



Labour Heritage

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Morgan Jones and the First World War

Morgan Jones was born on 3 May, 1885 in the village of Gelligaer at the foot of Gelligaer mountain. His birthplace was the small Rhos Cottages, close to the ancient parish church of St Catwg. The cottages were to remain his boyhood home.

Morgan Jones' father, Elias Jones, was a local collier, born in the hamlet of Llanwonno, near Mountain Ash. He was known for his sobriety, his dependability and his hard work. His mother, Sarah Ann, originally from the village of Llanfabon, was a strong and formidable woman with an earthy sense of humour and bright blue eyes. It is said that Sarah Ann had worked as a young woman in Llancaiach Fawr, the local Tudor manor house. What is certainly true is that she had a far from easy life at her own home, tending livestock as well as carrying out her other domestic chores.

In the Jones household, Welsh was the language of the hearth, liberalism was its politics and Protestant non-conformity, of the Baptist variety, was

its religion. Sarah Ann was especially devout and helped imbue in the young Morgan a strong religious belief. Indeed, of the seven children – two girls and five boys – it was Morgan who became the main focus of her attention and her encouragement. She recognised that of all the children it was Morgan who had the greatest ability and potential.

After attending Gelligaer and Hengoed Elementary Schools, Morgan won a scholarship to Lewis School, Pengam. He matriculated from Lewis School in 1901 and began training as a pupil teacher in Gilfach Boys' School, Bargoed. From there he gained admission to Reading University and studied 'Education and the Arts'.

In 1907, Morgan returned to the Rhymney Valley. He went back to Gilfach Boys' School as a teacher and continued the lay preaching which he had begun as a student in Reading. But if Morgan's religious non-conformity had been reinforced by his university experience, his politics had now firmly moved to the left. In 1908 Morgan joined the Independent Labour Party (ILP) and helped establish the Rhymney Valley's first branch.

In South Wales the political dominance of the Liberal Party and its working class offshoot, Lib-Labism, was now under threat from a new radicalism which was sweeping the South Wales coalfield. It was the ILP which was at

the forefront of the challenge.

Municipal socialism

In March 1911, Morgan Jones threw his hat into the political ring and stood for election to Gelligaer Urban District Council (UDC), describing himself as a 'socialist'. With a majority of only 11 votes Morgan Jones was elected and soon proved to be an effective and committed councillor, making housing his pre-occupation. In fact, due largely to Morgan Jones' efforts, Gelligaer UDC became one of the most forward looking local authorities in South Wales, building quality council houses throughout its area, but especially in Bargoed.

On Gelligaer UDC Morgan Jones put municipal socialism into practice. His democratic socialism was firmly based on a materialist analysis of capitalism, combined with a strong sense of moral purpose, which drew much from his religious nonconformity. In essence, Morgan Jones was a Christian socialist.

Equally central to his beliefs was his conviction that nations and peoples ought to live in harmony with each other, respecting difference and celebrating diversity. For Morgan Jones it followed that international disputes must always be solved through diplomacy and dialogue rather than through armed conflict. As a pacifist he believed that warfare could never be justified.

World War 1

When Britain entered the First World War in August 1914 Morgan Jones was in no doubt that this was a conflict which was wrong. Like many in the ILP, Morgan Jones believed that war generally, and this war in particular, could not be justified. True to his convictions, he argued that the disputes between the European powers should

be resolved through discussion without resorting to arms. From the beginning of the war Morgan Jones therefore linked up with the likes of Bertrand Russell and Fenner Brockway, and when the No Conscription Fellowship (NCF) was formed in late 1914 Morgan Jones was appointed to its National Committee. He later became Chairman of the South Wales Anti-Conscription Council.

During the first half of the war, until 1916, the army consisted entirely of volunteers. The country was awash with jingoism and the leadership of the South Wales Miners' Federation (SWMF) was amongst the most enthusiastic for the war effort. In Bargoed Labour Exchange alone there were 1,315 recruits in the first three months of the war. In such a climate, by opposing the war, Morgan Jones was seen by many as nothing less than a traitor.

By the end of 1915 there had been half a million British casualties and the horrors of the war were becoming increasingly clear. With the declining number of volunteers the Government felt that it had to introduce conscription to maintain the war effort. Accordingly, in January 1916 the Government introduced the Military Service Act. This meant that all unmarried adult men up to the age of 41 were regarded as being enlisted in the armed forces, even if they had not received their call-up papers, and therefore subject to military law. In May 1916 the measures were extended to cover married men as well.

Tribunals

A hierarchy of Tribunals was set up to decide if an individual who was a conscientious objector to the war could be given 'alternative' employment or if they should be given a custodial sentence if they refused. Gelligaer

UDC was informed by the Government in January 1916 that it would be expected to convene a local Tribunal. At roughly the same time Morgan Jones received his call-up papers. It soon became clear that the Council Tribunal would be expected to consider the case of one of its own members.

At a full council meeting in February 1916, with Morgan Jones present, the Council voted by only ten votes to eight to uphold the law and give the Chairman and the Clerk powers to convene a special council meeting as necessary. A special meeting was in fact called soon after, but it was inquorate; it seems that the "Labour" councillors deliberately boycotted the meeting. But not to be thwarted, those councillors who did attend formed themselves into a 'committee', augmented by a local doctor and a Justice of the Peace, and this body became the local Tribunal.

Morgan Jones was summoned to appear before this Tribunal after he refused to respond to his call-up. As happened throughout the country, after the war the Government ordered that the records of the Tribunals be destroyed. This was the case with the Gelligaer Local Tribunal and explains the gap in the otherwise unbroken minutes of Gelligaer UDC in the Glamorgan Archives. However, the local press covered the meeting of the Tribunal at which Morgan Jones appeared and provided an account.

In a packed courtroom in Bargoed, Morgan Jones told the Tribunal that he was a "socialist" and was "resolutely opposed to all warfare". He went on to say that, in his view, the war was the product of "wrong-headed diplomacy". The local Tribunal came to the conclusion that Morgan Jones could be excluded from military service, but not from alternative service. Morgan Jones

was not prepared to accept this and therefore appealed to an Appeals Tribunal in Cardiff. His appeal was unsuccessful and on 29 May 1916 Morgan Jones was arrested at his parents' home in Bargoed.

At about 8:30am the local police inspector called and asked to see Morgan. According to Morgan, the police officer was "most courteous and polite" and made him feel "quite at home", although Morgan was concerned that his mother "was somewhat alarmed" when the police officer arrived. After being arrested, Morgan was taken to Bargoed Police Station and later that day the police raided the ILP offices in the town.

From Bargoed, Morgan was taken to Cardiff where he appeared before the Magistrates Court. He was fined 2/- and sentenced to four months imprisonment for refusing to obey military orders. He was taken to Cardiff Gaol.

At the same time as the police took action in South Wales, the leadership of the NCF was also the subject of a police crackdown in London. As Morgan Jones was waiting to be arrested in Bargoed, other members of the NCF National Committee were appearing before magistrates in the Mansion House in London. Eight members of the National Committee, including Morgan Jones in his absence, were found guilty of prejudicing recruitment by circulating a leaflet calling for the repeal of the Military Service Act. They were each fined £100, the maximum possible, plus £10 costs, and if they did not pay the fines they were each to face 61 days imprisonment.

A month later, the National Committee members appealed against the judgement and Morgan Jones was brought up to London from Cardiff

Gaol, escorted by two policemen. He appeared before the court with his fellow Committee members and although he “looked white and worn”, he presented his case and responded to the questions asked of him “with great spirit and determination”. Morgan Jones explained to the court that he had been kept in solitary confinement for three weeks, but despite the hardship he had faced he had “no doubt” about the stand he was taking.

As expected, the appeal was rejected and the convicted were given 14 days to pay their fines or face imprisonment. Most of them went to prison.

On the day after his arrest in Bargoed, as well as appearing before Cardiff Magistrates, Morgan Jones was also brought before Caerphilly Magistrates’ Court. Here, on 30 May 1916, he was found guilty of being an ‘absentee’, was fined £2 and it was decided that he would be placed in the hands of the military. He was kept in detention of one form or other until the end of 1917.

Prison

After Caerphilly Magistrates, Morgan Jones had to face a military court martial. Even though he had never served in the armed forces, under the Military Service Act he was found guilty of “desertion” and sentenced to a period of “sheer hard labour” with the military. He began his sentence at the Kinnel Park Army Camp in North Wales, but was then transferred to join other conscientious objectors in Wormwood Scrubs.

It is difficult to appreciate the hardship which Morgan Jones experienced while in prison. There were periods of solitary confinement and throughout Morgan survived on a poor diet and was the subject of constant personal abuse. Within a few months Morgan’s physical and mental health

deteriorated, and in November 1916 Morgan re-evaluated the nature of his conscientious objection. As a result, he no longer felt able to uphold the ‘maximalist’ position as an absolute conscientious objector and instead he became an ‘alternativist’. This meant that he was breaking ranks with the leadership of the NCF by being prepared to accept ‘work’ which did not involve bearing arms but which nevertheless could be seen by some as indirectly contributing to the war effort. Morgan’s view was that it was important to differentiate between armed conflict, which he remained opposed to, and the legitimate functioning of the state.

From his prison cell in Wormwood Scrubs and then from his room in the Home Office Work Centre at Warwick to which he was transferred, Morgan Jones made an effort to explain and rationalise the change in his position. During 1917 he engaged in correspondence with Mansell Grenfell from South Wales who remained a prisoner in Wormwood Scrubs, and before that Morgan corresponded with Clifford Allen, the Chairman of the NCF, who also remained in Wormwood Scrubs.

In an undated letter to Clifford Allen, which seems to have been written in late November 1916, Morgan Jones, however, did not make any real attempt to defend the alternativist position which he had adopted. He stated that “it would be pointless and profitless for me to enter a discussion of the ‘Alternativist and Absolutist’ business now. We will not emphasise differences. Let us rather emphasise agreements. And in one way at least we are certainly at one – to work together each in his own way to realise the Co-operative Commonwealth of the future”.

The letter to Clifford Allen also is

interesting because it explained that the experience of imprisonment had reinforced Morgan Jones' religious beliefs. "More and more," he wrote, "I am compelled to recognise and appreciate the value of individual character and the formative influence of religion".

The second reason why the letter is of interest is because it contains Morgan Jones' heartfelt concern about his family back in South Wales. One of his brothers had received his call-up papers and there was very real worry that because of his ill health he would "fail to survive the war". Another of Morgan Jones' brothers was also a conscientious objector and had been forced to leave his teaching post. Morgan Jones was always very close to his mother and he was extremely concerned that the pressures that his family were facing would "prove too much for her". A final worry for Morgan Jones was whether his engagement to his fiancée would last. In fact, it did not.

An earlier letter to Catherine Marshall, the Secretary of the NCF, written soon after Morgan Jones had been transferred to Warwick, shows even more clearly the psychological strain which Morgan had been subjected to in Wormwood Scrubs. In the letter he explained that "the effect of prison" had been to take away his ability to concentrate "upon any subject for any length of time". He said that his mind was in a "nebulous condition" and that sometimes he felt his scalp was "about to fly off".

In the Warwick Work Centre, Morgan's health continued to worsen and because of this, he was released at the end of 1917. But this did not mean the end of his agitational work and in April 1919 Morgan appeared before Bargoed Magistrates charged with desertion, even though the war had

ended some five months earlier. Even more bizarrely, he was charged with deserting from the Lancashire Fusiliers. It appears that after granting him bail at £10, the Magistrates handed him over to the military and the authorities contrived to keep him under lock and key for a further three months. This time he remained in detention until 2 August 1919.

Morgan Jones' conscientious objection to the war meant that after the conflict had ended he was prevented from returning to school teaching. Despite his ill health, he worked for a time as a labourer in a local colliery before becoming the ILP's Welsh Organiser and joining the National Council of the ILP. He remained a member of Gelligaer UDC throughout the war and following the Armistice, when he was able, he returned to his council work.

Labour support for Morgan

In March 1919, Morgan unsuccessfully stood for election to Glamorgan County Council when he contested the Bargoed ward. But in December 1919 he was elected in a by-election following the death of a councillor who was a local Congregational Minister. At the first meeting of the County Council after his election, Morgan Jones was collectively and individually snubbed with no welcome or congratulations being offered to him by the Chairman of the Council or any of his fellow councillors.

Morgan Jones had taken a principled stand against the First World War. He and his family suffered enormously and Morgan Jones himself was subjected to terrible ill-treatment while in prison. Indeed, the physical strain which those years imposed on him was to remain with Morgan throughout his life and almost certainly contributed to his premature death at the age of 53.

The huge trauma of the First World

War left a deep scar on the country, not least in South Wales. The heady jingoism of the first few months of the war steadily gave way to a sense of resignation as the death toll mounted. But this did not mean that the public hostility to Morgan Jones diminished. If anything it increased as the war dragged on. After the war there were inevitably raw emotions as so many had lost loved ones. Increasingly though, Morgan Jones' contemporaries came to question whether such a conflict had been necessary and what it had achieved.

In July 1921, Alfred Onions, the strongly pro-war Labour MP for Caerphilly, died after a period of illness. Against the backdrop of economic crisis, Morgan Jones won the support of the local miners, who rejected their leaders' advice, and secured the Labour nomination. The following month saw Morgan Jones win a stunning and overwhelming by-election victory, thereby becoming the first conscientious objector to be elected to Parliament.

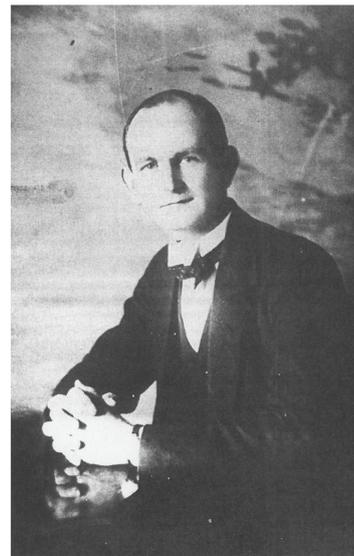
Morgan Jones had made a courageous stand against an appalling conflict. He did what he believed to be right. His election showed that even those who had bitterly disagreed with his stance at the time, nevertheless, were prepared to support him as a man of principle who was determined to help create a better world, free from war.

Note on Sources

Much of the information for this piece has been gleaned from newspapers. The *Caerphilly Journal* and the *Merthyr Express* have been particularly rich sources, complemented by the ILP paper *Labour Leader*. These have been especially important because of the destruction of the documentation from the Tribunals and Gelligaer UDC. John

Sheaff, the son-in-law of Morgan Jones, has written an admirable introduction to Morgan Jones' life and Dylan Rees wrote an outstanding article on Morgan Jones' contribution towards education in *Morgannwg* (Vol. 31, 1987), the *Journal of Glamorgan History*. Both have provided very useful background information. I have also been fortunate in the fact that correspondence from Morgan Jones has been reproduced in *Llafur – the Journal of the Society for the Study of Welsh Labour History* (Vol. 1, 1972 – 1975).

Wayne David (MP for Caerphilly)



Morgan Jones

West London Labour history day

A West London Labour history day was held in Ruskin Hall, Acton on Saturday 22nd February. There were three speakers, two of them on the two anniversaries of events from 1913 – the Dublin lock-out, and the death of Emily Wilding Davison, and the third on the stand of Labour leader Ramsay Macdonald in World War 1.

The Dublin lock-out of 1913 and its impact on the future of labour in Ireland

Ivan Gibbons (Head of Irish Studies, Twickenham College), spoke on the consequences of the Dublin lock-out of 1913, the greatest labour dispute that has ever taken place on these islands. He began by stating that by 1922 Labour was insignificant in the Irish Free State and suggested that the defeat of the lockout was a partial explanation.

There had been big changes in Ireland by the end of the nineteenth century. The Liberals and even the Conservatives in Britain had a policy of ‘killing Home Rule by kindness.’ The Protestant land seizures of the seventeenth century had largely been reversed. Most of the land was in the hands of Irish peasants. Local government in the South was mainly in the hands of the Catholic Nationalist middle class. They were the people who owned the housing stock in central Dublin described as “worse than Calcutta.”

William Martin Murphy was a representative of this class. He took on the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union, led by Jim Larkin, a revolutionary syndicalist. The Irish T & G had been busily organising the unskilled. 20,000 workers were locked

out in Dublin from August 1913 till January 1914.

Ivan saw 1913 in retrospect as “the beginning of a period of revolution”, culminating in independence for the South in 1922. He described the British trade union leaders as “aghast at the prospect of revolutionary syndicalism winning,” hence their lukewarm support. He pointed out that British workers such as dockers were insufficiently well organised at this time to black the supply of goods to Ireland.

After the defeat Larkin emigrated to the USA for 10 years. Connolly, according to Ivan, drew the conclusion that the national revolution was necessary first. He was executed after the failed Easter 1916 rising.

This left the Irish labour movement effectively leaderless. Moderate trade union leaders took over. The Irish Labour Party stood aside in the 1918 election, leaving the field to the Nationalists. At the end of the War there was a strike wave encompassing such areas as Cork and Limerick. In 1922 16 of the 17 candidates Labour stood were elected. It was too late. Fianna Fail stepped into the vacuum Labour had left.

Ivan concluded by partly blaming Larkin and Connolly for Labour’s lack of impact in the early years of the Free State. The latter had, in his view, “sacrificed socialism on the altar of Irish nationalism.”

It is certainly the case that Labour made little headway in the South after partition. For instance the Irish Free State was unable to provide the level of social spending promised by Lloyd George when Ireland was part of the UK. Expenditure on pensions was cut by from £3 million to £2.4 million – around 20% between 1924 and 1927.

Emily Wilding Davison

Phillipa Bilton is a cousin of Emily Wilding Davison (three generations down). She spoke at the Essex Labour history conference in October 2013, and again at our West London history day. Here is an edited version of her speech.



Emily was born on 11th October 1872 and was the third of four children that Charles Davison had with his second wife Margaret Caisley. Emily also had nine half brothers and sisters from her father's first marriage. She was born in Blackheath, London, though her parents were both from Morpeth in Northumberland and had moved down south shortly before Emily was born. Emily was known as a high spirited child and was a keen cyclist and swimmer. She was greatly interested in books and writing. She attended what is now known as Kensington Prep School and she won a place at Royal Holloway College to study English. She did eventually attend St Hugh's College in Oxford and gained a first class honour degree in language and

literature – though degrees were not conferred on women then!

Emily and her siblings were all brought up with a sense of social and political responsibility and that both needed reform. Mr Davison particularly encouraged Emily in her studies, which was quite unusual for the time, though women were making inroads in terms of science, maths and medicine.

After her education Emily, like most women of their class and education, went on to be a governess and taught in Birmingham, West Worthing and eventually ended up in London. Emily loved London and though she did spend time in Morpeth seeing her mother who ran a sweet shop in Long Horsley after Mr Davison died. I have heard a story that my great grandmother would meet Emily on the platform of the London to Edinburgh train for a quick catch up and then Emily would jump back on the train and continue her journey.

Emily was a great letter writer and part of the Bilton archive includes hundreds of postcards sent to my Great Grandmother from Emily asking for news and for her to write back.

Origins of the Women's Suffrage campaign

Throughout the 19th century many small groups of women suffrage had sprung up all over the country and indeed women had been lobbying parliament for the vote since the start of the 19th century and the first Parliamentary Reform Bill for women's suffrage was presented in parliament by Henry Hunt in 1832. So, over 60 years after that first reform bill was presented and rejected by the House of Commons, in 1897 about 20 of the women's suffrage groups from around the country came together to

form the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) and its Chair was Millicent Garret Fawcett. What they strived for was enfranchisement for women, but by peaceful means such as discussion and leaflet distribution about their cause. Emmeline Pankhurst was a member of the ILP and friends with Keir Hardy and it was her and her husband Richard who convinced him that women should have the vote on equal terms as men. By 1903 Emmeline was fed up with the lack of progress that the NUWSS were making and so in October that year with her daughters Christabel, Adela and Sylvia she set up the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU). It was a shilling to join and no-one was allowed to work or be associated with parliament until women got the vote.

The WSPU motto was "Deeds Not Words". This stands in direct opposition to a fraternal delegate's comments to Keir Hardie a year earlier. He was advising Hardie about his running of the ILP and explained that the American Federation of Labor used the motto "Reason, not Force" when setting up the labour movement in the USA.

Militancy began in Manchester on February 2nd 1904 at a Free Trade Hall meeting with a protest "of which nothing was heard and nothing remembered, because it didn't conclude with an imprisonment!" It was only after Christabel Pankhurst and Annie Kenney were arrested and imprisoned for not paying a fine that the WSPU were to get the public attention they wanted. This was a very shocking thing for people to stomach women, arrested and imprisoned. Who were these barbarians upsetting the equilibrium. Ladies did not behave in that way.

Emily Davison joins the WSPU

Emily Davison joined the WSPU in 1906. She had been attracted to the movement from hearing and reading reports about them in the press. She knew it was difficult to remain silent about her growing interest and she did not believe the negative reports surrounding the WSPU so curiously and to verify her instincts she started attending meetings. She soon discovered that the women were entirely misrepresented and her sense of justice and ardour grew quickly. Emily became a passionate member of the WSPU and became a chief steward at WSPU meetings. Branches sprung up all over the country and they organised rallies, picnics and meetings. One such huge rally was organised in Hyde Park in June 1908 and was attended by Mrs Thomas Hardy and Mrs HG Wells as well as the likes of Keir Hardie and George Bernard Shaw. 300,000 people were in attendance and given that there was no social media or mobile phones just shows how effective their organisational and communication skills were. Postcards were popular and in those days there was at least two or three postal deliveries a day.

Suffragette colours

In 1908 the WSPU adopted the colours green white and violet or purple some say to stand for give women votes. What is true is that green was for hope white for purity and purple for dignity. In 1909 Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Club decided to change its' colours from red, blue, green and yellow as they were too similar to the one used by The Royal Marines. They changed their colours to green, purple and a dash of white. It is no coincidence that Rose Lamartine Yates was head of the WSPU Wimbledon branch from 1908

– 1915 and was friends with members wives from the Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Committee. Wimbledon has always denied that the colours were a direct influence from these suffragette friendships, but you make of it what you will. These suffragettes were on numerous occasions two steps ahead of the establishment.

Hunger strikes and force feeding



Force feeding equipment

It was around this time that the women had started to hunger strike as a protest to imprisonment as common criminals and not as they saw themselves as political prisoners. Keir Hardie upheld in the press the WSPU tactics of demanding votes for women on the same terms as men, and he was appalled at the treatment of the women whilst in prison and with particular reference to force feeding. He had of course helped Emily Davison to get compensation from Strangeways prison after she had barricaded herself in the prison cell. The prison wardens had put a hose through the cell window and drenched her with water for a full

15 minutes. The public had agreed with Hardie on this occasion that the treatment was cruel and unbearable and Emily was paid 40 shillings in damages.

Force feeding began as a way to stop any of the suffragettes who went on hunger strike whilst in prison, from becoming martyred if they should die of starvation. Emily was force fed 49 times in total and it certainly affected her health and she sacrificed two teeth to the brutal act. You can see in photographs of an older Emily that her mouth droops down and looks slightly crooked and that is thanks to the force feeding.

Force feeding eventually stopped in 1912 and Reginald McKenna, then Home Secretary introduced the Cat and Mouse Act which allowed the weakened hunger strikers to be released from prison to recover only to be re-arrested once they were stronger. Emmeline Pankhurst was arrested under Cat and Mouse on the day of Emily's funeral procession.

Between July 1910 and October 1912 Emily was a prolific public speaker at many rallies and gatherings and they included Hyde Park, Morpeth, Marketplace, Gray's Inn Road, Sloane Square, Newcastle Bigg market, Wembley, Jarrow Mechanic Institute, Edward Hall Sunderland, Wimbledon Common and Regent's Park to name a few. So it is clear that Emily was becoming a quite established orator. And whilst speaking, protesting, engaging in acts of militancy and serving time in prison, Emily also embarked on a programme of letter writing to the editors of over twenty five journals and newspapers during the years 1911 – 1913. Many of these letters have been published in *In the thick of the fight* edited by Carolyn Collette.

It is hardly surprising then that the suffragettes became extremely good at

courting publicity. Newspapers wanted to sell papers and, even if the news was biased against the suffragettes, the pictures and stories of the women with their banners and flags, protests and speeches all added fuel to the publicity machine and more importantly helped with circulation.

Derby Day at Epsom, June 1913

Emily was aware of this, on the biggest racing event of the year the Derby Day at Epsom in 1913. She had bought a return ticket and was with other suffragettes that day. They were attending a party later on that day and a week after the Derby Emily was to visit her sister Leticia in France. At 3pm Emily was positioned at Tattenham Corner opposite all the Pathe newsreels and patiently waited for the horses to round the corner. She calmly stepped out onto the race track and let a couple of horses pass her by, she was waiting for the King's horse Amner. As it approached she reached up for the bridle to attach a suffragette banner to the horse so that as it crossed the finish line it would be displaying the suffragette colours (there had been talk before from some activists that they might exercise their right to petition the king).

Unfortunately Emily totally underestimated the speed and power of the horses and tragically she was knocked down and on 8th June died from her injuries at Epsom Cottage Hospital never regaining consciousness. On her bedside was an unopened letter from her anxious mother and another from an Englishman that was hate mail.

A poem written by Emily was published in the Suffragette newspaper on June 20th 1913. It was called *London*.

“Oh, London! How I feel thy magic spell.

Now I have left thee, and amid the woods

Sit lonely. Here I know I love thee well,

Conscious of all the glamour of thy moods.

But it is otherwise amid thy bounds!

Thou art an ocean of humanity!

Embarked on which I lose my soul in sounds

*That thunder in mine ear. The vanity
And ceaseless struggle stifle doubt and fear,*

Until I cry, bemused by the strife,

“the centre of the universe is here!

This is the hub, the very fount of life.”

Over the passage of time the suffragette causes, and the urgency for what they fought for, have faded. What we must remember is that Emily Davison and others weren't just fighting for the vote – that was just the beginning – they wanted economic justice, women's freedom to choose their partners, to define their lives for themselves and for the soul of society, cross the country across the world, equality and human rights. Emily believed that expanding civil rights was not a zero sum game but would multiply prosperity.

Let us not forget that the suffragettes were on the front line and were marginalised by the very powers that were there to protect and were denied all of their basic human rights in the process. On the front of Emily's funeral order of service was the famous quote - “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend.”

Ramsay MacDonald and the First World War

The third speaker was John Grigg on Ramsay MacDonald and World War 1. Ramsay MacDonald had been leader of the Labour Party since 1911, when the First World War broke out. In 1899 he had opposed the Boer War which he saw as a war in the interests of imperialism. After the Boer War was over he and his wife visited South Africa and what he saw instilled in him an emotional abhorrence for war that must have affected his decision in 1914 to oppose the war with Germany. He had taken a keen interest in foreign politics since the 1890s and had contacts with foreign socialists, notably with the German Social Democrats. He bitterly opposed the British Government's friendship with Tsarist Russia and in 1908 spoke at a great demonstration in Trafalgar Square against the Tsar's visit to England.



Ramsay MacDonald

He believed the key to keep the peace was held by the German Social Democrats who were the chief enemies of Prussian militarism. He believed

British foreign policy should be to cultivate the friendship of the peace party advocates in Germany. He thought the German Social Democratic Party (SDP) which had over 100 members in the Reichstag was the nucleus of a peace movement in Europe.

He favoured a general strike in the event of war breaking out, but this was not favoured by the trade unions and was a cause of controversy between the Independent Labour Party (ILP) and trades union members on the Labour Party National Executive Committee (NEC).

His deepest misgivings were aroused by the government's policy towards Germany, which, in his view hampered efforts of the SDP to establish friendliness between the two nations. He regarded Lloyd George and Winston Churchill as anti-German and that building more warships to keep ahead of Germany would end with the folly of war. He accused Churchill of treating Britain's fighting services as hobbies!

War breaks out

When war broke out MacDonald did not see it as a plot hatched in Berlin, but as the culmination of provocation and counter-provocation for which Britain and Germany were equally to blame, and against which he and his comrades on the continent had warned in vain. The cabinet was split and British public opinion hesitated. It was Germany's invasion of Belgium that swung British sentiment. Belgium neutrality had been guaranteed by Britain and by Germany, and reports of German treachery and atrocities, greatly exaggerated, filled the British press.

On 3rd August 1914 in the House of Commons Sir Edward Grey, the

Liberal Foreign Secretary, rose to say Britain was committed in honour to support the French. The Conservative opposition and the Irish Party gave full support. MacDonald then rose to give the Labour Party's view. He said that if Britain was in danger they would support the government - indeed would offer themselves if that were so. But the Foreign Secretary had not persuaded him that Britain was in danger. If the nation's honour was in danger we would be with him. If he could assure us that he is going to confine the conflict to Belgium we would support him, But what we are engaging in is a whole European war which will not leave Europe as it is now.

What MacDonald had said in the House of Commons had been agreed by the Parliamentary Labour Party. And two days later the Party's NEC, by 8 votes to 4, had also endorsed the anti-war position.

MacDonald's stance on the War

The Labour Party's instinct had always been influenced in favour of peace by an inherited anti-militaristic attitude of 19th century radicals like Gladstone, and also something of the Marxist notion that the working classes would be an obstacle to conflict unleashed by their rulers. But alongside that ran a vein of old-fashioned patriotism. On the same day that the NEC supported the anti-war position the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) decided to support the government's request for war credits of £100 millions. MacDonald promptly resigned the leadership. His view was that the PLP should have abstained and remained aloof on this war credits vote which was dwarfed by the main issue.

A week later MacDonald widened his argument in an article in the *Labour*

Leader. The real cause of the war was the policy of balance of power through alliances that divided Europe into two hostile camps. The alliance with France was shrouded in secrecy and Asquith and Foreign Secretary Grey had continually assured the House of Commons that Britain had contracted no obligations. This meant that nobody knew for certain the position between Britain and France. Secretly, however, there was an 'honourable' obligation to go to war if Germany declared war on France. But because it was a secret obligation, justification had to be provided on the spot. This was difficult but the German invasion of Belgium provided justification.

Of the 54 Labour MPs only Keir Hardie and two or three others backed MacDonald. The Labour Party was divided. It was a federation of trade unions, the Independent Labour Party (ILP) and the Fabians. The ILP backed MacDonald while the trade unions supported the war effort. The ILP did not exactly suit MacDonald. Many were pacifists, which MacDonald was not, and some were Marxists or near-Marxists who saw war as the inevitable product of capitalism. MacDonald believed the matter was more complex. He soon thought there should be an organisation to voice anti-war views and a committee was formed of him and Liberals who favoured neutrality, and out of that grew the Union for Democratic Control. The UDC campaigned for parliamentary control over foreign policy, in other words at least no secret treaties, and also that the eventual peace terms would not involve the humiliation of the defeated nation or an artificial re-arrangement of frontiers. Tragically, failure to do that led to the 2nd World War.

The relationship between MacDonald and the Labour Party remained in

confusion and there were rumours that he was to return to the leadership. An NEC appointed delegation urged him to do so and his successor, Arthur Henderson, believed MacDonald was the only man who could keep the socialists and trade union wings of the party together. It is a mark of the ability and regard for MacDonald in the Labour Party that despite his anti-war stance that made him very unpopular in the country, the party still regarded him as a leader who could unite the party.

Henderson and MacDonald were peace lovers. Henderson reluctantly went along with the war effort because once the war had started the prospect of a Prussian victory could not be ignored. MacDonald's emotional hatred of war would only let him continue the fight against it. Yet he admired the self-sacrifice and idealism that inspired the recruits while he strongly condemned the jingoism and revengeful tone fostered by the press, that was the popular opinion in Britain and inspired the soldiers' self-sacrifice. He held that a punitive peace would just sow the seeds for future wars – and of course he was quite right in that. The system of alliances and arms races should be replaced by international machinery for securing peace. MacDonald said that the Socialist International, to which numerous Socialist Parties around the world were affiliated, had tried to build an international understanding that would have made war impossible. But the German, French and British Parties had not matched their aims. Foreign policies had not been adequately addressed. He believed that once the war was over the socialist parties must determine that foreign policy is taken out of the hands of the aristocratic and plutocratic classes.

MacDonald faces hostility for his anti-war stance

Although MacDonald's complex reasoning caused some in the anti-war inner circle to distrust him, he was a hero to the vast majority who opposed the war. At an anti-war meeting in Briton Ferry, South Wales, where wreckers had cut off the electricity and the hall was illuminated by temporary gas light and candles, he raised the crowd to great cheers that drowned out a handful of opponents. He may have been encouraged by big ticket-only meetings but elsewhere he was regarded as a public enemy.

When he visited Lossiemouth in September 1914 a report went around that the Kaiser had secretly arrived by aeroplane to meet him. There was an article in the *John Bull* magazine revealing him as the illegitimate son of a Scotch servant girl and reproducing his birth certificate. That in fact hurt him more than anything else. *The Times* published a leading article on 1st October 1914 headed 'Helping the Enemy'. No paid agent of Germany, it said, had served her better.' *The Spectator* asked if it was right that he should draw £400 as an MP when the chief work he was doing was heartening the enemy.

In December 1915 the government proposed conscription. The Labour Party had always opposed conscription which was one reason why they supported the voluntary recruitment campaign. The Party had numerous meetings and at a conference where MacDonald, who held the post of Treasurer throughout the war, carried the day against conscription amid crescendos of ovations. The three Labour ministers resigned from the cabinet but withdrew their resignations after 'assurances from the prime minister.'

As the war progressed there were contacts within the Socialist International and MacDonald was part of that, but any discussion had no effect towards negotiations for peace, and any prospects of moderation in Britain were dashed when Lloyd George replaced Asquith as prime minister.

MacDonald thought about splitting with the Labour Party, and formed the United Socialist Council with the ILP and the British Socialist Party. This did not evolve into a political party.

MacDonald and Henderson, to their credit managed to keep the Labour Party together, in spite of its opposing anti and pro war wings.

In January 1917 MacDonald produced a pamphlet called "National defence", in which he put forward alternatives to what he believed were the causes of war.

Pacifism, he argued was no guarantee of peace, and neither was the idea of a citizen's army. Alliances had failed and led to war in 1914 and the idea of a League of Nations was inadequate so long as nations were rivals. He then turned to the popular idea of the destruction of Prussian militarism and the forcible democratisation of Germany. He rejected this on the basis the "forced democracy" is a paradox and cannot be done with a nation where a culture of militarism is paramount.

Russian Revolution

In 1917 the Russian Revolution took place. MacDonald hoped the new Russia would lead negotiations, inspired by socialist and working class demands, across Europe to end the war. But his main fear was that Russia would make a separate peace with Germany and the opportunity for peace across Europe would be lost. He called for support for the first Russian

Revolution and advocated a similar shift of power in Britain. He contacted Kerensky, the Democratic Socialist PM of the first revolution, urging him to put himself at the head of the democratic forces of Europe working for peace and not to make a separate peace with Germany.

A Socialist International conference was being arranged in Stockholm but against MacDonald's wishes Labour decided not to attend. But he was successful in persuading the government to allow him and three others from the Party to form a delegation to Petrograd. What attracted the government's consent was MacDonald's opposition to Russia negotiating a separate peace with Germany. The delegation left for Aberdeen to board a ship. But, bizarrely, the Seamen's Union refused to allow them aboard and they never got to Russia. He nevertheless continued contact with Kerensky. But of course Kerensky was deposed by Lenin and the Bolsheviks and a separate peace with Germany was negotiated.

Memorandum for peace

Macdonald and Henderson worked on a memorandum on what was to be done after the war. Typically MacDonald wanted the memorandum considered by other European socialist parties while Henderson saw it more as a matter for the Allied Governments. Allied Socialist Parties endorsed the British Labour Party memorandum but the process never got as far as the German and Austrian Parties. By July 1918 the war going badly for Germany and the Reichstag proposed a peace of mutual understanding and reconciliation. MacDonald moved the same resolution in the House of Commons but received only 19 votes.

When the end came France insisted on punishing Germany. Lloyd George whose view was initially more lenient backed away and Wilson, President of the USA was unable to put idealistic proposals into effect. The roots of World War 2 were sown.

A general election was called by Lloyd George and he led the Coalition of Conservatives and his breakaway Liberals against the official Liberal Party that had remained loyal to Asquith. The Labour Party withdrew from the Coalition Government and ran its own candidates. The Coalition won overwhelmingly, riding on the War victory.

MacDonald paid the price for his anti-war stand, lost very heavily and was out of parliament till 1922. Was MacDonald right to oppose the War? He believed that it was wrong for Britain to go in and had warned that British policies were leading to war. But what about when the War had started? Should he not have done what Henderson did and accept its tragic inevitability and support our troops in the war effort? He believed it was necessary to try to convince the working classes that their rulers had deceived the people into the War, and that they had the power to stop it. He was right about the causes of war and the consequences of a punitive peace. He was later twice to become prime minister.

“Do we want to starve? – Southall Labour and the Southall-Norwood Food Control Committee

By 1918 food shortages during World War 1 were becoming a problem for working people. Although there were local food control committees, many did not take up their powers to ensure an equitable distribution of food, and this led to food queues on a regular basis.

In January 1918 the Southall Trades and Labour Council called a public meeting at the Co-operative Hall in King Street Southall to discuss ways and means to abolish food queues in the district. 97 people attended. George Marshall secretary of the STLC wrote to Lord Rhondda, government commissioner for food to say that if nothing was done, then drastic action would be taken by the organised labour and townspeople of Southall. This was followed up by a letter from the branch secretary of the Southall National Union of Railwaymen to Lord Rhondda, the text of which was published in the Southall and Norwood Gazette as follows –
“My lord...a deputation representing the whole of the organised workers of this district waited upon the Local Food Control Committee to demand a better distribution of foodstuffs in this district.

Failing this to take place this week, they give the committee to understand that their men will do the shopping on Saturday next, being determined not to allow own women and children to stand about in queues and I happen to be the chairman of the workers’ committee and must say that if the Local Food Control Committee’s resolution to you is not given effect to, it will be beyond our power to restrain our men from taking this action.

When you will no doubt realise how serious will be the consequences seeing that this is a munitions area and a very large number of railwaymen, I trust therefore that you will comply with our modest request and give the necessary powers demanded.” George Wrighton, Southall NUR

Powers were granted to the Local Food Control Committee, which were warmly welcomed by the Gazette in an article entitled “Real powers at last”. To tell that the Committee was serious in implementing this, many adverts were subsequently placed in the *Southall and Norwood Gazette* for “two permanent capable clerks”. As effective rationing was now in place – there were also adverts on how to deal with meatless days – by substitutes such as tuna, pilchards, haricot beans and macaroni.

This was not however to be the end of Labour’s intervention in the food distribution in Southall before the end of the War. Gas workers asked for larger rations, because they were doing heavy manual work. The Women’s Co-operative Guild and the Women’s Section of the Labour Party campaigned against higher milk prices, which they said, would damage the health of women and children. They called for the dairies to be taken over if profiteering was not stopped.

Labour was gaining support in Southall. In the election of November 1918 the Labour candidate for Uxbridge which included Southall, was Harry Gosling, president of the Workers’ Transport Federation and one time president of the TUC. He had been a conscientious objector in World War 1. He did not win the seat, but it had been hoped that he would gain many votes from Southall, an industrial area. Women voting for the first time were particularly keen to get to the polling stations, and members of the Labour Party found themselves

looking after the children of complete strangers so that they could do so. Councillor Hudson, chairman of the District Labour Party found himself looking after five children at one time. When the mother told him to be careful that they did not fall out of their pram, he told her that he knew how to look after children, having five of his own!

Barbara Humphries

The legacy of Tony Benn

Stan Newens, was one of a panel of speakers at meeting of the Socialist History Society on Saturday 26th April on the legacy of Tony Benn. The other speakers were Duncan Bowie, Keith Flett, Lindsey German, Kate Hudson and Willie Thompson.

Duncan spoke about how Tony had come from a radical political family. His grandfather Sir John Benn had been leader of the Progressive Alliance on the London County Council 1904-1907, and an MP in Tower Hamlets. His father had left the Liberal Party to join Labour, and had been Secretary of State for India in the 1929/31 Labour Government. Tony had been a member of the Oxford Union when he invited Richard Acland of the Common Wealth Party to speak. In the 1960s he had been a member of the Wilson Government, and a moderniser, but he was already a member of the Movement for Colonial Freedom. Unlike many politicians Tony had been radicalised by office. He saw that politics went beyond Westminster and saw himself as an ethical socialist. Keith Flett spoke about his interest in science and technology, and his commitment to open government. Both Lindsey German and Kate Hudson spoke about Tony’s commitment to the anti-war movement and to CND both of which went back a long way. When he left Parliament he had been active in

the Stop the War Coalition and had been determined to exercise the right to protest. In the 1950s he had resigned from Labour's front bench over its position on nuclear weapons. Willie Thompson speculated on how a government led by Tony Benn would have coped with opposition from the US government to Britain giving up its nuclear weapons. This provoked a lively discussion from the audience.



Tony Benn with Labour Heritage officers and Norman Howard at the 2005 AGM

Unlike many Labour politicians today, Tony Benn had a vast respect for the history of the labour movement and the lessons to be learnt from it. He regularly spoke at the commemoration of the Levellers at Burford in Oxfordshire. On several occasions he addressed the Labour Heritage AGM on the anniversaries of the 1945 Labour Government and Indian independence in 1947.

Book reviews

John Shepherd, *Crisis? What crisis? The Callaghan Government and the British "Winter of Discontent"*, Manchester University Press, 2013

The book is informative but perplexing, in that it appears to query Jim Callaghan's conclusion that "We lost the election because people didn't get their dustbins emptied, because commuters were angry about train disruption and because of too much trade union power" whilst actually marshalling a story which supports the former PM's verdict.

For those too young to have lived through the late 70s, Shepherd details the twists and turns of the period, where a strong union movement in the private as well as public sector – witnessed high and constant interactions with government, the start of rank and file activists out-maneuvring officials, high inflation and unemployment, and with a tired and minority government (following the IMF crisis and consequent cuts) seeking to use incomes policy to bring down inflation.

There had been 3 years of pay restraint, which helped reduce inflation from 27 to 8%. But the government's attempt to continue was simply too long a period, with wage differentials narrowed, and living standards near stagnant. Whether encouraged by the then TUC General Secretary or not, the Cabinet determined on an unrealistic 5% limit in 1978 and with no "Plan B" if this failed.

Peter Shore and Roy Hattersley later concluded that this 5% demonstrated that the Government had grown out of touch with the Labour movement. Others point to difficulties such as, on

devolution, George Cunningham's amendment requiring 40% of the electorate in favour, whilst Tim Bell firmly blamed Jim Callaghan: "The Labour government lost the election by not holding it earlier, leaving the 1979 General Election to follow the Winter of Discontent". If this is true, then even the possibility of winning a 1978 election would be a remarkable achievement given that Labour had been a minority government from 1976 – battling economic problems, inflation, unemployment, and constant struggle with incomes policy. What is clear is that the failure to call a 1978 election meant the polls came after the 'winter of discontent' which, as Shepherd documents, involved fuel, lorries, deliveries, grave diggers, hospitals, local government – and even senior civil servants. Indeed, on 22 January 1979, no fewer than 1.5 million public sector workers participated in a day of action at a time when 1.5 million were out of work.

All this meant that images abounded, on TV and in the press, of uncollected refuse, grieving families, mass pickets and national strikes. In that month, the Tories soared to a 20 point lead over Labour, with Mrs Thatcher becoming a potential Prime Minister. So was it just those strikes and images, or were there broader issues? Callaghan's decision, announced on 7 September 1978, not to call an election (having allowed expectations to harden) foretold Gordon Brown's similar "election that never was" 30 years later, has now effectively been outlawed by the Fixed term Parliament Act.

Meanwhile, Shepherd seeks to place much of the blame on the press – including the switch of the *Sun* to becoming a Tory-supporting paper. Callaghan also thought that sometimes the nation needed a change, though the 28 March defeat (by 311-310) on a

vote of confidence was only the second time in the 20th century that such a vote led to a government falling (the earlier one having been MacDonald's Labour government in 1924).

The Winter of Discontent was a key turning point in political fortunes, and not simply on the Right. 33% of trade unionists voted conservative in 1979, helping to see the first woman PM to enter Number 10 on 4 May. Thus whilst for 11 of the 15 years between 64 and 79, Labour had been in government, 1979 saw the start of 18 years of conservative government, "fratricide" within Labour, and a seismic shift in trade union fortunes. Whilst the Winter of Discontent had undermined Labour's historic relationship with the trade union movement that gave birth to the party in 1900, from 1979 Mrs Thatcher used the rebuff to marginalise unions and curtail their activities through a steady stream of legislation, aided and abetted by press attacks on trade unionism, with unions never returning to their 70s strength or influence.

Trade union membership was 13,212,000 in 1979, comprising 48.7% of the working population. Today we have half that number, with far lower penetration, particularly in the private sector

This is not due to the 1970s industrial action, but reflects changes in working patterns. However, whilst Shepherd fingers the constant reminders of 1978/9 from the press (and conservatives) for assisting political perceptions, he forgets that such images only work if based on an element of truth. (Whilst "Iron Lady" or "Welsh Windbag" could enter public imagery because they were at least in harmony with the subject's character, "Red Ed" has failed altogether as it has no connection with

his true persona. So it is with social characterization, it can only work if connected to some reality.)

Shepherd also castigates Tony Blair, early in his leadership, for distancing New Labour from those Winter of Discontent days, failing to acknowledge the resonance this has with the public.

Finally, therefore, though bringing together the story of 1978 and 1979, the book fails to settle the issue.

Whether a tired, minority government, battled by the economy, unemployment, inflation, cuts, devolution and the timing of the election led to Mrs Thatcher's victory and the subsequent diminution of union influence. Or whether, in the words of the only former union official to become Prime Minister: "the unions did it: people could not forget what they had to suffer from the unions last winter".

Malcolm Wicks, *My Life, Matador*, 2013

Famous for revealing that it was the civil servant, Malcolm Wicks, who leaked Callaghan government's attempts to ditch the commitment to child benefit – rather than the suspected SPAD – this autobiography covers far more than just his saving of this vital income booster. Written as Malcolm was dying, and finished by others, it combines his life story with a collection of some notable writings which lay out his deep, albeit pragmatic, commitment to socialism and equality. A commitment which he lived to the full, both in his generous, modest and loved personal relations as well as in every job he did, whether as a public servant, in the voluntary sector, a Croydon MP from 1992-2012, or as highly successful minister.

As befits this intelligent, quiet but highly motivated politician, the book details the workings of government and parliament in a humane and understandable way. His achievements are notable for their breadth as well as depth, and also for the hurdles he had to jump on the way. It's worth reading by any new or aspiring politician to learn something about the art of the possible – as well as about the time it sometimes takes to reach every goal. A much missed man.

Dianne Hayter

Letters

Dear Editor

I enjoyed Philippa Bilton's informative talk about Emily Wilding Davison at West London Labour History Day this February. It was interesting to hear the insight that her family connections could provide.

Philippa's green, white and purple sash reminded me of the artifacts we had in my childhood home which was inherited from my suffragette great-aunt, Elsa Dalglish (1877-1949). She had had playing cards and household objects trimmed with ribbon in the suffragette colours. Family tradition has it that Elsa had been very indignant when a relative paid her fine and she was released from prison within a day. At the time Elsa was campaigning I believe she was a West London resident, living in Cromwell Road, London SW5.

Yours sincerely,

Janet Mearns