



# Labour Heritage

## Bulletin Summer 2024

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Edited by Penny Grigg and John Grigg. Due to lack of space some items have been held over for the next bulletin.

Barbara Humphries has relinquished the post of bulletin editor after at least 30 years. We owe a debt of gratitude for the great work she has done for us. Without Barbara the bulletin would not exist.

Two articles from in the past that uncannily reflect issues today are George Orwell's article written in 1946 (found in *Orwell in Tribune*, edited by Paul Anderson) touching on the issue of immigration facing the 1945 Attlee government. Linda Shampan's article, deals with the Israel/Palestine problem with particular reference to Gaza and Rafah. Linda was secretary of Labour Heritage until she died in 2022, this is not strictly Labour History but the article remarkably parallels what is happening today.

Trevor Hopper's piece on Brighton's railway strike 1909-10 follows a tradition in the bulletin of re-visiting forgotten strikes such as the 1909 Fulwell tram strike (Autumn 2004 bulletin), the 1933 Firestone factory strike (Summer 2023) issue and in the Winter 2022/4 the 1922 Watford bus strike by Martin Eady. View our website for; 1897 engineers' strike in Chiswick (Spring 2003), 1964/65 Southall 'Woolf' strike (Autumn 2004), 1989 London Underground strikes (Autumn 2010), 1976 Trico Equal Pay strike (Autumn 2013), and the 1888 Matchgirls' strike (Spring 2023).

John Grigg

## Orwell In Tribune



### George Orwell

**15 November 1946**

As the clouds, most of them much larger and dirtier than a man's hand, come blowing up over the political horizon, there is one fact that obtrudes itself over and over again. This is that the government's troubles, present and future, arise quite largely from its failure to publicise itself properly.

People are not told with sufficient clarity what is happening, and why, and what may be expected to happen in the near future. As a result, every calamity, great or small, takes the mass of the public by surprise, and the government incurs unpopularity by doing things which any government, of whatever colour, would have to do in the same circumstances.

Take one question which has been much in the news lately but has never been properly thrashed out, the immigration of foreign labour into this country.

Recently we have seen a tremendous outcry at the TUC conference against allowing Poles to work in the two places where labour is most urgently needed – in the mines and on the land.

It will not do to write this off as something 'got up' by communist sympathisers, nor on the other hand to justify it by saying that the Polish refugees are all fascists who 'strut about' wearing monocles and carrying briefcases.

The question is, would the attitude of the British trade unions be any friendlier if it were a question, not of alleged fascists but of the admitted victims of fascism? For example, hundreds of thousands of homeless Jews are now trying desperately to get to Palestine. No doubt many of them will ultimately succeed, but others will fail. How about inviting, say, 100,000 Jewish refugees to settle in this country? Or what about the displaced persons, numbering nearly a million, who are dotted in camps all over Germany, with no future and no place to go, the United States and the British Dominions having already refused to admit them in significant numbers? Why not solve their problems by offering them British citizenship?

It is easy to imagine what the average Briton's answer would be. Even before the war, with the Nazi persecutions in full swing, there was no popular support for the idea of allowing large numbers of Jewish refugees into this country: nor was there any strong move to admit the hundreds of thousands of Spaniards

who had fled from Franco to be penned up behind barbed wire in France.

For that matter, there was very little protest against the internment of the wretched German refugees in 1940. The comments I most often overheard at the time were, 'What did they want to come over here for?' and 'They're only after our jobs'.

The fact is that there is a strong popular feeling in this country against foreign immigration. It arises from simple xenophobia, partly from fear of undercutting in wages, but above all from the out-of-date notion that Britain is over-populated, and that more population means more unemployment.

Actually, so far from having more workers than jobs, we have a serious labour shortage which will be accentuated by the continuance of conscription, and which will grow worse, not better, because of the ageing of the population.

Meanwhile our birthrate is still frighteningly low, and several hundred thousand women of marriageable age have no chance of getting husbands. But how widely are these facts known or understood?

In the end it is doubtful whether we can solve our problems without encouraging immigration from Europe. In a tentative way the government has already tried to do this, only to be met by ignorant hostility, because the public has not been told the relevant facts beforehand.

So also with countless other unpopular things that will have to be done from time to time.

But the most necessary step is not to prepare public opinion for particular emergencies, but to raise the general level of political understanding: above all, to drive home the fact, which has never been properly grasped, that British prosperity depends largely on factors outside Britain.

This business of publicising and explaining itself is not easy for a Labour government, faced by a press which at bottom is mostly hostile. Nevertheless, there are other ways of communicating with the public, and Mr Attlee and his colleagues might well pay more attention to the radio, a medium which very few politicians in this country have ever taken seriously.

## **Brighton Railway Strike 1909-10**

### **Trevor Hopper**

At 3.15 on Monday 8th November 1909, a strike began in the boiler shop of the locomotive works of the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway. The strike is important historically, firstly because it gives an insight into the problems faced by trade unions in the years prior to the First World War.

Secondly, because this was a dispute in a town, Brighton, not associated with the working class, industrial development, or a Labour movement. Yet it was to a large extent a railway town with a manufacturing base in the railway works. Over two thousand men worked for the railway, the majority of whom were employed at the works. This seaside town possessed an industrial proletariat.

The Brighton Railway Works was a popular place to be employed, for the regularity of work, if not the conditions and wages, as the railways were notoriously low payers.

The Railway company had built many houses for the railway's workers, hence a railway community had sprung up around the station area. Here was a regularly employed, predominantly skilled or semi-skilled workforce with a unionised group at its head, the boilermakers, who fitted the term by labour historians, a 'labour aristocracy'

It is also important to note that this was an interesting period of mixed fortunes for trade unions and the labour movement. There had been increasing radicalism by large numbers of trade unionists, with strikes and outbreaks of syndicalism. The working class had to an extent arrived as a political force, with the formation of the parliamentary Labour party in 1906 and a Liberal government pledged to reverse the Taff Vale decision against secondary action. Yet, there was the setback of the Osbourne Judgement of 1909, regarding

trade union fees to Labour) which was also reversed later on.

Locally, Brighton had a distinct working class with Labour councillors and the usual groupings of Independent Labour Party, Clarion, Social Democratic Federation and Fabian activists. About 1500 trade unionists in a town of 13,123 was not high and consequently the outlook for supportive secondary action not promising. But the Boilermakers were a strong craft based union with almost 100% membership and their confidence is evidenced by the unions records of 11th January.

'A stranger appeared in the shop, on being approached he admitted he did not belong to the society' The said gentleman was then asked to leave, which he agreed to as he was working underprice. The union granted him twenty shillings 'as he was travelling around the country looking for work' An interesting example of both charity and craft strength. Public awareness of such incidents is illustrated by the following quote from the local newspaper:

'Sir, during the last year or two we have heard rumours of a strike in the boiler department of the railway works. As one of the general public, I am very pleased to hear that at last the trouble is settled'

But the introduction of piece work into the shop became a further source of friction. The union records of February 1909 notes the 'Tyranny and bullying existing within the shop'

Matters came to a head on 8th November when an unskilled man was asked to chip and file the fireboxes- a task which was the preserve of the skilled boilermaker. Interestingly, the account of the start of the dispute reported in the local paper tallies with the union's records. The boilermakers stopped work to be told by the foreman "if you don't like it you can clear out' The men proceeded to walk out.

The AEU (Amalgamated Engineering Union) reported that there were about 112 boilermakers out, 40 non-unionists and 70 rivet boys, who had refused to work in the boilermakers' place. Such a strong show of support would seem likely to have caused a shutdown of the works, but it appears the majority kept working if they were not directly involved in the dispute. The workers and the management were now at loggerheads, the battle lines had been drawn, and neither were prepared to cede any ground.

From the union's point of view, the timing of the dispute could not have been worse. Firstly, the union had cut back on benefits for out of work members. Secondly, with Christmas approaching, many with families would be unwilling to risk their seasonal comforts. Thirdly, the middle of winter in a seaside town with much seasonal unemployment would not have been the best time to rely on support from the wider working class community.

So, the strike began with management holding the upper hand despite the

show of unity from the men. Picket lines were manned daily, but these were more for the purpose of preventing new non-union labour starting rather than stopping other workers from showing solidarity by striking themselves.

Indeed, it is ironic that the pickets held collection boxes for the strikers, which their colleagues donated to on their way into work. The only sign of any trouble was an accusation by management that thirty boilermakers had molested two foremen and police protection had been requested. Although their colleagues steadfastly refused to perform the boilermakers' duties, there was no chance of sympathetic action by other unions. Management took a firm intransigent position. On November 17th they issued a new set of demands to be met before allowing the men to return to work. Firstly, an open non-union shop would prevail, enabling non skilled workers to be employed. Secondly, piece work was to be introduced. Thirdly, all hands would not be permitted to return to work at the same time, indeed some not at all. Such a rapid escalation of the terms of the dispute would suggest that the chipping of fireboxes was not the greatest priority of management in the first place. Inevitably, the men were adamant that they would not return to work under these conditions.

A meeting in a local hall on the 15th of November was to demonstrate both the strength and weakness of the strikers' case. The Brighton Herald reported 'There could have been no fewer than

fifteen hundred men present, a number all the more striking since the meeting was limited strictly to railwaymen'. The speakers varied from the general railway workers, the AEU and the Boilermakers' Society. At the meeting 'an elderly but vigorous worker' declared that all the evidence went to show that what was happening was an organized conspiracy to break the power of the men's unions. The success of the Labour Party in the House of Commons had aroused the forces of capital to crush the workers. At the Brighton Works it was decided to begin with the strongest union of all, that of the Boilermakers'. Such a speech may not have been typical of the average railway workers views but, like all the other speakers who denounced the management and pledged their support, he was received with rapturous applause. It is noticeable though that such a level of support still did not threaten any further action.

The statement on management was supported by an overwhelming 'forest of hands' and read 'In conclusion we are fully determined to support the boilermakers in their trouble and hope you realise the seriousness of the position and remove those officials who are responsible for the present conditions.' Poignantly, the day before the meeting the men had already agreed to discuss the introduction of piece work, providing they were all taken back and the closed shop persisted. But, despite this display of solidarity in a railway community that had been instrumental in the development of the labour movement in Brighton with

prominent railwaymen elected to the council, the management were sensing victory and conceded nothing.

Financial support was vital if the men were not to be starved back to work. The strikers did not receive any money for the first four weeks of the dispute and were immediately plunged into debt and poverty. They later received what was called a 'home donation' of 7s and 6d a week from the unions EC. The Brighton Trade Council sent £3 and the AEU sent £20. The Co-operative Society promised to hold a concert for the men's benefit at Christmas. Despite this by the 1st of December the men had agreed to let non-union men start work and were prepared to accept piece work. They voted on 8th December to continue the strike for the last remaining principle of allowing all qualified boilermakers to be members of their society and strikers to be re-employed.

Testimony to the suffering of the strikers and their families was heard at a meeting on 4th December of the Lewes Road P.S.A. (Pleasant Sunday Afternoon) an organization that was known for having Liberal/Labour non-conformist leanings. A Reverend from the Congregational Church, (also linked to Co-operative organisations) discussed poverty in general. He ended with what the Herald described as 'A touching appeal to the poverty and misery occasioned to the women and children who are affected by the railway strike' A collection was taken raising 2s and 6d and the church added a further 6 shillings. The treasurer of the fund was a

local Anglican vicar. The Trades Council had a letter published in the Brighton Herald on 11th December requesting help for the families.

*'Wistful glances will be cast towards the good things in the shops and little hearts will ache. These poor little children will be wondering in their childish way why daddy is at home and why the meals are so scanty.'*

It is difficult to judge whether the strike had widespread support throughout the town especially as the main newspaper the Argus, failed to mention the dispute at all. What can be ascertained is that the strike had the overwhelming support of the railway community and working class institutions, like the trade unions, Co-operative societies and some churches in the railway community.

Christmas passed and despite the donations and proceeds from the concert, the majority of strikers and their families would have had a bleak festive season. Yet still they seemed prepared to continue the strike for what little remained of their demands. On 3rd January 1910 a special meeting was held to vote on a return to work. Out of a total of 99 present, 41 voted to return to work while 58 voted to stay out. Such a close vote was enough for some men to decide that despite being in the minority they could wait no longer. Indeed one brother, F. Tupper, was honest enough to admit he would return to work the next day. Others were inevitably to follow him. The branch records of 4th January read as follows: 'The dispute is

practically lost owing to the action of some of the members starting work contrary to the feelings of the meeting' The Trades Council reported 'Outside influence had been brought to bear on the men'

Four started work the next day and soon twenty more joined them. The affair ended miserably.

It is not clear how many strikers were allowed back but two years later some of the older members on strike were still unemployed. Certainly, the main activists were not re-employed. The President of the branch, F Avenell left in February to work on the west coast of Africa, where it would seem prospects were brighter than on the south coast of England.

The question as to how indicative the dispute was of industrial relations in Edwardian England is difficult to answer. Certainly, the bulk of strikes nationally were in the heavy industries, railways, transport, mining, docks. Some of the language used in the meetings suggest that there was some awareness of wider industrial and political issues. Yet, the strike was a peculiarly localised dispute, and there is no mention of it in the official history of the Boilermakers. The piece work system was rapidly being introduced across industry and was reluctantly accepted across the board with little successful resistance and thereby indicative of many skilled workers problems. The closed shop was also a strongly contested area by

employers. It is perhaps, indicative of an organised working class in both its strength through skilled unions and a supportive community, but in isolation in a largely unskilled unorganised wider working class unable to provide sufficient support to be successful. An example of class and political development in an area not normally associated with such trends.

#### **Article in 'Viewpoints' Autumn 2004**

#### **JEWS FOR JUSTICE FOR PALESTINIANS**

**Linda Shampán**

JfJP is a network of Jews in Britain, formed in February 2002, opposed to Israeli policies that undermine the livelihoods, human, civil and political rights of the Palestinian people. As well as organizing to ensure Jewish opinions critical of Israeli policy are heard in Britain, we are developing ways of extending support to Palestinian people trapped in the spiral of violence and repression and helping Israeli Jews groups working with them.

As a local member of JfJP I enclose a copy of an open letter sent in June 2004 to the Board of Deputies of British Jews.

#### *Open Letter to the Board of Deputies of British Jews:*

Thousands of British Jews are looking for a just and humane resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in line with Jewish values of justice, tolerance and mutual respect. They look to the community's official leaders for support. Now that it is clear that more British Jews feel 'very critical of Israeli Government Policies' (31%) than generally support them (24%) (Jewish Chronicle 18.6.04), it is time to distinguish the interests of the Jewish community in Britain from the policies adopted by Israeli governments of the day, of whatever political persuasion. We fear that the Board of Deputies of British Jews fails to make the distinction, to the detriment of support for Israel in the Jewish community and in the population as a whole.

We are opposed to Israel's occupation and settlement of the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza. We are horrified by the repression, targeted assassinations, house demolitions, extended imprisonment without charge or trial, extended curfews and other collective punishments. They are inhumane and counterproductive. They fuel resentment and do nothing for long-term peace.

All attacks on civilians by either side are to be condemned, whether by suicide bombing, "targeted killing" by rocket in crowded places, or shooting into crowds. Moreover, it is not good seeing them as 'justified retaliation' – this



merely fuels an endless cycle of violence.

Unacceptable repression in Rafah has shocked the world. A new approach is needed. As Jews in Britain we believe Israel should be subject to the same criteria and moral and legal standards as we apply to other democracies. The Board of Deputies will not voice criticism of Israeli policies. This is counterproductive as it allows people to think that all Jews support Israel's policies. Silence in the face of oppression is never justifiable.

An Israeli withdrawal from Gaza would be a welcome start to Israel meeting its international obligations but withdrawal must be on terms that allow the people of Gaza the chance of constructing a life of peace with dignity. The only lasting solution will be a negotiated one. The continued seizure of ever more lands on the occupied West Bank makes it impossible to believe that the Israeli government is genuinely seeking peace. The accelerated construction of the 'separation fence' deep in Palestinian territory fuels this distrust.

To allow the Israeli government policy to be dismissed on the basis that it is 'a new antisemitism' is unjustified and unworthy of the generations of victims of antisemitism. We must oppose genuine antisemitism wherever it rears its head but not desensitize people by abusing the term.

The Board of Deputies of British Jews is not, and should not be, the voice of the Israeli government. Too often it seems to

be just that. We call on the Board to stand up and respond to the widespread desire in Britain's Jewish community for a just and peaceful long-term solution to the conflict. These issues must be brought into the open. Silence discredits us all.

Since June events have moved on and JfJp put out the following press release on October 5<sup>th</sup>:

The silence of the international community in the face of the carnage wrought by the Israeli army in the northern Gaza Strip is unbearable. Coming so soon after Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement, the decision to style the operation 'Days of Penitence' compounds the outrage.

Sharon's cynicism is clearly demonstrated. Disengagement is being prepared through terror against the civilian population. The creation of 'security areas, where houses, agricultural land and property is destroyed and razed to the ground is no more than a land grab, mirroring the effects of the separation barrier in the West Bank. Even 'potential' launch sites – i.e., orchards – are being razed.

The plan for Gaza has nothing to do with peace and everything to do with subjugation of the Palestinians to control by the Israeli army. It has nothing to do with the only hope for progress towards a peaceful and just solution of the conflict.

European Jews for a Just Peace calls on civil society to pressurize the European Union and the international community to stop the Israeli government from continuing the massacre and the human rights violations in the Gaza Strip.

We call on all Israeli soldiers to follow the example of the 1,000 or more refuseniks who oppose the Occupation and who will not serve in the Israeli army because of it, to refuse to take part in the brutal and illegal actions.

## Memories of a 1974 Labour Candidate

### Jean Gaffin



I was the Labour candidate for Streatham CLP in both 1974 elections. Whilst planning to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary with friends made in that campaign, I went through files of papers – the election leaflets, the press cuttings

from days when coverage in local papers mattered, and masses of correspondence – Letters typed on manual typewriters with smudged carbon copies, lots handwritten. Ward and CLP papers typed onto waxy sheets that were then placed on a Gestetner duplicating machine, each copy another turn of the handle.

How was an unknown branch secretary selected as a candidate – a woman at that?

From memory, I wrote to Labour Party Head Office to express an interest and got on a list enabling me to apply. I was in my thirties, married with two children and lecturing at a then Polytechnic. I applied to Wimbledon CLP as they knew me well. They interviewed me but seemed more interested in my childcare arrangements than my political views. I was living in Mitcham, so I then applied to Streatham, another adjoining CLP. The Women's Section interviewed me and nominated me; after longlisting I was shortlisted – others shortlisted included a local Councillor and Margaret Jackson (Now Dame Margaret Becket). And I was selected.

Of all the activity in the following two years I am picking on just two aspects. Casework and the organisations that sought my views. The photographs illustrate just some of the work we did to establish my name and meet as many people as possible: canvassing in Streatham High Road with our decorated umbrellas and using a loudspeaker van to advertise our

presence for example. And with the stress on rising food prices, lots of talking to shoppers.

With a member who had a camper van we advertised an Advice Van Service and toured the many Council estates. I took up many issues, as Councillors and PPC's do today, mostly housing just like today. And people responded – District Housing Officers, GLC member Tony Judge and when taking up issues relating to disability the reply was from Alf Morris the Minister himself. I took up wider issues – the search for a place for a youth club by a resident's association, and the search for premises by the South London Islamic Centre. The latter wrote thanking me for my sympathy and expressing disappointment and displeasure with Lambeth Council. And I called a meeting to discuss forming a Streatham Society that took off and is still going strong.

Then letters – typed, duplicated or handwritten – from a wide range of organisations as well as individuals seeking my view. Some concerned single issues: abortion most often; others euthanasia, nuclear disarmament, homosexual law reform. Some asked lots – the United National Association asked a range of questions from my views on the internationalisation of the seabed to international tariffs. One far-sighted handwritten letter from an individual asking my views on thermal insulation, recycling and reducing the use of private cars. The Conolly Association and Irish

Self-determination League asked me to pledge support to the demands of the Civil Rights Movement, ending of internment and cessation of harassment by the armed forces. The Catholic Electors' Constituency Committee of the Diocese of Southwark asked me about abortion, euthanasia and religious teaching in schools.

And now? I follow my prospective parliamentary candidate on Facebook and WhatsApp. If I have an issue, I have to wrestle with a chatbot rather than drop a line to someone in charge, let alone ring them up. My home phone number and home address were on my campaign material. Yes, 50 years is a long time, and nostalgia (plus hoarding) a dangerous disease.

## **Origins of the Co-operative Movement in the Suburbs**

### **Barbara Humphries**

Although the Co-operative Movement had its origins in the North of England in the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was able to sink roots in London suburbia in the interwar years. This was in new working class communities which were largely based on workers in industries such as electrical engineering and food

processing, rather than coal mines or shipbuilding. Many were migrants to the area to look for work. Many were more affluent, able to afford homes with gardens, holidays with pay and consumer goods. Soon the number of co-operators in London and the south-east outnumbered those in Lancashire and Yorkshire, although the latter had a higher density of members.

The West London Industrial Co-operative Society was founded by railway workers in 1893 with 253 members. Based in the workplace, this was fairly typical of newly formed societies in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The first co-op shop had been opened in Stratford in 1861 with the support of railway workers. However, the organisation changed from being a workplace to a community organisation. This article is based on the current London boroughs of Ealing and Hillingdon. By 1918 there were co-op stores in Acton Green, Southall, Ealing and Hanwell. Land had been purchased for a bakery in Southall. Later there were shops in the 'new build' areas of Hayes, Greenford and Perivale, where the population lived on housing estates without a town centre.

### **The London Co-operative Society**

The London Co-operative Society (LCS) was founded in 1920, out of the amalgamation of the Stratford and Edmonton Co-operative societies. It was joined in 1921 by the West London Industrial Co-operative Society and in 1931 by the Yiewsley Society. The latter was in Hillingdon.

The LCS grew rapidly. It was the main co-operative society in London north of the Thames, and its area extended from Harefield in the west, to Southend on the east coast. Its membership grew from 5,097 in 1924 to 44,989 in 1927. By 1922 it owned 99 groceries, 31 bread shops, 26 butchers, 8 bakeries, 16 dairies, a laundry in Ealing, and a farm in Essex. By the 1930s Co-op banks held 66,058 bank deposits on behalf of a minority of its membership.

It was branching out of core activities with banks, travel agents, and furniture shops. The LCS capital turnover at £8 million had surpassed those in the Co-op's northern heartlands. The LCS was an important employer, with 14,000 employees, the diverse workforce included clerks, bakers and laundry workers and shop assistants.

### **Continued Growth of the LCS**

The LCS became the largest co-operative society in the UK. In 1953 it had one million members, 40% of the population of greater London. It reported there were 403 groceries, of which 120 were self-service, 228 butchers, 114 fruit and vegetable stores, and 26 department stores which sold furnishings. During World War 2 it faced challenging times, but retained loyal support amongst its members, who registered their ration cards with Co-op shops. The first ever self-service departmental store was opened in Romford in 1942. By the 1950s the Co-op ran 60% of self-service outlets in the UK.

## **The Co-operative Movement and Politics**

It was feared that the growth of the Co-op into London and the South-East would undermine the ethics and values of the Co-op, but that was not the case. It was described as the 'housewives' trades union' protecting the consumer from shoddy goods and excessive prices. However, the Co-op was more than just a shop it ran educational and social activities to show how the benefits of social ownership could be put into practice. Public meetings were held but it was estimated that only a minority of members took part. A report was given in the *Wheatsheaf* of a concert meeting in Ealing, which was judged to be a success. Outings and afternoon tea was provided for children. Ten such concerts took place in West London which included film shows and a performance by the Acton Co-operative Dramatics Society.

The main event of the year though was the annual fete, an event which showcased the ideals of the Co-op. One of these took place in Acton. It was attended by 25,000 people, the largest event that the town had seen. It comprised a foreign fancy dress pageant, a 'beautiful baby' contest, and sports. It concluded with a firework display. There was also an annual fete in Hayes, providing entertainment for the local community. During World War 2, these events had to be curtailed.

## **The Guilds**

Most of the Co-op's political education came from the Guilds, particularly the Women's Co-operation Guild.(WCG). The WCG had been founded in Hebden Bridge in 1883. It appealed to mainly married working class women, although some middle class women joined. Its peak years were 1920-1939 when it grew from 44,539 to 85,785 members. It was however not as big as the Labour Party Women's Sections which grew to over 200,000 in the interwar years. As with the Co-op movement as a whole the main growth was to be in London and the South-East. By 1940 there were 6,000 members in 173 branches in the area covered by the LCS. Activities included collecting milk tokens for victims of the Spanish Civil War.

There were branches in Acton, Ealing, and Southall since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They held political discussions on, for instance, women and health, interspersed with social events such as whist drives. In Hillingdon there were branches in Hayes, Uxbridge and Yiewsley. The WCG held peace days, when the white poppy was worn. During the war there were discussions on growing vegetables, and peace aims, the Beveridge Report, and Home Rule for India.

There were other guilds besides the WCG. These included Men's Guilds and Mixed Guilds as well as Children's Circles and the Socialist Sunday School which had its own commandments and naming ceremonies. These provided the

education for children to participate in politics in later life.

### **The Co-operative Party and the Labour Party**

The Co-operative Party was founded in 1917. This was after wartime government had proposed to levy an excess profits tax on the Co-operative Movement. It was judged to be unfair because the Co-op did not make a profit: it distributed a 'divi' to its members. The Co-operative movement had been non-political. It contained members of all political parties, as a result of which it had not affiliated to the Labour Representation Committee in 1900. However, organisations such as the Woolwich Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society had affiliated to local Labour Parties. The WCG had also expressed an interest as many of its policies on health and education were similar. The Co-op needed protection just as the trades unions had needed protection. There were now two political parties representing the working class and with broadly socialist aims. Finally, there was a narrowly agreed arrangement whereby the two parties would work together. This was called the Cheltenham Agreement. Prior to this the Co-operative Movement stood its own candidates. Now there were joint Co-op and Labour candidates.

Political councils were set up which were to become branches of the Co-operative Party. There was no facility for opting out as for the political levy in the Labour Party. Local branches of the Co-

operative Party were to affiliate to the local Labour Party, but not to the national party.

The high tide for Co-operative and Labour Party candidates was in the 1945 election. Two candidates in west London received Co-op sponsorship – Ealing West and Uxbridge. The two Labour candidates were James Hudson and Frank Beswick. Neither of these two parties had attracted trades union support, like Southall and Acton. The two constituencies were to receive funding from the Co-op, in return for sponsorship for its candidates. The Co-op also made its premises available for Labour Party meetings, as was the case in Ealing West and later in Ealing North. The Co-operative Party also sponsored councillors.

### **The Decline of the Co-operative Party**

The Co-operative Party reached the peak of its membership in the 1940s and 1950s. Membership of the Co-operative Movement itself was higher in the interwar years than the trades unions. This was especially the case in the new industrial areas, such as the London suburbs. In 1945 there were 6.5 million trades union members and 9-10 million Co-op members.

The blame for the Co-operative Party's decline was blamed on the London Co-op Members Organisation which led the Co-op in London. Between 1950 and 1960 the party declined from 1,038 to 630 members in West London.

Membership of the LCS no longer grew as it had in the interwar years. 18,000 new members joined in 1953 but that compared with 46,000 in 1950. The increase in sales was the lowest since 1945. Inner city areas were particularly affected as there had been a migration to new towns and the suburbs. Its sales were down to 3% in inner London, as compared to 20% in West London and 25% in the rest of the country.

Membership of the guilds also declined. The most successful, the WCG had suffered like the Labour Party Women's Sections from the higher proportion of women in the workplace. They could no longer hold meetings in the afternoons.

The role of the Co-operative Movement has been underestimated as part of the labour movement. Although not as fundamental as the trades union movement, it nevertheless played a part winning votes for Labour across the country.

Sources – *The Wheatsheaf*; Minutes of the West London Industrial Co-operative Society (Bishopsgate Institute); S. Newens, *History of Co-operative Politics in London*; N. Robertson, *The Co-operative Movement and Communities in Britain*; C. Webb *The Woman with the Basket*; J. Gaffin and T. Thomas, *Caring and Sharing*.

**Tom Mann's Memoirs. Introduced by Ken Coates, *Spokesman*, 2008.**

**Reviewed by Barbara Humphries**

Tom Mann is known for his role in the successful 1889 dock strike. However, his life as trades union organizer and socialist orator is less well known.

He was born in Coventry and started work in the mines. He then went on to serve an engineering apprenticeship. At a young age he was influenced by religion and was a vegetarian. His work took him to ship builders Thorneycrofts in Chiswick where he joined the trades union, the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE) and the Mutual Shakespeare Improvement Society.

When work in Chiswick dried up he was forced to take a job in the Tilbury Docks where he had a two hour commute between work and home. Because of this he found accommodation in Battersea, where he became active in the Social Democratic Federation (SDF). There was much overlap between socialist organizations in the 1890s. The leader of the SDF, Henry Hyndman, was against strikes and this put him at odds with a lot of the membership.

William Morris and Eleanor Marx left to form the Socialist League. Tom Mann continued to lecture to both organizations. His main campaign was for the eight-hour day. He spoke at meetings of the Fabian Society and the

Independent Labour Party (ILP) on this issue.

One of the regular lecturers for the SDF spoke on the English Civil War of the 1640s particularly the Levellers and Diggers. He notes that Jim Connell was the author of the People's Flag although he did not approve of the music to which it was sung.

Away from London Tom Mann worked in the mines of Northumbria and in Rochdale and Bolton. Returning to London he organized the Beckton Gas workers alongside Will Thorne. There is chapter on the match girls' strike and the dockers' strike which he said gave a huge impetus to the organization of unskilled workers. He believed that financial support from Australia was the key to the dockers' success.

Tom Mann was appointed by the government of the day to a Royal Commission on Labor where he argued for one Port of London Authority to replace the existing four companies and hundreds of wharves. He became President of the Docker's Union and General Secretary of the ASE which had branches across the Empire. He was a member of the London Reform Union which he used to gain the support of the London County Council for municipalization of the docks.

His political commitment to socialism led to Tom Mann becoming the General Secretary of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) in 1894 and he unsuccessfully stood as parliamentary candidate in Colne Valley. Keir Hardie

stood as candidate in Bradford which showed how mobile these early socialist activists were.

Less well known is Tom Mann's international standing. He attended International Socialist Congresses and became president of the International Federation of the Ship, Dock and River Workers Organization. He travelled to organize dockers in Belgium, the Netherlands, France, Spain, and Germany where he was arrested and deported back to the UK.

He spent several years in New Zealand and Australia where he worked among miners and farm workers. In South Africa he found racism a barrier to trades union organization, as conditions were so different for black workers.

He returned to the UK in 1910 and was in Liverpool for the Great Labour Unrest of 1910 – 1914. There he witnessed gross brutality against strikers by the police and military.

Tom Mann became a convert to syndicalism which was French inspired. He differentiated himself from what he called 'State Socialists'. In 1912 he wrote a 'Don't Shoot' leaflet for which he was charged with incitement to mutiny. As president of the Industrial Syndicalist Education League he was prosecuted again for an article in the Syndicalist. He was sentenced to six months imprisonment in Strangeways Prison, Manchester but because of the strength of public support on his behalf this was commuted to seven weeks.



Tom Mann was to join the Minority Movement, organized by the Community Party of Great Britain. His record as a trades union organizer was exceptional.



Dockers strike 1889

## **Memories of the Miner's Strike 1984/85**

### ***Barbara Humphries***

2024 marks the 40th anniversary of the beginning of the 1984/85 miners' strike. There has been coverage of this by the BBC and some politicians. In the main though, tributes have come from the National Union of Mineworkers themselves.

However, what has been missing has been any mention of the support that the miners received from the rest of the labour movement. The strike is portrayed as the NUM versus the government, without much mention of how it polarised British society at the

time. Many were alarmed at the fighting between working miners and those on strike especially in the Nottinghamshire coalfield. The victorious strikes of 1972 and 1974 which brought down a Tory government, were still fresh in peoples' minds and many were taken aback at the way the 1984 strike started. It was not supposed to be like this.

There was criticism from the NUM, both during the strike and since about the lack of support that its members received from the Labour Party. The then leader of the party, himself from a mining background, was seen as distancing himself from the strike. This led to the accusation that the Labour Party did not support the strike.

For those who did not live through the strike the record should be set straight. Thousands of Labour Party members collected every week for the miners, on street corners, at stations and in the workplace. We got a lot of support, in areas like Southall with its Asian community, which had seen police violence over the previous decades. In some areas though there was a bit of hostility. Miners' support groups offered accommodation for miners travelling around the country, and some went to visit pit villages. A lot of the isolation faced by the miners was broken down. This is seen in the film *Pride* in which members of a Gay and Lesbian group in London adopts a pit village in South Wales and provides food, money and a new van for the miners. Prejudice against the gays and lesbians is gradually broken down. The NUM

reciprocates after the strike by supporting a resolution in favour of equality at a Labour Party conference and their banner was carried on a gay pride march.

In London we collected mainly for the Kent miners, who faced the closure of all of their pits. One of the miners who stayed with us, was en route to Sri Lanka to raise support and solidarity. Others collected for the Derbyshire miners where a minority of the workforce was on strike.

At the 1984 Labour Party conference there was a vote in favour of supporting the miners. A resolution had been previously passed by the National Executive Committee. In fact Arthur Scargill spoke to the conference , upstaging Neil Kinnock.

What about solidarity action by trades unions? The government was determined not to allow a second front. Disputes with the pit deputies were narrowly avoided, and a settlement was agreed with their union NACODS. The Liverpool council setting a deficit budget was likewise settled. Many groups of workers settled pay claims favourably on the backs of the miners' strike. Many also knew that the government, if it defeated the miners, would come for them as well. This was proved to be true.

## **Obituaries**

### **Sean Creighton 1947 – 2024**

Sean, who was Labour Heritage secretary in the early 1990s, was a frequent attendee at Labour Heritage meetings with his book stall and an occasional contributor to our bulletin.

He was born in Wandsworth and obtained a history degree at Sheffield University. He then worked in local government and in the voluntary sector. He worked with Wandsworth Poverty Action Group in the 1970s and later served as a school governor and a law centre volunteer.

Sean always researched the history of working class and peace movements in South London and ran walks and gave talks on black and Labour history. After retiring in 2012 he published on the radical and labour movement history in South London, and as project consultant was central to the North East Popular Politics Project creating an on-line data base accessible to all researching North East history.

Sean's gentle manner and research tenacity will be greatly missed.

John Grigg

## **Roy Delville Roebuck 1929 - 2023**

Roy Roebuck died at the age of 94 in December 2023. He joined the Wythenshawe Labour Party in 1945 and three years later, as a youth delegate of the Lancashire and Cheshire and Peak District Regional Council of the Labour Party, attended the meeting at Belle Vue in Manchester (held there because the Free Trade Hall had been bombed) when Aneurin Bevan launched the National Health Service and referred to the Tories as being 'lower than vermin'.

Much of his National Service as a wireless operator in the RAF took place in Ceylon. In his early career as a journalist and sub-editor Roebuck worked for many regional newspapers such as the Stockport Advertiser and the Manchester Evening Chronicle before coming to Fleet Street where he worked for, amongst others, the Daily Mirror and its successor The Sun, the Daily Express, the Labour paper Forward and the Daily Herald.

He first contested the seat of Altrincham and Sale in 1964, and again in a by-election the following year but it was not until the 1966 election that he entered Parliament as the Member for Harrow East with the slim majority of 378. Perhaps seen on the right wing of the party and a founder member of the Labour Common Market Safeguards Campaign he formed the group Harold Wilson's Young Eagles to show that the 1966 intake supported the Prime Minister. Amongst many things in the Commons, he championed press

freedom and secured a review of the law on Contempt of Court after the Attorney-General Elwyn Jones blocked press comment on the Aberfan disaster. After losing his seat in 1970 he read for the Bar and was called at Gray's Inn in 1974 supported by the newly appointed Lord High Chancellor Elwyn Jones.

His legal practice took him to Magistrates Courts, Crown Courts through to the High Court, Appeal Court, Tribunals, Courts Martial and the House of Lords. He continued to write, sometimes courting controversy by rebuking James Callaghan for appointing more special advisers instead of dismissing them and accusing Tony Blair of stealing the Tories clothes and questioned the lawfulness of his actions on Iraq. In his 60s he took two degrees at Leicester University. He retired from his practice at the bar in his early 80s.

A supporter of Labour Heritage for a long time, he was also a long-standing member of the Co-operative Party. Married to the virologist Dr Mary Adam. Their son Gavin, an arts manager and producer, survives them. 'A Crusade or Nothing', not a personal memoir but a book he was commissioned to write after the 1970 election, is newly available on Amazon and is of value to any interested in the Labour Government and Party in the 1960s.

Gavin Roebuck

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