



# Labour Heritage

## Bulletin Summer 2016

**Contents: AGM, Thomas Frederick Richards, Labour and CND, Anthony Eden, Rural Radicalism conference, *Hold on Tight* review, Hugh Lowe Obituary**

## Labour Heritage AGM May 2016

Labour Heritage held its AGM on Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> May at the UNITE HQ in London. It was attended by over 30 members and visitors and was followed by a meeting with two excellent speakers.

### The Spanish Holocaust

The first of these was Paul Preston, Professor of Contemporary Spanish Studies at the London School of Economics (LSE). He spoke on the Spanish Holocaust, the title of his first book. He defended the title by explaining the extent of the death rate, not only as a consequence of the Spanish Civil War, but the massacres through aerial bombing of civilians, hunger and deprivation suffered by those fleeing the war or held in concentration camps, or murder by death squads. He said that the majority of those who died were the victims of General Franco.

Paul has been researching the Spanish Civil War and its aftermath extensively. He said that it had been difficult to find the truth, as forty years after the end of the Franco regime, Franco still had a 'good press' in Spain, and successive democratically elected governments had refused to uncover the truth. There had been a climate of fear in the 1970s that civil war would break out again, and that

had affected a whole generation. Now however the grandchildren of those who died in the Civil War wanted to know what had happened to their ancestors.



Paul Preston with Labour Heritage officers Stan Newens and Linda Shampain

He said that myths about the Franco regime had persisted in Spain. One of those was that Franco had been necessary to defeat communism. The reality was that the Soviet Union had no interest in installing a communist regime in Spain in the 1930s as it would have undermined its relationship with other European powers such as France. In any case the Spanish Communist Party was very small at the time. It was also a myth that there had been equal amounts of violence on both sides – that had been disproved by statistical evidence that showed that the majority of deaths occurred in the Franco strongholds of Andalucia and Leon. Violence was used systematically by the Franco regime to wipe out its opponents. Where violence occurred in anarchist controlled strongholds such as Catalonia, it was often as a result of the state having collapsed, with the result that violent criminals got released from prison. Franco ruled in the manner of Hitler and Mussolini, even using the Jews in Spain (there were very

few as most had been expelled at the time of the Inquisition), as scapegoats.

The victory of Franco over Republican Spain changed the balance of power in Europe. The Conservatives in Britain initially supported Franco, whom they claimed to be a bulwark against anarchism and communism. Their policy of so-called non-intervention meant that the Spanish Republic could not buy arms to defend itself, whilst the Franco rebels were being armed to the teeth by Hitler and Mussolini. Eventually some like Winston Churchill came to see that Franco's Spain, like the other European dictatorships, would be a threat to Britain and its Empire.

A prose version of Paul Preston's speech is distributed with this bulletin. His books include: *The Spanish Holocaust: Inquisition and Extermination in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Spain*, Harper Press, 2013.

### Caroline Benn

The second speaker was Jane Martin, Professor of the Social History of Education at the University of Birmingham. She is researching the life and work of Caroline Benn. Caroline was married to Tony Benn, but she had very much a political life of her own. Her particular contribution was to Labour's education policy in the 1960s. She led the Socialist Education Society, and was an effective advocate for comprehensive education.

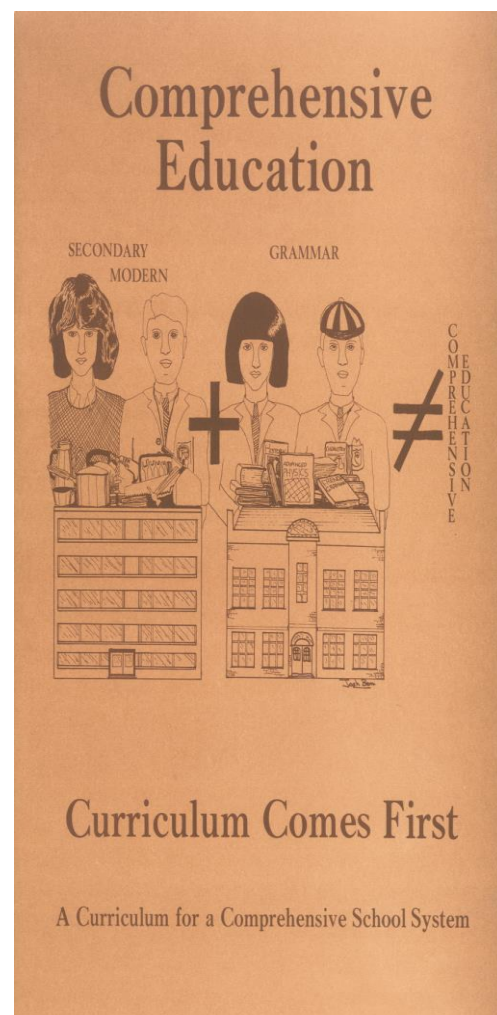


Jane Martin with Stan Newens

Jane used slides to illustrate Caroline's early life. She was born in Cincinnati, Ohio and came from a privileged background. Her family were Republican Party supporters in the US. She met Tony when he was a student at

Oxford. They both were attending a summer school. They got engaged and married when she came back to the UK, moving into their house in Holland Park Avenue where they were to live their whole life and bring up their four children. Close by was Holland Park Comprehensive School, a pioneering comprehensive school where her children were educated and where she was to become a school governor. Because the school was a progressive beacon it was constantly the subject of scandal and intrigue by the press, and as a governor she had to leap to its defence.

Caroline was an admirer of Keir Hardie, and wrote a well-acclaimed biography of him. But her greatest contribution was to Labour's policy on comprehensive education.



One of Jane's slides advocating the case for comprehensive education.

## **Thomas Frederick Richards (1863-1942): Labour MP for Wolverhampton West, 1906 -1910**

By John Grigg

Freddie Richards was born at Russell Street, Wednesbury, Staffordshire on 25 March 1863 and he wrote an account of his early life in *Pearson's Weekly* in 1906. His father was a commercial traveller who described himself as a Conservative, although Freddie says he suspected 'he was more of a democrat than a Tory'. When the Board Schools started up in Wednesbury his father immediately took him out of the Church school and put him into the state school saying he did not wish Freddie to 'grow up as an aristocratic pauper'. But there was nothing aristocratic about the poverty he subsequently endured.



Councillor T. F. RICHARDS.

At 11 he started working half time at file cutting earning 3/- a week. Within a year his father died leaving his mother and five children unprovided for, and 'against the grain' he left school, where he was a star pupil, to work full time. He was too young to work in a factory but the Factory Acts did not apply to licensed victuallers so he worked in a public house for 5/- a week and the occasional meal 'of broken meat'. But at home he often wondered why the family was allowed to go half starved.

At 13 he entered a gas piping factory and, when his mates produced their breakfasts, he made up stories of the splendid breakfast he had enjoyed at home before coming to work. He changed his job and was working in an iron foundry when the struggle to keep the family together finally failed. He went off to Birmingham and got a job as a carter's boy. The family - although Freddie does not say so - probably went into the workhouse.

His next job was in Aston and then he went to live in at the Birmingham boilermaker factory of Thomas Taylor, as a rivet carrier. He says that when he started he had scarcely a rag on his back and they gave him an old overcoat that was 'miles too big.' He did not want to go about like the Artful Dodger and had the sleeves cut down. But too much was taken off and the effect was even more ridiculous. Eventually he 'burnt the hateful thing'.

He 'seemed no good at foundry work' so went as a pot-boy at the Leopard Inn, Hockley, a public house that brewed its own beer. But he was a 'temperance man' and after saving a few pounds paid his premium to become a boot-laster in Leicester.

### **National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives**

He joined the Leicester branch of the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives (NUBSO) in 1885 and got himself 'heartily disliked by the employers and by the union officials, waging a bitter war against the aggressiveness of the former and the supineness of the latter.'

At that time the bulk of the work was done in workers' homes, 'a disease breeding state of affairs'. He says they succeeded after many reverses, in getting factories built but even then he was not content. He recalls how one day he complained to the factory manager that 76 men had been put into a room 'where you wouldn't put 76 pigs'. Soon afterwards he was dismissed. 'The sack', he says 'was my constant experience but I worried along somehow.'

He became a Union permanent official in 1893 and in 1894 vice president of the Union's

Leicester No. 1 branch. In the same year he became the first Labour member of Leicester Town Council representing Wyggeston Ward. He gained a reputation as a vigorous debater and regarded his greatest triumphs as an increase in street sweepers' wages and gaining one day's rest in seven for the local police force. He remained a Town Councillor until 1903 'unconsciously qualifying myself for Parliament which I never dreamed of entering.'

In the *History of the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives 1874 – 1957* Allan Fox describes how Richards in his early days was a thorn in the side of the Union's leadership opposing arbitration, leading unofficial strikes in Leicester, and speaking at the Union's National Conference against increasing the General Secretary's salary. He fought mechanisation in the Leicester factories by instructing union members to restrict output to that previously achieved by hand work. When the employers introduced piecework to frustrate this restrictive practise Richards was the driving force behind piecework calculations that deprived employers of any advantages from new machinery and protected jobs.

Richards was a keen supporter of the co-operative principle and used £1,000 of the Leicester branches' funds to set up the St Crispin Productive Society. The venture was not a success and was succeeded by the Leicester Self-Help Boot Society under Richard's presidency. As time went by and in the face of mechanisation and a declining membership Richards adopted a more moderate approach, yet still successfully opposed the centralisation of all union funds and the standardisation of benefits. Branches retained their funds and the right to decide sickness and other benefits locally. Despite this moderation he was often seen at Penrhyn during the bitter slate quarrymen's strike that lasted from 1900 to 1903.

### **Labour Candidate**

After the turn of the century anti-trade union legislation turned many unions, including the

NUBSO, towards political action. It was in this context that in 1903 Freddie was adopted by the Wolverhampton Trades Council as the Labour Representation Committee candidate for West Wolverhampton. He was backed financially by his union. *The Express & Star*, a Midlands daily paper still published today, reports that he immediately set about wooing the constituency with great energy, soon building up, 'with his attractive personality, pleasing voice, great fairness and moderation a considerable degree of support'. His programme was free trade, nationalization of coal and the railways, old age pensions, and a land increment tax. His slogan was 'Labour First and Always'. He toured the constituency tirelessly addressing street corner and factory gate meetings.

West Wolverhampton was a Conservative seat represented by Sir Alfred Hickman, an Iron Master who had been returned unopposed in 1900. It was not a safe seat, however, and the Liberals had won it by 123 votes in 1886, but the intervention of a Labour candidate would make it difficult for the Liberals. Shortly before the 1906 election Richards had private discussions with the Wolverhampton Liberals, and at a large Liberal gathering at the Temperance Hall on 11<sup>th</sup> December 1905 they decided to stand down and back the Labour candidate. That would have been part of the deal between Ramsey MacDonald and the Liberals at national level not to oppose each other in certain seats. During the ensuing election campaign there is no record of Richards mentioning the word 'Socialism'.

Straight away Richards launched attacks on Sir Alfred's poor voting record in the House of Commons saying he was either absent on votes concerning working class interests or voted against them. Sir Alfred responded by saying out of about 250 Leicester Town Council meetings each year Richards was absent for about 100 of them.

A huge Labour meeting was held at the Agricultural Hall on 9<sup>th</sup> January 1906. People were in the iron rafters and on top of the organ. Doors were closed 20 minutes before the meeting was due to start and Richards

made a rousing speech favouring Free Trade and opposing Protectionism. He spoke of the 'worst villain unhung' but it is unclear whether he was referring to Sir Alfred or Joseph Chamberlain.

Labour's opponents spread rumours that Richards had been in prison and had separated from his wife. Printed cards were distributed outside churches saying he was an agnostic. When it was announced from the Town Hall that Richards had won by 171 votes (1.6% of the poll) there was a crescendo of tumultuous cheers and a shocked silence from Sir Alfred's supporters.

*The Express and Star* observed that 'when Mr Richards first entered upon the campaign his appearance was not seriously regarded. Every opportunity was seized upon to taunt him and decry his candidature and not until we were in measurable distance of the election did Sir Alfred face the evidence that he would have to fight every inch of the ground. The Tories rode the high horse and now were in sackcloth and ashes. They forgot that the war would not be waged on personal grounds and that Labour had been hard at work in Wolverhampton for a considerable period. We can see in Wolverhampton the wakening of the workers to the consciousness of their power.'

The campaign had left Richards exhausted. One of his first votes in the House was against Chinese indentured labour in South Africa and he then travelled to Wolverhampton to a social gathering on the 24<sup>th</sup> February 1906 of the Wolverhampton branch of the Boot and Shoe Union at the Co-op Hall, where he welcomed the King's speech and spoke in favour of women's suffrage.

### **Member of Parliament**

In Parliament Richards asked a continuous stream of questions on labour issues, particularly on wages and conditions in government owned factories. One question revealed the existence of a government owned factory in Deptford making chocolate for the navy. Another secured a shilling rise in weekly pay for bricklayers at Chatham Dockyard. He asked about wages and

conditions for postman, bus drivers, painters, cutters in the Pimlico Army Clothing Factory and, of course, his members in the boot and shoe factories. Another issue he pursued was the right for people to conscientiously object to smallpox vaccination, which by law was compulsory. His first speech was against an amendment to the Education Bill that would have made evening or technical school attendance compulsory up to the age of 17. He said it was too much to compel children to attend evening school after a day's work, and a far better policy to benefit the working classes would be to raise the school leaving age to 15 or 16.

He became a junior whip and absorbed himself in the detail of a number of parliamentary bills including the Miners Eight-Hours Bill, The Feeding of Children (Scotland) Bill, an Anti-Sweating Bill, and a Bill to give local authorities powers to acquire land.

Within 12 months of entering the House left-wing socialists in the Union were condemning the Parliamentary Labour Party and Richards for failing to adopt a definite Socialist programme and accommodating themselves to the conventions and rituals of the House of Commons. Allan Fox, however, in his *History of the Union*, suggests that the rank and file membership was content with Richards' performances in the House.

### **1910 Election**

At the first of the two general elections in 1910 the issue was reform of the House of Lords. Richards opened his campaign in defence of his seat at the Co-operative Hall where he said, "I am not a revolutionary of the violent type but of the ballot box .... The House of Lords are a bunch of anarchists and Labour wants nothing less than abolition."

Richards received strong support from the *Express and Star*. Each day the paper carried the national election news under the headline 'Lords v The People' and extolled the virtues of the Liberal Government and the dangers of Protectionism if the Conservatives won. They described Richards as the champion of the people. Once again he was touring the factory

gates and so many people could not get into a meeting at Dudley Road Schools that 'the popular member for Wolverhampton West' had to address an extra overflow meeting in the playground. The campaign again took some toll on his health and at a meeting addressed by clergymen at the Wolverhampton Empire it was explained that Richards could not be present through indisposition. The Rev J.A. Shaw expressed disgust at the repeated allegations that Richards was an atheist.

On the eve of poll Richards toured the constituency and there were cheers for "Good Old Freddie" wherever he went, but early results were ominous. Of the first 92 declarations there were 18 Tory gains and the swing of the pendulum was taking marginal seats like West Wolverhampton. Freddie lost his seat by 592 votes.

The Union's monthly report said that Richards had done 'all that was possible to secure election. He had worked very hard and assiduously in the House of Commons to further the interests of the workers. The result shows still more education is needed if we are to make permanent headway. The reverse must only serve us to greater efforts to secure future victory.' Freddie blamed his defeat on his exhaustion during the campaign and on the corrupt 'treating' practises by Alfred Bird, his Conservative opponent, who was chairman of A. Bird & Sons, Manufacturing Chemists.

Although he had lost, the swing against him as a Labour candidate had been 1.6% compared with a swing against the Liberals in Wolverhampton South of 2.8% and 6.5% in Wolverhampton East. He was anxious to stand again. The Union, however, professed nervousness over the implications of the House of Lords Osborne judgement that had declared that a trade union had no right to spend money financing the Labour Party or any form of political activity. Some unions had already been restrained by injunction from contributing money to political activities.

Richards was convinced that this was an excuse used by certain Union Council members to damn his political chances, a

grievance that lingered for the rest of his life. This may be true for there were some who felt that Richards was too enthusiastic in wooing political fame. The reality was that under the Osborne judgement it was illegal for unions to spend money on political purposes.

### **Labour Candidate for Northamptonshire**

Soon after his defeat in Wolverhampton he was offered the Labour candidature in Northamptonshire East and he stood there at the December 1910 election. He came a poor third behind the Liberal and Conservative and he asserted that the withholding of Union funds lost him the seat. This seems unlikely. He polled less than 10% of the vote and any increase in support would have been at the Liberals' expense and could have put the Conservatives in. So that was the end of Freddie Richard's Parliamentary career. Yet he served the Labour movement for another 29 years.

### **President of NUBSO**

In 1910 he became president of the Union. Allan Fox writes that a study of Richard's actions and utterances reveal two important characteristics. An exceptionally strong will to power, expressed in a tendency to identify himself with popular causes, and restless sniping at those above him in status and authority. The other was an ability to rationalise his motives and invest them with an emotional passion and vehemence, which gave them an air of a disinterested crusade.

Despite this apparent ambition he refused a CBE offered by Lloyd George in recognition of his services during World War One on national and governmental departmental committees. Just after the war he went with a delegation from the Union to Czechoslovakia to investigate labour conditions there.

By the time he became president of the Union he had changed from an extreme 'anti-arbitrationist' to a 'moderate.' Allan Fox in his history of the union says no criticism should be attached to this. 'The workshop hothead of today is often the sound loyal Union officer of tomorrow.'

Freddie mellowed in more senses than one. Early photographs show him neat and conventional. Later he was among the first dandies of the Labour movement and a few sneered at the 'Beau Brummell' of the trade unions. Bow tie and white spats and an 'anarchist hat' were the keynote. James Crawford in his 1945 presidential address remembered as a boy attending a meeting addressed by Richards outside a factory around 1911. 'The most elegant figure that ever mounted a soapbox. .... He had personality and great ability, but wore white spats, a white waistcoat and a straw hat. The meeting unanimously rejected his advice.' Perhaps Freddie was reacting against the Artful Dodger overcoat he wore in Birmingham that had so shamed him.

Soon after becoming president in 1910 Richards had persuaded the Union to adopt the idea of a 'Union Stamp' on footwear made under Union conditions. The public were urged to buy no footwear that did not carry the stamp. This was an attempt to boycott non-union goods to compel employers to come into line. It was adopted by a few manufacturers – mainly Co-ops - yet Richards often complained that even his own Union members failed to buy stamped footwear.

### **Anti-Shoddy Campaign**

Another Richard's initiative was the 'anti-shoddy campaign'. This was a response to post World War One competitive pressures that were lowering standards of construction and materials. Lower standards damaged the union members' interests by the employment of cheaper and less skilled labour. Cheaper footwear undercut quality goods and obliged more manufacturers to follow suit or seek cost reductions, often at the expense of the workforce. By 1924 the employers were partners in the campaign against goods that 'endangered the health and well-being of the wearers.' Both the Union stamp scheme and the Anti-Shoddy Campaign came to nothing but continued throughout the inter-war period. The problem was that there was no public outcry of support. Low-quality goods were

sold at low prices; they looked like what they were and the public did not feel deceived.

### **Leather Workers Minority Movement**

Between 1927 and 1930 Richards and the Union leadership fought off attempts by the Communist led Leather Workers Minority Movement (LWMM) to gain control of the Union. This was achieved by a decision in 1928 banning any member of the Communist Party or the LWMM from holding office at branch or national level. The LWMM hit back by accusing the leadership of taking away the rights of branches, (an argument Richards had used in his early clashes with the leadership in the 1890s). The LWMM failed to attract any sizable support among the rank and file but many members were unhappy with the 1928 decision and attempts to have it reversed were made at the national conferences up to 1936. The fact that Conservatives could hold office in the union while Communists could not was a source of uneasiness.

### **Joint Industrial Council**

Another development during Richards reign as president was greater co-operation with the employers and he held the presidency of the Joint Industrial Council of the shoe trade. It was in the interests of the Employers' Federation and the Union to protect the industry from cut-throat competition from small non-union firms and there was a 'black list' of unscrupulous firms recognised by both sides. Foreign competition was also a danger and in 1927 Richards led a successful application, supported by the Employers' Federation, under the Merchandise Marks Act for all imported footwear to be marked 'Of Foreign Manufacture'.

Although the national Union gained benefits for its members during the 1920s it lacked the resources to mount a determined onslaught against unscrupulous manufacturers although plenty of funds were held by branches. Richards and Poulton, the Union's General Secretary, never seemed to have considered recasting the Union's machinery to provide funds for bolder campaigns, remaining

convinced by their earlier experiences that the branches would never permit centralisation.

In 1929, at the age of 66, Richards retired from the presidency. His considerable abilities were recognised by those who knew him. One colleague described him as ‘full of activity and a born fighter’. He was capable of ‘biting sarcasm and stinging satire that was a terror to his opponents.’ He also received tributes from the Employers’ Federation for his great services to the shoe trade. The Federation’s vice-president said, “He has engendered in us – the opposition – the greatest amount of admiration”

### **Leicester City Council**

But Freddie was not finished yet. He was back on the Leicester City Council for Newton Ward from 1929 to 1939, and served on numerous committees as a minority party member including the ‘City Farms Committee’ of which he was vice-chairman. From beginnings steeped in poverty he served the Labour movement as a trade unionist, a member of parliament and a local councillor for 54 years.

Freddie Richards died at Birstall in Leicestershire on 4<sup>th</sup> October 1942 and was survived by two children from his first marriage, an adopted son, and by his second wife Miss M.J. Bell, a former secretary and president of the Leicester Women’s branch of the Boot and Shoe Union.

*Sources: Pearson’s Weekly (26<sup>th</sup> April 1914), A History of the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives 1874 – 1957 by Allan Fox., The Express & Star, Leicester Evening Mail, The Leicester Mercury*

## **Labour and Unilateral Disarmament – the 1960 Party Conference**

**By Barbara Humphries**

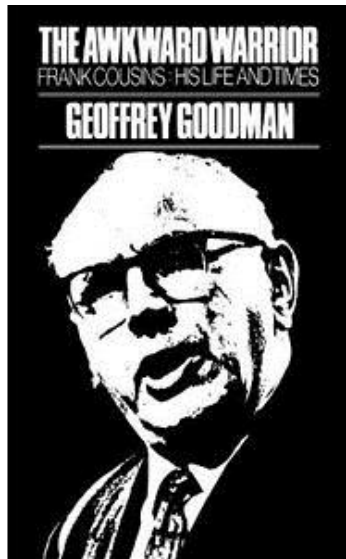
Britain had first acquired the atom bomb on the watch of the Attlee Government. It had been discussed in the cabinet, and by all accounts, it was because of the pressure of Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin. He wanted this weapon, with the union jack stamped upon it. Bevin’s foreign policy had been unpopular with a number of Labour MPs. They disliked Britain’s growing alignment with the USA against the Soviet Union and wanted Britain to be part of a third force in world politics. They had been uncomfortable with the role played by British troops in Greece, and later in Korea. When increased military expenditure had led to cuts to the NHS, there were high profile resignations from the Cabinet, especially Nye Bevan. Over 100 Labour MPs had opposed Britain signing up to NATO.

### **Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament**

However after 1951 Labour was to be out of office for thirteen years. The Conservatives in office continued to build up Britain’s nuclear capability. With the background of a growing and alarming nuclear arms race, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament was launched in 1958. It had broad cross party support, particularly amongst young people. At Easter 1959 it organised a second protest march to Aldermaston, Berkshire, where British nuclear weapons were being manufactured. It was supported by a number of Labour MPs included Barbara Castle and Ian Mikardo. They wanted Britain to adopt a no first strike policy, and an end to the testing and manufacture of nuclear weapons in Britain. They did not however call for Britain’s existing nuclear arsenal to be extinguished. They became known as unilateralists, and they were completely opposed by the then leader of the Labour Party, Hugh Gaitskell. The alternative compromise option of a ‘non-nuclear club’ was put forward by Nye Bevan, the shadow foreign secretary. This was the multilateral option. It was seen by many



opposed to the atom bomb as unrealistic as they did not see the world's powers, the USA and the Soviet Union signing up to it.



The Awkward Warrior; Frank Cousins His Life and Times by Geoffrey Goodman

Support for unilateral disarmament within the labour movement was to get a boost from the election of a new left wing leader in the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU), Frank Cousins. He became a champion of unilateral disarmament, and at its 1959 conference the TGWU held a debate in which there were 58 speakers, mainly speaking in favour of the policy. It was carried by 763 votes to 50. It looked likely that it would also be discussed at the Labour Party conference that autumn. However a general election was called for that year and at its 1959 the TUC conference rejected the policy of the TGWU by a majority of two to one. Due to the general election, Labour's October conference was cancelled, replaced by a two day event later in the year. Much of this was to be an inquest on the General Election result.

### **1959 General Election**

The 1959 general election was to be a disaster for Labour. It lost for a third time to the Conservatives by 107 seats, having expected a good chance of winning. The economic prospects for the government had not looked good. Unemployment had risen for the first

time since 1945 and there had been a growing number of strikes, in engineering and on the buses. The loosening of wartime price controls had led to inflation. However, come the election, Conservative Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan had been able to play on a feel good factor of 'you've never had it so good.' Faced with a defeat of this size, both Hugh Gaitskell and Nye Bevan were in a state of shock. But they drew very different political conclusions. Hugh Gaitskell pondered if he had not been seen as credible when he had denied the need to increase taxes to pay for proposed social reforms. Additionally he argued that the Party was wedded to the past in an age of affluence. He set up a task force which suggested, amongst other things, that the commitment to public ownership as set out in Clause 4, Part 4 of the constitution should be revised, that links with the trades unions be loosened and even that the Party could change its name!

But the members who met at a weekend conference in November 1959 were having none of that. Nye Bevan who gave the final speech at the Conference spoke for them when he said :

'What are we going to say, comrades? Are we going to accept defeat?....Are we going to send a message from this great labour movement, which is the mother and father of modern democracy and modern socialism, that we in Blackpool in 1959 have turned our backs on our principles because of a temporary unpopularity in a temporarily affluent society?'

In his memoirs General Secretary, Morgan Phillips wrote :

'Who heard these words and was unmoved? None of the cheering delegates can have dreamt that this was to be Nye's last public address. A truly great socialist and a very great man, he died on the 6<sup>th</sup> July 1960.'

An alternative view of Labour's defeat in 1959, was that the Party had failed to connect to a growing radical mood of discontent, particularly amongst young people. This included growing opposition to the atomic

bomb. At their 1960 conferences, both the TUC and the TGWU came out strongly for stopping nuclear testing, no first use of atomic weapons and suspension of production, although the words ‘unilateral disarmament’ were not used. In spite of threats from Hugh Gaitskell that he might have to resign as leader of the Labour Party if this were to be supported at the October Party conference, resolutions from the TGWU were supported by the other main trades union, the Amalgamated Engineering Union, as well as delegates from the constituency parties. It was to be a stormy conference. A CND demo outside the conference, led by Canon Collins of St Pauls, called on Gaitskell to go. Gaitskell appealed to delegates to reject the policy, as it was opposed by most of the PLP, who would not change their views overnight. He was heckled and booed, but went on to say that he would ‘fight, fight and fight again’ to ‘save the Party that he loved.’ However the resolution from the TGWU was carried decisively and Labour was committed to unilateral nuclear disarmament.

The Tory Press predictably wrote off Labour’s chances of ever winning an election again with open warfare in the Party. *The Times* even looked to the Liberals (with six seats) as a possible opposition. However even at the conference there were moves to heal the wounds. Frank Cousins invited Hugh Gaitskell to dinner, saying that in the end, we all had to work together. Harold Wilson, a potential challenger to Gaitskell for the leadership, issued a four point plan for unity. A report of the conference from the TGWU delegation for the *TGWU Record*, made the point that the defence discussion had only been one debate at the conference, much of which had been concerned with discussing *Signposts for the Sixties*, written by Morgan Phillips. It was an optimistic report, with clear evidence of a revival in the membership, after the election defeat of 1959. Phillips however had been too ill to attend the conference due to a stroke, and so it was moved on behalf of the NEC by Ray Gunter, MP. The last word at the conference was from a delegate Jim Griffiths, who moved a vote of thanks to the conference organisers.

He said: “We did not create this movement, we inherited it – let us be worthy of our inheritance.”

### **Aftermath**

Hugh Gaitskell died in 1963, and Harold Wilson was elected as Party leader. However the policy of support for unilateral disarmament was lost at the 1961 conference. Labour was to win the 1964 general election with a small majority, going on to win a larger majority in 1966. The leader of the TGWU who had put unilateral nuclear disarmament on the conference agenda in 1960, Frank Cousins, was appointed Minister of Technology in the Wilson government. Part of his remit was to make the case for re-nationalisation of the steel industry in 1967.

## **Parliamentarians on Parliamentarians, 10<sup>th</sup> May 2016**

By Vivien Giladi

### **Anthony Eden**

Five members of Labour Heritage went to listen to Lord Lexden, a Conservative peer (the former academic Alistair Cooke), talk about Anthony Eden (1897-1977). It was a well-delivered and interesting lecture and, as almost always in this series, added to our knowledge and understanding of the man and his political period.

Lexden’s premise was that Eden had the most difficult premiership of any over a hundred- year period and that he was, above all, a One Nation Tory and a man of peace.

Born into a wealthy but profligate family on the 8,000 acre Windlestone estate in the north of England near coalfields, and one of five children, Eden absorbed parental literary & aesthetic tastes rather than a money-making bent. The household was often unstable and very short of cash and his father given to unreasonable rages but

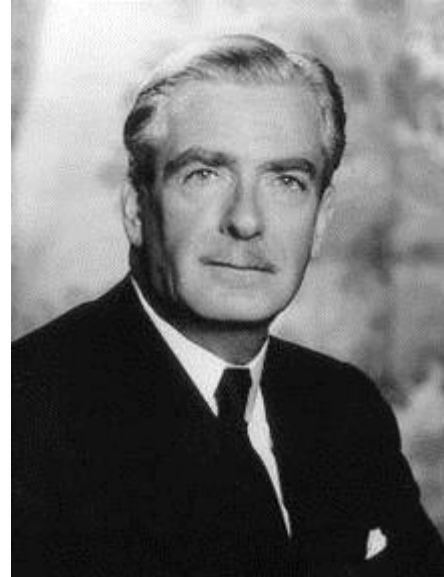
there was, of course, money to send Anthony Robert to Eton.

As very young man Eden had heard Ben Tillet speak and he thought him “wonderful”, demonstrating early on that he did not share conventional class prejudices. Having volunteered in 1915, he was a captain in the King’s Royal Rifles and, Lexden argued, it was his experience of the comradeship, valour and decency of working class men in the trenches, coming after his dismayed observation of the conditions of the miners and his conviction that shared prosperity was the way forward, that confirmed his position on the left of the Tory Party.

Academically able and formidably well-read, like Macmillan, Eden got a double first at Oxford in Persian and Arabic and this, as well as competence in French and German rather set him apart from his fellow Tory MPs when he entered the Commons in 1923, and steered him into foreign, rather than domestic, policy formation. Indeed he never held a domestic brief though, Lexden insisted, he did understand the industrial working classes and, by 1929, was urging the spread of property ownership.

He was Foreign Secretary by 1935 and when Baldwin retired in 1937 he saw Eden as his heir unless there was a war, when it should be Churchill. By 1939 Eden was firmly established on the world stage having practised shuttle diplomacy in meeting with Hitler and Mussolini, among others, in his search for an agreement with the dictators. Unlike Chamberlain, who stressed appeasement, he had been in favour of rearmament since 1934 and resigned over the Prime Minister’s appeasement of Mussolini’s invasion of Abyssinia. By 1939 he considered the destruction of Nazi Germany as vital to British interests and world peace, and by 1940 he was Foreign Secretary again developing an extremely close relationship with Churchill, almost like father and son,

according to Lexden who mentioned their anxiety to keep Stalin’s territorial ambitions in check.



Anthony Eden

Lexden described Eden as the long serving crown prince who should have succeeded Churchill in 1951, instead becoming his Foreign Secretary once more. He finally did succeed Churchill as PM in April 1955 and held the post for 18 turbulent months dominated by the Suez Crisis, a descent into political turmoil, for which he is principally remembered. He began with the Tory Party at his feet but by this time he was weakened in health and was soon faced with a disloyal cabinet, a faltering economy and even attacks from the Tory press. Eden fell before Nasser and his nationalisation of the Suez Canal, accusations of collusion with France and Israel and overwhelming American pressure to back down from his interventionism. How had this master of foreign and diplomatic policy with his in-depth knowledge and understanding of the Middle East failed so abysmally? Lexden argued that Eden was unlucky to be dealing with Suez during the run-up to a US presidential election and he said that Eisenhower had later recognised his policy mistake. Eden had been surprised by

American hostility, given that one of his avowed aims was to curb Soviet expansion and influence. Both Eden and Churchill were reluctant to accept that the balance of power had shifted ineluctably to the USA, we were told.

Clearly an admirer of Anthony Eden, our speaker emphasised Eden's painstaking and patient work in dealing with foreign leaders, his absence of class feeling and unconventional profile within the Tory Party, his support for the Welfare State and inability to descend to the level of petty intrigue within his cabinet. He mentioned that he was friendly with Attlee, Morrison and Bevin following their work together during the war, painting a portrait of a very handsome and debonair and, ultimately, unlucky Tory leader.

In failing health Eden resigned in January 1957.

Inevitably, the lecture did not cover the wider and profound issues involved in Eden's demise. The British Empire and the nature of colonial power in the Middle East raised by the Suez Crisis were not alluded to, but then Lord Lexden takes the Conservative whip in the Lords - and the lecture did what it said on the tin.

*Parliamentarians on Parliamentarians* is a series of lectures, to which Labour Heritage members can apply for tickets, subject to availability. Contact Linda Shampian if you are interested in any of the following –

25<sup>th</sup> October Lord Patten on Edward Heath

7<sup>th</sup> November Margaret Beckett on John Smith

29<sup>th</sup> November Baroness Williams on Charles Kennedy

12<sup>th</sup> December Gordon Marsden MP on Clement Attlee

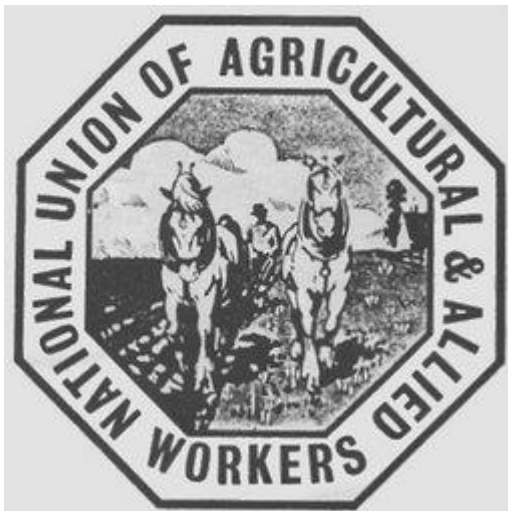
## **Rural Radicalism Conference, Cambridge, June 2016**

This conference was organised on June 4<sup>th</sup> by the Labour History Research Unit at Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge and the Victorian Studies Centre at Saffron Walden Town Library. It was sponsored by Great Yarmouth and District branch of UNITE.

There were six papers including *Town, Gown and Farm: the early Labour Party in Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire* given by Ashley Walsh, leader of the Labour Group on Cambridgeshire Council. The Cambridge Labour Party was founded in 1912, with support from railway workers in Cambridge, agricultural workers from the surrounding countryside and students at the university who had formed a branch of the Fabian Society. It faced an ongoing challenge from local Liberals and Conservatives, often in three way contests.

Alun Howkins, who started life as a farm worker and is now an Honorary Professor in the School of History at the University of East Anglia gave a talk on how the Labour Party in South Norfolk, basing its support on agricultural workers, won its first rural seat in a by-election in 1921. The candidate was George Edwards, himself a local trades unionist in the farm workers union. He had also been a Methodist preacher, and formerly a supporter of the Liberal Party. Labour's support in South Norfolk was based on the strength of agricultural trades unionism. By the 1920s there were 40 trades union branches in villages across the county. Many of these were affiliated to the local Labour Party. George Edwards lost the seat in the General Election of 1922, but won again in 1923. By this time agricultural workers were facing wage cuts

in the wake of the dismantling of wartime wage and price controls. In support of them, the 1924 Labour Government re-instated the Agricultural Wages Board. Labour continued to hold the South Norfolk seat from 1945 to 1970. Its loss since then has been down to the dwindling numbers of agricultural workers. After the 1960s Norfolk villages have become home to commuters and retirees.



Martyn Everett, former librarian in Saffron Walden and member of a UNITE community branch, gave a talk on the formation of the agricultural labourers' union in Cambridgeshire and Essex in the 1870s. The union was formed to press for higher wages, but its members feared dismissal from local farmers. A shadowy body called the Agricultural Reform Committee was able to call meetings of thousands of labourers in local villages. Leaflets were distributed anonymously, often bundles of them left in pubs and streets, the distributors disappearing before they could be recognised. Branch officers of the union were often from trades outside of agriculture, or even shop keepers, to avoid potential victimisation by local farmers. However the union recruited hundreds of members. Farm workers were only paid fortnightly. This meant that they were always in debt by the time that they

were paid. The strike met with a mixed response from the farmers. Some paid up, others dismissed their workers. Some increased their rents, for what would have been tied cottages owned by farmers! The farm workers union went on to advocate migration and emigration in a bid to boost wages by restricting the supply of agricultural labour.

Other papers were given on Conrad Noel and the Thaxted Movement, a study in Christian socialism, the role of location and custom in rural resistance, and on the Burston School Strike, together with slides. The commemoration of the Burston School Strike takes place on the first Sunday in September, and last year attracted several thousand people.

Anglia Ruskin University Labour History Research Unit is aiming to build links with labour movement activists who are interested in its history. It has launched a new website commemorating Cambridge and the Miners Strike 1984-1985.

Visit at [www.cambridgeminersstrike.com](http://www.cambridgeminersstrike.com)

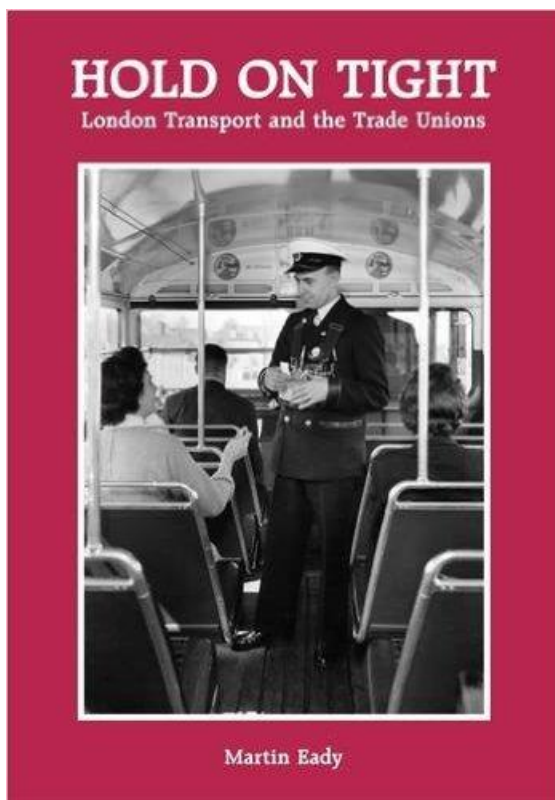


Report by Barbara Humphries

## Book Reviews

Hold on Tight: London Transport and the Trade Unions by Martin Eady, (Capital Transport Publishing, £19.95)

Reviewed by Mick Lynch



Placing events in their historical context, this fascinating and rewarding book from Martin Eady charts the history of the London Transport system and its predecessors from the point of view of the staff.

It documents the struggles of the trade unions and their members across the “combine,” following the development of the bus companies, trams and Underground.

Written from the perspective of a rank-and-file union activist who has a real command of the historical development of London’s transport network and of the workers’ movement within it, this is no dry academic study.

As a representative in the Tube engineering sector, Eady was an NUR/RMT activist for 35 years and was elected to the union’s national executive committee. Thus his narrative, insights and analysis provide a valuable guide to the development of the transport system and the parallel responses of the unions.

The volume ranges from the early struggles with the private companies and the development of public ownership to later attempts at reprivatisation through Private Finance Initiatives, the Public Private Partnership and outsourcing.

In doing so, it also provides a social history by outlining the introduction of women and immigrant workers and the struggles for equal pay, as well as the abolition of train guards and bus conductors in the drive to cut costs.

The book also highlights the divergent approaches of the bus unions and their rail counterparts and the consequent gradual reversal of fortunes from the period when bus workers considered themselves to be the aristocrats of labour, with higher wages, to the present, where the relative positions in terms of pay, conditions and union strength seem to be reversed.

This is a warts-and-all account and while it outlines the often hard-nosed approach of both the public and private versions of the transport companies and charts the strikes, disputes and campaigns, it has its fair share of critical analysis of the unions.

As well as the historical perspective, the book is also bang up to date with a final section on current and recent disputes, including the Night Tube.

Eady’s real fondness for London’s transport system shines through as he documents not only the development of the core bus and Tube services but also the rise and decline of the tram, trolleybus and Green Line bus services which have come and gone.

Lovingly illustrated throughout, with fantastic photos of transport workers, this book deserves to be widely read by those with an interest in the transport industry and the labour movement.

*Review by Mick Lynch*

Mick Lynch is Assistant General Secretary of the RMT union. This review has appeared in *RMT News* (February 2016) and the *Morning Star*.

Martin Eady is a member of Labour Heritage.

## Obituaries

### Hugh Lowe 1922-2016

After a lifetime of campaigning for the rights of working people Hugh Lowe has died at the age of 93.



Hugh became ill and was admitted to Charing Cross hospital on Sat 9<sup>th</sup> April. That night he fell in the hospital, breaking his leg and injuring his head. Bleeding on the brain was diagnosed and he never regained consciousness. He died on the morning of Sun 17<sup>th</sup> April.

Born in Holborn on 24th May 1922, Hugh's family moved to Epsom, where his father worked as a teacher. Rejecting religion as a boy, Hugh was not considered bright enough for more than elementary education and at 16 obtained a job as an electronics engineer at EMI in Hayes, Middlesex. His work was considered important enough to be a reserved occupation during the war, and he joined the Communist Party. He later moved to the Medical Research Council where he spent the rest of his working life. As an activist in the Association of Scientific Technical and Managerial Staffs (ASTMS) he became chair of the staff side of the negotiating machinery. Following the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956 he left the Communist party and in 1971 joined the Trotskyist International Marxist Group, leaving that organisation in 1980. He

then became one of the founders of London Health Emergency. Upon retirement in 1982 he also campaigned vigorously on pensions and older peoples' rights, right up to his death. He was a delegate to Ealing Trades Council, which he attended regularly. His beloved partner of 10 years Priscilla died a year ago.

He recently joined the Labour Party following the election of Jeremy Corbyn as leader.

Hugh's passing leaves a huge gap in all our lives. He leaves a son and two grandchildren.

Martin Eady

Martin interviewed Hugh Lowe and the transcript of this was published in the *Labour Heritage bulletin*, Spring 2013.

## Letters

Your article in the latest Bulletin by Jonathan Wood on Lucy Middleton was a very nostalgic read for me.

I joined Wimbledon Labour Party around 1959. I was (then but not now) on the left of the Party and on the issues of that time she seemed to be on the right. When it was suggested to her by Joyce Gould, then the party's Chief Woman Officer, that she edit a book about women in the Labour Party to celebrate International Women's Day Lucy invited me to write the chapter on the Cooperative Women's Guild. That book was "Women in the Labour Movement" (1) with chapters looking at the history and then the current contribution of women to the labour movement.

Described as "the first book to give a comprehensive account of the contribution of women to the British Labour Movement" it was originally planned that the Party would publish the book. When Ron Haywood then General Secretary decided the Party could not afford it Lucy took some of her contributors with her to meet him and try to get him to change his mind. Lucy needed a cataract operation around that period, and delayed going into hospital until she had read

the proofs. Somehow, I cannot remember how, the publishers Croom Helm agreed to publish the book. Like my later writing about the Guild (2) the book was largely ignored. Working class women and their activities and achievements were under the radar - maybe still are.

As a young member of the Party, Lucy's encouragement was very special to me - here was someone who did not agree with me on many issues giving me the opportunity to write and linking me through our friendship to her past including working within the suffrage movement. As an aside, her encouragement was part of the reason why I was a parliamentary candidate (Streatham) in 1974 - I had wanted to stand in Wimbledon but they chose someone else and I will never forget the selection meeting when I was asked what my child care arrangements would be if I was selected.

The link between your obituary of Irene Wagner and "Women in the Labour Movement" in that she is thanked as Labour Party Librarian, for her help during the writing of the book. When looking at my copy of the book I found within a Christmas card that Lucy had sent me - a War on Want card of course. The foreword to this book was written by James Callaghan.

Yours sincerely

Jean Gaffin  
(Secretary, Mill Hill Branch of Hendon CLP)

(1) Women in the Labour Movement; ed. Lucy Middleton. Croom Helm, London. 1977

(2) Caring and Sharing: The Centenary History of the Co-operative Women's Guild. Jean Gaffin and David Thoms, Holyoake Books, Manchester. 1983, revised 1993.

I am doing some research on syndicalism in Britain. I know that the TUC, the Labour Party and Hyndman's Social Democratic Federation supported Britain's intervention in World War

1. The TUC declared an industrial truce which was supported by most but not all unions. I am also aware that the ILP opposed the War though not all its MPs supported that position.

I have found that the London and Provincial Union of Licensed Vehicle Workers opposed the industrial truce, though they did not appear to have opposed the War as such.

Can readers assist me with any information about any other unions opposing the industrial truce or the War? I am aware that many individual syndicalists and socialists opposed the War. What I am looking for is any other unions who adopted this policy.

Thanks for your help

Martin Eady

### **Editorial Policy of Labour Heritage**

Articles for the Labour Heritage bulletin reflect the individual views of their authors. The bulletin is open to contributions from all those with an interest in the history of the labour movement.

However it is our remit to record labour history in a non-judgemental manner. We do not have a collective view on current political developments and debates.

At its AGM Labour Heritage received reports for the year and elected the following to its committee-

Stan Newens (Chair)

Linda Shampan (Secretary)

John Grigg (Treasurer)

Barbara Humphries (Bulletin editor)

Caroline Needham (Publicity Officer)

Bill Bolland, Kit Snape, Derek Wheatley, Stephen Bird, Khackatur Pillikian, Andy Love and Brian O'Dell were also elected to the committee. Vivien Giladi was co-opted at the last committee meeting. The auditors are Colin Bastin and John Gallagher.

The next Labour Heritage event will be the Essex Labour History Conference on Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> October 2016 at the Witham Labour Hall. More details to follow.