



Labour Heritage

Bulletin Spring 2005

Conference on Labour history in Essex

The third conference on labour history in Essex, organized jointly by Labour Heritage and the Essex County Labour Party took place on Saturday 23rd October 2004, at Witham Labour Hall. It was chaired by John Kotz and attended by over 50 people.

Labour on Essex County Council

In the morning the first speaker was John Gyford, himself a former Essex county councillor, who spoke on the Labour representation on the Essex County Council.

The Essex County Council was set up in 1889 and covered the whole geographical area of Essex, including the south-west metropolitan area, now the boroughs of Newham, Waltham Foerst, Redbridge, Havering and Barking. In 1965 these boroughs left the Essex county council and became part of greater London, changing the whole character of representation in Essex. Most of Essex remained largely rural. Initially the county council had responsibility for road and bridge maintenance and planning, infectious diseases, etc. but later took over education, social services and libraries.

John's talk focused on Labour representation between 1930 and 1965. It was based on the records of the Federation of Essex Labour Parties, which were included in the papers of a former chairman, the late Kenneth Cuthbe, now donated to the Essex Record Office. In 1919 the first Labour candidates agreed a programme for the county council. This was essentially based on the policies of the agricultural workers union and included the abolition of tied cottages and payment of county councilors. It was difficult for workers to stand for the position of councilor as all meetings took place during the day. Leisured volunteers were called for ! The first Labour candidates included a solicitor, a Methodist clergyman and a cinema owner. In 1919 the candidate for Ilford South, was the only one to win, but during the 1920s some of the future key players such as Perry Astins and Joseph Hewitt were elected to the council. Some of the councillors were working men, such as an engine driver and they faced severe problems to do with time and transport within the county. Councillors ended up using all their holiday entitlement on meetings and had to have a sympathetic employer. Perry Astins, for instance, was a full time general secretary for one of the small print unions. It was accepted that some councillors would only be able to attend the four quarterly meetings of the

LABOUR AT COUNTY HALL 1930-1965



Percy Astins Trade Union Secretary
 County Councillor (Walthamstow) 1925-1937
 County Alderman 1937-1955
 Chairman of General Purposes Committee 1944-1946
 Vice-Chairman of the Council 1944-1946
 Chairman of the Council 1946-April 1948 and October 1948-1949
 Secretary of the Labour Group 1931-1943



William Bennett Railway Clerk
 County Councillor (Tilbury) 1934-1937 and (Becontree) 1937-1946
 County Alderman 1946-1970
 Vice-Chairman of the Council 1948-1949 and 1960-1961
 Chairman of the Council 1952-1955 and 1958-1960
 Chief Whip of the Labour Group 1946-1948
 Deputy Leader of the Labour Group 1955-1958 and 1961-1967
 Leader of the Labour Group 1948-1952 and 1960-1961



Joseph Hewett Headmaster
 County Councillor (Loughton) 1925-1938
 County Alderman 1938-1948
 Vice-Chairman of the Council 1946-1948
 Chairman of the Council April-September 1948
 Leader of the Labour Group 1937-1948



Charles Leatherland Journalist
 County Alderman 1946-1948
 Chairman of Finance Committee 1952-1955 and 1958-1960
 Vice-Chairman of the Council 1952-1955 and 1958-1960
 Chairman of the Council 1960-1961
 Chief Whip of the Labour Group 1948-1952
 Leader of the Labour Group 1952-1960 and 1961-1968
 Vice-Chairman of Essex Federation of Labour Parties 1947-1949
 Chairman of Essex Federation of Labour Parties 1949-1965