

**An Analysis of the Rise of the Labour Party in East London, c 1880-1924**

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## **Abbreviations**

BSP - British Socialist Party

CofE - Church of England

FJPC - Foreign Jews Protection League

ILP - Independent Labour Party

LCC - London County Council

LLP - London Labour Party

LTC - London Trades Council

NSP - National Socialist Party

SDF - Social Democratic Federation

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## Introduction

London, prior to 1889, was a completely different city politically to the one we see today. There was not even an effective council system representing , unlike places like Manchester which gained one in 1838 as part of the *Metropolitan Corporations Act* 1835. For the beating heart of a pioneering Colonial Empire at almost at the height of its size, London was politically backwards. The 1855 *Metropolis Management Act* may have brought in the Metropolitan Board of Works to try equalize the imbalance, but this came hand in hand with the introduction of the Vestries which came to be much loathed with polls often swung by rate-payers associations if there was indeed a poll at all<sup>1</sup>. The *Local Government Acts* of 1888 and 1894 helped place London on a par with the rest of Britain with Vestries disappearing by 1900 and Metropolitan Boroughs taking their place. Through all this, London, served as a divided city with the wealthy living in the suburbs and to the West whilst the East End was left to rot. Studies such as Jack London's *People of the Abyss* highlight the conditions of the region describing it as an 'unending slum. The streets were filled with a new and different race of people, short of stature, and of wretched or beer-sodden appearance.'<sup>2</sup> These people often would work in one of the many sweated or casual trades in the area, such as tailoring in Stepney, or the Port of London docks, which spanned the East End from the Pool of London through to the Royal Docks in West Ham. Correctly this area was targeted for Socialist and working class representation in the early 1880's, right at the beginning of the Labour Movement in the UK. Many of the pioneers were from the artisan working class and the radical middle , as seen by the Fabian Society which started in London in 1884. This dissertation will seek out how Labour managed to gain a foothold in the East End of London, what challenges were faced and what led to the final breakthrough after the World War One.

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<sup>1</sup> J, Davis; *Reforming London: the London Government Problem 1855-1900*; Clarendon Press, Oxford; 1988  
pg28

<sup>2</sup> J, London; *People of the Abyss*, Isbister and Co; London; 1903; pg6

It will cover two eras. That of the tail end of the 1800s where the socialists were beginning to organise in numbers and the period from 1910 to 1922, where Labour finally progressed into a party of the masses in London's East End, laying the frame work for successes in both Parliament and the London region in the decade to follow.

The East End of London or just East London itself can bring different interpretations of where exactly is included. With some viewing it very narrowly as the area to the north of the Thames including Bow and Bromley in the east up to St George's in the East on the western side<sup>3</sup>. However, for the purpose of this study the traditional Cockney territory will be used including the former Bermondsey Borough to the South of the Thames and on the north bank will run from St George's via Stepney, Poplar, Bow to the western border of Essex in West Ham. Comparisons to non Cockney constituencies elsewhere in London will also be used to assist in the analysis provided.

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<sup>3</sup> J, Bush; *Behind the Lines*; Merlin Press; London; 1984; pg 3

## What was the East End like and how did the people vote before Labour?

East London has typically been a deprived area. With low voting figures and a high immigrant population. Poverty and deprivation in an area in this day and age tends to point to Labour Party representation, to try to improve conditions. At the turn of the 19th century this was not the case, the Labour Party was newly formed, meaning the Conservatives and Liberals had a near monopoly over East End politics. There were predecessors to the Labour Party and socialists acting in the East End, such as the Radicals, through which many leading socialists graduated. However, these groups did not dominate the entire area. What was the East End like and how did the constituents vote, prior to the real breakthrough of socialism in the early 1900's?

The nature of the East End in some regard was typical of London at the time. The Victorian Londoner's cast of mind remained primarily localist, only occasionally influenced by what Asquith called '*a fitful and irregular pulse of common life*<sup>4</sup>'. However, whilst those in the West had wealth and means to escape, those in the East did not. There was a high level of social severance thanks to the dividing affect of the docks, railways and rivers. Charles Booth referred to the Isle of Dogs as '*strangely remote from the stir of London...neither in it nor of it*<sup>5</sup>'. This division can be put down as one of the reasons for an overriding ideology dominating the East End, with such segregation each community was effectively isolated preventing a widespread movement of any form easily forming. This shows how remarkable the 1889 strikes were.

East London and its residents were quite easily the forgotten end of the capital, whilst '*the Thames has always been a barrier...the East and South-East remained clearly separated,*

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<sup>4</sup> H, Asquith; Daily Chronicle, 8 Dec 1894 in Davis, J; pg5

<sup>5</sup> C, Booth; *Life and Labour of the People of London (1902-3)*, 3rd ser.,i. 20, Bedarida, F 'Urban Growth and Social Structure in 19th C Poplar' *London Journal*, I (1975), pg166

*with neither bridge nor foot-tunnel across the widening river before the 1890's.*<sup>6</sup> The difficulty of spanning the Thames due to the Port was an issue however, in the richer West End it hadn't proven a problem. In the East the only method of crossing was the East London Railway through the Thames Tunnel and only through serious work by both the City of London Corporation and the London County Council were foot crossings installed in the 1880's<sup>7</sup>. From this it is easy to see why Fenner Brockway in *Bermondsey Story* was able to write that *'the Old Kent Road...its ceaseless traffic leaving the life of the borough almost untouched...the main Southern line drives directly across Bermondsey, but there is no station in the borough...not one Londoner in thousands visits Bermondsey; its life is almost as self-contained as that of a provincial town.*<sup>8</sup> Although Brockway's claim is misleading<sup>9</sup> it does show that to the working class the railways created divisions rather than integrated communities. This is the status quo of the East End when the labour movement started, a self-contained area, dominated by big industry, the docks and sweated casual labour.

In London many of the East End trades revolved around casual and sweated labour. These workers, as was typical in many working class communities, tended to lead work centric lives due to the very local nature of the areas in which they lived, alongside the relatively poor mobility around the Capital due primarily to cost. The small scale industry meant trade unions struggled to form, and where they did it was in more industrialised types of work such as gas and the railways. This left the casual workers in the docks and workers at places like “Bryant and May” at the whim of the employer. Unemployment was another factor that affected the East End. In 1906 for instance male unemployment was at up to 15.3% in

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<sup>6</sup> J, Davis; pp5-6

<sup>7</sup> Tower Bridge was built by the City of London Corp whilst two subways in Greenwich and Woolwich were built by the LCC following lobbying from Will Crooks

<sup>8</sup> F, Brockway; *Bermondsey Story*; Allen & Unwin; London; 1951; pg 11

<sup>9</sup> There were in fact numerous stations in the borough: Spa Road & Bermondsey 1836-1915, Southwark Park 1902-1915, Rotherhithe 1869-, Deptford Road/Surrey Docks 1869- and South Bermondsey 1866-

Poplar.<sup>10</sup> These men would be naturally disqualified from the vote due to their unemployed status making them irrelevant in the days prior to universal suffrage. In 1887 for instance 70% of the dockers, building craftsmen and tailors had been unemployed during the winter<sup>11</sup> helping to create an unstable population often moving to seek work further disqualifying people. Areas like Stepney were dominated by the tailoring trade whilst further east the existence of more industrial centres added a different dimension to the economy and the shape of the workforce.

These conditions allowed for politicians such as Spencer Charrington, of Charrington Brewery fame, to get elected as a result of loyalty to an employer. Charrington's being based at the Anchor Brewery in Mile End put it as one of the primary businesses in the area and thus would have relied heavily on the support of his own workers at the ballot box. This was a common practise throughout Britain with many influential local businessmen and landowners running in the elections. William Pearce in Limehouse, Hubert Carr-Gomm in Rotherhithe and William Evelyn in Deptford all managed to hold seats for their respective party in the East End for a period between 1886 and the early 1920s. In part this shows a high level of deference whereas the influence of the candidate through various means such as via their company or their landholdings would result in votes rather than any policy they were to enact. Arguably it could be said that this was and will always be the case through politics, however, for new candidates to enter the fight against such influential people in the local community it evidently made it difficult for them to compete effectively.

The influence of groups such as the Church in the East End also played a part in shaping the ideological position of many East Londoners. Many didn't attend Church however, of those

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<sup>10</sup> Toynbee Hall; *Unemployment in East London The report of a survey made from Toynbee Hall*; P.S. King & Son, Westminster, 1922 pg8: These figures do fail to determine the extent to which casual labour was deployed in places such as the docks so it is not possible to distinguish how this affects the figures.

<sup>11</sup> P, Thompson; *Socialists, Liberals and Labour*; Routledge & Kegan Paul; London; 1967; pg12

that did there are studies linking neighbourhoods voting intentions with church attendance. Marc Brodie figured that the higher the church attendance in these working class areas the higher the Conservative support<sup>12</sup>. This works hand in hand with the perception of both major parties, with the Liberals tending to be the party of non-conformism whereas the Conservatives stuck very staunchly to the Church of England. Therefore if the working class were won over to the Church of England the Conservatives would receive a greater turn out. In the Conservative Poplar West ward the congregation was typically '*men and women about equally; mostly regular; very mixed class: watermen...pilots, working men*'<sup>13</sup>, whereas in one of the lowest polling districts for the Conservative's the congregation typically was 'only the well dressed and respectable [that] came to the churches.'<sup>14</sup> The weakness of the nonconformist sects in London, could therefore account for the weakness in Liberal support just like the dominance of the CofE over the very small church going population gave the Conservatives an advantage. With even the Whitechapel founded Salvation Army failing to penetrate the poorer areas effectively despite working with a lower social class than the Baptists for instance<sup>15</sup>. Whilst elsewhere in the country nonconformity helped trade unions and radical elements grow in the Liberals whilst still maintaining the middle class. The failure of this in London again played into the Conservatives hands<sup>16</sup>.

Other factors were at play in the East End alongside the influence of the Church, employers and nature of the area in defining the political outlook of the area. Wealth and indeed poverty played key parts in deciding who to vote for, if one had the option of a vote at all. It is these people that the labour movement was primarily fighting for, to improve their conditions and life, however, poverty brings with it a very different political and social outlook. In many

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<sup>12</sup> M, Brodie; *The Politics of the Poor*; Oxford University Press; Oxford; 2004; pg96-7

<sup>13</sup> Revd J. Neil, Booth MSS B169, 51 in: Brodie, M; pg98

<sup>14</sup> Revd M.Sweetnam in Booth MSS B175, pg83

<sup>15</sup> P, Thompson; pp18-19

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid* pg91

cases despite realising the terrible position in which they were living, many families were too proud to take advice from people like doctors. Margaret Loane a district nurse, reported ' *in dealing with the backward poor, one needs to recall the Chinese maxim as to the duty of 'saving a man's face'...if I told an umbrageous matron that her little daughter was troubled by pediculi I always found her ready to adopt means of cure; if I had used a homelier term [lice], she would have vehemently denied the fact and utterly ignored my advice.*'<sup>17</sup> It suggests a need for people to maintain their honour and pride in front of superiors and indeed contemporaries due to fear that one's private business can be easily spread throughout the community. Even though it is ill reported some of the ways in which the working class were communicated with by socialists and social reformers meant they often fell into the trap that Loane mentioned. Thomas Burke mentioned that university students and old women came to the East End to make it their 'hunting ground' causing resentment and disenfranchisement of the poor 'who were victims of the whims and theories of the educated.'<sup>18</sup> In part this seems odd that the voters would place their trust in the factory owners yet not trust those seeking to assist them. It must be said that later on Clement Attlee was one of those who came to the East End via Toynbee Hall and Haileybury House after university. It shows that views did change over time, or indeed that there were exceptions to the rule, with Attlee becoming deeply imbedded into the East End way of life. However, regardless of such people as Attlee being products of the Toynbee system George Lansbury stated that ' *the one solid achievement of Toynbee Hall... has been the filling up of the bureaucracy of government and administration with men and women who went to East London...for the welfare of the masses, and discovered the advancement of their own interests and the interests of the poor were best served by leaving East London to stew in its own juice... people who, after leaving East London, discovered the problems of life and poverty were too complex to solve and that...all*

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<sup>17</sup> M, Loane; Neighbours and Friends; 1910; pg83 in M, Brodie; pg76

<sup>18</sup> M, Brodie; pg79

the poor in a lump were bad and reform and progress must be very gradual.<sup>19</sup> Such a scathing attack shows the view of non-home grown reform attempts in the area. Indeed things did change over time but the majority of those who impacted most were from the area, or spoke of it in such a way that maintained the poor's respectability as best as possible.

In these circumstances the political outlook did tend to follow the opinions shown previous showing opposition to outsiders assuming they knew what was best for the people. Voting records and registers of the poor help show how the poverty affected how people voted. The makeup of the registration process nationally made it the landlords and parties duty to register voters. Hence a period of whoever managed to sign up the most of their support usually won. Registers fluctuated greatly from year to year with a vast proportion of the population disqualified from voting. For instance it was possible for a university graduate to register 37 votes, whilst a middle class family could register the head of the household, adult sons and coachmen in the mews. A working class family however would struggle to register more than the head of the household and if he were to be on poor relief or indeed move he would be disqualified for at least a year. Lodgers, which formed a great proportion of the working class had to make annual applications to be on the register, unlike owners, meaning it was typical for half the lodgers to disappear from the list from year to year<sup>20</sup>.

It could also be affected by the high movement of workers around the East End, partly due to the huge influx of immigration making it far harder for people to form the communities that movements relied upon. This meant the vote was heavily influenced by the more stable population, who would be more inclined to vote Conservative due to either wealth or the nature of their employment. The 1911 Census records that the franchise for Whitechapel was

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<sup>19</sup> G, Lansbury; *My Life*; Constable; London; 1928; pp130-131

<sup>20</sup> P, Thompson; pg69

20.5%<sup>21</sup> whilst Southwark, Tower Hamlets, Bethnal Green and Islington, a combined total of 16 seats, had a franchise of between 49.4% and 35.7%<sup>22</sup>. This shows how the franchise discriminated against the Liberals and the poor. The fact that only Poplar was always Liberal<sup>23</sup> between 1885 and 1914 and that London wide during this time frame the Conservatives had 15 safe seats over the county<sup>24</sup> whilst the Liberals only had two, both in the East, shows how turbulent the area was politically. It also shows how weak and divided the Liberals were in London at this time.

This suggests the East End was primarily Conservative minded at this point. This is however a misrepresentation as in the undercurrents there existed the Metropolitan Liberal Federation which played an important role in starting the movement that spawned into the Social Democratic Federation (SDF) and the labour movement. These were usually located where pockets of socialism might occur. Whilst the traditional Liberal Associations favoured the more middle class, reactionary Liberals these clubs targeted the working class in a more social environment combining political lectures with recreation. The simple set of political values that all members were to subscribe to for example land nationalisation, free education and paying MP's<sup>25</sup>, this shows the strong link with socialist thought. It included people like Graham Wallas, who was believed to have written its manifesto,<sup>26</sup> alongside many former land reform, electoral reform and republican campaigners<sup>27</sup>. Once the Liberals had failed to back the Radical policies such as the eight-hour day it marked the beginning of the end for the Radicals in London whilst marking the growth of the labour movement as a full-blooded

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<sup>21</sup> *Census of England and Wales, 1911* tables on the cities in PP ;1912-13; cxixx

<sup>22</sup> C, Matthew and J, Kay; *The Franchise Factor in the Rise of the Labour Party* in R, McKibbin; *The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain 1880-1950*; Oxford University Press; Oxford; 1991 pg 74

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid* pg348

<sup>24</sup> This fails to include seats such as Limehouse which were turned into safe seats half way through this time frame

<sup>25</sup> P, Thompson; pp 92-3

<sup>26</sup> D, Bowie; *From Radicalism to Socialism: Working Class Politics in London 1860-1900*; Bishopsgate Library; 13/03/2012

<sup>27</sup> Sadly very little is written of these people and due to the limited time scope of this dissertation it will remain that way.

alternative. Alongside these Thompson reports that there were 40 SDF branches in London in 1899 whilst the Radicals were in decline<sup>28</sup>. This Bowie accredits due to Radical branches becoming disillusioned with the Liberals and moving to the left<sup>29</sup>. The SDF's main growth was after 1892 and this Thompson attributes to many branches colluding with older groups such as the Radicals, unions and the Labour Electoral Association<sup>30</sup> suggesting joint membership and also proving to an extent Bowie's claim. This growth of the SDF showed there was an interest in socialism in some areas of London in particular areas of the East End such as Poplar and West Ham where some candidates secured election. The issue of communication still posed a major issue however with the development of these clubs and branches in working class areas it allowed communication on the same level, helping to grow the movement.

It thus shows that a range of factors helped formulate the East End's outlook which tended to hinder the early advent of socialism and greater forms of working class representation. Localism worked hand in hand with highly influential bosses and candidates from the Liberals and Conservatives. The influence of the church upon the working class helped bring success to the Conservatives where it caught on whilst the opinions of superiors and the grim realities of poverty created a difficult set of issues which the labour movement had to embrace and strive against if they were to gain respectability and success. From this background it is now possible to look at the system and the early quest to get working class representation in London.

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<sup>28</sup> P, Thompson; pg 108

<sup>29</sup> Bowie, D; *From Radicalism to Socialism: Working Class Politics in London 1860-1900*; Bishopsgate Library; 13/03/2012

<sup>30</sup> P, Thompson; pg120

### **Working class representation, Socialism and the London electoral system.**

Despite the nature of London and its population seemingly conspiring against the labour movement, there was relative success on London's elected bodies for working class candidates considering the lack of alternative driving factors such as strong unions. People like George Lansbury, Keir Hardie and John Burns typically started out in the Radical and Progressive wing of the Liberal Party, which covered the political centre to the far left which the socialists sought to take. However, from Lansbury's experience in campaigning for the eight hour day '*pressure of all kinds was brought on me to persuade me not to move the resolution; Sidney Webb and H.W Massingham both wrote agreeing the resolution was a good one, but the time was not ripe.*<sup>31</sup>' Such leading Progressives opposing a relatively simple motion showed the nature of the Liberal machine, it was willing to take the opinion and votes of Radicals but give them very little chance of success in return. Had this motion been approved and became law there would have been an opportunity for the working class to dedicate more time to politics due to the increased leisure time it offered. However, this was not to be and thus helped cause the alienation of Radical members such as Lansbury to Socialist bodies such as the SDF which was in its infancy.

Of the system in which the working class and socialists had to compete, the Metropolitan Board of Works and the Vestry system that came with it in the 1850's brought one of the first opportunities for ordinary people to get elected in London. However, this new London system '*produced neither elite leadership nor participatory politics.*<sup>32</sup>' The aristocracy and peers in the West End simply were not interested whilst the poor were priced out by the £40

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<sup>31</sup> G, Lansbury; pg72

<sup>32</sup> J, Davis; pg20

qualification (with a £25 qualification if fewer than one-sixth of all tenements satisfied the £40 qualification.) The London labour movement too was still only in its infancy before the London County Council was established in 1889 which does also show for the lack of success on these bodies. The Board of Works would have been almost impossible to get any working class representation on whilst areas which could have had strong working class representation suffered from a shortage of candidates and eligible voters. In Bermondsey less than 1,000 of the 12,000 homes satisfied the £25 qualification, whilst Plumstead contained 400 eligible households for 96 positions in 1893<sup>33</sup>. Only a complete change of the structure of London government, as had started to happen in 1889, or indeed an enlarged franchise would enable greater chance of working class representation.

The School Boards and Boards of Guardians proved to be the early success stories for working class representation in East London. These bodies administered the running of schools between 1870-1902 and the administration of the poor law between 1834-1930. For many these were the lowest section of local government but in regards to the working class the Guardians were actually rather important. There are many reports of the poor standards inside Workhouses administered by the Liberal and Conservative boards, for instance in Poplar, when George Lansbury and Will Crooks had been elected to the board they found it almost impossible to enter the house as a Guardian to investigate the appalling conditions, furthermore they were opposed by opposition parties for their desire to drive up conditions for those at the bottom. In 1906 they were taken to court over their behaviour as Guardians. However, *'the magistrate gave my prosecutor a good lecture on how to behave at a public meeting and dismissed the case, and we Socialists were hailed as defenders of law and order.'*<sup>34</sup> Their actions stand against the traditional view of the poor where they merely let the

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<sup>33</sup> *Local Government Journal*, 2 Dec 1893 in J, Davis pg 21

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid* pg82

poor survive at the lowest standards possible whilst Crooks having been condemned to be in the same workhouse in his youth was able to lead the transformation of it.

The school board election of 1887 for instance was a tremendous achievement for working class representation in Britain. Not only did it put two Fabians into an elected position for the first time it was all the more remarkable by the fact that one, Annie Besant, was a woman. Stewart Headlam was the other Fabian whilst A.G Cook of the Compositors Union was also successful. All three managed to persuade the Conservative led Board to impose trade union rates on its contractors becoming the first public body in the country to do so<sup>35</sup>. Besant, who is well known for her role in the Matchgirl Strike of 1889 may not have been of the working class, but like many of her middle class contemporaries represented them well. These local boards allowed them to make an impact on local politics whilst building up their stature, their links with the Radicals meanwhile allowed them to campaign with a certain level of credibility due to the standing of the Radicals in East London.

The formation of the London County Council (LCC) in 1889 marked the transformation of London local governance leading to the foundation of local councils replacing the Vestries with the LCC forming a more democratic replacement to the Board of Works. This gave an extra opportunity to get working class representation into positions of power in London especially considering predominantly working class areas dominated the LCC with 8 more seats believed to be of this category than middle class<sup>36</sup>. Labour Party candidates failed to get elected until 1907, however, there were many candidates and even councillors in the first 18 years of the Council who were both of the working class and represented their values. Harry Gosling, the future Labour Group leader wrote of his campaign in 1885 *'we lost the election, and that largely because my Union, the Amalgamated Society of Watermen and Lightermen,*

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<sup>35</sup> *Star*, 15/08/1888 in P, Thompson; pg99

<sup>36</sup> J, Davis pg191

*which was financing me, would not vote for me.*<sup>37</sup> The conservative nature of many of these traditional craft unions inhibited Labour support despite the desire to get "one of their own" elected. With many of their crafts being endangered in part by New Unionism alongside the mechanisation of many trades, they were on the defensive. Despite this however, it is evident that there was, at a local level, a progressive majority in London due to the Progressives<sup>38</sup> securing a comfortable majority on the LCC every year until 1907.<sup>39</sup> With the Labour Party's predecessors being relatively small and ineffective the only realistic way of getting elected was via the Progressives in part because 'it was therefore a great financial help to fight side to side with a Progressive.'<sup>40</sup> However, finances were not the only reason for this as Gosling also states that the Progressives really did fight on the same issues that Labour later on claimed as their own, whilst the eight "Labour-Progressives": John Burns, Will Steadman, Will Crooks, George Dew, Charles Freak, Harry Taylor, Ben Cooper, and Harry Gosling elected in 1898 maintained a near independent stance on the Council essentially making it the first true Labour Group on any public authority<sup>41</sup>. The success of this Labour bench helped show the way forward for working class representation and indeed for the foundation of the Labour Party. It also showed that in London either Radicalism had a strong say in the Progressives or that the Labour bench were not particularly socialist in outlook. Regardless of politics however, there was strong success in laying a precedent for future elections that the working class, primarily via the trade unions, could be successful.

Prior to 1900 success for working class candidates in London was undoubtedly low. There was some success for Lib-Lab members in the 1880's. However this was an exception to the norm. However, London did bring about the first Labour successes electorally in Britain too.

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<sup>37</sup> H. Gosling; *Up and Down Stream*; Meuthen and Co; London; 1927; pg 81

<sup>38</sup> the Liberals London section

<sup>39</sup> The 1885 election this was only secured due to a higher number of aldermen

<sup>40</sup> H. Gosling; pg82

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid* pg83-4

Keir Hardie, the founder of the Independent Labour Party, and first leader of the Labour Representation Committee succeeded in 1892 in West Ham South a seat with 'a large vote of dockers, gas workers and Irishmen, all of them much influenced by the 'New Unionism' and the recent Dock Strike, [it] was a constituency with a strong labour tradition.<sup>42</sup> It had previously returned a Lib-Lab candidate in 1885, Joseph Leicester, thus proving an ideal seat to run in, in comparison to the rest of the East End it was more like an atomised industrial community, most similar to the northern Labour strongholds that emerged in the early 1900's. In Battersea John Burns, an agitator at the 1887 Bloody Sunday Riot, and one of the main leaders of the 1889 Dock Strike as well as an LCC councillor was also returned. However, Burns took the whip of the Liberals as a Lib-Lab candidate and Hardie's success drew more on the areas that would have been more traditionally aligned to Labour values with Battersea being influenced by the aristocratic West End due to the enhanced connections across the Thames in the west. Regardless of differences however, one similarity remained. To get elected they both relied upon the supporter of the Liberals, and both ran a two horse race against the Conservatives. In Hardie's case *'he would support the Liberal programme in its entirety.*<sup>43</sup> This therefore helped swing the Liberal votes directly behind him. Hardie, as with Burns and the LCC councillors, had successfully used the London Liberals and Progressives to gain success whilst attempting to be a break from the Liberal status quo.

Unlike Burns however, Hardie lost the seat after only one term. Whilst Burns stuck to the party line and indeed refused to take over leadership of the Independent Labour Party, Hardie set himself apart telling his constituents that 'he found the conventions of the house distasteful and boring' whilst the constituents who voted for him complained that *'they had landed themselves with an irresponsible socialistic agitator.*<sup>44</sup> It is no wonder therefore that

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<sup>42</sup> K, O'Morgan; *Keir Hardie: Radical and Socialist*; Weidenfeld and Nicolson; London; 1975; pg44

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid* pg51

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid* pg60

Burns rejected Hardies call and that the seat was lost for a decade due to Hardie's failure to act properly as a representative for that seat.

One common trend runs throughout the early days of working class representation in London. This was the Liberal and Progressive support for Labour candidates with supposedly little to gain for themselves. On one hand they could be seen as suppressing the Radical wing that had broken away by taking it in and embracing it. On the other it helped appeal to the working class electorate in areas such as the East End who, following the 1884 suffrage reform were playing an increasingly important role in politics as shown by the growth of the SDF.

What this does is show a taste of the success that could be had in London, in particular the East End if the working class were organised; if the poverty that they faced could be used as a political weapon by them rather than merely a tool of their apathy and oppression. At this time they had little voice and very few people indeed listened to that voice. For the working class and indeed labour movement the aim was to secure the support of the more affluent working class and philanthropic middle class from the Liberals and Progressives so that they could implement their reforms.

The main ingredient behind the working class, and indeed the quest for socialist representation was trade unionism. The advent of New Unionism drove the men mentioned previously into positions of not only recognition but power. Bloody Sunday in 1887, the Matchgirls Strike of 1888, the Gas Strike and the Dock Strike in 1889 were the sparks that really started the movements expansion. Bloody Sunday occurred after protests in Trafalgar Square regarding the Home Rule question in Ireland, with the East End having a large Irish population it was tied directly to conditions in the East End as well. Events climaxed on the 13th November with a march of 10,000 people to the square, subsequent clashes with police

led to the arrest and imprisonment of John Burns as well as the death of Alfred Linnell a friend of William Morris who stated "*It is our business to begin to organise for the purpose of seeing that such things shall not happen; to try and make this earth a beautiful and happy place.*"<sup>45</sup> The events of Bloody Sunday helped fuel the events of the two years after giving people a reminder of the power of the state to oppress, just as had been apparent with the Chartists 50 years prior.

The Match girls' Strike brought New Unionism to London as a result of Annie Besant's letter to *Link* magazine about the conditions of work for the ladies in Bryant and May's factory in Bow, the women came out as a result of Besant's main informants being sacked. The strike lasted 3 weeks until the employers gave in to the workers demands meaning most fines and deductions were removed.<sup>46</sup> With only 3000 people involved<sup>47</sup> who 'were rated somewhere practically below prostitution on the social scale'<sup>48</sup>, it was not a large strike compared to what was to come however, it was the significance that these "nobodies" could force an employer to fall to their demands showed others that it was also possible in their workplace.

The events of 1889 again raised the profile of New Unionism in East London. Tom Mann, Will Crooks, Will Thorne, John Burns and Ben Tillett all played a part in the Dock Strike whilst Thorne led the Gas Workers earlier that summer. The Gas Workers in Beckton, adopted the demand for 'shorter hours' and had most of the regular employees on their membership roll within four months. They were so powerful that a strike would have brought the cities gas supply to a standstill and as a result the companies cut the hours down to eight a

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<sup>45</sup> J, Charlton; *London, 13th November 1887*; Socialist Review 224; 1998;

<http://pubs.socialistreviewindex.org.uk/sr224/charlton.htm> accessed on 22/02/2012

<sup>46</sup> TUC History Online; *The Match workers Strike Fund Register* extracted from J, Charlton; *It Just Went Like Tinder: the mass movement and New Unionism in Britain 1889*;

<http://www.unionhistory.info/matchworkers/matchworkers.php> accessed on 14/06/2011

<sup>47</sup> T, McCarthy; *The Great Dock Strike 1889*; Weidenfeld & Nicolson; London; 1988; pg59

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid* pg 57-8

day with no loss of wages<sup>49</sup>. This was the first real success of the national eight hour day campaign.

The Dock Strike that followed however, overshadowed the events previously due to the sheer scale of it, crippling the majority of the East End docks. However, what turned out to be an outstanding success was in fact only hours away from failure. What emerged from a minor dispute regarding unloading bonuses for the *Lady Armstrong* resulted in a list of demands from Tillet, leader of the dock union demanding scrapping of contract and 'plus' systems, increasing wages to 6d an hour and the eight hour day which were put to the company. Instead of waiting for a reply however the men struck<sup>50</sup>. Whilst many socialists led the strike, with all but one going on to become a future MP, their politics seemed not to be the main drive for the success of the strike. Champion writes that '*those Socialists that took part in the strike were welcomed not because of their Socialism but in spite of it; not on account of their speculative opinions, but for the sake of their personal ability to help.*<sup>51</sup>' As has been covered previously the poor in London were essentially in a world of their own. People were in a position where if they did vote they tended to do so on trade or company loyalties, for instance the loyalty of brewery staff at Charringtons got Spencer Charrington elected for 20 years continuously in Mile End for the Conservatives. The socialists however, stood apart from this with dedicated concern for the working class the workers found an object via which they could better themselves. A few may have been converted to socialism through these struggles however, the majority were not. The strikes did raise awareness of the conditions of the working class in East London as well as the profile of the leaders involved. The Dock Strike's success was plucked from the hands of defeat as even though everyday there was a collection on the march from the Docks through the City of London this paid very little of the

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<sup>49</sup> H, Champion; *The Great Dock Strike*; pg 162 ;LSE Selected Pamphlets ; The Universal Review; pp157-178 ;1890; <http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdfplus/60216917.pdf?acceptTC=true> accessed on 16/06/2011

<sup>50</sup> K, Coates and T, Topham; *The Making of the Labour Movement*; Spokesman; Nottingham; 1991; pg55

<sup>51</sup> H, Champion; pg 163

daily £1,250 strike relief<sup>52</sup> a general strike plea to all London workers failed and thus it seemed the public sympathy and support that pulled them through had gone. However, Australia heard their call. In the days that followed money flowed in from the Brisbane Seaman and Wharf Labourers Union with the Sydney equivalent offering money soon after. Champion and Donovan's accounts both express different opinions on the strength of the manifesto with Champion suggesting it split the enemy 'a number of the harbingers were prepared to grant nearly everything the men asked<sup>53</sup>' whilst Donovan states '*the manifesto brought the strike to the verge of defeat.*<sup>54</sup>' Regardless of who was right it was the Australian aid that got them back around the table and led to Cardinal Manning and Sydney Buxton helping secure a settlement.

It is clear from this that the unrest of 1887-1889 helped raise the labour movements profile in the East End. As the majority of the leaders of the strikes all managed to get elected to parliamentary seats for either the Labour or Liberal party over the coming years it shows the power that this time had on the men involved and the entire East End. This laid the background for what was to come in the early 20th Century for Labour in the East End. However, it was not an easy ride.

Despite the successes the movement regressed between 1896 and World War I losing Burns fully to the Liberals, West Ham South being lost and taking 7 years to reclaim. There were occasional successes such as winning West Ham council in 1898, before subsequently losing it in 1901 and Will Thorne reclaiming West Ham South in the 1903 by-election. In 1907 Labour got its first LCC councillor proper. There was progress during this time but it was easily in the shadow of the rest of the country despite arguably having a head start.

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<sup>52</sup>F.D, Donovan; *Australia and the Great Dock Strike*; Labour History; Nov 1972 No 23; pg17

<sup>53</sup>H, Champion; pg170

<sup>54</sup>F.D; Donovan;pg17

### **What factors led Labour towards victory in London after the war?**

The 1900's were a relatively lean time for the labour movement in London. Despite the previous steady growth of the 1890's it was evident there was a problem. By 1910 Labour had only a handful of MPs and a trade union movement that had slipped back from the 1889 successes due to recession and an employer's offensive. How come Labour therefore managed to be transformed to the position in 1922 where Labour managed to return 12 MPs in London, with the majority being in the East End?

What changes did the war bring in terms of foreign influence and trade unions. What effect did the London Labour Party have and what did universal suffrage mean for Labour in London?

Following the successes of the 1880's the trade unions declined over the 20 years prior to World War 1. Over these 20 years the most stable unions were the London Compositors who had always around 10,000 members whilst the Engineers stayed around 9,000. These were both old craft trades that were more stable in employment hence it was no surprise the consistency in membership numbers. Meanwhile, the Dockers and Gas Workers, both products of New Unionism, provide a different picture. The Dockers in 1893-4 had 6,000 members, declining to 1,000 in 1900 and 1910, whilst the Gas Workers rose from 10,000 to 15,000 before a drastic decline to 4,000 in 1910<sup>55</sup>. This instability was most prevalent in London due to the casual and seasonal nature of the trades that existed there before the war. Despite the election of union men such as Will Thorne to Parliament in London the progress was still very slow. This can be partly attributed to the banning of union political levies through the Osborne Judgment resulting in the contracting in of political levies. However, there is little evidence this had any major, lasting, impact.

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<sup>55</sup> P, Thompson; pp54,59

There is more evidence suggesting that strikes and unrest in the period from 1911 until the war helped reignite the movement. The national strike of 1911 led enhanced solidarity and eventually amalgamation talks between numerous Unions. For instance the National Union of Railwaymen formed out of this leading to a substantial membership of 30,000 members in London in 1914. The unrest between 1911-14 led to great collaboration between the skilled and unskilled workers and, as with 1889, reached the hardest to organise workers most notably office clerks and women<sup>56</sup>. In 1914 the Gas Workers had reached 25,000 members and the dockers had again grown to 4,000 members showing that fortunes had indeed turned. The surge in membership helped Labour due to the close ties with the Unions that it shared and following the *Trade Unions Act 1913* greater finances were on offer from the Unions.

From 1914 the declaration of war, despite concerns that the union movement would be decimated, brought a period of prolonged prosperity, which also helped to break the vicious circle of disorganisation and poverty. '*Government contracts flooded into the area, soon, rising profits and full employment were providing the opportunity, and inflated food prices the incentive to organise as never before.*<sup>57</sup>' The overall decline in the conditions of the working class caused by these rising food prices pushed the population into the hands of the trade unions, the Labour Party, and Socialist Societies, these groups who were desperate to make sure the workers were not the victims of what many on the left would refer to as "the capitalist struggle." For the trade unions this was a godsend, having 80% more members in East London than in 1914, surpassing national levels, and unlike recruits in 1889 and 1911 these members didn't join primarily due to mass national strike waves. Coming from a wide range of occupations across East London, including the more established ones, they were more likely to stay.<sup>58</sup> This growth in Union membership was more likely to lead to a transfer

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid* pg65

<sup>57</sup> J, Bush; *Behind the Lines*; Merlin Press, London; 1984; pg103

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*

of people into associated groups such as the Labour Party helping to create a boom in membership for the post-war period.

The unions during the war managed to gain a very strong negotiating position due to the desire for the Government to keep civil unrest to a minimum. ‘The trade unions were rewarded by a fair amount of success in their efforts to obtain war bonuses, to secure protective guarantees in return for the temporary suspension of union practises, and to prevent full-scale industrial conscription. Their right to organise was reinforced by arbitration legislation; their organised strength enabled them to retain even a *de facto* right to strike.<sup>59</sup>’ The war allowed the unions great rights, respect and support than could have previously been imagined. London had been transformed from having a shrinking labour movement in 1900 to a booming one during and after World War 1. It is clear that this growth of the union's especially in regards to the financial side helped London Labour substantially.

Alongside the unions the influence of immigrants in East End Labour circles rose greatly during the war, in part due to discrimination against them from much of the population. It was no surprise that a substantial proportion of the population in the East End in 1911 were both heavily impoverished and of immigrant stock. This was largely due to oppression of the Jews in Eastern Europe alongside chaos in farming communities such as Ireland. Thompson shows East London as having a great concentration of Irish workers along the Thames, mostly in the areas with a high proportion of docks. This suggests that a lot of the London dockers were from the Irish community, whilst in the more aristocratic West Irish servant girls were common. Meanwhile in Stepney a large Jewish colony was forming. It is worth noting that at 1900 this was the only constituency with a large Jewish community.<sup>60</sup> For East

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*; pg104

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*; pp 355, 356

London this posed an interesting situation, skewing the political outlook. London had a clear pro-Irish Home Rule faction due to the large portion of Irish workers. This had an effect on the Liberals in London for as long as they were pro-Home Rule the votes largely stuck with the Liberals. In 1910 for instance the Irish vote in St George's in the East alone was around 20% of the electorate<sup>61</sup>. However, once this contentious issue had been supposedly resolved the Irish vote and support dissipated, leaving the Liberals in the lurch. It is not clear about how the Irish vote transferred after the war. For the Irish, being largely Catholic working class they had ties to all of the three main parties, due to their faith, the nature of their work and indeed the Home Rule issue. In Stepney, in particular, there is evidence that some of the Irish vote did end up in the Labour Party, suggesting that in some areas the Liberals loss was Labour's gain whilst even if it did not convert directly to Labour the loss of it reduced the Liberals vote share in some areas.

More importantly the Jewish colony played a substantial role in the East End. Although a deeply concentrated group its presence caused great controversy. The Jews, more so than the Irish, qualified as "aliens" as they were not of the British Empire. Due to the turmoil in Russia however, the fear of Jews and indeed Eastern Radicals coming to Britain raised concern that Britain would be swamped. The *Aliens Act 1905* sought to rectify this by restricting entry of "undesirable aliens" such as lunatics, idiots and those unable to support themselves<sup>62</sup>. This Act limited later migration however, it was already clear that from the Jewish colony a significant number were already in the country. How does this relate to the labour movement? In the short term after the Act it didn't have much impact, apart from calls that it either didn't restrict immigration enough or restricted too much, as expected. The immigrants were starting to establish themselves in London. According Julia Bush the *1905*

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<sup>61</sup> P, Thompson; pg167

<sup>62</sup> Moving Here; *Aliens Act; 1905*; pg1;

[http://www.movinghere.org.uk/search/..%5Cdeliveryfiles%5Cpro%5CAliens\\_Act\\_1905%5C0%5C3.pdf](http://www.movinghere.org.uk/search/..%5Cdeliveryfiles%5Cpro%5CAliens_Act_1905%5C0%5C3.pdf)  
accessed on 18/03/2012

*Aliens Act* had started to anglicise the new immigrants. However, the outbreak of war could reignite the old tensions and fears that had existed<sup>63</sup>, and increased war time immigration would be confronted by these restrictions. World War I revived the problem of racism as a result of a patriotic fervour, with nationwide consequences. Those at greatest risk from attack were the Jews and Germans. Due to the East End being the first port of call for a lot of these immigrants, thanks to the River Thames, tensions would be higher in this region, in particular Stepney where the "colony" existed. The question of relieving economic distress resulted in some of the worst prejudice, with complaints of this in East London soon reaching the War Emergency Workers National Committee. On one hand Shoreditch and Bethnal Green assisted aliens whilst Stepney directed them elsewhere for support<sup>64</sup>. Although a mixed reply from the labour movement did exist throughout this period, in part due to minor split of the Labour Party between the National Socialist Party,<sup>65</sup> the Pacifists and the mainstream. In the East End all three existed with George Lansbury and Herbert Morrison both being conscientious objectors whilst Will Thorne sided with the NSP. As a result the different views on the war did account in part for the different responses to the plight of the Jews. The oppression of "aliens" and more importantly the Jews in East London did eventually push them into the hands of the Labour Movement, both in the form of the British Socialist Party and Labour. The discrimination against them was highlighted by the violence that occurred for instance two waves of violence targeted against "the Huns," had a huge impact on the Jewish community. Following the sinking of the *Lusitania* there was three days of violence during which angry mobs stormed shops and houses across all East London boroughs in

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<sup>63</sup> J, Bush; pg165

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>65</sup> A Marxist temporary breakaway inside the British Labour Movement. Not to be confused with Nazism

which Jewish immigrants were hit...later in 1915 the fear of “aliens” taking over British soldiers jobs and businesses leading to further discrimination against the Jews<sup>66</sup>.

Despite such a clear injustice being served against a large section of the community there was little support in the mainstream at least for the London Jews ‘*since the war began I can honestly say that I have not come across a dozen Jewish soldiers. I have been told in many quarters that they are earning heaps of money in consequence of the shortage of men...the sooner it is brought to an end by conscription the better.*’<sup>67</sup> The sheer ignorance from one of the local councillors goes to show why it was the labour movement the oppressed turned towards in 1918 as even though there was no universal support within the movement there was enough to be a haven to turn to. Trade unions at a local level at least saw the injustices being committed with the London Trades Council backing a Foreign Jews Protection Committee resolution opposing Jewish persecution in Russia, and after the Russian Revolution the FJPC started to work with anti-war Socialists<sup>68</sup>. The Jewish links to the Bolsheviks and foreign Socialists correlates with their involvement at the end of the war with the East London Labour Movement and the further opposition posed to them after the Revolution, Trotsky indeed was Jewish and a Marxist thus comparisons can be easily drawn whether they were accurate or not. Post-war both the British Socialist Party (BSP) and Labour gained substantially from the links forged during the war. Due to the fundamental nature of many of the Jews being “aliens” it is hard to tell how much they influenced the khaki election as of course many were ineligible to vote, however, it does suggest there are links between the Labour successes and the treatment of the Jews by the old regimes. In Stepney the huge landslide to Labour on the council can be partly put down to this as there

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid* pg 170

<sup>67</sup> A Stepney Councillor in *East London Advertiser* in J, Bush; pg171

<sup>68</sup> J, Bush pg176

were leading Jewish figures inside the party which could have impacted on the Jewish vote due to their faith rather than their political beliefs.

In the East End however, it was not always a smooth ride between separate groups, with local issues prevailing over different communities. In Stepney for instance disputes between the Jewish and Irish factions held the local party back due to the inability to forge a strong consensus without the worry of being undermined. Trevor Burridge, writes that after 1918 ‘the old rivalry between the Irish and Jewish factions still existed.’<sup>69</sup> Indeed with around 90% of the Stepney population being working class<sup>70</sup> both the Irish and the Jews would fall disproportionately into this overwhelming majority, reflecting on the overall make up of the local party. The fact remains however, that following 1918 both these communities forged strong links with the Labour Party, and despite differences between themselves helped make the movement in London and in particular the East End far stronger. To resolve this individual example however and to push the party towards success it took the emergence of Clem Attlee as a middle ground, neutral option to lead the party in the right direction.

In the background for the Labour Movement during this time did lie a quite pressing concern of threat from the left. In line with the *Aliens Act 1905* undesirables were wanted out of the country due to either being a drain on the nation's resources, or due to being a radical. Whilst the Irish and Jews were often victims these radicals were the criminals, undermining the fabric of the nation and tarring the name of socialism and communism. This was Britain's first real taste of left-wing terror. The attacks that occurred in Tottenham, Houndsditch and Stepney between 1909 and 1911 were a shock to the system for London. With each attack being carried out by Latvian Anarchists and Communists, there was the potential to cause a great deal of damage to the labour movement in the area. As has often been the case with the

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<sup>69</sup> T, Burridge; *Clement Attlee: a political biography*; Jonathan Cape; London; 1986; pg47

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*; pg25-6

public the differences between Socialists, Communists and to a lesser degree Anarchists do not matter and they all are tarred with the same brush.

Of the three attacks arguably the most serious was that on Sidney Street, Stepney, in January 1911. An informer reported two strange men in house 100 to the house occupied by the infamous Peter “the Painter” and his cronies was in progress and reports of gunshots resulted in armed units from the Met being called to the scene. The Home Secretary, Winston Churchill, who was at the scene personally called for the Scots Guard to be brought in from the Tower of London<sup>71</sup>. After a heated exchange the building was set alight. The bodies of Franz Savers and Joseph were found in the ruins.<sup>72</sup> Even though evidence is lacking as to what effect this had on the labour movement, it does provide an indication of the turbulent times experienced in Britain, and London especially pre-World War I, tying in with the waves of strikes from 1911 and the growth of the trades union movement. It also shows that Labour had threats from the left as well as right. It had to be proven credible if there was to be any chance of gaining further seats in the capital by distancing themselves from any potential assault on the very fabric of British democracy and indeed the people who the party was trying to represent in the East End.

The pre-war radicalism witnessed in the East End and in the case of the unions, countrywide was evidence that the labour movement was finally finding its teeth. However, Lansbury's miscalculation in calling a by-election over women's suffrage, resulted in Labour losing an important East End foothold in what would be the final election in the area until the end of the war. Whilst Labour was quite clearly gaining ground it was still lacking in two realms, the suffrage and organisation. Solving these issues would go a long way towards making Labour a viable alternative in London and the nation as a whole.

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<sup>71</sup> The authors Great-Grandfather was one of the troops called to the scene

<sup>72</sup> D, Rumbelow; *The Houndsditch Murders and the Siege of Sidney Street*; The History Press; Stroud; 2009; pp 123-147

Although the suffrage never played a crucial role in the early policy of the Labour Party before the war it was evident that greater enfranchisement than what was on offer in 1884 was required to allow Labour to win all its supporters votes. The working class skilled workers or artisans were mainly in the other parties as was shown by Harry Gosling as candidate for Rotherhithe. The workers wanted one of their own selected but their hearts were in the Conservative tradition<sup>73</sup>. Over time this did change but London wide this was not enough to win elections. The unskilled, the lodgers and the unemployed were required for Labour to no longer be at an electoral disadvantage merely due to the nature of the system. There was also little evidence in the pre-war world of a latent Labour vote. In 1910 the 35 cases where Labour candidates fought three-cornered contests in 1910, Labour came bottom of the poll in 29, and obtained a median share of the vote of 22%.<sup>74</sup> This therefore suggests that when the Liberals withdrew their vote often directly transferred to Labour or was withheld. In constituencies like West Ham South in 1892 this was the case, showing that the working class electorate did identify with Labour values but perhaps voted Liberal due to the smaller nature of Labour as a third party in a form of tactical voting, we will never truly know. With the lack of evidence of votes being simply withheld it therefore points in the direction of the franchise enlargement directly benefiting Labour. As Lansbury pointed out in one of his numerous election campaigns " *meetings were most enthusiastic, but were filled up with people from all parts of London and young people and women who had no votes,*<sup>75</sup>" in other words there was substantial interest in Labour and the message however, it turned into little support because people did not have the right to vote. Only full suffrage would change this.

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<sup>73</sup> H, Gosling; *Up and Down Stream*; Meuthen and Co; London; 1927; pg 81

<sup>74</sup> Blewett, *peers, parties, people* 389-95; in R, McKibbin; pp87-8

<sup>75</sup> G, Lansbury; pg110

The *Representation of the People Act* 1918 changed the battleground forever. As McKibbin writes 'the ideologies of both the Labour and Conservative Parties made them better able to exploit a fully democratic franchise'<sup>76</sup> for the Liberals 'its failure lay partly in its attitude to the political community and the nature of its political organization. This is seen at two levels: in the reluctance of the Liberals to take electoral organization seriously, and more widely, in their incapacity to make the necessary 'demagogic' appeals to the mass electorate created by the 1918 Act'<sup>77</sup>. In other words the Liberals were caught unawares and failed to make the necessary changes that the Conservatives did, whilst Labour were already a party that a full franchise would benefit. This allowed Labour to surpass the Liberals, who by this stage were a party in turmoil with the Irish vote lost and the Asquith, Lloyd-George split having occurred.

The "khaki election", the first since the Act was passed did see Labour gain more seats than before but due to the post war fever distorted the vote in favour of the coalition. Labour leapt from 7% and 3% vote share in the two 1910 elections to 21.5% securing 2,245,777 votes over 505,657 and 371,802 in the two previous elections. This drastic rise to becoming the second largest party in terms of popular vote shows the importance of universal suffrage to Labour's successes in the UK and the East End.

To secure a successful election campaign, organisation and co-ordination are arguably the most important factors after it has been found that an area has an electorate that is likely to be sympathetic to the beliefs of a particular party. For Labour in the East End there were attempts at a local level to create a movement, yet it suffered the same fate as attempts by the Unions. There was simply too much disagreement and fragmentation. For example, according to the SDF official history, the withdrawal from the Labour Representation Committee was a

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<sup>76</sup> R, McKibbin; pg 67

<sup>77</sup> T.O, Lloyd; 'The whip as paymaster, Herbert Gladstone and party organization, *English Historical Review*, 89; 1974; pg798

‘sad mistake’<sup>78</sup> as ‘in London the stronger branches owed their success to local Labour alliances.’<sup>79</sup> Unity therefore was the key to success.

Between 1901 and 1914 there were nine documented attempts to establish a London Labour Party or a similar concept. In the vast majority of cases it was frustrated by trade union animosity and as had been proven countrywide through the foundation of the Labour Representation Committee Union support was essential to any Labour success. Firstly, the trade unions provided important financial support that the political parties lacked and secondly, the unions had a captive membership of whom many would support a union candidate. The London Trades Council (LTC) did initiate the majority of the attempts but again if its membership was apathetic to the general good of Labour representation it had to wait until the tide had sufficiently changed to allow it to develop.

The death of Harry Quelch in 1913 was the decisive moment. Quelch had been leader of the LTC and a leading name in the SDF and attracted a great deal of controversy at times within the movement. For example numerous branches of the SDF censured him for going in morning dress to an event the LTC had been invited to with the Prince of Wales in attendance.<sup>80</sup> His replacement, Fred Knee, took the brakes off the project for a London party that had been put on firmly with Quelch in charge. Knee, a BSP member, sought to 'fuse warring and inharmonious elements into cooperation for a common end'<sup>81</sup> Knee's perseverance brought about a conference led by the LTC "on 23 May 1914, 424 delegates met at the Essex Hall, Strand, 86 came from 197 socialist societies and 338 from 193 trade union bodies. Knee guided the meeting to the decision: 'that this conference, representing trade unions, trade councils and federations, Local Labour Representation Committees,

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<sup>78</sup> H.W, Lee and E, Archbold; *Social Democracy in Britain*; Social Democratic Federation; London; 1935; pg158

<sup>79</sup> P, Thompson; pg190

<sup>80</sup> G, Lansbury; pg79

<sup>81</sup> *London News*, April 1934, November 1935, February 1936 in B, Donoughue and D.W, Jones; *Herbert Morrison: Portrait of a Politician*; Phoenix Press; London; 2001 pg38

Independent Labour Party, British Socialist Party, Women's Labour League, Fabian Society, Cooperative Societies, Women's Socialist Circles and Women's Cooperative Guilds, do constitute itself the first session of the London Labour Party.<sup>82</sup> Finally getting to a stage where all groups were in the same room was a remarkable achievement by Knee and the result of the action was the show of unity amongst the labour movement that London so urgently required. Knee's death soon after could have resulted in the end of the project considering how crucial he was to forming and maintaining the Labour Party. However, it proved to be a blessing in disguise. Alfred Salter, the Bermondsey ILP leader and Treasurer of the LLP since November 1914, suggested Herbert Morrison run for Secretary. Morrison had been making a name for himself in the South London Independent Labour Party and had war not broken out looked destined for big things in the movement<sup>83</sup>. On winning the election by one vote he strived to make the LLP a force in London preparing for a post war election whilst maintaining unity of a party that had formed only after the existence of major conflict between sections. Morrison was left with a task of battling against the odds to make this new organisation not only work but be effective, this he managed to achieve with fantastic results.

Going into the war Susan Lawrence was the only notable Labour LCC member with numerous Progressives such as Harry Gosling being Labour sympathisers and subsequently councillors of the LLP. In 1919 15 were elected to the LCC whilst there was a sole aldermen. Of the 15 elected members, under the leadership of Harry Gosling, 8 represented East End constituencies, a large improvement on pre-war fortunes and largely due to the effectiveness of Morrison and the LLP in forging such a victory. Whilst this was developing a truce was formed between the Reformists and Progressives in London due to the war where neither side would campaign during the war years due to the greater issue of the war, allowing the LLP

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<sup>82</sup> B, Donoghue and D.W, Jones; pg38

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid* pg37

free reign over London<sup>84</sup>. At the subsequent post war local and LCC elections the papers reported that *'no great interest was taken in the election by anybody except the enthusiasts of the Labour Party.'*<sup>85</sup> The way was finally paved for Labour to press on.

At the first attempt at fielding candidates Hackney council was won with an overall majority,<sup>86</sup> in 1922 Bermondsey Council and the West Bermondsey parliamentary seat were won whilst other constituencies like Limehouse, Rotherhithe and Poplar South turned red. The momentum was with Labour and although there was evidence of some turbulence such as Salter losing his Bermondsey seat in 1923 only to reclaim it a year later things were on the up. In 1934, under Morrison's leadership Labour became the biggest party in the LCC taking overall control until 1965 when the Greater London Council was formed as a result of enlargement into the more Conservative suburbs.

These successes could not have occurred had it not been for the final unity in the labour movement. The growing strength of the trade unions and the importance of the full suffrage in both fracturing the Liberals and allowing Labour's supporters to finally be able to cast a vote for their party of choice freed Labour from the shackles that had been holding it back. The mobilisation of the "alien" vote due to the war also pushed Labour forwards in the East End leading it towards finally making London red in 1934.

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<sup>84</sup> London Municipal Society Annual Reports, 1919-19 and 1919-20; circular appeal for funds, 30 July 1919 in Thompson, P; pg289-90

<sup>85</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 4 November 1919; *Morning Post* 3 November 1919 in P, Thompson; pg290

<sup>86</sup> *Borough council elections - Extensive Labour gains*, The Times, November 4, 1919

## **Conclusion**

It took over 50 years from 1884 until 1934 for Labour and its associates to gain overall success in London and along the way there were many false dawns. The successes Labour finally experienced after World War 1 were the result of a great deal of work, spanning this period with the labour movement learning many lessons from its failures and misjudgements along the way. From the expansion of the franchise in the 1880's momentum slowly started to build. Although there were working class political movements spanning through to the medieval period in Britain it took the mass industrialisation of the 1800s to accelerate it into a true movement. East London was one of the most likely places to go Labour first by looking at the poverty. However, the area was plagued with casual and sweated labour, an unstable population and domination by an artisan skilled working class who held values more in line with the Conservative Party. The role of religion and localism in the area caused the movement to be fractured and struggling to pick up early support. However, there were successes across the capital and in the East End in elections like the School Boards and after 1889 the London County Council, often in collaboration with the Liberals. With the Dock Strike, Match girls Strike and Gas Workers Strike there was a time where the unions really did pick up support. However, this New Unionism was short lived. In the 1900s, particularly the years before the war the movement picked up again finally, with increased unity between unions and a more radical outlook. Throughout this period the work of the political organisations such as the SDF, and the ILP grew in stature often at the disadvantage of the Radicals and in turn the Liberals who they were affiliated to. Although there were often disputes and disappointments in the East End along the way, such as in West Ham South with Keir Hardie's defeat, and John Burns full on conversion to Liberalism in Battersea. Out of the darkness shone light with a gradual gaining of ground through the 1900's. However,

systematic failings and the nature of London held them back. The independent projects had essentially failed and it was only when groups finally realised that they were better off through the strength of their common endeavour did they finally come together, pooling their resources, success was in sight.

The foundation of the London Labour Party in 1914 alongside the appointment of Herbert Morrison to the leadership in the war years meant Labour finally was organised and able to mobilise effectively in London. The party was finally singing from the same hymn sheet across the Capital and at last, through the *Representation of the People Act 1918*, their full support could vote. London was finally turning red.

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