

Labour Heritage



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The League of Nations Union and the Labour Party

John H. Grigg

100 years ago the first meeting of the Council of the League of Nations took place in London in February 1920 and the establishment of the League was supported by the Labour Party in its 1918 election manifesto. There was cross party and church support for the League and the League of Nations Union (LNU) was formed in 1918 and local branches were established across the country. There was, however, some left wing opposition to the League variously based upon it being a 'capitalist club', Russia (Soviet Union) not being invited to join, and faith that a united international working class movement being a better guarantee of peace than a gathering of nation states.

LEAGUE OF NATIONS



By: Bria Morgan
December 4, 2007

SOCIETE DES NATIONS

Here are reports on two speeches made at LNU branches in West London.

The first is a speech by Oswald Mosley at the inaugural League of Nations Union meeting in Acton in December 1919. Mosley, who later founded the British Union of Fascists in 1932, was the 21 year old Conservative MP for Harrow, having won the seat at the December 1918 General Election. He said the alternative to the League of Nations was another war which owing to the advance of scientific inventions could cause unparalleled devastation, plunge the world into devastation and end civilisation as we know it. Nations should submit themselves to the process of law and replace secret treaties by acknowledging mutual obligations. As a pilot in the war he knew of the terrible engines of destruction that were in preparation.

Mosley was trained as a pilot with the Royal Flying Corps but crashed his plane whilst demonstrating his flying prowess to his mother at Shoreham Airport in 1915. He broke an ankle and could no longer fly so served in the Western Front trenches until the injury forced him into a desk job in 1916.

The gathering in Acton included representatives of the churches and 'also a small knot of Labour men and women whose attitudes were unfriendly with regard to the sincerity of the movement.'

Two local speakers from the platform ‘deprecatd the suggestion that it [the League of Nations] was a capitalist organisation – something presumably alleged by one of the ‘small knot of Labour men and women.’

It was agreed to form a branch of the Union in Acton although the Labour representatives voted against. A secretary could not be immediately found but the branch subsequently met regularly and formed various study groups.

John R. Clynes MP

The other meeting I want to mention, organised by the Chiswick League of Nations Union in November 1920, was attended by hundreds of people at the Chiswick Empire and it was addressed by the Rt Hon John R Clynes MP, Labour MP for Manchester North East since 1906. Clynes came into the labour movement as a Gas Workers’ Union organiser in Lancashire. He was leader of the Labour Party 1921-1922 and Home Secretary in Ramsay MacDonald’s 1929-1931 government. He lost his seat in 1931 but returned in 1935 and finally retired from the House of Commons in 1945. He died in 1949.



He said “The League of Nations could not succeed without the backing of a great world opinion on the side of the spirit and

purpose of the League. This meeting is one of many efforts designed to create that public opinion.”

“Here at home we have bitter troubles – unemployment, high prices, currency difficulties, housing problems which we would like to settle, but can never be permanently settled until we have world peace.”

“There is no living sane man capable of believing in war (a woman’s voice from the audience “Churchill does”) “I was referring to a sane man.” (loud laughter and applause.)

The woman in the audience was referring to the war between Russia and Poland. Poland, re-established as a republic after the war, invaded Russia claiming that a part of Ukraine should be within Poland’s borders. Russia counter attacked and got as far as the borders of Warsaw. Britain was backing Poland and supplying it with munitions and the government became alarmed that the Red Army might reach the German frontier and expand its Bolshevism into Germany and beyond. There were reports that Whitehall was considering intervention and the Minister for War, Winston Churchill, favoured sending troops. The Labour Party and the Trades Union Congress vigorously opposed intervention. Britain’s concern was solved by the Polish army counter attacking and pushing the Red Army back into the Ukraine. There was a ceasefire and at the Peace of Riga the disputed territory was divided between Poland and Russia. 100,000 men were killed in this war and a greater number wounded.

Clynes continued by referring to three difficulties facing the League of Nations – the American withdrawal from the League, Russia’s exclusion and France’s determination to severely punish Germany

for the War. Earlier in his speech he had said that the League was an imperfect and unfinished instrument and they were trying to make it fit to deal with problems that kept men and women as enemies living in a state of war. He was not there to apologise for the League as it was, but to defend it as he wished it to be. Germany could be made to pay every farthing of the financial losses but “whatever else you may make Germany do you cannot make him send back to a British home a single one of the young men who lie in the graves of soldiers in a foreign land.”

“We were told the sure way to maintain peace was to prepare for war ...there was never a more mischievous or shallow doctrine ...they had made ready for war but it did not bring peace.”

“There could never be any guarantee of world peace without the world’s democracies making known their determination not to have war, and putting into operation the great international machinery known as the League of Nations.”

“As a Labour man I am told the only guarantee we can get for world peace was international working class solidarity. That was why I did my best to create international working class opinion. But Labour governments all over the world would be no guarantee for peace. Labour and Socialists were as capable of quarrelling as well as others and indeed there were such unhappy differences even now.”

He concluded his speech by saying all classes have a common interest. “When the dogs of war are loosed and all had to do their share and bear the burden of it. Let all classes join together and work for the holy cause – the League of Nations.”

What was noticeable from the local newspaper reports about the meetings was the number of clergymen and also prominent Liberal members and councillors who were present. I could not find a single known local Labour name involved. The first president of the union was Sir Edward Grey, the Liberal Foreign Secretary before and during the 1914-18 war. He was succeeded in 1920 by Viscount Robert Cecil. His father was Lord Salisbury, the former Conservative Prime Minister. Cecil was a Conservative MP but at odds with his party over the issue of free trade and in 1920 was exploring the possibility of forming a new anti-Lloyd George Coalition and anti-Socialist Party to be led by Sir Edward Grey consisting of ‘the best of the Liberal and Labour People and some of the old land-owning Tories’.

The League of Nations Union (LNU) has been described as ‘a key Liberal pressure group on foreign policy and it also ‘largely consisted of Asquithian Liberals’

I suspect that local Labour parties’ misgivings about joining LNU branches had much to do with the LNU’s association with the Liberal Party. At national level the party supported the League of Nations in its 1918 and 1922 general election manifestos, but how close the Labour Party at national level was to the LNU, bearing in mind its association with the Liberal Party, needs further investigation.

Sources: *Acton Gazette*, *Chiswick Times* 1920. Also (of course Wikipedia), Frank McDonough, *Neville Chamberlain. Appeasement and the British Road to War* (Manchester University Press, 1988), George W Egerton, *Great Britain and the Creation of the League of Nations* (University of Northern Carolina Press, 1978), Maurice Cowling. *The Impact of Labour 1920-24: The Beginning of Modern British Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 1971).

Arthur Creech Jones: From East Dulwich to Africa

Duncan Bowie

Arthur Creech Jones lived in East Dulwich before the First World War and founded both the Camberwell branch of the Independent Labour Party and the Camberwell Trades and Labour Council. In his political career, he had two main interests – workers' education and colonial self-government. He served first as Under-Secretary of State and then as Colonial Minister in the post-war Labour government, from 1945 to 1950 and has been regarded as the founder of the modern Commonwealth. This article focuses on his later political career. Creech Jones is one of the least known members of Attlee's cabinet.

Early Years



Creech Jones was born in Bristol in 1891. Having passed the civil service junior clerk's examination, he moved to London in January 1907 to work as a clerk in the War Office. Known as Arthur Jones (adding the middle name of 'Creech' later), he lived at 46 Keston Road near Goose Green, Dulwich, lodging with relatives, the Tidman family. He appears to have been a Methodist, joining the Liberal Christian League. He was secretary of the Dulwich branch of the League of

Progressive Thought and Services and also joined the London Egyptian Debating Society. In 1910, he became lecture secretary for the Liberal Christian League study group.

Jones was secretary of the Dulwich Independent Labour Party (ILP) from 1912 to 1916 and of the Camberwell Trades Council from 1913 to 1922. The Dulwich ILP was based at Hansler Hall in Hansler Road, off Lordship Lane. Jones organised anti-conscription meetings for the ILP. A member of the No Conscription Fellowship and the South London Federal Council against Conscription, he was an absolute pacifist. He applied to join the Society of Friends (Quakers) ambulance unit but in September 1916 he was court martialled and sentenced to six months hard labour, which he served in Wormwood Scrubs, not being released until April 1919. Having lost his civil service post, he did some research for the Labour Party on prison conditions before being appointed organising secretary of the Docks, Wharfs and Shipping Staffs Union, of which Charles Ammon (later MP for Camberwell and Baron Ammon), London County Council member for Camberwell, ILP'er and leading member of the No Conscription Fellowship, was secretary. This union, originating in the Port of London Authority staff association, was in 1922 incorporated into the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU). He therefore became a colleague of Ernest Bevin the union's general secretary, who was to become his political mentor. In July 1920, Creech Jones married Violet May Tidman, a second cousin with whose family he had been lodging. Creech Jones was elected to the London Labour Party Committee in 1921. The TGWU sent him to the Ruhr with Ben Tillett (the veteran trade unionist and TGWU international and political secretary) in 1923 to report on the effect of the French occupation of the Ruhr on the workers.

Interest in Africa

Creech Jones' interest in Africa apparently originated in being inspired by the campaigns of Edmund Morel and Roger Casement against colonial atrocities in the Congo. In 1925 he was asked to help Clements Kadalie, who had established a union for black workers in South Africa, the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU). He commented later that : “ I felt that the struggle of the African workers in South Africa could be helped by a type of organisation which had contributed so much to the making of British democracy....”. He had been in contact with Winifred Holtby (the subject of Vera Britain's *Testament of Friendship* and later the author of *South Riding*) who was an active feminist and member of the ILP, who had visited South Africa and who had contacts with liberals there. Holtby had already been seeking to obtain funds and books for ICU libraries through the ILP's *New Leader* paper. Holtby had asked the ILP's Noel Brailsford to support the ICU and then approached Creech Jones. Kadalie also wrote to Creech Jones Kadalie and then visited London to seek support. Holtby acted as host and the ILP's imperialism committee, which included Creech Jones and Fenner Brockway, the ILP secretary who also had a lifelong interest in Africa, organised a promotional tour of England. Kadalie also attended the TUC conference as a visitor, though his request for delegate status was turned down on the grounds that the ICU was not affiliated to the (white) South African Trade Union Congress. Holtby and Creech Jones set up a fund to send a British trade unionist to South Africa to help Kadalie. A trade unionist from Motherwell was selected -William Ballinger. Holtby in fact supported the fund from the sales of her African novel *Mandoa Mandoa!* Kadalie and Ballinger however soon fell out though, Ballinger stayed in South Africa supporting the African National Congress, serving in the

Senate between 1948 and 1960 as a representative of Africans in the Transvaal and the Orange Free State (Africans not themselves being allowed to sit in the parliament), while his wife Margaret Ballinger also sat in parliament and became a vice-president of Alan Paton's Liberal Party.



Arthur Creech Jones dressed as a Yoruba Chief in Lagos, 1944

Workers' Education

Creech Jones also had an interest in workers' education, becoming a governor of Ruskin College, in Oxford, in 1923 and was an active member of the Workers Education Association, which in 1928 published his handbook *Trade Unionism Today*, widely used in the colonies. He unsuccessfully contested the Heywood and Radcliffe parliamentary constituency in Lancashire in the 1929 election. Creech Jones had been involved in the Workers Travel Association since 1921, and in 1929, following his failure to get into Parliament, left the TGWU to take up the post of WTA organising secretary. He was to lead trade unionist delegations to most countries in Europe and also visited Palestine. Through the WTA, he was later to direct the emergency rescue of hundreds of Czechoslovakian socialists and Jews by train, ship, and aeroplane from Prague after Chamberlain signed the Munich

Agreement in 1938.

Creech Jones became involved in the New Fabian Research Bureau established by GDH Cole and, with the fall of the Labour Government in 1931, Creech Jones joined the Socialist League, a Labour left group established by Stafford Cripps, which involved a number of Fabians and ILPers, though his association with the League was brief. With the ILP being disaffiliated from the Labour Party in 1932, Creech Jones left the ILP, focused his involvement in the Labour Party and was selected to stand for Shipley in Yorkshire in the 1935 General Election. On election to Parliament, Creech Jones joined the Labour Party's committee on imperial questions, also joining the Colonial Office's advisory committee on education in the colonies. He had been a member of the Fabian Society executive committee since 1925. In 1940 he helped to found the Fabian Colonial Bureau, which was to be the main focus of his political activity until 1945, when he became a Minister. Creech Jones also helped to set up a Trades Union Congress colonial affairs committee in 1937. Together with the Fabian Colonial Bureau secretary, Rita Hinden, he became the leading supporter of African nationalists and advocate of both colonial self-government and native education in the colonies as well as a constructive critic of British colonial policy under the succession of wartime coalition government colonial ministers, Malcolm Macdonald, Lord Lloyd, Lord Moyne, Viscount Cranborne and Oliver Stanley. He campaigned against the suppression of African associations in Kenya. In 1942, he argued that "There must be a recognition of Africans' rights and status. There must be a big drive in social services, in education and in economic development. We must also associate the African in the administration of local government. We should nationalise the mineral resources of these areas. We should redistribute the land and there should be planned

development of smaller industries...." Despite being a critic of government colonial policy, Creech Jones served as vice-chairman of the Government's commission on higher education in the colonies, visiting Africa with the chairman, the Conservative MP, Walter Elliott. This led to the publication by the Government of a report on *Mass Education in African Society* in 1943. In 1945 he contributed the introduction to *Fabian Colonial Essays*, edited by Rita Hinden, as well as writing an essay on the need for an accelerated policy of social reconstruction in the colonial empire.

Parliamentary Career

Between 1940 and 1944, Creech Jones was PPS to Ernest Bevin, Minister of Labour in the Wartime Coalition. With the election of a Labour government in August 1945, Creech Jones was appointed Under-secretary of State in the Colonial Office, with George Hall as Minister. In promoting the Colonial Development and Welfare Bill in Parliament, Creech Jones acknowledged that the Labour government was aiming at 'the liquidation of colonial status', commenting that: "I doubt if any imperial power has ever before embarked upon a policy of deliberately disintegrating its Empire." In August 1946, Hall was given a peerage and Creech Jones was promoted to the cabinet position, which he held until his defeat in the 1950 General Election. In this role, Creech Jones focused his attention on the social and economic development of the colonies, preparing them for self-government and with a continuing focus on the role of education. In 1948, he published a report on *Education for Citizenship in Africa*. He established the Colonial Development Corporation (later renamed the Commonwealth Development Corporation) to support agricultural development in the colonies. The independence of India and Ceylon threatened the continuation of the

Commonwealth as an institution, but Creech Jones managed the transition of the organisation to a voluntary federation of independent countries and self-governing colonies. He chaired the first conference of the West Indian Federation in 1947 and then the London conference of African colonies held at Lancaster House in 1948. His memorandum on local government issued in 1948 confirmed the government's intention gradually to transform indirect rule to responsible government. The Fabian Colonial Bureau published in 1947 a pamphlet by Creech Jones outlining the Labour Government's colonial policy.

On leaving parliament, Creech Jones continued to use the Fabian Colonial Bureau to promote colonial self-government. In 1951 he published a pamphlet on the *Future of the African Colonies* and in 1959 he edited the *Fabian New Colonial Essays*, contributing a positive review of the Labour government's colonial policy and achievements. He also worked with the Anti-Slavery Society and the more radical Africa Bureau established by Rev Michael Scott. He was active in the opposition to the Central African Federation (which federated Northern and Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland under white leadership) and supported Seretse Khama of Bechuanaland, who was exiled from his country by the incoming Conservative Government in 1951. Creech Jones failed to get re-elected to parliament in 1951, this time standing in Romford, but succeeded in fighting a by-election in Wakefield in 1954. He retired from parliament in August 1964 on the grounds of ill-health and died two months later. In his final years he continued to visit many Commonwealth countries, many of which were attaining independence, often as a delegate from the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. He was a vice president of the Workers Education Association as well as involved in the Oxford based Institute for Commonwealth

Studies. He was also on the committees of the Ramblers Association and the Youth Hostels Association, having piloted the Access to Mountains Act through parliament in 1939 as a private members bill.

As Patricia Pugh's biographical entry in the Dictionary of National Biography comments, Creech Jones "was unimpressive in appearance; he was not a brilliant or witty speaker, but he was one whom the House of Commons greatly respected for his knowledge, integrity, and sincerity." It may be appropriate to leave the last word to Ernest Bevin, trade union leader and Foreign Secretary who on Creech Jones losing his seat in the 1950 election wrote to his former cabinet colleague :

" Looking back over the history of colonial development, I do not think anyone has a greater record – the constitutional changes you have carried through, the development of education, the promotion of universities, the constant attention you have given to economic development, the way you have applied your mind to the problems of soil erosion and transport. If only it had been done long ago. What a different world it would have been!"



Empire was published by the Fabian Colonial Bureau

James Parker (1863-1948): MP for Halifax, 1906-1918, and for Cannock Chase, 1918-1923

Alice Mahon (MP for Halifax 1987-2005)

James Parker was elected as the first Labour Member of Parliament for Halifax in the 1906 landslide and took his seat as a member of the first Parliamentary Labour Party. Born at Awthorpe, near Louth, Lincolnshire, on 9 December 1863, the son of a farm labourer, his mother died when he was three. Despite this, he described his childhood as a happy one saying ‘for though I lost my mother at three years of age my sister filled her place with loving care for me, and as I was the youngest member of a family often, I was petted and spoilt. I was soon able to walk the two miles to the day school, a small one-roomed building where about 30 boys and girls were taught together the three “Rs”. When I was ten years old fate took a hand. With my sister we visited the West Riding, coming to Carlton near Yeadon. There she found a lover, and in a few months they were married. I was with them so Yorkshire has sheltered me for about 70 years’. He went to live with his sister at Carlton, near Leeds, where he then had a three mile walk to Bramhope School.

After leaving school, Parker worked successively as a greengrocer’s assistant, doctor’s groom, milkman and barman. Throughout all this time he studied science and art at Guiseley and Yeadon’s Mechanics Institute where, in his own words, he ‘passed out of the elementary stage reasonably well’. When he was 19 he came to Halifax and found work as a labourer with the Halifax Corporation, moving on to work as a packer and warehouseman for Blakey and Emmett, electrical engineers.

It is widely acknowledged that he learned his debating skills when he joined the Brunswick Church Mutual Improvement Society. He later acknowledged that it was at this time that he really began to learn, read extensively and debate with others, particularly on social matters. Not surprisingly, he soon became interested in politics and his first acquaintance with the principles of socialism dated from 1890 when he joined the local branch of the Fabian Society.

Parker was an early member of the Independent Labour Party and became the paid secretary of the Halifax branch of the ILP in 1895. So just twelve years after settling in Halifax he had begun to work full time organising and recruiting members for the new party. In this he was extremely successful and the party grew beyond expectations. He was later to become a member of the ILP Administration Council and of the Labour Representation Committee.

As an early pioneer of the labour movement, he had contact with Keir Hardie, Tom Mann, Philip Snowden and others. The *Halifax Courier* reported that he was a experienced election agent helping such pioneers in the labour movement as Pete Curran in Barnsley, Keir Hardie in a by-election in East Bradford, and Robert Smillie in North East Lanark. He also helped Tom Mann and was election agent to Philip Snowden in a by-election at Wakefield.

Local Government

However, in Halifax he is remembered for early public service. In 1897, after a few unsuccessful attempts, he was elected to the Halifax Council for the Northern ward. Of the so called ‘khaki’ general election of 1900 he said: ‘Those were the days of fighting the slums. Shall I ever forget

them? Days of greater freedom and responsibility sitting lightly on my shoulders. I was well known to the police, but never got locked up though I often broke the law in chalking notices on the pavement'. Parker was adopted as the parliamentary candidate for Halifax in a four-cornered fight in which he not only lost but came bottom of the poll.

Later he was to become the chairman of the Waterworks Committee, a powerful position. It was during his chairmanship that major progress was made in building some of the beautiful reservoirs that surround Halifax. He was still the chairman of this committee when, in 1906, he was elected on his second attempt as the first Labour MP for Halifax. Although not born in Yorkshire, James Parker was an expert on Yorkshire and its industries. Whatever differences that were later to develop between Parker and some of his ILP colleagues, he was widely respected by the general public in Halifax for his commitment public services in the town.

Interestingly, the local paper reported in 1907 that 'Mr James Parker MP expresses himself as heartily in favour of the scheme for a Channel Tunnel' on the grounds that 'Anything which helps to facilitate the interchange of commerce, which tends towards bringing closer touch the peoples of Europe, makes for peace and progress'.

Free School Meals Act

Parker served jointly as the Member for Halifax with Mr J.P. Whitley until 1918 when with the revision of seats, Halifax became a single member constituency. On his re-election to Parliament in 1910 Parker introduced a Bill to amend the Education (Provision of Meals) Act, the amendment aimed to make provision for poor children during school holidays. This was needed because the Government

Auditor had surcharged members of the local council Education Committee for the expenditure on food for children during the holidays.

In 1917 he became Junior Lord of the Treasury (a Whip). It was at this time that the War Savings Certificate came into being and he claimed to have introduced the idea to government. It was also during this period that he became a more establishment figure and left the ILP. Politics entered into this decision as, like number of Labour MPs, he put party considerations on hold and devoted his energies into recruiting and urging support of the war loans. Along with his colleagues, he had opposed the Military Services Bill at all stages, but unlike them he became an enthusiastic worker for voluntary recruiting. This almost certainly alienated him from some of his local party activists and led to him refusing the nomination for the Halifax seat in 1918. Activists in the party both national and local had not agreed with Parker either on his support for the War, nor his acceptance of ministerial office. This dissatisfaction came to a head locally when the selection committee of the Halifax Trades and Labour Council said they would only nominate him if he signed an undated signed resignation letter to leave with them when they nominated him. This he refused to do saying 'I hope to find another constituency where Labour can at least trust a man who has always followed the decisions of the majority of his party'. A year earlier the National Administrative Council of the ILP had decided that it would no longer recognise him as an ILP MP. This must have been trying for a past ILP full-timer, and past President of both the Gas Worker's and General Labourers' Society, and of the local Trades and Labour Council.

Within his constituency, however, his work was recognised and appreciated and in November 1918 he was presented with the freedom of the borough of Halifax, becoming the last person ever to receive this honour. In the same year his work was recognised nationally and he was made a Companion of Honour.

In 1918 Parker stood as the Labour candidate for Cannock Chase and returned to Parliament. He was for a period the vice-chair of the party, and then Chief Whip, acting as Leader when Ramsay MacDonald was in India.

Membership Drive

During the war Parker had embarked on a countrywide recruitment campaign for the Labour Party and was held in high esteem by the leadership. It should be remembered at the outbreak of the First World War the Labour Party's structure was still very weak, with very few individual members. Membership was mainly based on affiliations through trade unions and the socialist societies. This meant that Parker's recruitment drive for members was a great help to a party that needed people on the ground if they were to succeed when organising elections.

The immediate post war years were difficult for the Labour Party, great ideological differences opened up and it was claimed that in the end the party had become all things to all men. In 1923 Parker stood as an Independent against Labour and Liberal opponents, he lost the seat and stood down from public life. It is a measure of his affection for Halifax that he continued to live in Halifax, at Chester Road in Boothtown. His marriage had broken down but on retirement he and his wife were reconciled and he was grief stricken when in 1933 she died.

In his later years he continued to write articles on many subjects for the *Halifax Courier and Guardian*. He was often called upon to take part in civic occasions. A keen bowler, he joined the Akroydon Bowling Club where he had many friends.

On 11 February 1948, the *Halifax Courier and Guardian* reported the death of James Parker thus: 'Mr James Parker, C. H. dies at age of 84. The only surviving Freeman of Halifax, a former member of Halifax Town Council and for many years a Labour MP, died at his home, 14 Chester Road, Halifax. Mr Parker leaves one son'.

This article was originally printed in a collection of biographies of the first 29 Labour MPs published for the centenary of the Labour Party in 2006. Haworth, A. and Hayter, D. *Men Who Made Labour* (London, 2006).



James Parker was elected as one of 29 Labour MPs in 1906

Tom Braddock: a Left-wing Maverick during the Cold War

Jonathan Wood

In the General Election of July 1945, the Labour Party won many seats previously regarded as Tory strongholds. One of these was Mitcham in Surrey where the Labour candidate Tom Braddock was victorious. Braddock's parliamentary career was a brief one which ended with his defeat in the 1950 General Election. He remained a backbencher throughout his time in Parliament but became known for his outspoken criticism of government policy, especially its foreign and defence policy, and for his prominent role in the journal *Socialist Outlook* and the leftist group Socialist Fellowship. Braddock was a maverick who refused to accept party orthodoxy and his reputation as a left-wing rebel prompted party officials to prevent him becoming a parliamentary candidate in the 1950s.

Tom Braddock's Early Life and Career as an Architect

Tom Braddock was born in 1887, the son of Henry William Braddock, a civil engineer, and was educated at Rutlish school in Merton. He pursued a career as an architect and eventually qualified as a Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects (R.I.B.A.). His work as an architect included the design of war memorials in Dundee and Dorking.

Braddock settled in Wimbledon. In 1930, the William Morris Meeting Rooms, a labour movement community centre for local people in Wimbledon and Merton, chose Braddock as the architect to design their new hall, which was named William Morris Hall. Braddock's contribution is commemorated by a meeting room called the Tom Braddock Room in the William Morris Meeting Rooms at William Morris House in Wimbledon



Wimbledon Labour Hall (William Morris House)

Tom Braddock's Political Activities before 1945

In a speech to Labour Party Conference, Braddock claimed he became a socialist at the age of eighteen. In 1918 he joined the Labour Party. He was elected to Surrey County Council in 1934 and remained a County Councillor until 1946 and he was a member of Wimbledon Borough Council from 1936 to 1945. He also stood as the Labour parliamentary candidate in Wimbledon, which was then a strongly Conservative constituency. He was decisively defeated in the 1929 General Election and in the 1931 General Election, when Labour suffered the most disastrous electoral defeat in its history, the Conservative winner received almost 30,000 more votes than Braddock. Braddock contested Wimbledon again in 1935 and was again unsuccessful. During the Second World War, Braddock was employed by the Ministry of Labour in the early stages of the conflict as an inspector of building labour supplies. Later in the war, he worked for the Ministry of Works at the War Damage Commission.

Tom Braddock's Victory in Mitcham in 1945

In the 1945 General Election, Tom Braddock stood as the Labour candidate in the Tory-held constituency of Mitcham. In his election address Braddock expressed his sympathies with Russia - 'Russia is unpopular with big business cartels and monopolies and with the Tory Government. It is only natural that it should be so. Russia is not run for the profit-makers'. Pro-Russian sentiments were widespread in the British labour movement in 1945 but unlike many in the Labour Party whose views changed Braddock retained sympathy for the Soviet Union during the Cold War and opposed the Labour Government's anti-communist policies in the late 1940s.

In the 1945 General Election, Labour achieved a remarkable victory in Mitcham when Braddock won a large majority over the Conservative incumbent.

Result of the 1945 General Election in Mitcham

Tom Braddock (Labour) 26,910, 57.68%

Malcolm Robertson (Conservative) 19,742, 42.32%

Tom Braddock in Parliament

In his maiden speech in the House of Commons in November 1945 Tom Braddock said:

'This country cannot continue unless enormous changes are made' and his speeches and voting record demonstrated his commitment to radical change. In a debate on the Town and Country Planning Bill in 1947, he revealed his belief that Parliament would have to enact the nationalisation of the land. Braddock was forthright in his criticisms of government measures which he felt benefitted the well-off at the expense of ordinary working people. In 1949, Braddock spoke against a

reduction in the tax on bonus shares which he argued enriched affluent shareholders when poor people had a much greater need for extra cash.

Braddock viewed the Conservatives with deep distrust and rejected any form of bipartisan co-operation with the Tory Opposition. In one of his speeches he said he never entered the Division Lobby when 'Members of the Government Front Bench and Right Hon Gentlemen opposite have been mixed up together . . . my feet just will not carry me into the same lobby as that occupied by Opposition members.' Braddock was extremely suspicious of the Conservatives and the business interests who backed them as he made clear in a Commons Debate in November 1949. 'I have never been able to trust the hon.gentlemen opposite and gentlemen of their type in any part of the world'

Criticism of the Government's Foreign and Defence Policy

Disagreements over foreign policy and defence produced Labour's most serious internal disputes in the period between 1945 and 1951. As the Cold War intensified, Braddock's outspokenly critical comments on the Government's foreign and defence policy were the main reason for his increasingly antagonistic relationship with Labour Party's officials. Braddock was a persistent critic of government defence policy. In October 1946 the Commons debated government proposals for a Central Organisation for Defence. During this debate, Braddock, referring to the well-known adage that attack is the best form of defence, claimed that this would be a Central Attacking, not a Central Defence, Organisation and maintained that rearmament would not protect the British people. He deplored the fact that this proposal was being debated while the United Nations was beginning its first meetings, arguing that safety could only be ensured through cooperation with other nations in an international

organisation. Braddock opposed peacetime conscription and voted against the government measure which extended the length of National Service from 12 to 18 months.

In a Commons debate on the size of Britain's land forces in March 1949, Braddock repeated the objections he made in 1946, arguing these policies were not preparation for defensive measures but for military aggression and that major rearmament would not maintain peace but increase the risk of war. He speculated that arms manufacturers might be promoting the discussion of possible war to further their business interests. The fact that the Prime Minister kept the Leader of the Opposition informed about the government's military measures but withheld this information from Labour backbenchers disturbed Braddock who believed this consultation with the Opposition leader was evidence that Britain's involvement in the arms race would lead to a coalition government.

In June 1949, in a debate on an Auxiliary and Reserve Forces Bill, Braddock argued no preparations had been made to defend the British people against military attack and that Parliament was deceiving the people by encouraging them to believe that the Government's measures could defend Britain's population. He also opposed Britain's close relationship with the United States. In a letter to another left-wing M.P., Tom Driberg, in 1948, he wrote: 'I am personally against recognising the need for American aid'. One of the most influential group of Labour Left critics, the Keep Left group, advocated a democratic socialist Western Europe, a 'Third Force' independent of both the Soviet Union and the United States. Braddock's perspective differed from that of Keep Left in being more sympathetic to the Soviet Union.

The Nenni Telegram

In 1948, Braddock was involved in the most serious confrontation between the Labour leadership and left-wing backbenchers since the Labour Government took office in 1945. The conflict resulted from a telegram which left-wing Labour MPs sent to Pietro Nenni, leader of the main faction of the Italian Socialist Party, wishing their Italian comrades success in the impending Italian general election, The Nenni Telegram, as it came to be known, originated at a meeting of left-wing MPs in Braddock's Wimbledon flat which had met to organise opposition to the Government's pro-American, anti-communist foreign policy.

Nenni and the section of the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) which he led had formed an alliance with the Italian Communist Party. An anti-communist faction of the PSI, led by Giuseppe Saragat had broken away and formed a separate party. The Labour Government, strongly opposed to Communists and their allies, withdrew recognition from Nenni and the PSI and supported Saragat's anti-communist group.

The Nenni Telegram challenged the Government's foreign policy. Morgan Phillips, Labour's General Secretary, wrote to the MPs who had signed the telegram and Herbert Morrison made it clear that any signatories who did not disavow their support for the telegram would face disciplinary action. Fifteen of the 37 MPs who had signed dissociated themselves from the telegram.

Braddock was one of the signatories who refused to recant and he chaired a meeting of those who still supported the telegram to decide what to do. Those unrepentant signatories received a letter from Phillips warning them of disciplinary action if they did not withdraw their signatures and agree not to defy Labour policy in the future. On 26 April 1948, the 21 Labour MPs who

had not dissociated themselves from the telegram sent a collective reply. This failed to satisfy Phillips and the Party leadership and Phillips told the group that unless they each individually gave an undertaking to refrain from organised opposition to official Party policy they would be expelled from the Labour Party. The decision to expel John Platts-Mills, regarded as one of the main organisers of the Nenni Telegram, confirmed the seriousness of this threat.

The 21 left-wing MPs met and decide to publish their letter to Phillips. At the end of this meeting, Braddock issued a statement: 'We feel that it is wrong that a letter should be written to the press referring to a letter of ours without our letter being available. The letter from the General Secretary describes our letter as 'unacceptable'. 'We therefore feel the public should know its content.' The group selected twelve of their number, including Braddock, to prepare a draft reply to Phillips.

Phillips had demanded individual replies but it was decided that all the members of the group should write their replies in identical terms to prevent individuals being singled out for disciplinary action. When the 21 MPs submitted their replies promising to conform to the Party's rules and policy, the Nenni Telegram dispute ended.

Socialist Outlook

Later in 1948, Braddock was prominent in the launch of a new left-wing journal, *Socialist Outlook*. The Cold War had profoundly affected the Labour Government's foreign and defence policies and Britain cooperated closely with the United States in resisting further expansion of Soviet control and influence. The Keep Left group of left-wing Labour MPs had dissented from this and advocated Labour Britain lead a democratic socialist 'Third Force' independent of both the USA and the Soviet Union.

However, as a result of the oppressive nature of Communist rule in Eastern Europe, many former Keep Left supporters became fervent opponents of Soviet Communism and backed the Government's foreign policy. This was reflected in the political stance of the premier Labour Left newspaper *Tribune*. In January 1949, *Tribune* made an agreement with the Labour Party's Press and Publicity Department that Labour would pay to use two pages of *Tribune* for articles representing the official Labour viewpoint which, in effect, meant *Tribune* would receive a financial subsidy from the Labour Party. This was one reason why *Tribune*'s political views became much closer to official Party policy. For a period, *Tribune* and erstwhile leading figures in Keep Left were reconciled to the Government's foreign policy. Braddock, however, remained deeply suspicious of Britain's alliance with the USA and became involved in a new left-wing venture, *Socialist Outlook*.

The left-wing newspaper *Socialist Outlook* was established by a small group of Trotskyist entrists. The Trotskyist Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) had been established in 1944 and in the post-war years a group of RCP members, led by the combative activist Gerry Healy, had become an entrism group inside the Labour Party. A leading RCP member, John Lawrence joined Holborn and St Pancras South Labour Party and established links with Labour leftists in London, including Tom Braddock.

Healy and Lawrence created *Socialist Outlook* as a left-wing paper which would not be an openly Trotskyist journal but would appeal to a broader range of opinion in the Labour Left. Braddock, who disagreed with *Tribune*'s new political line, was receptive to this proposal for a new left-wing paper. Lawrence persuaded him to help fund a publishing company, the Labour Publishing Society, and a

printing company, John Stafford Thomas, which printed *Socialist Outlook*.

The first issue of *Socialist Outlook* appeared in December 1948. Braddock, Lawrence, Healy and Jack Stanley, the General Secretary of the Construction Engineering Union, were the members of its editorial board. Braddock wrote a regular column for the paper in which he frequently castigated government policy.

Braddock continued to oppose key aspects of the Government's foreign and defence policy. In May 1949, the House of Commons voted to approve the formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). Braddock was one of the few Labour MPs who voted against. The Commons vote on NATO revealed Braddock's political isolation within the Parliamentary Labour Party, as 333 MPs voted to approve NATO while only 6 voted against. Two Labour MPs, Ronald Chamberlain and Emrys Hughes acted as tellers for the 'noes'. The other MPs who like Braddock, voted against the motion were the two Communist MPs, William Gallacher and Phil Piratin, the Independent Labour member, D.N. Pritt, who was a close ally of the Communist Party and perfervidly pro-Soviet, John Platts-Mills, who had been expelled from the Labour Party in 1948 and Konni Zilliacus, whose expulsion from the Labour Party took place in 1949.

Braddock feared Britain's close relationship with the United States would have dire results. In a speech to a public meeting in Mitcham Town Hall, Braddock claimed that in return for its share of Marshall Aid, Britain had to agree to join NATO which he described as an American-led military alliance against Russia. One of the reasons for his hostility to Britain's close financial relationship with the USA was that it had resulted in defence related projects becoming Britain's biggest economic activity. He argued the United States was alarmed by

the success of British socialism because it feared it would inspire American workers to demand similar measures.

Consequently, the United States was using financial measures to destroy British socialism and was prepared to use military force against communism. However, Braddock was willing to acknowledge the political repression in the Eastern European Communist states. In the December 1949 issue of *Socialist Outlook*, he addressed the following question to Zilliacus 'Can he take a group of free Socialists ...into Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Rumania or Russia (to ask) where are your political prisoners? They belong to our class and we want to speak to them'.

Tom Braddock and Socialist Fellowship

In May 1949, the left-wing Labour MP, Ellis Smith announced his intention to form a national organization of socialists to achieve a more rapid move toward socialism in the Labour Party. This was the origin of the left-wing affiliated organisation Socialist Fellowship. Smith received the backing of the well-known left-wing parliamentarian Fenner Brockway. His proposal was also enthusiastically supported by the Trotskyist entrists who had set up *Socialist Outlook*. Although Braddock was not a Trotskyist he was working very closely with veteran Trotskyist John Lawrence.

Socialist Outlook sponsored a fringe meeting at the Labour Party Conference in June 1949 at which Ellis Smith formally announced the creation of Socialist Fellowship. Tom Braddock and John Lawrence were the other speakers at the meeting. Socialist Fellowship's first national founding conference was held in November 1949. Ellis Smith was elected president of the organization and Braddock became one of its vice-presidents.

This article is in two parts and will be continued in the next Labour Heritage bulletin.

A Glimpse at our Socialist Heritage

Arthur Priest

The idea of a free and equalitarian society is not, as some people would have us believe, a foreign idea which has been imported into Britain by agitators, but is the logical outcome of generations and centuries of struggle here in Britain by the people against their oppressors. Right through the ages the common people have dreamed and worked for a better system of society and have constantly banded themselves together into groups and brotherhoods to achieve such aims.

As far back as 1381 the peasants of England rose in revolt against the vile system which ground them down in serfdom. John Ball, a poor priest who wandered about the country preaching a simple sort of communism, spoke these words:

My good friends, matters cannot go well in England until all things be held in common, when there shall be neither vassals nor lords; when the lords shall be no more masters themselves. How ill they behave to us! For what reason do they hold us all in bondage? Are we not descended from the same parents Adam and Eve? ...it is by our labour that they have wherewith to support their pomp...

Let us think back to John Ball in 1381, standing on the village green preaching his message and giving the lie to the hypocrites who prate about socialism being foreign to British soil. As a result of their terrible plight the peasants rose in 1381 under the leadership of men like John Ball and Wat Tyler. The revolt started in Essex and soon spread through Kent, the rebels marched on London and took the Tower. A meeting was arranged between

Wat Tyler and Richard, King of England. Tyler took the King by the hand as an equal and secured promises from him of changes and better conditions for the peasants. Immediately after this conference of peace and good will the traitors arranged to have Tyler brutally murdered and the revolt was put down with blood and slaughter.

“Serfs you were and serfs you are. You will remain in bondage, not such as you have hitherto been subjected to but incomparably more vile.” These were the words with which the King honoured his treaty with the peasants, many were the good English folk who were murdered, slain for attempting to better their meagre conditions of life. Among the dead was John Ball, whose bowels were plucked out while he was still alive.

In 1549 the Norfolk revolt broke out, the instincts of the people for the common ownership of the land can be seen from the fact that they destroyed the boundaries of the fields by removing the hedges and filling in the ditches. The ruling class used foreign mercenaries to crush the revolt and murder its leader, Jack Kett. So great was the slaughter of the Norfolk peasants that the Earl of Warwick, himself no friend of the people, derided the nobility with the words.:

“Will ye then be ploughman and plough your own lands?”

So on, right down throughout the ages the history of Britain is the history of the people’s fight. In the middle of the 17th century the newly born and rapidly rising fathers of British capitalism, under the leadership of Oliver Cromwell, overthrew the power of the old feudal order (though vestiges of it remain to this day) and the way was cleared for the growth of British capitalism. However there were a few

among the people who did not want some new form of exploitation and oppression but a free society. Gerard Winstanley wrote extensively on a primitive socialist basis and attempted to form a colony or settlement of people who called themselves Diggers because they intended to dig the land on a co-operative basis. Such a colony was indeed set up – at St George’s Hill in Surrey in the year 1649, but the landed gentry sent agents to ruin their crops and damage their harvests and this early democratic experiment had to be given up.

With the beginning of the 19th century and the increasing use of machinery in factories and mills the plight of the workers was only comparable to the lot of the starving peasantry, from whose ranks the new working class were largely recruited. There was great discontent; the Luddites (poor wretches who saw the machines as the cause of their misery instead of the machine owners) smashed the machinery in the factories. But these years saw the beginning of a new movement springing up around the question of electoral reform and leading to the Reform Act of 1832. Mass demonstrations were held and there was serious discontent in London in 1814. In 1819 there happened one of the most tragic episodes in the history of the British working-class movement. Eighty thousand peaceful men and women had gathered together at St Peter’s Fields outside Manchester to hear the great orator Hunt. The Yeomanry were called out to disperse the crowd and in their brutal assault eleven of the best sons of the people were killed. Brutally murdered by a frightened ruling class that trembled in its fear of the rousing of the common people.

Peterloo, as it came to be called in parody of Waterloo, marks a turning point in the

history of the British workers from then on they began to understand the value of organisation. Under the Combination Acts it was however, illegal to form trades unions any many gallant workers were transported like slaves to Australia and Tasmania for attempting to band themselves into brotherhoods in order to defend their meagre standard of life. Let us think today of John Loveless and the heroism of those Tolpuddle Martyrs transported out in 1834 from their Dorsetshire village for seven years exile, separated from their families and firesides to a life of misery and degrading toil as convicts at Botany Bay. It is reported that at least one quarter of the prisoners in such ships were expected to die in their stinking holds before reaching their destination. What was the crime for which John Loveless and his friends were found guilty? It was that of attempting to form a branch of the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union. Such is the tradition of fight and struggle which we British workers have behind us.

In 1839 the political aspirations of the British working classes, disappointed at the outcome of the 1832 Reform Act, turned towards the demands of a People’s Charter. Chartism was the first organised political expression of the British people.

The Chartists wanted – Equal electoral areas, votes for all men, payment of MPs, vote by ballot, and abolition of property qualifications for electors. They also called for annual parliaments (the only point not achieved and not now demanded.)

This movement spread like wild fire through the north of England. Thousands declared their support for the Charter and giant petitions were sent to Parliament. The working people of England were in a sorry state at that time. Women and children were forced to work as long as

eighteen hours a day for mere pittance of wages. The mass of the people supported Chartism because in it they saw a way out of their misery. Britain had long to wait for the demands of the Chartists to be realised and from the middle of the century workers turned their energies again to building the trades unions. Also the utopian ideas of Robert Owen led to the development of retail shops owned by the customers with the profits distributed back to them. The modern co-operative movement started in a small shop in Rochdale, by textile workers.

From what we have seen in this brief glimpse into the early struggles of the British working people we can be proud to know that these islands form the birth place of a mighty working class movement. Not without bitter struggle and the loss of many brave lives was the degree of liberty which we now enjoy, wrung from the ruling class, fought for with heroism and defended with courage. The right to vote, to form trades unions and co-operative societies, and votes for women and a host of other liberties had to be fought for by our fathers (and mothers). But the struggle was only beginning in those days, the struggle which has brought us some advance in the form of the welfare state, with full employment, health services, pensions and family allowances. We must not betray our heritage, our living standards must be defended and extended for they were not won easily. The struggle which was begun so long ago and will end in a socialist Britain, will go on. To this end the Labour Party is dedicated.

This article was published in the *AEU Journal*, November 1954.

Syd Bidwell : A Tale to Tell

Reviewed by Mike Watts

A Tale To Tell, the autobiography of Syd Bidwell is not one of the great political memoirs. But it is a fascinating insight into the life of a warm, principled, interesting and very brave man. It weaves together three themes, the personal and working life of someone who left school at fourteen, a personal political adventure and the larger political picture.

The book ends abruptly at the time of Jim Callaghan's agreement with the Liberals, to support the Labour Government which Syd describes as "a very dangerous activity not carried out with consultation with all members of the Parliamentary Labour Party". Syd died twenty years later in 1997 following a sad de-selection by his Southall CLP and a long period of ill health of both Syd and his wife Daphne.

Syd lived to witness the Blair victory in 1997. On learning of the result his response was "I guess I should be happy" a sentiment familiar to many of us. It would have been fascinating to have heard Syd's views on Tony Blair.

Syd was born into a working-class household in Southall in 1917 the year of the Bolshevik revolution as Syd is keen to remind us. He left school at the age of fourteen and almost immediately joined the Great Western Railway Company thus triggering two great loves, railways and trade unions. We are treated to a lot of railway anecdotes and Syd charts his gradual rise through the ranks of the National Union Of Railwaymen and Trotskyist politics. Yes Syd was a Trot! He joined the The Workers' International League, the forerunner of the Revolutionary Communist Party, and was hailed as their first ever working-class member.

After the War Syd joined the Labour Party and became a lecturer and then organiser with the National Council Of Labour Colleges. This appointment reveals one of his great passions, political education. Throughout his life Syd devoured knowledge via various forms of formal and informal self-education and he was passionate to pass on this knowledge.

I found it very nostalgic. When I joined the Labour Party in the late fifties, I joined an organisation eager to teach me about the basics of politics, the Party's history, the meaning of socialism and many other aspects of politics. I and my contemporaries received a true political education, courtesy of people like Syd Bidwell. His description of training courses at Beatrice Webb House evokes many happy memories.

The demise of the NCLC following its absorption into the TUC was deeply regretted by Syd and his bitterness at the way he believed George Woodcock and Vic Feather let its education role die is palpable. He writes "I am not alone in the labour movement in thinking that the poverty of the Labour Party, politically deficient in its education work, has been a great deal responsible for its socialist decline".

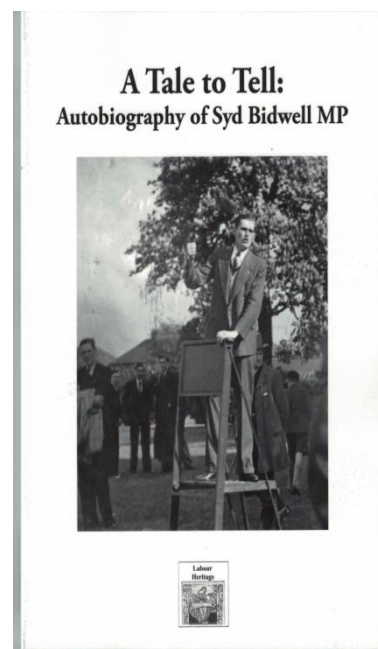
In 1966 Syd became the Member of Parliament for Southall. By this time his home town had become the home of large numbers of immigrants, mainly from India. Racial tensions had become inflamed. This was the time of the slogan "if you want a n---r neighbour vote Labour". Enoch Powell's "rivers of blood" speech was soon to come. Syd stood firm as a passionate defender of racial equality. He bravely opposed the London dockers when they marched on Westminster to support Powell. Not only was Syd's life threatened, his family's lives were

threatened, their home was attacked but Syd never wavered, he worked tirelessly to build and maintain harmonious race relations in Southall.

This is a book I'm glad I read. It evokes a time when the politics of the left was very different and tells us about a man who gave far more than he ever took from the labour movement.

I had the pleasure of meeting him once, his fellow Labour MP Russ Kerr introduced us. Syd told me he had written a book called *Red, White and Black*, he continued, "white is for my white constituents, black is for my black constituents," he then puffed his chest out "and the red is for me, I'm a red!" Yes you were Syd and proud of it.

'A Tale to Tell' is available from Labour Heritage at £5 per copy (post-free)
Contact us at:
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Election Posters from the 1960s

(photos taken by Sarah Newens, in the Office of the Leader of the Opposition, Portcullis House, February 2020)



Harold Wilson was elected Labour leader following the death of Hugh Gaitskell. He led the party to three General Election victories in 1964, 1966 and 1974.



In the 1959 General Election the Conservative leader Harold Macmillan told the British electorate 'You've never had it so good'. This was the Labour response.

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