



Labour Heritage

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James Keir Hardie 1856-1915

By Barbara Humphries

The 26th September 2015 marked the 100th anniversary of the death of James Keir Hardie, a man widely regarded as the founding father of the Labour Party. A Lanarkshire miner who had begun work at the age of ten, and secretary of the Scottish Miners' Federation, he had first sought Parliamentary representation as a Liberal. He became convinced however, of the need for independent working class representation in Parliament, and in 1892 he was elected as the first labour MP for West Ham, in London. His election campaign received unprecedented working class support, and the seaman's union lent him a life-boat to be used as a platform for addressing public meetings. When elected he alarmed other MPs by turning up to Parliament in his 'work-a-day clothes', (including a cloth cap), escorted by his constituents and a brass band. He went on to make his mark by demanding that more be done to help the unemployed.

The legacy of Keir Hardie has been claimed by many in the Party. So what did he stand for?

Firstly he was a staunch advocate of independent working class representation. He believed that the Conservatives and the majority of the Liberal Party, as representatives of capital were the enemies of labour. In 1893 he assisted in the formation of the Independent Labour Party, which he hoped would replace the Liberal Party for ever, as the political party of the working class. He always saw himself as a representative of the working class. Once asked by a House of Commons policeman if he had come to work on the roof, he replied that no, he had come to work on the floor. As an MP he campaigned for an eight hour day to help the unemployed. He supported what he saw as the rightful struggles of the trades union movement, although he was never a syndicalist and saw political action as the way forward. Converted to socialism by members of the Social Democratic Federation, such as dockers leader Tom Mann, he called for the nationalisation of the mines, docks, railways, land and tramways in his election campaign in West Ham.

In 1895 Hardie along with other labour representatives lost his seat in Parliament, but he was elected again, for Merthyr Tydfil in 1900, a seat which he was to retain until he died. By this time he had made his mark as an anti-war campaigner, calling the Boer War a 'foul crime' whose only aim was to secure an

outlay for capital and markets. He was savagely attacked by the capitalist press for being pro-Boer and a 'wild socialist'. He reportedly never lost his temper or responded to these attacks, saying 'that the traveller who stops to cast a stone at every cur which barks at his heels will be a long time reaching the end of his journey.'

In 1906 Hardie was elected first leader of the Labour Party, but not unanimously. 15 out of the 29 first Labour MPs voted for him, but others chose to support the more moderate Havelock Wilson. He was criticised by Labour MPs such as Ramsay MacDonald and Philip Snowden for allegedly failing to keep the Parliamentary Party together. They thought that he was more at home addressing mass rallies throughout the country, than dealing with parliamentary procedures. But using divisions within the ranks of the Liberals and Conservatives, he had at an early stage managed to get a debate on unemployment. This had been moved as an amendment to the Queen's speech in 1893.



First 29 Labour MPs elected in 1906

By 1907 ill health had got the better of Hardie, the punishing schedule of public rallies for the cause had taken its toll. In 1908 he told Ramsay MacDonald that he would not stand again as Labour leader. After a tour abroad in 1907 he returned to a welcome rally in the Albert Hall, the largest venue that the Labour Party had ever hired for a meeting. There were concerns about filling the hall, but there was standing room only. Keir Hardie had lost none of his magic for his audiences.

Hardie was an internationalist, widely travelling overseas to meet with socialists and trades unionists throughout the world. He also whole-heartedly embraced the cause of women's suffrage, giving practical help to suffragettes who were being imprisoned and forcibly fed, speaking at suffragette rallies and raising funds for them.

In 1909 the Miners' Federation of Great Britain affiliated to the Labour Party, ending its long standing support for the Liberal Party. The Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants had been supportive of the Party from its beginnings in 1900. Now seeing the Labour Party as a threat, the capitalist press, backed by the Anti-Socialist Union moved into top gear, viciously attacking Labour MPs, including 'moderates' such as Snowden and MacDonald. In 1909 a court ruling, the Osborne Judgement tried to ban trades unions from using their funds for political purposes, an attack on the funding of the Labour Party.

1911 saw the great industrial unrest when the number of strikes soared. During a railway strike the Liberal government sent troops to Liverpool and Llanelli in Wales where two railway workers were shot dead. In response Hardie wrote his famous pamphlet *Killing no Murder*. This was one of over 100 pamphlets that he wrote, alongside over 1,000 newspaper articles.

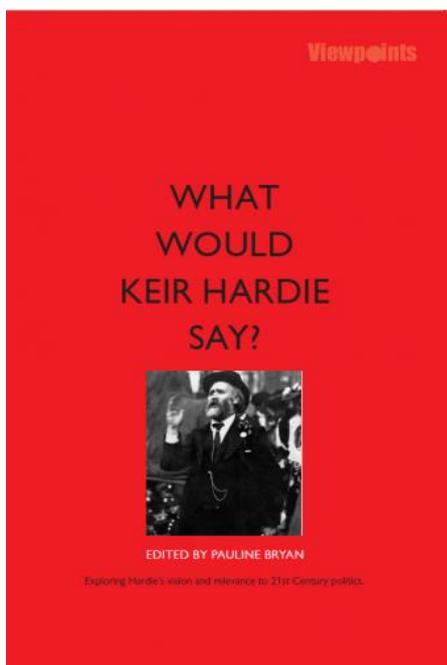
When Hardie died in 1915, Britain was already at war with Germany. He opposed the First World War, saying that British workers had no quarrel with German workers. Sadly his message of peace and international solidarity was to be temporarily drowned out by nationalism. Members of trades unions supported the War, and even in his constituency of Merthyr Tydfil he was to face hostility, being shouted down at rallies. The War split the Labour Party, and Ramsay MacDonald, also an opponent, had to step down as leader. Hardie died at a time of deep despair for himself and others who opposed the War. However his legacy was to live on in

the history of the labour movement. In 1910 he could already say that with only 29 Labour MPs, and the majority of the working class yet to be enfranchised, pressure had been exerted on the 1906-14 Liberal Government to carry out social legislation such as pensions, free school meals and some support for the unemployed. He did not live to see the change in political landscape which his party would bring to 20th century Britain.

In a year when we have seen a general election defeat, followed by a leadership campaign which in many ways has taken the Party back to its roots, enthusing members and supporters, old and new, there can be no more fitting a moment to celebrate the memory of Keir Hardie.

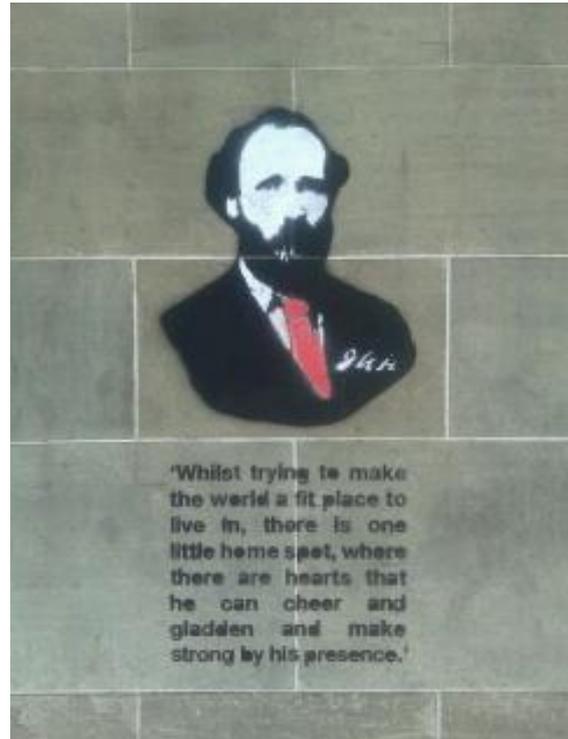
The Keir Hardie Society was set up in 2010, and to mark this anniversary they have published a book entitled *What would Keir Hardie Say ?* edited by Pauline Bryan.

<http://keirhardiesociety.co.uk/>



There is also an exhibition in the Baird Institute in Cumnock, Hardie's home town, which runs until December 19th. It is entitled *The Words of Keir Hardie*.

<http://www.ayrshirecollections.co.uk/tag/baird-institute-2/>



This was one of the temporary art installations placed in Cumnock Town Centre, using a chalk and stencil method.

A quote from Keir Hardie reproduced on the steps of the Baird Institute

“I am an agitator. My work has consisted of trying to stir up a divine discontent with wrong.”

Keir Hardie's trip to South Africa

**By Martin Plaut, Senior Research Fellow,
Institute of Commonwealth Studies and
former Africa editor for the BBC World
Service**

On August 10th, 1909 a remarkable meal was held in the House of Commons. It was the result of an invitation from Keir Hardie to William Philip (W.P.) Schreiner – South African politician, lawyer, campaigner for black rights and the former Prime Minister of the Cape Colony. A prettily-decorated menu from the House of Commons dining room reveals that they were offered mutton with green beans, followed by vanilla ice-cream and cheese. But it is what is on the reverse of the menu that is fascinating: it was signed by those who attended the meal.

The men and women were the leaders of the Parliamentary Labour Party and their guests were a non-racial deputation, led by W. P. Schreiner. The South Africans had come to London in a last ditch attempt to prevent a racist constitution being endorsed by the Imperial Parliament when the Union of South Africa came into existence in 1910. They were fighting to preserve the rights of all races to vote. A qualified, but non-racial, franchise had been in existence in the Cape Colony since 1853. It only allowed men of property to vote, but thousands of Africans and Coloureds (or people of mixed race) were on the voters roll.

Now the Union of South Africa was being formed linking the former British colonies of the Cape and Natal with the former Afrikaner republics of the Transvaal and Orange Free State. A campaign was launched to extend a non-racial franchise to the whole country. There had been fierce resistance from the Afrikaner politicians, who were supported in their opposition by many in the English speaking population. In the end a compromise was reached at a National Convention, which was only attended by white politicians. The Cape could keep its non-racial qualified

franchise, but the rest of the country would have an unqualified, but exclusively white franchise. No woman of any colour was granted the vote, and the right of black South Africans to stand for Parliament was removed.

This proposal was opposed by almost all sections of the African and Coloured community, who banded together to resist it. A petition to the British government was drawn up, supported by dignitaries, including the Archbishop of Cape Town. W. P. Schreiner agreed to lead a delegation to London. A British trained lawyer, he knew his way around Westminster and had excellent connections with Liberals like Sir Charles Dilke. The deputation met the Colonial Secretary, Lord Crewe. It held a breakfast meeting with the Aborigines Protection Society. They spoke, they wrote and they lobbied, but to no avail. Now, in August 1909, they were on the final lap. The Bill endorsing the South African Constitution was about to come before the Commons, and looked certain to pass.

The British guests are mostly well known Labour MPs. Their South African guests may be less familiar, but were equally impressive. Among them were the men who would found the South African Native National Congress (SANNC) in 1912 – the organisation that became the African National Congress. Alfred Mangena became party treasurer, Thomas Makipela the party's speaker, and Walter Rubusana its Vice President. The journalist and editor, John Tengo Jabavu also participated in the SANNC's founding conference, while John Dube (who did not attend the meal but supported the Schreiner deputation) became the party's first president. Dr Abdurahman led the mainly 'Coloured' or mixed race African Political Organisation (APO) with his colleagues, Lenders and Fredericks. The doctor served on the Cape Town City Council until 1940. These were the cream of the crop of black South Africans, who would go on to build the institutions that

shaped their country's future through the twentieth century.

Labour's Links with South Africa : the Boer War

South Africa had been a major issue for the British left for many years. Keir Hardie and Ramsay MacDonald had been passionate opponents of the British war on the Afrikaners in the Second Anglo-Boer War. Most socialists and a faction of the Liberal Party were members of what became known as the 'Pro-Boers' – the movement that resisted the conflict. When the Labour Party was formed in 1900 it contained many who had been part of this movement. South Africa was then an imperial responsibility, and as such an issue for the party to raise inside and outside parliament.

Ramsay MacDonald, the party's first general secretary, made it his business to visit South Africa in 1902 just three months after the Boer war was finally over. MacDonald used the trip to meet some of the Afrikaners he had supported during the war, as well as members of the Trades and Labour Council, and various unions organising white labour – often branches of their British counterparts. MacDonald spent four months travelling extensively across the country with his wife, Margaret, from the battlefields of Natal to the ostrich farms of Oudtshoorn . He recorded his observations in a series of letters to the press. These he eventually published in book form. MacDonald met editors, trade unionists, former soldiers and Boer generals. General Jan Smuts, by this time a leading Transvaal politician, continued corresponding with the Labour leader for years, while his wife swapped family information by letter with Mrs MacDonald for years.

MacDonald was a shrewd observer. He concluded in his notebook that Afrikaners might have been forced to sign the Treaty of Vereeniging, but they were far from being a spent force. In the Transvaal MacDonald met

the white unions. He observed that differences between English and Afrikaners – so prevalent before the war – had largely been overcome. He believed that whatever their residual differences there was now unanimity on one topic: "The English and the Dutch have now practically agreed upon the treatment of the natives." MacDonald forcefully rejected suggestions of using "brutal force" to put down native unrest and distanced himself from the views of whites – or, as he puts it the "man on the spot."

MacDonald then described the Cape's non-racial franchise and gave his unequivocal support to the proposal that it should be implemented for the whole of the territory, then controlled by London. At the same time he was realistic about how difficult this might be. "To extend the Cape system throughout British South Africa would no doubt meet with much opposition; the racial prejudices and the parochialism of the Natal majority would oppose it, so would the majority of Rhodesians, and so would a majority of the Dutch in the new Colonies. Nevertheless the Imperial authorities ought to make a point of persuading the Federation [as he called the proposed Union] that this is its best policy, and should not hesitate, if need be, to retain in a very definite and effective way sovereignty over all native affairs unless the franchise is granted."

Keir Hardie continued to campaign for a variety of South African causes after the Anglo-Boer war ended. These included the 'Bambatha Rebellion' of 1906, during which Zulu protests against British taxation led to a ruthless repression of the Zulu nation. The MP for Merthyr Tydfil repeatedly raised reports that Zulus had been killed after surrendering in the House of Commons, to the evident discomfort of the then Under Secretary for the Colonies, Winston Churchill. Hardie also corresponded with the leader of APO, Dr Abdullah Abdurahman, who visited London in 1906 to protest against the exclusion of

Coloured people from the franchise when self-government was granted to the Transvaal and the Orange River Colony. Abdurahman wrote to Hardie on 30 July 1906 from his hotel, saying that he was convinced that the possession of the franchise by the Coloured people was not only consistent with the performance and security of a component part of the Empire and that without a due recognition of our rights and liberties a system would be established which would end in servitude and bring ruin to us all. He added that to withhold the franchise from the Coloured People would be inflicting upon a “self-respecting and intelligent section of men a most disastrous wrong.” It is not clear how Hardie responded, and he did not raise the subject when self-government for the Colonies was discussed in parliament. Instead he called for all issues relating to the black population to be reserved to Britain, rather than entrusting them to the local white population.

Keir Hardie Visits South Africa

In 1908 Hardie had the opportunity to visit South Africa to see the situation for himself, as part of an extensive world tour which lasted from July 1907 to April 1908. In that time he visited Canada, Japan, New Zealand and Australia. For Hardie it was a chance to see the countries for which he was – as a Member of Parliament – partly responsible. It may also have been an opportunity to leave behind his increasingly difficult romantic relationship with Sylvia Pankhurst.

Keir Hardie landed in Durban on 11 February 1908. He immediately encountered controversy; the critical remarks he had made about British rule in India had preceded him, as reported in the South African press. Although Hardie attempted to re-assure the journalists who came to interview him in Durban that he was not in the country to stir up a revolution, he had little success. Hardie’s South African journey was dogged by bitter criticism from whites and violent demonstrations, from which he was lucky to

escape without serious injury. His attempts to win the trade union movement (often affiliates of British unions) to the cause of non-racialism ran into virulent opposition. Hardie’s basic position was that white workers were ill-advised not to organise their black companions in unions, since the bosses would simply undercut them by hiring un-unionised black labour. It was not a popular message. His visits to Pietermaritzburg in Natal and Johannesburg and Pretoria in the Transvaal, were marred with violence. In the normally sleepy town of Pietermaritzburg a hostile crowd of 500 led to Hardie being hustled away from the meeting to a nearby hotel. In Johannesburg the crowd of 1,000 drowned out his speech with shouts of “Zulu Hardie” and the singing of “Rule Britannia.” The worst was to come in Pretoria, when a mob, 3,000 strong effectively ran him out of town, singing ‘We’ll hang Keir Hardie from a sour apple tree’. Hardie fled, grabbing a Union Jack as he ran, which he hung in his flat in Nevills Court as a proud souvenir.

The near riot in Pretoria turned out to be the worst South Africa had to offer. On the way to Cape Town he visited the renowned author and early feminist, Olive Schreiner in the tiny railway town of De Aar. Schreiner, the sister of the former Cape Prime Minister, W. P. Schreiner, managed to keep in touch with world events despite living in such isolated locations. She had followed Hardie’s support for the Afrikaners during the Boer war. He had been, in her view, “...the strongest Pro-Boer in England; sometimes almost facing death at the hands of mobs in the pro-Boer cause.” Olive Schreiner was enraptured by the opportunity of meeting Hardie and went out of her way to secure his visit. She wrote to him while he was in the Transvaal, even though she had no address to which to send it, in the hope that her letter would reach him, and had to contact him via General Smuts. To Olive’s joy, the meeting took place on 25 February.

In February 1908 Hardie arrived in Cape Town. The city had recently experienced both

boom and bust. Cape Town had been a re-supply point for European powers on the way to the East for centuries, and had come into its own during the Boer war. The city had a population of 170,000, having more than doubled in size in the previous decade. Cape Town had a long history of militancy and union organisation. Some unions exclusively organised white workers, but others did not. The tailors' union, for example, could not have survived if it had excluded the Malay community, whose forebears had arrived from the Dutch East Indies as slaves or political prisoners. They were well established in the industry. This did not prevent some white members complaining that they were being undercut by Malays and 'Polish Jews' who were 'living cheaper', and working longer hours for very little money.

Labour and Socialist Organisations in South Africa

During the Boer War the increasing demand for labour gave ordinary men and women the confidence to adopt new forms of organisation. In 1902 the APO was launched to mainly represent the Coloured population. By 1904 it had 2,000 members in 33 branches and was led by Dr Abdurahman. Yet the APO and its leader, Dr Abdurahman, could not take their popular support for granted. They were in competition with a range of left wing movements and parties that flourished in Cape Town in the first decade of the twentieth century. The trade union movement, together with the immigrant community and the Cape's educated Malay and Coloured populations, allowed a diverse range of parties to flourish, challenging the prevailing racism of the age.

Among these parties was the Social Democratic Federation, which was founded on May Day in 1904. Initially linked to the British organisation of the same name, it soon lost these ties. The Social Democrats were led by Wilfred Harrison, a British soldier who had been demoted for fraternizing with Afrikaner prisoners during the Boer War. He was a

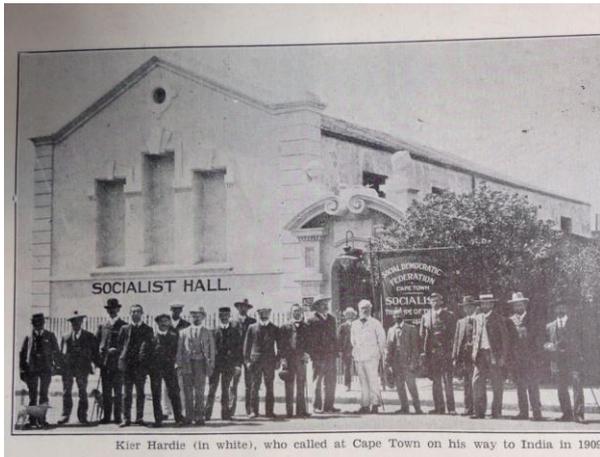
carpenter, trade unionist and skilled organiser. The Federation ran its own newspaper, *Cape Socialist*, and built an impressive meeting place, predictably called the *Socialist Hall*, which held up to 600 people. The Social Democratic Federation's founders were mostly white immigrants, but it went out of its way to recruit across the colour line. When the Trades and Labour Council and the Labour Representation Committee declined to host Hardie in Cape Town, the Social Democrats stepped into the breach. W. H. Harrison, wrote to the *Cape Argus*, expressing his disgust:

"It is not altogether surprising though pitifully nauseating, to find that semi-capitalist mixture, styled the 'Labour Representation Committee' passing a resolution refusing to participate in the reception of Keir Hardie. Such an insult to one of Labour's greatest leaders adds to the chagrin of such bodies in the eyes of true sympathisers. "

An alternative meeting was arranged at the *Socialist Hall* on the edge of District Six. It must have come as a considerable relief to Hardie that the welcome he received was so warm; in fact, if anything it was rather too warm! Three to four hundred people packed into the hall, including some women, the reporter noted. It soon became stifling. "The ventilation of the hall was most unscientific, and some time before the meeting started the atmosphere was abominable," a reporter declared. "Many of the audience wore red ties, and buttonholes of red ribbons were hawked about the hall. The red banner of the Social Democratic Federation, bearing the white letters of the words 'Socialism, the Hope of the Age,' made a background for the platform, and the chairman (Mr Needham) addressing the audience as 'Comrades,' requested that on Mr Hardie's arrival they would rise and sing 'The Red Flag'."

Perhaps the newspaper's readership was not familiar with the socialist anthem, so the paper reprinted a couple of verses, including its promise to bear the socialist flag 'onwards',

whatever the cost. Hardie was more than an hour late, which cannot have improved matters. “Mr Hardie’s small, piercing eyes at once attract attention,” the reporter noted. “He is a much shorter man than most had expected to see. He is a comparatively slow speaker. His words are characterised by an intense earnestness, and his sentences, though simple, are models of good composition. He had a very hearty greeting.”



Hardie – the man in the white suit

The Socialist Hall meeting was not the main event of Hardie’s visit, so after a rousing chorus of ‘Men of Harlech’ he spoke for just fifteen minutes, promising he would give a fuller talk on Sunday, 1st March. Using his brief time to outline the growth of the Labour Party in Britain, he called for the “...holding of a Socialist and Labour Conference in South Africa, and promised to persuade one or two leaders to come from England. He hoped the time would come when the land and wealth of South Africa, instead of being exploited for the advantage of individuals, should become the property to be used for the good of the entire community.” At this point, he sat down, lighting his pipe to loud cheers.

On the Sunday, at the more spacious Good Hope Hall, he spoke to a “large” crowd, which had packed in. This time they were not all socialists, but although at the beginning... “a

small hostile element made its presence known, the assemblage was well disposed towards the speaker, and gave him a cordial reception.” Hardie used his Good Hope Hall speech to appeal to the self-interest of white workers; urging them to make common cause with their black brothers. He said:

“Now, Socialism stood for the rights of humanity as human beings, and if the white working people of South Africa countenanced the exploitation of the coloured races, then they (the white workers) themselves must expect to be exploited. Freedom could not be limited by geographical lines or racial lines, and the time would come when unless something were done speedily in South Africa, they would find the coloured man ousting them from their places because he was a cheaper worker than the white man. Let a strike take place, and they would find then where the blacklegs were drawn from... I don’t want to see, and I shall not be silent and stand by, and see our white civilisation dragged down by the capitalist class employing coloured labour for the purpose “. (Cheers)

He concluded with a theme that was commonly held among British liberals at the time: that although black and white were not yet equal, both had an equal right to receive the human rights that they were due.

Having won over Cape Town’s lively, organised working class, Hardie went on to hold a very friendly meeting with Cape Town’s Indian community, which had sent him a telegram inviting him to address them. After his speech Hardie was presented with “an engraved rhinoceros horn walking stick, mounted in silver” and a plea for his continued support for the Indian cause.

Keir Hardie returned to Britain in April 1908 and was given a tremendous reception. A great public meeting was organised at the Albert Hall to welcome his return. Hardie later explained in the *Labour Leader* what he had

learnt in South Africa. Certainly he believed the Cape's property-qualified, but non-racial franchise might provide a model for the democratisation of Britain's other South African colonies. There was no doubt where he stood on this issue, and Hardie remained engaged with the rights of black South Africans in the years ahead, but he returned to Britain a changed man. Hardie had experienced the racism and the venom of the white working class in Natal and the Transvaal at first hand. He no longer referred to the Afrikaners in the glowing words he had used at the height of the Boer War. Then he had spoken in terms that were nothing short of romantic. "Try to imagine what the free Yeoman of England were like two hundred years ago and you have some idea of Boer life" Hardie told his supporters in 1901. "Their Republican form of government bespeaks freedom...while their methods of production for use are much nearer our ideal than any form of exploitation for profit."

Support for a Non-Racial South Africa

At the same time the Labour Party leaders remained in touch with Afrikaner leaders, including Jan Smuts. This posed something of a challenge as the years went by and the nature of their rule became clear – first in the Orange Free State and the Transvaal, and then, after 1910, in the Union of South Africa. By 1909, when the new Union Constitution came before the British Parliament, the Labour Party had moved firmly away from supporting white South Africans in general and the Afrikaners in particular. Rather Labour drew on the experience and expertise that Hardie and MacDonald had gained from visiting the country. The party sided with W. P. Schreiner and the non-racial deputation that he led, against the official white South African delegation including men like Botha and Smuts.

As we saw earlier, the Labour Party entertained Schreiner and his colleagues in Parliament. The party supported their case to

the end of the debates. When the Bill came before the House of Commons, Hardie was scathing in his attack on the racial bar that prevented people of colour standing for parliament. He concluded his speech with these words: "it is of the utmost importance that the last word should not be spoken in the way of washing our hands of responsibility, either towards the people of South Africa, or the Empire as a whole, and that the House of Commons should not assent to the setting up of the doctrine that because of a man's misfortune in having been born with a coloured skin he is to be barred the possibility of ever rising to a position of trust." Ramsay MacDonald was even clearer. "This is not a South African question only, but it is a great Imperial question, and one which is probably going to have more to say in shaping the future of this Empire than any other single question which is before us now."

The Liberal government of the day had set its face against making any concessions to the argument. In reality the die had been cast in the terms of the Treaty of Vereeniging, which ended the Boer war. The British establishment was enormously relieved that it had ended its battles with the Afrikaners. Men like Botha and Smuts were being drawn into the system of Imperial defence that would be vitally important during the First World War. By 1909 all the goodwill in the world was not going to rupture the new-found relationship between London and Pretoria, a relationship which had little to offer the majority of South Africans. The Union of South Africa, which came about in 1910, deprived Africans and Coloured people outside of the Cape of the vote. It was a bitter setback to their hopes. The British had promised so much more before and during the Boer War. Perhaps the only consolation for black South Africans was that their links with Labour, nurtured by MacDonald and Hardie, would endure in the years ahead.

A False Dawn? The Unfulfilled Promise of British Labourism in Ireland

By Mike Mecham, St Mary's University, Twickenham

This paper is about the attempt, and failure, of the British Labour Party to establish a foothold in Ireland during its formative years at the beginning of the 20th century; and of its virtual political abandonment of the endeavour both before and after partition in 1922. It will explore these issues through three key figures of the period. Two prominent in Labour Party histories were Ramsay MacDonald and Keir Hardie; and the third, virtually unknown, was Belfast labour leader William Walker. All three were closely associated; and all held important positions in the Labour hierarchy in its formative years. Only MacDonald survived beyond partition. The paper will pay greater attention to William Walker: firstly, because he was the lynchpin of Labour's hopes in Ireland; and secondly, because he is the least known of the three and perhaps deserving of greater attention.

Socialist Revival

During the 1880s Britain experienced a 'socialist revival'. While there had been earlier radical working class organisation and political agitation, most notably through the Chartist movement, Keith Laybourn in *The Rise of Socialism* in Britain has suggested that "British socialism barely existed at the beginning of the 1880s." But a number of events combined to rekindle radicalism in the country. Following the 'great Victorian boom', from around 1850 to 1873, the country had fallen into a social and economic trough, with economic depression, deflation and high unemployment. This had further entrenched the poverty and wretchedness of much working class life, highlighted by social

reformers such as Charles Booth and Joseph Rowntree, which had led to political agitation.

The situation in Ireland, perhaps with the exception of the north-east, was arguably worse during this period of economic depression. It ruthlessly exposed the vulnerability of Irish industry to free trade and revealed a manufacturing base over-dependent on obsolescent minor crafts; it was also discouraged from modernising by depopulation and a fall in agricultural prices. Ireland had for a long time exported its surplus labour to Britain and integrated more thoroughly with the British economy.

Against this trend the north-east of the country, Ulster, was experiencing a second industrial revolution as the linen industry drove an engineering expansion which was followed by the expansion of shipbuilding and marine engineering. Belfast was becoming the industrial heart of Ireland and an important hub of British capitalism.

In his *Origins of Modern Irish Socialism 1881-1896*, Fintan Lane, describes how "the progression of socialism in Ireland ... was particularly enmeshed with ideological developments in Britain." This was the case with the 1880s 'socialist revival', although to some extent the emerging groups in both countries were to feed off each other. The first of these in Britain was the Social Democratic Federation (SDF, formerly the Democratic Federation), led by the Marxist leaning H M Hyndman, who freely acknowledged a debt to the Irish Land League agitation of the time. This was reflected in the demand for Irish independence and land nationalisation in the SDF's 1884 programme.

It was no coincidence that the 'socialist revival' and the emergence of groups such as the SDF coincided with a new era of trade union organisation into large, 'amalgamated', unions. The rise of a mass labour movement, the 'new unionism' as it was called, represented the first serious attempt to

modernise the labour movement. It spread trade unionism to previously unorganised workers throughout Britain, primarily the large battalions of the unskilled in the industrial heartlands. Its new militancy, involving sympathy strikes, rocked the complacency of the old leadership as well as the employers. Moreover some of the important early disputes that shaped the new unionism involved large numbers of Irish workers; for example, the 1888 'match girls' strike, as it was called then, and the 1889 gas workers and dock workers strikes. Soon, the new unionism spread to Ireland and its arrival played a key role in accelerating Irish assimilation into the British labour movement.

Arguably the most important political organisation, which was itself driven by the emergence of the 'new unionism', was the Independent Labour Party (ILP) which came into existence as a national party in January 1893. It had evolved in the north of England during the previous two years or so and Keir Hardie was a leading figure in its emergence. William Walker was a founding member of the Belfast Branch and it was probably in September 1893, when the British TUC Conference came to Belfast, that Walker and Hardie first met. The local ILP had convened a meeting addressed by Hardie and other leading figures and in its wake Walker arranged a meeting that was to establish a women's linen workers union with him as its first organiser.

William Walker

So who was William Walker? He was born in the overwhelmingly Protestant quarter of North Belfast in 1870. His father was a skilled boilermaker and union organiser with shipbuilders Harland and Woolf and William joined him in 1885 as an apprentice carpenter.



William Walker
Labour Party
Executive
1907 -1912

The 1880s was not only a period of radical political change in Britain but in 1886 Belfast would suffer one of the worst periods of sectarian violence after the defeat of the first Home Rule Bill. It lasted for four months, claimed 32 lives and spread to the Queens Island shipyards. But it was these shipyards that would foment Walker's own radicalism. He was soon organising unskilled workers and pressing their interests in the influential Belfast Trades Council.

Walker's activism would eventually cost him his job and blacklisting. He was rescued by his union, the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners, who appointed him a full time official in Belfast. He was also fast becoming the ILP's most charismatic campaigner and speaker. He drew large and enthusiastic crowds to central Belfast but was threatened by loyalists and was under police protection for some time. Undeterred, he was elected by his community in 1899 as a campaigning Poor Law Guardian from where he was to win healthcare improvements in the infirmary, a new TB sanatorium and education outside the workhouse for the children. As one contemporary wrote in 1926: "Walker was a fighter ... and to me the "Abbey

Sanatorium” is a monument to Willie Walker, the Socialist Poor Law Guardian of Belfast”

A key development for both the British labour movement and for Walker was the foundation of the Labour Representation Committee in 1900. For many years Hardie had sought an alliance between labour political organisations and trade unions. In January 1900 the TUC finally called a special conference to consider a proposal for a single body that would sponsor parliamentary candidates. In October 1900, the LRC fielded 15 candidates in the so-called ‘Khaki’ General Election after the second Boer war. Two were elected, one of whom was Keir Hardie in the Welsh constituency of Merthyr Tydfil. Support was boosted for the LRC the following year by the Taff Vale case whose judgement made strikes virtually impossible by imposing huge compensation awards to employers.

Belfast Trades Council

By now Walker had been elected Secretary of the Belfast Trades Council. When he became President the following year, 1902, he persuaded the Council to affiliate to the LRC. And in 1903 Ramsey MacDonald and Keir Hardie came across to a conference in Belfast which was to lead to a Belfast branch. The two then accompanied a Belfast contingent to the annual conference of the Irish TUC in Newry where Walker’s motion for Irish trade unionists to affiliate to the LRC was carried. So the initiative for establishing the LRC in Ireland was coming from Belfast, led by Walker, with the British leadership enthusiastically supporting it. In reality, however, although a similar motion was passed regularly over the following years, a sign of Walker’s influence in Ireland, it was only in Belfast that it took root. In May 1904 Walker was elected President of the Irish TUC. His President’s address in Kilkenny was widely praised by all sides of the community. The nationalist press welcomed its great breadth of view, the eloquence of its appeals

“for a united Ireland on the trade union platform” and the bridging of the Nationalist/Unionist chasm. It was in this address that Walker spelt out many of his labourist principles. He argued that the only progressive way forward was through a new and vigorous labourist party built on the potential electoral power of the trade union movement. He urged Ireland to respond, to stand aloof from its prejudices, to lay aside traditional animosities, and to unite through working class solidarity with the LRC.

Walker was by now the major figure in the Irish labour movement. The two future icons of Irish labour history were not yet there to challenge his position. The Marxist James Connolly, and later martyr of the Easter Rising, was in the US and would not return until 1910; and trade union leader Jim Larkin would not arrive in Ireland from Liverpool until 1907. For the LRC, therefore, and British labour, Walker became the person who could establish a firm foothold in Ireland. But again the initiative was to come from Belfast and London followed. In the months after the Belfast LRC was formed in 1903, unions were invited to suggest a constituency that should be fought and to nominate candidates. The one chosen was North Belfast and Walker was the preferred candidate. He lived and worked in the constituency and in 1904 was elected to Belfast Council from one of its Wards. It seems likely that the Belfast initiative was discussed with MacDonald and Hardie when they came over for the founding conference in 1903. Walker would have impressed. North Belfast was an overwhelmingly Protestant working class industrial constituency. It had always voted Unionist. Walker would stand for the constituency on three occasions between 1905 and 1907, and came close to taking the seat from the Unionists. In a clear sign of its importance to the LRC, the party secretary Ramsay MacDonald would act as Walker’s election agent and the party’s top brass would campaign for him, including Keir Hardie.

Ramsay MacDonald and Irish Labour

I will, however, focus on the first of the contests, the 1905 by-election as this set the tone for historical assessments of Walker's efforts. It is also likely to have set in train MacDonald's views, and the Labour Party's, in years to come on the feasibility and worth of an electoral presence in Ireland. It was to be a bruising campaign for both MacDonald and the Labour Party. The electorate was also small: 11,000 voters, including around 1,000 Catholics. Women did not have the vote and male suffrage was qualified, excluding many working class voters. Walker's task was therefore a formidable one. He had to wrest away from the Unionists, who were also the employers, a majority of the Protestant voters, with as many Catholics as he could get. Walker's position throughout his political life was that the future well-being of the Irish working class was in a union with the burgeoning British Labour movement. He therefore believed in the legislative union with Britain, fearing that Home Rule would result in subservience to an Irish bourgeoisie and a Roman Catholic church. He had always campaigned against clerical interference of any sort in education and was not a practicing Christian, an 'agno-theist' according to his 1901 and 1911 census returns.

His views would cause problems for him and MacDonald during and after the campaign. His approved election addresses declared that he was "a Unionist in politics" but while standing "for maintaining the Union between Ireland and Great Britain" he believed that "the contest should be fought on social questions such as housing, trade unionism, and temperance". This led to protests from some British trade unions and Walker had to be defended at an internal enquiry by both MacDonald and Hardie. But he was seen to have made a serious error of judgement, almost resulting in MacDonald's resignation, which some called 'opportunism' while others insist it was blatant sectarianism. Cornered by the extremist

Belfast Protestant Association, Walker responded to a questionnaire (cleverly avoided by his Unionist opponent) in a way which in some answers suggested that he was content to maintain Protestant supremacy in a number of public areas. Was his overall response pork barrel politics? Walker had a clear chance of winning the seat which was overwhelmingly Protestant. How should he have responded? Perhaps, like his opponent, not at all?

Nor is there evidence, as distinct from accusation, that Walker himself was sectarian. For example, in the 1907 Belfast dock strike he joined Jim Larkin in organising pickets distributing handbills urging workers not to play 'the employers game dividing Catholic and Protestant'. Moreover, his political and trade union life had been devoted to improving the condition of the least well-off, Catholic or Protestant. In the event he lost by 400 votes and at the 1906 general election reduced the gap further to under 300 votes. In reality his response to the questionnaire is unlikely to have altered the outcome, as canvass returns in Catholic areas showed good support. It was more likely that he could not persuade enough Protestants to switch from Unionism to labourism.

Home Rule and the Irish Labour Party

But by the time of his final defeat in 1907, the Labour Party, as it was now called, may have decided that enough was enough. The experience had clearly affected Ramsay MacDonald and as Ivan Gibbons has observed, "... his lifelong view that Irish politics were inherently irrational, emotional and unpredictable was profoundly coloured by his experience as election agent for William Walker."

While Walker continued to be active in the following years he too may have concluded that Belfast was a bridge too far. He therefore sought seats in Liverpool and Hull, before fighting the Scottish seat of Leigh Burghs, Edinburgh, in the 1910 General Election. He

also continued to play an important role in the Labour Party. He was elected to the Party's Executive Committee and in 1911 became Vice-Chairman of the Labour Party itself and likely Chairman in 1912. But in 1912 Walker would leave politics to promote the Government's National Insurance scheme giving some first measures of support and protection for the working class. His supporters were shocked and his brand of labourism fell into decline. Why he did it is a matter of speculation. Did he see the end of the road for his brand of labourism? Did he come to accept in 1911 that Home Rule was inevitable and violence probable? Or did he quite simply accept after years of struggle the need for a secure income for his wife and seven children? Perhaps it was a combination of all of them.

After his departure, his opponents were finally able to set up an Irish Labour Party which still exists today. In 1913 the British Labour Party gave the Irish party exclusive organising rights in Ireland. After partition in 1922, a Northern Ireland Labour Party (NILP) was formed from existing political groups, including the Belfast Labour Party. Although the NILP maintained relations with the British Labour Party it was independent of it and would eventually be disbanded in 1987. For its part, the British Labour Party maintained a 'hands-off' approach to Northern Ireland. If you lived there you were not allowed to join the British Labour Party nor set up a branch. That continued for the following 80 years. The Labour Party's argument, put more recently, was that it could not act as an honest broker in Northern Ireland if it had an electoral interest there. Moreover, that it would also harm the interests of the Social Democratic Labour Party (SDLP), whose MPs had often voted with Labour in Westminster.

But finally, in 2004, following a campaign by local activists the Labour Party relented, to a degree. It allowed membership of the Party and the establishment of a branch organisation,

the Labour Party in Northern Ireland. But crucially, it would not allow the branch to field candidates and therefore not allow the electorate an opportunity to vote for a Labour government. But things may be changing further and take us back to the era when activists in Belfast were fighting for Ireland to affiliate to the British Labour party. A compromise has been proposed, welcomed by Northern activists, for a 'hybrid' arrangement in Northern Ireland involving the British and Irish Labour Parties. At its annual conference in March 2015, the Irish Labour Party passed a resolution calling on the British Labour Party to join them in forming 'a Northern Irish Labour Party'. Members in Northern Ireland who joined it would automatically be members of both the Irish and British Labour Parties and be empowered to put up candidates at all elections. A joint commission would be set up to flesh out the detail of the arrangement and to make recommendations to both Parties. The British Labour Party, however, has ruled out a change in the foreseeable future. Nevertheless, while the promise of British labourism in Ireland was unfulfilled in the 20th century, in the post-reconciliation era after the Good Friday Agreement perhaps a degree of fulfilment might finally be in prospect.

This was a paper written for *Shaping the Labour Party Conference, Bangor University 23-24th March, 2015*

Essex Conference on Labour History

The fourteenth Essex Conference on Labour History was held on Saturday 31st October at the Witham Labour Hall. It was attended by over eighty people.

1945 and Clement Attlee

The first speaker was *Norman Howard*, labour historian and author of *New Dawn: the General Election of 1945*, who had also spoken at our 2015 AGM in March. (report in *Labour Heritage bulletin* Spring 2015). He reminded us of the unique circumstances under which the election was held, after the Labour Party conference had voted to pull out of the wartime coalition government. Clement Attlee had been elected leader of the Labour Party in 1935. However his leadership had not been uncontroversial. Even as late as the summer of 1945 he had received a letter from the chairman Harold Laski asking him to resign as leader. Characteristically he had thanked Laski for the letter and said that its contents would be noted. After the election result there were to be no further attacks on Attlee's leadership. Norman said that the Liberals had claimed responsibility for the Beveridge Report but it had been written mainly by one young researcher by the name of Harold Wilson.

Following on from this, *Francis Beckett*, author of several Labour biographies, spoke on the life and achievements of Clement Attlee. Attlee had been a convert to socialism. He had been to public school, Oxbridge, and was a lawyer and poet. Allegedly he did not know that the poor existed, until he got involved with a charity based in the East End of London. This changed his life completely. He became completely convinced that the poor needed rights, not charity. This was the only way that they would become equal citizens. For Attlee this was the guiding principle of the welfare state, which his government set out to put into practice in 1945. 1945 was, Francis

said, a defining moment in British history, when the mood of public could be harnessed by the political conviction and vision of the government. There were no attempts to change this until 1979, another defining moment, after the election of the Thatcher government. However the popularity of the NHS had ensured its survival as an institution, even if under attack.

Attlee was a man of deep conviction and principle. Having taken a decision he would never lose a night's sleep. Although accused of speaking out without reference to decisions taken by the Labour Party as a whole, he always saw himself as a servant of the Party. He would never speak to the electorate over the heads of the Party membership. At an early stage he had sought to change Party policy away from non-intervention in the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s, arguing that the Spanish Republic needed military support. He had a reputation for being modest, but was known for being very self confident. He gave short speeches and even shorter interviews, believing that action was more important than words. For future researchers he left no private diaries or letters.

1984/85 Miners' Strike

In the afternoon *Stan Newens* spoke on the 1984/85 miners' strike and its significance thirty years on. He talked of the Thatcher Government's plans to destroy the coal industry in Britain. Cabinet papers now released under the 30 year rule, revealed that it intended to close 75 pits, not just the 20 loss making ones, which sparked the 1984/85 strike. Such claims made by NUM leader Arthur Scargill were dismissed at the time. A secret cabinet was set up, comprising Tory right wingers, who discussed stockpiling coal, the use of oil in power stations, and the use of police and even the army to combat resistance from the NUM. Ian McGregor, notorious for his earlier closure of steel plants, was appointed Chairman of the National Coal Board.

Thatcher's attack on the mining industry was only made possible by her election victory in 1983, after some Labour MPs had left to form the Social Democratic Party which went into an alliance with the Liberals. This allowed the Tories to achieve electoral victory on the basis of a minority vote. Labour was further damaged by its election manifesto being dubbed 'the longest suicide note in history'. Stan said that in reality this manifesto could have been the basis for investing in the British economy, rather than destroying it.

The miners' strike began in Yorkshire in March 1984, where many of the pit closures were to fall. The NUM was to rely on mass picketing to persuade miners in Nottinghamshire, Staffordshire and Derbyshire to join the strike. It was made official by the NUM. Police were moved into mining areas to combat pickets. At one time 8,000 police officers were stationed in Nottinghamshire, mainly from outside the area. This came to a head at the battle of Orgreave when pickets were confronted by mounted police wielding batons, leading to many wounded and arrested. Later most of the convictions from this day of violence were quashed as it was acknowledged that they arose from trumped up charges. The NUM faced the hostility of the press, fabricated reports even on the BBC news to look as if the miners had made the first charge against the police at Orgreave. The NUM was dubbed by Thatcher 'the enemy within.'



Orgreave June 1984

However Stan criticised leader Arthur Scargill for not calling a ballot during the strike, which an opinion poll said he could have won with a predicted 51% of the vote. This would have strengthened his hand when asking for the

support of other trades unions. He also said that Scargill should have participated more fully in ACAS discussions on new procedures for pit closures. Mick McGahey, his vice-president wanted a more flexible approach but felt that he was sidelined. After an opportunity to get all the pits closed with the support of pit safety officers union, NACODS, was lost in the autumn of 1984, the NUM continued alone. By January some of them were starving and some returned to work. The Nottinghamshire miners broke away from the NUM, forming the Union of Democratic Mineworkers. If official support from the Labour leadership for the miners was lacking, there was plenty of support from the rank and file of the labour movement, who set up support groups across the country. The funds of the NUM were sequestered under the anti-trades union laws and it was offered loans from abroad. The Press continued to pursue a vendetta against the NUM and its funding long after the strike had ended, based on the evidence of suspected informers.



The strike was called off in March 1985 without a settlement. It had been the longest strike in British history. It had cost the government billions of pounds, led to five deaths, and thousands injured and arrested. Britain is still dependent on coal – imported from abroad – 50 million tons of coal are imported every year, adding greatly to our balance of payments deficit. The defeat of the strike led to the destruction of mining communities, and contributed to the de-industrialisation of Britain, which has

continued under the Tories. In many mining areas much of the workforce was left without employment or was able to obtain only insecure low paid jobs, with many now dependent on welfare and food banks.

The final talk of the day was given by Barbara Humphries, on James Keir Hardie 100 years after his death. This is summarised in an article earlier in the bulletin.

Before the close of the conference there was a discussion of ideas for future labour history conferences in Essex.

London Musicians Union Strike 1916

By John Grigg

Patrons of all the Stoll houses in London and the suburbs on Monday evening found the usual men's orchestras displaced by women. In some instances there were one or two men and the conductors were men.

The Musicians Union case is that musicians at the Coliseum have been promised an increase per performance from 6/- or 6/3d to 7/- or 7/6d to bring them in line with the Hippodrome players. The union states that at suburban halls the average pay is £2 and 5s per week and they consider they are entitled to a considerable increase. Mr Stoll says the demand amounts to a 50% increase.

Women are paid the same rate as the men they have replaced and are employed Stoll says, not as stop gaps but on a permanent basis. So far as the string instruments are concerned, little difficulty was experienced, but from the fact that women have never taken up brass and woodwind playing considerable trouble was experienced in filling those parts.

Outside the Chiswick Empire there was no demonstration in the evening, although one or two ladies had been approached by the men as

they went into the theatre for rehearsal in the morning. Handbills were distributed to the public, prepared for general use outside all Stoll halls, containing a statement that some of the men who had "fought and bled" for them in the war were being replaced by "women blacklegs". The Chiswick management said this was untrue and the nearest any of the men had been to the front was to play with the Brigade of Guards bands in France. To those old members of the orchestras who are at the front, and whose notices were handed in by the union by proxy, Mr Stoll will continue to pay half the salaries agreed upon.

The Chiswick Empire drew a larger audience than usual on Monday evening, curious to hear the new orchestra that consisted of first and second violins, viola, cello, double bass and a second cello taking the part of the bassoon, a flute, a piano and organ and a lady drummer - twelve in all. When the revue came on a second pianist - a man assisted. When the conductor, Mr Harry Rattray appeared, there was a sustained outburst of applause. The absence of brass and woodwind was responsible for thinness, and at times there was some nervousness, but on the whole the ladies did well and should do better with experience.

At Shepherds Bush Empire it was seen that munition making is not the only part that woman can play in the war. The orchestra surpassed the expectations of their best well-wishers. The overture, considering that eight of the dozen instruments were violins, went particularly well, the one cornet player doing a fair share in also bringing out the melodies in the "Ragtime Revue." The difficult playing for the singing and dancing was also tackled well, and with experience and confidence they were able to carry on and prove that even in this line they were not inferior to the opposite sex.

Source: Chiswick Times. 1916

More on Alfred Linnell

John Grigg

In our Summer 2015 bulletin my article on Alfred Linnell left some unanswered questions. Why, although the exact location of Alfred's grave is recorded in the Tower Hamlet Cemetery Park, is there no sign of a headstone and the plot is crowded out with other graves? Research by the cemetery trust has come up with the answer. The Law and Liberty League, who had reserved the plot for the burial on 18th December 1887, failed to pay for the grave until 19th June 1888 by which time, in view of non-payment, the plot had been sold on and another deceased person was buried there. The Bow Cemetery, as it was then known, was a commercial concern and presumably this was a common practise in 1888. It may be significant that the Law and Liberty payment was not made until six months plus one day after Linnell's burial. Maybe payments for plots had to be made within six months otherwise the plot would be sold on.

Alfred was a widower and one newspaper report mentioned that a collection had been taken for Alfred's children and I had wondered what happened to them. One 1887 newspaper reported that the children had been sent to the Holborn Union Workhouse in Mitcham. Another report indicated that there was a boy, who had died, and a daughter.

We now have information supplied by Alfred's great grandson who lives in Australia. There were two daughters. The eldest was Julia Mary Linnell. She was a domestic servant in Hackney, aged 14, in 1891 and she married Harry Goodbun, a railwayman, in 1899. They had eight children the youngest of which is John Leslie Goodbun who is still with us and lives in Dagenham.

The younger daughter, Mary Ann Abigail was born in 1881 and married Harry's brother

William, a tramway motor man, in 1905 and they had three children.

More on Bloody Sunday 1887

Alan Rogers

Dear Editor,

I enjoyed the article 'The Brick, Bloody Sunday and Alfred Linnell' by John Grigg in Bulletin Summer 2015.

It reminded me that my grandfather George Elliott had taken part in the demonstration. I can still remember his animation when as boys we would say 'Come on, tell us about Bloody Sunday, grandad'.

George was born in Hammersmith Village in 1867. Sometime before the turn of the century he married Louisa Dimmock (obviously an Irish family) also from Hammersmith Village. Nothing remains of the village which disappeared in 1930 as did the Creek which presumably ran through/by the Village. Both were from working class families and living lives of deprivation. Sadly I know nothing about other members of their families.

George had little schooling..... he often told us that he threw his slate at the schoolmaster and ran away and never returned. Working class kids had little pleasure in school in those days. However I remember him reading the newspapers but whether or not he could write I do not know. Louisa could both read and write.

It follows that George started his working life at an early age and he settled down as a building labourer. George was no fool and we learnt from his two sons, Harry and Bill, who worked with him as young men, that when George (working name Brock) went into a building site, union organisation began. George was particularly proud of his part in working on the site of Barkers' Departmental Store in Kensington. We have a family

photograph of the old chap yarning away about the building trade and the photograph bears the words 'Brock Building Barkers.'

George would tell how they marched to Trafalgar Square from Hammersmith and how they fought the police, rolling marbles under the horses' hooves, hoping to unseat the coppers. The memories remained with him for the rest of his life. He died aged 81 in 1948. In 1887 George was 20 years old.

I was very pleased to read of the intention of Labour Heritage to mark the grave of Alfred Linnell in Tower Hamlets Cemetery. Now that the Labour Heritage brick has been set into the stone and the ceremony has been carried out on 5th September, I write to congratulate Labour Heritage and particularly for quoting the words of William Morris:

'Not one, nor thousands must they slay, but one and all if they would dusk the day.'
Cameron & Co should bear these words in mind as they proceed to neutralise our labour movement.

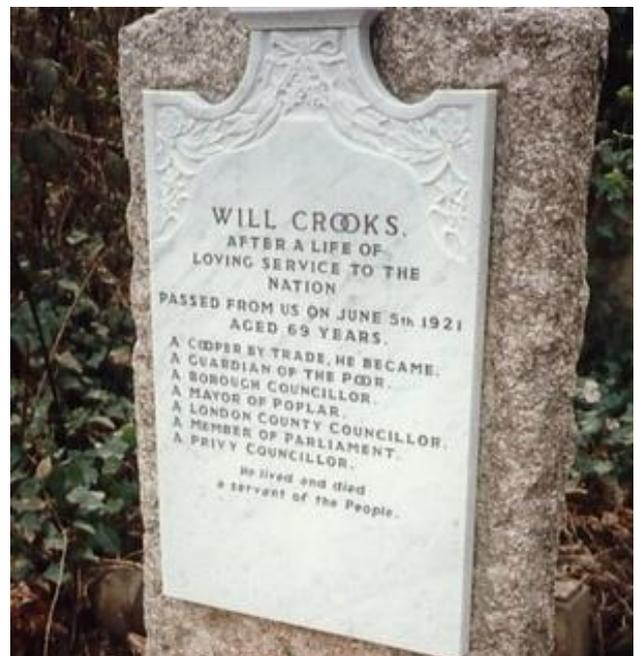
Labour Heritage organised a commemoration for Alfred Linnell on Saturday 5th September at the Tower Hamlets Cemetery.

It was attended by 20 people, including some local residents. Both Stan Newens and John Grigg gave talks about Linnell's life and death, and how Labour Heritage has been involved in getting a headstone for his grave. We were then taken on a guided tour of the cemetery by Kenneth Greenway, from the Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery. This is a green space in the East End of London, close to the Mile End Road. Most of the graves were for public burials, where the families of the deceased could not afford headstones. Some of them had been pauper's burials, where there had not even been enough money for a funeral. However there are some enormous headstones for wealthier residents of East London, such as major employers on the London docks, factory and shipping owners and publicans. There

have been no new burials at the cemetery for several decades, but the cemetery is open to the public as a local park and nature reserve. There are regular guided walks, with historical themes and its wildlife. For further information see the web site for the Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park.

<http://www.fothcp.org/>

Another labour movement figure to have a grave in the cemetery is Will Crooks former dockers' leader and Labour MP for Woolwich in 1902. He was born in Poplar, where he was to become a borough councillor, and later Mayor. When he died in 1921 thousands attended his funeral.



From Baldwin to Blair

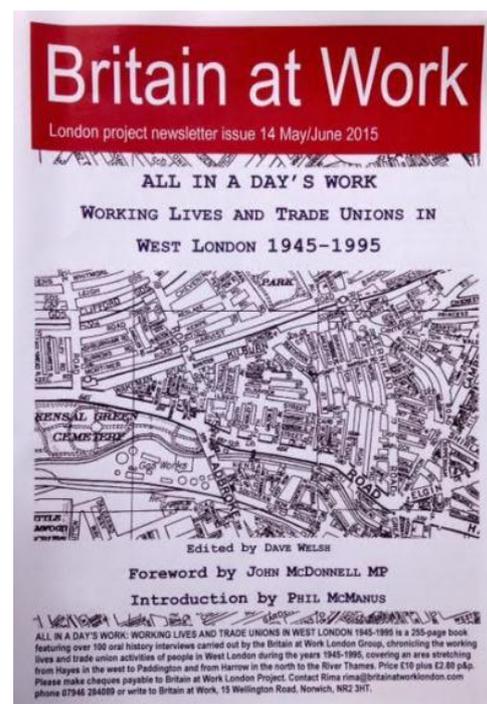
By Archie Potts

When Stanley Baldwin resigned as Prime Minister in 1937 he was made a knight of the garter and awarded an earldom. He had served three times as Prime Minister and newspaper editorials lauded him for having steered the country through the General Strike, for supporting the formation of a National Government in 1931, and for his role in the recent Abdication Crisis. He retired to wide acclaim. Three years later, after the fall of France had exposed Britain's military unpreparedness – for which he was blamed- he was advised by friends not to visit London because he would face a hostile reception there. In Baldwin's own words 'they hate me so.'

Tony Blair resigned as Prime Minister and as MP for Sedgefield in 2007 after winning three general elections and enjoying ten years in Downing Street. He was loudly applauded when he made his last appearance in the House of Commons. Since his retirement his reputation has plummeted. Political reputations wax and wane over time but one has to go back to Stanley Baldwin to find such a steep decline.

Blair's record in office has not stood up to scrutiny. He promised more than he ever delivered. His first term was devoted largely to 'spin', his second term was dominated by the invasion of Iraq, and the third was overshadowed by the aftermath of the war and Blair's poor relationship with Gordon Brown. But the main reason for his tarnished reputation has been the way he has lined his pockets since retiring from office by charging for public speaking engagements and acting as a consultant to various organisations and world leaders. He admits to being worth £20 million but some reckon his assets are considerably more than this.

He was disappointed at not being made President of the European Union and had to be content with an appointment to the nebulous post of Quartet Peace Envoy to the Middle East. Judged by results he can hardly be said to have been a success in the job. Yet he hankers after another top post and believes he is entitled to it. At least Stanley Baldwin retired into private life and hoped that the historians would be kinder to him than his contemporaries had been. Blair shows no such inclination. Like an ageing rock star he does not want to leave the stage although no one wants to listen to him anymore. It will be interesting to see how the rest of his life works out, and even more interesting to see what historians make of his career.



This book is edited by Dave Welsh and includes interviews with members of Labour Heritage. It has a foreword written by John McDonnell, MP. Available from the Russell Press www.russellpress.com