Labour Heritage

Bulletin Spring 2025

Contents

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Jim Callaghan and the 1964 – 1979 Labour Governments

John Grigg

I remember where I was on 16th March 1976 when the news came through that Harold Wilson had resigned as Prime Minster. I was in a bank in Kingsway in London and two people cheered believing it would mean an immediate general election and an opportunity to get rid of the Labour government. That, of course, was not the case. The Parliamentary Labour Party held a ballot to select the party's new leader and on the third ballot Jim Callaghan beat Michael Foot by 176 votes to 137. On the 5th of April he was invited to Buckingham Palace to form a government.

1964

Labour, led by Harold Wilson, had come to power in 1964 with an overall majority of six after 13 years of Conservative governments. They inherited a sterling crisis. Wilson appointed Callaghan as Chancellor of the Exchequer, and they resisted pressure to devalue the pound. The last time the pound was devalued was during the Attlee postwar government and they did not want Labour governments labelled as the only administrations that devalued the pound.

Attempts to tackle the problem included a 15% surcharge on imports. But later in the year the government had to seek aid from foreign central banks to prop up the pound. A major economic difficulty was that wages were leaping ahead of productivity and the government considered a Prices and Incomes policy. The Trade Unions were unenthusiastic about such a policy but eventually a voluntary system emerged which was only partially successful. An adverse balance of payments continued.
With such a tiny majority divisions within the Parliamentary Labour Party made retaining control a perilous business and often sick MPs had to be brought to Westminster to vote in the division lobby. Wilson was seeking an opportunity to go to the country to increase his majority.

1966

In January 1966 there was a swing to Labour of 4% at a byelection at Kingston-upon- Hull and Wilson took the opportunity to call a general election that Labour won with an overall majority of 98. I do recall that there was a general feeling that the government had at least weathered an economic crisis that could be blamed on the previous Conservative government.
Events proved difficult. The failure of wage restraint, the seamen's strike in 1966, and the closure of the Suez canal caused by the Arab-Israel war in 1967 worsened the trade balance. The balance of payments deficit rose and there were runs on the pound. Finally, the government were forced to devalue in November 1967. Callaghan stepped down as Chancellor and Wilson appointed him Home Secretary where he had to deal with troubles in Northern Ireland.

1970

With the exchange rate at a more realistic level the trade balance improved and went into surplus in the early months of 1970. With opinion polls and municipal elections favouring Labour, Wilson went to the country in June 1970 anticipating a Labour victory. This, however, was a miscalculation. It has been suggested that the electorate was despondent after England, who after winning the world football cup in 1966, were knocked out in the1970 competition four days before the election. A more plausible explanation is that just three days before the election the monthly balance of payments figures for May were announced. A deficit was reported reversing recent surpluses and disturbing the government's claim that it had turned round the economy for the better. Wilson had made much of the recent surpluses. I remember canvassing in that general election, and all looked good until election week when too many electors were going down as 'doubtful' on the canvass cards
Labour lost and a Conservative government under Edward Heath came to power with a plan for a free-market economy to solve the unemployment and inflation problems. This was not successful and was replaced by what became known as the 'Barber boom.' The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Anthony Barber, in his1972 and 1973 budgets, pumped £2.5 billion into the economy by increased pensions and benefits and cuts in income tax largely paid for by government borrowing. Barber forecast that his 'dash for growth budgets' would achieve a rate of growth 'twice as fast as in the past decades.' This strategy failed and led to higher inflation and wage demands and a sterling crisis that forced Barber, instead of resorting to another

devaluation, to float the exchange rate of the pound.

1974
The 1974 miners' strike led to a three-day week and to another general election with Heath asking "who runs Britain? The unions or the government?" Wilson was returned to power but this time with no overall majority. The election gave Labour 301 seats and the Tories 297. Liberals had 14, Ulster Unionists 11, Scottish National Party 7, Plaid Cymru 2, Others 3. Labour formed a minority government after an agreement with the Liberals that they would be consulted on legislation, and with the Scottish Nationalists who were promised a referendum on devolution (as were Plaid Cymru).
Callaghan was appointed Foreign Secretary and renegotiated European Community membership terms. He endorsed the 'Yes' campaign that confirmed membership in the 1975 referendum.
However, the economy continued to perform badly. In 1976 inflation (which was a worldwide problem) hit 17% because of a tripling in oil prices, and wage increases were still outstripping productively. Unemployment reached 1.5 million. Public sector wage restrictions were introduced.

1976
In his biography Jim Callaghan writes that on succeeding Harold Wilson as Prime Minister in 1976 he scribbled on a rough piece of paper his objectives for 1980.

'Reduction of inflation below 5 per cent and unemployment below 3 per cent; a manageable balance of payments; devolution within the United Kingdom, and the country to play a leading role in European, Commonwealth and world affairs; to resume our social aims in housing, education, health and welfare to build a cohesive society; and to win the general election for Labour. We had a few successes, there were some near misses and the rest were failures.'

Callaghan and Wilson at an annual Labour Party conference in the 1960s.

At the Labour Party conference six months after becoming prime minister, Callaghan made a speech emphasising "that for too long the country had been borrowing money abroad to maintain our standards of life. Instead of grappling with the fundamental problem of British industry. The option to spend your way out of recession no longer exists. Overcoming unemployment depends on our labour costs being at least comparable with those of our major competitors. We will fail if we think we can buy our way out by printing what Denis Healey (the Chancellor of the Exchequer) calls confetti money to pay ourselves more than we produce."

Callaghan had to face a host of economic problems. Inflation had hit nearly 25% in 1975. International

confidence remained low and there was pressure on the pound. The government attempted to deal with the problem by cuts in government expenditure and wage restraint, the latter being reluctantly accepted by the TUC. To arrest the fall in the value of the pound the government sought a loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) of $3.9 billion. The IMF insisted on further government cuts. In the event less than half that amount was taken up and the balance of payments moved into surplus. There was a feeling that the country had weathered the storm and in early 1978 Labour had a lead in the opinion polls. Inflation was down to 8%. The Unions became restless and there was great expectation that Callaghan would go to the polls in October. There were distinct indications that this was so, not least by signs from Callaghan, but in September he announced to the cabinet and then to the nation via a TV broadcast that there would not be an election that Autumn.
He might have won in October but what followed were defeats of the government's wage increase limit of 5% at the TUC and Labour Party conferences and wage claims well in excess of 5% by public sector unions. This led to a series of strikes and the notorious 'Winter of Discontent.' Widespread stories of mounting piles of rubbish in the streets and unburied dead turned the public against Labour. A public opinion poll lead turned into one of 20% for the Conservatives. On 28th March 1979, the government lost a vote of confidence by one vote.

"We shall go the country," said Callaghan and in May 1979 Margaret Thatcher led the Conservative Party to victory. The country was never the same again.

Postscripts
In his book '*Please, Mister Postman'* Alan Johnson recalls that Tom Jackson, leader of the Union of Communication Workers, was president of the TUC in 1978. At a meeting of the TUC General Council a statement supporting the government's 5% guideline was put to the vote and an equal number voted for and against. Tom, who supported the 5% guidelines and had been instrumental in forming the social contract between the TUC and government since 1975, was a strong advocate of wage control. He would have been expected to cast a chairman's vote in favour of the statement. Instead, he declared the proposition 'not carried.' The explanation, Alan Johnson tells us, is that Tom was guided by Walter Citrine's *ABC of Chairmanship* (I have a wartime copy on my shelf) that says that if a proposition is tied it is clearly not carried and to cast a vote in favour would undermine the neutrality essential to the chair's authority. Alan Johnson claims that if the proposition had been passed the Winter of Discontent would have been avoided.

When, in March 1979, Margaret Thatcher moved the vote of no confidence in Callaghan's government it was essential for both government and opposition whips that all MPs voted. But Labour had a problem. One of its members, Sir Alfred Broughton MP for Batley and Morley in West Yorkshire was mortally ill. If he had been brought to Westminster by ambulance he could have been nodded through the division lobby. But the journey from Yorkshire might have killed him. His doctors strongly advised him not to travel. Sir Alfred, apparently, was willing to risk this but the deputy chief whip, Walter Harrison, with the agreement of Callaghan, decided it would be unacceptable to ask him to

do so. It is now known that the government deputy whip, Walter Harrison, approached Bernard Wetherill, his opposite number, requesting that the sick man be 'paired.' Wetherill first insisted that 'pairs' were never provided for votes of confidence. Roy Hattersley in a Guardian article in March 2004 writes 'Harrison replied that the refusal was a breach of faith. Anxious to defend his honour, Weatherall offered to sit out the division himself – simultaneously matching Broughton's absence and destroying his own career. Touched by the act of chivalry, Harrison told him he could not accept such a sacrifice.' This account was confirmed when Harrison and Wetherall discussed the event on the radio in early March 2004.
The vote of no confidence was carried by one vote. Sir Alfred Broughton died five days later.

Dick Leonard in his book *A Century of Premiers. Salisbury to Blair* refers to the unexpected May trade deficit that was announced three days before the June 1970 election. He writes that the figures turned out to be exceptional due to the chance inclusion of a hefty bill for the order of fighter planes from the US. Leonard writes that if the election had been a week earlier or a month later Labour would probably have won.

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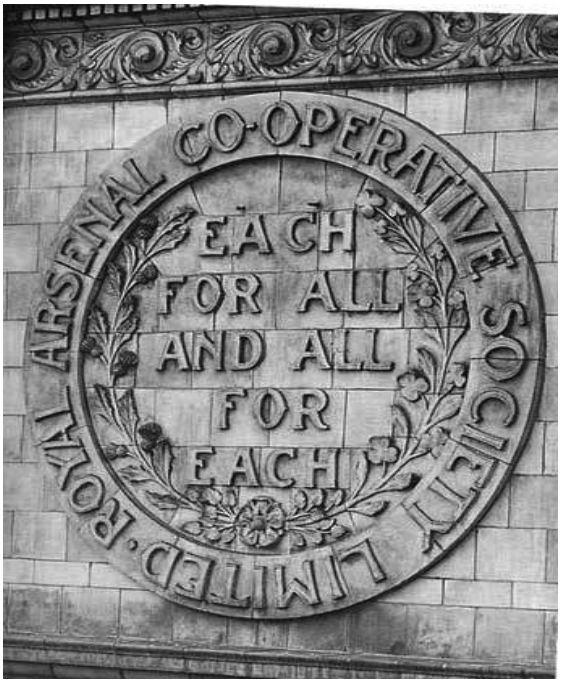
History of Co-operation in Greenwich and Woolwich

Mary Mills

In order to look at the growth of co-operative and other mutual organisations in what is now the Royal Borough of Greenwich we need to start with a quick look at the historical background. This part of Kentish Thameside had huge industrial sites by the 17th century when the Royal Dockyards in Deptford and Woolwich, along with the Royal Palace in Greenwich, employed many, many people in the service of the state.



In this area a skilled work force in state owned industries were well aware of the advantages of collective action. This increased in the 19th century with the military establishment in Woolwich and the vast industrial site of the Royal Arsenal - the largest and most diverse factory ever in Europe. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries private industries opened here using Arsenal trained engineers in skilled jobs, and workers with aspirations for better lives in a better world. In the mid-19th century many of these workers were involved in the temperance movement and heard a message of how, by founding their own organisations, they could take control of their lives.

In the mid-18th century a number of mutual businesses were set up by workers hoping to improve the quality and price of food and other household items on offer locally. In Deptford a butchery business was opened by dockyard workers, and in 1758 in Woolwich, as in Chatham, a mill was set up to support a bakery business. These were owned by groups of shipwrights or 'artificers' in the Royal Dockyards and were successful in bringing down prices. The Woolwich Mill and bakery survived for 80 years and supplied bread commercially to military establishments as well as to local people. It stood near the side road still called 'Mill Close' today. The Royal Dockyard closed in 1869, and a suggestion was made by a future leading co-operator that it might be saved by becoming 'co-operative shipbuilding'.

In Woolwich, several organisations were set up with a mutual structure, particularly for financial or insurance purposes. Most are not entirely relevant to a history of co-operation locally, but it should be noted that the best known of these institutions was the Woolwich Equitable Building Society of 1847 and described in the *Survey of London* as 'an important staging post in the history of mutualists enterprise in Woolwich, and a seed that grew to spread the name of Woolwich nationally'.

Alexander McLeod came from a poor background in Scotland where he had served an apprenticeship in engineering and came south in the 1850s to find work in the Royal Arsenal. Today his statue still stands above the main door of the shop he founded in Powis Street, Woolwich. As a member of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers he was at a meeting where the subject of Co-operation in trade was raised. A special meeting was called for November 7th 1868 at which the Royal Arsenal Supply Association was founded with just twenty members. This was the beginning of the mighty Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society (RACS).

The first co-operative 'shops' were stores in the homes of leading members - McLeod was secretary to the organisation and in 1869 the first store was in a room below his home at Parry Place on the Plumstead borders. In 1871 they set up the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society Limited and adopted the 'Rochdale model' for a retail co-operative with profit-sharing through dividends. Two years later, when they took on their first employee, it was decided to pay a profit sharing bonus on staff wages. This idea was unique in retail co-operatives, and I am reminded of the contemporary local profit sharing scheme at South Met. Gas which lasted until nationalisation in 1946. The RACS scheme lasted until the 1980s merger with CWS.

In the early 1870s they took on a proper shop at a site in Powis Street. *Survey of London* comments that this was 'away from the main shopping district- typically for a co-operative.' It was at the western, 'Greenwich end', of Powis Street and the start of what

became a complex of RACS owned buildings there. At first it opened for just four evenings a week' and McLeod became full-time manager.

Within ten years RACS had 1,597 members, many of them skilled workers looking for a respectable shop with a high standard of goods at affordable prices. Starting with groceries they soon added a draper, a boot maker and a tailor and, eventually, much more. These Powis Street properties expanded and became RACS main stores. McLeod's statue remains on a building, currently a Travel Lodge. A description of this central Woolwich complex of shops is included in great detail in the Woolwich volume of *Survey of London.*

By the 1880s the Powis Street shop included a butcher and the beginnings of the network of milk rounds. A tearoom was added and more stables and a purpose-built bakery. Central Stores were opened in 1903, when RACS had a membership of 21,788 and was the largest co-op in London. At the opening ceremony a crowd of some 5,000 heard a speech from newly elected Labour MP, Will Crooks, followed by a procession round Woolwich which included the Society's 130 horses and 86 vehicles plus military bands.

Concurrently, the Society opened smaller shops around the area – a network which would eventually cover most of Kent and Surrey. At first sites were in Plumstead, Erith, Charlton, and most notably in 1900 at The Links on Plumstead Common. There were eventually hundreds of shops and branches, all with their own histories.

RACS was not alone in South London in its popularity and expansion. In the 1890s a Co-operative Festival was held in Crystal Palace as part of Blackheath resident, Edward Owen Greening's, 'One and All' movement. 34,800 people are said to have attended and over 100 co-operative societies were there with half a mile of exhibition tables. There were speeches from London trade unionists - Ben Tillet and Tom Mann and there was a grand concert with 6,000 singers and a new Labour song specially composed for the day – although the Co-op movement, including RACS at this stage, was not party political. The Festival was an expression of what working people could aspire to and achieve - "what do we want? ... good music ... the love of flowers ... the appreciation of the domestic arts... the practice of athletics ... the desire for culture ... association in employment."

The RACS Board of Management was known as the 'General Committee' with nine, initially unpaid, members. They managed the day-to-day business of the Society, but major decisions of policy needed to be agreed at a general meeting of members.

From the start RACS promoted 'culture' and 'association.' The earliest facilities at the Powis Street store included a reading room and a library, this was the earliest library in Woolwich, and others were set up in or near stores in the coming years. In 1901 the Powis Street library moved

into a converted Baptist Chapel in Parsons Hill which became the Co-operative Institute and Education Centre. The building was demolished when John Wilson Street was rebuilt as part of the South Circular Road and the Education Centre moved to Park Vista in Greenwich. I remember the Co-op library there myself in the 1970s and thought it was somewhere I was perfectly prepared to settle into and study.

Edward Greening's 'One and All' movement was all about healthy living, self-sufficiency, allotments, and growing your own food. As RACS expanded, they bought up a number of farms and areas where members could grow their own vegetables or where their shops could sell fresh local grown produce. One result of this, still with us today is, now community run, Woodlands Farm on Shooters Hill, originally purchased by RACS in 1920. One service they did provide was for customers to choose the piglet which would be slaughtered for them at Christmas! By 1937 there was an abattoir at the north end of the farm, which was said in the 1970s to have the fastest beef gang in Europe. The Woodlands Farm Trust does a good job and I hope will continue to do so.

Some of the farmland purchased by RACS was used for housing development - most notably on the Abbey Wood 'Co-op' Estate, aimed at respectable and well-paid Arsenal workers. Street names reflected Co-operative values and the movement's heroes – McLeod, Federation, Greening and several more. One unique feature was the excavation of extensive underground mine workings for chalk to provide building materials. The miners' canteen survived to become the reception area for what is now the Abbey Wood camp and caravan site.

Later, in 1925, RACS took over and managed the architecturally exceptional Eltham Well Hall Estate built by the Government in the Great War to house munitions workers. RACS added community facilities, in particular, Progress Hall. RACS retained the estate until it was sold to Hyde Housing in 1985.

As RACS grew and expanded, they began to take over smaller local co-ops. The earliest was probably in 1905 when they took over East Greenwich Co-operative Society which operated a single shop in Woolwich Road, later used by the Co-op funeral service. Once taken over by RACS they soon announced greatly increased turnover. In the 1960s this process of takeovers accelerated, and many Co-operative Societies were taken over by RACS, from as far from Woolwich as Woking, Sheerness and Slough. I remember when RACS took over Gravesend Co-op in 1968 with its 20 shops, although there is no mention in the RACS account of Gravesend Co-op Hall where I saw George Melly, or indeed of Gravesend Education Department where I met Harold Wilson.

The Great War led to the introduction of sugar rationing – ironic since the Co-op Jam factory was opened in

Abbey Wood in 1916. It survived to be bombed in the Second World War and provided valuable employment for local women. On 7th November 1918, four days before the end of the war, RACS celebrated its 50th anniversary with a Jubilee Concert. Sales for 1919 were well over £2.5 million and membership was 68,500. They looked forward to a prosperous peace.

A memorial to employees who had died in the Great War was installed in the Powis Street Head Office. In 1918 as part of the peacetime future RACS purchased Shornell's, a huge house in woodland off Bostall Hill in Abbey Wood, intended to be used as an education centre and hostel for students. The first weekend school featured lectures by playwright, George Bernard Shaw, by economist, G.D.H.Cole, and Joe Reeves, future MP for Greenwich, who had just been appointed as RACS Educational Secretary. By 1985 and the merger with CWS Shornell's was in a bad state, subject to vandalism and fires. It was sold for £1 to a local project for a Greenwich hospice and is in use today.

In 1921 RACS established their Political Purposes Committee which involved direct affiliation to the Labour Party, locally, regionally and nationally. The early co-ops had been set up at a time when political allegiances were changing, with new ideas and new politics - the gradual rise of Labour and decline of the Liberals. Most co-ops did not identify too closely and recruited activists from many different political perspectives. The foundation of RACS Political Purposes Committee is complex, as is its' history up into the 1980s. Rita Rhodes book '*An Arsenal for Labour'* is recommended and follows the whole process through with great clarity.

Outside London the Co-op Party was active and dealt with politics and elections. In the RACS, area nominees represented co-op interests on local Labour Party management committees and nationally RACS's nominee had a place on Labour's National Executive Committee. Since the demise of RACS in the 1980s a Co-op Party branch was set up in Greenwich and Woolwich and quickly built up a strong membership. Co-op delegates still attend Labour Party management meetings, and most Greenwich councillors are 'Labour and Co-op."

In 1926 RACS was involved in setting up the youth movement known as 'the Woodcraft Folk'. This had originated outside the co-op as 'Kibbo Kift', set up to provide an alternative to the militarism of the Scouts, with an Advisory Council which included H. G. Wells, and Julian Huxley. Joe Reeves, the RACS Education Department Secretary, was interested in the youth movement and RACS Society developed its own version called 'The Woodcraft Folk.' This became a national organisation with 6000 members by 1938, by the 1980s membership exceeded 15,000. The Woodcraft Folk still appears to be going strong.

In 1926 RACS bought freehold land, once part of the Woolwich Royal

Dockyard, from the Admiralty. Re-named Commonwealth Buildings, by 1937 the site housed nearly 1,900 staff, handling grocery and provisions warehousing - bacon smoking, tea blending etc. Additionally, there was a pharmaceuticals laboratory, shoe repairs, clothing manufacture, general engineering, and motor maintenance, with a garage and transport depot.

In 1929 a Co-operative Exhibition was held at Commonwealth Buildings, attended by the Prince of Wales and over 200,000 members of the public, mile long queues were reported. It included “a model bungalow, the theatre of fashion, home cookery demonstrations, concerts, arts and crafts, corset and hosiery making, working exhibits of machinery, sweet boiling, cigarette making, etc. Famous bands will provide music and Admission is Free.” The site was closed in 1985 and housing at the current King Henry’s Wharf was developed from the 1990s.

When the Commonwealth Building site was demolished the original gateway and entrance buildings to the former Royal Dockyard remained, with the address of ‘2 Commonwealth Buildings’. This was the Royal Dockyard’ Apprentice School and it still houses one last co-operative business, funeral services, now run by CWS. Another relic of Commonwealth Buildings is the prominent chimney on Woolwich Church Street. Built as part of the Royal Dockyard it was used by the Co-op for their boiler systems. It appears to be doing well, despite disuse.

In the interwar years the numbers of employees at RACS rose from 1,000 to 10,000, with 70 new shops opening in the 1930s, some of these being Post Offices. A travel business was started with two charabancs for hire, and eventually the purchase of hotels.

After the war the new American ‘self-service’ way of shopping was investigated, soon a shop using this system was opened in Woolwich. Many others followed**.** Perhaps other readers know of shoppers like my mother, who refused to use the wire baskets provided at Gravesend Coop’s Echo Square branch. Self Service was the future in the modern world; there were also rental schemes for TV sets, and fridges, and at head office, a computer to work out the dividends was installed, and an automatic telephone exchange.

RACS made it to their 100-year anniversary but felt out of date and old fashioned. The co-op as a body serving local working class interests has become too remote for the public to understand or relate to. Many reasons have been given as to why RACS failed; did they overreach themselves with the super-store at Margate, did replacing the ‘divi’ with stamps make them seem identical to commercial supermarkets opening around them? Today, Co-op online deliveries can be more efficient than the big-name stores and the grocery stores appear to be doing well.

Ultimately, in 1985, RACS gave up and became part of CWS.

While this article covers a few features of co-operatives in the borough of Royal Greenwich, much of it about RACS, there are notable omissions, including the co-ops support for women in public life.

There are several histories of RACS, this article is very dependent on material collected by Ron Roffey. Ron was RACS last company secretary and collected a vast and interesting set of memorabilia which was housed on a whole floor of the Powis Street Department store. When Ron left the Council housed the collection in various depots, but eventually most of it had to go. I was told that Rochdale museum wouldn't take much of the vast archive of written records - if that isn't true, please correct me.

Co-operation in Greenwich is not dead, despite the demise of RACS. We still have co-op shops and Royal Greenwich is a 'co-operative council (51 Labour-Co-op out of 60 majority members and 4 opposition). In the 1980s as Thatcher's policies decimated Greenwich industry and jobs so the Councils looked to new ways of creating jobs. In 1982 they set up Greenwich Employment Resource Unit which evolved into todays' Greenwich Co-operative Development Agency. Inevitably this organisation had its ups and downs, but it is very much still with us and currently achieving success after success, continuing to make the co-operative message count in Greenwich, and something we should all be proud of.

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I still have two RACS membership packs, one with unclaimed divi on it! I have rung up CWS to ask what I should do with them, but no one in Manchester had ever heard of RACS, after all it was in London, where co-ops, like heavy industry, apparently never existed!

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1945 and the forces vote

Norman Howard

Extracted from 'A New Dawn. The General Election of 1945' by Norman Howard published by Politico's Publishing in 2005. Norman, an occasional contributor to this bulletin and speaker at Labour Heritage meetings, died in 2023. Enquiries about the book can be addressed to martinhoward966@gmail.com

The first indication of the likely result of the 1945 General Election came from the votes of servicemen and women flown in from all theatres of war and counted in most parts of the country on Wednesday, 25 July – the day before the official count. The ballot papers arrived back in Britain, were sorted into constituencies and dispatched to constituency returning officers. Because service personnel were given a choice of either voting by post or appointing a proxy it was necessary for the returning officer to extract from the ballot boxes all the proxy votes which were printed on colored paper so as

the ensure the service voter had not voted twice.

Nearly 3 million service personnel were eligible to vote and the final number of those voting by proxy was 986,784 and 1,032,688 voted by post. The view has been expressed by several commentators that it was the service vote which decided whether there would be a Labour Government. Whilst there is evidence that many in the services did support Labour with their vote, the actual number of service personnel voting was just over 50 per cent and that figure included votes for all parties. The comparable figure among ordinary electors was 72 percent. Nevertheless, there is anecdotal evidence that a majority of servicemen and women voted Labour, but since this would have been spread over 640 constituencies it does somewhat take the gloss off the argument that were is not for those in the services, the nation would not have returned a Labour Government.

Sergeant George Wallace, the successful Labour candidate in Chislehurst commented, 'I should say about 90 percent of the forces vote was for me.' At his count when they were dealing with the service vote, they found a rifle bullet wrapped in a ballot paper. The returning officer awarded him the vote but not the bullet! Roy Jenkins who failed to win Solihull for Labour, stated, 'The forces vote was very strong. That's attributed to a great deal of educational work during the war, but educational work can't do all that much unless a mood is running in a certain direction.'

A former gunner in the Royal Artillery, Jack Goldberg, recalled the position in his regiment which was serving in northern Italy. 'The troops were puzzled by the system of voting which was not clear to the ordinary soldiers. Many men appointed their wives as proxies, but the wives never exercised their votes. In my own regiment the number who voted was almost certainly under a third.'

Under the provisions of the voting system that existed in 1945, only those people who were 21 years of age could vote. The call-up age for the services reached 18 so all people in the services between the ages of 18 and 21 did not have a vote; this would have represented a large number and is a further argument against the theory that a Labour Government was elected merely because of the service vote. In fact, the 1945 service vote was only 7 percent of the total votes cast.

Because of the technicalities of the election, servicemen abroad were at a disadvantage. Most did not have access to BBC radio nor were national newspapers widely circulated. Some army newspapers emerged, which tried to keep readers informed, but most troops were isolated from the election campaign. There is some evidence that many in service uniform who were based in the UK worked and assisted local Labour candidates when they were off duty although their vote would have been in another constituency. One newspaper report

stated the British troops in Berlin were heard to be chanting ‘Attlee…Attlee.’ The service vote was therefore important to the Labour Party, but it was not crucial. It formed part of the general swing towards the Party that existed in all sections of society.

One of the contributory factors in determining the way in which service people voted was the existence of educational schemes introduced to some extent to overcome the boredom of military life. Debates on major post-war policies took place in ‘mock parliaments,’ and educational circles, when those in the services began to understand for the first time the economic and social background to important strands of everyday life. The dividing line between education about current affairs and active political campaigning became difficult to measure when Leo Abse, who was later a Labour MP, was arrested in the Middle East for political activities whilst serving in the RAF in 1944. This precipitated a debate in parliament.

Although there was a strong full-time regular element in the services, the vast majority of servicemen and women were conscripts, and they came from all walks of life including people who were natural lecturers and teachers. In the Army there was the Army Bureau of Current Affairs (ABCA) staffed in many cases by people from the Workers Educational Association and similar adult education services who issued pamphlets and discussion documents on topical subjects every week. In addition to filling in the time between active service, these classes and pamphlets acted as morale boosters and informed service personnel what the war was about and how the peace could be won. These classes and seminars prompted service personnel to think for themselves. The political result of this activity is difficult to assess, and some critics claim it was a breeding ground for left-wing thought and action. Clearly a well-informed fighting force was desirable in itself, but almost certainly it clarified in many people’s minds the problems of the thirties and how Parliament had dealt with the issues. The next step from understanding the problem was to take some action and for most people the only step they could take was to use their vote.

Major Leonard Caplan, who was the Tory candidate in North Hammersmith, wrote, ‘What was not really appreciated until after the election was the effect many people believed the Army Bureau of Current Affairs had upon the soldiers vote because a large number of people who were manning ABCA, and who were responsible for the lectures on public affairs given to soldiers, were, in fact left wing’.

Lieutenant Willie Hamilton, who fought West Fife for Labour, recalled his army days: ‘I’d been attached to the Education Corps when the Beveridge Report came out. We talked about Beveridge, and I think the Army vote went almost solidly in favour of the Labour Party because we advocated

the implementation of Beveridge so far as the health service, national insurance and the rest were concerned. The military vote was normally a patriotic vote, but they'd had a basin full and they were determined we'd won the war and the only way to win the peace was to get a Labour government'.

The Liberal view was recalled by Lieutenant Basil Wigoder who fought the election at Bournemouth. He wrote: 'Part of my job was to be a lecturer in current affairs in the ABCA which involved trying to talk to the troops in as reasonably impartial way as any Liberal could, and one got a very strong feeling from them that they were pretty disillusioned with the Conservative Party as a whole and particularly with the days of appeasement and events before the war. The swing in that sense didn't surprise me but of course in my youthful naivete I thought we might get it rather than the Labour Party'.

Many in Whitehall and Parliament were fully aware of the influences of these service education schemes. Churchill at one point suggested they should be wound up and the Cabinet should have an official inquiry. But the very success of the schemes put them in a strong position to survive and though there was in 1943 an inquiry, Churchill took no further action on the subject.

Reginald Bridgeman and the 'Communist Solar System'

Barbara Humphries

In 1932 the Labour Party published a pamphlet entitled *The Communist Solar System*. It was an exposure of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) 's tactic of creating 'sympathising organisations' in order to avoid expulsions. It contained this quote from the Communist International:

We must create a whole solar system of organisations and smaller committees around the Communist Party ...smaller organisations working actually under the influence of our Party.

These, Labour claimed, were independent, but sympathetic to the Communist Party, and hostile to Labour and other socialist parties across Europe. In Germany the Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands had made common cause with the Nazis in elections, against what they called the 'Social Fascists' in the German Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands.

At least thirteen organisations were identified as part of this solar system, including the Minority Movement, the League Against Imperialism and several of its sister organisations, such as the Meerut Prisoners Release Committee and the Negro Welfare Association. Often these organisations operated out of the same address and there was much overlap between their

officers. Reginald Bridgeman for instance, who had connections with West London, had been a founder member of the League Against Imperialism in 1927. A former British Foreign Office Official, he was the grandson of an Earl who had decided to take a stance against British colonial rule. He was also secretary of Workers International Relief, and chairman of the Negro Welfare Association. The CPGB welcomed non-communists taking part in these organisations. James Maxton, leader of the ILP, for instance, had for a time been chairman of the League Against Imperialism, but he had been expelled from it in 1930, after having been denounced by Bridgeman and Sharpuri Saklatvala (former Labour MP for Battersea) 'for supporting the imperialist policies of the Labour Party in Britain.'

Reginald Bridgeman

Bridgeman was active in West London in support of the Meerut prisoners in India. Throughout 1930 he spoke at public meetings in Southall, Hayes, and Ealing Common in support of the Meerut prisoners, once with the chairman of the Uxbridge DLP, Frank Hall in December 1930.

In 1934 he addressed anti-fascist councils in Hayes and Uxbridge, explaining the class nature of fascism.

Bridgeman had been the Labour candidate for Uxbridge in 1929, and although he did not win the seat, he achieved a respectable number of votes, 16,422 to the Conservative's 17,770. This was the highest vote that Labour had ever achieved in this parliamentary division. This was the last time however that he was to contest the seat on behalf of the Labour Party. In December 1929 the Executive Committee (EC) of Uxbridge District Labour Party (DLP) received a letter from the Party HQ, stating that the League Against Imperialism was not eligible for affiliation to the Labour Party and therefore Bridgeman, who was its secretary, could no longer be its parliamentary candidate. There was still a lot of support for Bridgeman in Uxbridge. At a meeting of 85 delegates in January 1930, the EC report was referred back, with the request that no action be taken until Labour Party annual conference, where it was hoped, policy on the League Against Imperialism could be overturned. A local conference was held in Uxbridge in March 1930, attended by a member of Labour's National Committee (NC), who appealed for loyalty. The implication was that the Uxbridge DLP could face disaffiliation if it continued

with Bridgeman as its parliamentary candidate. In May 1930 the annual conference of Uxbridge Labour Party voted by 39 to 29 votes to support the National Committee. Strong support for this position had come from the National Union of Railwaymen, which was influential and provided substantial amounts of finance to the local party. However, the Uxbridge delegates were divided. Some wanted Bridgeman adopted at all costs, others wanted him to comply with the Labour Party constitution. Members of the ILP called for rejection of the NC's position. The DLP narrowly rejected a resolution to try to change Labour Party policy on the League Against Imperialism. (27-29). In September delegates passed a resolution which was very critical of the 1929-31 Labour Government. However, in November they elected a new candidate to replace Bridgeman, Mr Worsnop, who was to be heavily defeated in the October 1931 election.

Bridgeman stood as a Workers Candidate in Uxbridge in the 1931 General Election, sponsored by the Southall branch of League Against Imperialism. In an election in which National Government candidates won overwhelmingly, Bridgeman polled 2,358 votes, Labour candidate Worsnop polled 11,609 votes, and the Conservative 35,836. Bridgeman was to rejoin the Labour Party in 1937 when the League Against Imperialism had been wound up, and he became Labour's parliamentary candidate for Hendon. He was however expelled from Labour (for the final time) after supporting the Communist inspired Peoples' Convention in 1941. According to John Callaghan, Bridgeman was never an open member of the CPGB, but he always followed the line of the Communist International.

Uxbridge DLP backed down on selecting Bridgeman as its parliamentary candidate, but this did not stop the local party from supporting the activities of the League Against Imperialism and other organisations, which were linked to the Communist Party. In 1930 Southall and Uxbridge members supported a reception committee for the hunger marchers, although in many cases correspondence from the NUWM could not be discussed at Labour Party meetings.

By 1931 there was a Communist Party local (branch) in Southall, and groups of supporters in Hayes and Uxbridge. There continued to be local support for CPGB affiliation to the Labour Party, from the newly founded Labour Party branch in Northolt, where there was also support for Stafford Cripps, the Socialist League and the Unity Campaign. There was also support for affiliation from the Southall Trades Council and Labour Party, the Southall Co-op Political Council and several local trades union branches, including ASLEF and the Southall Brass and Metal Mechanics Union. When the National Committee of the Amalgamated Engineering Union adopted a resolution calling for the unity of working-class organisations, to go to Labour Party conference in 1936,

it was moved by a Mr. Stokes from Coventry and seconded by George Pargiter of the Southall branch. The Southall Labour League of Youth had close links with the Young Communist League, particularly on the issues of fighting fascism and aid for Spain. In Ealing a branch of the Left Book Club was launched. In September 1939 the *Daily Worker* reported Communist branches in Acton, Hayes, Greenford, Ealing, Southall, and Harrow.

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The Transport Salaried Staff's Association (TSSA)

Malcolm Wallace

The Transport Salaried Staffs' Association (TSSA) has been affiliated to the Labour Party since 1910, but this did not just come about from political debate; there was also a social dimension that exists to this day - the Socialist Fellowship.

The TSSA was established in 1897 as the National Association of General Railway Clerks; it became the Railway Clerks' Association (RCA) in 1899 and the TSSA in 1951. Politics was not an issue for its members in the Association's early years, and it is fair to say they were quite comfortable with the political status quo.

Their main concerns were pay, including payment for Sunday work, long working hours, compulsory overtime, and poor office accommodation. However, it is important to note that railway clerks had a pension, a rare benefit which they greatly valued. Indeed, some trade unionists said railway clerks were more concerned about their pensions than taking strike action for better pay and conditions.

It was not until the First World War, when the Association's Irish members came out on strike against conscription (Ireland was the only country to reject conscription), that a strike was an issue. Defence, not Defiance, was the Association's motto. The next strike was launched to obtain recognition

from the railway companies; this was during the politically charged atmosphere of 1919, but as the companies conceded just before it was due to start, only a few who did not receive the message set up picket lines. The RCA did, however, participate in the 1926 General Strike and received accolades for its organising and clerical abilities. For this, its members, particularly those in the supervisory grades, suffered for years. Their personnel files were also marked.

The Association's first President was a National Liberal, its second a Conservative MP, and all its Vice-Presidents were Liberals, Unionists or Conservatives, all of whom were relatively progressive on social issues, and some proved to be of considerable assistance to the RCA. Before the RCA launched its monthly magazine, the *Railway Clerk*, it used the *Railway Herald,* which was owned by a Conservative and had a Liberal as its editor. In 1901, the RCA's General Secretary, John Stopford-Challener, said, "Nothing is further from our intention than to dabble in politics or party creed." He and many others within the RCA began to move away from this position, but a motion to the 1903 Annual Conference seeking affiliation to the Labour Representation Committee was rejected. This came after a speech from an Executive Committee (EC) member and Liberal Councillor, Alexander Walkden, who said that the "time is not yet opportune." In due course, Walkden became the Association's General Secretary, a Labour MP and ended his political career as a Lord.

The EC adopted a neutral position on affiliation, and the RCA's new magazine, *The Railway Clerk*, was forbidden to express any party-political views. However, politics were slowly changing. When delegates met for the 1904 Conference, those who favoured affiliation were far from confident of victory, but delegates voted by 32 votes to 8 to affiliate. Members differed, with those in favour being 912 and those against 942. The 1906 Conference also voted to back affiliation but the members, once again, rejected it in a close vote of 2,006 being in favour and 2,440 against.

This defeat led to two members attempting to form a Socialist Fellowship within the RCA to encourage affiliation, but it failed to attract sufficient members until the dynamic George Ridley appeared on the scene. A member of the (Kings) Lynn branch, he was, at the age of twenty-two, the youngest delegate at the 1908 Annual Conference. He gathered together a small group of socialists, and the first meeting took place in Ridley's bedroom at a hotel in Birmingham. Its objective - to win the affiliation debate and the support of members.

It was the 'Osborne Judgement' a legal decision that threatened the future of the Labour Party, and one which the RCA opposed, that helped to change minds. Nevertheless, the Association was wary as it had been warned by its

solicitor that affiliation would be illegal. One member of the Socialist Fellowship, George Chandler, made a passionate speech against this advice, and he carried the day. This time, members agreed, and on 14 October 1909, it was declared that of the 5,443 who had voted, 4,296 were in favour, and 1,139 were against. Eight papers were spoilt. The EC, however, was reluctant to risk legal proceedings, and no action was taken. At the next Conference, two members of the Socialist Fellowship criticised the EC, but after delegates were told that no date had been set for affiliation, delegates supported the EC; the Socialist Fellowship had been defeated but only for a short period. In 1910, the EC, unexpectantly, agreed to affiliate to the Labour Party based on 9,000 members.

As for the Socialist Fellowship, it continued to hold its meetings, which, except for the First World War and from 1921 to 1935, have been held during the Association's Annual Conference. It has a President and Treasurer who their predecessor has always appointed. Its rules are few: no one can refuse a request from the President to contribute - no warnings are given, although the contributor decides the entertainment; they tend to be a poem, jokes, a song, playing an instrument, or politics, but on this, there is an important rule. During the early years, affiliation to the Labour Party was a matter of debate, but from then on, no one can raise an issue that is on the Conference agenda. The attendees have been historically on the left but not exclusively. Indeed, some General Secretaries, Presidents, and officials on the right of the Labour Party have made many contributions. For over forty years, annual souvenirs of the Socialist Fellowship have become the norm, and many delegates treasure their badges, mugs, candlesticks, and keyrings. It is a great night that concludes with the Red Flag and the Internationale.

As for George Ridley, who had formed the Socialist Fellowship, he is remembered at every meeting. Sadly, his life was short; he became a senior negotiator for the RCA and was editor of the *Railway Clerk* from 1937 to 1944. Ridley was the MP for Clay Cross from 1936-1944 and, for two years, Private Parliamentary Secretary to Arthur Greenwood. He served on Labour's National Executive Committee from 1936-1944 and was its chairman when he died, aged 57, on 3 January 1944. Among those who attended his funeral was the Deputy Prime Minister, Clement Atlee.

John Stopford-Challener was the first RCA member to be approved as a prospective candidate, and he stood on behalf of the LRC to be a Councillor in Doncaster in 1903. He lost twice, but undaunted, he offered to stand in any parliamentary constituency as a candidate for the LRC. The Association's peak representation in the House of Commons was in 1951 when 19 of its members were elected to the House of Commons, of which ten were official candidates. Its first members were elected to Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann in 1922.

Bursary appeal update, Caroline Needham, Labour Heritage

Labour Heritage has established an annual bursary at Birkbeck College in memory of Stan Newens, our past chair, and Linda Shampan, our past secretary.

As a volunteer with West London Welcome, a project in Hammersmith run for and with refugees, migrants and people seeking asylum, I experience the thirst for education amongst the people I meet. Schemes like Birkbeck's meet this need. I feel a renewed sense of the importance of Labour Heritage continuing to support the Birkbeck project. Please support this year's appeal.

Birkbeck is proud to be a place of sanctuary for students. The college was awarded the 'University of Sanctuary Status' in recognition of its work with forced migrant communities. In a climate that has recently placed severe restrictions on the lives of people from refugee backgrounds study is only possible if there is access to funds from donations.

Birkbeck College continues to impress with the level of support given to students. We aim to raise £3,000 to provide a bursary for one student, enabling them to afford the costs of study and empowering them to thrive.

Cheques can be made payable to 'Labour Heritage' – please write 'Bursary appeal' on the back of cheque – post to Labour Heritage at 11 Aylmer Road, London W12 9LG Reference 'Bursary'

Payments can also be made by bank transfer to Labour Heritage, Unity Trust Bank – **Sort Code: 608301**. Account Number: **20149763**

Funds to be submitted in October 2025

'My desire to work in the medical field resulted from my experience of growing up in Syria, along with my interest and aptitude for science. I passionately want to help individuals suffering from disease or injury. The tragedies I witnessed during the war gave me a better perception of how working in the medical field makes a significant difference to people's lives, and I volunteered in an emergency department in a local hospital in Syria during the war.

[Arriving in the UK] as a refugee, I had to adapt to an unfamiliar environment, learn a new language and integrate with a new community. It was not an easy journey. But Birkbeck was made for me. It has all the modules useful in real life - not only as basic knowledge. I am enjoying every bit of it so far. Receiving this bursary would help a student focus much more on their studies and worry less about financial issues. *'Aisha' [name anonymised]*

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