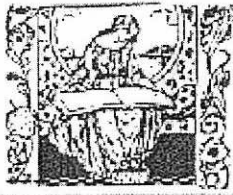


Labour Heritage



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BULLETIN AUTUMN 2004

Labour's True Centenary: 2006

On Tuesday 27 February 1900, at 12 noon, the founding conference of what became the Labour Representation Committee (LRC) opened in the Memorial Hall in London's Farringdon Street. However it was not until 1906 – and the first gathering after the general election which returned 29 Labour MPs – that the PLP was formed, and then, at the 1906 Party Conference, the name "Labour Party" adopted in place of Labour Representation Committee.

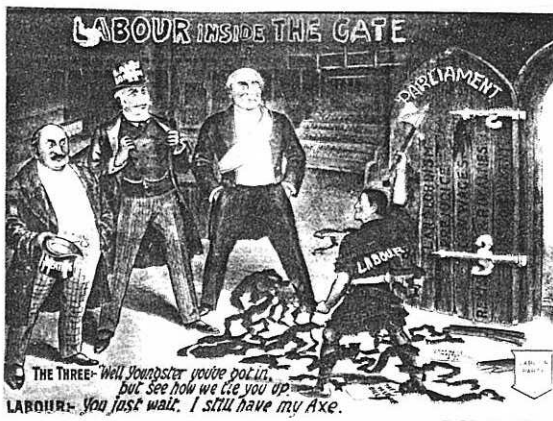
Not only was the 1906 result a great success for the fledgling party (which had but 4 MPs before), but it also represented the start of the system of campaigning we know today. 50 candidates had been officially nominated and approved by the LRC, and (unlike in the 1900 election), they had been officially promoted by affiliated organisations and selected within their constituencies. Labour's 1906 total poll, of 323,195, averaged 37% of the vote in the contested seats.

The 29 men (women had yet to join them on the green benches) represented the great trades of Scotland, Wales and England: mining, iron, steel, printing, textiles and transport. Their first task was to elect a Leader (Keir Hardie), with Ramsay MacDonald MP as the secretary of the party. The manifesto they had fought highlighted the plight of "the aged poor", slums, "underfed schoolchildren" and the second meeting of the PLP (on 13 February 1906) agreed to promote bills on a range of subjects including: Women's Suffrage, Unemployment, Mines, Taxation of Land Values, Child feeding, Old Age Pensions and a Shops Bill.

It is now time to celebrate these 1906 pioneers, but also to save, document and exhibit our history from those days. With the blessing of the Labour Party's NEC, a group of historians, journalists, academics and activists are already planning how to commemorate this important anniversary, by seeking to engage the movement in understanding and discovering its own history. We are hoping to publish a commemorative book on the stories of the Labour pioneers and to stimulate displays – whether in libraries, schools or Labour Clubs. We want to support activities at a local level, including oral history projects, to preserve the memories of the past for the generations of the future.



So we now need your involvement to create a plethora of projects, from locating and saving archives (those minute books in someone's loft!), to interviewing key players with long memories, or researching local stories. We then want to see these written, exhibited or posted on a web-site for others to enjoy. Local (amateur or professional) archaeologists, historians or archivists might like to track down the history of their CLP, branch, Labour Hall or personalities. Or look at the party's changing membership over time, and how it reflected the community's shifting employment, travel and demographic patterns. A record of trade union affiliations over the years would tell a lot about the rise and fall of different industries. Look around you for good stories and identify some enthusiasts with time to spare and a passion for old photos, record or oral history.



We had a very good Fringe Meeting at Conference this year. Our two speakers were Alan Howarth (current secretary of the PLP) and NEC member Tony Robinson. Both were excellent and the large audience was very enthusiastic.

If you would like to get involved in the 2006 project, please contact

me c/o Labour Party, 16 Old Queen Street, London SW1H 9HP.

Dianne Hayter
Member of Labour's NEC
and Chair of the 2006 Group

From "Labour's early days" by John Shepherd (a former National Agent)

"It was at this Conference (1906) also that a decision was taken to drop the name 'Labour Representation Committee' and to adopt the name 'Labour Party'. Many socialists have, during the years, challenged the use of the latter name, preferring as they have professed, the name Socialist Party. Wisdom however, has quite frequently come to the aid of the political workers' movement in moments of doubt and the title 'Labour Party' has been retained without difficulty.

No better title could have been chosen to convey to the working classes a sense of their ownership of a political party. A working man may be a Conservative, a Liberal or a Socialist, but he will always look upon those words as something additional, as something that can be discarded at will. But to be a Labour man is another matter altogether. A working man is a Labour man inevitably, and he naturally belongs to the Labour Party. He may disagree with its policy at times, but he is not tempted to leave the Party because he is a vital part of its organisation".

Copies of "Labour's early days" by Lord Shepherd (£3) and also