

## PRESS CUTTING

# Scots Tory donors reject Davidson

Supporter says party backers will not pay out under an inexperienced new leader, writes Lorraine Davidson

THE Scottish Conservative party has lost out on hundreds of thousands of pounds in funding from wealthy backers, said a well-known Tory donor, after the recent bitter leadership contest was won by the newcomer Ruth Davidson.

Several millionaire donors have decided not to bankroll the party in protest over last week's appointment of Davidson. John McGlynn, the car park magnate, said he was no longer prepared to hand over £100,000 to the party and that he was disillusioned with the direction it had taken.

He claims other Tory donors – naming Alister Jack, a self-storage entrepreneur, and Robert Kilgour, an investor and developer, who had pledged that they would make similar donations if Murdo Fraser, the previous deputy leader and Davidson's rival, had been chosen – were also taking stock in light of the party's new leadership at Holyrood.

"I am no fan of Ruth Davidson or what she represents," said McGlynn. "The handling of the reshuffle was shambolic and her appearance at first minister's questions was cringeworthy beyond belief."

"I promised Murdo I would donate £100,000 but I will not be writing a cheque any time soon. Alister Jack and Robert Kilgour are also people who could write cheques for £100,000 in the blink of an eye, but like me they are sitting on their hands to see what happens."

Davidson, now 33, is Britain's youngest party leader. She claims she can reconnect the party with voters in Scotland. However, prominent funders claim that, despite her fresh-faced image, she has failed to set out a convincing plan for reviving the fortunes of the Conservatives in Scotland.

McGlynn is one of the party's biggest individual backers, having given donations total-

ling £100,000 over the past three years. "I don't see any sign of a dynamic new approach," said McGlynn. "I see politics the way I see business and there is nothing I want to buy into."

"The big difference with Murdo and Jackson [Carlaw] is that they have experience. You wouldn't take a teller with HSBC from behind the counter and make them the chairman of the bank, no matter how many degrees they might have," said McGlynn.

It is estimated that the Scottish Tories require £20,000 each month to pay staff salaries. They were forced to make their director of strategy redundant last year after failing to attract funding to retain the post. Davidson's supporters point out that she has retained the backing of the party's top fundraiser in Scotland, Sir Jack Harvie, who runs the Focus on Scotland dinners.

However, a source said: "The dinners are only successful because business people such as John McGlynn and Alister Jack donate money to them. We can't afford to lose people like them."

The withdrawal of funding pledges comes at the end of a difficult first week for the new Tory leader, who beat rivals

Fraser, Carlaw and Margaret Mitchell to the party's top job. Several MSPs, including Fraser, rejected offers of shadow cabinet positions, undermining Davidson's authority as leader.

Last week, Davidson's supporters said that there was anger over what they regarded as attempts by rivals to undermine her leadership. They were furious at the lack of discipline that they claim has been shown by MSPs since she was appointed.

Details of refusals as Davidson tried to reshuffle the Holyrood team were widely leaked. One ally said: "Not content with trying to blow the party up from the outside, Murdo Fraser and his supporters appear to be intent on trying to sabotage it from the inside."

The comments underline the tensions that have developed within the party after the bitter leadership contest.

However, a senior Holyrood source said that Conservative MSPs realised that the animosity was harming the party and they now wanted to draw a line under the divisions created by the contest.

"At the end of the day it is about the cause and there is still more which unites them than divides them."