



Gerry Fitt and the SDLP: 'In a minority of one'

Sarah Campbell

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Gerry Fitt was a key political figure in Northern Ireland for over twenty years, yet there is no major historical evaluation of his contribution, nor of his legacy or place in the memory of the minority community there. Drawing on unpublished party and private papers, recently released Irish and British government papers, and interviews, this book is the first academic study of the role of Gerry Fitt in the politics of the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) and will examine the first decade of the party through the lens of his leadership.

Fitt was a driving force behind the original vision of the party and played a central role in creating the identity of the SDLP as a 'radical socialist party' which provided a 'new' style of nationalism, by prioritising socio-economic issues over the constitutional question. Yet, Fitt noted that he was often in an 'unhappy minority of one' over many issues and at times the relationship between himself and his party colleagues was 'very uneasy'. This book, therefore, sheds new light on the formation of the SDLP, examining the reasons and processes through which the party was formed and the often conflicting policies and sense of political identity that the party portrayed throughout the 1970s. Contrary to the official narrative of the party, this book presents an alternative and more nuanced view of the machinations which moulded party policy in its first decade.

Gerry Fitt and the SDLP is essential reading for students and scholars of modern Irish and British politics and the Northern Ireland conflict. It will also appeal to those interested in conflict resolution in divided societies.

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