

Labour Heritage

BULLETIN SPRING 2003

THE 1897 ENGINEERS STRIKE -

WHAT HAPPENED IN CHISWICK

In 1864 John Isaac Thornycroft established a boat building yard on the Thames at Chiswick and by the 1890s was building destroyers for the British and foreign navies and employing 1,800 men at Church Wharf. The firm moved to Southampton in 1904 when the ships became too big to get under the Thames bridges.

Sir Robert Ensor in *'The Oxford History of Great Britain 1870 - 1914'* wrote that 'trade unionism went ahead through the nineties with a new impetus. The most famous disputes were the miners lock-out in 1893 and the engineers strike of 1897.' This article is based upon reports

in the Chiswick Times and the Acton & Chiswick Gazette about the 1897 striking Chiswick engineers who were members of the Hammersmith branches of the Associated Society of Engineers. Engineers served a seven years apprenticeship and another five before coming on to full pay which in 1897 was 10d an hour (about 4p in today's money). Their basic working day was nine hours. At Thornycrofts work started at 6am. There was a half hour break for breakfast and an hour for lunch and the men were expected to work overtime. The normal leaving time was 9pm.

Many Thornycroft skilled workers rented terraced cottages on the Glebe estate or in the Paxton Road area - properties now fetching up to £500,000. Others, whose families lived away from Chiswick, lodged locally during the week. Unskilled workers lived in poorer property, since demolished and replaced by council flats, at the end of Devonshire Road.

At Thornycrofts in 1896 there were demarcation disputes between the Amalgamated Engineers Society (ASE) and the Boilermakers Union over who should do work on boiler manhole covers. The Chiswick engineers claimed it was their work and came out on strike on 15th July for three weeks; the boilermakers struck over the same issue for a week in August. The company said the matter had to be settled and the

AMALGAMATED SOCIETY OF ENGINEERS.

Engineering Trade Lock-out, 1897-8.

Cause of Dispute.

THE Executive Council of the above-named Society, having had prepared a careful analysis of the sources of income of a voluntary nature received during the recent dispute, have now much pleasure in issuing the same with summarised statement of the disposition of the monies so subscribed and an epitome of the facts relating to the dispute.

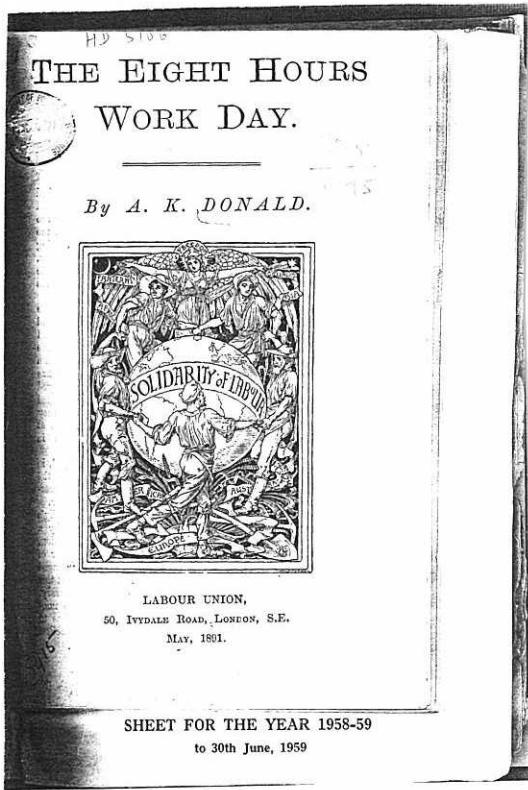
The immediate cause of the Lock-out was the claim made in London for an Eight Hours Day.* This claim, as regards the general body of the Employers, was preferred by the London Joint Committee only on the 30th of April, 1897, although some Employers had voluntarily conceded the shorter working day prior to that date, and many had conceded as the result of negotiation.

Other matters were, however, at issue, and it is necessary to go back a few years to understand the position. Since 1892 there had been a good deal of friction, especially in the Marine Engineering centres. Interruption of work, consequent upon squabbles about lines of demarcation, had alternated with disputes in regard to wages, which had been subject to extreme fluctuation. And concurrently with this there was also a gradual perfecting of organisation on the part of the Employers, as well as on the part of the men, so that, by the middle of last year, the Employers had formed a strong Federation, and the Unions had, in the period under review, increased their membership by some 25 to 30 per cent. We do not suggest that better organisation should in itself have constituted a danger or contributed to rupture, but there was unfortunately a desire on the part of many to use the weapons thus forged as means whereby complete

* See Appendix, Document 4, page 19.

unions agreed to submit future disputes to arbitration.

Eight hours day



In March 1897 the 70 ship joiners at Thornycrofts struck as part of a London wide carpenters' and joiners' strike for an increase from 10d to 10½d an hour and a reduction in hours from 9½ to 8. The firm accepted the wage increase but said Tyneside competition prevented them granting the reduction in hours. The joiners remained out and in fact never went back. Thornycrofts replaced them with non-union men, an action resented by other unions at the shipyard, and there were court appearances after scuffles between strikers and the non-union men. One man was bound over to keep the peace.

Meanwhile the ASE, allied with some smaller craft unions, had been negotiating with the London Federation of Engineering Employers for an 8-hour day and the concession was secured at many London firms for about half of their 10,500 London members. But three big firms - Thornycrofts, Middletons at Southwark and Humphrey & Tennants at Deptford - refused the 8 hours. At the beginning of July the ASE and allied trades unions called out their members at these firms who then joined the northern based National Federation of Engineering Employers lead by Colonel Dyer, a much tougher outfit than the London Employers Federation. This National Federation locked-out ASE members at selected firms in the North in retaliation for the ASE strike in London. The ASE then called out all its members nationally, except in firms where the 8-hours had been accepted, and there was a national stoppage.

In Chiswick, Thornycrofts said 450 out of 1,700 men were on strike and they were buying in ship parts from America. The boilermakers never came out in Chiswick or nationally and this was a crucial factor that affected the final outcome. The Boilermakers Union attracted great resentment and invective. The London boilermakers, who had at first decided to strike, were drawn back at the last moment by their Newcastle based National Executive Council who decided the 8-hours should be negotiated by peaceful means.

The yard was picketed and the men set up their headquarters at the Old Ship public house, by the river in Hammersmith Mall, which had large grounds where meetings could be held. The pub is still there and you can see the open space beside it stretching back towards Chiswick. They elected a strike

committee with James A. Welch as chairman and Mr Fynn as secretary. Other members of the committee were Mr Mills, David Rose and Frederick Harlock. From the outset several meetings were held each week addressed by Tom Mann and John Burns, both renowned labour leaders, as well as speakers from many unions including the Smiths and Hammermen, the Drillers Union, The Machine Workers Society, the Marine Engineers Society, the Coalporters Union, the Bakers Union and the Carpenters and Joiners. Another speaker was Albert Tochatti, an anarchist of some repute. At some of the meetings Mrs Tochatti sang stirring songs including *England Arise*, *Wearing of the Green*, and *Hark the Battle Cry is Ringing*.

Reports from the 'Chiswick Times'

Speeches, reported in great detail in the '*Chiswick Times*', illustrated the main issues of the strike and emphasized the historic nature of the struggle. Emphasis was placed upon an idealistic need for men to work shorter hours in order to gain time for self-improvement and community involvement.

There was debate over the need for greater federation and merger of unions to achieve increased strength and unity of action. Another debate was over the need for political action, some believing that legislation was the way forward to improve working conditions and that the unions should cut their links with the Liberal Party and run their own candidates.

The employers contended that higher labour costs would lose them markets to Germany and the U.S.A. John Burns in speeches to the Chiswick men produced strings of figures to dispute this. Tom

Mann emphasised the international nature of the labour movement. Union speakers at the Old Ship declared that the employers were fighting to destroy the ASE. The employers denied this but said that an important issue was their right to run their businesses free from union interference in shop floor working practices.

By escalating the stoppage the employers put a huge financial burden on the ASE's strike fund, which was paying out to their members and also to affected non-union members. The fund was financed from accumulated reserves, by support from other unions, and by a levy on the ASE members who were still working in those shops that had conceded the 8-hours.

But all was not going well for the union in Chiswick. The Brassfounders Union had called out its London members but those at Thornycrofts left the Union and joined the Ironfounders Union, which had allied itself with the Boilermakers and was not on strike.

Another setback was Thornycroft's success in obtaining blackleg labour from as far away as Bristol and Cardiff. Chiswick tradesmen refused to serve those who were taking the jobs of the local men, so Thornycrofts brought in food and drink which was sold to the strike-breakers on the premises during meal breaks. The determined Chiswick ASE members set up an effective picketing system and a number of strike-breakers were persuaded to return home.

Arrest and trial

Thornycrofts hit back by co-operating with the police. Eight strikers were arrested and charged under a section of the Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act for 'following with two or

more persons in a disorderly manner.' When they left the works the strike-breakers had been followed by a crowd, whistling the *Dead March* and shouting out phrases like 'You dirty dogs', 'Boo – you blacklegs' or 'What a fine body of men.' The police considered this to be disorderly behaviour.

The arrested men, who were led into court handcuffed and chained together, denied the charges and the union instructed a barrister to defend them. The cases were heard before a severe looking magistrate, Mr Albert De Rutszen .

Three of the men claimed they were not in Chiswick on the day in question.

Bill Hurst produced witnesses who swore they were together in the Lamb Tavern and then the Duke of York all evening. Another of the accused, Tom Cotton, had a witness who said he met Tom at 10am at the Old Ship and they went to Ealing and Wembley, not returning to Chiswick until after midnight having waited an hour for a train at Willesden Junction. The magistrate did not believe these witnesses. He did however discharge Joe Punter whose sister-in-law, a cook in service in Kensington, confirmed that he and his wife and child were having supper with her that evening. Nevertheless the magistrate said there was no doubt Punter had been 'following in a disorderly manner' on other evenings and he was fortunate to be let off.

Tom Syrett was also charged with assaulting Albert Hawker, one of the strike-breakers, in the street and, despite the only witness being Hawker's fellow lodger and the absence of medical evidence, the magistrate found Syrett guilty. This was the only mention of

violence reported by the '*Chiswick Times*' during the strike.

On the 17th August De Rutzen found seven of the eight guilty of 'following in a disorderly manner.' He said it was useless to impose fines because they would be paid by the union leaving no responsibility upon the men's shoulders. He sentenced them to three weeks hard labour with an extra week for Syrett for the assault. The men appealed and were released, the union having put up bail, pending a further hearing at the Middlesex quarter sessions.

At the next meeting down at the Old Ship, after Tom Glazier from the Independent Labour Party had made an enlightening and rousing speech, a woman intervened.

" I have met a woman with five children whose husband has worked at Thornies for seventeen years and he has gone to prison for three weeks! Go home and educate yourselves! Elect better men as your officials! How many men have died and gone under? You sit down and take it easy!"

Demonstration in support of the strikers

On Sunday 22nd August there was a huge procession of 3,000 people, behind the Hammersmith Trades Council brass band, from the Queen of England in Goldhawk Road to Turnham Green where a rally took place. There was an Independent Labour Party banner on the march and many others from unions representing the Engineers, Gasworkers and General Labourers, Stonemasons, Drillers, Hammermen and Watermen.

On Sunday 29th August about 350 Chiswick men and their supporters went by steamer from Hammersmith to Blackfriars and marched to Hyde Park .

The Old Ship meetings continued but became ominously less frequent after September. The employers were refusing to budge and a boilermakers' national ballot confirmed the decision to not join the strike. Strike funds were running low and settlement talks had begun. Instead of great rousing speeches someone gave a talk on his visit to America. Mr Bolus, a chemistry professor, spoke about miniature glass working. The men formed the Chiswick Debating Society and had discussions on socialism and the history of the working classes.

On Sunday 10th October the Chiswick men marched from Turnham Green to Eelbrook Common, Walham Green to a rally attended by 5,000 people. There were two platforms and many speeches urging one final effort. This was the last big rally reported in the '*Chiswick Times*.'

Sentences upheld

Then in November the sentences on the seven men were confirmed at the Quarter Sessions, although the extra week awarded to Syrett was waived. Several broke down in tears as they were led away. The news was received with disbelief and horror by much of the local population. There were protest meetings and concerts and collections were organised for the men's families.

On the day of their release the '*Chiswick Times*' reporter was invited to accompany the strike committee in a brake pulled by four horses to Wormwood Scrubs to welcome the men. He missed the brake but took a tramcar and caught it up at Hammersmith Broadway. The police would not allow the hundreds of supporters into DuCane Road to hold a demonstration outside the

prison and they waited in Wood Lane. At 8.30am the seven were spotted approaching through the misty November morning accompanied by several policemen. There were many handshakes and welcomes when they reached Wood Lane. A banner was raised saying 'Welcome to our martyred comrades', and there were banners from the ASE, the United Society of Smiths and Hammermen (Lambeth & Southwark Branch), the United Male and Female Costermongers and Street Sellers Benefit and Protection Society (Notting Hill Branch), the National Union of Gasworkers and General Labourers (Fulham Branch), and the Fawcett Liberal Club.

The men were conveyed along North Pole Road in the Chiswick brake behind a brass band to the Fawcett Club headquarters in Blechynden Street, Notting Hill. The cavalcade was large and cheers were raised when specimens of prison bread were raised on poles. The men joined in the jokes with good humour 'yet there was occasional evidence that conflicting emotions strove for mastery with them.' They had not been allowed to shave in prison and had stubbly beards giving one or two a fierce appearance. All had lost weight - from four to seven pounds.

They were treated to a substantial breakfast at the Club where there were speeches condemning the brutal sentences and welcoming the 'martyrs in the cause of labour' on their return to life and liberty. One of the released men, Frederick Harlock who was a member of the strike committee, spoke for his comrades and thanked the Club for all they had done.

The procession reformed, marched to Hammersmith Broadway and then along King Street, Chiswick High Road and

Chiswick Lane to the Lamb Tavern where the East End contingent left them. A Mr Keene presented two boxes of cigars for distribution between the released men and others. Those still left went on to Turnham Green where the procession finished and the released men were driven in the brake to their respective homes.

Defeat but political lessons learnt

Negotiations at national level dragged on through December. The employers were not only rejecting the 8-hour day, but were refusing to settle unless the unions agreed to changes to a number of working practices which affected piecework and apprentices, and included the employment of unskilled workers on machines. The ASE held a national ballot before Christmas and voted overwhelmingly to continue the strike. The Employers made some concessions on working practices but would not give way on the 8-hours. Another ASE ballot was held in January and although the Hammersmith branches, made up mainly of the Chiswick men, voted 80 to 22 to continue the strike, the country-wide decision was to accept the masters' terms. The strike was over. There was no 8-hour day at Thornycrofts and none of the striking engineers were reinstated by the company. Many found work elsewhere.

So the strike went down as a defeat. But was it? The ASE had gained and retained the 8-hour day in many London firms.

The defeat taught the labour movement two lessons. More unions amalgamated or formed federations to avoid the inter-union disputes that had disabled the 1897 strike. They

also turned towards political action and in 1900 joined with the Fabian Society, the Independent Labour Party and the Social Democratic Federation to form the Labour Representation Committee, which later became the Labour Party.

Somewhere in Chiswick, perhaps at the Old Ship by the Thames or near Church Wharf, there should be a memorial to the Chiswick seven, who the '*Chiswick Times*' described as 'martyrs to the cause of labour'.

Their names were – Thomas Cotton, Frederick Harlock, John Humphries, William Hurst, Benjamin Munson, Thomas Syrett and Richard Taylor.

John Grigg

'LABOUR AND POPULAR CULTURE IN LONDON' – LABOUR HERITAGE DAY SCHOOL HELD AT THE LONDON METROPOLITAN ARCHIVES ON SATURDAY 23RD NOVEMBER

Labour in Wimbledon

The first speaker was Heidi Topman on the history of Labour in Wimbledon from the 1850s to present day. Christian socialists were active in Wimbledon in the 1850s. By 1889 there was a Wimbledon Radical and Liberal Association, which ran a reading room for artisans and held public lectures and concerts. It owned a hall, the Liberal and Radical Club which rented rooms to trades unionists. There was also a branch of the Social Democratic Federation in the 1890s. One its members, Fred Knee campaigned for better housing for workers and stood for the local vestry and board of guardians.

In 1905 the Wimbledon Marxist Socialist Society was founded and one of its members, Braddock was later to be the Labour candidate for Mitcham and Morden. The Society held outdoor meetings, organized rambles on Wimbledon Common and supported Womens' Suffrage.

In 1918 Wimbledon and Merton constituency Labour Party was founded. It organized lectures on politics and economics, had an entertainments committee and set up a 'piano fund'.

In 1921 a committee – "Labour Hall Ltd" was launched to raise funds for a hall. £300 was raised by the selling of shares. The committee had representatives from the cooperative society and the trades unions. In 1922 the opening of the hall was celebrated with tea and a whist drive. Throughout its history the hall was used by trades union branches, the Socialist Sunday School and public lectures were held. In the 1920s and 1930s garden parties were held to raise funds for the miners in Britain and for the anti-fascist movement in Spain.

The first Labour MP for Wimbledon, Arthur Palmer was elected to parliament in 1945. He lost his seat in 1951, and Wimbledon was not to see another Labour MP until 1997. However, Wimbledon had a labour movement tradition in spite of its image as conservative suburbia. Collections for made for the National Union of Mineworkers during the 1984/85 strike and there was a very strong anti-apartheid group.

Freemasonry and Labour in London

A fascinating speech was given by Andrew Prescott, a Professor at the University of Sheffield and Director of

the Centre for the Study of Freemasonry. He stated that the center had been funded by the Grand Lodge itself, and access had now been given to records and archives of the Freemasons, an association guarded with secrecy. The Freemasons' Hall in Covent Garden was now open to the public, it included a museum and library of 40,000 books, not available elsewhere.

Andrew outlined the development of the Freemasons from the guilds of Scotland in 1717 to the world's largest secular organization – 300,000 members in Britain and 8 million world - wide. There had been connections between labour movement figures and the freemasons going back to the Chartists, but he emphasized the importance of the New Welcome Lodge, which had been set up specifically to recruit Labour MPS in the 1930s. It has been suggested that this Lodge recruited over 20 MPs and tried to play a part in the Labour leadership campaign in the 1930s. The lodge was sponsored to promote social cohesion and cut across class conflict. It did not have any support within the trades union movement. However lodges were set up in local government. This became more important as local government grew and employed a growing number of professional people. Full time officers, staff and elected representatives were recruited. Holborn Borough Council had its own lodge. There was also a branch – Co-Masonry, which recruited women.

One interesting aspect was that freemasonry on the continent did not have the same reactionary traditions as in Britain. In Spain the Freemasons supported the Republican side in the war against Franco very strongly and allegedly recruited Attlee as one of its members. The international branch of

the Freemasons in London, the Philadelphs, had Louis Blanc and Garibaldi as two of its members.

Socialism in Woolwich and Poplar

Paul Ashton who is completing a doctorate on the links between labour in Woolwich and Poplar gave a talk on developments at the end of the 19th century. He emphasized the role of the Fabian Society in propogating ideas and of individuals such as Will Crooks. Will Crooks was active in campaigning for a tunnel under the Thames to link the two working class areas. The foot-tunnel, which opened in 1897 allowed workers to cross easily from north to south, for work and also to political and trades union meetings. The ferry, which had previously been the only way of crossing the river was often unreliable and in the event of fog, out of action. Woolwich became a focus for worker immigration as the arsenal grew with the demand for munitions during the Boer War. Engineers moved in from all parts of the country, increasing the membership of the Amalgmated Society of Engineers in the area. Woolwich was to become a Labour seat, having previously been held by the Conservative and Unionist candidate. The Labour vote had increased by 4,000 from 1895 to the bye-election of 1903. This was dependent on the arsenal workers, but it also depended on the socialist and labour movement links with Poplar, north of the river. There had been no Liberal tradition in Woolwich.

The trades union badge

In the afternoon Paul Martin gave a talk and slide show of trades union badges. Some of these were quite rare, including

a badge for the ASE (Amalgamated Society of Engineers) Battersea Cycling Club and an AEU (Amalgamated Engineering Union) retired members outing from Acton in 1961. These showed how the history and activities of the trades union movement in the past could be illustrated through badges.

Music and the labour movement

The final session was given by Duncan Hall on music and the labour movement. Duncan related how Labour choral associations and Clarion choirs had taken root in Yorkshire, particularly in Bradford. Music was also associated with the Socialist Sunday School Movement which had its roots in Scotland. These published their own socialist hymn books and operettas. In South Wales male choirs were linked to the labour movement. Throughout the country trades unions had their own bands.

Moves to co-ordinate a musical tradition linked to the labour movement came with the formation of the London Labour Choral Union in 1924. Songs such as *Jerusalem, England Arise* and the *Marseillaise*, sang at rallies were to inspire and recruit to the movement. Later the Labour Party launched the National Labour Choral Union to co-ordinate Labour choirs. This was finally run by Alan Bush who in 1936 set up the Workers Music Association. A number of Labour fairs were held in the 1930s including a "Pageant of Labour" and the Independent Labour Party organized an "International Fancy Fair".

Members of the Workers' Music Association sang a couple of songs to conclude the day. They later planned to sing for the Fire Brigades Union pickets who were on strike at Farringdon fire

station –a song entitled “*London’s burning*”.

Duncan Hall’s book – “ *A pleasant change from politics- music and the British labour movement between the wars*’, published by New Clarion Press was on sale at the book stall.

Barbara Humphries

THE LABOUR PARTY IN THE NORTHWEST

A Manchester conference organized on March 1st on the history of the Labour Party in the north-west of England at John Rylands Library was attended by some sixteen people.

As six were speakers, that left just ten paying customers. Too many seats, too few bottoms.

In a way this fitted in nicely with the history and reality of the Labour Party in Lancashire, a county made up overwhelmingly of the industrial working class. However the talks showed that this was a county where the labour movement has had to struggle frequently against itself, to obtain adequate representation at both municipal and national level.

Jeff Hill gave an overview of the county representation up to about 1939. Utilising a map, he showed that the western part of the county was overwhelmingly Tory and there was only patchy Labour Party growth in the east. The only area which guaranteed a Labour Party success was the Lancashire coalfield, most notably Wigan. Liverpool did not have a Labour majority in the municipal council until 1955. Prior to that politics was sectarian based, rather than being determined by class.

Declan McHugh concentrated on Manchester where the position was almost as depressing. Like Jeff Hill he concentrated on the period 1900-1939. There were just three constituencies where Manchester Labour could guarantee success, namely Plating, Ardwick and Gorton. This was because local trades unions had control. Thus a mixture of trade unionism and strong local organization was the recipe for success in the poorest areas where people were generally apathetic and had little interest in political activity. A good comment made by a person living in poverty was that Labour activists were different from poor people.

Krista Cowman gave her talk the catchy title “Votes, vans and mock turtle soup”. It concentrated on women’s involvement in politics in late Victorian Liverpool. The women set up a soup kitchen at St Georges Hall, but in the main their sole task was to support the menfolk, especially when they were on strike. Their role was supportive rather than holding positions of power.

The first talk in the afternoon was given by **Alan Fowler** on Lancashire textile workers. Individual unions did not join the Labour Party. They were affiliated through an overall group – the United Textile Factory Workers Association. There were four parliamentary candidates selected by his overall group, but the candidates were not necessarily cotton workers or trades union representatives. For example, they chose Arthur Henderson and R.H.Tawney, the idea being that they may be better at resolving the cotton workers’ grievances. The workers were conservative in their ways, being concerned with improvements such as stronger factory acts and lower working hours.

Cotton workers had little concern with broad socialist principles and world events. Alan mentioned the goodwill shown to Gandhi on his visit to Lancashire in 1931 but that had a purpose. The limited autonomy granted to India in 1921 meant that India imposed a 20 per cent tariff on imported cotton goods. The Lancashire workers were attempting to have the tariff ended. Throughout the period 1920-1939 the cotton industry was becoming more depressed. In 1931 even the four cotton MPs were not elected. The cotton trades unions reverted simply to union questions such as dust in factories.

Alan Flinn spoke about Labour and the left in the 1930s in Lancashire. Really it was not about left and right in the Labour Party, but rather the left and the apathetic, or the left and those with other interests and values.

A general sense of caution was the main factor in all industries except mining. There were many working class Conservatives, some actively supporting the Empire. Irish people were usually conservative, desiring to maintain their national culture and religion. Yet the Irish vote was vital for success. In Wigan it was more important than the miners, even though Wigan was the best area for Labour support.

On the left the divisions were if anything greater. For instance in the late 1930s some supported pacifism, whilst others, noting the rise of fascism in continental Europe, supported re-armament.

In Lancashire generally, unemployment between the wars was high. The marches organized by the Communist Party led National Unemployed Workers' Union were frequently in clashes with the police. Even the parties left of Labour had divisions, the Independent Labour Party was divided, resulting in the

Independent Socialist Party, which has long since disappeared. There was a Unity Conference at the Free Trades Hall, Manchester, but the unity was ephemeral. The divisions continued. The overall result of all this bickering was apathy by the general public.

The final speaker was **Steve Fielding** who spoke on Labour Party culture. Steve was mainly concerned with municipal Labour, and the divisions between representatives, party members and the general public. Councillors were frequently seen to be authoritarian and corrupt. Those who controlled local branches were not keen to recruit new members, as they wanted to maintain control. This was particularly true of "one party states", that is municipalities which in recent times were continuously controlled by the Labour Councillors.

When he had finished his talk Steve Fielding requested comments from the audience. One gentleman rose and stated "recently I stood for election in a Manchester municipal by-election. Just 8% of the electorate turned out to vote."

Report by Michael Leahy

OBITUARIES

ROY JENKINS 1920-2003

Like him or not, you cannot airbrush Roy Jenkins out from Labour Party history.

His roots were in the Labour Party. His father was a miners' agent, who became an MP, and indeed was imprisoned for his part in the General Strike. Jenkins himself was a grammar school boy, whose first university was University College, Cardiff. He subsequently went to Oxford, where he was Chairman of the Democratic Socialist Club, in

opposition to the official Labour Club, which was run by the Communists, which included Denis Healey.

Through his father's connections he came to the notice of the Party leadership. He entered parliament in a by-election in Central Southwark in 1948. Boundary changes moved him to Birmingham Stechford, which he represented until 1976. Having staked his mark on the right-wing of the Labour Party at Oxford, he continued to be a spokesperson for the ideals of the post-war Social Democracy and was a firm supporter of Hugh Gaitskell. Gaitskell's death and Harold Wilson's election to the party leadership did not hold up his career. In fact the opposite occurred. Wilson very anxious to have a balanced cabinet rapidly promoted him from Aviation Minister to Home Secretary.

It was at the Home Office he made his mark. One positive memory of the Harold Wilson era are the social reforms that took place in the late 1960s. These included the abolition of the death penalty, decriminalisation of homosexuality, the legalisation of abortion and reform of the divorce laws. All these measures came from private members' bills, but they will be associated with the tolerant and open society that Jenkins wished to promote. Jenkins' political advance continued, when he became Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1967 and was elected deputy leader of the Labour Party in the same year, after the resignation of George Brown. His period as Chancellor was difficult, but the economy was turning the corner, when Labour was defeated in the General election of 1970.

The 1970s marked a new era in the Labour Party. The gradual advance of the Left marked the waning of Jenkins' star. He resigned from the Deputy Leadership over the Party's second u-turn on Europe. Labour's return to power in 1974 brought him back to the Home Office. Even though his argument on Europe triumphed in the Euro-referendum of 1975, the Party was still not enthusiastic for a cause in which he had for a long time strongly believed. He resigned his seat and became the first British President of the European Commission in 1977.

This should have been the end of Jenkins' career, but he returned to Britain in 1981 and was the prime mover in founding the Social Democratic Party. This venture, which brought him back to parliament as MP for Hillhead, came to nothing, except to keep Labour in opposition longer than it should have been. It could however be seen as the logical conclusion of Jenkins' political career.

Jenkins was a very cultured man, a fine biographer, historian and writer, who ended his life as Chancellor of Oxford University. His autobiography "*Life at the Centre*" indicated that he had come a long way from South Wales, even though there remains a consistency in the sometimes turbulent political path that he chose to take.

Stephen Bird

FRANK ALLAUN

Frank Allaun, Labour MP for Salford East (1955-83) and a member of the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party (1967-79) died on 26th November 2002 at the age of 89.

Convinced by his reading, even in his teens, of the utter folly of war he became secretary of the Manchester Anti-War Council in 1932 at 19 years of age and, for the next 70 years, campaigned for peace. He joined the Communist Party in the 1930s and served on its Manchester District Committee but gradually became disillusioned with events in the Soviet Union. An article in the Daily Worker by the Soviet novelist, Ilya Ehrenburg, in 1944, suggesting that all Germans were Nazis, was the final straw. He left and joined the Labour Party.

Eleven years later, in 1955 he was elected to the House of Commons and took his crusade for peace there. One of the organizers of the first Aldermaston march in 1958, he never ceased to campaign for unilateral nuclear disarmament, for arms cuts and for the resolution of international disputes by peaceful means. As a member of the constituency section of Labour's NEC he continually raised the same issues there. He was, in addition, in the chair of the Labour Peace Fellowship- later renamed Labour Action for Peace-and directed his efforts to convincing the rank and file of the need to oppose war and war preparations.

Working class education

In his youth, Frank's ambition was to be a journalist and he became a newspaper correspondent and later editor of Labour's '*Northern Voice*' for 16 years, after editing the Vickers Factory News which working as an engineer during the Second World War. He believed in working class education and was always a voracious reader, taking novels, literature, politics and economics in his stride. He was secretary of Manchester

Left Book Club in pre-war days and was committed to the cause of labour history. As a friend of Eddie and Ruth Frow, he was a staunch backer of their endeavours which had led to the establishment of the Working Class Library in Manchester. He was Chair of this organization until his death.

As long as he could, he wrote letters to the press, attended meetings and continued to work for the causes in which he had always believed.

He is survived by his second wife, Millie, a son and a daughter by his first wife and his grandchildren.

Stan Newens

MEMORIAL MEETING FOR ROYDEN HARRISON

A meeting to commemorate the life of Royden Harrison, whose obituary appeared in the Autumn 2002 Labour Heritage bulletin, took place at St Mary's Community Centre, Bramall Lane, Sheffield, on 23rd November 2002. The chair was taken by Bob Heath, one of Roydon's former students, of whom several made contributions. University and Workers Education Association teaching colleagues, Richard Storey (former director of the Modern Record Centre at Warwick University, which Royden helped to found) and associates from the Society for the Study of Labour History paid tribute to his achievements. Professor Harvey Levenstein recalled Royden's work in Canada and his part in editing the writings of Bertrand Russell. Shin Ohmae of Kyoto discussed Roydon's last book "*The life and times of Sydney and Beatrice Webb*", drawing attention to the interest in Japan which he visited several times. Fred Reid gave a penetrating review of an earlier book,

'*Before the Socialists*', and considered the importance of a vision of a new society in stimulating socialist commitment. John Halstead and I referred to Royden's part in the campaign against the 100 year rule for the closure of sensitive records.

Others who spoke included the Home Secretary, David Blunkett MP (another former student), Harry Barnes MP, Michael Barratt Brown, John MacIlroy, Dorothy Thompson, Jean McCrindle and Peter Jackson, a former MP. Royden's widow, Pauline, talked of his support for women's emancipation, despite the fact that most of his students were male.

Royden's pioneering work in labour history, his efforts to ensure the preservation of records, his dedication to the task of providing education to those in full-time industrial employment and his personal commitment as a socialist who spoke at the Labour Party Annual Conference and stood for the NEC, all stood out.

It was the general view of the meeting that some means should be found of commemorating the work of Royden Harrison in a permanent form and this is under consideration by his family with a number of close friends.

Stan Newens

JOHN PLATTS-MILLS

John Platts-Mills was the Labour MP for Finsbury from 1945 to 1948 when he was expelled from the Party, and then Labour independent MP until his defeat in 1950, died on 26 October 2001, aged 95.

Gwen Cook, a new member of Labour Heritage, wrote in the newsletter of the Workers Music Association that the WMA President Aubrey Bowman, led

the singing of the Internationale at the memorial meeting on 24 January. Tributes were delivered from Tony Benn, Jack Jones and others. In a tribute written by Bowman and read out by Gwen on his behalf, Platts-Mills' work for civil and human rights was highlighted.

Born in New Zealand, Platts-Mills came to Oxford in 1928. His life encompassed encountering Hitler on a walking holiday in Austria, being special adviser on Anglo-Soviet relations during the Second World War, volunteering as a Bevin boy, attending Stalin's funeral and negotiating with Colonel Gaddafi on behalf of striking miners in 1984. His work as a barrister included the murder trials of the Krays and George Richardson.

He wrote his memoirs '*Muck, Silk and Socialism. Recollections of a Left-wing Queen's Counsel*'. These are available from: Paper Publishing, Mark Platts-Mills, QC, 8 New Square, Lincoln's Inn, WC2A 3QP. ISBN 0953994902. £25 post free. Cheques payable to Tim Platts-Mills.

Full appreciations by Lena Jeger and Michael Mansfield, QC were published in the *Guardian*, 27 October 2002

DEATH OF A CENTENARIAN

Charlie Poulter, honorary life president of Braintree CLP, died on 2nd December 2002 at the age of 100, after eighty four years of Labour Party membership. His centenary birthday party a few months earlier had been attended by local Labour MP Alan Hurst and was also marked by a card of congratulations from Tony Blair. The party took place at the Witham Labour Hall where in earlier years Charlie had often presided over the

marking off of Labour voters on the reading pads as the returns came in from the polling stations.

Joining the Labour Party at the age of 16 in 1918, when individual membership first became possible, Charlie had a long and sometimes hard, life as a market gardener, bootmaker, printer and school groundsman. Throughout it all he remained a dedicated party member. Eighty -four years of such service must surely be some sort of record in the history of the Labour Party.

John Gyford

BOOK REVIEWS

REVIEW OF "ZILLIACUS: A LIFE FOR PEACE AND SOCIALISM" BY ARCHIE POTTS. (MERLIN PRESS. £14.95). REVIEWED BY STAN NEWENS

Archie Potts, a long-standing member of the Labour Party in Tyneside, has just published a biography of Konni Zilliacus (1894-1967), a former Labour MP for Gateshead. Zilli, as he was usually addressed, was an expert on international affairs – very well known for both his dedication to the cause of peace and his leftist views.

His background was unique. Born in Japan in 1894, the son of a Finnish nationalist of Swedish origins and an American citizen of Scottish and Alsatian descent, he was educated in Finland, Sweden, Britain and the USA. He could speak eight languages and understood more. In the First World War he joined the Royal Flying Corps, but was later attached to the British Military

Commission in Siberia, supporting the anti-Bolshevik forces of Admiral Kolchak.

After demobilization, he eventually obtained a post with the League of Nations Secretariat in Geneva and saw from close range how the powers flouted its principles and took the steps which led to the Second World War. By 1938 he was disillusioned with the League and resigned.

He had already expressed his views in a series of publications which appeared under the pseudonym "Vigilantes" – 'The Dying Peace' (1933), and 'The Abyssinian Dispute' (1935), which were New Statesman pamphlets, 'Inquest on Peace' (1935), 'The Road to War' (1937) and 'Why the League has failed' (1938).

Horrified by the rise of fascism in Italy, Germany and France, he now argued in favour of an alliance with the Soviet Union and denounced the National Government in Britain for "making the war inevitable". He accepted that capitalism was defunct and believed that socialist measures were imperative.

Zilliacus had been a member of the Labour Party since 1919 and as an expert had provided advice and guidance to the Party's foreign affairs spokesmen. Arthur Henderson, as Foreign Secretary in the second Labour Government (1928-1931) and even more as Chairman of the World Disarmament Conference, relied on his expertise.

When the Second World War broke out, Zilliacus found work with the Ministry of Information, which made use of his linguistic skills to communicate with Swedish journalists and Soviet representatives. At the same time he wrote articles, made speeches and produced a very influential pamphlet

'Can the Tories win the peace and how they lost the last one.'

Having been adopted as Labour candidate for Gateshead, he was elected to the House of Commons in the 1945 General Election.

He already viewed with deep disapproval the support given by the Coalition Government to right wing political movements in liberated Europe and was horrified when Ernest Bevin, with whom he had already clashed, was appointed Foreign Secretary.

After a 3,000 word memorandum to Prime Minister Clement Attlee was dismissed, he began a campaign of bitter criticism directed at Bevin's foreign policy. A large number of Labour MPs disliked Bevin's stewardship – for refusing to give free rein to those seeking to establish a Jewish state in Palestine, for pursuing rearmament, for not seeking a more independent 'third force' policy – but Zilliacus, along with John Platts Mills, Leslie Hutchinson, Leslie Solley and others came to be regarded as beyond the pale- fellow travelers who were basically in sympathy with the Soviet Union.

"I choose peace"

In 1949 Zilliacus published a new critique of Labour foreign policy "*I choose peace*", but in the same year he was expelled from the Labour Party, with other members mentioned above and lost his seat to an official candidate in the 1950 General Election.

The fact that he was not a Soviet puppet was soon demonstrated when he was denounced in the Soviet bloc for supporting Tito. He was, furthermore, cited as a British agent in the Prague treason trials of 1952, which led to

Rudolph Slansky and twelve others being hanged.

In due course, Zilliacus was readmitted to the Labour Party, selected for Gorton, Manchester, and re-elected to the House of Commons in 1955. His attitude to the character of Labour's foreign policy was, however, unchanged and until he died in 1967, he campaigned for nuclear disarmament and a left-wing stance in foreign affairs. When Labour was elected to power in 1964 and refused to condemn the US bombing of Vietnam, he heaped coals of fire on the head of Michael Stewart, the Foreign Secretary.

Archie Potts' book represents a history of British foreign policy as seen from the left, from the end of the First World War to the Vietnam conflict. Zilliacus may have been a Labour rebel throughout his parliamentary career, but his story gives an account of the main issues faced by Labour for half a century which ought to be studied even by his critics. This is an important book which those who wish to be informed on this aspect of Labour history must read.

'A SHORT HISTORY OF THE LABOUR PARTY IN BRENT' 1900- 2000 BY LEN SNOW REVIEW BY HEIDI TOPMAN

Although this publication appears to be 'short' in length (48 pages including appendices), Len Snow's fascinating history actually contains an extraordinary wealth of information about the Labour Party in Brent during the course of the twentieth century. It is clear that the former mayor and long time local Labour Party activist has a very detailed knowledge of his subject.

Early years

The first chapter, 'The Background', sets the scene in 1900, from a national perspective with references to the final year of the reign of Queen Victoria and the Boer War. Len Snow then goes on to discuss radical political groups such as the Independent Labour Party (ILP), Social Democratic Federation (SDF) and the Co-operative and Clarion movements. Local examples of all these organisations are provided. However, the chapter concludes in February 1900, with the formation of the national Labour Representation Committee at the Memorial Hall in Farringdon Street.



Chapter two, which takes the reader 'up to World War 1', commences with the General Election of 1900 and the victories of Keir Hardie at Merthyr and Richard Ball at Derby. Local governance

is then considered. The fact that at the beginning of the twentieth century, few councillors were elected 'with outright party affiliations' is noted. The election in 1904 of Dave Barrett, the 'first acknowledged Labour Councillor' is followed by a detailed account of his political career in his roles of local councillor and member of the Board of Guardians. Interestingly, one of his greatest successes noted here was the overturning of an original Education Committee decision to not permit the ILP to hire a room in a council school for a Socialist Sunday School (SSS) meeting. Barrett argued that the SSS had as much right to meet as any other school. He won by a single vote. Although, chronologically, this chapter should finish with the 'well established' Labour Party at the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, Len Snow actually concludes it with the acquisition of new premises by Willesden Trades and Labour Hall in 1922.

Between the wars

The third chapter, 'Between the Wars' concentrates on local council and parliamentary elections between 1921 and 1925. The shifting fortunes of Labour on the local council are noted. In 1921, for example, there were fifteen Labour Councillors out of a total of thirty-three. In spite of the fact that Labour did not have a working majority, by using tactical voting the councillors were able to implement many of their desired reforms. This situation was to only last for a year: in 1922, several Labour Councillors lost their seats.

Chapter four, 'The General Strike' takes the reader from Brent's response to that event to the late 1930s. Len Snow delineates the political and social

activities of the General Strike on a local level; from the Council of Actions headquarters at Willesden Labour Hall (also known as Hamilton Hall) to the strikers' football matches on a local green. By 1936, ten years after the General Strike, the Labour Party finally had a majority on the council. Len Snow briefly considers the Labour Council's achievements before weaving several more organisations and prominent individuals into the history. Such individuals include Lou Unwin, the longest serving member of Brent Labour Party, having been signed up by her parents at the age of 12!

Labour wins in Brent

The fifth chapter concentrates on the period 'Post World War 2'. Surprisingly the references to the Second World War are largely limited to housing difficulties. Much of this chapter concentrates on the work of the local council, but the local impact of the national left/right (Bevan / Gaitskell) split in the Labour Party during the 1950s is also considered. This centred on the Council's Labour Group's refusal to cut capital spending, which resulted in the Labour Group leader's resignation. The chapter ends on a high note, in 1963, with the opening of the New Hall (Pavitt Hall from 1994), Wembley Labour Party's premises.

Chapter 6, 'Brent and the GLC' takes the reader from the inception of the Greater London Council and the creation of the borough of Brent to the present day. The emphasis is, again, very much on the work of the local council, but this incorporates local references to the founding of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) in 1981 and the Miner's Strike of 1984/5. Many local Labour activists

were involved in fund raising efforts for the latter. The shifting fortunes of the Labour Group are fully examined, from the winning of the council with a record share of the vote in 1971 to the forming of a Conservative administration in 1983, after a Labour Councillor 'crossed the floor' to the Tories. Ultimately, Labour governed with a minority administration after 1996. Len Snow believes that the success of the minority administration in Brent 'may have been a factor' in the 1997 general election landslide win. Focussing on the work of the local council also enables Len Snow to introduce many more prominent local figures into his history. He concludes both the chapter and the book by reflecting upon the 'turbulent, sometimes glorious, sometimes fraught' history of Labour in Brent. Now 'Labour really does feel like the natural party to govern in Brent'.

'NEW LABOUR GRASSROOTS' BY PATRICK SEYD AND PAUL WHITELEY, PUBLISHED BY PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

'The fortunes of the Labour party were at a low ebb at the start of the nineties, but rose to electoral triumph towards the end. By using a series of unique surveys conducted during the 90s, the authors observe how changes in social backgrounds, attitudes, political activities and political impacts of party members reflected in Labour's eventual success. Evaluating the role of the member in the New Labour party organisation, the authors examine questions about the relationship of the rank-and-file membership to their political party, and finally ask if the

party can remain viable without its voluntary membership in the future.'

This book received press coverage at the end of September in the lead up to the Party Conference at Blackpool.

'Labour's support for the 1991 Gulf War caused thousands of party activists to tear up their membership cards, according to a survey carried out at the time by Professor Pat Seyd (Politics). He found that the largest group of people leaving the Labour party cited the war and opposition to it. Each year since 1997 the Labour party has been losing a substantial number of members. If Tony Blair continues with his war policy, there could, in the longer term, be a significant haemorrhaging of the party, with financial and electoral consequences. (Guardian 27 September, Sunday Times 29 September)'

- Quotes from *University of Sheffield Newsletter*. October 2002 - Seyd is Professor at the University

LES STANNARD

Les Stannard grew up in the depression, fought in the War, was a member and active stop steward of the Electrical Trades Union, as well as active in the Co-operative movement, the Communist Party and later in life the Lewisham Pensioners' Forum. 'He had a burning sense of justice and a hatred of injustice', says Jim Dowd MP, a former Lewisham Labour Councillor. 'He was a civilised and democratic individual.'

'*Mr Lewisham: A Life of Les Stannard*'. Helen Tomkins (Lewisham Pensioners' Forum) is available for £4.99 inc.

postage from Lewisham Pensioners' Forum, 120 Rushey Green. Catford, London, SE6 4HQ. Tel: 02028 314 9841/2 lp.forum@tiscali.co.uk

from *Socialist History Society Newsletter* June 2002

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