Labour Heritage

Bulletin Autumn 2025

Contents

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Before 1888: The Labour 'Aristocrats'

Louise Raw

This is an excerpt from Louise Raws's book 'Striking a Light' about the 1880 Bryant and May Matchwomen's Strike. The book can be purchased by contacting Louise on louiseraw@hotmail.co.uk

From the mid-nineteenth century, transport links improved so dramatically that amalgamations became possible between unions which had previously been organized on a purely local basis. The Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE) was formed in 1851 and provided an organizational and ideological template which others would follow. Membership was strictly limited to apprenticed workers and subscription rates high, allowing for the employment of a core staff of full-time officials as well as the payment of sickness, accident unemployment and death benefits to members.

The ASE seems to have settled quickly into a political moderation which made it more akin to an old Friendly Society than a radical union in the mode of the Grand National Consolidated Trade Union (GNCTU).

The ’new model’ period did not put an end to local societies, and even within national unions a high degree of branch-autonomy remained. Nor did all unions follow the ASE template, some preferring to maintain a separation between their trade and friendly society functions. However, trades like tailoring, woodworking and shoe making followed the ASE’s lead, in outlook if not in organizational structure. These new model unions are generally regarded as having been protectionist in outlook – concerned to preserve their members’ labour price through the employment of apprenticeship and similar schemes and so limiting the number of skilled labourers who could enter their professions. One miners’ leader of the period expressed this simple philosophy of supply and demand with the maxim:

“When eggs are scarce, eggs are dear. When men are scarce, men are dear.”

The leaders of the key new societies, collectively christened the ‘Junta’ by Sidney and Beatrice Webb, set about

“transforming the ‘paid agitator’ into the trusted officer of a great financial corporation…enlarge[ing] the mental horizon of the rank and file … opening out to those whose vision had hitherto been limited to the strike and the tap-room, whole vistas of social and political problems in which they as working men were primarily concerned. “

The boon in ‘skilled’ trades such as engineering, printing, and building, it has been argued, assisted the rise of an elite within the workforce. Morton and Tate have written that the increasing use of cheaper, unskilled female labour, in industries like textiles, also helped to give a ‘more distinct and dominant place to highly skilled male workers.’ Numerous writers, however, argue that this new emphasis on ‘skill’ as a masculine preserve was deliberately constructed, and led to the downward classification of work done by women to ‘unskilled,’ though it might quickly be upgraded to ‘skilled’ if taken over by men.

The ’skilled hands’ continued to grow in both affluence and status, aspiring to a lifestyle closer to that of their bourgeois masters than of lower-ranking workers. As George Porter, himself a prominent ‘new model’ trade unionist and editor of the union journal the *Beehive,* noted in 1870:

The working man belonging to the upper classes of his order is a member of the aristocracy of the working classes. He is a man of some culture, is well read in political and social history… His self-respect is also well developed.

The term ‘aristocracy of labour’ became, and remains, current to describe this elite. How much the

development, and behaviour of this elite tier affected the rest of the working class has been highly controversial among historians. To some the ‘aristocrats’ put a break on industrial militancy, subordinating their fellow workers into a period of compromise and collaboration with the employer. To others, their influence has been over-stated. Periodically as John Field put it, this debate ‘smoldering quietly in the corners of British historiography’ will ‘once more burst into flames.’

Morton and Tate have estimated that the ‘aristocracy’ represented around 15 percent of workers, with the skilled but less affluent making up about 50 percent and including those classed as semi-skilled in the new mechanized industries, and also the highest-paid laborers (workers in industries regarded as ‘unskilled’ which nonetheless included workers with particular skills). Making up the remaining percentage were dockers, gas stokers, agricultural workers, building, railway and shipyard and ‘general’ labourers, and a large proportion of the miners.’ The industries within which this elite predominated were unionized, and it has been argued that the aristocratic unions dominated the politics of the labour movement during the latter half of the nineteenth century.

It is noticeable that Morton and Tate make no reference to any groups of women workers in their classifications. The matchwomen would presumably have belonged in the last category, with other unskilled groups who would become central to New Unionism, such as the ‘dockers, gas stokers…’ and others. Women workers were largely excluded from the ‘craft’ unions, as they were from apprenticed work; and unions with protectionist stances were inclined to view the encroachment of female labour with hostility, seeing them as an economic threat. This made the self-organized victory of the matchwomen as all the more unexpected and significant.

Morton, A. and Tate, G. (1956), *The British Labour Movement.* London: Lawrence and Wishart.

John Field, ‘British Historians and the Concept of the Labour Aristocracy.’ In *Radical History Review* Winter 1978-1979.

The Welsh in London

Barbara Humphries

Unemployment hit Britain's staple industrial areas in the 1920s and 1930s. These included South Wales, as well as Scotland and the north of England. Unemployment reached 38% in Wales in 1932 at the peak of the depression. This mainly affected the coal mining industry in the Rhondda Valley. In Jarrow unemployment in the shipyards reached 60%.

Industrial Transference

The government described parts of the country affected by employment as 'the distressed areas.' In the 1920s an Industrial Transference Scheme was introduced to encourage workers in the 'distressed areas' to move into London and the Southeast to find work. Government Training Centres were set up and in some cases fares were paid.

West London experienced industrialization in the interwar years with new factories in Southall, Hayes, Greenford, and Acton. Some factories like EMI, which made gramophone records, and AEC which made buses for London Transport, had relocated to West London due to the low cost of land.

Others like Firestones and EMI were US multinationals. There were hundreds of new factories in Acton, including Napier and Walls. The Park Royal Estate had been developed during World War 1 and its wartime industries were converted to peace time use after the end of the war. It was estimated that over a million workers migrated to London between 1923 and 1932. In London 28% of these came from Wales.

West London attracted workers from South Wales more than any other area of the capital due to the diversity of its employment. Non-native workers formed 10% of the workforce in Acton, 15% in Hayes Southall and 17% in Hayes. Not all those who migrated, however, came under the Industrial Transference Scheme. Many more joined friends and relatives already living in the area. Future Labour Councillor Tom Allsop, in an interview for the Labour Oral History Project, described how he left home and came to London. Suzanne Burge's Welsh father caught a 'football special' train to London, and did not return.

The Great Western Railway (GWR)

The GWR had attracted the first migrants from South Wales. It was the gateway to West London and its employees were very mobile. A Mrs. Chard arrived in Southall, where she assisted women in munitions factories to find employment. She was later to become the leader of Southall Council. Mrs. Chard was the wife of a railway worker and an active member of the Women's Railway Guild. Southall was established as a railway town and newcomers to London who were employees of the GWR also found work at Paddington or Old Oak Common in Acton.

However, most Welsh people who came to London were not railway workers. Some had known employment in the coal mining industry. They had been black-listed after the General Strike of 1926 and were unable to find work in the South Wales mines. They could be employed in the factories of West London which employed semi-skilled labour, producing electrical goods and food processing. Women as well as men migrated. They found jobs in catering, public health, and domestic service. If they had the opportunity they would prefer to work in one of the local factories.

Isolation

By the 1930s there were ten Welshmen in London for every hundred in Wales. However, they did not live in distinct communities and were scattered throughout the capital and therefore faced isolation. Most were of the younger generation as families found it difficult to find housing. There were some concentrations of Welsh workers, for instance, at EMI in Hayes, who lived in the surrounding streets. Attempts were made to set up social and cultural events, like choirs. Suzanne Burge whose father was Welsh, recalls gatherings at Hyde Park Corner where Welsh people could sing, give out information about available work and get news from home. Otherwise, they fitted into their local communities, joining organizations like the British Legion, non-conformist churches, and the Labour League of Youth.

Hostility

Like later migrants from the Asian community, the Welsh faced some hostility from residents in Southall and Hayes. Local housing and schools were overcrowded. There were fears that they could undercut wages in poorly regulated industries such as construction. Employers with a bad reputation like Woolfs in Southall were keen to recruit Welsh labour, as they were later to recruit Asians. Suzanne Burge recalls her father being told ‘no taffs here’ or worse, when he went for a job on a building site. Only if there was a Welsh foreman was he in with a chance. Syd Bidwell, Labour MP for Southall 1966-1992, recalled ‘Welsh go home’ painted on a railway wall. ‘Blacks go home’ was painted on the same wall in the 1960s.

The Industrial Transference Board concluded by 1934 that there were limits to the number of migrants that the host areas could take. There had been no lack of willingness to move south to look for work, but the scheme had become exhausted. Migration had a negative impact on the communities that the Welsh left behind. The youngest moved to find work. One third of the population aged 15-29 left the area between 1921 and 1939. The population of the Rhondda Valley fell by 36% between 1921 and 1941. The government had no plans to encourage new industries to relocate to the distressed areas. That did not happen until after 1945. Many in the labour movement, like Nye Bevan, were critical of Industrial Transference

in the interwar years but were unable to do anything about it.

Trade Unions

Many Welsh people were to play a role in the trades unions, both in London and in other parts of the south-east like Oxford. They came from a trades union background and were equipped to organize factories like Firestones. They could be identified by their names and their accents. At EMI in Hayes there were several shop stewards with the name of Evans. They were also active in the Labour Party. Dai Cousins was the first Labour mayor in the London Borough of Ealing in 1965. Tom Allsop became a Labour councillor in Ealing. Tom Parker was leader of the Labour Group on Uxbridge council and became the first Labour mayor of Hillingdon in 1965. Syd Bidwell recalls migrants from South Wales who lived near the Hoover factory in Greenford. They were keen on the Labour Party because of the hardship they had seen in the Welsh mining valleys. There was support for the General Strike in 1926 as miners' leaders such as Arthur Cook, addressed mass meetings and support for the hunger marchers in the 1930s. With industrial migration this part of London changed significantly and in 1945 returned a number of Labour MPs for the first time. The Rhondda Valley had become a Labour stronghold at the beginning of the century and those migrating to London, Coventry or Oxford brought their political beliefs with them.

Miner's statue, Rhonda.

* * *

Salford East Labour Party in the 1940s and 50s. Suspension and reinstatement

Jonathan V Wood

In 1951 three Salford councillors were expelled from the Labour Party and two other Labour members were suspended from all offices in the Party. The Labour Party took this action because the five members had continued to give public support to an unofficial strike in Manchester docks despite instructions from Party officials that they should not. The General Committee of Salford East Divisional Labour Party voted not to accept these disciplinary measures against its members and their Party, which had one of the largest memberships in the country, was suspended as a result.

The disagreement between local activists and the Party hierarchy over support for an unofficial strike led to these events but the political climate of the Cold War and its effects on Labour Party attitudes had an important influence.

Socialist Outlook and Socialist Fellowship in Salford

In 1944 the majority of British Trotskyists united to form the far-left Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) and a faction pursued 'entryism' – becoming Labour Party members to pursue their revolutionary aims. This entrist group collaborated with other Labour leftists to found the journal '*Socialist Outlook'* to appeal to a wider range of left wing opinion in the Labour Party. Several Salford Labour members contributed to the journal.

The RCP disbanded in 1949 and urged its members to join the Labour Party. The organisation Socialist Fellowship was established within the Labour Party and this was welcomed by *Socialist Outlook*. The Socialist Fellowship received strong support in the Salford Labour Parties.

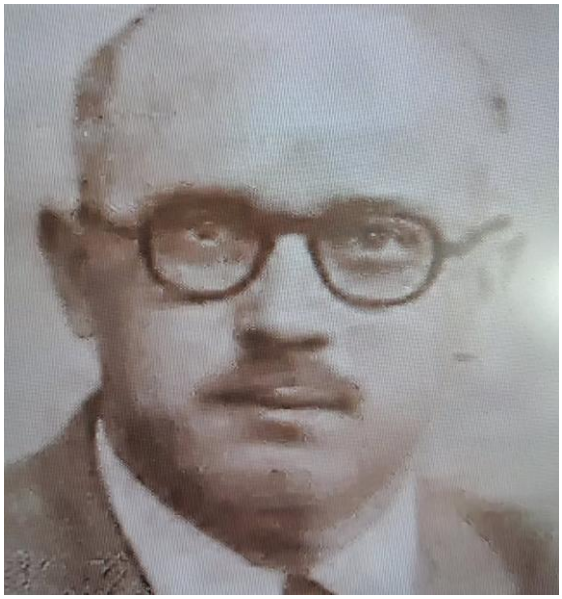
Salford East Labour Party and the Korean War

After the Second World War, there was a long period of antagonism between the Soviet Union and its allies and the United States, Britain and other Western nations - the Cold War. Britain's Labour government participated in the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and was a staunch ally of the USA in the conflict with Communism. The Labour government's role in the Cold War resulted in the Party's leaders and officials becoming increasingly intolerant of Party members who were sympathetic to the Soviet Union and communism or were vocal opponents of Britain's close relationship with the USA.

In 1945, Korea had been divided into two nations. Pro-western South Korea and the communist North. In June 1950 North Korean military forces invaded the South. The United Nations authorised a military intervention led by the United States to defend South Korea. The Labour government supported the military intervention and sent British troops to fight in Korea. British participation in this conflict contributed to increased political polarisation in the labour movement.

Socialist Outlook condemned the UN military intervention and in July 1950 Socialist Fellowship's National Committee adopted a resolution demanding the withdrawal of British troops. A number of left-wing MPs and many others opposed this resolution and left the group. Socialist Fellowship advocated socialist policies far more radical than official Party policy and, in April 1951, the NEC decided the Fellowship's programme and policy was fundamentally different from official Labour policy and consequently membership of the Fellowship was incompatible with membership of the Labour party. As a result of this the organisation disbanded.

Salford East Labour Party mandated Harry Ratner, its delegate to the 1950 Labour Party Conference, to oppose the NEC's policy on the Korean War. Ratner delivered a vitriolic attack on the military intervention in Korea and the Labour Government's support for it.



Harry Ratner.

Ratner rejected claims that the aims of the military intervention were to resist aggression and defend democracy, stating that the intervention was 'an attempt to maintain a foothold for imperialism in Asia.' He did not believe a Communist plot had caused the Korean War and accused the Labour Government of allying itself 'with the most reactionary imperialism in the world - that of American capitalism'

These were controversial statements at a time when British soldiers were fighting and dying in Korea and provoked a hostile response from many Conference delegates. Ratner was frequently heckled and eventually shouted down and Salford East's reference back motion was rejected.

In March 1951, Labour Leftists set up a committee to campaign for an emergency conference of the Labour Party to discuss concerns over the Government's foreign policy and rearmament programme, and Salford East and Salford West Labour Parties both passed resolutions supporting the campaign.

Parliamentary politics in Salford 1945-1951

In 1945, Salford was a predominantly working-class community divided into three parliamentary constituencies, Salford North, South, and West. All three elected Labour M.Ps. The Redistribution Act of 1948 reduced Salford to two constituencies for the 1950 General Election– Salford East and West. In 1951, Salford East Divisional Labour Party had 4,000 members, making it one of the largest Labour Parties in the country.

The Salford Labour Parties displayed strong sympathy for left-wing policies. At the 1948 Labour Party Conference the Northern Division submitted a resolution advocating nationalisation of the Iron and Steel industry without compensation and the establishment of workers' control in all nationalised industries. In 1950 the East constituency's resolution proposed state ownership of the banks, the land, and all basic industries. In 1951 a resolution claimed that unrest in the docks was caused by the lack of

participation by dockers in the running of the industry.

Salford Labour Parties became involved in an unofficial docks strike in Manchester docks between April and June 1951. Salford East Labour Party submitted a resolution to the 1951 Party Conference which claimed one reason for the industrial unrest in the docks was ‘the lack of direct participation by dock workers in the running of their industry’.

Bernard Burchill and Harry Ratner

Two of Salford Labour Party’s most vocal left-wing activists, Councillor Bernard Burchill and Harry Ratner, were both shop stewards in the engineering industry.

Burchill was a shop steward at the big Metro-Vickers engineering works in Manchester. He was elected to Salford City Council in 1947 and gained a reputation as one of the Council’s leading experts on housing. As well as being a shop steward and councillor, he was chairman of Salford City Labour Party and on the Parliamentary Panel of the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU). The author of a profile of Councillor Burchill in the Manchester Evening News in September 1949 wrote that the councillor had probably been ‘the cause of more stormy Salford council meetings than anyone else in the past two years’ Burchell’s own words, ‘Trouble ? It always seems to find me’ provided the article’s heading. He had faced strong criticism, not only from the other political parties, but also from within the Labour party, but he favoured directness, even if it led to disagreement. Burchill asserted ‘. . .It is much better to bring a controversy into the open. It leads to a quicker checking of facts and a quicker righting of wrongs.’

Harry Ratner was a dedicated member of the Trotskyist entrist group inside the Labour Party. He was born in London in 1919 and in 1936, joined the Labour League of Youth and became a member of the Youth Militant Group, a Trotskyist body operating within the League. In the 1940s, Ratner became a member of the RCP. After the end of his wartime military service in 1945, Ratner found employment in a Manchester engineering factory. He became a shop steward, works convenor and the President of his AEU branch. Ratner belonged to the RCP faction who had adopted a policy of entryism inside the Labour Party, calling themselves the ‘Club,’ and was a member of its National Committee. He was a regular contributor to *Socialist Outlook* and was active in Socialist Fellowship.

The number of positions Ratner held in the Labour Party and trade union movement is evidence of his tireless activism. He was a leading shop steward, President of his AEU branch, a member of Salford Trades Council and of the General Management Committee of Salford East Divisional Labour Party.

On several occasions he was a delegate to Labour Conference and spoke in Conference debates,

sometimes denouncing Government policies. At the 1948 Conference, he moved the Salford North resolution which advocated nationalisation of the iron and steel industry without compensation. In an uncompromising speech, Ratner dismissed Labour's existing approach to nationalisation as merely the State taking over the management of industries for the benefit of the owners. He scornfully called Labour politicians opposed to workers' control 'Tory fellow-travellers' and excoriated Stafford Cripps, Chancellor of the Exchequer, with these scathing comments 'When Sir Stafford Cripps, who was once a Socialist, tells us that the workers are not fit to control industry then we wonder whether he knows in which party he is in.'

Another disciplinary example occurred in April 1948 when 37 Labour MPs signed a telegram wishing Italian Socialist leader Pietro Nenni, leader of the faction of the Italian Socialist Party allied with the Communists, success in the Italian General Election. The Labour Party had ended its relations with Nenni because of his alliance with the Communists and threatened the telegram's signatories with disciplinary action. The MPs who had signed the telegram had to promise not to participate in organised opposition to Party policy or face expulsion. John Platts-Mills, Labour M.P. for Finsbury, who was believed to have organised support for the telegram, was expelled from the Labour Party. In 1949, two Labour MPs, Konni Zilliacus and Leslie Solley, and a parliamentary candidate, Lester Hutchinson, regarded as 'crypto communists', by the NEC, were also expelled from the Party.

The 1951 Manchester docks strike

The intervention by members of Salford East Party in an unofficial docks strike resulted in disciplinary action. In April 1951, dockers working on a cargo ship in Manchester Docks were instructed to work overtime and refused to do so, arguing local custom restricted overtime work. They were told that the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) had accepted an agreement which meant they could be required to work 'reasonable overtime.' Most of the workers complied but two men objected and were suspended for three days and lost three days' pay.

Other dockers were angered by the treatment of the two men and imposed an overtime ban. In response, the management told the protesters they would have to work nights and denied them daytime work. The 2,300 dockers employed in the Manchester docks then walked out on strike demanding that the suspended dockers be reimbursed for their lost pay. This was an unofficial strike led by the Manchester Port Workers' Committee, an organization of rank-and-file activists not recognised by either the employers or the TGWU. It was one of several Port Workers' Committees established in British ports after 1945.

The employers and the Dock Labour Board refused to negotiate with an unofficial group. The TGWU's officials

insisted the strikers return to work before there could be a discussion of their grievance and Alf Robens, the Minister of Labour, refused to meet a deputation from the Port Workers' Committee maintaining that the dockers had to work through their union.

The Dock Labour Board sent every striker a strongly worded letter advising those unwilling to return to work seek other employment. This was met with defiance from the striking dockers.

The strikers were also rebelling against the officials of their union and passed a vote of no-confidence in their union officials. The TGWU agreed with the Dock Labour Board's refusal to negotiate with the Port Workers' Committee. In May 1951, the Port Workers Committee decided to recommend the strikers withhold all union subscriptions.

The TGWU, at that time, had a centralised and authoritarian leadership. Arthur Deakin, the union's General Secretary, was a committed anti-communist with an intense dislike of unofficial rank-and-file movements in his union. These factors exacerbated the tensions between the union officials and the striking dockers.

In the early 1950s there was anxiety about Communist infiltration and industrial unrest was often attributed to Communist subversion. Politicians and the press had emphasised that Communists had fomented the docks strike in Manchester. This appeared plausible because George Norman, Chair of the Manchester Port Workers Committee, and several of the other strike leaders were Communist Party members.

The Manchester Evening News described the Manchester Port Workers Committee as 'an offshoot of the Communist Port Workers' Committee in London.' Alf Robens ordered an investigation into the strike. The Times, in an editorial, declared 'the Minister of Labour demonstrates that the dock strike in Manchester last spring was deliberately begun and directed by Communist agitators.'

However, there was strong sympathy for the strikers in the Salford Labour Parties. Hundreds of the striking dockers lived in Salford and many were Labour Party members. The Executive Committee of Salford City Labour Party sent a telegram to Alf Robens recommending the immediate reinstatement of the two suspended dockers and called on him to intervene. He replied condemning the strike as unconstitutional arguing that the strikers should return to work and use official channels.

Salford City Labour Party also telegrammed the National Dock Labour Board asking for a 'more conciliatory attitude' to bring the strike to an end and warned that the Board's confrontational approach could result in a national docks strike. The Executive of the City Labour Party organised a special meeting to discuss how to end the strike, which was attended by two of the striking

dockers, both of whom were Labour Party members. Despite warnings from Labour Party officials, Councillor Burchill and other members of Salford Labour Party continued to support the striking dockers.

In August 1951, Reg Wallis, the Labour Party's North-West Regional Organiser, led an investigation to decide if Salford Labour Party had 'acted contrary to party policy' when it had intervened in the Manchester docks strike and concluded that three Labour councillors and two officers of the Salford Labour Party had acted as a group over the docks strike and had behaved in a disruptive manner. In September 1951, the three councillors, Bernard Burchiil, Harry Williams, and Peter Grimshaw were expelled from the Labour Party and Harry Ratner and Israel Zott were suspended from holding any office in the Party. Councillor Burchill complained about 'not knowing what particular offence we have committed we have had no opportunity to defend ourselves'

There were protests from local labour and trade union groups including shop stewards representing the 20,000 workers employed by Metro-Vickers. The Manchester District Committee of the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU) voted unanimously to support Councillor Burchill, and its secretary wrote to the NEC to request a meeting with Morgan Phillips, Labour's General Secretary, to express the Committee's opposition to Burchill's expulsion. Pendleton Cooperative Party complained to Transport House that it had not been told why Councillor Grimshaw, who was its representative on the Executive of Salford City Labour Party, had been expelled.

Suspension of Salford East Labour Party

By a narrow majority, the Executive of Salford East Labour Party refused to accept the NEC's decision to expel the three councillors and refused to elect new party officers to replace those who had been suspended. Reg Wallis warned 'This inevitably means disciplinary action'. At the end of September, the Labour Party's North-West Regional Office announced that all Salford East's officials were suspended. This was a drastic step with a General Election imminent and meant the party's existing electoral organisation ceased to function. However, individual members of Salford East, continued to campaign for the re-election of A.E. Hardy, the Labour M.P, and regional office established a committee to run Hardy's election campaign. After the General Election, in accordance with instructions from the Regional Office, Labour aldermen and councillors in Salford East set up an administrative committee to be responsible for correspondence and outstanding affairs.

Socialist Outlook supporters in Salford wrote a highly critical article about the suspension which was published in the November 1951 issue of the Journal. They viewed the measure as part of the Party's leadership's crackdown on those advocating socialism. The article

noted that ‘East Salford has the record of being among the most militant constituency parties’ and asked ‘Is there any connection that the East Salford Party instructed its delegate in (last year’s Labour Conference) to oppose the Executive’s position on the Korean War?’

Subsequent developments in Salford

In April 1952, the suspension of Salford East Labour Party ended and the party resumed political activity at a delegate meeting. In August that year Councillors Burchill. Williams and Grimshaw were allowed to rejoin the Labour Party after they conceded they had acted contrary to the Party’s best interests and promised to be loyal in the future.

Harry Ratner continued to be active in Trotskyist politics. In 1958, a new Trotskyist group, the Socialist Labour League (SLL), was formed and Ratner became a member. In 1959, the Labour Party proscribed the SLL and expelled several SLL members, including Harry Ratner. Ratner eventually became disillusioned with the SLL ‘s increasingly authoritarian and sectarian politics and left the organisation and Trotskyism in 1960.

Conclusion

Labour officials expelled Salford councillors and suspended Salford East Labour Party even though the 1951 General Election was imminent. Although the conflict originated in the attempt to intervene in the dock strike, the impact of the Cold War was a key factor in what happened. Salford East had become well-known for its outspoken criticisms of government policy. A corollary of the Labour government ‘s role in the Cold War was a much less tolerant attitude to left-wing dissentients within the Labour Party.

* * *

Royston Price. 1927 - 2025

Roy Price, a long-standing member of Labour Heritage, died in April aged 97.

Whilst going through her father’s things Roy’ daughter, Janet, came across the leaflet opposite which was in the back of an old picture frame. The leaflet was published by Labour Party Head Office, Transport House, Smith Square, London for use in local elections and we work out from the wording it was during the1945 Labour Government. We can imagine Roy delivering the leaflet house to house - perhaps before he was entitled to vote at the age of 21. Janet tells us he used to say that he got through a pair of leather soled shoes canvassing at each election. The leaflet will be sent to the Labour History Museum in Salford for their archives.

Roy left school at 14 to work in an engineering factory and after a few years joined the telecommunications division of the Post Office, now British Telecommunications. He was very active in his trade union all through his career with BT. He was a Labour councillor in Ealing for 12 years and a

THE WISE MAN SAYS VOTE LABOUR

It's a free country. It's my business how I vote, but after studying all the political parties I can't help thinking that the only sensible thing to do is to Vote Labour.

Somehow it makes me feel proud to read all these tributes that other countries are paying to Britain's amazing recovery effort; I know we couldn't have done it without Labour's self-discipline and planning for the future.

Well, I think we need the same sort of spirit in local government, too. There doesn't seem much sense in Parliament promoting great new measures if the Councils aren't really heart and soul behind them.

The Tories say that Labour threatens the 'freedom of the individual.' If that were true, Labour wouldn't get my vote; but with a steady job, security and no health bill worries, I don't feel that my freedom is in danger.

Oh, yes, I know there's a lot to do yet, and many more reforms required, but I'm convinced that only Labour can do it. When polling day comes I'm going to

VOTE LABOUR

NATIONALLY AND LOCALLY

Labour had built, by the end of last year, 312,881 new houses.
And the new homes are better constructed and equipped than prewar.
By a policy of 'fairness not finance' homes go to those in need.
Our Health Service is acknowledged everywhere as the world's best.
Until this great Act class distinction reigned in medicine.
Reductions in infant and maternal mortality rates have created new all-time low records.

Local health centres and new hospitals are on their way.
Every mother-to-be and young child gets free food supplements.
About 2 million children get school meals. Ultimately all school meals will be free.
Despite Tory protests our children now get an extra year's schooling.
Students, too, benefit from Labour. State university scholarships have nearly trebled.

Towns and country planning is killing the ugly ribbon building of the past.
Healthy youth gets happier leisure. Better youth clubs and sports facilities is Labour's aim.
Entertainment is brought to your doorstep under new powers given to local authorities.

With the 1948 Local Government Act State grants have brought justice to the poorer areas.
Already Labour local authorities are maintaining their services better than ever before.
You can speed these, and other great measures by playing your part in returning Labour Councils.

VOTE LABOUR

PUBLISHED BY THE LABOUR PARTY, TRANSPORT HOUSE, SMITH SQUARE, S.W.1. PRINTED BY THE PEMBRIDGE PRESS, 1951, W.11. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED, 155 SOUTH AUDLEY STREET, LONDON, W.1.

school governor of Stanhope school in Greenford for 40 years. Roy was involved in many local community organisations such as the prominent local Hobbayn Charity formed over 500 years ago for the prevention and relief of poverty in Hanwell.

Amongst other activities Roy loved sailing and went on a couple of tall trip cruises with his daughter.

Royston Price

* * *

Labour Heritage member Mary Mills writes about her book ‘George Livesey. A Biography.’

Livesey is best known for his role as the villainous boss who in the1889 gas workers strike utterly defeated the workforce – and the book is not to exonerate this but does say that this is a very interesting man with many very radical ideas. His working life was spent in the Old Kent Road gasworks – first living on site as the manager’s son in the 1840s when the works was very small and dysfunctional to the early 20th century when South Metropolitan Gas was world class.

From the start George had very radical ideas about how society should be organised and how employers, their customers, and the workforce should work in partnership together. He was also a lifelong grassroots activist in the Band of Hope. Early on in his career as manager of South Met he worked with radical London politicians on legislation which forced the privately owned London gas companies to regulate their profits and prices. At the end of his career, in the 1900s, South Met pioneered a slot-meter-with-free-gas-stove scheme which gave working class families a means to cook properly and cut smoke filled air pollution. There were many other achievements.

In the middle of this stands the 1889 gas workers strike in which Livesey has very much been described in many popular works as the archetypal villain of the bosses – and I am not seeking to justify him or much of what happened. I have done my very best to describe it using only contemporary records as far as possible. I’m aware that the event was described by academics in the 1960s – and that I am not the only person to have researched it further, but the original version persists. They also made assumptions about trade unionism in

the early 19th century gas industry which have been challenged.

Livesey never made peace with or accepted the trade unions and thus lost what had been a great deal of credibility from what we would describe as ‘the left’ although he was eventually partially accepted by some in his final years.

In response to the strike Livesey set up a profit-sharing scheme. This evolved into ‘co-partnership’ which included direct elections from the shop floor to the Board of Directors. It was also designed to enable workers to buy their own houses. The scheme lasted until the 1940s nationalisation. The book is about somebody who was a bit different and who was very good at almost everything he did – but, like everybody else, he also sometimes got it wrong.

Mary’s book, which is wonderfully illustrated with over 200 captions, can be ordered through Amazon for £20.

* * *

Book Review

Keeping The Red Flag Flying. Mark Garnett, Gavin Hyman & Richard Johnson

Books on Labour Party history nearly always deal with Labour in government, but this one is about Labour in opposition and is the best book I’ve read for a long time about Labour’s history.

John McDonnell writes ‘In fascinating detail this book demonstrates that political direction and the success of failure of Labour governments are shaped by the party’s period in opposition. At last we have an exciting analysis of these critical periods.’

* * *

Letters

Betty Costello

I read with interest the article about the 1945 election and as somebody who can claim to have been there, I would like to share my thoughts about it.

I was the 7 year-old child of a very Labour oriented family, and as far as I can remember seemed to be very aware of what was going on. In those days it was not illegal for children to take part in electioneering so come election day, I clearly remember standing outside my school gates, which had become one of the polling stations in Tottenham South, singing to the tune Tramp, Tramp, Tramp, with other children as voters walked into the school, "Vote, vote, vote for Freddy Messer, kick old Churchill down the stairs".

I can't remember if it was 'kick, sling or chuck, but it was definitely down the stairs that Churchill was going - and looking at it from this distance, that sounds quite violent. Now, I don't think it was us children that made up the words, it was what the adults had taught us to sing. And I know that the

general feeling was that whatever the papers might say, Churchill was hated by my family and their friends.

Looking this from today's perspective, the question is why, and I wonder if it has anything to do with the fact that while everyone seemed to get thinner because of rationing, and luxuries like cigarettes were hard to come by, Churchill who always seemed to have a cigar on hand, didn't look as if he was suffering the hardships the rest of us underwent.

In the 1950's I worked with a middle-aged lady from Dundee, she told me that Dundee hated Churchill because of something he did when he was young. I can't quite remember the story, but it was to do with him being in South Africa as a reporter or something similar and because of what he did a large number of soldiers from Dundee got killed. Was that the Boer War, I wonder? Whatever it was, Scotty as she was called, was vitriolic about Winston C.

As for children not helping at elections, it's something I was told in the dim and distant past by an election agent. I never checked to see if it was true, I just assumed it was. Back in '45 we weren't the only children to get involved, were we? And we were really excited about it, wanting Labour to win. Having been involved in plenty of elections myself, one way or another since the 1960's, looking back I can't ever remember children being as keen to participate as we were then. The more I think about it, the more I wonder what it was that influenced us?

As an added note, Frederick Messer MP, and a very good one at that, was always called 'Freddy.'

Jean Gaffin

'In 1945 Leah Manning was elected for Epping and campaigned for the retention of day nurseries and school milk in peacetime. Lucy Middleton, elected for Plymouth, played a role in the reconstruction of that city'.

Excuse a burst of nostalgia brought upon by reading the above paragraph in the Winter 2024-2025 Labour Heritage Bulletin, relating to the article by Barbara Humphreys. When I joined Wimbledon Labour Party around l959 in my early twenties Lucy Middleton was in her sixties. She was far to the right of me politically, and I was a little in awe of her as well as disagreeing with her: she had been an MP, was the widow of an early General Secretary of the Labour Party. She had worked for the suffragette movement, and I now so regret not asking her about her past experiences.

In the early l970's Joyce Gould, then Women's Officer of the Labour Party, asked Lucy to edit a book about women in the labour movement to celebrate International Women's year. It was agreed the Labour Party would publish the book. Lucy invited 9 women, all young, to write aspects of women's contribution to the movement, and Lucy invited me to write the chapter on The Co-operative Women's Movement. Although I had edited a Wimbledon Labour Party Newsletter and had briefly been a

member of the Wimbledon branch of the Guild, I was amazed and flattered to be asked. When the book was finished, Ron Hayward, then Secretary of the Labour Party, decided the party could not afford to publish it.

Lucy was furious and was determined to get it published. Not quite sure how, but she got her way and WOMEN IN THE LABOUR MOVEMENT was published by Croom Helm in l977. I remember Lucy delaying an operation on a cataract in order to proofread the book. Lucy died in 1983 aged 89 - around the age I am now - by which time I had moved to north London, moved to her side of the party, and had not met her for several years. I think she would have been disappointed that the Party she loved had yet to have a woman Leader. And pleased that I am still active and Chairman of my Branch - Mill Hill, Hendon CLP.

Old Labour Party Badges

If anybody wants one let us know. The badge represents ‘workers by hand and by brain’ and the torch of liberty. Sometimes disparagingly referred as the knife fork and spoon and in the 1990s replaced by the red rose.

NCLC: a part of Labour’s heritage

Harry Shindler

In considering ‘Labour Heritage’ we cover many aspects. But one area which appears to have been overlooked, although it has been of fundamental importance in our history, is education.

Education within the Labour movement in the past seems to have been more important than it is today. This is perhaps due to the fact that most Labour activists (the writer included) left school at 14 to go to work or make an early acquaintance with the dole queue. The movement thus developed its own system of education.

It is well known that most of the early leaders of the movement in Wales, Aneurin Bevan, Jim Griffiths etc went through the Labour College. It is also a fact many of those who rose through the ranks in the 1930s obtained their

basic education from the National Council of Labour Colleges (NCLC).

At the head of the NCLC were a couple devoted to independent labour education; ‘J.P.’ and Margaret Miller. They ran the organisation from their NW London house, and then from Tillicoultry in Scotland until its sad demise.

The NCLC gave hundreds of us an insight into subjects not covered by schools. I attended lectures on British colonialism and learned about Britain’s administration of the Empire. I completed postal courses on ‘electioneering,’ that served me well when I became a party agent, and on ‘secretaryship’ that was valuable when I was elected secretary of a shop stewards committee. A course on ‘bookkeeping’ helped me when elected a Labour Party ward treasurer. I was only one of hundreds who got our ‘basic training’ through the NCLC.

NCLC was supported in its work by donations from Labour Parties and trade unions. It published a very good journal and had a network of voluntary lecturers and a small staff of paid teachers.

The NCLC was an independent body serving the labour movement. It was not responsible to any government department and could cover any subject which could help educate members of the movement.

Many will join me in acknowledging the very valuable role played by the NCLC and think how the movement could benefit from the colleges today. I am sure the NCLC was an honourable part of Labour’s heritage.

John Grigg writes: This article first appeared in the Winter 1991/92 Bulletin. The NCLC was formed in 1921 and in 1964 merged with the Workers Educational Trade Union Committee to form the Trade Union Congress Education Department

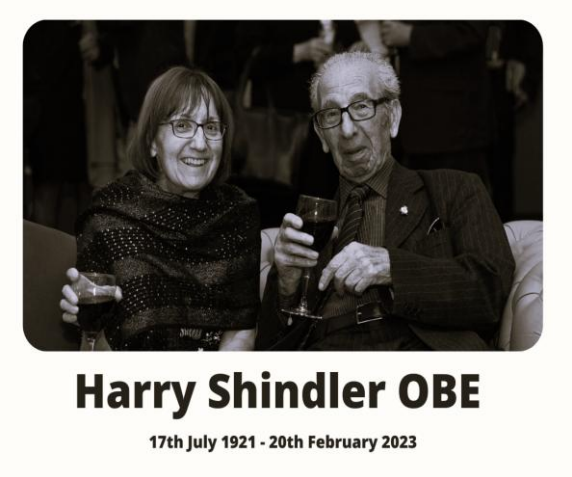
Harry was born in 1921 and died in 2023 aged 101 in Italy where he had lived for the last four decades of his life. He is best known for the 20 year campaign he ran to secure the right of foreign based British citizens to vote in UK elections which was achieved in 2020. I remember him addressing a meeting of Labour Heritage on the subject.

He was conscripted into the army for World War II and served in North Africa and Italy, and he worked through the Italy Star Association to keep alive the memory of British servicemen killed in Italy. Harry was awarded the MBE in 1914 and the OBE in 2021

As his article indicates Harry was very active in the Trade Union Movement and the Labour Party before and after the war, and he was a supporter and member of Labour Heritage for many years.

Searching the internet I find from an item posted by Mike Clist, a former Chief Executive Officer of the British Institute of Innkeeping, that Harry was general secretary of the National Association of Licensed House

Managers from 1981 to 1990 and a founder member of the British Institute of Innkeeping in1981. The photo below was probably taken at the Summer lunch of the Institute in 2019. Mike Clist writes that Harry loved the British pub and worried about the number failing each year. Was Harry was once a publican? Further research required.



2025 Birkbeck Bursary

Thank you to all our members who donated to our annual appeal in memory of Stan Newens and Linda Shampan. £3,500 has been sent to Birkbeck College to assist a refugee student who has no other means of support. The appeal went well and a small surplus is left over for next year's appeal.

Letters and articles can be sent to;

LabourHeritage45@btinternet.com

For more information about Labour Heritage including access to previous bulletins, go to the website at: www.labour-heritage.com