour Party

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1. Labour Party Election Addresses 1961 and 1962.
2. Conservative Party Election Addresses, 1961 and 1962.

in opposition formed its alternative to the traditional status quo, so the Conservatives in opposition, yet on the brink of taking control, have been stimulated to propose their own alternative to the Labour status quo. Before 1945 there was no Conservative municipal policy; since then they have produced one.

The financing of the election campaigns differs slightly from party to party. In the Labour Party the election expenses are borne by the party; whereas in the Conservative Party if a candidate can afford it, he pays for his own campaign.[1] In one Conservative ward, West Park, the financing and the actual election campaign are in the hands of two families who act under the name of the Conservative Association. The Guys, father and son, and the Fullwoods, father and son, all represent the ward as Councillors or Aldermen. They have provided the money, organised the canvassing and the arrangement of cars for polling day;[2] an easy task for them, since the Guys own a motor car servicing business and the Fullwoods a tyre selling concern; thus they have many contacts with the leading businesses in the town.[3] This situation in West

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1. Interviews with D. H. Haselock, W. J. Rawlins and V. J. Bowyer.
2. Scrapbook of L. R. Guy.
3. ibid.

Park Ward represents a blending of the old and the new; on the one hand it appears as a personal fief of two closely linked families, and on the other these families operate under the banner of a political party. Within the Labour Party on the Council there are no members to compare with the Guys and Fullwoods in wealth and range of business contacts. Their candidates are more dependent on the party for financing and organising their campaigns.

The style of the campaigns pursued by the parties is similar. Each candidate is nominated by members of his party residing in the ward he seeks to represent. For a number of evenings before the actual poll, the candidate and his canvassers will tour the ward, posting literature and talking to voters on their doorsteps. The efforts of both parties are concentrated on known party supporters who have previously indicated loyalty to the party; or else on doubtfuls or new arrivals to the ward. No attempts at conversion are made. Often a loudspeaker will be used by the candidate on the streets or outside a factory gate. Posters are put up in windows or on boards in gardens. There is little excitement until election day itself. Then all attention is paid to getting out supporters. Canvassers knock up voters, cars hurry them to the polling station: school children run from the polling station to committee rooms to keep the

organisers informed of those who have voted. Canvassers go from the committee rooms to pull out those who have not yet been to vote. The time of most activity is between 7.00 and 8.30 p.m., when the largest number of party workers are engaged in the fight and when the majority of people are at home after work.[1.]

Compared with the elections of the turn of the century[2.] two features are significant. Party is now uppermost; the candidate himself stands first and foremost as a party man; and secondly now there are few public meetings. It is most rare for a candidate to hold a public meeting. If one is held, then it is sparsely attended and usually by loyal party workers only. Both parties have come to the conclusion that the public meeting as a means of putting a candidate before an electorate is inappropriate, and that since the people won't come to the candidate, the candidate must go to them.

This decline of the public meeting has reduced the opportunities for the press to report on the election. Often the only signs in the local newspaper that an election is to take place are a series of letters in the

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1. Personal experience of election campaigns in the 1950s and 1960s.

2. See Chapter I, pp. 29-41.

correspondence columns praising or attacking a particular candidate, or taking up points raised in the election addresses.[1] On the day of the election, the leader columns exhort the electorate to vote and not to kill democracy through apathy. The press does not report the activities of the parties and candidates, nor do the parties inform the press of their doings. It could therefore be argued that the press has contributed to a decline of interest in local government, since it no longer gives such prominence as it did to the elections.[2] In reply the press would say that they have cut down their coverage because of lack of public demand. If the public wanted to read such news, they would demand and receive it.[3] Thus each blames the other; and it is impossible to prove which is right.

In 1900 political parties played little part in municipal elections and there were no party groups on the Council. In 1964 only party candidates stand for election to the Council and two party groups, one the governing and the other the opposition party, face each other in the Council chamber. The introduction of party politics

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1. Personal impression gleaned from a study of the press from 1890 to 1964.
2. See Chapter 1, p. 33 and Introduction pp. 22-27.
3. Interviews with R. Foster and H. W. Small.

into local government is often thought to have been a cause of increasing apathy. But in Wolverhampton there is no evidence of growing apathy. Just the opposite - because of the introduction of party politics more people have the opportunity to vote for their Councillors than in 1900 and more people have the opportunity to stand as candidates. Today there are more contests and more people seeking to be Councillors than 60 years ago. Now more people are eligible both to vote and to be elected; party has enabled them to make use of these opportunities. It has increased public participation in the municipal political process.

CHAPTER 3

The Political Background: a Survey of the Wards

Between 1896 and 1964 the boundaries of the wards were altered twice, in 1927 and 1958, but on both occasions most of the wards retained their essential characteristics. Thus it is possible to examine each ward over the whole period to reveal its economic and social composition, its voting behaviour and the types of Councillor it sent to the Town Hall.[1.]

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1. Sources (a) The details of the economic and social composition of the wards come from the author's personal observations, based on 25 year's residence in the town and a tour of every ward between 1963 and 1964. Assistance was received from Mr. A. J. Robbins, the Chief Electoral Registration Assistant of Wolverhampton, also a native of the town, who discussed with the author the returns made by the canvassers who compiled the electoral register. There are no surveys, for example of the rateable value of property in each ward, because the wards have not been used as administrative units. The Census returns have not presented their material by wards.

(b) Details about election results have been taken from the local press, and the size of the electorate, from 1896 to 1913 from the press and the Wolverhampton Directories, and from 1919 to 1964 from lists supplied by Mr. Robbins. The shares of the vote gained by each party in each ward together with the size of the electorate and the percentage poll from 1896 to 1964 are given in Tables IIA and IIB.

(c) Details about the Councillors, i.e. their occupations, religions etc. are taken from Council Yearbooks, the press, interviews and replies to a questionaire. The latter is reproduced on page 817.

(d) The boundaries of the wards from 1896 are shown on the maps on pages 813-816.

(e) The dates following an individual's name refer to his years on the Council as representive of the ward under discussion.

St. Peter's Ward

The town centre has since 1848 been in St. Peter's Ward, the commercial and professional centre of the town dominated by the retail trade. It is the smallest ward in area and population, but the richest in rateable value. It has also contained a working class area in the northern part in shabby narrow streets of nineteenth century terraced houses. During the 1950s and 1960s these have been demolished and Council flats have begun to rise in their place. The business vote has declined since 1945 as private owners have been replaced by limited liability companies whose directors do not qualify for a vote. The population of the ward fell until 1958, when a redrawing of the boundaries added to it a working class area in the north east which was formerly part of St. Mary's Ward. This part has continually lost population as the older properties have been cleared.

From 1896 to 1945 the ward was a Conservative stronghold. Only one Liberal was elected, and he was a prominent businessman in the ward.[1.] There were few contests in the ward until Labour candidates began to contest seats in the middle 1920s,[2.] but they never gained

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1. G. le M. Mander (1911-20).

2. 3 contests between 1896 and 1924.

over 40% of the vote. In 1945 Labour won a seat with 52% of the vote, but it remained basically a Conservative ward until the revision of the boundaries in 1958 turned it into a highly marginal one.[1.]

Before 1945 its Councillors had 3 main characteristics. They were either professional men who had offices in the town centre, businessmen with factories in the ward or traders with premises there. The latter element has remained constant, while the former have dwindled. Since 1945 the Conservative Councillors have usually been shop-keepers with establishments in the ward.

The Labour Councillors have had fewer links with the ward. None has ever lived or worked there. Their occupations have been various, 2 trade union officials, 2 housewives, a boilersmith and a machinery inspector.

Before 1914 one attachment of the representatives to the ward was far more noticeable than later. Many Councillors worshipped at the parish church of St. Peter and held such lay offices as sidesman and churchwarden. This connection has not been apparent since 1914.

St. Mary's Ward

Adjoining St. Peter's Ward on its north east side was St. Mary's Ward, which vanished as a separate ward in the

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1. Labour won it in 1952 and 1957.

reorganisation of 1958, part going to St. Peter's and part to Eastfield. It was an industrial and working class area, of large and small factories and streets of terraced houses. In the 1920s it contained some of the worst slums of the town and it was one of the earliest of the Council's slum clearance areas. By 1958 its population had dwindled as its people had been moved to new estates.

It saw only one contest between 1896 and 1914. Conservatives, Liberals and Independents peacably shared the representation of the ward. After 1920 no Conservative or Liberal who stood openly was elected. Labour first won the ward in 1920 with 59% of the vote. Its hold was shaken in the 1930s by 2 Independents who were well-known local figures, the Catholic parish priest and a publican. Between 1945 and 1957 it was a safe Labour seat.

Its Councillors have often been Catholics, for the ward contained the Irish quarter dominated by St. Patrick's Church, whose priest at the turn of the century, Father Darmody, was an influential figure who "controlled the vote."[1]. A Liberal manufacturer and shopkeeper who represented the ward were Catholics; Labour's representatives have contained 2 Catholics; one

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1. See Chapter 5, pp. 239-240.

Independent was a Catholic and this ward is the only ward to have returned a priest, the Catholic Father Lockett, to the Council. Four of its Catholic Councillors were also Irishmen.

Many of its Councillors were connected to Butler's Brewery, whose Springfield works was situated in the ward. The Managing director was a Councillor in 1895-1903; one was the steward at the brewery's sports and social club, one was a licensed victualler of a Butler's house and another became a Butler's publican after retiring from the coal trade.

Between 1945 and 1958 its Labour Councillors were all working men except the wife of a working man and the owner of a small bakery. Only one of them lived in the ward.

Dunstall Ward

To the north and north east of the town centre is Dunstall Ward. In 1964 it is an industrial area, containing the Electrical Construction Company which was established in the 1890s, Courtaulds which came to the town in the 1920s and many small engineering firms. The large railway sheds and workshops, which used to be the main employers in the ward, were closed down in 1964. Most of the housing dates from the late nineteenth century, both working class and lower middle class terraced houses.

Much of it is scheduled for demolition which is soon to start. There are small pockets of interwar semi-detached houses but hardly any were built after 1939. Before the Second World War it used to be a ward of mixed working and middle class social composition. Since 1945 its status has declined, especially after many West Indian and Indian immigrants flocked into the ward in the early 1960s.

No Labour member won a contested election in the ward before 1919. When Labour candidates fought a straight fight with the Conservatives Labour gained over 40% of the vote, but when Liberals fought straight fights with the Conservatives the Liberals got over 60%. Labour and Liberals fought each other only once before 1919, in 1913, when the Liberals gained 55% of the vote. After 1919 Labour won some seats in the ward; the most dramatic election being that of 1919 when a Labour candidate fighting for the first time defeated a Liberal Councillor who had represented the ward for 25 years.[1] When all 3 seats were fought in the municipal "general election" of 1927, each of the 3 successful candidates belonged to a different party; A. Davies was Labour, C. A. Mander, a Conservative and F. S. Thompson a Liberal.[2]

After 1945 it became a fairly safe Labour seat being

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1. See Chapter 2, p. 74.
2. E.&.S. 23.3.1927.

lost only twice in 1947 and in 1960 and on the last time by only 9 votes.[1.] As the social composition of the ward became more homogeneous, so its political allegiance hardened and was no longer spread widely over the 3 major parties.

Its Councillors have been as varied in occupation as in politics, a mixture of Labour working men, Liberal shopkeepers and Conservative industrialists and professional men. It has the distinction of being the first ward to return a female Councillor, the Labour Mrs. E. Sproson, in 1921. The one striking characteristic of its Labour representatives in particular has been their connection with the railways; 4 of its Labour Councillors were railwaymen between 1919 and 1964.

Graiseley Ward

To the south and south west of the town centre is Graiseley Ward. It has always been a ward with a very varied social composition. Until very recently it contained an area of very old and poor slums tightly packed in alleys and courts. Some of the worst were cleared in the interwar years; most went in the 1950s, but some still await demolition. At the turn of the century it had a number of small factories, now removed elsewhere. On the cleared land were erected the Council's first multi-

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1. E.&S. 13.5.1960.

storey flats in the 1950s, while in the corner furthest from the town centre was one of the Council's first housing estates of the 1920s. The ward also has a large number of private houses of different kinds, ranging from terraced lower middle class housing of the period 1890-1914, through more substantial villas of the same period, to some large houses of the interwar years. Many of the larger houses have been flatted or, if near the town centre, taken over by West Indians. Thus since 1896 it has been a far from homogeneous ward; in 1900 in the area nearest the town centre were ugly slums, while at the other end were the large houses of the well-off. In 1964 a select area of the well-to-do still exists, while at the other end is a West Indian community.

Over the whole period this ward has been eagerly contested by the Conservative and Labour Parties. Labour's first Councillors were from this ward in the 1890s. From this time right up to the 1960s it has been a marginal ward returning both Labour and Conservative Councillors. A seat in Graiseley was never safe. No Liberal was ever elected for the ward.

The Conservative Councillors for the ward before 1945 were mainly manufacturers and businessmen, with an occasional professional man or a local publican being elected. Since 1945 their occupations have been more varied, an estate agent, a chemist, a sales promotion

manager and the owner of a large store. The Labour members too have produced no significant occupational type; they have been a newsagent, housewife, a travel club agent, and a trade union official.

Blakenhall Ward, formerly Blakenhall and St. John's Ward

To the south of the town centre is Blakenhall Ward. From 1848 to 1896 this area was in St. John's Ward. In 1896 it was divided into two, Blakenhall and St. John's Wards. In 1927 they were largely combined, becoming known as Blakenhall and St. John's Ward, until in 1958 it became merely Blakenhall Ward.

The Blakenhall and St. John's sections can be distinguished. The latter was nearest the town centre and consisted of numerous nineteenth century factories and very slummy working class housing. The former was to the south of St. John's, more residential and middle class. The industries it contained were newer, the Sunbeam Motor Car Company, the Villiers Engineering concern, Star Aluminium and some engineering and electrical concerns, mostly of twentieth century origin. Over the period the shift of population has been away from the St. John's part, which by 1964 has been cleared of houses and is now a factory zone. The Blakenhall area too has in the late 1950s witnessed considerable clearance, but it is to be a residential area. Council flats will soon be erected

on the cleared ground. At the end of the ward farthest from the town centre is a select residential area of large interwar detached houses. West Indian and Indian immigrants have settled in a small part of the ward. Thus like Graiseley Ward it has had a very mixed social composition.

No Liberal ever stood for election in St. John's Ward between 1896 and 1925, nor was any Liberal ever a representative of the ward. The contests which did take place were between Conservatives and Labour. The former usually won except in 1898 and 1921. Other Labour members became Councillors for the ward by being elected unopposed. This ward was one of the earliest wards to send Labour men to the Council between 1898 and 1903 like a decorator, a carpenter, a spectacle maker and a plumber. The Conservative Councillors had one striking characteristic; 4 between 1891 and 1908 were publicans in the ward. They were likely to be the only Conservatives who were well-known and liked by the working class population of St. John's. No employer with a factory in the ward ever became its representative.

Blakenhall was quite different. Conservatives rarely got over 48% of the vote: only once between 1896 and 1925, in 1913, did they win a contested election.

Liberals did well in this ward before 1913; Labour won seats in 1897 and 1911 but not until after 1918 did they have a long run of successes. The Conservative and Liberal representatives had similar occupations, manufacturers and professional men; the publican element was not so prominent among the Conservatives as in St. John's Ward. The Labour members were mainly workmen.

The combination of the two wards in 1927 and the splits in the Labour Party injured Labour's chances in the ward and made it largely a Conservative ward until the increase in the electorate of 1945, when it became a very marginal ward, often changing hands. But the slum clearance and removal of the population in the course of the 1950s turned it by 1960 into a fairly safe Conservative ward. Its Conservative Councillors since 1945 have been shopkeepers and small businessmen; its Labour Councillors have been mixed; a shopkeeper, salesman, sheet metal worker and trade union official.

Parkfield Ward, formerly St. George's Ward

To the south and south east of the town centre is Parkfield Ward, which before 1958 was called St. George's. In 1958 it lost an area of working class terraced housing at its northern end to East Park Ward. It is predominantly an industrial and working class area, with some large and small engineering enterprises and builders'

yards. Half of its housing consists of Council estates, both pre- and post-war, mainly pre-1939, and half is nineteenth century terraced housing, which at the turn of the century was occupied by the middle and lower middle class and now by the working class.

It witnessed few contests between 1896 and 1910. Those which did take place were straight fights between the Conservatives and Liberals, with the latter winning. Labour won in 1910 and 1913. Between 1919 and 1927 Conservatives and Liberals combined to defeat Labour candidates, but after a redrawing of the boundaries in 1927 it became a safe Labour seat, never to be won by any other party afterwards. Conservatives have rarely gained over 30% of the vote. In the 1950s the Communists have run candidates but they have only won about 6% of the vote.

Before 1914 its Liberal and Conservative representatives were of similar occupation, manufacturers with their factories in the ward or an occasional professional man like a doctor or an accountant. Labour's Councillors were working men. Between 1919 and 1927 the representatives remained manufacturers, but after 1927 the Labour representatives have been of mixed occupations, housewives, grocers, a commissionaire, a trade union official and a tool maker.

This ward is unique in that it has sent 3 Labour grocers to the Council. Considering that shopkeepers are not a high proportion of the Labour membership of the Council,[1] it is odd that most should have come from the same ward. This suggests that there is a powerful personal influence at work in the Ward Labour Party. The influence is that of Alderman H. E. Lane, once the Councillor for the ward (1930-45), Chairman of Housing Committee (1945-49, 1952-60, 1962-), and a most dominant individual, who is credited with pushing forward as candidates those he likes and of pushing out those he dislikes.[2]

West Park Ward, formerly Park Ward

To the west and north west of the town centre lies West Park Ward, which contains some of the most attractive parts of the town around the West Park and astride the Tettenhall and Compton Roads. It is an area of tree shaded avenues, squares and cul de sacs, with large Regency and Victorian houses (many now converted into flats), interwar detached houses and modern luxury flats. It was once, and to some extent still is, the most select residential area of the town. The ward also contains valuable retail property in Chapel Ash and a sizable area

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1. See Chapter 4.
2. Interviews with Mrs. G. Bagley and Mrs. I. M. Hayes.

of terraced housing, which at the turn of the century, was of middle and lower middle class status. Now they house many of the workers at Courtaulds in the adjacent ward of Dunstall. This area also holds a considerable number of immigrants; East Europeans who came to the town after 1945, and Indians and West Indians who entered in the 1960s. A cluster of multi-storeyed Council flats has been erected in the ward. It has no industry. It is also the educational centre of the town, containing the town's 3 grammar schools and the Wulfrun College of Further Education. Symbolically perhaps, the South West Wolverhampton Conservative Association has its head-quarters in the ward.

Since 1896 it has seen few electoral contests. When there were fights the Conservatives won. Only two Liberals have represented the ward; one defeated a Conservative in the education battle of 1904, but the other in the 1920s had Conservative support against Labour opposition. Since 1945 Labour has never got over 29% of the vote; in 1960 it sunk to 10%. In 1963 the Liberals fought the seat for the first time since 1906 and obtained 30% of the vote. It is indeed a Conservative stronghold.

Up to 1945 its Councillors were very similar to those elected by St. Peter's Ward, business and professional

men with their premises in the town centre but their homes in Park Ward. Its representatives were some of the leading figures in the business life of the town. After the war it has been dominated by two families, the Guys and the Fullwoods. The former are the owners of a motor car sales and service enterprise and the latter are the owners of a tyre selling business; both sizable concerns. L. R. Guy was elected in 1939; H. T. Fullwood was co-opted in 1942. Their sons came on later, E. Y. Fullwood in 1955 and G. A. Guy in 1960. These two families, particularly the Guys, run the ward organisation with great efficiency. Because of their contacts with garages and motorists they are able to produce for an election the highest number of cars of any party in any ward. Although their organisation bears the label Conservative, it is really a personal family machine,[1] against which the Conservative Group and Association have been powerless. For example in 1958 the Conservative Group was displeased at the way the Fullwoods and Guys had voted over the choice of Mayor.[2] A resolution was passed deploring their attitude and complaining of their non-attendance at Group meetings. An attempt was made to get the South West Conservative Association to withdraw

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1. Scrapbook of L. R. Guy.
2. See Chapter 8, pp. 354-355.

the official Conservative label from them; but nothing happened. They remained inviolate in their ward, too important to antagonize.[1] Amongst progressive Conservatives these two families,[2] "alike as two peas", and always a solid block, are regarded as a bad influence, an obstructive force for doing nothing.

Merridale Ward, formerly St. Mark's and Merridale Ward

To the west and south west of the town centre and adjoining the southern part of West Park Ward is Merridale Ward. From 1896 to 1927 this area comprised two wards, St. Mark's and Merridale; they were combined in 1927 and renamed in 1958 Merridale Ward. Then it lost the land between the Compton and Tettenhall Roads to West Park Ward, but gained from St. Phillip's the area around Finchfield.

In 1964 it is on the whole a large private housing estate of interwar and post-war detached houses and luxury flats. It is one of the most desirable residential areas in the town. Nearer the town centre around St. Mark's Church is a nineteenth century area of very poor terraced housing and larger villas, now being demolished or else taken over by West Indian immigrants. But this area, which was once the hub of the ward, is becoming rapidly empty and forms only a small proportion of the

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1. Minutes of the Conservative Group, 2.11.1958, 4.12.1958
2. Interview with S. Brindley.

ward. In 1900 those parts of each ward nearest the town centre, around St. Mark's Church and near to Brickkiln Street, contained some small factories and working class housing. But as one moved out to the boundaries of the borough the wards became more middle class until one reached the substantial houses of the business and professional men, set in a rural area to the west of the town.

Between 1896 and 1925 St. Mark's Ward saw two contests, in 1903 and 1905, when the Conservative candidates got 60% of the vote in straight fights with the Liberals. No Liberal ever represented this ward. Merridale saw more contests and a few Liberal victories. In 1919 a Labour Councillor was elected, a surprise result to the agent, who put the victory down to a thorough campaign to bring out every Labour vote.[1] No Labour man ever won the seat again, nor was Labour ever successful in the area between 1927 and 1964. It gained 36% of the vote in 1945; by 1960 its share had fallen to 12%. Liberals began to fight the ward again in 1962, reaching a peak of 36% of the vote in 1963. Thus this area throughout the period has been a Conservative stronghold.

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1. Interview with C. T. Morey.

Its Councillors have been over the period people of similar types, manufacturers, professional men and shopkeepers. These Conservative shopkeepers were quite different from the Liberal shopkeepers. The former, like those who represented St. Peter's, had establishments in the town centre and often many branches in the suburbs. They were high class traders; often in the wholesale business too. The Liberal shopkeepers, in St. James' and St. Matthew's Wards especially, tended to have a single shop only and that in a working class district. The Conservative shopkeepers were of a higher social status than their Liberal counterparts.

Merridale has the distinction of being the first ward to return a working man to the Council. In 1891 A. Weaver, a Conservative and a clicker, was elected, before the Liberal or Trade Union Parties could get one of their men in. The Conservatives appear to have chosen Weaver as their candidate as a deliberate attempt to woo the working class vote and to get one step ahead of the other parties. Weaver was fiercely opposed by the Trades Unions of the town, since he ostentatiously refused to join a trade union, one of his attractions to the Conservatives. They put him up in Merridale Ward not only because he lived there but also because he might have been defeated if he had stood in a working class ward.

Like Park Ward, Merridale Ward has been influenced by 2 families who ran the Conservative Party machine in the ward. The sweet manufacturer, H. Bowdler, and his wife were Councillors for the ward from 1930 to 1955, while A. H. Windridge, a manufacturer and retailer of perambulators, was its Councillor from 1946 to 1962; his son-in-law, an accountant H. R. Elliston, has been its Councillor since 1957, and another accountant, G. C. Millichamp, represented the ward from 1958 to 1961. But no one in this ward has the reputation as a boss as have the Guys and Fullwoods.

Eastfield Ward, formerley St. James' Ward

To the east of the town centre lies Eastfield Ward which from 1896 to 1958 was called St. James' Ward. At the turn of the century the ward was an industrial and working class ward. At the west end of the ward was the shopping area of Horseley Fields, a cluster of small shops of low status, serving the working class who lived in the ward. To the east of the shops and out to the borough boundary was the area where the Industrial Revolution began in Wolverhampton. In 1900 the mines were no longer working and their machinery and mounds had left large tracts of the area derelict. Here also were the large iron works and metal trade factories. The canals and railways cut through the ward. The houses

dated from the middle of the nineteenth century and were some of the worst and most unhealthy slums of the town. During the twentieth century these have been cleared, the last going in the 1950s; the derelict land has been reclaimed and huge post-war Council house estates now cover the old industrial sites. Industry still flourishes in the ward, the iron and metal trades, the chemical industry and some small engineering concerns. In 1958 the Horseley Fields shopping area was put in St. Peter's Ward, and the new Eastfield Ward gained the new Council house estates in the east from Heath Town Ward and some early twentieth century working class housing from St. Mary's Ward, including the area around Butler's brewery. Thus in 1964 the ward is, as it was in 1900,an industrial and working class ward but shorn of its shopping centre.

To 1945 it was a Liberal stronghold. From 1896 to 1919 it saw 2 electoral contests, when the Liberal got 53% of the vote against Conservative opposition. After 1919 Conservatives no longer stood against Liberals, who now faced Labour opposition. But until 1945 Labour could never gain over 38% of the vote. It was left to groups other than the Conservative and Labour Parties to upset the Liberal hold. The Ex-Servicemen's candidate won in 1919; and I.L.A. candidate won in 1932 and then turned Fascist; in 1945 the Communist

candidate won and then turned Conservative.[1] These groups, the Ex-Servicemen, the I.L.A., the Fascists and the Communists, received the bulk of their support from the unemployed who were many in this ward during the 1920s and 1930s.[2] Between 1946 and 1952 Labour battled against Independents to represent the ward, and by 1952 had dislodged them. Since then only Labour members have been elected, and their hold was strengthened by the reorganisation of 1958. The Independents of the late 1940s and early 1950s were really the old Liberals under a new guise, but their strength was eroded as the shopping area was cleared and the slums demolished.

The Liberal Councillors for the ward before 1945 were mainly traders and shopkeepers with establishments in the ward. They were of a lower social status than the Conservative shopkeepers of Merridale and St. Peter's Wards, and they were all Nonconformists, Congregationalists, Wesleyan or Primitive Methodists, whereas the Conservative shopkeepers were Anglicans.[3] One shopkeeper who did represent the ward at the turn of the century was a butcher whose house and shop were in the ward. Socially he was identical to the Liberal shopkeeper Councillors,

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1. See Chapter 9, pp. 398-399.
2. See Chapter 9, pp.397-403 and John Yates, Lifting Timber for the King, London 1939.
3. One was a Catholic.

but politically he was a Conservative and by religion an Anglican, a Warden at the parish church of St. James'.[1] Opposite the church was the Mount Zion Primitive Methodist Chapel at which many of the Liberal Councillors worshipped. Religion rather than class was the determinant of political allegiance. The Labour Councillors since 1945 have been of various occupations, a housewife, grocer, electrician and a stores clerk. Religion was not the fore.

To 1952 this ward presented many features which made it unique. Liberalism persisted longer than elsewhere; Labour was slow to take hold of working class loyalty and minor parties did well here. The inspiration provided by Mount Zion Chapel is a partial explanation of the strength of the Liberals, but some aspects of the ward's social structure are significant. The working class of this ward lived in the oldest and worst slums of the town and they worked in the oldest and largest factories of the town. These enterprises made iron and steel products, heavy and crude manufactures in no way comparable to the more finished and composite goods made in wards like St. John's, Graiseley or Blakenhall. Here labour was skilled and unionised, but in the larger concerns of the east labour was unskilled and not unionised. The trades unions

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1. A. Hollingsworth (1887-97, 1899-1901).

of Wolverhampton created the Labour Party and naturally the working class in these western wards turned to it as their party of protest against employers both Liberal and Conservative. But the working class in the east, without any trade union tradition and facing employers who were mainly Conservatives,[1.] turned not to the Labour Party which had put down no roots in the area but to the Liberal Party, which was associated not with the employers but with small shopkeepers who lived close amongst them in the ward. These shopkeepers, Radical Liberals, became the leaders of the working class. After the First World War, however, the working class became disillusioned with Liberalism as unemployment mounted in the depressed heavy metal industries. Still without any tradition of trades unionism and loyalty to the Labour Party, many of them turned to the Ex-Servicemen, the I.L.A., the Fascists and the Communists, who championed the unemployed and offered easy panaceas for their plight. By the late 1940s these groups had disappeared, and it was only then that the working class became firmly linked to the Labour Party and no different from the working class

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1. The need for protection against German and Belgian competition in the production of iron and steel had turned these large industrialists against the Liberal Party and its doctrine of free trade.

of other wards. Liberalism persisted as long as there remained a sizable number of small shopkeepers in the ward and as long as religion was a potent influence. Both declined after 1945; they had been on the wane since 1914, but old habits persist until a new generation comes to the fore.

East Park Ward, formerly St. Matthew's Ward

To the south east of the town centre and adjacent to the southern boundary of Eastfield Ward lies East Park Ward, which before 1958 was called St. Matthew's. Like St. James' Ward it was the scene of the first industrial activity in the town. The mines and ironworks were situated here too. Now it is still an industrial area of small engineering firms and larger metal trade enterprises. In 1900 it contained a basically working class population housed in mid-nineteenth century terraced houses squashed together in alleys and courts. These slums were cleared in the 1950s and the population rehoused on land reclaimed from the old industries of the ward. Today it contains still a basically working class population housed in Council flats and estates which were erected in the 1950s and 1960s. However it lacked two significant features which St. James' possessed, a sizable "shopocracy" and an influential Nonconformist chapel to act as an inspiration for Liberalism.

In the 1890s this ward was the battleground for the Radical Liberal temperance reformers and the drink trade. Between 1885 and 1897 it could be called a marginal ward between these two groups. The Liberal Councillors were mainly shopkeepers, all Nonconformists, while the Conservatives were licensed victuallers and wine and spirit merchants. As this conflict subsided, Labour made its challenge and succeeded here far more than in St. James'. Many of the working class in this ward worked at the John Thompson boilerworks in nearby Ettingshall. The first Labour Councillor for the ward, elected in 1901, was William Sharrocks, a full-time organiser for the Boilermakers' Union. From then to 1932 it can be called a marginal ward between Labour and the Liberals. In the 1930s the I.L.A. made its most impressive advances in this ward. By 1936 it had all the 3 Councillors, with nearly 60% of the vote. Its success was due to the fact that the official Labour Party did not oppose it and because the leading local figure in the I.L.A., the unemployed W. Lawley, nursed the ward with great thoroughness.[1.] Since 1936 no Liberal nor Conservative has ever represented the ward. It has been a solid Labour seat, with Labour gaining over

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1. See Chapters 2, pp. 88-89, and 9, pp. 397-398.

70% of the vote in straight fights with the Conservatives and 90% against the Communists. In 1960 and 1961 the Liberals fought the ward for the first time since 1934 and got 27% of the vote.

The occupations of the Labour Councillors have been very varied, a trade union official, railwaymen, a housewife, a grocer and a sheet metal worker.

This ward, so alike St. James' has had a different political history. The explanations for its different development are the absence of a considerable shopocracy, the absence of a strong focus of Nonconformity and the presence of the trade union tradition amongst the working class.

Heath Town Ward

Heath Town was an Urban District acquired by Wolverhampton in 1927. Up to the 1950s it retained a strong sense of independence from Wolverhampton. Its community feeling was intensified because it had its own centre for shopping, commerce and culture. During the 1950s this centre was demolished and the ward became as closely integrated with the town as its other wards. The majority of its housing is now working class. Most of the low value nineteenth century terraced houses have been pulled down in the 1950s, but many remain. The bulk of the working class housing consists of pre-war Council

estates, although some new estates are now being built. There is also some pre-war private development in the ward and some substantial Victorian houses. It contains an industrial area too of large and small engineering firms, and vehicle and electrical apparatus enterprises. In the reorganisation of 1958 it lost an area of new Council houses to Eastfield and some terraced Victorian houses to St. Peter's but gained some interwar Council houses from Low Hill Ward.

To 1945 the Labour Party never got over 40% of the vote in the annual elections, whether its opponents were Independents with Liberal or Conservative support. In 1945 the proportions were reversed, although until 1952 the ward was highly marginal between Labour and the Independents. Since 1952 it has been a safe Labour seat.

Its Councillors in the 1920s and 1930s were mainly former members of the U.D.C.; even the first Labour Councillor, elected in a by-election in 1938, had been a member of the U.D.C. Most of them were also retired men, a former brewer, boot manufacturer, doctor and railwayman. The Independents, who represented the ward in the late 1940s and early 1950s, were all people who lived in the ward, but they differed significantly from the Independents of the 1930s. The latter had well-known national party allegiances and at election time they were assisted by

their parties, but the former sought to be genuine Independents, eschewing the support of any party. They regarded themselves as spokesmen for their ward and not as party men.[1] The Labour Councillors since 1952 have rarely been working class; they have comprised a teacher, press relations officer and an insurance agent. At first they tended to be inhabitants of the ward, but in 1964 2 of the 3 representatives lived outside the ward.

Bushbury Ward

In 1927 north of the town centre was Bushbury Ward; in 1933 it was divided into Bushbury and Low Hill Wards and in 1958 it was divided again into Bushbury and Oxley Wards. Both divisions were caused by the great increase in the population of the ward. In 1957 the ward was basically a large housing estate, containing an area of interwar private development and some post-war private development, but most of it consisted of pre- and post-war Council houses. Many of the inhabitants worked on the railways, in Goodyears or in some engineering and chemical works which were in the ward. In 1958 the ward lost the bulk of the private development to the new Oxley Ward.

Only Labour representatives have been elected to the Council. Since its foundation in 1927 it has been a

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1. They resented being pressed to join the Conservative Group. Interview with A. G. Barrett.

safe Labour seat, and it became more so after1958. Many of the Labour Councillors have been railwaymen, particularly active members of the railway unions A.S.L.E.F. and N.U.R. Two brothers were elected in 1945, Norman and Harry Bagley, who were the leading figures in the ward party. They have produced an organisation comparable to Lane's in Parkfield Ward or to a lesser extent to the Guys' and Fullwoods' in West Park Ward.

Oxley Ward

Oxley Ward, formed out of the north west part of Bushbury Ward in 1958, is varied in social composition, being a mixture of private development, both pre- and mostly post-war, and of Council development about equally pre- and post-war. It also contains a considerable industrial area in the north, consisting of a number of engineering and chemicals works. The largest open spaces in the borough lie in this ward, the airport, golfcourse, sewage farm and sports stadium.

It is a very marginal ward, frequently changing hands between Labour and Conservative Parties. The Conservative Councillors have been in the superior white collar group, a works manager, a director of an advertising agency and a buyer for an iron foundry. The Labour representatives have had diverse occupations, a housewife, toolmaker, salesman and turner.

Low Hill Ward

Cut out of the north east part of Bushbury Ward in 1933, Low Hill Ward is a huge Council estate, the first major estate constructed by the Corporation in the inter-war years, to which has been added much post-war Council housing. It contains hardly any private development. It is predominantly a working class area and is regarded as holding the "roughest" elements of the town's population.

Since 1933 it has been a safe Labour seat except when an Independent was elected in 1935 and again in 1938. He was T. W. Glynn, a clerk at Butler's Brewery and a Catholic. The reason why he broke Labour's dominance was that the ward contained many Catholics from St. Mary's Ward, who also worked at the brewery. He was thus a well-known personality to the voters of Low Hill, where, in addition, he lived. The Conservatives have rarely fought in Low Hill, only 4 times in 31 years, and they never gained over 26% of the vote. The Communists began to fight the ward in 1960 and they have increased their share of the vote from 6% to 17% in 1964, although the turnout has sunk to 18%.

Many of the Labour Councillors, like those of Bushbury, were railwaymen or the wives of railwaymen, keenly interested in their unions' activities. One,

A. E. Griffiths (1945-47), became General Secretary of A.S.L.E.F.

Oxbarn Ward, formerly St. Phillip's Ward

This area in the far south west of the borough was taken into the town in 1927 when it was called Upper Penn Ward; in 1933 it was renamed St. Phillip's Ward and in 1958, after a readjustment of its boundaries, Oxbarn Ward.

From 1927 to 1958 it was a private housing estate, of very select housing in the Finchfield area built in the inter and post-war years, and around St. Phillip's church of late nineteenth century middle class terraced housing. In 1958 it lost the Finchfield area to Merridale Ward, but gained the Council houses and private development at Warstones from Penn. This area was built in the pre-war years and in the late 1940s. The ward contains no industry.

To 1947 it was represented by Independents or Ratepayers, all of whom then adopted the Conservative label. Their share of the vote remained the same whatever the label. Labour did not get over 20% of the vote after 1945 until 1958, following the reorganisation which gave the Council houses to the ward. In 1962 and 1963 the Liberals fought the ward and pushed Labour into third place, although in 1964 Labour pushed the Liberals into third place. Never has a Labour or Liberal candidate been elected.

Its Councillors have largely been shopkeepers or minor businessmen resident in the ward.

Penn Ward

This area was taken into the borough in 1933. It lies to the south of Oxbarn Ward and at the far south of the borough. Like Oxbarn it is non-industrial, and contains only private housing, ranging from some semi-detached to a considerable number of large detached houses. It contains no Council houses; it lost the Warstones estate to Oxbarn in 1958. It is a very select residential area with less of the nineteenth century terraced housing than Oxbarn.

From 1933 to 1945 its Councillors were elected unopposed and all were candidates of the Penn Ratepayers' Association.[1.] From 1945 to 1950 Labour opposed them, usually gaining around 25% of the vote. The Conservative Party in 1950 ran an official candidate against both the Ratepayers' nominee and a Labour man. The Ratepayer pushed the Conservative into second place. When the Conservatives stood again in 1954 and 1955, the Ratepayers came bottom of the poll with only 20% of the vote. From then the Conservatives became the Councillors and the Ratepayers' Association disappeared. Since the loss of

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1. See Chapters 2, pp.91,98-99 and 9, pp. 369-386.

the Council houses in 1958, Labour has rarely fought the seat. In 1960 in a straight fight with the Conservatives it had only 10% of the vote, and in 1964 it was pushed to the bottom of the poll with 11% when a Liberal stood too. He gained 18% of the vote against the Conservative's 71%. From 1933 to 1954 it was a safe Ratepayers' seat; since 1954 it has been a safe Conservative area.

Its Councillors have mainly been men who resided in the ward and were small businessmen especially shopkeepers. They were of a very similar type to the representatives of St. Phillip's Ward.

This survey shows that social class is an important factor correlating with voting behaviour and party membership. Safe Conservative wards contain predominantly a middle and upper middle class population, living in private houses usually owner-occupied. Safe Labour wards contain predominantly a working and lower middle class population, living in Council houses or late nineteenth century privately rented property. Marginal wards are those of mixed social composition. Conservative Councillors have consisted in the main of manufacturers, professional men, shopkeepers and administrators,[1.] while

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1. See Chapter 4 for a further discussion of these points.

Labour Councillors have been working men, the wives of working men, retired working men, trade union officials and white collar workers, like clerks and insurance agents.[1.]

But class has not been the sole determinant of party loyalty. At the turn of the century religion played a significant role, deciding whether individuals of similar occupation would be Liberals or Conservatives. Generally a manufacturer or a shopkeeper who was an Anglican would be a Conservative while, if they were Nonconformists, they would tend to be Liberal. Other factors cut across class solidarity. Shopkeepers with premises in the town centre who were of a higher social status than those who had establishments only in the suburbs serving working class areas tended to be Conservatives against the latter who were apt to be Liberals. Indeed the Liberals in 1900 were regarded as being between the working class at the bottom of the social scale and the manufacturers and professional men at the top. The Liberals in the 1960s did not consist of shopkeepers, whose loyalty was mainly to the Conservatives, but of white collar administrators, who were neither independent businessmen nor working class. Thus even in 1964 the Liberals come "in between". The working class was not a homogeneous block, but was divided into a skilled and unionised group who tended to support

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1. ibid.

the Labour Party, and an unskilled and non-unionised group who tended to support any party but the Labour Party.

The survey also showed that in the 1950s and 1960s fewer Councillors lived or had business interests in the wards they represented than before the Second World War. Table IX shows that in 1903-4 the majority of Councillors did not live in the wards they represented (22-14), but that at least 10 of those who did not live in them had business interests there. In 1929-30 more lived in the wards than not (21-18) and of those who did not at least 7 had business interests there. In 1945-6 and 1962-3 the business connection had fallen away, and those who did live in the wards were outnumbered by those who did not (24-21 in 1945-6 and 25-20 in 1962-3).

Party has played an influential part in this process as Table X shows. Before 1945 it is hard to correlate party allegiance with ward connections. In 1929-30, for example, 8 Conservatives lived in and 9 did not; 3 Liberals did and 4 did not; 8 Labour did and 4 did not. This does show that Labour members had the strongest residential links with their wards. After 1945 this position was reversed. In 1945-6 more Conservatives lived in their wards than Labour Councillors; 11 Conservatives did and 8 did not; 10 Labour Councillors did and 13 did not.

The difference by 1962-3 was very pronounced. Then 14 Conservatives lived in their wards and 8 did not, but only 6 Labour did and 17 did not. In safe seats the difference was even more marked. In 1962-3 in Conservative safe seats 11 lived in and 4[1]. did not; in Labour safe seats only 5 lived in and 13 did not.

The explanation for this variation lies with the different procedures used by the two parties for selecting municipal candidates.[2]. In the Labour Party between June and September each year each organisation affiliated to the Borough Labour Party, that is each ward party, constituency party and trade union branch, the Women's section, the Co-operative Party and the Fabian Society, is entitled to nominate individuals for the "panel" of approved municipal candidates. Each year a new "panel" is drawn up, consisting of retiring Aldermen and Councillors seeking re-election, former members of the "panel" wishing to stand again, and those wanting to be

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1. 2 of these 4 were related to Councillors who did live in the wards.

2. On the Labour Party's procedure: Rules of the Wolverhampton Borough Labour Party, the "panels" for 1962-3 and 1963-4 and interviews with A. Garner, Mrs. R. F. Ilsley, R. Reynolds and A. Storer.
On the Conservative Party. Interviews with V. J. Bowyer, S. Brindley, H. J. Ebbon, E. Y. Fullwood, R. N. Pollard. The Conservatives claimed that they had no written rules but preferred to run things informally. The Labour Party in practice operates in the same way, because few members have copies of the rules, which are kept in the back of the minute books and are rarely referred to.

candidates for the first time. For the panel of 1963-4 30 were nominated, 7 retiring Aldermen, 7 retiring Councillors, 3 former members of the Council, 8 former members of the "panel" and 5 seeking to be put on the panel for the first time. Nominations were received from all but two ward parties, the North East Constituency Party, the Women's Section, the Co-operative Party and 6 trade union branches, A.E.U. numbers 1 and 3, A.S.L.E.F., D.A.T.A., N.U.P.E., and U.S.D.A.W. On the nomination form are required the name and address of the nominee, his age, years lived in the borough, years as an individual member of the Labour Party, years as an affiliated member, his trade union, years in the trade union and general information about offices held in the party and in public life.

In October the Executive Committee of the Borough Labour Party scrutinises the qualifications of the nominees and may interview any it wishes, normally only those nominated for the first time or sitting members of the Council who have deviated in some way from party policy. The latter are usually asked to give assurances to abide by party decisions in the future. The Executive then recommends to the full Borough Party meeting in November which names should be accepted or rejected. At this session nominees may be interviewed again. For the panel

of 1963-4 the Executive advised the acceptance of all and the Borough Party placed all 30 on the "panel".

From December the ward parties begin to select their candidates for the May elections. They request from the Borough Party the "panel". It is examined by the ward party, which draws a short list, usually never more than 3. By the rules of the party the actual selection should take place at a joint-meeting of the ward party and the Executive Committee of the Borough Party, but in practice the Borough Party asks 2 of its Executive to attend the ward party meeting. They have the right to speak and vote, but usually forego to exercise the latter. At this meeting the qualifications of the nominees are examined, the record of sitting members reviewed and they may be asked to speak and answer questions. Then ballots are taken until the one with an absolute majority is selected as the candidate. Some of the more active wards choose their candidates in December so as to have the pick of the bunch; some select at the last minute around mid-April; but most do so in February or March. Sitting members of the Council are usually re-adopted automatically at a very late date.

The Conservative Party, unlike the Labour Party, has no Borough Party devoted solely to municipal matters and to drawing up a list of approved municipal candidates.

The two Constituency Associations are responsible for both Parliamentary and municipal affairs. The two Associations, and not a single Borough Party, deal with the ward parties over the selection of candidates. The choice of the candidate is made at a selection meeting of the ward party to which all its members are entitled to attend. It does not have to nominate an individual to be scrutinised by any other body in the party nor is it restricted to adopting only candidates on an approved list. The ward party is solely responsible for its choice, usually made from among names raised at the ward meeting.

Before a candidate has been selected the party rules say that the name should be submitted to the Executive Council of the Constituency Association for approval.[1] This is a mere formality for it is unlikely that the Executive at this stage would want to incur the wrath of a ward party, particularly if that party were wealthy and strong, by rejecting its nominee. The agent for the North

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1. Wolverhampton's practice is not that suggested by the Conservative Central Office's model rules, which advise, but do not direct, that if a ward party wishes to fight a seat its Executive should send the name to the Executive of the Constituency Association for its approval before the name is submitted to the general meeting of the ward party. (Model Rules No.3, Conservative and Unionist Central Office 1956, page 14). A Central Office official has said, "the attitude of the Associations towards local elections is entirely for local decisions hence the varying attitudes in different parts of the country." (Letter to the author from H. Brabin, 26.11.1963).

East Association has said that if a ward did chose someone who was not "a good Conservative" then his Executive would veto his candidature;[1.] this situation is unlikely to occur. In the South West the autonomy of the ward parties was forcefully asserted,[2.] and its agent regards the Executive's approval of a ward's choice as automatic.[3.]

Conflict between the Executive and the ward parties is unlikely to arise because the Executive consists mainly of people who are themselves the officers of the ward parties. This interlocking membership tends to promote harmony as it does in the Labour Party, since there too the same individuals are likely to be officers of their ward parties, Constituency Parties and the Borough Party. Overlapping personnel overcomes institutional separation.

The Conservative Party's lack of a list of approved candidates, a Borough Party and limitations on ward independence have consequences which make its candidates differ in significant respects from those of the Labour Party. The prime qualification to be a Labour candidate is service to the party and a trade union.

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1. Interview with V.J. Bowyer.
2. See Chapter 8, p. 362 especially footnote 1.
3. Interview with R.N. Pollard.

This enables him to be nominated to the panel in the first place, to pass the scrutiny of the Borough Party and to gain the favour of the ward party when it selects. This concentration on party service is reinforced by the fact that Labour members have less social activities outside the party than Conservatives, who engage in a wider range of social activities which have no connection with party politics.[1] Thus when Labour members come to select a candidate both the party rules and the narrow range of their social contacts limit them to choosing known party stalwarts. Party activity is not such an important factor in choosing a Conservative candidate. Many had not been active in the party, indeed many were not even members of the party, when they were selected to fight their first contests.[2] They had made reputations in non-party activities, which had brought them to the attention of the officers of ward parties, who asked them if they would like to stand for the Council. If they agreed then the leaders of the ward parties had little difficulty in persuading their wards to adopt them. Thus in the Conservative Party the way to become a candidate is not so much to be a loyal party worker as to have come to

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1. See Chapter 5.

2. Interviews with S. Brindley. Replies to Questionnaire from A. Baker, J. Beattie and F. G. Stones.

the notice of a ward officer, and since party activities do not loom so large in the life of the Conservatives as for Labour members, other activities than party work bring the individuals to the notice of the key officers. A reputation as a suitable candidate can be made in business, trade, or in a profession, in a trade or professional association, at a social club, in Rotary or the Round Table.[1] D. H. Haselock, a hairdresser, was asked to stand by a confectioner, M. G. Evans, whose shop was near his;[2] the solicitor, S. Brindley, was asked by the estate agent, A. B. Kennard, with whom he came into professional contact;[3] the accountant, A. E. Lacon, was asked by F. Jennings, an undertaker, at a meeting of the Rotary Club.[4] None of them had been active party men. In the Conservative Group of members of the Council, members have been asked to seek out possible candidates and secure their adoption by their ward parties, of which they were usually officers.[5] Circulars have been sent from the Group to industries and to the Chamber of Commerce asking if they could recommend suitable candidates.[6] In the Labour Group, however, there has

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1. See Chapter 5.
2. Interview with D. H. Haselock.
3. Interview with S. Brindley.
4. Interview with A. E. Lacon.
5. Minutes of the Conservative Group, 21.9.1954, 10.3.1961.
6. ibid. 28.12.1956, 10.3.1961.

been no discussion about candidates. That is regarded as the preserve of the Borough Party.

The Conservative means of selecting candidates puts a premium on informal and personal contacts, and allows to the leaders of ward parties great scope to make their friends candidates and even Councillors. For example in West Park Ward in 1960 the 3 Councillors were H. T. Fullwood, his son E. Y. Fullwood and L. R. Guy; when the latter was made an Alderman, his seat was taken by his son, G. A. Guy. In Merridale Ward the Councillors were A. H. Windridge, his son-in-law, H. R. Elliston an accountant, and G. C. Millichamp also an accountant. In Graiseley Ward in 1958 J. Beattie and W. G. Morrison were Councillors, the former, the managing director of a large store and the latter, his sales promotion manager.[1.]

In addition, the Borough Labour Party enables members of the two constituency associations to meet each other, and thus members of wards in the south west get to know members in the north east. Further, in the many committees of the Labour Party there are many opportunities for Labour members to meet other Labour members from other wards. Thus when selecting a

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1. Informal and personal contacts are of importance in the Labour Party too, though less so than in the Conservative Party. The brothers, Harry and Norman Bagley, were Councillors for Bushbury Ward in the 1950s, and the grocers H. Preece and F. V. Law represented Parkfield Ward. See above pp. 127, 143.

candidate the ward party is not so tied to choosing a candidate from that particular ward. But the Conservative Party has no Borough Party where members from the two halves of the town can mingle. This explains why in 1964 15 Conservatives Councillors sat for wards in the constituency in which they resided and only 3 did not; while 14 Labour Councillors sat for wards in the constituency they resided and 11 did not. Further, since the ward parties of the Conservative Association are more autonomous than those of the Labour Party and since the Conservative Party has fewer committees where members of the various wards can meet each other, there is a strong tendency for ward parties to select candidates who reside in the wards. This explains why in May 1963 10 Conservatives represented the wards where they lived and 8 did not; but only 5 Labour Councillors lived in the wards they represented and 20 did not.[1] Thus institutional and social factors explain why the Conservative members have closer connections with their wards than the Labour representatives. Labour candidates are chosen by a rigorous selection process which favours

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1. These figures are distorted because of the revision of ward boundaries in 1958. It would be fairer to give the figures for the Councillors as if the boundaries had not been reorganised. In that case 11 Conservatives would have represented wards they lived in and 7 would not; while 9 Labour would and 16 would not. The main generalisation, however, still remains true.

those who have served the party. Conservatives are "co-opted" on the basis of informal and personal contacts usually made outside the context of the party.

These different selection processes go far to explain the different attitudes of each party to the role of party politics in local government. The Labour Councillor owes his seat to his party; work for it has been rewarded with Council membership. The Conservatives tend to have come onto the Council not through party activity and thus they do not owe so much to the party. Further, the Labour Councillor has fewer non-party leisure pursuits than his Conservative counterpart, who has a wider range of social, business and professional connections.[1.] He thus does not devote so much time to his party as does the Labour member. For the Labour Councillor party is essential, beneficial and looms large in his life but for many Conservatives party is a harmful intrusion, one factor in his life amongst many and not of crucial importance. In addition, the Conservative Councillor has tended to see himself more as a representative of his ward than as a representative of a party. This is a partial explanation why the Conservatives only recently have adopted a specifically Conservative municipal policy for the town as

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1. See Chapter 5.

a whole. Whereas the Labour Party from its earliest years has continuously advocated a policy for the town and not for specific wards only. Before 1950 each Conservative Councillor and candidate had his own line which stressed the advantages it could bring to the ward. Labour representatives never made such strong ward appeals.

Another development brought out by Table IX is the decline of the Councillor's business interest in his ward. Before 1930 many Councillors, although not living in the ward, owned a shop or a factory there, in a personal capacity and not as a member of a board of directors. Many of these Councillors lived out of the borough in the rural areas at Compton, Tettenhall, Pattingham, Oaken, Palmers Cross, Shifnal, Seisdon or the Wergs. Such men were often the leading men on the Council. But since the 1930s they have not come onto the Council, because with the spread of limited liability they no longer qualify for membership of the Council; in addition the increasing demands on the time of professional and executive types has made membership of the Council not so attractive as it once was.[1.] Members of the Council now live within the boundaries of the borough and do not qualify for membership through a business interest.

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1. For a fuller discussion of these points see Chapter 4, pp. 187-194.

Since the attachment of a Councillor to his ward has declined over the period, so have the occasions when Councillors press in open Council the interests of their wards. At the turn of the century many divisions in the Council were about the claims of wards for special attention, either for them to have some particular amenity provided or else to be protected against some nuisance. Claims were made for baths and wash-houses[1.] and foot-bridges over canals[2.] or for some wasteground to be laid out as an open space.[3.] Objections were made against the changing of old street names[4.] and the erection of cab stands,[5.] knackers' yards[6.] or a urinal for females.[7.] In their election addresses candidates stressed their attachment to their wards and the benefits they would gain for them.[8.] After 1919 divisions in open Council about

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1. C.M. 14.7.1890.
2. C.M. 12.12.1892. W.C. 14.12.1892.
3. C.M. 11.5.1891. W.C. 13.5.1891.
4. C.M. 13.3.1893, 11.12.1893, 12.6.1899. W.C. 15.3.1893. 13.12.1893, 14.6.1899.
5. C.M. 12.6.1893, 12.8.1895, 9.9.1895, W.C. 14.6.1893. 14.8.1893, 11.9.1895.
6. C.M. 14.12.1896. W.C. 16.12.1896
7. C.M. 8.1.1900. W.C. 10.1.1900.
8. See Chapter 1, pp. 35-36.

ward affairs declined but in the 1930s Penn Ward established a Ratepayers' Society, whose chief purpose was to improve the amenities of Penn Ward.[1] Although battles over ward claims no longer rent the Council, Councillors still promote the welfare of their wards, but now behind the scenes, like the Ratepayers' candidates, who, when they wanted something for Penn Ward, would first lobby the officials, then the committee concerned, and only if they did not have satisfaction would they air the matter in open council.[2] In the 1960s occasionally a ward claim produces a division which cuts across party lines. In 1962, for example, the Councillors of Graiseley Ward sought to allow children to play on some open land from which children were debarred,[3] and the Councillors of St. Peter's urged the Council to refuse permission to a fair company to have its entertainment booths erected on a piece of wasteground in the ward.[4] Since 1945 the battle between the parties has superseded the battle between the wards, except in the general sense that the Labour Party promotes the interests of its safe wards as the Conservatives promote the interests of their wards. In 1962, for example, the Conservatives opposed the

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1. See Chapter 9, pp. 369-386.
2. ibid.
3. C.M. 26.11.1962.
4. C.M. 22.10.1962.

Labour proposal to build a large swimming bath in Bushbury Ward, arguing that a smaller bath there would enable a bath to be built in Penn Ward too.[1] Thus the battle between the wards has itself been contained within the battle between the parties.

In 1900 the wards of the borough were much more separate communities than in 1964. Over the period they have become more integrated into the town, as transport improved and enabled people of one ward to cross more easily to another, and to work even at the opposite side of the town from where they lived. Building too joined up areas which had previously been cut off from each other. In 1900 the distinctive social characteristics of each ward gave an individuality to its voting behaviour, but since 1945 the wards have become moulded into 3 political types, safe Conservative and safe Labour and marginal, each reflecting a different type of social and economic structure. The previous variations have been wiped away.

Before 1945 the municipal election results in each ward showed generally little uniformity; the swing was not the same for all wards nor was it even in the same direction, although occasionally a clear pattern emerged,

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1. C.M. 1.1.1962.

like the swing to the Liberals in 1905 or the swing away from Labour in 1920.[1] After 1945, however, both the general direction of the swing and its size became more uniform, especially in the keenly fought marginal wards. There were clear swings in all wards to Labour in 1952, 1956 and 1962 and to the Conservatives in 1946, 1951, 1955 and 1960.[2] The occasional disparities were not as large as those before 1945, and can be explained by numerous factors. A popular well-known candidate, especially a sitting member, can arrest slightly a swing against his party or encourage one for it. Conservatives, with more cars at their disposal than the Labour Party, can produce more favourable results for their candidates in their safe wards, where their cars are concentrated, than where they do not have so many vehicles. Bad weather between 7.00 and 8.30 p.m. on polling day can reduce a swing to Labour, for the majority of its vote comes out then. Conservatives seem not to be so inhibited from voting by bad weather as the Labour voters. The sex of the candidate has a significant effect on the swing; generally females do less well than males.[3]

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1. Table IIC (i) and (ii).
2. Table IIC (iii). It is difficult to calculate swings before 1945 since all parties did not contest all wards every year.
3. These explanations for disparities in the swing are based on the author's observations of election campaigns in the 1950s and 1960s.

Since the swing is more uniform in the marginal wards, it is usual for one party to take all the marginals in any one election. This movement of the seats in Wolverhampton is very similar to the general trend over the whole country. A comparison of the parties' gains and losses of seats in Wolverhampton with the gains and losses published in The Times after each bout of municipal elections shows that even from the 1870s[1]. the movement in Wolverhampton has corresponded to national trends, especially since 1945. There were Liberal gains in 1904, Conservative gains in 1908 and Labour gains in 1919.[2]. Conservatives had good years in 1947, 1949, 1955, 1960 and 1961,[3]. while Labour did well in 1945, 1952, 1956, 1957, 1958, 1962 and 1963.[4]. The gains and losses usually take place in marginal wards where party activity is concentrated. Thus the figures suggest that in these wards the key factor determining the result is not so much the individual candidate or any local issue but the national fortunes of the parties.

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1. In 1872, after the introduction of the secret ballot, The Times first began publishing surveys of the results.

2. The Times 2.11.1904, 3.11.1908, 3.11.1919. Wolverhampton Journal, November 1904. E.&S. 4.11.1908, 3.11.1919.

3. The Times 3.11.1947, 13.5.1949, 14.5.1955, 14.5.1960, 13.5.1961, E.&S. 2.11.1947, 13.5.1949, 13.5.1955, 13.5.1960, 12.5.1961.

4. The Times 3.11.1945, 10.5.1952, 12.5.1956, 11.5.1957, 10.5.1958, 12.5.1962, 11.5.1963, E.&S. 2.11.1945, 9.5.1952, 11.5.1956, 10.5.1957, 9.5.1958, 11.5.1962, 10.5.1963.

And since psephological studies and opinion polls have shown that voting for a particular party is a habit which few ever change, the factor which decides the election is whether the national party can inspire its supporters to get out to the poll in sufficient numbers to defeat the opposition.

Voting behaviour in municipal elections in Wolverhampton is very similar to that in Parliamentary elections. Before 1945 it was hard to correlate the two, since the franchises were different, municipal and parliamentary boundaries did not coincide and all the parties did not fight all the wards close to a General Election. Since 1948 the franchises have been equal, the boundaries the same and all wards are fought in order to keep the party machine in trim for the Parliamentary fight. Table IID shows that, although the municipal poll is 50% below that of a General Election,[1] the parties' shares of the vote are almost identical; especially was this clear in 1959. Municipal election results are thus a clear indicator of parliamentary results,

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1. The mass media give far more publicity to a General Election than to a municipal election. The parties spend more money and are more active, and voters feel they have more of a duty to vote and that their votes will be more significant than in a municipal election. Hence the larger turnout.

despite the far lower turnout in the former. This correlation is further evidence that local issues and policies are not decisive in municipal elections. The fortunes of the national party is the determining factor.

CHAPTER 4

The Occupational Composition of the Council, 1900-60 [1]

The occupational, as well as the political, composition of the Council changed during this period, and these two developments were closely connected. The pattern of occupational change is depicted in Tables XI-XIb. Table XI presents the occupational composition of the Council at 7 dates in the period 1888-1963; Table XIa shows the occupational composition of the new entrants to the Council for the years between the dates of those Councils selected for particular analysis, while Table XIb shows the occupational breakdown of all members of the Council over roughly decennial periods. This triple approach provides snapshots of individual Councils over the period, the changing composition of the new recruits to the Council, and a wider view of the types of people who composed the Council during each decade of the period. Table XII then analyses the party affiliations of the occupational groups for the new entrants to the Council over 3 periods, and Table XIII does the same for 2 specific Councils, 1903-4 and 1962-3.

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1. See p. 211 at the end of this Chapter for a note on the sources.

For the new entrants, the period 1888-1903 was a time when party was not prominent; from 1903-1919 party became more significant; the periods 1919-29 and 1929-45 witnessed the growing importance of parties: 1945-53 and 1953-62 show the trends following Labour's first victory, before party had really hardened, and then in the 1950s when party was very significant. In this chapter 1888 is the starting date, because if one wants to understand the trends which had produced the Council of 1900, one must consider the important developments which had taken place in the course of the 1890s. The dates of the specific Councils and periods were chosen to present typical examples of the Council membership at various times throughout the period. The occupational descriptions used are not the usual ones of sociologists, but they do conveniently cover the occupations of the members of the Wolverhampton Council and provide a useful tool for analysing the composition of the Wolverhampton Town Council. They suit the context of Wolverhampton at least.

In the Council of 1888-9 the largest single occupational group was the manufacturers, comprising 38% of the Council.[1] The bulk of these, 7/9ths, were

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1. See Table XI.

connected to the main industry of the Black Country at that time, iron and metalware production, as iron masters, manufacturers of hardware, hollow-ware, edge-tools, tubes, corrugated iron, locks and doorsprings, or as the manufacturers of chemicals used in the processing of the metals or of the varnish and paint to adorn the finished articles.[1.] Closely associated with these men was the small "administrative" group, composed of 2 metal brokers and a carrying agent for the Great Western Railway. Thus over ¼ of the Council were engaged in the basic Midland industries, as the owners and controllers of substantial enterprises. The second largest single group was the "professional" element of 21%, 6 solicitors and 4 doctors. Following closely behind these were the shopkeepers, 19% of the Council, comprising 2 grocers, a butcher, fruit merchant, chemist and tailor.[2.] Socially akin to these retailers were the licensed victuallers, but they have been itemised separately as the "liquor" interest, since people involved in the "drink" trade were regarded as a distinct group both by themselves and by

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1. The manufacturers comprised 2 ironmasters, 2 japanners, 1 manufacturer each of tubes, edge-tools, corrugated iron, enamel ware, locks, doorsprings; 2 of chemicals, 2 of varnish, 3 of boots and shoes and 1 of rope. Total = 18.

2. Also a "photographer" and a "merchant".

others. As publicans or wine and spirit merchants they formed 10% of the Council. Finally there were 3 members of the Council who claimed to be "retired" or "gentlemen", a former farmer, baker and antique dealer. Thus just over 2/5ths of the Council were industrialists, just over 1/5th were professional men and just under 1/5th were shopkeepers, while 1/10th were engaged in the drink trade.

The Council of 1962-3 bears little occupational resemblance to that of 1888-89.[1] The manufacturers had fallen to 7% and no longer represented the leading industries of the locality.[2] Only 1 was connected with metal manufacture, and he was the director of a minor welding concern. Another made and sold perambulators and 2 were building contractors. The professional group too had diminished to 8%, but had broadened its scope to include not only a doctor and a solicitor but also an accountant, a surveyor and estate agent and an advertising agent. The shopkeepers however had increased to 27% and had remained retailers of a similar kind to those in 1888-9, comprising 3 grocers, a butcher, jeweller, ironmonger, tobacconist and a stationer.[3] The

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1. See Table XI.
2. See the Introduction pp. 5-6 and Table ii.
3. This group also included 2 motor car traders, 2 tyre traders, a milliner, a hairdresser, timber merchant, and the proprietor of a shop selling electrical apparatus.

"administrative" group had grown, and can be conveniently divided into the "superior white collar" section, all employees yet with much responsibility, like 2 chief buyers, a press officer for an engineering firm, a projects engineer, a sales production manager and a works director, and an "inferior white collar" section, employees but with little status and responsibility, like clerks and insurance agents.[1.] Each of these two sections formed 10% of the Council. The largest single group in the Council was the "working class" members; none of this category was present on the Council in 1888, but in 1962 it formed 30% of the Council. Of these, half were male active workers, mostly skilled, like a coppersmith, boilersmith, master printer, engineer, turner and fitter;[2.] the other half comprised 2 retired workers, an electrician and a trade union official; and 7 wives of workers, 4 of whom were the wives of railwaymen. No women had been in the Council of 1888, but they now composed 13% of the Council and were all but one the wives of workmen. Retired persons made up 8% of the Council and consisted, in addition to the 2 working men, of a brewer, a hairdresser

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1. This section comprised 2 clerks, an insurance agent, a Friendly Society agent and an Admiralty examiner .

2. Also a trade union official, a sheet-metal worker and a railwayman.

and a railway official. The drink trade had dwindled to one lone licensed victualler. Thus the working class formed just under ½ of the Council, followed by the shopkeepers with just over ¼. In 1888-9 all members of the Council were independent, responsible for their own enterprises as manufacturers, shopkeepers or professional men. But in 1962-3 just over 40% of the Council were or had been employees or were the wives of employees, lacking occupational experience of executive and administrative responsibility. Few of the working men, however, were unskilled; these formed a mere fraction of the working men. Just under 60% of the Council were men of independence, experienced in business or holding positions of professional responsibility. The Council of 1962-3 was certainly not dominated by the workmen and their wives.

The trends which emerge from a crude comparison of these 2 Councils are clear: the decline of the manufacturing and professional groups, an invasion by the working class and a slight advancement of the shopkeepers. But such a comparison reveals neither the rhythm and timing of these trends nor the significant periods affecting the changing occupational composition of the Council. A crude comparison suggests that the development was straightforward and even. Closer examination is needed.

The Manufacturers

The number of new entrants to the Council who were manufacturers, did not fall sharply until after 1929; before then they had composed about a quarter of the new Councillors in each of the 3 periods, 1888-1903, 1903-19, and 1919-29, but in 1929-45 only about 9% of the newly elected members were manufacturers.[1] They rose a little in 1945-53, but fell back to 9% in 1953-62. Two further sets of figures indicate that the 1930s were the years when the industrialists fell away from the Council. In the Council of 1929-30 they comprised 21%; but in that of 1945-6 only 12%,[2] and over the period 1919-30 they comprised 25% of Council members, while in 1930-40 only 16%;[3] this represents their largest fall during any of the decennial periods. The second largest fall occurred in the 1890s and 1900s, since in the period 1888-1900 the manufacturers had formed 33% of the members of the Council, but from 1900 to 1910 they comprised 27%.[4] Thus the manufacturing element on the Council was falling from 1888; the biggest falls occurred around the turn of the century and in the 1930s. Up to the 1930s they had been the biggest single occupational group on the Council.

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1. See Table XIa.
2. See Table XI.
3. See Table XIb.
4. See Table XIb.

During the 1930s they were overtaken by the shopkeepers and then after 1945 by the working class.

As well as falling away in numbers the manufacturers changed in kind, and this process was also a feature of the 1930s. The great ironmasters and metalware manufacturers, who had formed the majority of the industrialists, no longer joined the Council; the new men were the manufacturers of dairy produce, sweets, confectionery, clothing, perambulators, builders and men in charge of light engineering businesses. The great ironmasters, employers of large labour forces, producing metal ware for export to world markets gave way to lesser men, in charge of smaller enterprises, catering for a mainly local market, and manufacturing lighter products.[1.]

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1. The 1930s were crucial in this change. In the 1920s large industry continued to send to the Council the manufacturers of metal goods, like G. C. Jenks (1919-27), H. W. Vaughan (1920-3), J. K. Hunt (1921-4), D. Green (1922-5), F. S. Thompson (1923-45), W. M. Furniss (1927-30), H. C. Instone (1927-29), B. E. Hunt (1928-34) and T. W. Simpson (1929-41). No one comparable joined after 1930. The new men made confectionery (H. Bowdler 1924-7, 1930-52 and N. Pritchard 1954-5); bread and cakes (G. E.J. Luce 1927-45, W. Povey 1947-53); milk (H. A. White 1932-45, J. A. Birch 1933-46, H. H. Mould 1947-54, P. E. Morrell 1949-52, 1953-9, 1960); clothing (H. Southan 1925-44); bedding B. Bayliss 1947-51); perambulators (A. H. Windridge 1944-5, 1946-); or they were builders (A. G. Goodman 1939-51, J. E. Weaver 1957-62, R. J. Greenly 1962-) or they were directors of light engineering concerns (C. B. Clark 1945-9, 1951-60, T. R. Stokes 1946-9, W. T. D. Morgan 1949-56, F. C. Evans 1961-).

The Professional men

The professional men, mainly doctors and solicitors, had increased their proportion of the new entrants in the early years of the twentieth century before the First World War; during the period 1903-19 they formed the largest single occupational group of the new members of the Council with 30%,[1] and they had steadily increased their proportion of all members of the Council, from the period 1888 to 1900 when they were 16% of the members, to 1910-19 when they formed 27%.[2] But after the First World War they slumped to comprise a mere 8% of the new entrants from 1919 to 1929[3]. The 1920s and the late 1940s were poor years for the professional element; they only began to pick up again in the late 1950s, when they comprised 13% of the new entrants.[4] Taking the decennial periods however, the picture is one of a steep decrease in the 1920s and a continual decline from the 1930s onwards, with them forming 13% of the members in 1919-30, 8% in the years 1930-40 and 1940-50 and 7% in 1950-60.[5] Looking at the particular Councils, it is seen that the professional men formed about 1/5th of the

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1. See Table XIa.
2. See Table XIb.
3. See Table XIa.
4. See Table XIa.
5. See Table XIb.

Council in 1888-9, 1903-4 and 1919-20, and then they never rose abcve 8%.[1.]

The kinds of professional men on the Council changed somewhat too. Solicitors and men involved in land and real estate have remained a significant proportion of the professionals, but the doctors have dwindled; only 1 was a member of the Council in the 1950s, and he had been elected way back in 1930.[2.] No doctor had been elected to the Council after his entry: except 1 female doctor co-opted to the Council during the war.[3.]

The Shopkeepers

The shopkeepers have been a significant and constant element on the Council throughout the whole period, except for a temporary falling away in the 1920s. Of new entrants they have formed between 1/5th and just over a ¼ except for the years 1919-29 when they composed only 9%.[4.] This decline did not make itself felt all that sharply in the actual composition of the Council, since although in the period 1919-30 they were at their lowest with 18% of all members, they still counted as the second largest single occupational group. Their proportion of the

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1. See Table XI.
2. Dr. A. Byrne-Quinn.
3. Mrs. M. B. Mackay 1942-5.
4. See Table XIa.

members of the Council in the 1940s was exactly what it had been in the 1890s, 23%, while in the 1950s they comprised 25% of the Council.[1] Thus except for the 1920s, the shopkeepers have formed a consistently high proportion of the Council. Their consistency is marked in another direction too, for the kinds of shopkeeper elected have throughout the period remained of the same type. This emerges not only from comparing those of 1888-9 with those of 1962-3; any year will yield a similar result. For instance in 1929-30 they comprised 2 greengrocers, a butcher, a chemist, a tailor, undertaker, stationer, jeweller, furniture dealer and a milliner. Such occupations could have been typical of the Council members for any year in the period.

The "Drink" Trade

The number of Councillors connected with the drink trade, that is licensed victuallers, wine and spirit merchants and brewers, has declined since the turn of the century. Just before 1900 they contributed 11% of all members of the Council, which they did again in the 1930s.[2] But apart from these peaks of representation, their proportion of new entrants has fallen from 9% in

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1. See Table XIb.
2. See Table XIb.

1888-1903 to 2% in 1929-45.[1] The last man to enter the Council as a publican was elected in 1936 and he retired in 1951.[2] The only other member of the Council in the 1950s who was a publican, had been elected in 1935 as a railwayman, but later became a publican.[3]

The Working Class

The first working man to enter the Council was elected in 1891, and from then to 1903 the working class formed 15% of the new entrants, the third largest single occupational group of the new members. This initial impetus was lost in the years before the First World War; they comprised only 8% of the members elected from 1903 to 1919. But in the 1920s, 30s and 40s they greatly increased their proportion of the new members, 23% in 1919-29, 24% in 1929-45 and 31% in 1945-53. In the 1950s they declined again.[4] Up to the First World War they comprised about 10% of the Council members and afterwards just under 20% for the decennial periods.[5] In addition, besides the male workers and those actually engaged in a job, women and the retired formed a significant part of the working class element. In 1919-30

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1. See Table XIa.
2. B. Dagnan.
3. L. J. Woolridge.
4. See Table XIa.
5. See Table XIb.

all of the 4 female Councillors were working class; and in 1950-60 of the 11 female Councillors, 8 were working class. Of the retired group, in 1930-40 5 were retired workers; in 1940-50 9 and in 1950-60 7 out of 11. These 2 groups boost the working class representatives from 1919 to be the largest single occupational group of members of the Council, comprising around ⅓ and just over ¼ both of new entrants and the actual membership of the Councils.

Amongst the working class members 2 groups stand out as being particularly numerous, the railwaymen and engineers. Between 1891 and 1962 there have been 22 railwaymen and 21 engineers who were members of the Council. In 1919-30 there were 10 active or retired railwaymen on the Council, 11 in 1930-40 and 8 in 1950-60. 3 wards in the town provided the railway representatives. Dunstall Ward, where the railway sheds and workshops were situated, was described in 1923 as "the railwayman's ward."[1] Low Hill and Bushbury Wards have been described as the "pocket" wards of the railway unions, whose members

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1. E.&S. 1.11.1923. See also Wolverhampton Worker, November 1913. It sent as representatives such railwaymen as A. Davies (1919-54), F. W. Smithies (1931-46), C. W. Hill (1935-52) and F. A. Grainger (1946-56).

provided the bulk of the membership and finance for the ward Labour Parties there.[1] On the establishment of Bushbury Ward in 1927 it returned to the Council 3 members of A.S.L.E.F.[2] and when these retired, they were replaced by railwaymen.[3] Low Hill exhibited a similar pattern.[4] Many of the female members of the Council have been the wives of railwaymen and members of the women's section of their husbands' trade union.[5] The engineers have been the second leading group within the working class representatives, and 11 of the 21 engineers who have been Councillors in this period worked at one time or another at one factory, the Sunbeam Motor Car Company, where trades unionism was particularly strong.[6]

Trade Union officials have provided an important group of Councillors. The first was William Sharrocks,

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1. Interviews with R. Garner and L. J. Woolridge. Chapter 3 analyses the wards in detail.
2. D. F. Sharman, J. Cadman, J. T. Eccleshall.
3. In 1933 Sharman was replaced by W. Mather, a retired engine driver, who was himself replaced in 1945 by another engine driver N. F. Bagley. In 1935 Eccleshall was replaced by L. J. Woolridge, who worked in the railway sheds.
4. It elected, for instance in 1933, D. F. Sharman, A. C. Wiggins and A. E. Griffiths; all A.S.L.E.F. members.
5. e.g. Mrs. A. A. Braybrook (1937-), Mrs. R. F. Ilsley (1941-) and Mrs. G. Bagley (1957-9, 1959-).
6. Interviews with H. Mash, C. M. Walsh, F. Mansell and C. B. V. Taylor.

agent for the Boilermakers Society, a Councillor from 1901-21; then followed J. Whittaker, an official of the Plumbers Union and Secretary of the Building Trades Federation, a member of the Council 1903-12 and 1924-40. Between 1945 and 1962 5 Labour members of the Council were trades union officials, agents for N.U.P.E.,[1] N.F.B.T.O.,[2] A.E.U.,[3] N.U.F.W.,[4] and the Trades Council.[5]

A distinctive feature about the working men Councillors was that they were mostly skilled men; rarely did an unskilled labourer become a Councillor. Less than a dozen unskilled men were members of the Council between 1891 and 1962.

The Women and The Retired

The first woman elected to the Council was the Labour representative Mrs. E. Sproson in 1921. In the Council of 1929-30 they formed 4% of the membership and in the Council of 1962-3 13%.[6] Of the new entrants to the Council in the periods 1945-53 and 1953-62 they formed 11%.[7] Throughout the period the women have been mainly

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1. G. Rastall — member of the Council 1944-7, 1948-60
2. W. M. Hale — member of the Council 1945-
3. F. Clapham — member of the Council 1945-7, 1948-
4. W. H. Whittle — member of the Council 1958-61
5. J. W. Smith — member of the Council 1945-52
6. See Table XI.
7. See Table XIb.

of working class background; of the 17 women who have been members of the Council since 1921, 12 have been working class: the others were a doctor, a teacher, and wives of businessmen. The women therefore have gradually increased their membership of the Council.

The retired group does not exhibit such a steady rise. As a proportion of new entrants, they rose from about 4% from 1888 to 1919 to about 9% in the interwar years, falling back to about 5% after 1945.[1.] This pattern is reflected in the figures for the specific Councils.[2.] Both in 1903-4 and 1919-20 4% of the members were retired persons; in 1929-30 and 1945-6 the proportion was in the 13% range, while 1953-4 and 1962-3 saw a fall to 10% and then 8%. Men of various occupational groups have comprised the retired element, but since the 1930s the working class element has been in the majority among them, ½ in 1939-40,[3.] 2/3rds in 1940-50[4.] and 4/5ths in 1950-60.[5.] Railwaymen again

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1. See Table XIb.

2. See Table XI.

3. 5 railwaymen, 1 boot manufacturer, 1 insurance agent, 1 brewer, 1 chemist, 1 commercial traveller.

4. 7 railwaymen, 1 varnish worker, 1 brassdresser, 1 boot manufacturer, 1 brewer, 1 railway official.

5. 4 railwaymen, 1 varnish worker, 1 engineer, 1 foundry worker, 1 brewer, 1 chemist, 1 director of education, 1 railway official.

formed a large part of the retired group: 5 in 1930-40, 8 in 1940-50 and 5 in 1950-60.

Administrative

The final group is the administrative, divided into first the managerial and supervisory element, and secondly into the clerical. The former have until the 1950s not been at all significant, providing a handful of members, never above 6% of the Council between 1888 and 1940.[1.] They were 9% of all members in 1950-60,[2.] 10% of the Council in 1962-3,[3.] and 9% of new entrants in 1953-62.[4.] Their increase is clearly a phenomenon of the 1950s; but that of the clerical group was earlier, in the years after the First World War. Before 1919 they had been 4% of the new entrants; then from 1919-29 they were 11% and in 1929-45 10%, reaching a peak of 13% in 1945-53, and then falling away slightly in the late 1950s.[5.] These too have never been a large part of the Council; never above the 6% of all members in 1919-30;[6.] but they have been increasing a little in the 1950s to form 10% of the Council in 1962-3.[7.]

In the 1920s a significant element in this group was

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1. See Table XIb.
2. See Table XIb.
3. See Table XI.
4. See Table XIa.
5. See Table XIa.
6. See Table XIb.
7. See Table XI.

the insurance agents; 3 of whom were Labour members, while there was also a Labour Friendly Society agent who did similar work to that of the insurance agents. Their occupations fitted them ideally to become Councillors. Their door to door visits would make them known to a large number of people. They would become very close to their clients and get to know their personal problems. They would act as advisers. In addition they had the time to give to Council and committee meetings, since they could arrange their collecting work for any time of the day, and when they did call at their customers they could keep them informed about the Council and receive complaints which they could channel up to the Council. Thus they had support and the time to give to Council work. They were invariably Labour, since their occupation was not regarded as of high status, save by the working class, and the bulk of their clients were working class. Thus they could conveniently represent the working class. The peak of their representation was in the 1920s, when the Labour Councillors consisted mainly of railwaymen, engineers and insurance agents. In 1962 however only 1 Labour member was an insurance agent.

Looking at the occupational composition of the Council chronologically, it is possible to say that, in the years before the First World War, 1888-1914, the Council was

mainly composed of manufacturers, professional men and shopkeepers; in the interwar years, the manufacturers and professional men dwindled as the working class invaded the Council; this process continued after the 1939-45 war, when in addition the administrative group began to rise, until in the early 1960s the Council became composed of shopkeepers, the working class, that is men, women and retired, and the administrative groups.

Explanations

The reasons for the changing occupational composition of the Council are many and complicated. Actual proof is hard to come by and suggestions advanced here are laregly tentative. A crude Marxist view would argue that the rise and fall of the various occupational groups is related to the benefits which these groups could obtain from Council membership for their own members. Later chapters examine what each section could and did get out of the Council over the period and discuss the motives for seeking membership.[1] Here other explanations will be put forward.

The Manufacturers

The incursion of the working class members has clearly

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1. See Chapters 13 and 14.

reduced the number of manufacturers and professional men on the Council. The extension of the franchise, the reduction of the property qualifications for membership, the introduction of expense allowances and the growth of party, all contributed to enabling working men to enter the Council. The initial decline of the manufacturers in the 1880s and 90s can be ascribed partly to the abolition of the property qualification for Council membership. By the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835 the qualification for membership of the Council of a large borough like Wolverhampton was the ownership of real or personal property worth £1,000 or the occupation of property rated at £30 per annum.[1] This was a device to prevent public funds from falling into the hands of poor people, who would profit from lavish municipal expenditure. It was not repealed until 1880, when any person on the burgess roll was eligible for election.[2] Broadly this Act enabled all householders living within or up to 7 miles beyond the borough and who had paid rates for the previous 12 months to qualify for membership. On the Council of 1888-9 22 of the 48 members had been elected before 1881, and thus just under half of the

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1. 5 and 6 Wm.IV c.76.
2. 43 Vic. c.17.

Council had had to conform to the high property qualification. It was not until the 1880s and 1890s that lesser men could get into the Council. The actual franchise remained full of anomalies until tidied up in 1948, but by 1884 virtually household suffrage had been attained. No further extensions took place until 1918, when the vote was granted to all men or women who occupied any property in the borough for 6 months prior to the coming into operation of the list, and to the wife of an occupier, if she was over the age of 30. In addition those receiving poor relief were no longer disfranchised.[1.] In 1926 the qualifying period was reduced to 3 months,[2.] and in 1928 the female franchise was made equal to that of males.[3.] In 1945 a temporary Act enabled all who had the Parliamentary vote to have a municipal vote[4.] and in 1948 this provision was firmly enacted: thus those people over the age of 21 and in residence on the qualifying date had both a municipal and Parliamentary vote; while to the former were added those who owned or rented rateable land or premises in the borough to the annual value of not less than £10.[5.] These Acts greatly extended the franchise.

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1. 7 and 8 Geo.V c.64.
2. 16 and 17 Geo.V c.9.
3. 19 and 20 Geo.V c.12.
4. 8 and 9 Geo.VI c.5.
5. 11 and 12 Geo.VI c.65.

In 1914 Wolverhampton's Burgess roll totalled 18,987: in 1919 37,512. In 1939 it was 73,222 and in 1945 106,245.[1] Following these extensions of the franchise came the Labour advances of 1919 and 1945. The composition of the Labour representatives was predominantly working-class.[2] Labour was the party of the working-class, formed by it to advance its interests.[3] The growth of the number of Labour Party Councillors reduced the proportion of the seats held by other occupational groups.

The political allegiances of the occupational groups is given in Table XII. It shows that in the period 1919-45 the anti-Socialist new Councillors were the manufacturers, shopkeepers, professional and managerial men, while of the 38 new Labour entrants 31 were of the working-class.[4] Thus the decline of the occupational groups of manufacturer, professional and managerial Councillors has to a large extent a political cause, the rise of the Labour Party.

This is a general trend applicable to the whole period, but beginning in the 1890s. About the same time two other trends manifested themselves and acted to reduce the number of manufacturers returned to the Council. Many

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1. E.&S. 24.10.1945. The business premise vote was small, a mere 324.
2. See Tables XII and XIII.
3. See Chapter 14.
4. This includes 21 men, 6 women and 4 retired.

family businesses in these years were converted into limited liability companies and many firms grew in size by reason of amalgamations.[1.] Within these more impersonal undertakings the head of the firm exerted less personal dominance and had to have regard to his board of directors. No longer could he easily arrange his business life so that he could devote a great part of his time to local government; his company and fellow directors made more demands on his time and it was seen that too great a preoccupation with the Town Council would impede his success within his business, against competitors and amongst his directors.[2.]

Family concerns were being further reduced by the expansions, amalgamations and takeovers in Midland industry which became evident at the turn of the century. Small local firms were merged into nationwide combines, and the directors and managers who controlled what were

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1. For the economic background see G.C. Allen, the Industrial Development of Birmingham and the Black Country 1860-1927, 1929, and the bibliography pp.814-815.

2. Ex-Councillor J. Beattie, managing director of the town's leading store, said that fewer businessmen than in the past owned their own businesses, and as members of boards they could not afford to give up time to local government, since "the board might hit back". Ex-Councillor T. W. Phillipson, who ran a chain of tobacconists' shops, said that young business executives were too involved in building up their own businesses and forwarding their careers to engage in Council work. Councillor S. Bridnley, a solicitor, claimed that his partners complained that he was neglecting his practice for local government. Interviews with: J. Beattie, T. W. Phillipson and S. Brindley.

now local branches were no longer predominantly local men, brought up in the town, but newcomers without deep attachment to Wolverhampton, often staying there but a short time before moving up the ladder of promotion in the business to other parts of the country.[1] Such men owed their primary loyalty to the firm; the town came low on their scale of concern. They were not likely to join the Council since a pre requisite for membership of the Council appears to be an attachment to the town springing either from birth or long residence there. Table XIV shows that very few Councillors had lived in the town for under 10 years before they first entered the Council. Although in many cases the length of residence in the town is unknown, especially in the earlier years of the period, it is clear that well over a ½ and nearer ¾ of the Council have been either natives or long residents in the town.[2]

A further trend helped to loosen the connection between the industrial executives and the town. Although they worked in the town, they made their homes increasingly beyond the borough boundaries in the more rural, pleasant and spacious Western surrounds, in places like Tettenhall

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1. A similar phenomenon was noted in Glossop. See A. H. Birch, Small Town Politics, 1959, and in Banbury see M. Stacey, Tradition and Change - A Study of Banbury, 1960.
2. See Table XIV.

and Pattingham, whence they would commute to work. The big houses which the manufacturers used to inhabit within the borough were often converted into flats or offices, or were demolished. This evacuation of the town was greatly stimulated by the development of the motor car, which has enabled people to live at some distance from the town and yet be able to reach it conveniently for work. For these people the town was a work place: they lacked the wider interest in the town's affairs, which might have encouraged them to have joined the Council.[1] A further consequence of the moving out of the town as well as of the conversion of private businesses into limited liability companies was that many businessmen failed to qualify for the municipal franchise or for election to the Council. They did not reside in the borough, and as directors of a limited company they did not qualify for a vote, as they could if they had been in charge of a personally owned enterprise or were partners in a private non-limited firm.

All these factors help to explain the gradual falling off of the manufacturers over the whole period, but not

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1. The Local Government Commission in its final proposals for the West Midlands Special Review Area, 1961, p.19, noted that the movement of population from the county boroughs of the Black Country to the outer areas had reduced the supply of voluntary leadership available to the county boroughs, which found it difficult to recruit Councillors of sufficient calibre.

the spectacular dwindling of the 1930s. It is easy to find statements of the businessmen as to why they sought entry to the Council, but it is more difficult to find statements as to why they no longer came on; the positive is easier to assert and find evidence for than the negative. In default of firm explanations for the fall in the 1930s, 2 tentative suggestions will be advanced. The Local Government Act of 1929, which derated industry by 75%,[1.] and in 1932 the adoption of the policy of Industrial Protection, provided relief for Midland industry, which ever since the 1880s had been relatively depressed. The depression had been an incentive to businessmen to enter the Council in order to keep the rates low, to oppose any policy injurious or burdensome to industry, and to promote any policy which would help trade. In the 1930s this stimulus was much reduced and the incentive which had propelled businessmen to enter the Council was removed.[2.]

The 1930s then saw a large reduction in the numbers of manufacturers gaining entry to the Council, because they were no longer heavily rated and a measure of protection had been introduced. Compared with the North,

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1. 19 Geo.V c.17.
2. See Chapter 5, p. 219.

the Midlands was a prosperous area in the 1930s: there was relatively little unemployment and trade flourished. These years in addition saw a change in the type of manufacturer who entered the Council,[1.] but these new men shared important characteristics with the manufacturers of old. Both were personally responsible for the running of their enterprises, which were often family concerns, untrammelled by boards of directors and limited liability or else were very small limited companies. Both had often been born in the town, or had lived there for a long time, and had acquired local roots. Their work and their homes were within the town, in whose life they took an active part, not just by entering the Council, but also by participating in many of the town's associations and clubs.[2.] The businessmen who were the Councillors of the 1950s, although not engaged in the manufacture of the same products as those made by the industrialists at the turn of the century, in many ways are like the old style manufacturers, particularly in being closely linked to the town. Their closeness to the town's life is perhaps the major factor making for their participation in local government.

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1. See above p. 175.
2. See below Chapter 5.

The Professional Men

Many of the trends affecting the decline of the manufacturers apply also to the professional men. They were predominantly Conservative throughout the period,[1] (indeed only one Labour Councillor was a solicitor[2]) and lost ground to the Labour advance after the First World War. The decline of the family venture, the moving out of town to live in more pleasant surroundings, all have affected solicitors and doctors too. Foremost in the reasons given for the disappearance of the professional man is the time factor. An ex-Councillor A. E. Lacon, a chartered accountant, said that it was no good for a professional businessman to go into public life, "since it consumed so much of his time."[3] A solicitor S. Brindley, a Councillor, bemoaned that his partners were complaining that the practice was suffering because of the long hours he devoted to local government.[4] Demands on the time of professional as well as businessmen are far greater now than 60 years ago. For instance, legal aid and the increase in property transactions for the solicitors, and the introduction of the Health Service with the need to keep abreast with the latest developments in medical

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1. See Tables XII and XIII.
2. R. J. Evans, 1923-27.
3. Interview with A. E. Lacon.
4. Interview with S. Brindley.

science and technology for the doctors, have meant that they have less time to give to the Council.

Local Government itself has increased in scope and complexity,[1.] making more demands on those involved in it. No longer can it be a hobby to be indulged in by leisured gentlemen. There are fewer leisured gentlemen now and local government work can no longer be dispatched without much energy, effort and time being devoted to it. Thus it is no wonder that professional men, caught between the increasing demands made upon them by their career and by the Council, have decided to opt out of local government.

The Shopkeepers

Explanations are required for the steadiness in the proportion of shopkeepers on the Council and for their sudden temporary decline in the 1920s. They possess many advantages enabling them to take a seat on the Council. Their daily contact with customers gives them a knowledge of local gossip and events, anxieties and hopes, a channel for their own opinions, an unrivalled opportunity for meeting and influencing people and a fund of electoral support. An establishment in the centre of the town involves them closely in the property dealings

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1. See the Introduction.

in the borough, makes them sensitive to movements of rateable values, the burden of the rate, the prosperity of the town, and therefore arouses their interest in Council policies. A number of shops in the suburbs provide further centres and sources of information and points of concern. Also they can fairly easily find the time to devote to Council work, since they can leave their premises in the hands of assistants, especially as most Council and Committee work is conducted in the afternoon when trade is somewhat slacker than in the morning. Thus having the time and possessing notable means to obtain local knowledge, an influential base from which to command local backing and a number of incentives to watch local administration, it is no wonder that shopkeepers have been an important element in the Council.

The reason for the fall of the shopkeepers in the 1920s is political, and is illustrated from the municipal elections of 1919. In Dunstall Ward the Labour candidate, Alan Davies, a railwayman, defeated the Liberal Councillor, Fred Evans, a fish and fruit merchant. Evans had sat for this ward since 1894; he had been Mayor in 1907-8, chairman of Markets Committee 1897-1917 and of Water Committee from 1917, yet, influential though he was, a Labour candidate in his first fight defeated him in the ward

he had held for a quarter of a century.[1] This defeat illustrates the plight of the shopkeeper in the 1920s. His party was the Liberal Party. Of 21 shopkeeper new entrants to the Council from 1888 to 1919, 13 were Liberals, only 8 were Conservatives and 1 Labour.[2] Of the 11 shopkeepers who were members of the Council in 1903-4, 7 were Liberals. H. G. Wells has precisely described the appeal of the Liberal Party for the shopkeepers. It was, he said, "a gathering together of all the smaller interests which find themselves at a disadvantage against the big established classes," yet it was also set against the collectivist state sought by Labour since "the small dealer is doomed to absorption in that just as much as the large owner."[3] Two quotations from Liberal Councillors in Wolverhampton will illustrate the uneasy in-between position occupied by the shopkeepers. In 1903 T. Reade attacked the Lorain system because it imposed a heavy burden on the ratepayer. "It frequently happened that when matters of this kind were taken in hand by men of easy circumstances and in possession of great wealth - they could not find that consideration for

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1. E. & S. 3.11.1919. Other examples of the Liberal shopkeepers being defeated by Labour are given above in Chapter 2, p. 74.

2. See Table XII.

3. H. G. Wells, The New Machiavelli, 1911 (Penguin edition 1946), p.238.

struggling tradesmen and shopkeepers and hardworking artisans, who had to get their living and reside in the town, that was desirable."[1] In 1905 the other enemy was revealed when P. Lewis attacked the Labour opposition to a grant for the independent Wolverhampton Grammar School. "While he was in profound sympathy with labouring people and the struggles of the poor, there were people in other walks of life, who to maintain respectability had an equally hard time."[2] The fortunes of the Liberal Party, hit by the Unionist split and then revived by the controversy over Education, were ebbing away. Before the war they had flirted with Labour, but afterwards they linked themselves to the Conservative Party.[3] They decided to ally themselves with the "established classes" against the growing strength of the "labouring people". The 1920s were the difficult years when the shopkeepers were in the process of re-orienting their political allegiance. As Liberals they were being defeated by Labour and they had not yet made their commitment to the Conservative Party. By the 1930s they had cemented themselves to the Conservative Party. In the

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1. W.C. 14.10.1903.
2. W.C. 24.5.1905.
3. See above Chapter 2, pp. 75-76.

years 1919-45 of 15 shopkeeper new entrants to the Council, only 1 was a Liberal and 11 were Conservatives.[1] Thus the reason for the dearth of shopkeepers on the Council in the 1920s, was that as Liberals, they had been squeezed out between the Labour and Conservative Parties. But once they were committed to the Conservative Party, they returned to the Council in their old numbers and more.

The Drink Interest

The 1890s and 1930s were the years when the drink trade was represented at its peak in the Council; and the causes for the high representation differ for each period. In the first, the publicans, wine and spirit merchants and brewers primarily sought to defend their trade against the attacks of the temperance reformers. This clash was in addition a political battle, since the drink trade was Conservative; of 8 new entrants to the Council in 1888-1919 who were connected with the liquor business, 7 were Conservatives and 1 an Independent.[2] The temperance reformers were Radical Liberals. In the early 1890s the municipal elections were largely fought between the trade and temperance.[3] J. Cahill, an

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1. See Table XII.
2. See Table XII.
3. e.g. 1888, 1890, 1891, 1897. See above Chapter 1, p.45.

Alderman and a former brewer, has said that publicans were eager to get on the Council in order to be in a position to influence the licensing bench and even in the hope of being appointed to the bench themselves.[1.] This was a defensive move to obstruct the efforts of the temperance reformers, who were seeking to close down and refuse licences to as many public houses as possible, regarding them as causing the evil social conditions, particularly in the East end of the town. In an election in 1890 a temperance reformer claimed that "the move of the publicans was to get on the Council, to get on the Bench, to get anywhere where the licensing system could be controlled."[2.] "The drink traffic was at the bottom of all the social evils of the town."[3.] By the end of the 1890s temperance reform lost its impetus. No longer was it the main issue of elections. It flared up for the last time in 1903, when the "trade" was described as a "strong ever dominant power".[4.] Other factors than drink were now recognised as causing social distress, bad

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1. Interview with J. Cahill.
2. E.&S. 31.10.1890.
3. E.&S. 23.10.1890.
4. E.&S. 2.11.1903.

housing for instance and inadequate wages. Thus as the attack of the temperance reformers subsided there was less incentive for the publicans to join the Council.

Although the publican element among the new entrants declined, the actual publican element among the Councillors did not, and in the 1930s it was as high as in the 1890s. This is explained by the fact that some Councillors became licensed victuallers after joining the Council, like J. Haddock, a former Friendly Society agent and G. J. Williams, a former engineer. Once on the Council these men had become very friendly with the brewer Alderman J. F. Myatt, who put them in charge of his public houses. Some Labour members claimed that this process was not because Myatt wished to help his Council colleagues at a time when employment was short, but because he wished to buy their support for his shady property deals; indeed H. E. Lane claimed that Myatt offered him a licenceship to desist from attacking him.[1] With Myatt's death in 1937 the trend ceased, and the publican element continued its decline.

A long-term trend operative over the whole period is perhaps an additional factor explaining the demise of the Councillors who were publicans. The early publicans were

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1. Interview with H. E. Lane.

not the employees of a brewery, operating a tied house, but the independent masters of their own establishments, even brewing their own beer in their backyards, men like Levi Johnson, Jeremiah Mason and William Moseley.[1.] They were similar to the shopkeepers, small businessmen, but the publicans of the 1950s are employees of breweries, not independent men, liable to be moved from house to house in the chain.[2.] This loss of independence and status has perhaps removed an incentive to join the Council.

The Working-Class

The increase in the number of the working-class Councillors has been shown to be related to the lowering of the property qualifications for membership and to the extensions of the franchise, which were followed by an increase in the number of working-class Councillors. These have been overwhelmingly members of the Labour Party, and it is the foundation of that Party, and its activity in training people in the arts of, for instance, Committee work and in financing and organising election campaigns, which has enabled people of more humble circumstances than before to enter the Council. The Labour Party's

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1. Councillor Johnson 1881-1937.
   Councillor Mason 1877-1905.
   Councillor Moseley 1912-1944.
2. Interviews with J. Cahill and L. J. Woolridge.

policy too was designed to appeal to the newly enfranchised, promising to advance the social position of the working-class; and in its early days particularly its policy was aimed at promoting specific trade union objectives.[1.]

The trade union connection explains the high proportion of railwaymen and engineers amongst the working class Councillors; these 2 groups were highly unionised. We have shown above that Low Hill and Bushbury Wards were almost "pocket wards" of the railway unions;[2.] while the engineers, especially those who worked at the Sunbeam Company, were highly unionised in the A.S.E. This union, now the A.E.U., has offices in the town and full-time staff and officials there. Its district officer is a Town Councillor, the Chairman of Town Planning Committee.[3.] Participation in union activities, indeed being an active member of a union, would bring the member close to politics and to the Labour Party, for the unions have used the Labour Party as their political wing. The Trades Council was the first organisation to run candidates at municipal elections; the unions formed the local Labour

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1. See below Chapter 14.
2. See above Chapter 3, pp.143-145.
3. F. Clapham, Councillor 1945-7, 1948- .

Representation Committee as the organisation to get Labour members elected in municipal and Parliamentary elections;[1.] trade union money financed the local Labour Party, paid for the election campaigns and gave out-of-pocket expenses to the early Labour Councillors,[2.] while the programme of the Labour Party contained policies to assist the unions. An active trade unionist could easily become an active Labour Party member and through the Party gain entry to the Council.

It was the strong trade union connection which prevented the Liberal Party from containing the working-class. This Party, predominantly of shopkeepers, showed for instance by its attitude in the minimum wages controversy that it was not the friend of organised Labour.[3.] Although in the 1890s many working men, indeed some active trades unionists, had been Liberals,[4.] by 1914 the Liberals had lost this element which had formed its own party. Thus the increase in working class membership of the Council is due to the development of the Labour Party, backed by trade union support in terms of manpower and money and producing a programme designed

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1. See above Chapter 1.
2. M.L.L.P., 2.5.1907.
3. See above Chapter 1, p. 67.
4. e.g. G. Cocking, W. Sharrocks, T. Frost, W. Mee.

to attract the newly enfranchised working men.

The growth of the Labour Party also explains the increase in the number of female Councillors. Not until 1908 could women become members of Town Councils;[1.] and not until 1921 did the first woman enter Wolverhampton's Council,[2.] following the enfranchisement in 1919 of women over 30.[3.] Only after 1945 did the women come more and more onto the Council, as the Labour Party grew in strength. They were predomonantly Labour, often members of the women's section of their husbands' trades unions, working class and entering the Council often in their 40s and 50s, after their children were sufficiently grown up for them to have time on their hands to devote to local government work. Thus the rise of the number of female Councillors is due to the growth of the Labour Party.

The number of Councillors who were retired has risen albeit slightly; and as we have seen they have been since the 1930s composed mainly of working class men and thus members of the Labour Party. Like the women after their children had grown up, they found that after

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1. 7 Edw.VII c.33.
2. Mrs. E. Sproson.
3. 7 and 8 Geo.V c.64.

retirement they had time to devote to politics and Council work. They had been often active in their trade union before retirement, but had been unable to find the time to give to local government. The advent of old age pensions was also a factor enabling men to enter the Council, since no longer would they be compelled to keep on working well into their 70s. Thus earlier retirement, a more secure retirement, indeed the release from work altogether have allowed retired working men to enter the Council more than in the past.

The small increase in the number of Councillors of administrative occupations both managerial and clerical can be explained by the increase of these groups as a proportion of the population. As the number of manual workers in the population has declined so have the managerial, clerical and service occupations risen. As their numbers have grown so one would expect the number of Councillors would have grown. This change in the population is also perhaps the explanation for the slight fall in the 1950s of the number of manual workers who were members of the Council. Despite these population changes the managerial and clerical groups appear still to be a small proportion of the Council as compared with their proportion of the population. The apparent reluctance of these groups to enter the Council can be put down to the nature of their

work. Compelled to work set daytime hours, and not shifts which allow the working man to come to Council and committee meetings in the day, they have little opportunity to join the Council. And these groups are likely to be concerned about their prospects of promotion and therefore not keen to jeopardise their chances by appearing to neglect their jobs for local government. Like the professional men and the industrial executives, these newer occupational groups put their jobs first and since both their jobs and local government have increased in the demands of their time, local government has been given second and even lower placing.

Occupation has correlated closely with party allegiance during the whole period.[1] Professional men throughout the period have been predominantly Conservatives. The shopkeepers up to 1919 were Liberals and later turned to the Conservatives. The manufacturers changed their loyalty too. In the Council of 1888-9 there were 11 Liberal manufacturers and 7 Conservatives. The balance soon changed. Between 1888 and 1919 Conservatives were the largest proportion of the new Councillors who were manufacturers,[2] and their share

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1. See Tables XII and XIII.
2. 14 Conservatives and 9 Liberals.

increased greatly from 1919-45.[1] Their change in allegiance has an economic cause; their desire for Protection and their opposition to Free Trade. The Conservatives in Wolverhampton advocated the former, while the Liberals extolled Free Trade. The working class have been consistently Labour, as have the women members of the Council, and since 1919 the retired and the clerical workers have been mainly supporters of the Labour Party. Managerial and administrative types have been chiefly Conservative, but during the 1950s a growing number of Labour members have fallen into this category, through promotion inside their firms.[2]

The Council of 1903-4 presented a picture of Conservative and Liberal manufacturers, Conservative professional men, Conservative publicans and Liberal shopkeepers, together with Conservative and Liberal administrative and retired individuals, providing the bulk of the Council, all accepting in a general way the status quo, opposed by a small group of Labour working men.[3] But the Council of 1962-3 presented a picture of

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1. 14 Conservatives and 2 Liberals.
2. e.g. H. E. Lane - from engineer to chief buyer.
   D. A. Birch - from engineering estimator to Press Relations Officer.
3. See Table XIII.

Conservative shopkeepers, with a few Conservative professional men, small manufacturers, managers and retired men facing Labour working men and women, retired working men, clerical workers and some managerial types. These 2 groups were evenly balanced.[1.]

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1. See Table XIII.

A cautionary note on the sources for the occupations of the Councillors.

The basic source for the occupations of the members of the Council is the annual Council Diary and Yearbook. But it is not a completely trustworthy or useful source for three main reasons:

(i) The descriptions of the members in it are based on the members' own descriptions, which they put on their nomination papers. No one has lied in Wolverhampton about his occupation, but many have tended to raise the status of their jobs by giving them more flamboyant titles than one would normally; e.g. hotel proprietor or maltster for licensed victualler; a millinery specialist for a hat seller.

(ii) The descriptions become out of date when members change their occupations or rise in their jobs. Often the member's original description stays with him. e.g. an "engineer" is really a chief buyer; a "carpenter" is the head of a firm of shop-fitters.

(iii) Many descriptions are too vague to be useful, e.g. "engineer", "manufacturer", "merchant", "company director", "secretary", "housewife", "gentleman", and such terms as "solicitor" or "grocer" give no indication of the size, status or success of the concern.

Therefore the information in the Council Yearbooks must be supplemented by newspaper reports and interviews, if a more accurate picture of the occupations of the Council members is to be obtained.

CHAPTER 5

The Associations of the members of the Council from 1900

Throughout the period one aspect of the Council members' extra-Council activities has been strikingly constant, their "clubability". They have always been inveterate joiners of Associations, and not merely in a passive role, but as active members, sitting on Executive Committees, and as officers. Initially membership of an Association would assist an individual to obtain a seat on the Council, in that he would be provided with an arena in which to make a reputation, to show his competence at administration and committee work, and to display his powers of persuasion. Success in this field might bring him to the attention of a sitting member of the Council, who would suggest that he too might become a Councillor. During the subsequent election campaign the Association would most likely be a valuable source of help for the candidate. Once elected, he would be drawn into other Associations, either as a result of his own initiative in the quest for further support, or as a result of approaches made to him by the Associations seeking his aid and patronage. A skilful Councillor could capitalise on small initial assets, augmenting them to provide an ever-growing fund of backers. Thus being

in an Association helped the man into the Council, and then being in the Council helped him to become a member of more Associations, which in turn further consolidated his position on the Council.

Over the whole period Councillors of all parties have played a part in associations, based in the wards which they have represented. Sports clubs, hobby clubs, amenity associations, charitable and social welfare organisations, associations to defend particular interests, have all been cultivated by the Councillors. Allotment Societies, Tenants Associations, Parent Teachers Associations, Community Associations, Nursing Associations, Social Clubs, Bowling Clubs, Old Folks Xmas Clubs, the list could be huge of the various organisations centred in the wards, which have claimed Councillors as representatives.[1] Out of this welter of Associations 4 points emerge. First the publican members of the Council seem to have been particularly good in obtaining membership and offices in Sports Associations, for example Bowling Clubs, Football Clubs, Dominoes Clubs, Darts Clubs, which were based on the

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1. Details about the Associations and their connections with members of the Council have been obtained from:
a) Newspaper biographies or obituaries of Councillors.
b) Newspaper reports of functions of the Associations.
c) Wolverhampton Red Book and Directory. Issues from 1900 to 1960.
d) Interviews and Questionaires with Councillors.

licensed houses of the publicans. Clearly this trend is evidence of the publican's attempts to widen his custom and to maintain the loyalty of his customers to his establishment. It would also make him more popular and well known, and thus of advantage when he came to seek a seat on the Council.

Secondly there is no evidence of these ward based Associations being active in putting pressure on the Council for particular policies. The only exception is the Allotments Associations, whose voices are heard on the Small Holdings and Allotments Committee of the Council. They were particularly vocal after the 1939-45 war, when Councillors who were in these Associations opposed the return to public parks and children's playgrounds of land which had been converted into allotments during the war as part of the "Dig for Victory" campaign.[1] Even then the Allotment Associations had had to fight hard against those who wished to keep the parks for recreation.[2]

Thirdly there is no correlation between party affiliation and membership of such Associations. Labour, Conservative and Liberal Councillors have been active in Sports Clubs, Parent Teachers Associations, Allotment

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1. C.M. 28.9.1953.
2. C.M. 13.4.1942. E.&S. 13.4.1942.

Societies and in the various local welfare and amenity organisations. The only exception here is that Labour members have predominated in the Municipal Tenants Associations.[1]

Fourthly these local Associations have often had links with similar organisations for the town as a whole, and in these too the Councillors have played a prominent part. The Red Book and Directory of Wolverhampton, in its issues between 1900 and 1960, has listed the major Associations of the town, and their officials; amongst these names have always cropped up those of Councillors.

Correlation between party affiliation and Association is very clear with regard to those Associations connected with occupations. With the Labour members Trades Unionism has been a significant force. We have already observed that the railway and engineering unions have been a fruitful source for providing members of the Council, and that trade union full-time officials have formed a sizeable section on the Council.[2] Every member of the Labour Party is constitutionally bound to join his appropriate trade union, and thus it is only to be expected that the majority of the Labour Councillors were members of trade unions. Their role within the unions

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1. No Conservative member of the Council has been a Council house tenant. See also Epilogue, pp. 633-634.

2. See above Chapter 4, pp. 180-182.

however has not been negative; often they have filled the leading part-time official positions within their local branches. Indeed their work here was a factor commending them to the Labour Party as suitable candidates for Council membership. Below are 9 examples of the range of unions represented on the Council over the period and the offices held by Council members in the unions.
i) A. Bent, Treasurer of A.S.R.S. branch, Council member 1913-20. ii) S. Tatton, Secretary of N.U.R. branch, Council member 1938-47. iii)A. E. Griffiths, Secretary of A.S.L.E.F. branch, Council member 1945-47. iv) H. Bagley, Chairman of A.E.U. branch, Council member 1945- . v) S. R. Swain, Chairman of N.U.F.T.O. branch, Council member 1947-61. vi) F. V. Law, Chairman of U.S.D.A.W. branch, Council member 1952- . vii) F. S. Smith, Chairman of D.A.T.A. branch, Council member 1952- . viii) A. Storer, Secretary of U.S.B. branch, Council member 1957-60, 1961- . ix) W. H. Whittle, Secretary of A.U.F.W. branch, Council member 1958-61.

The trade union activities of such men did not end at the branch level; they were often delegates to the local Trades Council; and many Council members have acted as officials for the Trades Council, such as C. W. Hill, A. W. Beck, J. Whittaker, J. E. Dideridge, A. A. Beach,

W. H. Hale and H. E. Lane.[1] Association with a trade union has been a distinctively Labour phenomenon; never has a Conservative or Liberal member of the Council been a trades unionist.

For the non-Socialist members of the Council the nearest equivalents to trades unions have been their trade and professional associations. Here too the Council members have not been passive but active in their organisations. Below are 17 examples to show the range of interests represented on the Council, and the positions held in the Associations by Council members.
i) W. G. Allen, President of the Law Society, member of the Council 1892-1901, 1902-11. ii) A. G. Barrett, President of the Master Printers' Association, member of the Council 1949-52. iii) E. Blakemore, President of the Grocers and Provision Dealers' Association, member of the Council 1892-1905. iv) J. H. Coleman, Secretary of the Chemists' Association, member of the Council 1910-61. v) H. R. Elliston, Chairman of the Society of Chartered Accountants, member of the Council 1957- . vi) M. G. Evans, Vice-Chairman of the Confectionery Trades Council, member of the Council 1942-52. vii) H. T. Fullwood, President of the Tyre Distributers' Association, member of the Council 1942- . viii) R. Gibson, Vice-Chairman of the Hardware

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1. Wolverhampton Red Book and Directory 1900 to 1960.

Association, member of the Council 1903-19. ix) R. Gough President of the Retail Fruit Trade Federation, member of the Council 1955-58. x) L. R. Guy, Chairman of the Ford Dealers' Association, member of the Council 1939- . xi) L. Johnson, Chairman of the Licensed Trade Association, 1881-1937. xii) W. Lawley, Secretary of the Federation of Sub-Postmasters, member of the Council 1932-52. xiii) G. E. J. Luce, President of the Master Bakers' and Confectioners' Association, member of the Council 1927-45. xiv) N. Pritchard, President of the Retail Market Hall Tenants' Association, member of the Council 1953-4. xv) R. E. Probert, President of the Butchers' Association, member of the Council 1927-45. xvi) C. T. Richards, Chairman of the Pawnbrokers' Association, member of the Council 1903-26. xvii) A. H. Windridge, Chairman of the Perambulator Manufacturers' Association, member of the Council 1944-45, 1946- .[1]

Over the whole period members of the Council have belonged to trade and professional associations each member being linked to the Association relevant for his occupation. This feature has been constant between 1900 and the 1960s and has never slackened. Generally Conservative and Liberal members of the Council have been

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1. Source: Wolverhampton Red Book and Directory 1900-1960.

the majority of such individuals, but whenever there have been Labour members of the Council who were not able to join a trade union, they too have joined their appropriate trade or professional association.[1.]

Later chapters examine the activities of the Trade Unions and the Trade and Professional Associations in relation to the Council, and investigate the advantages of membership to the various occupational groups.[2.]

The number of members of the Council who were members of the Council of the Chamber of Commerce has declined significantly over the period.[3.] 11 members of the Town Council of 1888-9 were members of the Chamber; in 1962-3 only 1 was in both. Between 1886 and 1933 members of the Town Council provided 13 Presidents of the Chamber of Commerce.[4.] Since 1933 not one member of the Town Council has been President of the Chamber. This decline is related to the decline of the number of industrialists on the Town Council; no longer does the Council contain such men likely to become members of the Chamber.[5.] The

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1. e.g. R. J. Evans (Labour Councillor 1923-27), a solicitor, was a member of the Law Society.
2. See below Chapters 13 and 14.
3. See Table XV.
4. V. B. Beaumont, Record of the Wolverhampton Chamber of Commerce 1856-1956, 1956.
5. See Tables XI, XIa, XIb.

1 member in 1962 was himself not a representative of a manufacturing enterprise but of a retailing concern. No Labour member has ever been a member of the Chamber of Commerce,[1] and the Chamber itself has been very closely connected with the Conservative Group of Councillors. For a long time the Conservative Group used to hold their pre-Council meetings in the Chamber's premises.[2] When seeking candidates the Conservative Group has circulated the Chamber to discover if it knew of anyone suitable.[3] In the 1920s the Chamber was prone to make statements about Council policy openly, usually to attack items in Labour's programme. In 1927 for example it claimed that Labour's policies would result in an "enormous increase in the rates with the consequent depression in local industries and an increase in the number of unemployed."[4] Such statements have not emanated from the Chamber in the 1950s and 60s.

Another Association which has had links and influence

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1. See Table XV..
2. Interview with W. J. Rawlins, Minutes of the Conservative Group (cited after as M.C.G. 19.6.1953, 24.7.1953, 14.6.1954, 24.9.1954, 19.11.1954, 29.4.1955.
3. M.C.G. 28.12.1956, 10.3.1961, In 1925 the Management Committee of the Conservative Association in the West met 3 representatives from the Chamber to discuss the candidates for the municipal election. M.M.C. 14.9.1925.
4. E.&S. 23.3.1927. Statement by the Chamber of Commerce for the 1927 election.

with the Council was the Wolverhampton Property Owners' Association. It comprised the owners of rented property, Conservatives and Liberals, but no Labour Councillors. In 1901 its President and Vice-President were both Councillors, C. H. Cousins and W. Shepherd.[1] It was particularly active with regard to the Council in the years before 1914; and it impinged on the Council mainly over 4 issues. It first became prominent in the late 1890s, when it defended the interests of the property owners against those who wished them to bear the main burden of the expense of substituting the water carriage system for the pan system of excrement disposal in the houses which they owned. It pressed that the Council should pay a substantial subsidy towards the conversions: 1 Councillor bemoaned the plight of the property owners absolutely dependent on their property for their livings.[2] In 1897 another Councillor, angry at the delay in abolishing the pan system, exlaimed that "one great difficulty in dealing with the insanitary property of the town was that a large proportion of them belonged to members of the Council."[3]

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1. Wolverhampton Red Book and Directory 1901.
2. C.M. 18.11.1895, W.C. 20.11.1895.
3. W.C. 15.9.1897.

Secondly in the early 1900s it protested at what it regarded as the Council's grandiose schemes, particularly its plans to construct a new Cold Store and Abattoir. The Association feared that the rates would rise to an excessive level; and that the noise of the machinery and the nuisances created would reduce the value of the property in the vicinity.[1.]

Thirdly it delayed the building of Council houses. A Councillor said that the delay in the building of the first Council house was due to "the pressure that is being brought to bear on the committee (Housing of the Working Classes Committee) by the Property Owners' and Ratepayers' Association."[2.] Indeed many of the Committee were themselves "large owners of small house property,"[3.] and thus resented competition from the rate-subsidised Council houses. In 1913 Labour tabled a motion "that in the opinion of this Council it is detrimental to the speedy solution of the housing question for members to hold interest in any property which comes under the category of slums."[4.] The other side maintained that

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1. See letters from the Association in E. &S. 8.5.1900, 11.5.1900, 12.5.1900.
2. E. &S. 14.4.1900.
3. E. & S. 21.3.1900.
4. C.M. 8.12.1913. W.C. 10.12.1913.

there was no need to build Council houses since "private enterprise would come along and solve the difficulty, if only speculators were allowed to get a fair remuneration on their outlay."[1].

The attempts to get "a fair remuneration" had led members of the Association in 1912-13 to raise the rents of their properties, which provoked the formation of the Tenants' Defence League and thus assisted the advance of Labour.[2].

After the First World War the Property Owners' Association was no longer such a significant force on the Council as it had been. In the interwar years the Associations which came to the fore in the property field, and which had very close connections with the Council, were the Building Societies of the town. There were 3, the Wolverhampton Freeholders' Permanent Building Society founded in 1849, the Wolverhampton and District Permanent Building Society founded in 1877, and the South Staffordshire Building Society founded in 1902.[3]. Table XVII shows that in 1903-4 7 members of the Council were

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1. W.C. 11.12.1914.
2. Wolverhampton Worker November 1913. See above Chapter 1, pp. 66-67.
3. Wolverhampton Red Book and Directory

directors of these Building Societies; the peak year was 1929-30 when there were 17: by 1962-3 there was only one. The 1920s and 1930s were the years when the Council and the Building Societies were linked most closely. It was at this period that much building was taking place in the town, slums were being demolished near the centre, new estates both public and private were being built; the Corporation was engaged in improvements, street widening and laying essential services to the new estates.[1.] Opportunities were available for expansion by the Building Societies. The Labour Party, none of whose Councillors were ever directors of the Building Societies,[2.] were not without explanations of the close tie-up between the Councillors and the Societies. Councillors Lane and Lawley accused the Societies of buying valuable land from the Corporation cheaply and of selling poor land to the Corporation dearly, and of arranging for the Corporation to lay essential services to their new estates at low cost.[3.] A typical "incident"

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1. See Mayoral reviews of the previous years' developments in the town. E. & S. 9.11.1922, 10.11.1924, 9.11.1925, 5.4.1927, 9.11.1933, 9.11.1934, 9.11.1935, 9.11.1936.
2. See Table XVII.
3. Interviews with H. E. Lane and W. Lawley.

of the 1930s occurred in 1936 when Lane asked a question in Council as to whether Building Society directors came within section 76 of the Local Government Act of 1933 about the declaration of financial interests. The Mayor said that he would take no action as they did not have full information of the financial interests of members of the Council. Lane retorted "I can give it to you". The Mayor replied "I am not inviting it", "You are afraid" said Lane. Then Councillor T. W. Simpson, Chairman of the Town Planning Committee and a director of the Permanent Building Society, whom Lane and Lawley regarded as "up to his neck in shady deals", spoke up that this was a serious affair, and if accusations were made he would take Counsel's advice. Lane retorted "if the cap fits, wear it."[1]. Another instance of Labour suspicion was in 1934 when Councillor A. Dallow opposed the sale of a piece of land by the Education Committee to private owners, and argued that it should be transferred to the Small Holdings and Allotments Committee. He said "the general public knowing that members of the Council were interested in various ways in building - building societies and speculative building - were asking why the 10 acres were being let go so easily."[2]. Nothing ever came of

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1. E. & S. 10.3.1936.
2. E. & S. 14.5.1934.

Labour's accusations, no one was ever prosecuted. One Alderman often charged by Labour said that the Labour members were merely consumed by envy and they could not see how a man could do well for himself without being crooked. He claimed that there was no truth in Labour's accusations.[1] Since the Second World War the Building Societies have severed their links with the Council; and the Labour Party has made no more accusations about their activities.

Table XVII shows not only that Labour never got a foothold in the boards of directors, but also that at times the Societies had definite party biases, for example the Permanent in 1903 was Liberal, and the Freeholders in 1929 was Conservative. This phenomenon is perhaps due to the way directors were recruited. Invariably a Councillor became a director only after being on the Council for some time. A director did not usually become a Councillor; it was the other way round. The way to the board was by making a good showing in Council, impressing a director, who would then invite one onto the board. Thus the Council was for some a means to advancement.

The anti-Socialists in turn accused the Labour Party

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1. Interview with J. Cahill, whom Lawley called "Soapy Sam" - an artful smooth talker.

of seeking to advance the interests of the Co-operative Society.[1.] It was a specifically Labour Society. No Conservative or Liberal has been prominent in the Wolverhampton Co-operative Society. In 1958 during a Council debate on whether the Society should be granted the lease of some shops on a new estate, 25 members of the Council declared an interest in the Society, all Labour members,[2.] about ¾ of the total Labour membership of the Council. The interest which they declared was the possession of a share number; only 1 member of the Council over the whole period has been really active in the Society, and she was an exceptional figure. Councillor Mrs. M. Dale, member of the Council 1945-7 and from 1949, has held many official positions within the Co-operative Movement at both local and national level, for example as a director of the Wolverhampton and District Co-operative Society and as President of the Co-operative Womens' Guild. For her the Co-operative Movement contained the "essence of Socialism."[3.] No other Labour member has ever come close to her interest in the Co-operative Society. Normally each has merely

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1. See below Chapter 14.
2. C.M. 22.9.1958. E. & S. 23.9.1958.
3. Interview with Mrs. M. Dale.

had a share number. The influence of the Co-operative Society on the Labour Party and on the Council will be examined later.[1.]

Except for religious Associations we have really exhausted the range of organisations with which the Labour Councillors have been connected, ward-based Associations, Trades Unions and the Co-operative Society. In the early part of the period they often held positions within Friendly Societies, like the Rechabites[2.] and Hearts of Oak,[3.] but with the advent of state social services, the need for such simple voluntary services has declined. For social contacts, the Labour members have preferred to be members of the Working Mens' Clubs of the town, the Cannock Road and the West End mainly, or to frequent particular public houses. This range of contacts, compared with those of the anti-Socialist Councillors, is narrow. The Labour members, compared with the Conservatives, have been "socially undernourished",

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1. See below Chapter 14, pp. 574-577.
2. e.g. J. Whittaker, member of the Council 1903-12, 1924-40.
   T. Frost, member of the Council 1901-08, 1911-49.
   E. & S. 9.1.1935, 22.5.1953.
3. e.g. A. A. Beach, member of the Council 1921-4, 1927-52.
   E. & S. 26.5.1958, 16.12.1958.

they seem to have devoted more time to party than to social activities. They find and make social contacts within the party; and attend party functions, jumble sales, dances; indeed the numerous committee meetings which occur in the party partake of the nature of social functions.

The anti-Socialists have had a far wider range of contacts, particularly in the social field, and have not so exclusively concentrated on their political parties to satisfy their needs for social contacts. Rotary and Round Table have since their foundation in the 1920s been represented on the Council by a fairly constant number of anti-Socialist Councillors, 12 in 1929-30, 11 in 1945-6 and 11 in 1962-3.[1] No Labour members have ever penetrated their rank, except when a Labour member was Mayor and became an Honorary member for his term of office. The high peak of Rotarian and Round Table membership of the Council came just before the 1945 election; 16 were counted in 1944.[2] This was because these bodies had become recruiting centres for co-opting

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1. See Table XVI.

2. E. & S. 13.3.1944.

anti-Socialists onto the Council.[1] During the same period of the 1940s, these Associations were exceptionally strong amongst the chief officers of the Corporation: the Town Clerk, the Treasurer, the Chief Constable, the Medical Officer of Health, were all members, and the Director of Education, T. A. Warren, became a President of Rotary International.[2] His activities for Rotary took him on a 2½ months visit to the U.S.A. which angered the Labour Party who tabled a motion deploring his absence. However a majority supported his visit as a service for the war effort and as bringing honour to the town.[3] By 1961-2 the number of Chief officers in Rotary had declined: in 1961 the Chief Librarian, the Borough Engineer, the Housing Manager and the Water Engineer were listed. The leading officials were not evident.

There has been no evidence that Rotary or Round Table had particular policies to advocate. Their influence was not so specific. In 1943 the President of

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1. Interview with A. E. Lacon. During the election campaign of 1945 a letter in the Express and Star attacked the Progressive Party as "guided and controlled by Masonic and Rotarian influences"; "the same that co-opted members to the Town Council." 4.9.1945.

2. List of members of Rotary at a dinner and letter to the author from the Secretary of Wolverhampton Rotary, 9.5.1962.

3. E. & S. 11.5.1942.

the Wolverhampton Rotary claimed that "the quiet and pervading influence of the Rotary movement was making itself felt. In towns were Rotary had a footing there was a better spirit of tolerance, forbearance, mutual understanding and help."[1] Its exclusiveness however made it suspect in the eyes of the Labour Party, which viewed it as a sinister body where Council policies were formed on an informal basis between groups of Councillors and Chief Officers. Whether this was so is hard to prove, but the fact that Councillors did meet informally with officials here is a significant factor. Labour members did not attend social functions at which they were likely to meet the officials on such an equal basis. Anti-Socialist Councillors did attend such functions, and were therefore more likely to be on better terms with the officials, or at least they could understand each other's position better than could the Labour members and the officials, who never really came into contact with each other save on official business. This difference goes far to explain the reason for the view often expressed by Labour Councillors that the officials were really "Tories at heart" and "not one of us". Thus Rotary provided means to get harmony between officials

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1. E. & S. 6.7.1943.

and one group of Councillors and was a recruiting centre for new Councillors. Its influence was at its highest during the Second World War. Afterwards Labour came to power; yet the number of Councillors who are Rotarians is still significantly high.

It is most difficult to discover if an individual is a Freemason, since the very basis of this Society is secrecy. An attempt has been made to discover which members of the Council have been Freemasons, by examining the lists of mourners at the funeral of particularly prominent Freemasons and newspaper accounts of dinners and dances at lodges; and by making discreet inquiries.[1] The figures given below are not exhaustive: they should be regarded as merely suggestive. The figures for 1888-9 and for 1903-4 are exceptionally hazy since at such a distance it is hard to discover such personal information.

Council members being Freemasons

Council	Conservative	Liberal	Labour	Total
1888-9	2	1	0	3
1903-4	4	1	0	5
1919-20	9	1	0	10
1945-6	7	2	0	9
1953-4	5	0	0	5
1962-3	4	0	0	4

1. See T. J. Barnett, A. History of the Lodge of Honour No. 526 holden at Wolverhampton. 1896 and F. W. Willmore A History of Freemasonry in the Province of Staffordshire 1905.

It is clear that Conservatives have predominated in the ranks of the Freemason members of the Council, that Labour has never been represented and that since the 1920s there has been a decline in the number of Freemasons on the Council. This fall is related to the fall in the number of industrialists and professional men on the Council, since the Freemason members of the Council in the 1920s were predominantly of that type.

It is hard to find any proof that the Freemasons had a distinctive policy to press upon the Council. Their main function, like that of Round Table and Rotary, would be social; providing opportunities for people to meet and forging social links between individuals which might help them to unite on matters of Council business. A former committee clerk said that in the 1920s and 30s Freemasonry was strong amongst both Council members and officials, and that its main activity was to "help each other up" and of "sticking together."[1].

Thus the Council has become polarised, not only politically into the Labour and Conservative Parties,[2]. and not only occupationally into those economic groups represented by the Conservative and Labour Parties,[3].

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1. Interview with W. E. Ellwell.
2. See above Chapters 1 and 2.
3. See above Chapter 4.

but also socially, since the Conservative and Labour Party members of the Council have their own distinctive set of Associations. At the turn of the century in contrast this polarisation was not so sharp; then the Councillors were more homogeneous, and the leading divisive factor was religion, though this too correlated to a large extent with political allegiance.

In 1900 there were 3 significant religious groupings on the Council: first an Anglican Conservative group of Councillors, whose place of worship was the town's parish church of St. Peter's. Men of high social status in the town, like the manufacturer Sir C. T. Mander, and the solicitors W. G. Allen, F. T. Langley and F. A. Willcock worshipped there and held such lay offices in the church as sidesmen and churchwardens. Their businesses were in the ward, and on the Council they represented the ward. Anglicanism and Conservatism went together. The Church Party was the Conservative Party. Table XVIII shows the close correlation between Conservatism and Anglicanism amongst the Councillors. In 1903-4 17 Conservatives were Anglicans: but no Liberals.

The second group were those who worshipped at the Queen Street Congregational Church; manufacturers like S. T. Mander, J. Jones, W. H. Jones and A. B. Bantock, who held such offices in the Church as Deacons, Sunday

school superintendents, patrons of mission churches and trustees of the Congregational School, Tettenhall College. They were of similar high social status to the St. Peter's set, but different from them politically, since the Queen Street men were Liberals; all 9 of them on the Council in 1888-9 and all 8 in 1903-4.[1] The Pastor of Queen Street from 1883-99, the Rev. C. A. Berry, was a dominant personality who preached a civic gospel of the need to build "the kingdom of God in the State."[2] He was a partisan figure, eager "to refute the exclusive claims of Anglicanism",[3] and often making political pronouncements, for instance publicly supporting particular candidates at municipal and Parliamentary elections.[4] He was an inspiration to many Liberals,[5] and it was his influence perhaps that explains why "Many of the members of Queen Street Church take an active part in municipal affairs, and are well known as esteemed public servants."[6]

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1. See Table XVIII.
2. The Congregationalist, 28.10.1897, and C. A. Berry, Municipal Patriotism. A Sermon, November 1896.
3. The Congregationalist, 28.10.1897.
4. E. & S. 20.10.1894. See J. S. Drummond, Clarence A. Berry, A Memoir, 1899, p.186.
5. E. & S. 6.1.1900.
6. W. H. Jones, History of the Congregational Church of Wolverhampton, 1894, p.169, and see H. A. May, Queen Congregational Church. The Story of 100 years 1809-1909, 1909.

These 2 Churches can be called the "Establishment Churches" of the Council. There the leading Councillors worshipped. In 1900 of 13 Chairmen, 5 came from Queen Street and 3 from St. Peter's. The other "establishment" Church was the Darlington Street Methodist Church, an imposing building like the other Churches, situated also in the centre of the town, at which, for example, Sir H. H. Fowler worshipped. Those members of the Council who worshipped here were not so committed to Liberalism as the other Nonconformists. These Wesleyan Methodists inclined in numerous cases to the Conservative Party.[1.]

At a lower level in the social scale were the shopkeepers who worshipped at the Waterloo Road Baptist Chapel and the Mount Zion Primitive Methodist Chapel. Those were the centres for the Radical Liberals, temperance reformers like T. G. Baker, P. Lewis and G. R. Thorne, who opposed the more moderate Liberalism and less severe Nonconformity of the Queen Street and Darlington Street sects. The members of the Council who were active in these 2 Chapels, as lay preachers, organisers of the Pleasant Sunday Afternoon classes, and superintendents of Sunday schools, were foremost in demanding reforms for the East End of the town, where Mount Zion

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1. See Table XVIII.

was situated. Baptists and Primitive Methodists combined, speaking at each others services and functions, and acting together in the Council and in municipal and Parliamentary elections. The wards of St. James' and St. Matthew's were their strongholds, and Mount Zion was regarded as the centre of their support. The alliance is symbolised in 2 men, Price Lewis[1.] of Mount Zion, member of the Council (1888-1914) and G. R. Thorne,[2.] member of the Council (1888-1891, and 1897-1920) who worked closely together.[3.] These 2 were regarded as the "opposition", against the Chairmen from St. Peter's and Queen Street. Indeed it is significant that despite their many years of service on the Council, neither of them ever became a proment Chairman. Lewis was Chairman of Small Holdings and Allotments 1907-8, and of the Free Library Committees 1912-14, while Thorne was Chairman of Health Committee (1903-9). They never became part of the town's "Establishment".

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1. For his life and work for Mount Zion see Wolverhampton Journal, May 1902 and E. & S. 20.8.1943.
2. For his life and work see E. & S. 20.2.1934.
3. Once a Councillor called Lewis "Thorne's Lieutenant" W.C. 13.12.1905. And Thorne called Lewis "the most intimate friend he possessed" W.C. 16.11.1898.

We have seen that sectarian issues were very divisive with regard to the School Board at the turn of the century, and that Anglicans and Nonconformists fought each other in 1902-5 over Education in the Town Council.[1.] But even before the clash over the Education Bill religious bitterness spilled over into Council debates. They fought over such topics as whether the Corporation should contribute to the provision of an illuminated clock in a church tower; (A Nonconformist Councillor objected "to the ratepayers money being given as a present to the vicar"[2.]) whether the Corporation should buy, and then at what price, St. Peter's burial yard for conversion into a park;[3.] whether a ward of the town should be named after the parish church or be given a more secular title;[4.] whether the Corporation should contribute to the laying out of the front of St. Peter's; (A Councillor objected to having to pay this "Church rate"[5.]) whether to allow St. Peter's to celebrate its 900th anniversary in the public park;[6.] and every year at the time when the Council

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1. See above Chapter 1.
2. C.M. 13.3.1893. W.C. 15.3.1893.
3. C.M. 8.1.1900, 14.7.1902, 20.4.1903. W.C. 10.1.1900. 16.7.1902, 22.4.1903.
4. C.M. 13.4.1896. W.C. 15.4.1896.
5. C.M. 14.8.1897. W.C. 16.8.1897.
6. C.M. 9.4.1894. W.C. 11.4.1894.

had to decide how to appropriate the assigned revenues, a battle would rage over whether to grant some of the money to a Church school.[1] The objection of the Nonconformists in all these debates was to having to contribute from their rates towards the Anglican Church. This was the issue which really irked them over the Education Act of 1902.

Another significant religious grouping on the Council and in the town at the turn of the century was the Roman Catholics. Their leader in the town was the Irishman Father Darmody,[2] who was for 34 years from 1890 to 1924 parish priest of St. Patrick's, in a part of the town where there was a substantial Irish population - in St. Mary's Ward. He dominated his flock; they voted as he told them; first for the Liberals in the 1890s because they supported Home Rule;[3] then for the Conservatives over Education, since Catholic schools would obtain more from the rates under the Conservatives than under the Liberals;[4] then by 1908 he was urging them to vote Liberal, since as Amery put it his "educational zeal was much less ardent than his Irish nationalism." Amery

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1. e.g. C. M. 10.2.1896. W.C. 12.2.1896.
2. E. & S. 8.6.1942.
3. E. & S. 31.10.1892, 1.11.1892.
4. E. & S. 2.11.1903.

indeed called Darmody "the real controller of the vote."[1.]

By the 1920s St. Mary's Ward was returning Labour members, but they too were Catholics like J. W. Kennedy. In 1930 Darmody's successor Rev. F. Locket[2.] was elected to the Council, and he stayed on for 15 years. The Catholic tradition of the ward was evident even in the 1950s, since in 1955 C. M. Walsh, of Irish extraction and a Catholic, was elected to the Council.

Despite the above remarks the Roman Catholics on the Council have never really been completely connected to one particular party; in 1903-4 for example, they were equally divided into 2 Conservatives and 2 Liberals. But a general trend can be discerned: on the whole, the Catholics of Irish and working class origin have been in the earlier years Liberals and later Labour, while those of higher status and not Irish have been Conservatives. The main concern of the Catholics (as such) on the Council has been to ensure that the Catholic schools were not neglected by the Corporation. Even in the 1950s they have watched with concern the Council's policy over their schools. In 1956 J. Cahill and C. M. Walsh hoped that the congestion in the Catholic Schools would be relieved.[3.]

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1. L. S. Amery, My Political Life Vol.I, 1953, p.333.
2. The only clergyman ever elected to the Council.
3. E. & S. 26.3.1956.

But party loyalty sometimes conflicted with religious loyalty and predominated, as in 1953, before Labour took the Chairmanship of Education Committee, the Labour Catholic Councillor C. M. Walsh complained that the Education Committee had not stressed the needs of the Catholic community; and in answer the Conservative Catholic Alderman J. Cahill said that the Committee had done all in its power to assist Catholics.[1.] The other field of Catholic anxiety has been about Birth Control. They led the opposition in 1937 to a proposal that the Council should pay £50 to the Women's Welfare Centre, which taught family planning techniques. A Catholic Councillor said that the birthrate should increase; the tradition of family life had to be maintained, and "it was not a proper thing to support that kind of thing."[2.] That Wolverhampton has no Family Planning Clinic can perhaps be ascribed to Catholic opposition.

During the 1920s and 1930s debates arose in Council which showed that Nonconformity was still a significant force. Nonconformists of all parties came together for example to prevent the playing of games in the public parks on Sunday;[3.] 1 Catholic Councillor complained that

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1. E. & S. 4.5.1953.
2. C.M. 8.3.1937. E. & S. 8.3.1937.
3. C.M. 9.5.1927, 13.6.1927, 30.9.1929. E. & S. 9.5.1927, 14.6.1927, 1.10.1929.

the Nonconformists would stop the lambs skipping about on Sunday if they could.[1] His kind of view was regarded by the Nonconformists as "a deliberate attempt to undermine the Sabbath".[2] They sought to prevent mixed bathing from taking place in the public baths.[3] They sought to prevent the opening of cinemas on Sunday;[4] They assailed the Catholic Councillor who led this campaign as being in the pay of the cinema proprietors and as seeking "to break down the barriers of our English Sunday."[5] The question of the nature of the Sabbath pitted Catholics against Nonconformists irrespective of party. They also battled over Council grants to Catholic schools; in 1928 for example, a grant of £400 to the Governors of St. Chad's school was opposed by the Nonconformists as a "sectarian grant".[6]

Since the Second World War these kinds of issues have not divided the Council. Only 1 Councillor, G. J. Costley, a Labour man, who is a Wesleyan Methodist lay preacher,

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1. E. & S. 14.6.1927.
2. E. & S. 1.10.1929.
3. C.M. 14.7.1924, 9.5.1927. E. & S. 15.7.1924, 9.5.1927.
4. C.M. 9.11.1933, 11.12.1933, 8.1.1934, 14.3.1938. 28.10.1940, 13.12.1946, 13.1.1947, E. & S. 9.11.1933, 11.12.1933, 9.1.1934, 15.3.1938, 29.10.1940, 14.12.1946, 14.1.1947.
5. E. & S. 11.12.1933.
6. C.M. 12.3.1928. E. & S. 13.3.1928.

really maintains the old Nonconformist tradition, inveighing against the evils of roller skating on Sunday or the opening of shops on Good Friday.[1] He however is a lone voice. Religion is no longer such a dominant force in the lives of the Councillors as in the past. Few play an active part in any Church or Chapel. At the turn of the century the religion of almost all the public figures in the town was known: that is why there are relatively so few "unknowns" in Table XVIII for the years 1888-9 and 1903-4. Afterwards religion was not such a key factor; the battle between Anglicans and Nonconformists no longer counts for anything on the Council. In 1900 to be a "churchman" implied a political as well as a religious set of beliefs. In 1960 the Councillor who puts "C. of E." on his questionnaire is not making the affirmation of his political views that his predecessors did in expousing Anglicanism.

A final point about the correlation between religious and political affiliation emerges from Table XVIII. There has been quite clearly a connection between Liberalism and Nonconformity and between Conservatism and

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1. Interview with G. J. Costley. C.M. 28.7.1958. E. & S. 29.7.1958. The Labour Group allowed him to speak in the debate, but not to move an amendment. Minutes of the Labour Group (cited later as M.L.G.) 25.7.1958.

Anglicanism, and indeed within the range of Nonconformist sects there has been a gradation from the moderate to the severe sects, corresponding to varying degrees of political Radicalism. With the Labour Party however the picture is not so clear cut. In Wolverhampton the Labour Party has not been associated with any religious group. Its secular policy has won adherents from all; Anglicans like Thomas Frost[1.] and Alan Davies,[2.] Catholics like J. W. Kennedy[3.] and H. E. Lane,[4.] Nonconformists like J. Whittaker[5.] and A. A. Beach[6.] and agnostics like C. W. Hill.[7.] Thus in another sphere Labour disrupted an existing pattern of relationships and conflicts, and substituted a new pattern of tensions.

Another important Association for the members of the Council is kinship. A large proportion of the Councillors over the period has been related to other members of the Council at one time or another.[8.] It

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1. Member of the Council 1901-08, 1911-49.
2. Member of the Council 1919-54.
3. Member of the Council 1920-30.
4. Member of the Council 1930- .
5. Member of the Council 1903-12, 1924-40.
6. Member of the Council 1921-24, 1927-52.
7. Member of the Council 1938-52.
8. See Table XX.

seems that once one member of a family joins the Council, other members of the same family are encouraged to join the Council also. In addition there seems to have been a tendency especially around the turn of the century for members of the Council to marry into the families of other members of the Council. Thus the family trees of many Councillors become intertwined.

Throughout the whole period, or at least from 1888 to 1952, 2 families have spread the branches of their family tree over the Council; and these 2 families have produced the 2 outstanding members of the Council, A. B. Bantock and Sir Charles Mander.

A. B. Bantock was a member of the Council from 1900 to 1937; he was Chairman of the Public Works Committee (1904-17), and of the Finance Committee (1917-37): 3 times Mayor 1905-6-7 and 1914-15), an Alderman for 27 years, a J.P. and an Honorary Freeman of the Borough. He was the son of Thomas Bantock, himself a former Mayor (1869-70), Alderman (1868-93), and Chairman of the Teams and Watch Committees (1890-3). Thomas Bantock had married the sister of Samuel Dickinson, also a Mayor (1876-7), Alderman (1876-97) and Chairman of the Parks and Baths Committee (1887-97). A. B. Bantock married the daughter of John Jones, who was Mayor (1878-9-1880-1) and an

Alderman (1877-88). Four of John Jones' brothers were members of the Council, W. H. Jones (Mayor 1873-4), Alderman (1874-1903) and Chairman of the Streets (1875-93) and Watch Committees (1893-1903); Joseph Jones, Mayor (1887-8), Alderman (1887-1912) and Chairman of the Free Library Committee (1883-1912); Harry Jones, a Councillor who died very ypung in 1870, and Benjamin Jones, a Councillor (1871-88). One of John Jones' sons, H. B. Jones, was a Councillor (1904-10). Thus A. B. Bantock's father was on the Council, as were his uncle, father-in-law, brother-in-law and 4 of his wife's uncles. All were Liberals and Congregationalists: and all save H. B. Jones (a solicitor) were connected to the Midland metalware industries. They could be said to have formed a family power elite.

Sir Charles A. Mander succeeded A. B. Bantock as Chairman of Finance Committee in 1937 and remained there until his death in 1951. He was Mayor twice in 1932-3 and in 1936-7; an Alderman for 13 years, J.P. and Honorary Freeman. His father Sir Charles T. Mander had been Mayor 4 times (1892-3-4-5-6), Alderman for 34 years, Chairman of Lighting Committee (1893-1902), Tramway Committee (1896-1920) and Watch Committee (1920-7). Sir C. T. Mander's father had been a Councillor: and his great grandfather and great uncle had been members of

the Board of Township Commissioners before the borough was incorporated in 1848. A cousin of Sir Charles T. Mander, S. T. Mander, was Mayor (1899-1900), Alderman (1891-1900) and Chairman of Art Committee (1885-1900). His son Sir Geoffrey le Meseurier Mander, was a Councillor (1911-20). The Manders were directors of a concern manufacturing varnish. All were on the Board of Directors. But over religion and politics the family was split.[1] Those on Charles T. Mander's side were Anglicans and Conservatives, while those on his cousin's side were Liberals and Congregationalists.

Inside the Council these close family ties were not politically significant. The clans did not vote together as solid blocks on all issues. Sometimes relatives voted with each other; at other times they did not; they sometimes spoke against the policies advocated by their relatives, sometimes they spoke on their side. Family relationships were important as forces conducive to the social homogeneity of the Council, and had religious and national political correlations, but as far as the actual policies which were fought out in the Council were concerned, there is no close connection between voting and kinship.

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1. In 1911 Sir Charles T. Mander was prominently active for the Conservative candidate in St. Peter's Ward against the Liberal Geoffrey Mander. E. & S. 31.10.1911.

An examination of the kinship connections in specific Councils will be helpful to illustrate the close ties between the Councillors. The Council of 1899-1900 contained both Sir C. T. Mander and S. T. Mander, A. B. Bantock, Joseph and W. H. Jones aut of those so far considered. It also held: i) Alderman John Annan, Mayor in 1884-5, whose daughter married T. W. Dickinson, Mayor 1911-12-13, and Alderman for 28 years, Chairman of Sewerage Committee (1912-27) and of Watch Committee (1927-38) and an Honorary Freeman. ii) Alderman F. D. Gibbons, Mayor (1882-3), an Alderman for 43 years, Chairman of Sewerage (1879-1903), Watch (1903-16) and Care of the Mentally Defective (1920-5) Committees, he married the sister of Alderman H. W. Ash, Chairman of Teams Committee (1896-9). iii) W. Edwards (a Councillor 1895-1900) father was Alderman W. H. Edwards, Mayor (1874-5), Alderman for 15 years, Chairman of the Artisans Dwelling Improvement Committee (1875-87) and of Watch Committee (1887-90). iv) Edwin Blakemore, Councillor (1892-1905), Chairman of Teams Committee (1899-1905) was distantly related by marriage to James Cremonini, Councillor (1881-90). v) J. W. Hamp, Mayor (1900-1), Alderman for 24 years and Chairman of Health Committee (1909-11) had a son L. W. Hamp who was a Councillor (1927-32). vi) John Marston, Mayor 1889-90-91)

Alderman for 27 years, Chairman of Finance Committee (1891-2) and of Waterworks Committee (1892-1917), also had a son R. Marston, who was a Councillor (1908-13).
vii) R. E. W. Berrington, Mayor (1904-5), Alderman for 10 years, Chairman of Health Committee (1898-1903), 1911-15) and of Sewerage Committee (1903-11) too had a son E. E. W. Berrington who was a Councillor (1906-12).
viii) R. A. Willcock, Chairman of Markets Committee (1898-9) his father had been an Alderman; his brother F. A. Willcock was Mayor (1925-6-7), Alderman for 14 years and Chairman of Park and Baths Committee (1917-38). Their sister married F. H. Skidmore, Mayor (1913-14), Alderman (1915-20) and Chairman of Housing Committee (1913-20), and his brother A. C. Skidmore was Mayor (1915-16-17), Alderman (1918-24), Chairman of Water Committee (1919-20) and of Care of the Blind Committee (1921-4).

The family connections of the Council in 1962 are not so varied and extensive as those of 1900; understandably since for the Councillors of 1962 we cannot have details about which of their relatives will be in the Council of the 1960s, 70s and 80s. It contained i) Alderman Mrs. A. A. Braybrook, Mayor (1953-4), Alderman (1952-), Chairman of Children's Committee (1948-9 and 1952-). ii) Her daughter-in-law was Mrs.

M. H. Braybrook, Councillor (1961-), whose father G. T. Challenor was a Councillor (1937-46). This family group illustrates that party affiliations cannot be closely correlated to family connections, since Mrs. A. A. Braybrook was Labour, Mrs. M. H. Braybrook Conservative and G. T. Challenor a Liberal. iii) Alderman H. T. Fullwood, Mayor (1952-3), Chairman of Transport Committee (1949-52), whose son iv) E. Y. Fullwood, had been a Councillor since 1955. v) Alderman L. R. Guy, Mayor (1950-1), Chairman of Fire and Ambulance Committee (1948-54) also had a son vi) G. A. Guy on the Council from 1960. vii) Alderman W. H. Windridge Chairman of Small Holdings and Allotments Committee (1949-51) and of Water Committee (1951-2 and 1954-5) was father-in-law to viii) H. R. Elliston, a Councillor since 1957.. ix) H. Bagley, Chairman of Cultural and Entertainments Committee (1952-) was the brother of N. Bagley, Mayor (1959-60), Alderman 1954-61) and Chairman of Cleansinc Committee (1955-61). N. Bagley's wife was formerly x) Mrs. G. Brazier, a Councillor since 1957. xi) P. Farmer, Councillor since 1951 was the son of W. H. Farmer, Councillor (1934-52), Chairman of the Care of the Mentally Defective Committee (1940-8) and of Public Relations and Development Committee (1950-3).

xii) C. Walsh, Chairman of Civil Defence Committee (1955-61) and of Housing (1962-), was the nephew of Alderman J. Walsh, Chairman of Education Committee (1918-22 and 1927-9).

In the Council of 1899-1900 8 members of the Council were related to previous members;[1.] in 1962-3 7 were.[2.] Thus since the Council as a whole has increased from 48 to 60 over the period, there has been a decline in the family tradition of Council membership.

This chapter has shown that members of the Council over the period have belonged to a wide range of Associations, catering for various kinds of activities. It has shown that the division between Labour and Conservative members is not merely a political or even an occupational division, but a social one too. They have not intermingled in the social associations. At the turn of the century, when Labour representation was small, the Council was a fairly homogeneous social unit; the main divisive factor was religion. During the course of time this factor has receded from prominence, and the

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1. C. T. Mander, S. T. Mander, A. B. Bantock, J. Jones, W. H. Jones, W. Edwards, E. Blakemore, R. A. Willcock.

2. Mrs. M. H. Braybrook, E. Y. Fullwood, G. A. Guy, H. R. Elliston, Mrs. G. Bagley, P. Farmer, C. Walsh.

polarity has emerged between Labour and Conservative members, each group inhabiting its own world and only coming together on the Council. Thus the Council has served as a device to bring together the 2 groups; it is itself a force for socialising divergent interests. A further point of significance is that Labour members have fewer contacts with social associations than the Conservatives. Labour members have been more closely involved in party and trade union work than the Conservatives have in the functions of their party and trade associations. Thus the Labour members can be said to be more like "politicians" than the Conservatives; for the Labour member, the Party, the Trade Union and indeed the Council loom larger in his life than for the Conservative member, who has a range of other interests to occupy his attention. A conclusion from this is that Labour members are therefore more likely to make good Councillors than the Conservatives, who are not so immersed in the business of the Council. The Conservatives, however, with a wider range of interests than the Labour members, might be able to bring a wiser sense of judgment to Council and committee deliberations. There is no means of testing if this is so beyond giving a purely personal assessment.[1] The Labour Councillors

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1. This is given in Chapter 6.

are likely to be more effective in opposition than the Conservatives. The former would stick to their Council work in opposition, since their life is so concentrated on the Council and their party. But the Conservatives, not so devoted and with a wider range of interests, would feel the state of opposition to be unrewarding. They would feel that their talents were being neglected and could be put to more fruitful use. Hence the exodus from the ranks of the Conservative Councillors in the 1950s of a number of young and able men who had held Chairmanships before the Labour Party took them all.[1.]

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1. e.g. J. Beattie, D. H. Haselock, T. W. Phillipson.

CHAPTER 6

The Calibre of the Council 1900-60

Changes in the occupational composition of Town Councils have been regarded as indicating a decline in the quality of the elected representatives. Fewer people, it is said, with experience of administration and the responsibility for taking executive decisions have been coming onto the Councils, while an increasing number of middle aged housewives, trade union officials and old age pensioners has lowered the tone and the efficiency of local government. L. J. Sharpe has disputed this exclusive concentration on occupation as a measure of the ability of the Councillor: he has advocated the consideration of such intangibles as "integrity, political nous, will power, judgement and local knowledge", but he still believes that "a person's occupation can tell us something, but certainly not everything about his likely qualities as a councillor."[1.] Yet doubt can be cast on even his guarded claim by the experience of Wolverhampton.

In Wolverhampton, as on the national stage, the contention has been that the calibre of Councillors has

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1. L. J. Sharpe, "Elected Representatives in Local Government" British Journal of Sociology.1962 pp.189-209.

shrunk, and the same reasons are given. Basically the main cause, so it is claimed, is the influence of party politics, and especially the advent of the Labour Party on the local scene. The Economist in 1960 bemoaned "the new type" of Councillor who entered local government not to serve the community but because his party had asked him to stand, whose main concerns were not the burden of the rates but the work of his particular committees and the national fortunes of his party.[1] This charge was by no means new: 80 years earlier a leading article in The Times complained of the intrusion into local government elections of party politics, so that no longer were the Councillors "upright and thoughtful and courageous administrators", but "docile tools of party politics."[2] In Wolverhampton dismay at the low standard of Councillors is long standing. After the municipal elections of 1885 the Express and Star deplored the apathy and called on the political parties to take part in municipal elections. "There would be little difficulty in placing in and keeping in the Council men of a class all too few there now if only the political organisations of the town would bestir themselves in our Municipal as they do in the

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1. The Economist, 30.1.1960.
2. The Times, 3.11.1880.

Parliamentary elections."[1] The 30 years experience of Alderman Craddock on the Council revealed that the problem of attracting able people to local government is not of recent origin. In 1897 he "had to lament that so many of our leading townsmen refused to take their part in the government of the town to which they belonged;"[2] and in 1923 he despaired that "for many years he had tried to get men of that kind to come forward and take their part in the work of the Council, but the reply he sometimes got was 'if you're fool enough to do it, I'm not!'"[3] These examples come from a period when party politics was not

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1. E. & S. 3.11.1885. 2 years later it again complained at the lack of contested seats. "All the boroughs in the Kingdom are doing their best to improve the personnel of their Town Councils. Wolverhampton is doing nothing..." And this was a time when the paper regarded the Council as "a haughty, plutocratic, oppressive, supercilious, obnoxious body with horse-head proclivities." E. & S. 1.11.1887.

2. W.C. 26.5.1887

3. E. & S. 29.10.1923. Alderman Craddock referred often to this topic. In 1898 at a dinner of the Ancient Order of Foresters he said he was "depressed about the future of Wolverhampton chiefly because he found that the very best men of the town would not consecrate themselves to its service." (Midland Evening News, 22.11.1898) In 1900 he "could not understand how it was that all the good men of Wolverhampton still remained outside that chamber." (W.C. 7.11.1900.) Before Craddock, Alderman Major had stated that "there were many in the town who were well-cultivated and able to perform the duties in connection with the Corporation and other public offices, but who would not take upon themselves such duties."(E. & S. 9.11.1889.)

so pervasive in local government as it is today. In no case was party thought to be the cause of the failure of the able people to come forward. In 1944 a Conservative Councillor, W. H. Farmer, feared that the quality of the Councillors would not be sufficient to tackle the tasks of post-war reconstruction. To make them worthy of their new responsibilities, he proposed an age limit of 70, a limitation of entry to those between 21 and 50, free elocution lessons ("since some were forced to be yesmen because they lacked ability to express themselves") refresher courses on local government, and payment of members.[1] Thus the inadequacy of the Councillors was not due to party but to their age, inarticulateness, ignorance and to the fact that service on the Council involved a serious diminution of their earnings.

Two former Councillors can illustrate the contemporary opinion. In his Mayoral speech of 1951 James Beattie said that he was disappointed at the failure of representatives from big industrial businesses in the town to enter the Council. Such men with special experience

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1. E. & S. 4.7.1944. In the 1920s and early 1930s the local paper considered that "apathy" amongst the electorate meant that "it becomes increasingly difficult to get representatives of the right type to offer themselves for public service." E. & S. 1.11.1924 and 25.10.1932.

of large-scale management and administration he regarded as invaluable to the Council.[1] In 1957 he returned to this theme. Local government had failed to attract and hold a great number of those best qualified to serve on local authorities. He blamed the political parties, who had made it impossible for a candidate to stand as an Independent, and yet had failed to substitute from their own ranks candidates of similar or higher calibre.[2] The other example is D. H. Haselock, who complained of "deadbeats" on the Council, Council house dwellers who had never signed a four-figure cheque and who had never even possessed a cheque book. He was especially bitter about the appointment as Mayor of C. H. Davies, whom he castigated as an old age pensioner, often on the dole, whose last job had been to open and close the gates of the gas works.[3] Most Conservative Councillors when interviewed on this question are convinced of a fall in quality; that there is no one on the modern Council with the business acumen and social standing of Baldwin Bantock or Sir Charles Mander and that the leading professional families of the town like the Skidmores no longer play

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1. E. & S. 21.5.1951.
2. E. & S. 27.9.1957.
3. Interview with D. H. Haselock.

their part in the Council chamber.[1] The former Town Clerk of 1919-29, Warbreck Howell, said that in his day substantial men entered the Council keen to serve the public and with no political axe to grind.[2] But no one in Wolverhampton has stated that he personally had been deterred from standing for the Council because of the party political system. Further, the business and professional men who did enter the Council, even around the turn of the century, were very active within local political parties, and often held the leading official positions in their parties. Their political activities were well-known and were not a deterrent to their becoming members of the Council.

Thus complaints that the quality of Councillors has declined are not recent, and party politics have not always been held to be responsible. This suggests that decline in quality did not set in about 1945, when the Labour Party first gained a majority on Wolverhampton's Council; indeed the antiquity of the complaints suggests

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1. e.g. interviews with J. Beattie, J. C. Homer, T. W. Phillipson, A. H. Windridge and A. H. Oakley, who said that when he was a member (1915-1919) his colleagues were men of "character, ability, wealth and a well-known name which entitled them to respect." This was not the case in 1961.

2. Interview with F. W. Howell.

that there may have been no decline at all.

Sharpe's opinion that occupation can reveal something of the potential of an individual to be a successful Councillor is based on the assumption that if a man holds a position of executive responsibility in private life, or is used to taking administrative decisions or has had professional training, he is thereby better equipped as a Councillor than someone who wholly lacks that kind of experience, notwithstanding the importance of the other less tangible variables that are not the prerogative of any one social class or occupation. Former Labour Councillor G. J. Costley would support Sharpe's view because of his observations of Councillor W. G. Morrison, the sales promotion manager of the town's largest departmental store.[1] His position demanded that he take daily decisions of vital importance for the store. This experience had made him used to responsibility and authority, which earned him the leadership of the Conservative Group in 1962.[2] Conservative Councillor S. Brindley praised the ability of the trade union officials on the Council, whom he regarded as making

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1. Interview with G. J. Costley, who noted especially Morrison's ability to assess a situation and come to a quick decision.

2. E. & S. 22.6.1962.

excellent Chairmen. Their experience in handling trade union committees, in drafting and presenting reports, and the training given to them by their unions, he considered as fitting them well for Council work.[1] Brindley's opinion is relevant also for most of the Labour members of the Council. As the leading members of the party in the locality, they will have had great experience of committee work through their membership of the many committees which proliferate in the party; in addition as officers of their trade union branches they will have had further opportunities for becoming adept at committee work. Skill in this kind of work is very likely to fit a man or woman better for Council work, which largely consists of committee work, than skill in running a business or a profession.

Tables XXVA and XXVB show the correlations between the occupations and the calibre of the members of the Council. The assessment of the member is based on a personal evaluation by the author, grading each into one of four types.[2] The first class members have come from the manufacturers, the drink trade (really brewery owners), the superior white collar group of administrators and

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1. Interview with S. Brindley.
2. This method is explained more fully on pp. 278-281.

working men. All groups have provided members who were of no consequence on the Council, but the drink trade (really publicans), women, the inferior white collar group, the retired and the shopkeepers have provided the majority of this bottom category. The administrative group produced most at the top and fewest at the bottom, while the professional group, the working men and women have provided most of the solid competent types who have made a significant contribution to the Council. Those who have made a minor contribution of little distinction have been mostly shopkeepers, clerks and professional men. But there have been so many exceptions to any assertions correlating occupation with calibre that occupation is useless as a basis for a generalisation. Some examples of such exceptions follow.

Alderman W. H. Furniss was a highly successful businessman, the Managing Director of the Electrical Construction Company, and President of the Chamber of Commerce (1920-22). He was Chairman of the Council's Electricity Committee (1927-30). Furniss resigned from the Council in 1930 very hostile to his Committee. His letter of resignation[1]. stated that "while there was some small chance of my doing good work for the town of my

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1. E. & S. 10.2.1930.

adoption I was prepared to carry on, but it has been so plainly shown to me today that I have little knowledge of the profession in which I have made my living that I feel that to remain on the Council would be a pure waste of time." Commenting on the resignation the Mayor said that "it was indicative of the businessman who in the ordinary course found the procedure of Council work slower. Business people believed in getting on with the job and they sometimes found the statutory limitations imposed on municipalities irritating."[1]. Furniss was clearly not suited to the exigencies of local government committee work, and his unfitness was largely due to temperament and to his experience as a businessman.

Other successful businessmen left the Council with poor reputations, while others, who made a relative failure of their private affairs, gained great prestige for their public services. F. S. Thompson was the Chairman of a large engineering firm, a member of the Council (1925-45), Mayor (1943-44), Alderman (from 1939) and Chairman of Water Committee (1930-41). Despite

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1. E. & S. 10.3.1930. F. W. Howell said that Furniss had built up his company by ability and drive: but he was a man who lived on his nerves, was used to taking rapid decisions and therefore did not fit into Council work. Interview with F. W. Howell.

excellent paper qualifications, he is remembered by his committee clerk as a deplorable Chairman, lacking purpose and direction, unable to control the committee, always letting members ramble far from the point.[1] A similar case was G. E. J. Luce, Councillor (1927-45), Alderman (from 1944), Mayor 1938-39) and Chairman of Parks and Cemetries Committee (1942-45). Leaving school at the age of 11 he took his first job as a butcher's boy and rose to become the town's leading baker and confectioner, with a cafe, shop and bakehouse in the main square of the town. He was a prominent Freemason and Chairman of the Wolverhampton Freeholders Permanent Building Society. He was a well recognised personality in the town always sporting a white carnation and large diamond tiepin. Here clearly was a successful businessman who had attained a leading social position in the town. But 2 former committee clerks attest to his uselessness as a councillor. One said that he continually needed help.[2] The other said that he had little ability and he failed to understand how he made so much money.[3] A former Councillor described him as illiterate and recalled

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1. Interview with R. J. Wiley. W. H. Farmer stated that Thompson was a good businessman but a bad Chairman and Councillor. Interview with W. H. Farmer.
2. Interview with W. E. Ellwell.
3. Interview with R. J. Wiley.

how incoherently he had read his Mayoral speech.[1.] Another member of the Council, J. H. Coleman was described by various colleagues as "effete and helpless, without initiative or brains,"[2.] "ineffective",[3.] "decent, harmless and of no influence,"[4.] and as a man who "never made a noise."[5.] Out of 50 years membership of the Council he was Chairman of committees for about only 2 years, and then only of minor committees.[6.] This obvious failure however was the first secretary and founder of the Wolverhampton and District Chemists' Association and for 36 years was a director of the Wolverhampton Freeholders Permanent Building Society. He left in his will £53,415. Obviously outside the local authority he was effective.

On the other hand "the chief patron of the County Court"[7.] was one of the most successful Chairmen in

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1. Interview with W. Lawley.
2. Interview with W. Lawley,
3. Interview with G. le M. Mander.
4. Interview with F. W. Howell.
5. Interview with J. Cahill.
6. Art Gallery and Public Library Committee, 1946-48. Small Holdings and Allotments Committee, 1951-52.
7. Interview with W. Lawley.

Wolverhampton. Joseph Clark was a Councillor (1912-1954), Mayor for 2 terms (1923-25), Alderman (from 1925) and Chairman of Education Committee (1928-54). In 1952 his civic patriotism was praised: "his enthusiasm, ability, wide experience in the work of education and in the general conduct of public affairs had earned for him the respect and esteem of the Council and the public."[1]. The Conservatives advocated that he be granted the Honorary Freedom of the Borough.[2]. So devoted was he to public service that he neglected his private business as a building contractor. At the end of his life he was hawked around his children, who complained of the time he had given to serving the public while ignoring the interests of his family.[3]. Thus a "bankrupt builder"[4]. could be an outstanding Councillor and Chairman.

Eminent Chairmen have come from the ranks of trade union officials, the working class, old age pensioners and women. Alan Davies was a Labour Councillor (1919-54), Mayor 1929-30), Alderman (from 1931) and Chairman of the

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1. Speech by Councillor H. T. Fullwood, E. & S. 23.6.1952. His ability and efficiency were confirmed by J. Cahill, C. B. Clark and W. J. Rawlins.
2. Interview with Mrs. G. Bates. The Labour Group opposed this proposal. Minutes of the Labour Group June 1954.
3. Interview with Mrs. G. Bates.
4. Interviews with W. Lawley and G. T. Challenor.

Transport Committee (1925-49). Men of all parties acknowledged him as a most distinguished Chairman and Councillor, who had shaped the transport system of the town and had immensely improved the hospital service;[1] "first-class, able charming"[2] and "most excellent"[3] were some of his descriptions. He was a railwayman who had risen from a cleaner to be an inspector and had retired in 1938 at the age of 65. He led the Labour Party during the war and for the first 2 years after, staying as Alderman until his death in 1954 at the age of 80. Even at the close of his life he was influential and no one ever condemned him as senile. Thus a railwayman, an old age pensioner and a man who left in his will only £9. 2. 8d.[4] could be a first-class Councillor. Always linked with the name of Alan Davies

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1. He was praised by such Conservatives as J. Cahill, W. H. Farmer, J. Ireland, A. E. Lacon, T. W. Phillipson and A. Byrne-Quinn and by such Labour members as A. A. Beach, A. Cattell, C. B. Clark, M. Dale, R. J. Evans, I. M. Hayes, R. F. Ilsley, W. Lawley, C. M. Walsh and L. J. Woolridge, and by committee clerk W. E. Ellwell.

2. Interview with F. W. Howell.

3. Interview with R. J. Wiley.
In 1930 at a Mayoral Banquet a Conservative, R. A. Willcock, spoke of him - "he has stuck to the line, has kept a good head of steam, has looked out for the signals and has never been known to miss the point." (E. & S. 11.10.1930. A Doctor Craig described him as an "assiduous worker", "a man of self control and quiet determination." (E. & S. 11.11.1929).

4. E. & S. 8.4.1954.

as an able Councillor and leading figure in the Labour party was C. W. Hill, who was secretary of the West Wolverhampton Labour Party for over 40 years while Davies was Chairman.[1.] Hill entered the Council only after retiring from the railway,[2.] where he had been a clerk. He too died in harness at the age of 76 in 1952. He and Davies so arranged their membership of committees that they knew the policy of every important committee. "A great figure of power,"[3.] "with all at his finger tips,"[4.] "a good organiser,"[5.] "sincere, able and firm"[6.] were some of the epithets applied to Hill, the old age pensioner from a humble background who "dominated the Labour Party"[7.] and together with Davies effectively ran the Council from 1945-47.[8.] Harry Bagley, Labour Councillor since 1945, and Chairman of the Cultural and Entertainments Committee since 1952, is listed in the yearbook as an engineer: most often he is unemployed or at work provided by friends; he was clearly not of

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1. 1910-52.
2. 1938.
3. Interview with J. Cahill.
4. Interview with H. D. Hughes.
5. Interview with C. Morey.
6. Interview with H. E. Lane.
7. Interview with W. H. Farmer, Also J. Beattie, I. M. Hayes, J. Ireland, A. E. Lacon, W. J. Rawlins, C. B. V. Taylor, C. M. Walsh.
8. Interview with A. Cattell, F. Mansell.

executive calibre and therefore, by Sharpe's theory, unlikely to be an effective Councillor. Yet the town Clerk regards him as a powerful force in committee and Council, a man who knows what he wants and with the skill to see it implemented. He was responsible, says the Town Clerk, for the speedy construction of the Aldersley Sports Stadium on its particular site.[1] Bagley is especially disliked by the Conservative Party which sees him as attempting to make his ward Bushbury the centre of Wolverhampton and as seeking to channel all improvements and amenities into this ward.[2]

The female members of the Council are not negligible. The first woman member, Mrs. E. Sproson (1921-27), is remembered by the present Treasurer of Coventry as being a most persistent questioner and critic of the financial administration of the Corporation.[3] The Town Clerk

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1. Interview with R. J. Meddings.

2. Discussion in the Conservative Group, November 1962, on Bagley's scheme to build a swimming bath at Bushbury. In 1956 the Conservative leader J. Beattie led an attack on Bagley's Chairmanship, over the building of the stadium. "We must stop a committee which having set its heart on an ambitious scheme intentionally or unintentionally, witholds the ultimate cost of it from the Council and then having got approval for part of the cost claws its way into far greater sums of money in such a manner with such indefinite reports and with such lapse of time between reports that no one knows what is really happening at all." E. & S. 8.5.1956.

3. Interview with Dr. A. H. Marshall.

mentioned Ruby Ilsley, wife of a railwayman, Councillor since 1941, Alderman since 1952, Mayor 1957-58 and Chairman of Health Committee from 1953, as a vigorous and able woman, skilled in achieving her aims.[1.] "Intelligent,"[2.] "very forceful and dominant,"[3.] and "powerful."[4.] are some of the phrases used by her colleagues to describe her.

The importance and significance of these sketches is to show that occupation is not necessarily a meaningful indicator of ability as a Councillor. Successful businessmen have failed in local government, while old age pensioners, women, working class individuals, all people with no executive experience have been outstandingly efficient. Sneers against this type of person are not warranted by the evidence. One reason why the businessmen failed and the others succeeded is perhaps a question of time. The businessmen were absorbed in their own private affairs, with little time or energy to spare for local government, whilst the others were able to devote themselves wholeheartedly to

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1. Interview with R. J. Meddings.
2. Interview with W. Lawley.
3. Interview with Mrs. V. A. Fletcher.
4. Interview with H. Mash, P. Bentley and A. Cattell.

Council work. 'Time' is the aspect pointed out by Councillor Brindley as being the most important. He states that most professional people are deterred from public service not because of party politics but because of the lack of time to play a really full part in committee and Council.[1] The housewives and old age pensioners can be full time Councillors, whilst the ordinary worker, shut off from responsibility during his daily work, can find an outlet for his organisational and administrative ability through work in the local authority.

Another reason for the success of the humble in origin and for the failure of the more socially elevated, is the training and experience gained by so many Labour Party members in the Party and in the Trade Union movement. In the committees and sub-committees at ward, borough and constituency level and in the trade unions at branch, district and area level, most of the Labour Councillors have worked either as members or most often as Chairmen, or as some other officers, like

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1. Interview with S. Brindley.

Secretary or Treasurer.[1] Such experience has stood them in good stead for Council work which involves much committee work.[2] Conservative Councillors do not seem to have so many opportunities; their committees seem fewer and most important of all their progress to the Council does not seem to depend on years of work

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1. a) A.Davies was Chairman of West Wolverhampton Labour Party.

   b) C.W. Hill was Secretary of West Wolverhampton Labour Party, and Treasurer of Wolverhampton Trades Council.

   c) H. Bagley was Chairman of Wolverhampton Borough Labour Party; Vice-Chairman of the Trades Council and A.E.U. branch Chairman.

   d) R.F. Ilsley was Secretary of North East Wolverhampton Constituency Labour Party and Secretary of Wolverhampton Borough Labour Party.

   e) G. Rastall (see below footnote 2) was Chairman of South West Wolverhampton Constituency Labour Party: Chairman of Wolverhampton Borough Labour Party and N.U.P.E. branch Secretary.

   f) F. Clapham (see below footnote 2) was Treasurer of North East Wolverhampton Constituency Labour Party and President of the Wolverhampton Trades Council.

2. Trade Union officials should also not be underestimated. Brindley's example of a good Chairman was Frank Clapham, A.E.U. District Organiser and Chairman of Town Planning Committee from 1952. After the deaths of Hill and Davies the real leadership of the Labour Party passed to the N.U.P.E. organiser George Rastall, Chairman of Public Works and Estates Committee (1945-47, 1948-49, 1952-60) who was regarded by members of both parties as a) "able", b) "clear and logical in making a case", c) "decisive and effective" and d) "very clever, a man you take your hat off to". Interviews with a) J. Cahill and J. Ireland, b) C.B. Clark, c) H.D. Hughes and d) A.H. Windridge.

within the party as it does in the Labour Party.[1.]

As we have shown above the Conservative members of the Council are involved in many other than merely party-oriented activities. For this reason they do not make such devoted opposition members of the Council as do the Labour Councillors. Out of power, with no responsibility, they have little incentive to stay in the Council and pursue a negative critical role. Thus we can say that they are not such 'politicians' as are the Labour members. Since 1955 Labour has taken all Chairmanships and Vice Chairmanships, and this policy, it can be argued, has driven away such an outstandingly able man as James Beattie, who was Chairman of Finance Committee from 1951 to 1955. Without a Chairmanship such a man would have thought that his talents were wasted and his abilities could be better employed elsewhere.

Therefore it can be said that politics has driven able men out of local government; not only in the sense that the Labour Party, in gaining seats on the Council has therefore reduced the chances for a businessman to enter the Council, but also in the sense that the Labour Party, by introducing Parliamentary techniques into the

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1. See above Chapter 2. and Chapter 3.

Council in taking all the Chairmanships, has deterred businessmen from joining the Council, since they feel that they will have nothing constructive to contribute.

The quality of the Councillor, his ability for Council work, cannot be assessed merely by his occupation. As we have seen some businessmen have been failures on the Council, and some workmen, women and old age pensioners have been generally recognised as first class Councillors. This does not mean however that there have not been able businessmen and useless workmen, women and retired members on the Council.[1] Examples of such are as plentiful as the examples of the failures amongst the businessmen, and successes amongst the women, workmen and retired. The only assertion is that "occupation" in itself is no guide to the calibre of a Councillor.

One test of calibre could be perhaps the education of a Councillor: but details about the educational background of the Councillors are hard to uncover especially for the earlier years of the period. Hence the large number of "unknowns" in Table XXI, which relates the education received by members of the Council for specific Councils with their party allegiance. The

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1. See Tables XXV A and XXV B.

figures tell very little, except that more Conservatives and Liberals have had education beyond the Elementary stage than Labour members, many of whom have had little more than an Elementary education, although their educational standard has been rising over the years, with more having a Secondary, Higher Grade and Grammar school education; they have however never really broken into the Public School or University educated categories. Table XXI shows that since 1945 out of 60 Councillors about a third, between 20 and 22, had received Elementary education only and most of these, from 16-18, were Labour members. The next largest group were those who had a Grammar school education, most of whom were Conservatives. In Wolverhampton after 1945 the Higher Grade school became known as the Municipal Grammar School; no pupils of this school after 1945 have yet joined the Council, but many of the years before have. It is more realistic to class these people with those who received a Secondary education, which brings that group to above the Grammar School block. Besides these groups, a handful have been to Public Schools and Universities.

It could be argued that the age of the Councillors might indicate their ability, since the young might be considered vigorous, and the old sluggish - though it

might be argued again that the young would be raw and inexperienced, while the old with their experience and wisdom might be able to make a more useful contribution. To the author's mind such qualities do not necessarily correlate with age. The young too can be sluggish and conservative; and the old can be energetic and radical. In any case as far as Wolverhampton is concerned the age of the Councillors over the period is not a helpful indicator in any way as to calibre. The main point which emerges from a survey of the ages of the members of the Council over the period,[1.] is that little has changed between 1888 and 1962. The average age of new entrants to the Council has stayed in the mid 40s; the average age of all members of the Council has stayed in the early and middle 50s, while the average of the Chairmen, the key figures, has stayed in the middle to late 50s. There is also no evidence that the Chairmen have come very early or very late to their Chairmanships, since the average length of time in which they have served on the Council has stayed between 13-17 years.[2.] Thus a consideration of the age structure of the Councils from 1888 to 1962 shows no evidence that the Council has got either

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1. See Table XXII.
2. See Table XXIII.

appreciably older or younger. It has stayed about the same.

Service on the Council is less a stepping stone to Parliamentary office since 1945 than before. Three members of the Council became M.P.s, all Liberals and all for East Wolverhampton, H. H. Fowler, 1880-1908, G. R. Thorne, 1908-1929 and G. le M. Mander, 1929-1945. No other member of the Council has been elected to Parliament. The Council has, however, provided four unsuccessful candidates, P. Lewis, Liberal for West Wolverhampton in December 1910, H. E. Lane, Labour for East Wolverhampton in 1935, J. Beattie, Conservative for West Wolverhampton in 1945 and G. J. Costley, Labour for Oswestry in 1964. Thus it might be argued that, since the Council is not such fertile soil for M.P.s as before 1945, the calibre of the members has declined. But on the other hand it could be said that being an M.P. is not so attractive for the Councillors in 1960 as in 1900, particularly for one who is the Chairman of an important committee. This latter position might give him more satisfaction in being able to achieve something positive than being an M.P. responsible for nothing. The disadvantages of a Parliamentary candidature might deter the Councillor from embarking on such a course; he may not be able to accept the dislocation of his family

life, nor to afford the time from his work and his Council activities. The more he is engrossed in and devoted to Council duties, which have increased tremendously since 1900,[1] the less likely is he to wish to give them up to become an M.P.

To assess the calibre of a Councillor is a complex process; so much has to be taken into account, not merely the quality of the Councillor but the demands made on him, and these have increased tremendously over the period as has been shown in the Introduction. More is demanded of the Councillor in 1960 than in 1900, and thus the standards we expect and apply are stiffer. Table XXIV assesses for specific Councils the quality of the Councillors. Marks have been awarded to each one on the basis of a subjective appreciation by the author, taking into account his performance in the Council, as revealed by the Council minutes and newspaper reports, opinions of colleagues, their letters or contributions to the press, their activities outside the Council. Each individual would naturally award the marks in a different way, but this subjective approach is the nearest possible we can get to finding out if the calibre has declined. The Councillors' ratings have

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1. See Introduction.

been divided into 4. Type A is for those outstanding figures who have made a mark on the Council as a whole, on many aspects of its work and not in just one committee. Type B is for those who have made a significant contribution in more than one field on the Council, though more narrow in the range than Type A. Type C is for those who have made some mark, though usually only in one committee. Type D is for those who have made a little or no impact at all. The Table reveals a strikingly constant situation. The percentage of Type D has stayed within 37-44% of the whole Council; and the variations for the other types are not tremendous. However it is clear that there has been a decline in the first class members of the Council; and an increase in those of Type C, that is those who made a minor impact on the Council.

Two qualifications must be made about these figures; first the figures for 1962-63 are the least accurate, since many members of the Council have yet to make their marks; this fact has pushed up the numbers in Types C and D. In addition when considering Type A it is important to acknowledge that time has enhanced the reputations of the great figures of the past Councils. Memories have perhaps increased the stature of these Councillors to an extent that they may be unrecognisable

by their contemporaries. In 50 years time those members in Type B may perhaps be firmly placed in Type A by historians who have not been close enough to them to see their works.

Table XXV correlates this calibre rating with party affiliation. Type A have come from all parties; Type B also, except that from 1945 they have come predominantly from Labour. The reason for this is that since Labour has kept the Chairmanships for itself, non-Socialists have not been given the opportunities to make a significant mark on the Council. Type C has comprised more Conservatives than Labour, while Type D has been composed largely of Labour members. Thus Labour has produced more of the useless category than the Conservatives. As for the Conservatives and Liberals, in the years before 1945 the various types were pretty evenly distributed between the parties. None was predominant in any category.

Table XXIV also presents cross sections of the calibre contained in specific Councils over the whole period. At the top are 2 or 3 outstanding figures, whose scope takes in the whole field of Council activity; then a group of men, just under 30% of the Council, usually Chairmen of committees who are directing their

committees and leaving a definite mark on the policy of the Council; then a group of Councillors, again just under 30%, perhaps Chairmen or long serving Councillors who are competent and leave a small imprint on the Council, and finally the largest group of all, around 40% of the Council, those who make no contribution, either because they have just joined the Council, or are too old or because they have no contribution to make. This kind of picture has been typical for the Council over this whole period.

CHAPTER 7

The Labour Group

A leading contribution of the Labour Party to local government in Wolverhampton has been the "Group", that is the meeting of those members of the Council belonging to one party, held before the Council meeting in order to concert the action of party members in the Council. In the 1950s and 60s both Conservative and Labour Parties held such meetings. But at the turn of the century no such institution existed. Liberals and Conservatives did not vote as party blocks, save on sectarian issues.[1] Normally on each debate there was a fresh coalition for or against; alignments of the Councillors were in a continual state of flux. The Labour representatives, however, from their earliest days tried to act as a block, if not on all issues, at least on matters affecting Labour. The Labour Party tried many institutional devices to ensure unity of action by Labour Councillors, and they worked smoothly until the 1920s, when the party was rocked by recurring conflicts between some of its Councillors and a majority of the party. Only in the 1930s did peace return on the adoption of the Labour Party's model Standing Orders governing the

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1. See above Chapter 1, pp. 47-51, and Chapter 5, pp. 238-239.

relations between Labour Groups and the party outside the Council. However not until 1945 was the Labour Group put on a regular and formal basis; before it had met infrequently. The non-Socialists[1] at first had strongly opposed the Group system, but in the 1940s they too, in order to be a more effective force against the Labour Party, perfected their "caucus". Thus by the 1950s each party, on the same night and often only a few yards from the other, held a Group meeting.

There are 3 reasons why Labour from the start sought unity from its representatives. Firstly, since the party financed the election campaigns and the out-of-pocket expenses of its representatives when they were engaged on Council work, it expected them to be loyal to party policy and to advance it in the Council. The constitution of Wolverhampton's Labour Representation Committee stated that "the candidate selected shall have all printing, hire of halls and every expense incurred paid by the L.R.C."[2] Once elected they were to be paid 9d. per hour for "all lost time from employment while engaged on representative duties," with an upper limit set at £6 in a year.[3] In return the representatives

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1. See below Chapter 8.
2. Rule 8, M.L.L.P. May 1910.
3. ibid In 1907 J. Whittaker received 16s.6d.(M.L.L.P. 7.2.1907) and in 1909 Whittaker and T. Frost each received £1. (M.L.L.P. 5.2.1909.)

had to "agree to abide by the decisions of the party in carrying out the aims of this Constitution."[1.]

Secondly the Labour Party had a municipal policy to advocate.[2.] To achieve it required concerted action by Labour representatives, all the more important when they were not in a majority and when their only hope of success was to win over some non-Labour members of the Council to their proposals. Wavering by any member would injure the cause.

Thirdly the Labour Party was infused with the trade union tradition of collective action. Most of the members of the L.R.C., and the Labour Councillors, were active trades unionists; local trade union branches financed the L.R.C. and the leading items of the Labour policy were to attain trade union objectives.[3.] Trade union experience taught the Labour Party the value of collective bargaining; only by presenting a united front could aims be realised.

Conservatives and Liberals on the other hand had no parties to finance their elections and expenses: these burdens they bore themselves. They had no municipal programme to propound;[4.] they had no tradition of trades

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1. Rule 3, M.L.L.P. May 1910.
2. See above Chapter 1, pp. 37-38 and below Chapter 14.
3. See below Chapter 14.
4. See above Chapter 1, pp. 41-42.

unionism, and they did not face a hostile majority. Therefore they had no incentives to act as party blocks on the Council.

Before 1910 the activities of the Labour Councillors were supervised and co-ordinated by the L.R.C. There was no special institution for this function. The L.R.C. "empowered",[1] "authorised,"[2] and "requested",[3] Labour representatives with regard to specific courses of action. It laid down their policy on cheap workman's fares,[4] the Girls High School[5] and the salary of the Electrical Engineer.[6] Councillors reported to the L.R.C. about the work of committees they were on,[7] and asked the L.R.C. what action they should take on the Council, for example "re-an application from the Borough Band re-engagements for the Parks."[8] Matters great and small were considered by the L.R.C. The Councillors were not regarded as possessing a corporate identity distinct from that of the party of which they were members. There were too few of them on the Council for

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1. M.L.L.P. 4.4.1907.
2. M.L.L.P. 1.10.1908.
3. M.L.L.P. 6.5.1909.
4. M.L.L.P. 4.7.1907.
5. M.L.L.P. 5.9.1907.
6. M.L.L.P. 1.10.1908.
7. M.L.L.P. 1.10.1908.
8. M.L.L.P. 8.3.1907.

such a divergence to emerge. Thus the L.R.C. considered municipal affairs in the Council, along with their other activities. It ran the elections, deciding which wards were to be fought[1]. and which candidates, nominated by the affiliated organisations, were to stand.[2] It organised the campaigns[3]. and supervised the drawing up of the election addresses.[4] It was also the body which was responsible for the Parliamentary campaigns.[5].

Thus the L.R.C. combined the functions performed in the 1950s by the Group, the Borough Party and the Constituency General Management Committee; that is it carried out Council, Municipal and Parliamentary functions.

In 1910 an attempt was made to separate Council matters from the general work of the L.R.C. by establishing a Consultative Committee, comprising "Labour members of governing bodies, and five elected members from the L.R.C. together with the Chairman and Secretary."[6]. It was to meet once a month,[7]. and at its

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1. M.L.L.P. 7.2.1907.
2. M.L.L.P. 18.8.1909.
3. M.L.L.P. 6.10.1910.
4. M.L.L.P. 1.10.1908, 8.10.1908.
5. M.L.L.P. 10.3.1910, 2.11.1911, 12.2.1912.
6. M.L.L.P. May 1910.
7. M.L.L.P. ibid.

first meeting it decided to convene on the second Thursday of the month at 9.00 p.m.[1]. These intentions however were never fully realised; between 1910 and 1913 the committee met only 3 times, the first meeting in the full flush of initiation to hear a report from Councillor Sharrocks on "work to be done in Council,"[2]. and the other 2 called specifically by the L.R.C. to consider particular items.[3]. Even at these the full complement of Councillors did not attend, 3 being absent in September 1910.[4]. The reason why the committee did not at first take root was that the L.R.C. continued to exercise its old functions. It still "instructed"[5]. Councillors; it told them to watch "the question of Corporation employees not being paid the standard rate of wages",[6]. to press for the Land Acquisition Bill to be put into operation,[7]. and the representatives were asked to give reports about the work of their committees to the L.R.C.[8].

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1. M.L.L.P. 2.6.1910. It was thus not dovetailed in with Council work, since the Council met on the first Monday of each month.
2. M.L.L.P. 9.6.1910.
3. M.L.L.P. 2.9.1910, 4.12.1913.
4. M.L.L.P. 2.9.1910.
5. M.L.L.P. 1.9.1910.
6. M.L.L.P. 4.9.1913.
7. M.L.L.P. 5.9.1913.
8. M.L.L.P. 1.9.1914.

After 1914 the Consultative Committee did meet more often. It was intended that it should meet on the Sunday night prior to the Council meeting;[1.] and for the first time the committee systematically examined the agenda of the Council meeting for the following day, deciding the Labour attitude to Waterways, Housing and Street development,[2.] while the L.R.C., though still keeping the final word, did delegate to the committee more items, the implementation of the Feeding of Necessitous Children Act,[3.] the position of the Maternity and Child Welfare Centre,[4.] and the Unemployment Question.[5.] But the L.R.C. was still supreme: it told the representatives to vote against an officials' salary increase,[6.] to press for a Municipal Supply of Coal[7.] and to support the establishment of a Building Guild.[8.]

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1. M.L.L.P. 17.3.1914, again a good intention but not regularly carried out.
2. M.L.L.P. 18.4.1914.
3. M.L.L.P. 4.3.1915.
4. M.L.L.P. 7.6.1917.
5. M.L.L.P. 3.12.1914.
6. M.L.L.P. 5.3.1917.
7. M.L.L.P. 7.10.1917.
8. M.L.L.P. 10.5.1920.

As the number of Labour Councillors increased so did the opportunities for division among them, and between them and the party outside the Council. In addition changes in the Labour Party's constitution encouraged division within the party, since for the first time members could join the Labour Party as individuals and not, as previously, only as members of affiliated organisations. Previously the party had been predominantly a trade union pressure group, but now with the influx of people who were not primarily the spokesmen of trades unions it witnessed clashes between the 2 sides, which had earlier manifested themselves as conflicts between the trade unions and the I.L.P.[1]. The conflicts which struck the party in the 1920s and disrupted the relationship between the Councillors and the party were mainly between the moderate trade union oriented Councillors and the extremist more doctrinaire Socialists whose home before 1918 had been the I.L.P.

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1. e.g. M.L.L.P. 1.10.1908. The I.L.P. wished to change the rule which allowed only Trades Unionists to stand as Labour candidates. Their request was rejected. The Express and Star commented that "relations between the two sections have never been quite so cordial as could be desired." 7.10.1908.

This dichotomy is clear from the first big quarrel in the party in 1923 which provoked a revision in the constitution locally. In the Town Council Mrs. E. Sproson, a strong I.L.P. supporter, accused A. Davies, a railwayman and a trade unionist, of covering up mismanagement of the Borough Hospital.[1] After an inquiry by a Council committee she was severely rebuked.[2] The party divided 5-5 on a motion that she had not acted in the best interests of the party in that she had not consulted the party first.[3] The outcome of the dispute was a revision of the local rules. A new Consultative Committee was established, consisting of the elected Councillors,[4] 2 members from the Eastern Divisional Labour Party, 5 from the Western, 1 from the Trades Council, and the Trades Council's co-opted member on the Education Committee; all had full voting rights.[5] The new constitution stated that "in all cases in which the policy and principles of the Party are affected a majority vote shall be binding on all members."[6] "No

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1. C.M. 14.5.1923. E.&S. 14.5.1923.
2. C.M. 1.8.1923. E.&S. 2.8.1923.
3. M.L.L.P. 10.8.1923.
4. Labour had no Aldermen at this time.
5. M.L.L.P. 4.11.1923, 17.11.1923.
6. M.L.L.P. 4.11.1923, Clause V.

member shall make any resolution at a Council meeting until the same has been agreed upon by the Consultative Committee,"[1] and no question was to be asked before the opinions of the Labour members on the committee concerned had been consulted.[2]

But a final settlement was still far away. From 1924 to 1930 the Wolverhampton Labour Party was torn by dissension over the voting behaviour of its Councillors in the Council chamber. Over these years some Councillors refused to accept the majority decisions of the Consultative Committee and failed to conform to demands made on them by the Labour Party to obey the decisions of the committee. In 1924 some voted to increase the Town Clerk's salary,[3] against a decision of the committee;[4] some refused to accept the committee's decision on Aldermanic vacancies;[5] the Town Clerk's salary again provoked a split in 1926;[6] and in 1928 some Councillors voted in favour of a grant of £400 to the Roman Catholic College of St. Chad's against a committee

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1. ibid.
2. ibid.
3. C.M. 10.3.1924.
4. M.L.L.P. 6.3.1924.
5. C.M. 29.9.1924.
6. C.M. 27.9.1926. M.L.L.P. 7.10.1926.

decision.[1.]

These defections were followed by many meetings of the local Labour Party where recriminatory motions of censure were proposed against the rebels:[2.] their expulsion was demanded;[3.] threats to withdraw support were made[4.] and they were asked to give undertakings to obey committee decisions in the future.[5.] The supporters of the rebels in their turn proposed that nothing be done, that the matter be dropped,[6.] that the Councillors be left to make up their own minds and that in any case the issues over which they had disagreed with the committee had not been questions involving the principles or policies of the party.[7.] No side was ever able to get the upper hand: they fought themselves to a deadlock and the party was paralysed. In 1924 for instance the minutes from March to October were taken up with controversy about what should be done to the rebels.

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1. C.M. 12.3.1928. M.L.L.P. 3.4.1928, 26.4.1928.
2. M.L.L.P. 27.5.1924, 30.9.1926.
3. M.L.L.P. 3.7.1924, 26.4.1928.
4. M.L.L.P. 27.5.1924, 31.7.1924, 30.9.1926.
5. M.L.L.P. 6.3.1924, 17.9.1924.
6. M.L.L.P..8.8.1924.
7. M.L.L.P. 6.3.1924, 3.2.1927.

Attempts to escape from the impasse were sought by convening joint meetings of the Executive Committees of the Constituency Labour Parties together with the Councillors to examine the constitution of the Consultative Committee in order to make it work effectively.[1.] The proposals went back and forth between the Executive Committee and the Party as a whole;[2.] new rules were devised for the Consultative Committee and its composition was altered again and again,[3.] to no avail, for as soon as a new system was arranged, some Councillor or group of Councillors disobeyed a decision of the committee, and again the party was quarrelling.[4.] Typical of the views expressed by the anti-rebel group was a motion proposed by St. George's Ward in 1925.[5.] It said that "it is about time that there was unity amongst our Town Councillors when in Council and less hobnobbing and pandering to the other party, and we call on the Executive Committee to discuss the agenda of all Town Council meetings (prior to Town Council meetings) and to arrive at a decision on

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1. M.L.L.P. 5.6.1924, 30.12.1924, 28.11.1929.
2. M.L.L.P. 24.6.1924, 7.1.1926.
3. M.L.L.P. 10.9.1924, 17.1.1926, 30.6.1927.
4. M.L.L.P. 30.9.1926, 7.10.1926, 3.4.1928.
5. M.L.L.P. 7.1.1926.

every item of the agenda and to instruct our Councillors to vote and support every decision arrived at by the Executive Committee. Further any Councillor acting contrary to any decision arrived at by the Executive Committee should be dismissed from the party and forced to resign from the Town Council." This motion expressed the views of those who wanted the Councillors to be completely the servants of the outside party. Their plan was to abolish the Consultative Committee, since it had failed to secure obedience, and to put control firmly in the hands of the Constituency Party.

It was clear that, in spite of the tinkering with the rules and composition of the Consultative Committee, it was a failure. In 1928 a new solution was suggested for the first time, that "the Committee be composed of Public Representatives only."[1]. This motion like the St. George's motion was defeated, and the party limped on, crippled by dissension. Members were expelled;[2]. others resigned;[3]. the Consultative Committee failed to get a quorum;[4]. Councillors refused to turn up at party meetings.[5]. The moderates more and more urged

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1. M.L.L.P. 24.4.1928.
2. M.L.L.P. 7.11.1929.
3. M.L.L.P. 3.6.1928.
4. M.L.L.P. 3.4.1929.
5. M.L.L.P. 10.12.1928.

that the solution was for the Councillors alone to decide their actions in the Council.[1.] A Solution was in sight. At the Labour Party's annual conference at Llandudno in 1930 the National Executive Committee's draft model standing orders for Labour Groups were accepted. In Wolverhampton the Executive Committee examined them;[2.] the Council Group looked at them also,[3.] and the party then agreed to put them into operation.[4.]

The Group was to consist of members of the Council only, who alone were responsible for taking decisions on matters coming before the Council.[5.] The local Labour Party could send 3 representatives in a consultative capacity, able to speak but not to vote.[6.] The Labour Party could express its views by communicating to the Group secretary or through the 3 representatives,[7.] while the Group could appoint a representative to report from time to time on its work to the Constituency Labour Party.[8.]

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1. M.L.L.P. 3.5.1928, 21.5.1928, 28.11.1929.
2. M.L.L.P. 31.7.1930.
3. M.L.L.P. 1.1.1931.
4. M.L.L.P. 5.2.1931.
5. Model Standing Orders no.56.
6. Model Standing orders no.16.
7. Model Standing Orders no.56.
8. Model Standing Orders no.10.

Restrictions were placed on the actions of the members of the Group. Resolutions, motions or amendments could not be submitted to the Council meeting unless they had first been submitted to and received the approval of the Group meeting.[1.] Members, without consultation, could ask questions in Council, provided their tendency was not likely to be in conflict with the policy of the Labour Group.[2.] Members were not to speak or vote in opposition to a Group decision, unless it had been decided to leave the matter to a free vote. If a matter of conscience arose a member could abstain from voting, provided he first raised the matter at the Group meeting to ascertain its feeling.[3.] If any member violated the standing orders, the whip could be withdrawn, after due notice was given and after consultation with the local Labour Party.[4.] The outside party still possessed the ultimate deterrent of refusing to readopt a rebel as official Labour candidate when the Councillor or Alderman came up for re-election.

The acceptance by the Wolverhampton Labour Party of

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1. Model Standing Orders no.7a.
2. Model Standing Orders no. 7b.
3. Model Standing Orders no.7a.
4. Model Standing Orders no.9.

these model standing orders apparently ended the deadlocks which had paralysed the party in the 1920s. The 1930s witnessed no more expulsions.[1] However it was not the adoption of a formal set of rules which produced such harmony: indeed the full Group system did not come into its own until after 1945. Only then did the Group meet regularly and have its own minute book and its own formal procedures and officials. Other factors than standing orders brought consensus to the Labour Party.

Firstly, the division between the moderates and the extremists, who in the 1920s had been the protagonists, was no longer in the 1930s a feature of the Labour Party's internal affairs. The extremists left the party to follow W. J. Brown and his I.L.A., and they remained there until the I.L.A. disbanded in the late 1930s.[2] The people left in the Labour Party were of a similar outlook; they worked together harmoniously and were given an additional incentive to act together

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1. M.L.L.P. 1.3.1934. One Councillor, T. Frost, did go against the Group policy when he called Labour's protest against the Unemployment Bill mere propaganda.

2. See above Chapter 2, pp.86-90 Indeed their defection enabled the model standing orders to be accepted by the Labour Party; if they had been present they would have opposed the adoption of the orders.

in unity by the presence of the I.L.A. intent on poaching their members.

Secondly, the leadership of the Labour Party in Wolverhampton fell into unquestionably able hands. One man, the railwayman A. Davies, was Chairman of both the West Wolverhampton Labour Party and the Wolverhampton Municipal Labour Party and also the Leader of the Group; another railwayman, C. W. Hill, was Secretary of both the West Wolverhampton Labour Party and the Group. These two together ran the Labour Party in Wolverhampton until 1945, and remained a most significant influence until 1953. By all accounts both Labour and anti-Labour, they were able, commanded the respect of their followers, kept their fingers on the pulse of all Council activities and exercised a moderate, tactful yet firm leadership.[1.] These personal qualities enabled the various bodies of the party to work together, as did their ove lapping leadership. Their hold over the party was such that when the I.L.A. group returned to the fold they were unable and indeed unwilling after the fiasco of Brown to challenge the well-established leadership.

Up to 1945 the Group met irregularly only when Davies and Hill called a meeting, and then often only

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1. See above Chapter 6, pp. 266-268.

half an hour before the Council meeting was due to start.[1] At the Group meetings Davies and Hill really led the Councillors in the direction they wanted; they told the Councillors what the policy was to be and there was no question of leaving it to the meeting to decide after a rancorous and lengthy debate.[2] They were the spokesmen of the Group, leading for the party in Council debates and negotiations with the non-Socialist leaders and the officials. Their policies were not contested by the Constituency or Municipal Party since these 2 bodies were also under their firm management. The personal leadership of Davies and Hill did far more to harmonise the various institutions of the Labour Party than the adoption of the model standing orders.

At the very moment in the early 1930s when at long last formal machinery had been devised to settle the quarrels over the spheres of interest of the Group and the Party, informal personal leadership rendered the formal rules irrelevant. In 1945 the formal rules

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1. Interview with Mrs. A. A. Braybrook. Occasionally a call was made to fulfil the constitution and bring into being a proper Labour Group. M.L.L.P. 16.3.1934.

2. On the leadership of Davies and Hill, interviews with Mrs. A. A. Braybrook, Mrs. V. A. Fletcher, C. B. V. Taylor, H. Mash.

again came into prominence, as the informal leadership was challenged. The 1945 municipal elections increased the size of the Group from 19 to 32 and for the first time the party was in a majority.[1.] These 2 factors, the increase and the responsibility, meant that the old system could not last; thus the working of the Group was formalised. It acquired a minute book, elected officials, devised rules for its procedure and arranged to meet regularly on the Friday night before the Monday Council meeting.[2.] In addition the rule of Davies and Hill was challenged. They were now ageing; Davies was 72 and Hill 69, while the majority of the new Councillors of 1945 were in their 30s and 40s. In 1946 Davies retired as leader after the Group failed to follow his advice to oppose the campaign to hold Council meetings in the evenings.[3.] For 3 years 3 men acted as leaders of the Group, but none could give the kind of lead that Davies had done. Indeed it can be said that Davies and Hill continued until 1952 to be the informal leaders of the Group.[4.] The official leader, F. Mansell, was a compromise figure for a party bitterly

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1. See Table I.
2. M.L.G. 7.11.1945.
3. M.L.G. 8.3.1946.
4. Hill died in December 1952 and Davies in January 1954.

divided between the followers of two younger men, H. E. Lane and G. Rastall. Lane, a tubthumper and an extremist, was scathing and sarcastic in speech and, far from conciliating people, provoked quarrels.[1] Rastall, a moderate right winger, was slow and dull in speech, yet had a full command of Council work and was skilled in conciliating and managing people;[2] he was greatly respected by the anti-Labour members of the Council, unlike Lane who was detested or ridiculed. Lane and Rastall disliked each other, as did the followers of each: this situation opened the way for a compromise figure like F. Mansell, who had no firm views but who was able at bringing together the warring elements of the party.[3] Lane had been chosen as leader in 1946, with Mansell as Vice-Chairman.[4] When Lane was Mayor from 1947-49, a W. H. Hale was leader:[5] Lane's gaffes as Mayor meant that in 1949 Mansell was elected leader instead of him.[6] Mansell retained this

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1. On Lane - interviews with A. Cattell, C. B. Clark, W. H. Farmer, A. G. Goodman, D. H. Haselock, W. Lawley, H. Mash, T. W. Phillipson.
2. On Rastall - interviews with J. Cahill, A. Cattell, C. B. Clark, J. Ireland, H. Mash, A. H. Windridge.
3. On Mansell - interviews with A. Cattell, D. A. Birch, R. F. Ilsley.
4. M.L.G. 8.4.1946.
5. M.L.G. 3.11.1947.
6. M.L.G. 20.5.1949.

position until he became Mayor in 1955; then Rastall defeated Lane for the leadership[1]. and in the following year Mansell returned, again defeating Lane.[2]. Thus since the departure of Hill and Davies the leadership of the Group was not so firmly based. From such an insecure position the leadership was not able to give a clear lead, nor was the leader personally able to do so: indeed that was why he was chosen. Those who were able to lead, it was feared by a significant number of the party, were likely to lead the party in the wrong direction; better then to have as little leadership as possible.

The formal organisation of the Labour Party since 1945 has consisted of the basic units, the ward parties, and trades unions branches, affiliated to the Labour Party. These are entitled to send delegates first to the organisation which is responsible for the running of the constituency, that is Parliamentary affairs; this body is the General Management Committee, 1 for each constituency; and secondly to the organisation responsible for municipal affairs, the Borough Labour Party, 1 body for the town as a whole, on which sit representatives from the 2 constituencies into which the

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1. M.L.G. 15.5.1955.
2. M.L.G. 28.5.1956.

town is divided for Parliamentary purposes. Each of these 2 bodies elects annually an Executive Committee, which in practice executes nothing, since it reports everything back to the parent meeting, which is jealous of its powers as the ultimate authority and discusses most decisions of the Executive in great detail.

The Labour Group consists of all Labour members of the Council, and 3 representatives of the Borough Party who can speak but not vote. Their role in theory is to co-ordinate the work of the Group with that of the Borough Party. In practice however they are superfluous, since co-ordination is achieved by overlapping membership. Councillors are usually members and officers of ward parties, Management Committees and of the Borough Labour Party. These connections allow the bodies to work together in step. The Borough representatives on the Group have been very poor attenders at Group meetings[1]. and only 1, A. Cattell, has been of significant influence.[2]

The Borough Labour Party is responsible for laying down the general policy to be pursued by the Group; and the drawing up of the policy is the responsibility of the Policy Committee, consisting of 12 members of the Group and 12 from the Borough Labour Party. This body comprises the leading figures of the party in the town,

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1. M.L.G. - attendance record.
2. See below pp. 317-318.

the chief Councillors and officers of the other bodies. In theory it looks impressive; and annually the motions are gone through of electing it, though this consists of re-electing en bloc the previous members. Its real function is not so much to initiate and formulate policy but to draw up an election address to be presented for the approval of the Borough Party.[1] The function of the Group is to implement this policy, though it alone determines how in the Council it shall be implemented in detail. The Group is therefore solely responsible in theory for deciding what aspects of policy shall be carried out, and for interpreting what the policy actually is. None of the other bodies can dictate to the Group; they may send resolutions to the Group requesting a particular course of action, but the Group alone decides whether or not to accept the advice.[2] The possibilities of conflict between the Group and the party outside exist in theory, but in Wolverhampton clashes have not occurred, because harmony

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1. In 1957 and 1959 the election address was drawn up by a Committee of 10; 5 from the Group and 5 from the Borough Labour Party. In 1964 the election address for the Labour candidates in the North East was drawn up by a leading Councillor, while that for the South West was the creation of the South West's agent.

2. M.L.G. 24.7.1959.

is obtained by the interlocking leadership. In addition since all Group members are members of the Labour Party and have entered the Council through flying the Labour colours, discipline can be enforced on them individually by the withdrawal of the party's support when their inclusion on the panel comes up for review. This threat has been used on those individuals in the Group who have dissented from a Group decision.[1] This type of conflict, that is between individuals inside the Group, has been more common than a conflict between the Group as a whole and the party outside.

The Labour Group meets for its normal sessions 11 times a year: on the Friday evening before the Monday Council meeting. The Council agenda arrives at the Councillors' houses on the Wednesday before. In theory the Labour Councillor is supposed to examine the agenda and thus come primed to the Friday Group meeting, but complaints are frequent that Councillors open their agenda envelopes only on arrival at the Group meeting.[2] The place of meeting has varied, since the Labour Party has had no permanent place of residence after its premises were bombed in the war. The Group has met in rooms hired from public houses or dance halls, in

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1. On discipline in the Group see below pp.318-319, 325-329.
2. Interview with H. Mash.

temporary party premises, in rooms hired from the Co-op and in the 1960s it has begun to meet in the Committee rooms of the Town Hall;[1] a symbol perhaps of a more respectable status, and a recognition that the functions it performs contribute usefully to the working of the Council. Indeed the Group has become in practice a Committee of the Council.

The main business of the Group meeting is to go through the agenda. The Chairman reads out the page numbers and pauses for contributions from the floor.[2] At this stage questions are asked on the item reached; answers are given by the Chairman or spokesman of the appropriate Council committee; or else the Chairman of the committee on his own initiative explains the background to a resolution and its problems.[3] Mansell says that his main aim is to get through the agenda quickly so that the meeting beginning at 7.45 p.m. will be over by 9.45 p.m., in time for members to get out to a public house.[4] Since most of the items do not raise controversy, Mansell is often able to do this. If conflict arises, then a debate takes place, followed by

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1. M.L.G. 9.12.1957, 15.12.1957, 24.1.1948, 20.11.1959, 1.1.1960.
2. Group meeting attended by the author with Mansell in the Chair.
3. e.g. M.L.G. 28.12.1956, 25.1.1957.
4. Interview with F. Mansell.

a vote, and the majority decision is binding on all members. If the issue is an important one then the item is often adjourned for a special Group meeting devoted wholly to that topic, for instance on Housing Finance,[1] the Rate for the year,[2] Civic Catering[3] and the Workshops for the Blind.[4]

The Group plans the tactics of its members for the following Council meeting. The movers and seconders of motions are selected; speakers are designated; points to be made are rehearsed.[5] It is decided whether or not to force an issue to a division.[6] Replies to Conservative questions are planned, and sympathetic questions are organised from Group members.[7] Permission is requested to move motions and ask questions.[8] At each stage an eye is cast on the tactics of the opposition and means to outwit them are sought.[9] If an election is near then consideration is

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1. M.L.G. 28.2.1958, 6.11.1959.
2. M.L.G. 15.2.1957.
3. M.L.G. 26.9.1958, 17.12.1959.
4. M.L.G. 2.1.1959.
5. M.L.G. 28.12.1956.
6. M.L.G. 18.10.1956.
7. M.L.G. 6.3.1953.
8. M.L.G. 25.2.1955, 28.12.1956, 1.5.1959.
9. M.L.G. 25.11.1960, and the meeting attended by the author.

paid to the effect a particular line might have on the result.[1.]

Another function of the Group is to arbitrate between committees and particularly between Chairmen; for instance in 1956 the Chairman of Watch Committee complained that the estimates of the Public Works Committee for the construction of police houses were too high. The Group had to rule on the matter.[2.] The Group also has to settle quarrels between the members of one committee.[3.]

Members of the Group claim that the ordinary monthly Group meeting keeps them informed of the activities of committees on which they do not serve and enables them to see the work of the Council as a whole. Any queries or misunderstandings can be solved and disputes settled. It keeps the members in touch, informs and educates them.[4.] It also facilitates the business of the full Council through holding a rehearsal. The unnecessary, trivial or ill-informed question can be eliminated. Debate can be concentrated on a few

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1. M.L.G. 23.9.1960.
2. M.L.G. 28.12.1956.
3. M.L.G. 3.6.1952, 26.9.1952, 25.3.1960.
4. Interview with Mrs. I.M. Hayes who found that most members became very absorbed in the work of their own committees and but for the Group meeting would not have paid attention to wider issues affecting the Council as a whole.

leading topics and irrelevancy can be removed from the speeches. A certain order can be brought therefore to the Council proceedings. The Group also takes decisions following debate on controversial issues by means of a majority vote, and the binding nature of a majority decision on all ensures that responsibility can be pinned on a particular Group. A definite party can be held accountable by the public.

The Group does not initiate or formulate policy. It has not the time to go into detail. Normally after the agenda has been finished there is little time to deal with "any other business" at any length or depth. Its function is to register or reject proposals drawn up elsewhere, to decide the Group's attitude to particular propositions. Therefore it does not look ahead and plan for the future; it is a "hand to mouth affair"[1]. living from agenda to agenda. It is not a Cabinet but a miniature Council. The Group therefore waits on events, and save for the occasional special meeting to consider a single item it does not examine policy in depth; even the special meeting is a response to an immediately pressing problem. To overcome these drawbacks other towns have instituted regular mid-monthly Group meetings

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1. Interview with A. Cattell.

in addition to the agenda or epitome meeting to discuss general policy, to look to the future and to consider particular items in detail. They have also established sub-committees of the Group to be responsible for certain spheres of policy, and have set up a policy sub-committee of the Group, comprising the leaders and the Chairmen of the main Council committees, to act as a Cabinet plotting future courses and co-ordinating the work of the various committees.[1] In Wolverhampton however there is no mid-monthly Group meeting, no policy sub-committee nor sub-committees charged with policy responsibilities.

In 1952 an attempt, the only one, was made to set up a kind of Cabinet of the Chairmen. The impetus for this development came from the return to power of the Labour Group, but this time without the leadership of Davies and Hill. 2 men, G. Rastall and A. Cattell, felt that with their grip relaxed, there was little co-ordination, that committees were going off on their own without regard to a general policy and that, particularly in the field of finance, estimates were being drawn up without regard to overall resources and

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1. e.g., see B. R. Bentley, Conventions in Local Government a study of the party system in Coventry, unpublished M.Comm. thesis, 1960, Birmingham University. L. J. Sharpe, "The Politics of Local Government in Greater London," Public Administration 1960, pp.157-172. H. V. Wiseman, "The Working of Local Government in Leeds." Public Administration 1963, pp. 51-69, 137-155.

policy.[1] They suggested that a meeting of the Chairmen should alternate with Group meetings. Bi-monthly meetings were accepted, to be attended by both Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen.[2] 3 meetings were held, which discussed the financial implications of the policies of certain committees. Then it was decided not to meet regularly but only when called by the Chairman and Secretary.[3] At the December Group meeting a number of complaints were made against the system, the main objections being that members of the Group were kept in ignorance about decisions taken by the Chairmen.[4] They never met again. Reasons for the failure of this experiment were not limited to the resentment of those excluded from the meeting that decisions were being taken over their heads; the Chairmen themselves did not want to be more effectively controlled, especially over their estimates. They preferred the weak supervision exercised by the full Group to control by a smaller more experienced body.

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1. M.L.G. 3.6.1952. Interviews with A. Cattell and Mrs. I. M. Hayes. M.L.G. 22.8.1952 when Rastall said "unfortunately the Group is not aware of what is happening until it is on the agenda."
2. M.L.G. 22.8.1952.
3. M.L.G. 24.10.1952.
4. M.L.G. 1.12.1952.

Mansell the leader did not like the system, which detracted from his leadership and elevated the position of Rastall. Mansell preferred to deal individually with each of the Chairmen and not to be submerged in a type of collective leadership, where he would be overshadowed by more forceful colleagues. He claimed that the system never really worked well and that he and the majority of the Chairmen preferred the informal means of co-ordination through personal contact.[1.] Paradoxically an additional reason for the failure was the very factor which gave rise to the demand for the system, namely the accession to power of the Labour Group. If it had remained in opposition, without the firm leadership of Davies and Hill, it would have been forced, as the Conservatives were later,[2.] to turn to its own resources, to obtain information, plan ahead and concert its activities more effectively. But since the Group was in power, the Chairmen settled quickly into their committees and got on good terms with their officials, who kept them supplied with information and policy ideas. By their Chairmanships they were exalted above the Group and had no incentive to defer to Group

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1. Interview with F. Mansell.
2. See below Chapter 8.

control. They put the interests of their committees before the interests of effective Group control. Ex-Councillor Mrs. Hayes said that after the deaths of Hill and Davies the individual Chairmen took the lead, pressing forward the claims of their own committees.[1.]

The implication of the failure of Rastall's plan was that the Group did not initiate policy or plot out the forward lines of advance. It was relegated to saying "for" or "against" to policies devised elsewhere. And the place where policy was devised and formulated was in the committees of the Council, or more accurately in most cases it was thought up by the officials who then planted the policy inside the minds of the Chairmen, who in their turn guided the committees. Some towns, recognising that this was so, have set up Group meetings for members of the same party on each committee on a permanent basis.[2.] In 1952 Rastall proposed the establishment of such "advisory committees" for the Education and Health Committees.[3.] None materialised. Only the Education Committee has had Group meetings for its members and then only occasionally,

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1. Interview with Mrs. I. M. Hayes.
2. See above p. 310, footnote 1.
3. M.L.G. 3.6.1952.

for instance to discuss Comprehensive schools.[1.] Normally the members huddle together for a few minutes before the committee or its sub-committees meet.[2.]

Since there is no formal Group supervision of the Council committees, it is sometimes complained that a policy decided by the committee will be rejected by the full Group and then in open Council members will have to speak against their previous position and the committee will have to withdraw its agreed policy. In practice however this does not happen. On most issues Group policy will be known, or at least its general tenor will, and this will be a sufficient guide to the position to be adopted. If an item does arise on which Group policy is unclear or unknown, the Chairman will find an excuse to defer a decision until the next meeting so that consultations can be had with the leader and perhaps a special Group meeting can be called. In most cases the officials are not likely to spring on a committee an item of importance requiring an immediate decision.[3.]

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1. M.L.G. 10.10.1956. Interview with C. B. Clark.
2. Interview with A. E. Steventon.
3. Interviews with Mrs. R. F. Ilsley and F. Mansell.

Another objection laid against the Group system is that decisions are often taken without adequate knowledge, since the officials of the Corporation cannot be present to advise. If they were to attend, it is argued, their neutrality would be compromised, since they are the servants not of one party, even if it has a majority, but of a committee and of the Council consisting of members of all parties. No official has ever attended a full Group meeting: none has ever been asked. If asked it is not certain that they would have refused, since the Director of Education attended an Education committee Group meeting when invited to talk on Comprehensive education.[1] Even if they do not attend, their views are known and discussed at the Group meetings.[2] The Chairman of a committee is usually very close to his chief officer and is able to explain his position to the Group. If an official's views are not known or his advice is needed, then the Group can defer a decision until he has been sounded out. There is no evidence that decisions are made without adequate official advice: indeed a criticism often made is that the officials are too influential, that the Chairmen are their mouthpieces and that the Groups do not effectively tell the officials what the public will not stand.

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1. Interviews with C. B. Clark and G. W. R. Lines.
2. An argument for holding the Group meetings in secret.

The officers of the Group consist of the Chairman (the leader), the Vice-Chairman, the Secretary and the Whip. Since 1949 the leader has been F. Mansell, the Chairman of Transport Committee. This committee requires little of his attention, and thus he is free to overlook many aspects of Council work. In some towns the leader has no committee to Chair and acts as a Prime Minister, but in Wolverhampton it was felt that the leader should have a Chairmanship to keep him in contact with the problems of a Chairman and the running of a department. In any case it is a minor committee.[1.] Mansell as we have seen was a compromise choice without the personality of a leader. Many are the complaints that he fails to give a lead;[2.] he is described as a voice or a spokesman of the Group. He issues statements on behalf of the Group; he discusses with the Town Clerk and other officials;[3.] he negotiates with the leader of the opposition,[4.] for example over Aldermanic vacancies, or discusses with him the estimates for the year.[5.] He informs the Mayor before the Council meeting

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1. Interview with F. Mansell.
2. Interviews with Mrs. R. F. Ilsley, H. E. Lane, D. A. Birch and A. Cattell.
3. M.L.G. 27.11.1957, 22.10.1959.
4. Interview with F. Mansell.
5. M.L.G. 25.7.1958.

of those members wishing to speak in the debate.[1] He is consulted by the Chairmen of the committees about problems of their committees; if the item is minor he will give a quick decision, if more important he will call a special Group meeting to consider the matter. Ordinary members of the Council will consult him about difficulties and bring queries to him.[2] His forte is personal relations; he has the skill to conciliate, but he has not the inclination to give a decisive lead in any particular direction. He wants the machine to keep ticking over, and therefore angers the more forceful of both the right and the left, but since these cannot agree on an alternative leader Mansell remains as the lesser evil.

The Secretary after C. W. Hill was A. Cattell, 1953-56. He was not a member of the Council but was the representative of the Borough Labour Party to the Group; the only one to make a significant mark on the Group. He was a highly intelligent and articulate school teacher, whose occupation as an employee of the Council prevented him from standing for the Council. He was

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1. M.L.G. 21.3.1958.
2. Interview with F. Mansell, Mrs. R. F. Ilsley and Mrs. V. A. Fletcher.

chosen as Secretary, so he said, because he had no ambitions to be a Chairman or Alderman or Mayor.[1] Although not a member of the Council he says that he could always see the minutes of any committee he wished; and on his appointment as Secretary he went to see the Town Clerk to tell him that in future they would have to work together. The job of the Secretary as carried out by both Cattell and his successor, F. Smith, is to record the minutes of the Group, especially its decisions, and to write letters from the Group. He is not a mere scribe. He drafts the schemes of committee membership; he interprets and explains Group policy to those seeking guidance.[2] As an officer he is a leading member of the Group and Cattell said that since Mansell failed to give a lead, he found himself on many occasions acting as virtual leader. Complaints have also been made that Smith is usurping the functions of the leader.[3]

The office of Whip was abolished in 1960 in an attempt to wipe away the image of the Group as a coercive body whipping its members into submission.[4] The Whip's job had been to inform members of Group decisions if they

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1. Interview with A. Cattell.
2. Interview with F. S. Smith.
3. Interview with A. Garner.
4. M.L.G. May 1960.

had been absent, and in Council to tell them which way to vote, a necessary function given the long-winded obscurity of some motions and amendments. He had to encourage attendance at both Group and Council meetings. He helped to "straighten out problems"[1]. for Councillors, listen to their grievances, explain the Group policy and persuade them to follow Group decisions. Most attention has usually been paid to his disciplinary functions, reporting to the Group anyone who did not vote in accordance with a Group decision. In 1960 the Secretary took over the task of informing and encouraging members.

These 3 officers, together with the Vice-Chairman, who has no specific task, have been the formal leaders of the Group: but informal leaders are significant too. Able individuals with a following, whose voices are listened to with respect by the Group can sway a meeting particularly on an issue within the purview of their committees. Such on the right of the party would be Mrs. R. F. Ilsley, Chairman of Health and D. A. Birch, Chairman of Finance Committees;[2]. and on the left H. E.

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1. Interview with J. K. Woodward.
2. Birch thought that he should be the leader of the Group since as Chairman of Finance he had connections with all other committees and since finance was the most important factor in any policy decision. Interview with D. A. Birch.

Lane, Chairman of Housing. These are often angry at Mansell's lack of leadership but since they could serve under no other, he has been tolerated.

A function of the Group which has taken up much of its time and has caused general furore has been the distribution of patronage. Who is to be Alderman, Chairman of a committee or Mayor, indeed who is to be the member of which committee are the questions which have continuously disturbed the Group. The allocation of members to committees is relatively easy. At the start of each municipal year, informal talks with the opposition leaders attempt to establish a balance of party members on each committee to reflect the parties' positions in the Council. Once that has been agreed or once the Group has decided on the proportion,[1] the Secretary calls for the wishes of the members about the committees on which they wish to serve. He produces a draft scheme, trying to accommodate their views, and after consultation with the other officers submits it to the Group: then individuals voice complaints and explanations are given. Normally this process causes little trouble.[2]

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1. M.L.G. 15.5.1955, 27.5.1955, 19.6.1959, 20.3.1954, 3.5.1957.

2. M.L.G. 18.10.1956. Interview with F. S. Smith.

The Chairmen in theory are elected by their committees each year. In practice the Group decides and the party members on the committees then vote them in. In 1945 the Group decided not to take all the Chairmanships: it decided which to take and who was to take them.[1.] When Labour lost the majority in 1949, the Group decided that none was to be accepted.[2.] In 1952 on regaining their majority, they decided not to take all, and settled which to take and who was to take them. The Group was divided at this time: one set wished to take them all, others, fearing that the Labour Group had no able people to replace particularly the Conservative Chairmen of Education and Finance, succeeded in persuading the Group to share the Chairmanships with the opposition.[3.] In 1955 this set was defeated and all the Chairmanships and Vice-Chairmanships were taken.[4.] The one side advocated that all Chairmanships should be taken so that one party could be seen to accept responsibility for the whole range of Council policy: it was crazy, they argued, to have a Conservative as the Chancellor of the

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1. M.L.G. 7.11.1945.
2. M.L.G. 20.5.1949.
3. Interview with A. Cattell. M.L.G. 15.5.1953, 23.5.1954.
4. M.L.G. 15.5.1955.

Exchequer or the Minister of Education in a Labour Government. They said that such Chairmen without a majority in their committees could not take day to day decisions with the confidence of their committees' backing, nor could they really speak for their committees in Council. The other side argued that it was doctrinaire to throw out able Chairmen, whom Labour could not adequately replace. The difficulties of sharing, they claimed, had been exaggerated: in practice no problems arose from sharing. But since 1955 the Group has decided who shall be Chairmen of all committees of the Council;[1] and the Chairmen of School Governors.[2]

The Mayor in theory is chosen by a Mayoral committee comprising ex-Mayors who recommend to a full Council meeting a name, which is adopted. In practice when the Labour Party is in a majority, the Group decides whether to take the Mayoralty and who is to be Mayor. In some towns arrangements have been made between the parties to share the Mayoralty; for example one party is to have it for one year, the other for the next.[3] In Wolverhampton the Conservatives during the 1940s, 50s and

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1. M.L.G. 10.5.1959, 15.5.1960.
2. M.L.G. 9.9.1954, 27.6.1956, 24.6.1960.
3. See W. Thornhill, "Agreements between Local Parties in Local Government Matters", Political Studies, 1957, pp. 83-88.

60s have repeatedly tried to get the Labour Group to agree to a set of rules governing the sharing of the Mayoralty. But the Labour Party has refused to have an agreement,[1] chiefly because the Mayor may be a vital element in deciding who shall control the Council, since the majority of one party has never been overwhelming.[2] Also the Labour Party has contained many people who aspired to the Mayoralty, powerful people at that, who entered the Council about the same time and who therefore believed they had a right to the office. The Conservatives were allowed to nominate for the Mayoralty only when the outcry against the Labour monopoly of the office had become too loud and might have adversely affected the position of the party.[3] Hence as with the choice of Chairmen the Group decides by voting who is to occupy the position.[4]

The same voting process has taken place with regard to the Aldermen. Again the Conservatives have sought to reach an arrangement with the Labour Group over the allocation of Aldermanic seats in proportion to the party majority. The Group has been divided over this

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1. M.L.G. June 1953. 24.7.1956, 25.2.1957.
2. e.g. in 1961 and 1962. See below, Epilogue.
3. 1958 and 1962.
4. M.L.G. 20.2.1959. 19.2.1960.

issue. Some have favoured an agreement: others have advocated that the Group should take all vacancies, when they arise, because the Aldermen could be the key to control.[1.] The compromise position reached between these two views has been that each vacancy should be considered as and when it arises in the interests of expediency.[2.] The Group has adopted delaying tactics to make the Conservatives think an agreement would be reached, but none ever has.[3.] The Labour Group wishes to maintain its freedom of action and to consider each case as it arises. When the Group decides to take an Aldermanic vacancy, as with the Mayoral vacancy, it votes; voting is necessary because there are so many contestants, because of the large number of Councillors who entered the Council in 1945 between whom it is hard to decide seniority, which is the criterion for election to the bench.[4.]

Thus over patronage two types of issue have arisen; first over relations with the Conservatives, over whether as a Group they should choose the Chairmen, the

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1. As in 1961-62.
2. M.L.G. 23.1.1953, 15.5.1955, 21.11.1958, 6.11.1959.
3. M.L.G. 24.2.1956.
4. M.L.G. 25.6.1954, 22.5.1955, 25.3.1960, 24.3.1961.

the Aldermen and the Mayors, and secondly inside the Group over which member of the Group should actually be elected as the Chairman, Alderman or Mayor in question.

The aspect of the Group's work which has attracted most attention is that of disciplining members as regards their voting in the Council chamber. We have seen that in the 1920s this was a contentious issue. In the 1930s it became less important, and since 1945 the minutes of the Group reveal numerous cases where Councillors have not voted in the Council in accordance with a Group decision. The common practice is for a deviant to be reported to the Group, when an explanation is invited and usually is accepted. Normally defection is rare since party loyalty, common ties, personal relationships and adherence to a common programme and set of principles mean that the members are in harmony on general policy and direction. Therefore the contentious issues which arise are usually of minor significance and can be and are ignored and forgotten.[1.] Once or twice since 1945 members have become so alienated from the party that they consistently vote against all Group decisions, eventually leave the Group, are invited to attend the Conservative Group,

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1. M.L.G. 23.10.1953, 20.11.1953, 18.10.1956, 29.4.1960, 6.1.1961, 20.1.1961.

stand as Independents or Conservatives at the following election and are defeated and vanish from the Council. Such were B. Dagnan in the late 1940s,[1] and Mrs. M. Cattell in the late 1950s.[2] Such cases are very rare, since they rebelled not merely over one issue but over many and for a long period of time. Only when it is clear that they have become out of tune with the party are they expelled.

Therefore Councillors vote together not because they are coerced, but because in most cases they are in agreement with each other. The criticisms often made of the Group are twofold and unfair. If the members of the Group did not vote together, the opposition would accuse them of having not made up their minds; if they did vote together they would be condemned as servile. Since most business is uncontroversial, few issues of conflict arise, and on most of these all are in harmony. If one does decide on a single issue not to vote with the Group, the Councillor will be put on the mat, and if that was his only deviation, nothing will follow but a mild rebuke. If however he has a record of defection then in the end he can expect to be removed or to

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1. M.L.G. 2.7.1948.
2. M.L.G. 22.11.1957, 9.12.1957, 21.2.1958, 28.2.1958.

withdraw himself.

In the Group debate on issues is free: anything can be said, since the press is not admitted, in complete secrecy and security. After a full debate, a vote is taken and the majority decision is binding on all members, unless permission is given for particular individuals to abstain. They can request permission to abstain; sometimes it is given, sometimes the Whips are put on.[1.] Sometimes free votes are allowed.[2.] By the standing orders they can abstain on matters of conscience like religion.[3.]

Another aspect of discipline is the attempt made to ensure that all members of the Group are present at the Group meetings, so that they can take part in the debate and vote on the decision, that is so that they can share in the responsibility for decision taking. The Group has always been concerned about poor attendance. Officers have been asked to contact and encourage absentees,[4.] or in serious cases the Group has sent

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1. M.L.G. 24.10.1952, 24.10.1957.
2. M.L.G. 25.7.1952, 20.2.1953, 4.3.1954, 22.3.1957.
3. M.L.G. 21.11.1958.
4. M.L.G. 10.5.1957, 21.6.1957.

messages to poor attenders.[1] In the 1950s the Group has met for 14 or 15 times a year, for agenda and special sessions. The leading figures have had attendance records of 12-15: then come the majority of around 9-12 attendances and then the others tail off below 8 because of illness, laziness, other activities or a temporary alienation from the Group. This pattern of attendance has been typical since 1945.[2]

One drawback of the Group system and its discipline is that the policy ultimately approved by the Council may not command the support of a majority of the Council. An example of this occurred in 1959 over Housing Finance. The Borough Labour Party was divided equally, 22-22, over whether to adopt a differential rent scheme. The Group divided 19 against and 10 in favour.[3] Thus all the Labour members, 39 in all, were committed to oppose a differential scheme. All the Conservatives, 21 in all, were in favour. Thus in open Council the measure was lost.[4] However, if, of the Council as a whole, all who were in favour of the scheme had voted for, they would have had a majority, since at least they

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1. M.L.G. 25.5.1956.
2. Attendance Records in M.L.G.
3. M.L.G. 6.11.1959.
4. M.L.G. 23.11.1959.

would have had 31 votes against 29. Such an issue is rare. Only 2 rebelled against the Group's verdict; 1 expressed sorrow and promised to obey in future; the other, Mrs. Cattell, voted consistently with the Conservatives on every vote afterwards. The other Labour members who voted with the Group and yet privately wanted a differential scheme explained that they accepted the Group's decision because the issue was not one of such overriding importance that they were prepared to cut themselves off from their colleagues, with whom they agreed on most other items of policy.[1]. Very often the criticisms made of the Group system attach undue significance to features which occur only rarely, and in no way typify the functions of the Group.

The Group system has come into being in Wolverhampton not just because the Labour Party happened to conduct its affairs in this way. It arose to enable the Town Council to fulfil its functions in the 20th century. In structure the Council formally exhibits its origins in the 19th century at a time when the franchise was narrow and the Council's functions were not extensive. The 20th century has witnessed the widening of the franchise and from this the growth of mass parties, notably the

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1. Interviews with D. A. Birch and Mrs. R. F. Ilsley.

Labour Party with a distinctive local policy. To achieve this required co-ordinated action by its Councillors. The Group fulfilled this need, as well as enabling the larger electorate to hold their rulers responsible, since the Group system allowed the public to see which group of men were responsible for a particular policy. In addition the growth in the duties of the Council made it vital to have a co-ordinating body to overlook all aspects of the Council's work and to harmonise the activities of the various committees. The Town Clerk and the Treasurer and the Finance Committee performed some of this work,[1.] but the Group system has enabled it to be performed more effectively by the elected representatives. The Labour leader Mansell has justified the Group system with the statement that through it a majority can obtain a mandate to direct the town's affairs and can be held responsible to the electorate.[2.]

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1. See below Chapters 10 and 12.
2. E. &S. 23.9.1955.

CHAPTER 8

The Conservative Group[1].

In 1900 the non-Socialist members of the Council had no formal organisation which met before the Council meeting to plan their course of action inside the Council. This was because neither the Conservative nor Liberal Parties professed distinctive municipal programmes, which they required their representatives to implement; they did not fight local elections formally as parties; they did not pay the election expenses for their members who contested seats, nor did they pay their Councillors any out of pocket expenses. Nor had they a tradition of collective action. On the Council the members of one party did not continually vote together as permanent groups, for on each issue there was a new combination of individuals.

However there were informal meetings of members of the Council to discuss Council affairs. These were "get-togethers" to "talk over" policy, held in the political clubs. The Conservatives met in their Deanery Club,[2]. which in 1902-4 the Liberals regarded as

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1. Up to 1960 it was called a "Caucus".
2. Interview with J. Cahill.

the centre from which the Anglican policies on Education emanated.[1] The Liberals met at their Liberal Club,[2] or else talked over Council matters after Chapel with their Methodist and Congregationalist friends.[3] Informality was the keynote of these sessions: they were not organised; no summons to attend were issued; no officers were appointed. Councillors were not compelled to act as consistent voting blocks on all issues. These "get-togethers" can hardly be called official party meetings: rather they were informal meetings of like-minded men, where they could discuss Council affairs, give and take advice and extract information.

If an important issue arose on the Council, the usual way to round up support or opposition was for individuals to canvass their friends. For instance in June 1936 a motion came before the Council to increase the salaries of the chief officials. On hearing about this proposal Councillor W. J. Rawlins hurried around his closest colleagues urging them to oppose. They then pressed other Councillors close to them. The other side canvassed also. At the June meeting the voting was

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1. W.C. 29.4.1903.
2. Interview with R. Lewis.
3. Interview with J. Clark.

25 for the increase and 25 against, and the Mayor gave his casting vote in favour. Canvassing began again more fiercely. At the July meeting 26 voted to rescind the resolution, but 29 voted against. On both sides were members of all political parties.[1] This example is typical of the way in which support was gained for a particular measure; a small nucleus would canvass on a personal basis as many Councillors as possible. There was no attempt to impose a party line. Liberal Councillors have claimed that the Liberal Constituency Association did not instruct them or give them advice; nor did they meet before the Council as an official Liberal Group to decide on a peculiarly Liberal position in the Council.[2] As for the Conservatives, the minutes of the West Wolverhampton Conservative Association's Management Committee reveal between 1907 and 1945 only one occasion when the Association expressed any view about the activities of Conservative Councillors on the Council. In 1928 the minutes report "considerable dissatisfaction amongst Members of our Committees at Conservative Town Councillors voting for the contract

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1. C.M. 8.6.1936, 13.7.1936. Interview with W. J. Rawlins.
2. Interviews with A. H. Oakley, Sir G. le M. Mander.

for the purchase of R.O.P."[1]. These Councillors had voted that 40% of the petrol used by the Corporation's Transport Committee should come from Russian Oil Products Ltd. Some Conservatives had opposed the purchase of Soviet petrol "on principle" despite its cheapness and high standard, because the proceeds would go "to foster the forces of revolution and anarchy."[2]. No further action was taken. The controversy died. The Conservative Councillors were not torn by such quarrels as divided the Labour Councillors in the 1920s: nor did their outside party Associations seek to instruct them as regards Council matters. The Associations did not regard their Councillors as their servants to implement a given programme.

The traditional means of obtaining support ended in the late 1930s, with the growth in the number of Labour representatives and with the deaths of 2 men who had led the Council for over 20 years. Before the 1930s the Labour members had been too few to force the non-Socialists to act together consistently as a united block. By 1939 however the Labour Party formed the

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1. M.M.C. 20.3.1928.
2. C.M. 12.3.1928. E. & S. 13.3.1928.

largest single group of Councillors,[1] and thus the non-Socialists had to act together for a common policy or else divided they would let the Labour Party have its way.

In 1938 the 2 leading men on the Council both died: in February A. B. Bantock, Chairman of Finance Committee since 1917, a Liberal;[2] and in August J. F. Myatt, Chairman of Public Works Committee since 1917, a Conservative.[3] For over 20 years these 2 had been the leaders of the Council, the dominant influence. The Town Clerk from 1919-29 said that if any policy was approved by the 2, then it was guaranteed to get through.[4] After their deaths no one was left on the Council with their stature to replace their personal leadership. To fill the void emerged a collective leadership, which to rally support to its proposals had to adopt new methods, since individually they had not the prestige of Bantock or Myatt to influence followers. Thus to enable the non-Socialists more effectively to combat a growing Labour Group and to fill the vacuum

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1. See Table I.
2. E. & S. 9.2.1938.
3. E. & S. 15.8.1938.
4. Interview with F. W. Howell.

left by the deaths of Bantock and Myatt arose the anti-Socialist "Caucus".

The Caucus[1.] was a meeting held before the Monday Council meeting, either half an hour before or else for more important issues on the Friday evening before, to which were invited all non-Socialist members of the Council. There was no compulsion to attend. Since it comprised Conservatives, Liberals, Ratepayers and Independents, the evening meeting could not be held at a political club, for fear it became associated with a particular party. Most often it was held in a room rented from the main hotel of the town or over the shop of one of the Councillors. Not all those invited attended; only a few came regularly, and these were the "cornerstones" of the Council, mainly the Chairmen of the Council committees, like T. W. Simpson of Town Planning, J. Clark of Education, R. E. Probert of Health and W. J. Rawlins of Sewerage. From these were chosen the officers, Chairman and Secretary. The form of the meeting was to go through the agenda; the Chairmen would explain their policies and answer questions, rank

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1. For the early years of the Caucus, 1938-45 - Interviews with W. J. Rawlins, J. Beattie, J. Cahill, J. Clark, A. G. Goodman and T. W. Phillipson.

and file members would express their views. It was an opportunity for the leadership and "backbenchers" to exchange opinions and to try to reach general agreement. The atmosphere was "free and easy"; discipline and compulsion were not in evidence. 1 Councillor who had the opportunity to attend both the Caucus, as an Independent, and later the Labour Group after switching to that party, said that the only difference between the 2 bodies was that the Caucus was not so concerned with discipline and the need for all to vote the same way as was the Labour Group.[1] Also since the Caucus was composed of members of more than 1 party, the discussion ranged not so much over what would benefit any 1 party but over the merits of the case under discussion. Members voted later in the Council as their consciences dictated.

Conservatives claim that they adopted the Caucus system reluctantly, only to meet the Labour threat. Since Labour was organised, the anti Socialists had also to organise or else they would let the Labour Group take over control in default. The ideal way of running a Council, in the Conservative and Liberal view, was for each ward to select a representative for his personal

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1. Interview with C. M. Walsh.

qualities; and on the Council and in committee this individual would judge each issue on its merits with only the good of the town as his objective. The Councillor should not be elected because of his party affiliation and should not vote in Council as a member of a party block. In the 1920s and early 30s the non-Socialists frequently attacked the Labour Councillors for subservience to party decisions, pointing out that the Labour Party expelled Councillors "because they wanted to use their own judgement in voting in the Council chamber."[1]. The ideal of the non-Socialists was inappropriate in the changed conditions of the 20th century, with a widening of the franchise, the growth of a mass party with a particular local policy to implement , and the increase in local government functions. Thus the Conservatives had to adopt the very practices which they had once condemned, although many of their Councillors still express longings for the old system when party did not prevail.

The Conservative defeat in 1945 "shook up"[2]. the Conservative Association. With the Labour Party in a majority on the Council it was felt necessary for the Caucus to act more as a united block than it had in the

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1. E. & S. 31.10.1930.
2. Interview with J. Beattie.

past, and this meant that a majority decision should prevail. In addition the new Conservative candidate, Enoch Powell, was urging that the Independent and Ratepayer Councillors and candidates should stand openly as Conservatives in order to assist the party's Parliamentary prospects.[1] He was aided in this task by Councillor T. G. Williams, Chairman of the South West Wolverhampton Conservative Association, who pressed candidates to change their labels and urged the Caucus to act as a solid anti-Labour group.[2] These developments upset some of the Ratepayer and Independent Councillors, who resented having to give up their labels and to conform to Caucus decisions. At one point in 1950 Councillor J. Ireland was about to establish a separate Independent Caucus, distinct from the Conservative Caucus, but he was prevented from doing so by the tactful persuasion of the Chairman of the Caucus, J. Beattie, when he made it clear that only by combining the Conservatives and Independents in a united group could the Labour Group's control be prevented.[3] The crisis

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1. See above Chapter 2, pp. 97-100.

2. Interview with T. W. Phillipson.

3. Interviews with J. Ireland and J. Beattie. E. & S. 9.5.1950. In 1949 the Caucus had passed a resolution describing its role as "purely an anti-Socialist co-ordinating body", saying that it bore "no allegiance to any political or non-political body in the town," M.C.C. 25.11.1949.

passed and the Caucus carried on as the Conservative and Independent Caucus.

In 1954 the Conservatives took stock of their position in the town. In the minutes of the Conservative Caucus is to be found a paper entitled "An appreciation of the Wolverhampton Local Government party political situation as at July 1954." It bemoaned that the years 1950-54 had been "disastrous for all who opposed Socialism on the Wolverhampton Council, having lost 9 Councillors' seats, 2 Aldermanic seats and control of the Council." It reviewed the working of the Conservative and Independent Caucus.

"There never has been close co-operation between the Caucus and the two Conservative Organisations. This may partly be due to the fact that all 3 in the past wished to maintain their independence and were fearful of complications which might arise from closer co-operation."

The Caucus was also hampered by the absence of discipline within its ranks and the existence of several members who claimed independence from all parties. "These members have given most valuable service to the Caucus, and as individuals, and because of their anti-Socialist support, they have been most welcome. In return they have shared in such honours and appointments

as have been earned by the Caucus as a whole."

"Nevertheless they have in the past few years been the cause (sometimes quite unintentionally) of major crises, with the result that the Caucus and the Associations have sometimes found themselves as opponents."[1.]

"The greater part of the work on the Council is still non-political and many members of the Caucus cling to the hope that party politics may find expression only to a limited degree. These members are perhaps a little frightened that closer co-ordination with the political associations, may cause them to beat the political drum rather more often and rather more loudly than they would wish." The paper then stated the future responsibilities of the Caucus.

> "(i) to get its house in order and to do everything in its power to act as a single unit and with the strength and confidence which comes from unity.
>
> (ii) to so conduct itself and develop its team spirit that would-be-Councillors (especially those already in positions of responsibility in the town) will be attracted by it and by the privilege of becoming one of its members.
>
> (iii) to do all in its power to assist the Associations to find candidates."

Despite this review little changed in the working of the Caucus although no new Independent or Ratepayer

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1. e.g. over the position of the Ratepayers in Penn. In 1954 a Conservative and a Ratepayer candidate fought for the seat.

Councillors entered the Council, and those who remained adopted the Conservative label or else retired from the Council when their 3 years were over. The Independents who were Aldermen stayed on the Council until death removed them. They did attend the Caucus, though not regularly,[1] and they were inclined not to speak or vote with the Caucus over one or two matters, for example over the expansion of the boundaries. The Caucus opposed extension, while the old Independent Aldermen were in favour.[2] Such an event was exceptional. In 1960 the Independent title was dropped and the Caucus was renamed "The Conservative Group of the Wolverhampton Borough Council."[3] Councillors wishing to be members had to be "known Conservatives."[4] Thus by 1960 the 2 parties had their Groups of Councillors who met to do very much the same thing at the same time before the Monday Council meeting.

The Caucus gradually came to meet more and more on the Friday evening before the Council meeting: in 1953 it was resolved to meet at 6.30 p.m. save when the

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1. M.C.C. - Register of attendance.
2. C.M. 23.3.1959. E. & S. 24.3.1959.
3. Terms of Reference adopted 20.5.1960, clause 2.
4. ibid. clause 5(a).

Chairman would decide to transfer it to 2.15 p.m. on the Monday afternoon "in the light of the Council Agenda and the probable amount of discussion arising therefrom."[1]. The use by the Chairman of his discretion provoked complaints that matters had arisen which needed to be considered by the Caucus, yet could not be thoroughly gone into in a quarter of an hour.[2]. From 1955 the Caucus has met regularly on the Friday evening.[3]. The Monday afternoon session was abandoned 10 years after the Labour Party had abandoned theirs.

Those who could attend were at first the anti-Socialist members of the Council and by 1960 only "known Conservatives" who were members of the Council. From 1955 the agents of the 2 Associations were invited[4]. and they became regular attenders; they also received copies of the minutes of the Caucus. The Labour Group's standing orders do not allow the agents to attend; in any case the Labour Party in Wolverhampton in the 1950s has had no full time paid agents. In 1957 the Chairman and Vice-Chairmen of the 2 Conservative Associations were invited to the Caucus.[5]. The Labour Group has no

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1. M.C.C 18.5.1953.
2. M.C.C. 29.10.1954.
3. From 1959 at 6.15 p.m. M.C.C. 22.5.1959.
4. M.C.C. 25.11.1955.
5. M.C.C. 30.7.1957.

provision for such ex officio attendances. In 1956 the Conservative M.P. was invited to attend the Caucus. He came and was invited to attend whenever possible.[1] In fact he does not appear to have come again. In the Labour Group the Labour M.P.s have never been invited; none has ever attended and there has been no discussion about inviting them to attend. The Conservative Terms of Reference also allow to attend, by a majority vote, adopted municipal candidates, potential or prospective candidates and such other persons as may be needed in an advisory capacity.[2] But only members of the Council shall have a right to vote at any Group meeting.[3] The Labour Group is restricted to the members of the Council and 3 representatives of the Borough Party only. The Conservatives have not regarded their Caucus as such a closed body reserved to the Councillors only as has the Labour Group. Indeed the latter was reluctant to admit the author to a session, while the Conservatives offered no opposition. This difference probably arises from the difficulties experienced by the Labour Group in the past in obtaining autonomy from the party outside

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1. M.C.C. 20.1.1956.
2. Terms of Reference, clause 5(c) i, ii, iii.
3. ibid. clause 5(c) iv.

the Council. The Conservatives, not having had to fight for the independence of their Caucus, have not such a strong sense of their Caucus as an autonomous unit.

The officers of the Caucus are the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Secretary, elected annually at the start of each municipal year. Only once in the 1950s was there a contested election, in 1956 for the Chairmanship and Secretaryship.[1.] Their functions are the same as those of the Labour officers; the Chairman presides at the Caucus meeting, acts as the spokesman of the Caucus, negotiates with the Labour leader and Town Clerk and advises members about the policy of the Caucus. The Secretary keeps the minutes, deals with Caucus correspondence, drafts members to committees and generally advises members about Caucus policy. The Conservative Caucus has never had a Whip, nor any officer charged with the responsibility of watching how members vote: a sign of the less importance attached by the Conservatives to discipline.[2.]

The leader of the Conservative Caucus, like the Labour leader Mansell was a compromise candidate. The

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1. M.C.C. 25.5.1956.
2. Interviews with M. P. Birch and E. Y. Fullwood.

Conservatives were as divided as the Labour Party but not so much over ideological issues.[1] A number of divisions can be detected but they do not all coincide. There is the group of old Ratepayer and Independent Councillors who have adopted the Conservative label and cannot be called keen partisans. They do not play a prominent part in the Conservative Association. They invariably sit for the safest seats. The keen partisans who are active in the Conservative Party are often those who sit for marginal seats and who owe their position to the party. They are often much younger than those who sit in the safer seats. There is a division between those who are active in the North East Association and those in the South West: the former resent the wealth and strength of the latter and feel that it should make more efforts in the North East to assist it regain seats. The leadership has been divided so that no group predominates. Birch the leader was a Ratepayer who quickly changed his label when asked. The Vice-Chairman, P. T.W. Farmer, is regarded as a leader of the younger more partisan element, and the Secretary, E. Y. Fullwood, though young is more inclined to vote with the traditional Conservative sections composed of his father and his cronies the Guys.

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1. Interviews with A. Cattell and S. Brindley.

Since the Caucus is so divided, Birch is unable to give a decisive lead, much to the annoyance of many, but at least he is safe and refers matters to the Caucus for decision.

The Caucus meets less often than the Labour Group.[1.] It has its normal monthly meetings before the Council meetings, but unlike the Labour Group it has very few special meetings to deal with particular issues. This difference arises because the Conservatives are in opposition and have therefore not the work, the responsibility, or the need to take as many decisions as has the Labour Group. Office means more work for the Labour Group. Another result is that when the Conservative Caucus does meet it has less to discuss than the Labour Group. The latter has never held a meeting at which nothing came up for discussion, but for many times the minutes of the Caucus

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1. Number of meetings per annum:

	Con.	Lab.
1953-54	10	14
1954-55	11	14
1955-56	12	Unknown
1956-57	11	13
1957-58	14	16
1958-59	13	15
1959-60	12	15
1960-61	13	14

Sources: M.C.C. and M.L.G. Attendance Register

report that "no matters arose for special consideration."[1]. The pattern of attendance at the Conservative Caucus meeting is similar to that at the Labour Group. There is a core of regular attenders, a large number of moderate attenders, and 1 or 2 who rarely attend.[2]. As in the Labour Group concern is often expressed at poor attendance and the officers are encouraged to urge members to turn up.[3]. The form of the Conservative meeting is like that of the Labour Group.[4]. The Chairman goes through the agenda, reading out the subject headings and drawing attention to noteworthy points, not merely reading out the page numbers as does the Labour Chairman. Members then state their opinions, say what they think should be done, and comment on the Labour Party's actions. When the Caucus has decided on a line, whether to accept a resolution, to refer it back or to amend it, the wording of motions and amendments are drafted, the movers and seconders are chosen, speakers, questioners and questions are selected.[5]. As in the Labour Group the tactics to be

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1. M.C.C. 28.6.1954, 20.1.1956, 20.6.1958, 25.9.1959.
2. M.C.C. Register.
3. M.C.C. 22.7.1955, 20.6.1958, 4.12.1958.
4. The author attended a Caucus meeting on 20.10.1961.
5. M.C.C. 23.11.1953, 3.5.1954, 29.4.1955, 22.6.1956, 22.11.1957, 18.2.1960.

pursued in the Council are considered and points to be made in debate are rehearsed. Members also announce that they will ask a particular question in Council or will speak on a certain topic.[1].

The Caucus reaches a decision on an issue either by the Chairman summarising the sense of the meeting or by a vote. The minutes then record that it was decided that all should vote in a particular way or that members should vote as they wished.[2]. The main difference in this part of the proceedings compared with the Labour Group lies in the role of the Chairman. The Conservative Chairman gives the Caucus more guidance about problems, but some of the younger members of the Caucus complain that he is apt to give little decisive leadership, but merely waits on events and follows the general sense of the meeting.[3].

The Caucus meeting enables Councillors to be put in touch with developments in committees on which they do not serve; they can acquire information on which to base their vote in Council and learn how their colleagues feel about a particular issue. An ex-Councillor said

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1. M.C.C. 22.2.1954, 19.11.1954, 21.9.1956.
2. M.C.C. 22.2.1954, 28.3.1955, 23.11.1956, 25.10.1957, 25.9.1959.
3. Interview with S. Brindley.

that he found it useful to talk over the agenda before the meeting in a secret session where "steam could be let off" and where they could "kick the shit about."[1]. A difference in the style of the Conservative Caucus as compared with the Labour Group arises because the Conservatives are in opposition. Much of its work consists in scrutinising Labour proposals and seeking out any failings. Members have announced that they had not been satisfied with the way tenders had been dealt with in the Parks Committee;[2]. it was decided to query some bad estimating and to ask for a detailed explanation;[3]. they decided to discover why no full report had been given,[4]. and members of the various Council committees concerned with Compulsory Purchase Orders were asked to be extremely vigilant on this subject and report back to the Caucus meeting regarding such orders.[5]. The Conservative Caucus acts as an opposition in the Council, continually subjecting Labour policy to criticism.

Being an opposition has produced for the Conservatives

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1. Interview with D. H. Haselock.
2. M.C.C. 27.2.1954.
3. M.C.C. 24.2.1956.
4. M.C.C. 30.12.1954.
5. M.C.C. 20.6.1958.

a slightly different structure of their Caucus from that of the Labour Group. In 1955 the Caucus resolved that "generally the caucus attempts to form a useful and constructive opposition, carrying out its responsibilities in an efficient and dignified manner."[1]. To achieve this aim the Conservatives have gone further than the Labour Group in establishing a small policy making body, a type of Cabinet, and policy study groups for particular topics. Since the Conservatives are in opposition, they hold no Chairmanships, and are therefore not as close to the officials as are the Labour members. In the last chapter it was argued that the Labour experiment of a Cabinet of Chairmen failed because the Chairmen were closely bound up with their chief officials. The Conservatives, not being so tied up, have been forced back onto their own resources more. They have therefore established a Policy Committee of the half a dozen leading members of the Council to think out policy and future lines of action, overlooking the work of the Council as a whole, and to report to the full Caucus meeting. Individuals have been delegated as Shadow Chairmen to watch over the activities of particular committees and to report to the Caucus any matter likely to interest it. In 1955 W. J. Rawlins was called on to hold "a

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1. M.C.C. 2.6.1955.

watching brief" on the work of the Sewage Disposal Committee,[1.] of which he had been Chairman. In the following year Shadow Chairmen were allocated to all committees,[2.] and the practice has continued.[3.] At the meeting attended by the author it was suggested that the Shadow Chairmen should consult members of their committees half an hour before the committees met to get a "more cogent policy." In addition the Caucus has set up "study groups", concerned with particular topics, to engage in research and to suggest future policy. In 1957 2 were established, for education and housing.[4.] The housing study group was later asked "to formulate a policy on slum clearance with particular reference to reallocation of commercial and shopping premises."[5.] These study groups and the policy committee report to the Caucus after the agenda has been examined, when necessary, i.e. if they have anything to report.

As in the Labour Group the problems of "patronage" have taken up much of the time of the Caucus. For a long time the Conservatives have tried to reach an

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1. M.C.C. 24.6.1955.
2. M.C.C. 27.6.1956.
3. M.C.C. 4.10.1957.
4. M.C.C. 4.10.1957.
5. M.C.C. 21.10.1960.

agreement with the Labour Group about appointments to the Aldermanic bench and to the Mayoralty. They wanted seats for the former to be allocated in proportion to the number of Councillors possessed by each party[1]. and for the latter they wished it to be granted to each party on a rota basis.[2] On many occasions the Caucus thought that agreement had been reached with the Labour Group, but when the time came for an appointment to be made they found that the Labour Group would not be bound by an agreement.[3] Labour's stalling tactics[4] succeeded in confusing the Conservatives, for the Conservatives at one point were convinced that an agreement had been made, only to be disillusioned when the Labour Group would not convert a verbal agreement, a "gentleman's agreement",[5] into writing.[6] The Conservative minutes show that the Labour leaders had said that they wanted an agreement to settle these disturbing quarrels but that they found it difficult to

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1. M.C.C. 24.7.1953, 14.6.1954.
2. M.C.C. 14.6.1954, 24.2.1956.
3. M.C.C. 19.4.1954, 22.2.1957, 22.3.1957.
4. See above Chapter 7.
5. M.C.C. 28.2.1955.
6. M.C.C. 24.6.1955.

carry their rank and file with them on this issue. Thus they could only deal with each occasion as it arose.[1.]

When the Labour Group did allow the Conservative Caucus to appoint a Mayor or an Alderman, it was the Caucus who decided who exactly was to fill the vacancy. The choice was made on the basis of seniority. In 1958 the Caucus was deeply divided over the Mayoralty. They had not been allowed to nominate to it since 1952 and demand for the position was intense. 2 claimants arose, J. C. Homer who had joined the Council in January 1944 and A. H. Windridge who had come in July 1944. Homer was backed by the older Ratepayer and Independent groups while Windridge was supported by the younger more party oriented Councillors. Windridge gained a slight majority in the Caucus meeting,[2.] but this vote was not final since the Conservatives at this time still chose their Mayor through the Council's Mayoral Committee, composed of ex-Mayors. On this committee the Labour members stayed silent while the Conservatives proposed Homer. At the full Council meeting his name was put forward; the Conservatives again split but after

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1. M.C.C. 22.3.1957.
2. M.C.C. 14.2.1958, 21.2.1958, 21.3.1958.

a 75 minute session decided to accept Homer.[1] After this episode the Caucus decided that in future the Caucus would choose the Conservative Mayors, and not the Mayoral Committee.[2] Thus the Conservatives have followed the Labour Group's practice, and have not allowed their representatives on the Mayoral Committee to disregard Caucus decisions.

The Caucus has been concerned about the allocation of Chairmanships. In 1955 it protested against the Labour Group taking all the Chairmanships and claimed that they should be shared amongst the best qualified in the whole Council.[3] When the Labour Group paid no attention to these complaints the Caucus declined to accept any Vice-Chairmanships or Chairmanships of Sub-Committees.[4] Although the Conservatives have made no pronouncement on this subject since 1955 it is likely that if they were to get a majority, they would take all the Chairmanships without offering any to Labour, since each committee has its Shadow Chairman. In any case the Labour Group would not accept any if offered by the Conservatives, as in 1949.

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1. E. & S. 14.3.1958, 13.3.1958. Interview with A. Byrne-Quinn. Chairman of the Mayoral Committee.
2. M.C.C. 24.2.1961.
3. M.C.C. 24.6.1955.
4. M.C.C. 23.5.1955.

The Caucus has also been keen to ensure that its representation on committees was in proportion to its strength on the Council. After every election or by-election which has produced a change in favour of the Conservatives, they have pressed for extra representation on committees.[1.] The method of allocation to committees is similar to that used in the Labour Group.[2.] Members inform the Secretary of their preferences. He produces a draft scheme and then has talks with the Secretary of the Labour Group. It is made clear to Caucus members that the Labour Party really decide; their own people have "not the final word in this matter."[3.] Contacts between the 2 leaderships are frequent. They could be called the "usual channels," and are not merely for discussing the composition of committees but for all aspects of policy.[4.]

The Town Clerk has said that he can detect no difference in the way the 2 parties operate. Their group systems seem to be the same and the effect on the behaviour of the Councillors is similar; they vote

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1. M.C.C. 13.5.1960, 16.5.1961.
2. Interview with E. Y. Fullwood.
3. M.C.C. 27.4.1954.
4. Interviews with F. Mansell, F. S. Smith and E. Y. Fullwood.

solidly as party blocks and speak along the same lines.[1.] But the Conservatives claim that on one matter at least they do differ radically from the Labour Group and that is over discipline. Their Caucus they say is a "free and easy" meeting,[2.] with little or no discipline. No one is reported to the Caucus for voting against a Caucus decision; no one is "put on the mat"[3.] or "drummed out of the Brownies"[4.] for disobedience. Conservatives, it is said, have their own minds; if they disagree and vote against their colleagues nothing happens.[5.] The Terms of Reference of the Caucus state that "any member conscientiously feeling he wishes to vote against a Group decision may do so; but should, if possible, by courtesy previously inform any member specifically concerned or the Chairman of the Group, of his intentions."[6.] But the Terms later state that "where the control of the Council by the Conservative Group is in jeopardy, the majority decision of the Group concerning Aldermanic Elections etc. shall be final."[7.]

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1. Interview with K. J. Meddings.
2. Interview with S. Brindley.
3. Interview with J. Cahill.
4. Interview with D. H. Haselock.
5. Interview with J. C. Homer.
6. Clause 6(a).
7. Clause 6(b).

The minutes show no evidence of anyone being disciplined for voting against a Caucus decision, unlike the minutes of the Labour Group. In fact few have voted or spoken against a Caucus decision in the 1950s, except for a few of the old Ratepayer and Independent types over, for example, the boundary extensions,[1] and future of the sewage farm.[2] Indeed so united is the Caucus that in October 1961 it discussed devices to create an artificial division in the Caucus to show the public that it was not a monolithic block and that it did allow its members to vote as they liked without any action being taken against them.[3]

The minutes do reveal however in the way Caucus decisions are recorded that it is expected that members will abide by the decisions. The minutes have stated that all members would "vote solidly against;"[4] "no member of the Caucus would take part in any debate on the subject;"[5] "in future all members of the Group would vote in Committee and in the Council Chamber in favour of all contracts going out to tender."[6] And

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1. C.M. 23.3.1959.
2. Council meeting attended by the author.
3. Caucus meeting attended by the author, 20.10.1961.
4. M.C.C. 25.1.1957, 23.10.1959.
5. M.C.C. 22.3.1957.
6. M.C.C. 22.11.1957.

like the Labour Whip, the Secretary was asked to inform absent members of Caucus decisions.[1] The implication of this form of wording is that a Caucus decision was binding. Indeed, although there is no formal and official discipline imposed, many Conservative and Independent Councillors and ex-Councillors have said that "they get back at you in other ways."[2] J. Ireland, a former Ratepayer Councillor, explained that the Conservative Association would threaten to refuse to help a candidate with election expenses, not to nominate him as official candidate and to run an official candidate against him.[3] In 1949 Sir C. A. Mander, Chairman of Finance Committee and President of the South West Wolverhampton Conservative Association, praised the work of the Direct Labour Building Department of the Corporation, which had been established by the Labour Group in 1947 in the face of fierce Conservative opposition.[4] The Caucus was angry at Mander. W. J. Rawlins was delegated to tell him that he had "embarrassed" the Caucus.[5] The Conservative Association

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1. M.C.C. 22.11.1957.
2. Interview with W. H. Farmer.
3. Interview with J. Ireland. This was the fate suffered by the Ratepayer candidates of Penn Ward.
4. E. & S. 10.5.1949. He called it "one of the show departments not only in this town but in the country."
5. Interview with W. J. Rawlins. Minutes of the South West Wolverhampton Conservative Association. 13.5.1949. 16.5.1949.

was angry too and as a result of their hostility Mander resigned as President.[1] Many Conservatives felt he had become too soft and mellow.[2]

Other Councillors have told of the "moral pressure" to comply with a Caucus decision;[3] how colleagues would cold-shoulder someone who had let the team down.[4] D. H. Haselock said that when he did disagree with a Caucus decision he found it convenient to be absent from the Council meeting when the matter arose. Such occasions are rare; for most of the time the Caucus is united; as an ex-Councillor said of his time on the Council "I found complete unity within the party's Council group, and I know this unity still prevails."[5]

Another difference between the Conservative and Labour Groups lies in their relations to the outside party organisations. The basic unit of the Conservative Association is the ward association, or branch of the Constituency Association. To this body the individual pays his dues. There are no affiliated organisations. Membership is on an individual basis. The branches,

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1. ibid. 11.5.1949.
2. Interview with J. Ireland.
3. Interview with D. H. Haselock.
4. Interview with A. E. Lacon.
5. W.C. 18.4.1957.

together with the various organisations of the Association like the Young Conservatives, the Womens Section and the Conservative Clubs send representatives to an Executive Council, akin to the Labour Party's General Management Committee, which elects a Management Committee, akin to the Labour Party's Executive Committee. However the Conservative's Executive Council does not meet as frequently as Labour's General Management Committee, since it allows its Management Committee more scope than is given to Labour's Executive Committee. This constituency organisation and the Council Caucus is the total of the Conservative organisation. It has nothing to correspond with Labour's Borough Party, whose responsibility is municipal affairs only. This body in practice consists of members of both the General Management Committees. It draws up the panel of candidates and discusses Council policy; although it cannot instruct the Group, 3 of its members sit with the Group with the right to speak but not to vote. In the Conservative Organisation there is no Borough Party, breathing down the necks of the Councillors, as it were. The ward branch selects its own candidates, subject to the approval of the Executive

Council which has always been automatic.[1] In practice members of the Caucus, who are the leading figures in their ward branches, recommend to their branches suitable candidates. The 1954 review of party organisation said that the Caucus should "do all in its power to assist the Associations to find candidates." Thus the Conservative Caucus has a role which the Labour Group does not fulfil. Also the Conservative Caucus has discussed electoral plans, how to organise the campaign and which wards to contest;[2] in the Labour Party this is the function of the Borough Party. The Labour constituency Associations are not responsible for any aspect of municipal activity as the Conservatives' are. In practice however since the Borough Party consists of the same people as man the constituency organisation, it comes to the same thing in the end. But since the Conservatives have no Borough Party, liaison between the

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1. In 1950 when the fight with the Ratepayers was taking place, the Executive Council resolved "The right of each ward branch to elect its prospective candidate is indisputable and must remain intact." It said that the names should be submitted to the Executive Council so that it could express its views but, "whatever the conclusion of the Executive Council it is repeated that ward branches are entirely at liberty eventually to elect the candidate of their own choice." Minutes of the Executive Council of the South West Wolverhampton Conservative Association, 22.2.1950.

2. e.g. the 1954 review and 10.3.1961.

Caucus and the constituency associations is maintained by having the agents and the Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of the Associations present at Caucus meetings, able to speak but not to vote; and in both parties liaison is further strengthened by the interlocking membership of the various organisations. The leading Councillors are prominent at the ward, the constituency and the borough levels.

There is no evidence that any party has received instructions from its Head Office as to what municipal policy to pursue. Neither Transport House nor Central Office presumes to direct the Council Groups, although they do send a constant stream of advisory leaflets, for example giving details of recent legislation. The Labour Group has adopted the model standing orders for Labour Groups as recommended by the party: while the Conservative Caucus has devised its own Terms of Reference without any guidance from above.[1.] Indeed the Conservatives have no model orders for Groups. The result of this lack of national direction of the Groups is that the fears that the involvement of party in local government would cause national issues to take precedence over local issues have not materialised. Indeed since

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1. M.C.C. 22.5.1959, 3.6.1959, 20.5.1960.

1945 only in 1957 have detailed accusations been made that the Council chamber was being used for national and not local objectives. In January 1957 the Labour Group attacked the Government's Rent Bill as a "barefaced act of exploitation", "hitting hard at the low paid workers, pensioners and those about to be evicted," and requested its withdrawal. The Conservative leader stated that "it was the considered opinion of his fellow members that it was not an appropriate subject for discussion by the Council; the resolution being a matter purely of national party policy."[1]. In March 1957 the Labour Group protested against the decision to increase the price of school meals by 2d. per day. The Conservative leader again deplored that "a matter of purely national policy" had been brought to the Council. His colleagues "refused to enter into discussion. They were there to administer the affairs of the town."[2]. The same charge has been made whenever the Labour Group has criticised the high interest rates for borrowing money.[3]. But for these events, the charge has not been made. Both local Council Groups concentrate on local matters.

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1. E. & S. 28.1.1957. C.M. 28.1.1957.
2. E. & S. 25.3.1957. C.M. 25.3.1957.
3. e.g. E. & S. 27.9.1955. C.M. 26.9.1955.

The Council has become like the House of Commons; a Governing party with a majority is faced by an Opposition with a minority. The fact of being in office and of being close to office has caused both of them to adopt a similar system.

In the 1920s, the then Town Clerk has claimed, if Bantock and Myatt were in agreement over a matter, it would get through the Council. In the 1950s the present Town Clerk has presented a different picture. Neither of the party leaders was strong enough to commit his followers to a line of action without consulting them. Neither could rely on the loyalty of his followers. Even if the 2 leaders agreed privately there was no guarantee that they could carry their colleagues with them. Thus the Group system has made the Council more democratic; the decision-making process has not been limited to a knot of key leaders.