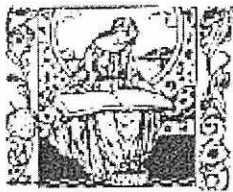


Labour Heritage



Labour Heritage

Bulletin Spring 2004

LABOUR HERITAGE WEST LONDON DAY SCHOOL

Labour Heritage held a day school in Ruskin Hall, Acton, on Saturday 13th December to commemorate the 60 year's anniversary of the 1943 Acton by-election. This by-election was held during World War 2 and challenged the electoral pact between the Labour and Conservative parties. When the Conservative MP – Hubert Duggan died, the official Labour Party position was not to contest the seat. However the local branch of the Independent Labour Party selected Walter Padley, the party national industrial organizer to fight the election.

Walter Padley and the Acton by-election

Bill Bolland, member of Labour Heritage and Acton and Shepherds Bush CLP spoke on the research which he has conducted on Walter Padley and the 1943 by-election. This has included reports from the local Gazette and from talking to relatives of Walter Padley who are still alive.

Walter Padley was an industrial organizer with a large amount of support from the shop stewards at Napiers, an engineering firm located in Acton Vale. During the war he had been a conscientious objector believing the war to be imperialist in its aims. However he

had also been rejected by a medical board for military service on the grounds that he suffered from asthma.

WIN ACTON FOR SOCIALISM

WALTER PADLEY
JAMES MAXTON, M.P.
SYLVIA PADLEY

Co-op Hall, Western Ave., East Acton
SUNDAY, 12th December, 3 p.m.

YOUR VOTES WILL DECIDE

Published by Fred. G. Barton, Agent, 318, Uxbridge Rd., Acton, W.3

WHY LABOUR WILL NOT CONTEST THE BY-ELECTION

1. Because the National Government is based upon an agreement by the political parties composing it not to contest each other at by-elections. The Labour Party will honour the agreement because it does not wish to undermine the stability of the Government in these critical times.
2. The voting register is nearly five years old. Thousands of voters are in the forces, and others are scattered throughout the country on war work, whilst thousands of people now living in Acton will have no vote in this election. The election therefore cannot represent the will of Acton people.
3. Our main job is to get on with the war effort and bring it to an early and victorious conclusion.

IN THE MEANTIME

Keep your powder dry for the election that matters at the end of hostilities.
The Labour Candidate for that election will be
Clr. J. A. SPARKS.

Issued by the Secretary of the Acton Labour Party, 37 Allison Rd., Acton, W3

The by-election was held in unusual circumstances on an electoral roll, which had not been updated since 1937. Local people serving in the forces could vote using their last civilian address in Acton.

Initially there were six candidates but the independent labour and Liberal candidates withdrew leaving Walter Padley, a Edward Godfrey (reported as a founder of the pro-Geman British Nationalist Party), a Dorothy Crisp (who wrote for the Sunday Dispatch) and the official Conservative candidate – Henry Longhurst. Walter Padley held public meetings in Acton and ILP speakers such as Jimmy Maxton spoke to an audience of 100 people. Padley defended the decision to fight a by-election – after all other countries involved in the War such as Australia and the USA had held general elections. He rejected the anti-patriotic labels – his Tory opponent Longhurst, he pointed out, had visited Germany on a golfing holiday and had praised Hitler. Winston Churchill made a point of writing to the local Gazette calling for a Conservative victory. When election day came the turn out was 20%. Longhurst gained 5104 votes to Padley's 2336. However Padley had won 28% of the vote, the best ILP result until that date, during the wartime years. He was selected again as an ILP candidate for Acton in 1944. After 1945 the ILP joined with the Labour Party and Padley was selected as a Labour candidate, though not for Acton and went on to have a career in the Foreign Office in the 1964-70 Wilson government. (more on Walter Padley in article by Bill Bolland in this Bulletin).

Southall

The second speaker of the day was Oliver New, RMT London Region Transport President and Southall local activist. He spoke on the history of the labour movement in Southall, explaining how the area had long been one of economic change and transition. In the

1930s emigrants from Wales sought jobs in factories such as AEC and Quaker Oats. They often faced the same violence and hostility from local people as the immigrants from the Indian subcontinent who began to arrive in the 1950s. By 1965 there were over 9,000 immigrants in Southall from the 'New Commonwealth' – the area changed very quickly. Oliver spoke of the conditions in which they worked, in factories such as Woolfs, the impact on housing and education and the controversial issue of bussing. In the 1960s the British National Party attempted to organize in Southall, holding nine public meetings. The Indian Workers Association was set up as a welfare organization for Asian workers and in 1967 the first Asian councilor, Sardul Gill was elected. In the 1970s the Labour Party moved to the left and campaigns against racialism by the Anti-Nazi League helped to transform the situation in Southall. The local Labour Party was on the left with MP Sid Bidwell. The the Asian community organized itself into the labour movement, including the Labour Party which has a large membership but not a large active base. In recent years we have seen the rise of Asian businessmen within the community and an increasingly divisive role of religious institutions which have become more inward looking. There was a lot of discussion on the events in Southall on April 23rd 1979 when the National Front was allowed by the Tories on Ealing Council to meet in the Southall Town Hall. It was announced that 2004 would see the 25th anniversary of this event when a teacher Blair Peach was killed and a commemoration would take place.

Serpius Stepniak

The first speaker in the afternoon was Tristan Bunnell, member of Brentford and Isleworth CLP who spoke on the little known anarchist – Sergius Stepniak. Stepniak was a member of the Hammersmith Socialist Society. He was an exile from St Petersburg, having murdered the chief of police and been involved in countless uprisings. He ended up in Harrow on the Hill, then Hampstead where he joined the Karl Marx Club and finally moved to Bedford Park, Chiswick. He lived near the station and was sadly killed by a train in 1895, aged 44. His death was unlikely to have been suicide. He was reported to be abandoning anarchism and was moving towards the ILP. 1895 however had been a bad year for socialists, with the death of Engels and William Morris within a short space of time. At this time the movement was reduced to small groups and these deaths had a major impact. 1,000 people attended the funeral of Stepniak. He had become known through the number of books, which he had written on the Russian peasantry and his ideals for the setting up of rural communes. He had also written a book on how to use dynamite!

Co-operation in Brent

Len Snow, former mayor of Brent spoke on co-operation in Brent, the subject of a recently published pamphlet, which was reviewed in Labour Heritage bulletin Winter 2003. He explained that the pamphlet had been written as a result of an open session of the Brent Cooperative Party, open to the public and Labour Party members. Much of what had been written had been recorded by word of

mouth. Len gave an outline of co-operative ideas going back to the Levellers, the Rochdale Pioneers and Robert Owen. Co-operation had a variety of outlets – theatre, bookshops housing cooperatives, the Woodcraft Folk and of course the Women's Cooperative Guild. The Willesden branch of the WCG had been set up in 1887. There had been a decline in the number of co-op shops however. This provoked a discussion on where the co-op had gone wrong. In 1917 the Co-op Representation Committee was set up and political neutrality was ended. This was to defend the Co-op from political attack by the government of the day. In 1927 an electoral agreement was made with the Labour Party and as a result Labour and Cooperative candidates, such as James Hudson were elected as MP for Ealing North.

1897 engineers' strike in Chiswick

John Grigg of Acton and Shepherds Bush CLP spoke on the 1897 engineers strike in Chiswick. This dispute was described in detail in Labour Heritage bulletin Spring 2003. In 1864 there were 10,000 men employed in the shipyard in Chiswick, building destroyers for the Navy. By 1904 this had finished and shipbuilding was moved to Southampton. The Thames was no longer able to accommodate the larger ships. The 1897 strike affected 4-5,000 members of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers. These men had to serve a seven year apprenticeship, and their families rented cottages on the Glebe Estate, now a very upmarket area. Lower paid workers lived down by the river, an area now demolished. There had been a demarcation dispute at Thorneycrofts between members of the ASE and the

boilermakers and this had contributed to the defeat of the ASE members. Engineers were locked out after the employers, Thorneycrofts refused to settle the 1897 dispute on the grounds of competition from Tyneside. Most local employers had settled the ASE dispute for a wage increase and an eight hour day. After the strike was over the settlement at Thorneycrofts included the introduction of piecework, use of unskilled labour and the dismissed men were not reinstated. This had a political impact on the ASE and other unions. (full report Spring 2003 Labour Heritage bulletin).

Workers' Educational Association

The final speaker of the day was Sean Creighton secretary of Labour Heritage who spoke on the Workers Education Association with special reference to West London. There were many branches in West London offering classes on a range of subjects. In 1914 there were branches in Southall, Hammersmith and Fulham offering classes on industrial economics, economic history and literature. There was a flurry of branches set up in 1919 – 31 in the area including Acton, Ealing, Hanwell, Uxbridge, Harrow, Southall and Wembley. The Ealing branch had 65 members. Membership fluctuated. In 1922 this had fallen to 44, but classes were offered in economics, and English literature. Winter socials and summer rambles were organized. The Hammersmith branch had 22 members in 1922 offering music, gymnastics, drama and monthly socials. They ran fund raising events such as operettas. A branch in Harrow had 50 members in 1923. In Willesden in 1921 a branch of 45 set up political theory study circles.

There was a London District which organized meetings of the WEA where no branch existed. A protest conference was held on educational issues. The journal "The Highway" published articles from members. Plays were very popular with many branches. Language teaching for adolescents including Esperanto as well as French and Russian.

In the 1930s subjects taught reflected an increased interest in economics and an Ealing day school attracted over 100 people to hear about the 'five year plan in Russia'. Another day school on 'Can democracy control finance' attracted 55 people. Activity fluctuated and often depended upon the enthusiasm of branch officers. In 1932 a rally was held in London to oppose education cuts by local education authorities.

However literature and drama were still popular in the 1930s. In Heston and Isleworth a day school was held on the subject 'From the thriller to Shakespeare'. There were also day schools on foreign policy, the colour question and revolution in Spain. By the late 1930s activities were falling off but the WEA maintained itself during the war. The WEA survived after 1945 and in fact up to the present day. Branches exist in Ealing, Ruislip, Uxbridge, Kilburn and Hillingdon. Subjects have changed though. Typical classes now are creative writing, French for women, effective parenting and Egyptology. In many ways the WEA is the provider of skills rather than education – not in line with Toynbee's ideal of education for the citizen or knowledge is power.

The day school ended on this note. 26 people attended throughout the day, many of who contributed. There was never a dull moment!

WALTER PADLEY

Walter Padley was born in 1916 and grew up in Chipping Norton where his father was the local co-op manager. In 1927 he won a scholarship to the recently opened local grammar school. He joined the Labour Party in 1930 and at the general election the following year was speaking on public platforms at the age of 15. He was a delegate to the general management committee of the Banbury District Labour Party and was very active in the National Union of Distribution Workers winning a gold medal for trade union recruitment later in the decade. During the 1930s he was not only gaining a reputation as a 'brilliant theoretician' but was active in the front line. Oswald Mosely was eager to establish support in North Oxfordshire and on Saturdays an open-air wagon would arrive in the square at Chipping Norton where the British Union of Fascists was met with local hostility. Eventually a public debate was arranged and Moseley sent his 'intellectual heavyweight' Alexander Raven Thompson, the Left chose the teenage Padley who was reported to have 'floored' the apologist for fascism.

Candidate

His direct debut into elective politics saw him stand as the youngest ever candidate for Chipping Norton borough council, in a two-seater ward he was just four votes behind the successful second Labour candidate, but would have been disqualified, being several months short of 21. After that time he won a trades union scholarship to Ruskin College where he gained a diploma in economics and later an external degree. He also captained the college cricket

team and was goalkeeper for the football side.

His rise in the Independent Labour Party was rapid – quickly he became London divisional representative on the Party's National Administrative Council as well as political organizer for the area and a national industrial organizer. When Acton's Tory MP died in late 1943 the shop stewards committee at Napier's voted to contest the election, several were ILP members including the convenor Wilfred Wigham who worked with him on other committees. Indeed one story told is that Padley mildly approved the influx of rather hardened Trotskyists into the ILP in the 1940s as it would 'innoculate the Party against Stalinism.' He was formally adopted as the ILP candidate in October 1943 and despite a hugely out of date register polled 28% of the vote cast. The local Communist Party seemed more concerned with the release of Mosely and effectively called for a boycott of the election. The official Labour Party preferred to 'keep their powder dry, their chief concern appeared to be fundraising for a Labour Hall and support for the Beveridge Report. Padley had the support from all three ILP MPs who spoke during the by-election, including Fenner Brockway then editor of the *New Leader*, who spoke twice. Padley was readopted as ILP candidate in 1944 in what appeared to be the high tide of ILP optimism. He spoke of 140 candidates at the eventual general election. In the event there were five candidates, and a 60% success rate in seats fought.

After 1945

As July 1945 approached, differences were set aside and Padley spoke for Joe Sparks who was to become Acton's

Labour MP for the next fourteen and a half years – saying that the Labour Party was the only party which could implement the changes needed. At an ILP NAC meeting he told Maxton that he was preventing him from being effective in the wider labour movement, provoking Maxton to lose his temper. Following Maxton's death later that year, Padley – now posed to become president of USDAW, the shopworkers' union, a post he held for 16 years, rejoined Labour along with Fenner Brockway. Within a year the three ILP MPs followed suit. To old ILPers what followed over the next 30 years was a disappointment. Beating Roy Jenkins, amongst others Walter Padley was to become Labour candidate for the safe seat of Ogmire and went on to represent the constituency for 29 years. When Harold Wilson became prime minister in 1964 he became Minister of State at the Foreign Office under Patrick Gordon Walker and continued under Michael Stewart until January 1967. The remaining twelve years were sadly spent on the back benches. He died in 1984. Several comrades have helped me out with this venture and my gratitude is due to all, with special thanks to his brother Ray, a Hounslow councilor for 30 years and his widow Mrs Sylvia Padley.

Bill Bolland

SOUTHALL 23RD APRIL 1979 – 25 YEARS ON

It is now 25 years since the events in Southall on 23rd April 1979. Southall, a suburb of West London is home to one of the largest Asian communities in Britain, the majority of whom originally came from the Indian Punjab. During the

election campaign of 1979 the National Front, a fascist organization tried to hold a public meeting in Southall Town Hall. This was clearly intended as a provocation to the Asian community. There was no way that this meeting was to be a genuine public meeting. It would be attended by a handful of fascists plus selected invitees from the press. Although the NF were not standing a candidate in the area, the ruling Conservative Council in the borough allowed them to hire the local Town Hall. The minority Labour Group on the council fearing trouble on a large scale appealed to the then Labour Home Secretary to ban the meeting but without success.

The Asian community together with activists from the wider labour movement and the Anti Nazi League vowed to organize against the meeting to prevent it from going ahead. The local Indian Workers Association, partially a welfare organization which gave advice and help to workers in the area, called a general strike in Southall and for a sit-down protest Gandhian style in front of the Town Hall. Immediately the police moved in to remove those sitting down and as a result all hell broke loose. Riot police were moved into Southall on a large scale. As local workers reported – one police horsebox after another crossed the main road bridge into the center of Southall. All roads into the town were closed. Workers trying to leave or return home were prevented from doing so.

By the evening Southall was virtually under police occupation. The demonstration was swelled by more and more people as the evening wore on, but they were kept well away from Southall Town Hall where the fascists were escorted to their meeting to prattle on

that Southall should be restored to being an English hamlet! Demonstrators were attacked by riot police. Hundreds of people were arbitrarily arrested on trumped up charges and many were seriously injured as police tried to clear the streets. It was reported that as many as a thousand people needed hospital treatment that night. The Special Patrol Group, an elite thug group of the police, since disbanded, went out in force later in the evening attacking demonstrators still left on the streets. It is they who were accused of murdering a London school teacher and Anti Nazi League activist called Blair Peach by hitting him on the head with a truncheon. Blair Peach died that night of a blood clot on his brain.

Birth of the Asian community in Southall

Workers from the Punjab had started moving into Southall, an industrial working class town in the 1950s to provide cheap labour for local factories. One of these – the Woolf Rubber Company had an appalling record of low pay, poor health and safety and long hours. In the 1930s the company had employed workers escaping mass unemployment in South Wales. Asian workers with little knowledge of English were vulnerable to exploitation. Victimisation of trades union activists was rife. This led to frequent walk outs in the factory culminating in a strike in the winter of 1965/66. In addition Asian workers faced race discrimination from some of the white workforce. The fascist British National Party tried to capitalize on the fears of white workers in relation to overcrowding in housing and schools and stood candidates in Southall in elections.

However the Indian Workers Association assisted in the organization of workers at Woolfs and other factories, into the trades union movement. As more Asians were able to buy houses in the center of Southall, the area changed very rapidly and soon the majority of the population in the area was of Asian origin. Labour retained the Asian vote in Southall and maintained its political control of the town. The BNP followed the white exodus into neighbouring suburbs. However violent attacks against Asian workers and school students continued on the fringes of Southall and in 1976 a student was stabbed to death in the town center. Threats of retaliation and race riots were avoided as the IWA, local trades council, Labour Party and community organizations organized a united peace march through the center of Southall. In 1981 again a fascist band tried to organize a concert in a Southall. This time local youth were prepared for them and burnt the pub to the ground. Hundreds of youth were to turn out on the streets.

In the 1980s the labour movement organized against racism. Thousands had marched through Southall against the murder of Gurdip Singh Chaggar in 1976 and demonstrated against the National Front in 1979. This was in contrast to the couple of hundred aroused by the BNP in the previous decade. The solidarity of Asian workers which sustained their own disputes for trades union recognition at the Woolfs Rubber Factory in 1965/6 was extended to the National Union of Mineworkers during the 1984/85 dispute. The NUM were given money and food most generously from the people of Southall

Barbara Humphries

LABOUR AND RACE

The theme of this year's Labour Heritage was 'Labour and race' with speakers on racism and the impact of imperialism on the labour movement in Britain and the role of black labour activists.

Labour and ethnic minorities – an overview

The first speaker was Ken Lunn from the University of Portsmouth who gave an overview of Labour and ethnic minorities. He said that the view that British workers had their attitudes on race formed by the legacy of Empire and were as a result hostile to immigrant workers was over simplified and should be challenged. It was also not enough to see immigrant workers simply as the victims of capitalist exploitation. He had spent over 25 years doing research on different groups of immigrant workers and they were extremely diverse with different cultural traditions. The main focus of Labour and race has been the immigration of black and Asian workers to Britain after 1945, but the history of immigrant workers goes back a lot further than that. Ken spoke of Jewish workers who organized separate trades unions in the face of hostility from the established trades union movement. Seaports such as Liverpool had long received immigrant communities and had supported strong Asian seamen's organizations to combat racism. The diversity of ethnic communities in Britain was illustrated by the examples of the Arab community in South Shields and the Lithuanian community in the Fife coalfields. Local studies had

supplemented national histories in this respect.

Discussion included the issue of race and culture in the relationship between ethnic minorities and the 'native working class'. The majority of the workforce in Britain have their origins in an immigrant community, such as the Irish. Race was also an issue. Immigrant white communities had over generations become 'invisible' but black workers would not 'melt away' in the same way.

The Labour Party and Africa 1920-1961

The second speaker was Paul Kelemen from the University of Manchester who spoke on the theme of 'The Labour Party and Africa 1920-1961'. The focus of his speech was Kenya and the land reform movement. In Kenya as in other African countries white settlers had taken the best land from the Africans leaving land hunger in the African reserves. There had been support for land distribution and the radical solution of co-operatives in the 1930s but with a Labour Government in 1945-1951 keen to boost agricultural productivity in the colonies, policy changed in favour of the white settlers. Europeans were again encouraged to settle in Kenya. The interest of the European consumer was counterposed to the African producer. By 1952 land reform in Kenya was vigorously pursued by the Kenyan African Union and the Mau Mau rebellion began. Now with Labour out of office the Labour left supported the African peasantry in its quest for land redistribution and credit provision to be able to farm. The increasing brutality of the security forces was condemned. In 1954 the Movement for Colonial Freedom was set up, led by Fenner

Brockway and supported independence for the colonies. When land distribution to Africans was achieved, loans from the British government left them indebted and thus dependent on growing cash crops. The position of the Trades Union Congress was to try to set up trades unions in the colonies.

Krishna Menon

In the afternoon Marika Sherwood of the Black and Asian Studies Association spoke on the case of Krishna Menon who was adopted as a prospective Labour candidate for Dundee but was subsequently rejected by the Labour Party national office. Menon was born into a wealthy family in India in 1896. In the 1930s he had been active in the Home Rule League in India. He later came to London, studied at LSE and was admitted to the Bar. He joined the India League which he described as being full of white English people. He also joined the Labour Party and became a councilor in St Pancras. It is not clear why he was selected as a candidate for Dundee, although the jute industry was a link between the city and India. Workers in the jute industry had lost their jobs as the industry relocated to India. Workers from Dundee went out to Calcutta. The records of Dundee Labour Party have been lost in a fire so it has not been possible to research fully.

Movement for Colonial Freedom

Stan Newens spoke on the Movement for Colonial Freedom. In 1945 one fifth of the world was still under British sovereignty. 780 million people throughout the world still lived under European colonial world. Hopes of independence for the colonies under a

Labour Government were not encouraged by the Labour Party's general election manifesto which gave no commitment to introduce bills to provide for self-government, except in the case of India. Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin said that the loss of the colonies would mean falling living standards for British people. However continued colonial rule was in contradiction to the Atlantic Charter which advocated full sovereignty for all the world's peoples. In some British colonies repression was on the order of the day – in Malaya for instance communist insurgents were put down by British security forces, who even used head hunters to bring in rebels' heads. This news was concealed from the British public but anti-colonial activists received the photographic evidence. Fenner Brockway played an active role in convening a conference of anti-colonialists and representatives of nationalist and independence movements, and black organizations such as the League of Coloured Peoples in 1947. Offices were set up in Paris and London and in 1948 the Congress of People's Against Imperialism was established.

With the outbreak of wars against French rule in North Africa the Paris office was closed. By now India, Ceylon and Burma had their independence. In Africa however independence organizations, such as the Mau Mau led by Kenyatta were established and solidarity was called for. Against this background, the Movement for Colonial Freedom was founded in 1954. The Labour Party's official position was not to support independence leaders. This however was not universally accepted and 70 MPs, including Harold Wilson and Barbara Castle, supported the

John Archer

Movement for Colonial Freedom. It had support also amongst celebrities such as Benjamin Britten and in the universities. Fenner Brockway was the chairman, Douglas Rogers the secretary and Tony Benn the treasurer. It had a lot of support amongst the rank and file of the Labour Party and trades union movement and waged a very high profile campaign. It drafted over 1500 parliamentary questions. Press cuttings from Kenya proved that prisoners in the independence movement had been beaten to death at Hola Camp and Barbara Castle succeeded in getting this confined in the House of Commons. In 1963 Kenyatta declared an independent republic.

Other activities were organized by the MCF around the Suez crisis in 1956. A Suez Emergency Committee was set up. In the end however the Labour Party itself took over the organization of the demonstration on 4th November 1956 against the British invasion of Egypt. The MCF campaigned for freedom for the Portuguese colonies in Africa, for peace in Vietnam, support for Castro in the Cuban revolution and opposition to the seizure of power by the Ba'ath regime in Iraq and the reign of terror against its opponents. But it was divided on the question of Israel. On the homefront it fought racism and mobilized opposition to Enoch Powell's rivers of blood speech in 1968. The MCF continued to campaign against neo-colonialism after independence, and opposed military take-overs in Africa, Asia and Latin America, such as the Pinochet coup in 1973. In 1970 it was renamed "Liberation" and will celebrate its 50th anniversary in May 2004.

The final speaker was Sean Creighton who spoke about the life of a black activist in Battersea called John Archer. He was elected mayor in Battersea in 1913 and quite possibly was the first black mayor in Britain. He combined Labour politics with pan-Africanism and Roman Catholicism. He was born in Liverpool in 1863. His father was a seaman and his mother was Irish. When he moved to Battersea in the 1890s he worked with the Progressive Alliance. He was involved with the Pan African Association and was a delegate at the Pan African Conference in 1900. Archer became a councilor in Battersea in 1906 and in 1912 he was elected to the local Board of Guardians. He was mayor between 1913-1914 and did not experience any problems of colour prejudice, in spite of speculations by the local press. It was reported that "a man of colour" had been elected as mayor of Battersea and congratulations flowed in from all over the world. Archer continued to fight for the unemployed on the Board of Guardians where he was the leader of the Labour group. In 1922 he ceased to be a councilor but he was an Alderman up to 1931 when he was re-elected as a councilor and deputy leader of the council. He died in 1932 aged 68. He left a legacy as a champion of both poor and coloured people. A block of flats is named after him.

LabourHeritage AGM

Labour Heritage held its AGM on the same day. It was reported that Labour Heritage had experienced a successful year, with conferences in Essex and West London and a regular bulletin. One new development had been the setting up of a web site maintained by Jason Williams. This web site has already

received over 500 visits. Thanks were given to two members of the committee who were not standing again, both for their outstanding contributions to Labour Heritage over the past years. They were Irene Wagner who, as treasurer had been involved right from the very beginning in 1982 and Sean Creighton who as secretary over the past few years had revitalized the organization.

A new committee was elected for the forthcoming year –

Chair-Stan Newens, Secretary-Heidi Topman, Treasurer-John Grigg, Bulletin editor-Barbara Humphries, plus Jonathan Wood, Bill Bolland, Stephen Bird, and Helen McAlpine. Jason Williams who has developed the Labour Heritage web site was co-opted at the first committee meeting. (www.labourheritage.com)

“CULTURE IN RADICAL POLITICS” – CONFERENCE HELD AT THE MECHANICS INSTITUTE, MANCHESTER, NOVEMBER, 2003

Manchester may be the chief city of Industrial Lancashire, but historically it cannot claim to have played a significant part in the growth of the Labour Party. On the other hand many fine public buildings were constructed out of the profits of "Cotonopolis" profits which were made chiefly by city burghers who supported the Liberal Party.

Last year some 6 paying customers turned up to the meeting held at the Rylands Library, another of the fine public buildings of which Manchester is justly proud. This year some 50 people gathered in the opulent surroundings of the Mechanics Institute.


The best talk of the morning session was that by Dr Malcolm Chase of the University of Leeds on the subject of Chartism. Chartism may only have lasted little more than the 10 years of the 1840s, but he argued that the Chartist movement was far more than a political party or a pressure group. Chartism was a whole way of life. Chartist Sunday Schools, Chartist Land Plan, Chartist Co-Operative shops, Chartist Temperance Association, and for those who liked a drop, Chartist Pubs. All family members participated in its events.

The lunch hour gave the participants the opportunity to appreciate the talent and outstanding artistic skill of those who constructed the Mechanics Institute, and also appreciate its only link with Labour Heritage, namely the Labour and Communist Party Archives.

The afternoon session was primarily devoted to a talk by Tommy Jackson of

Labour Heritage Over 21 years of preserving Labour history

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Manchester University on the Unity Theatre Club.

The main Unity Theatre was situated in Goldrington Street near Mornington Crescent Underground Station in North London. There were some 250 Unity Theatre branches in various parts of England. Tommy Jackson displayed outstanding knowledge, both of this theatre and similar theatres in the USA. The Unity Theatre was described as left-wing, but in reality its links were solely with the Communist Party. Nonetheless, many famous actors started their careers in the Unity Theatre; examples given included Michael Gambon, Alfie Bass, Bill Owen and Warren Mitchell.

In addition to the talk there was a video and two short excerpts of live productions given by drama students of Manchester University. All three parts were much appreciated by the audience. The Unity Theatre Club effectively ended in the 1960s although the building stood until 1974 when it was burnt down. The word "Club" was used in the name was to overcome the problems of the censorship laws. The relaxation of the censorship laws gave the opportunity to the Royal Court and other left-leaning theatres to make their mark. Amongst the audience was a former actor from the Unity Theatre who complained bitterly that censorship was much more extreme despite the term "Club." He stated that he was arrested after a play.

Michael Leahy

HARTLEY SHAWCROSS (1902-2003)

Hartley Shawcross was born on 4 February 1902 in Germany. His father John was Professor of English at Frankfurt University.

His mother Hilda was an active suffragette and socialist. Soon afterwards the family came back to England. Hartley went to Dulwich College as a day boy. He grew up in Wandsworth. He joined the Labour Party when he was 16, took part in the 1918 General Election campaign, and became a Ward Secretary.

After studying French in Switzerland he was translator to the British delegation at the Socialist International Conference in Geneva. Writers of obituaries credit Ramsay MacDonald, Herbert Morrison and Jimmy Thomas as persuading him to become a lawyer.

Lawyer

Having qualified in 1925 at the top of the list of 220 students in the Bar final, he practised in Liverpool in the chambers of David Maxwell-Fyfe and lectured at the University (1927-1934). Although a socialist he was prepared to represent business. He represented the coal-owners in the court case that resulted from the 1934 explosion at Gresford Colliery in North Wales in which 265 miners were killed, opposite Stafford Cripps representing the miners. As a result of Cripps' devastating performance at the hearing a manager of the mine was imprisoned and the Government set up a Royal Commission into safety in mines. Shawcross was made a QC in 1939.

War Work

Due to a spinal injury sustained in a climbing accident, he was unable to see active service in the War. He took on a number of public wartime appointments: He chaired the Enemy Aliens Tribunal (1939-41), was Recorder of Salford (1941-45), Deputy Regional Commissioner for the South-East (1941-2) and for the North West (1942-45), and Chairman of the Catering Wages Commission (1943-45). His former Head of Chambers David Maxwell-Fyfe was Solicitor-General in Churchill's Coalition Government from 1942.

Attorney General

He won the seat of St Helens in the 1945 election. His brother Christopher won nearby Widnes. Despite being a new boy, Attlee made him Attorney General. If he appears at all, Shawcross only makes fleeting appearances in autobiographies and biographies about members of the Attlee Government. This is probably because so little attention is paid to the role of the Attorney-General. But the Attorney-General had a busy workload to ensure that legal opinions were provided to the Cabinet on a wide range of issues. He did not attend every Cabinet meeting or only attended for parts of the meetings. His verbal views are rarely cited in the Cabinet minutes.

He submitted written views as Attorney General, or in conjunction with the other Law Officers on a wide range of matters, including: the release of doctors from the armed forces (8 November 1945), what to do about German Generals in British custody (5 July 1946), an infringement of the Commons rights by the Lords (8 September 1947), Commonwealth relations in the light of Eire's plan to cease to be a member of the Commonwealth (28 October 1948), the Anglo-Norwegian fishery dispute (17 January 1949), under-sea oil in the Persian gulf (17 February 1949), corruption (9 May 1949), the sale of civil aircraft in Hong King (6 April 1950), leasehold reform and rent restriction (20 October 1950), disputes with local authorities (2 January 1951), and the Stone of Scone (16 and 19 April 1951).

Sometimes the Cabinet decided what role he was to take in the House of Commons. On 18 March 1946 it agreed that he would announce the Government's intention to abolish special juries, with the exception of the London Special Jury in commercial cases. On 8 July he was to be involved in drafting a Government motion proposing acceptance of the report of the Committee of Privileges, and could speak in the debate. On 22 March 1948 it agreed that he should be available to speak in the Commons debate of equalisation provisions of the

Local Government Bill. On 28 October 1948 it agreed that the Law Officers should consider the legal implications of India's membership of the Commonwealth if it acted on its announcement to become a republic. On 12 November he was given to task of consulting New Zealand, Australia and Canada on the Eire intention to withdraw from the Commonwealth.

At various times as Attorney-General he was a member of Cabinet Committees, including: on Nationality Law (set up 1 August 1946), electoral reform (set up 6 March 1946), the reform of legal procedure (reported March 1946), and the Geneva Convention of War Victims (1949).

Nuremburg Trial

THE TRIAL OF GERMAN MAJOR WAR CRIMINALS

BY

THE INTERNATIONAL MILITARY TRIBUNAL
SITTING AT NUREMBERG
GERMANY

(COMMENCING 20TH NOVEMBER, 1945)

OPENING SPEECHES OF THE CHIEF PROSECUTORS

FOR

The United States of America;
The French Republic; The United Kingdom
of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; and
The Union of Soviet Socialist
Republics

PUBLISHED
UNDER THE AUTHORITY OF H.M. ATTORNEY-GENERAL
BY HIS MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE

London: 1946

He was signatory for the British Government to the Charter of the International Military Tribunal. He led the British prosecuting team at the Nuremburg Trial, assisted by his former Head of Chambers Sir David Fyfe-Maxwell, who was particularly devastating against Goering. In his opening address at the

Nuremberg Trial Shawcross took 5 hours. He condemned the leading Nazis on trial as “black-hearted murderers, plunderers and conspirators of which the world has not known their equal.” “Murder does not cease to be murder because the victims are multiplied ten-million fold.” “There comes a time in every life, when conscience must defy the leader’s orders.”

The Times obituary explains that because of the limitations of the Russian, American and French prosecutors, it was left to Shawcross ‘to demolish the defence that the proceedings were merely “victor’s justice”, in measured tones, the more effective for being entirely without histrionics or anger, he relentlessly built up the indictment against the accused of waging aggressive war in breach of treaty obligations. The very calmness of Shawcross’s exposition made it the more terrible. He let the appalling history of Nazi oppression unfold itself in the courtroom through a dispassionate relation of facts which told their own awful story. It was a performance which gave him an international reputation. Although against capital punishment, he knew that nothing less was possible given the awfulness of the crimes. Later he supported the idea of a permanent international tribunal on war crimes.

The Trial led on to a number of initiatives on international criminal justice and human rights, including the UN Declaration on Human Rights in 1948, and the European Convention on Human Rights which was adopted in 1950, which was initially drafted by David Maxwell-Fyfe. The Cabinet discussed a memorandum by Shawcross as Attorney-General on the Convention on 12 April 1951.

United Nations

The first part of the first General Assembly of the United Nations took place in London in January and February 1946. The second part took place in New York in the seven weeks up to 15th December. Shawcross was a British delegate at the second part. The delegates were allocated to six committees:

Political and Security, Economic and Financial, Social, Humanitarian and Cultural, Trusteeship, Administrative and Budgetary and Legal.

In a row over the power of veto on Security Council decisions between the Soviet Union and the other big powers Shawcross begged the Soviet representatives ‘to consider whether they can’t move a little towards our point of view so that, neither of us sticking rigidly to any preconceived ideas, we can together evolve a joint plan which would serve the common interests of us all.’

India complained at the Assembly that South Africa’s treatment of its Indian nationals was discriminatory, a denial of human rights and fundamental liberties, and therefore contrary to the Charter. Field Marshall Smuts argued that discussion of the internal affairs of a member was contrary to the Charter. The matter was referred to a joint meeting of the Political and Legal Committees. Smuts supported by Britain and the United States argued that the matter should be referred to the International Court of Justice as to whether it was a matter which the UN was qualified to deal with. Shawcross argued ‘that important matters of principle were involved which went far beyond the Indian-South African question. He said that he had made his views clear on the question of racial, religious or political discrimination, but he could accept the argument that if there were political and legal issues involved, the political issue should be dealt with first. That would strike at the very roots of what the United Nations was seeking to establish between nations – the rule of law. If the article in the Charter dealing with his matter were lightly dealt with, delegates ought to realise where it might lead them. Was it, for example, open to the United States to enquire into the operation of the caste system? There were places where people of negro blood were by law denied the privileges accorded to others. Could the United Nations deal with that? He cited other examples. Later he warned the Committee ‘that any decision reached by a narrow majority would be likely to antagonise the European element in South

Africa, and weaken the position of the liberal-minded elements there.' A compromise was reached through asking the Indian and South African Governments to report to the next session of the General Assembly the measures adopted to ensure that the treatment of Indians in South Africa was 'in conformity international agreements'.

We Are the Masters Now – Trade Union Matters

In 1946 he introduced the Trade Disputes and Trade Unions Bill repealing the anti-union legislation of 1927 following the collapse of the 1926 General Strike. Hansard reported him as saying: "We are the masters now and not only at the moment but for a very long time to come." It is thought that he was misquoted, actually saying: "We are the masters at the moment and shall be for some considerable time". He was attacked for this and he admitted later that it "was the most stupid thing" he had ever said. This political gaffe was cited as an example of the arrogance of power by Justice Popplewell in a lecture in 1997. According to the Times obituarist 'it was intended as a factual description rather than a boast'. It did him a 'good deal of harm. 'It was certainly uncharacteristic, for he was neither a bully nor a zealot; he had inherited from his parents a sense of compassion and caring for the unhappy and the unlucky, but he was hardly a fierce party warrior.

Order 1305 passed in 1940 and renewed in 1945 referred labour disputes to compulsory arbitration with a 21 day cooling off period during which industrial action was prohibited and if breached prison. Labour disputes became an important area of Cabinet concern from March 1949, including unauthorised strikes in electricity undertakings (March), the London Dock Strike (April, July, electricity power stations (December), the London Dock Strike (April 1950), Smithfield drivers (July 1950), and the London gas strike and interference with military supplies (September-October 1950).

On 7 July 1949 the Cabinet discussed the London Dock strike involving dockers refusal to unload two Canadian ships. The Emergency Committee had agreed that troops be used, and recommended a State of Emergency be declared if the dockers were not back at work by 11 July. Shawcross told the Cabinet that on the basis of the evidence provided to him it was a lock-out by the employers, who had previously tacitly accepted the dockers' refusal because of a dispute between the ship-owners and the crew. The employers had indicated that no dockers would be engaged for any work until the two ships were unloaded. The Cabinet decided that the Emergency Committee should discuss the matter again. Shawcross prosecuted 10 striking gas workers under Order 1305 at a time when the labour movement was calling for its repeal. On Shawcross' recommendation the Cabinet agreed to retain the Order but substitute fines for imprisonment. Problems with London Docks were back on the Cabinet agenda in April 1950. Shawcross also prosecuted seven London dockers under Order 1305. They were fined.

The Lynskey Tribunal

In 1948 allegations of corruption were made against Ministers and Officials of the Board of Trade. It was agreed to set up a Tribunal of Inquiry to be chaired by Justice Lynskey. On 28 October the Cabinet discussed whether Shawcross as Attorney-General should conduct the proceedings before the Tribunal, including the cross-examination witnesses. Shawcross thought that it was his duty to conduct the case and that if he refrained from doing so it might be thought that he did so because the Government and administration were deeply involved. The Cabinet was concerned that he would be put in an embarrassing position having to cross-examine Ministerial colleagues. The Cabinet agreed that Shawcross should open the case and then leave it to the Tribunal to decide whether he should continue or had the cross-examination of witnesses conducted by another leading counsel. In the end he did

carry out cross-examination. The Tribunal culminated in the resignation of John Belcher, Parliamentary Secretary of the Board of Trade, for taking bribes. George Gibson, a trade union director of the Bank of England, was mildly rebuked. Accusations were made against Hugh Dalton and his insistence on giving evidence damaged him.

Prosecutions and Capital Punishment

William Joyce (“Lord Haw-Haw”) and John Amery were tried for High Treason. Joyce was convicted and executed on 3 January 1946. In 1949 Shawcross prosecuted the Acid Bath murderer, John George Haigh. Shawcross demolished the defence’s argument that Haigh had been insane. Following the turning down of George Kelly’s Appeal by the Court of Appeal, Shawcross refused to refer the case to the House of Lords. Kelly was executed in March 1950 for the murder of a cinema manager. It was subsequently proved that he had been innocent and his conviction overturned by the Appeal Court in June 2003.

He was personally against capital punishment. He told the Cabinet on 7 August 1947 that he preferred to see an abolition clause inserted into the Criminal Law Bill. The Home Secretary wanted the Government to resist any amendment to abolish capital punishment, and oppose any resolution seeking to grade by degree of offence. As the Bill went through a clause was proposed to provide, for an experimental period of 5 years, life imprisonment instead of the death sentence for murder. On 8 April the Cabinet agreed that Ministers and Law Officers should abstain from voting on the issue if they could not vote for its retention on the grounds of conscience. On 14 April the Commons agreed the clause. On 2 June the Lords rejected it and agreed there should be a graded approach. On 8 June the Cabinet agreed the Lords approach. Meanwhile the Home Secretary had announced that he intended to advise the King to commute all death sentences to life imprisonment. The

Law Officers advised that there were constitutional problems with this, so the matter needed to be reconsidered. The Commons agreed the new approach, the Lords rejected it, and the Cabinet agreed on 22 July to acquiesce in the Lords’ rejection, but continue to seek to limit the death penalty.

Colour Prejudice

With growing immigration from the Caribbean and the Indian Sub-Continent symbolised by the arrival of SS Empire Windrush in 1948, colour prejudice was on the rise. On 21 November 1949 the Communist MP Phil Piratin was due to ask Shawcross a Parliamentary Question as to whether the Government would introduce legislation to make it illegal to include in tenancy agreements clauses preventing tenants from granting sub-leases to coloured persons. The Cabinet discussed this on 17 November. It was told that under the common law the courts might hold that such a clause was invalid as being contrary to public policy. Ministers agreed that Shawcross should answer to question on the basis that it would not in any event be practicable to introduce legislation on the subject at that stage of the present Parliament.

The Korean War

On 6 November 1950 the Cabinet discussed the possibility of Chinese intervention in Korea, the Chinese invasion of Tibet and Communist propaganda about Korea. Shawcross presented two memoranda dealing with the legal implications of the Korean conflict and Communist propaganda. On 13 November it discussed the Chinese intervention in Korea, making a contribution towards the reconstruction of Korea, and the 20th the creation of a demilitarised zone in Korea. There was also discussion about the possibility of bringing in legislation on the security of armed forces in overseas operations, including interference with the assembly of troops and

supplies in the UK in anticipation of UN operators abroad. Shawcross felt that that the latter issue was covered in the draft Bill. The Cabinet decided to proceed.

Other Issues

In 1946 Shawcross attacked 'the campaign of calumny and misrepresentation which the Tory Party and the Tory stooge press' had directed at the Labour Government. "Freedom of the press does not mean freedom to tell lies." In October 1946 Parliament set up the Royal Commission on the Press, which prepared the ground for the establishment of the Press Council.

He introduced the Legal Aid Bill in December 1948. 'which will open the doors of the courts freely to all persons who may wish to avail themselves of British justice without regard to the question of their wealth or ability to pay.'

On Cabinet instructions he took action against the squatting of empty Government property.

Politics, and public service from 1959

Shawcross resigned as MP in 1958 not liking the politics of opposition. When he became a life peer (Lord Shawcross of Friston) a year later he sat on the crossbenches. Bernard Levin, the political journalist and interviewer, had already dubbed him "Sir Shortly Floorcross". He regarded himself as a right-wing socialist, and in the 1981 joined the Social Democratic Party for a while.

He chaired Justice, a reforming legal organization for 16 years, and argued for a new Bill of Rights "a new Magna Carta for the Little Man". In 1957 he was one of several eminent lawyers who were refused permission to enter Hungary to observe the trials following the 1956 Uprising.

In 1990 he opposed the idea of an act to prosecute Second World War criminals on the grounds that it would constitute an "indelible blot upon every principle of British law and justice." War crimes", he observed, "were not confined to the enemy."

He took part in a number of public bodies. He was a member of the Monckton Advisory Committee in Central Africa, until ill-health led him to resign. He chaired the Royal Commission on the Press set up in 1961, the Medical Research Council from 1961-65, and the Panel on Takeovers and Mergers (1969-80). One outcome of the Panel's work was the City Code of 1972 designed to clamp down on insider trading. He became chairman of the Press Council in 1974. He joined the Council of the new University of Sussex becoming Chancellor in 1965 until 1985

Business and leisure

Shawcross was on the Board of Directors of a wide range of companies including Hawker Siddeley, Shell (1961-72), EMI (1965-81), Rank-Hovis McDougall (1965-79), Times Newspapers (1966-74), BSA (1968-73), Thames Television (1969-74), and The Observer (1981-93). He joined Morgan Guaranty Trust in 1965, becoming Chairman of its International Advisory Committee (1967-74) and thereafter a special adviser.

His leisure life was dominated by riding and sailing. He chaired the Society of Sussex Downsmen from 1962 to 1975. He supported the Countryside Alliance's Liberty and Livelihood march in 2002, although not physically strong enough to take part.

Legacy

His two lasting legacies are the citing of his speeches at Nuremburg to inform the debates on contemporary international war crimes, and his explanation of the role of the Attorney General to the House of Commons in 1951, again a contemporary issue given the role of the Attorney General in providing legal grounds for the invasion of Iraq. His closing speech at Nuremburg is extensively quoted on a Welsh website advocating the prosecution of Tony Blair for war crimes over the invasion of Iraq.

(www.Newcastle_emlyn.com/stopwar/vman/son/nur-shawcross-closing.shtml)

Sean Creighton

When he was freelance in the early 1990s, Sean undertook research into the Cabinet papers 1945-51 for Lord Shawcross to use in writing his autobiography 'Life Sentence' published by Constable, 1995. This is not acknowledged in the book.

A survey of issues discussed by the 1945-51 Labour Cabinet at meetings attended by Shawcross or affecting his role is available in email form from Sean: sean.creighton@btopenworld.com.

WHO WILL GREET THE KING?

When the world is in turmoil and revolution is in the air, you can do without reinforcing the old order. In Britain in 1921 the old order was capitalism and the monarchy. But West Ham was marching to a socialist tune and every Mayor of West Ham since 1916 had been from the Labour ranks. Three years late, and Labour would be in power at Westminster too. So, the question of how to entertain the reigning monarch when he visited the county borough was a difficult one. In June 1921 the question had to be tackled. King George V and Queen Mary were coming to open the splendid new YMCA Red Triangle Club in Greengate Street, Plaistow. The Mayor of West Ham was a socialist and chairman of the West Ham Trades Council. He was also a Welshman who had worked in a Merthyr coalmine from the age of nine. David John Davis would have to decide if he should entertain royalty. He chose to do so. Even on the last day of his year as Mayor, in November of the same year, he was still defending the decision to fellow councilors. "When I discovered what was the object of the Red Triangle Club and I was asked to receive the greatest man in the country-they might not think so, but the country thought so-what kind of man would I have been if I had refused?" I would have been unfaithful

to the people of Plaistow who sent me here and unworthy of my place in the chair."

In the end, the day of opening turned out to be a brief coming together of monarchy, church, trades unions and capital at a time when there were 3,000,000 unemployed in the country, the government had exhausted the £30,000,000 in Unemployment Fund, the miners were in dispute with the mineowners and the War Emergency Powers Act was still in force.

The Mayor was quick to point out the advantages of everyone pulling together in this time of trouble. Just before the royal party arrived at 3.45 pm that Saturday afternoon in June, he noted the strange bedfellows that were sharing the welcoming party platform. "In the Bishop of Chelmsford and the Rev. Thomas Nightingale they had representatives of the Church, in Will Thorne and Jack Jones they had both the trades union and Labour parliamentary representatives, and in Mr John Silley they had the employer represented."

Soon the King would arrive to complete the set. To placate parties of the left he would, having formally opened the YMCA, immediately visit a trades union meeting held rather self-consciously in one of the ground floor rooms, in an effort to relieve tension through humour. Mayor Davis wondered if the King would be asked for his trade union ticket. The joke went down well. Speeches of mutual congratulations were made by the Bishop, by Mr Silley who used his contacts to raise the £80,000 to build the Club, and Will Thorne MP while they nervously awaited the arrival of King George V and other members of the royal party.

Six minutes early, the royal motorcars arrived. The appropriately named Queenie Jones, daughter of the Silvertown MP, Jack Jones, the Dennis Skinner of his day, presented a floral bouquet to the Queen. As per instructions, the room in which the Plaistow and East Ham branch of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers were meeting, was visited first. As might be expected from a rather white collar union,

someone started to sing "For he's a jolly good fellow". It was says the Stratford Express, taken up and sung lustily. This was indeed the acceptable face of trades unionism. Two minutes later and the façade was shattered. The King bowed his acknowledgement and passed on to another room. No sooner had he done so, then the other door opened with a timing that would have graced a Ben Travers farce and three 'excited men' emerged. Will Thorne was recovering from his enforced politeness to the King with a cigarette. The men caught sight of him. "You are a reactionary" yelled one of the men. That was at least the gist of his remark. It may have been that Thorne, a burly man who knew how to look after himself, was also not accurately reported when he replied "I will take to you outside". The men were hustled out. The Stratford Express was a pain to clear the matter up. "The statement that anything in the nature of a disloyal demonstration occurred whilst the King was in the room is untrue."

The visit continued without further incident. Indeed some Labour members of the council became positively pally with the King. Alderman Devenay, last year's mayor, relaxed so much in the Royal presence that he lit the King's cigarette and the two of them "puffed away contentedly together". It may have been at this very moment that Devenay, a representative of the Port of London Authority, was chatted up by the King, and the name of the new docks in the borough was decided. Later that year the King George V Docks were opened. The Keir Hardie Docks just wouldn't have had the same ring.

Repercussions

The repercussion of the visit rumbled on. Mayor Davis was hauled before the West Ham Trades Council several months later and a vote of no confidence was put up before him. He had, said Mr Monk, the proposer from the Canning Town branch of the National Union of General Workers, hobnobbed with Royalty. He had, and this was even worse, stood on the same platform

as John Silley while hundreds of Silley's workers were locked out on Thames side. A Mr Foster seconded the motion. Mayor Davis, he shouted, had met Mr Silley at a time when the joiners were out on strike and he did not show his disapproval of Mr Silley. Mr Silley was the chief criminal and the Red Triangle Club was anti-socialist and ought to be condemned. This was tough talk indeed. The meeting now degenerated. A letter of support for David Davis from the Builders' Union was howled down and it seemed that a fracas might develop. A Mr Savill called for some decorum. "This is all going to get into the press" he pleaded. Hecklers retorted in unison "great, that's just where we want it", Luckily for my research, that is exactly where it did end up.

A Mr Lake now pointed at the diminutive figure of Mayor Davis seated at the top table. "You come in this hall" he snorted, with all the pomp and humbug of our office hung about you. You are one of the clique, those twisters who let down the unemployed and the sooner everyone here realized that there wasn't one of you with true socialist principles, the better it would be."

Amidst jeers and counter jeers, he rallied his supporters "How can we overthrow a system of society if we are always bolstering up the heads of it. We must not let the Trade and Labour Council be dragged at the heels of tyrants and at the coat tails of royalty."

With some difficulty the meeting was called to order and Mayor Davis who at only five feet two was unlikely to win any physical battles, rose to reply. He stressed that the building was already the home to a number of trades unions. For years the unions had been looking for a home and now they had found it. If it took only a handshake with the King to obtain such a home, he would gladly do the same again.

Victory for moderation

A vote was taken and the motion was defeated. It was a small victory for moderation in West Ham. The Mayor was wise not to tell the meeting that he had already hung the photo of himself

welcoming the King to Plaistow in the living room. It stayed with him till his death twelve years later, by which time he had become a revered and much loved elder statesman.

The YMCA building that once housed a 100 by 30 foot swimming pool, a gymnasium and 400 seater theatre cum cinema, a billiard room with eight full sized tables, a restaurant, and two trades union meeting rooms awaits its next incarnation. The University of East London left it in 2002 and the odds are that it will be converted into flats. The tiles of the swimming pool are still visible in the basement if you open the trap door. Hopefully some sympathetic developer will incorporate the building's history into its future. Maybe, they might even invite George V's granddaughter to cut the ribbon. I hope that she won't give the mayor the same headache as in 1921.

Martin Davies

The life of David John Davis written by Martin Davies (his grandson) was reviewed by Stan Newens in the Summer 2003 Labour Heritage bulletin.

Book reviews

Paul Routledge, *The Bumper Book of British Lefties* (Politicos, ISBN 1-84275-064-X, £12.99)

Paul Routledge's book was a surprise entry to the bestseller lists in the weeks leading up to last Christmas. It was a popular present for all current and former lefties of whatever persuasion. In it Routledge provides short pen portraits of nearly 250 men and women from Diane Abbott to Koni Zilliacus. These essays offer a very personal impression of these people, based less on historical accuracy or importance, but rather on the author's ability to tell a good story about them. This criteria also affects the

selection of the individuals included, the former Conservative Chancellor Kenneth Clarke is in, but arguably the most effective lefty of them all - Clem Attlee - is shameless omitted. There are also too many obscure trade unionists and communists for my liking, probably included because Routledge was a former Labour Editor on *The Times* and remembered anecdotes about them.

Even so the book is genuinely entertaining revealing a real affection for a world and the people who inhabited it which has almost gone. You might not want to use it as a work of reference, but it is certainly a good introduction to labour history.

Simon Fowler

Articles for the next Labour Heritage bulletin to be sent to-

~~Barbara Humphries~~
~~117A Uxbridge Rd,~~
~~W.733TF~~

(~~mickandbarbara@btopenworld.com~~)