

Labour Heritage



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Ellen Wilkinson

(reprinted with permission from the author Graeme Atkinson from the *Durham Miners Gala Brochure 2019*)

Ellen Wilkinson was known for her red hair and, for the greater part of her political life, her even redder politics.

Born in 1891 into the mainly working class Chorlton on Medlock in heavily industrial Manchester, Ellen's work as a feminist, trade unionist and socialist was intimately connected with our own north-east of England, Middlesbrough and Jarrow most notably.

Ellen discovered her socialism at the age of fifteen-years-old when, as a trainee teacher, she was introduced to the radical writings of Robert Blatchford, publisher of the socialist weekly *The Clarion* which had a paid sale of 74,000 copies around that time.

Her views developed rapidly as she read socialist books and pamphlets and joined and became active in the then very influential Independent Labour Party (ILP) as well as campaigning for the right of women to vote.

Already winning a reputation for activism, Ellen completed her studies at the University of Manchester and became a full-time organiser for the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies where she was able to sharpen her speaking skills and become a formidable orator.

Opposing the First World War, she moved on to a much deeper engagement in the trade union movement as a national organiser for the Amalgamated Union of Co-operative Employees, taking charge of recruiting women and broadening the battle for equal pay and the rights of the low-paid.

More Action Than Talk



Ellen's style was more action than talk and, during 1915 to 1918, centred on organising strikes, though illegal in wartime, to demand equal pay for Substituted Female Labour – the large numbers of women recruited into jobs vacated by men who had gone to the war – and “one big union” for Co-op workers.

Walk-outs occurred in Carlisle, Coatbridge, Plymouth, Bradford and Lincoln while strikes by Co-op printers in Pelaw and

Longsight (Manchester) spread to include over 10,000 workers.

Ellen's militancy and energetic activism, leading struggles from the front and not from her office, had already made her a respected figure in Durham's pit communities and, so, by the early 1920s, the stage was now set for her long association with the miners and the Durham miners in particular.

So strong was her commitment to their cause that she was accorded the great honour of speaking from the platform of the Durham Miners' Gala in 1927 (and again in 1929, 1934 and 1937).

In March 1926, the government's Samuel Commission suggested slashing miners' wages by 13.5%, but not increasing hours as demanded by the coal owners who began drawing up their own plans both to increase hours and cut pay.

The TUC General Council, which wanted a compromise, pressured the Miners' Federation of Great Britain (MFGB) to negotiate with the coal owners and accept wage reductions. To up the stakes, on 16 April, a lock-out ultimatum with a two-week deadline was displayed in pit yards by the coal owners.

The TUC General Council (against the MFGB's objections) accepted the principle of wage cuts though not on the scale the government and employers were demanding.

Nevertheless, fixated on avoiding conflict, The TUC negotiated right up to the last minute, a stance lashed by Ellen who had left the Communist Party – of which she had been a founder member since its formation in 1920 – but had been elected Labour MP for Middlesbrough in 1924.

Support for Miners

Her support for the miners and their unions, communities and families was steadfast, made all the more so by her disgust at the

way the TUC caved in after nine days and left the miners to fight on alone.

Inspired by the miners' determination, she had toured the length and breadth of the country and its coalfields addressing no fewer than 47 mass rallies during the nine days the strike lasted. At many locations, she found workers desperate to be called out officially by the TUC.

Ellen treated the news of the TUC's surrender with stunned disbelief. In June 1926, she was a key speaker at a big solidarity rally in London's Albert Hall, the collection raising £1,200 (a staggering £72,740 at today's value) for the striking pitmen and their increasingly hungry families. At the same time, she became understandably bitter, blasting the TUC's capitulation to the Tory government as a "tragedy". Her analysis left no doubts about how upset she was. She attacked the TUC and Labour Party leadership's failure to prepare for the confrontation with the Tories and the state and criticised the TUC's cowardly pressure on the miners to compromise, in other words accept wage cuts and longer hours.

Fully behind miners' leader AJ Cook's slogan "Not a penny off the pay, not a minute on the day", the 800,000 miners – over 153,000 in Durham – fought on.

Ellen, witch-hunted by the right-wing Tory and fascist press, did her utmost to help, touring the country to encourage resistance, chairing the Women's Relief Committee for Miners' Wives and Children which raised £350,000 (£20.3 million today), and even travelling, with mixed results, to the USA to seek solidarity funds.

After at least seven months on the cobbles, the miners returned to work. Last to go back despite a clear majority – but not the two-thirds required – for staying out were the Durham miners on 30 November 1926. The memory of this was burned enduringly into the consciousness of the county's mining communities.

The aftermath was terrible as the Tory government went to town with the Trades

Disputes Act, banning general strikes, curtailing picketing and interfering with Labour's funding. The TUC offered no resistance.

Four years later, even worse happened when the Labour government – in the backwash of the Wall Street Crash and wanting to make a savage 10% cut to already meagre unemployment benefits – collapsed and its leader Ramsay MacDonald and other Labour right-wingers betrayed the working class to form a “National Government” with the Tories and Liberals and implement the cuts.

In the ensuing general election in October 1931, Labour was almost wiped out nationally and Ellen lost the Middlesbrough seat she had held since 1924.

These defeats for the British working class, combined with similar defeats across Europe, made for an increasingly perilous international situation.

Mussolini's fascists had already destroyed the Italian labour movement and, using the global capitalist crisis, Hitler's Nazi gangsters, backed by the big capitalists and industrialists in Germany, were waging murderous war on the unemployment-hit German workers and Spain was heading towards a massive class showdown and civil war.

Ellen's instincts and political understanding pushed her to see these international effects first hand by visiting the USA to witness the “Buddy, can you spare a dime?” queues for jobs and food.

In 1932, the storm clouds of Hitler fascism building menacingly, Ellen travelled to Germany, where 8 million were jobless, to observe the parliamentary elections of July 1932 and see the resistance put up by the Social Democratic and Communist workers. While there, she addressed anti-fascist meetings attended by as many as 6,000.

Nazi Dictatorship

After the handover of power to the Nazis by the conservatives six months later, Ellen took on a new role as a representative of the Communist-led Relief Committee for the Victims of German Fascism (RCGVF) and, though banned from entry, entered the country illegally to gather evidence of the brutal atrocities of the Nazi dictatorship and its violent destruction of the workers' organisations. The result was a pamphlet, *The Terror in Germany*, documenting early incidents of Nazi outrages.

Later, she cooperated with a refugee from Hitler's Germany, Edward Conze, to produce a major book *Why Fascism?* arguing for the need for working class unity and revolution to smash the threat of fascism across Europe. At the 1934 Durham Miners' Gala, she blasted fascism as “capitalism's last big trick”.

Re-elected to parliament as MP for Jarrow in 1935, there was no let-up in Ellen's efforts to oppose fascism. She heaped scorn on the British fascist leader Sir Oswald Mosley and his Blackshirt movement and intensified her internationalism with a trip to Spain, from which she was forcibly deported, where the coal miners of Asturias had launched a mass uprising against the right-wing Spanish government.

The Spanish government reacted with massive violence, invading the region with troops commanded by later dictator General Franco, brutally killing 3,000 miners, taking over 30,000 prisoners and embarking on a grisly rampage of looting, rape and executions in the pit communities. Ellen was instrumental in bringing this savagery to the attention of the UK labour movement.

Intent on supporting the fightback by workers everywhere, she went to France to support the 1936 wave of mass sit-in strikes, to Flint in Michigan to back car workers occupying General Motors' massive plants and, again, to Spain to

support the anti-fascist cause in the Spanish Civil War and make several visits to the fighters of the International Brigades in the battle zones.

Her efforts for Spain, defying constant attempts at sabotage by Labour's right-wing and sniping by the Tory press, were unstinting and were not lost on the Durham miners who, it was announced at the 1938 Gala, despite their own terrible hardships had collected £15,000 (£840,000 in today's terms!) to help the widows and children of the thousands of colliers slaughtered by Franco's fascists.

Even before becoming MP for Jarrow, there were also issues closer to home, not least the catastrophic levels of unemployment – 70% – and extreme poverty and ill-health in the town following the 1934 closure of its biggest employer, Palmer's Shipyard.

In 1936, frustrated with two years of pleading, appeals, petitions and negotiations to secure jobs in the town, the town council organised the "non-political" Jarrow March by 200 unemployed men to London. The protest was branded "revolutionary mob pressure" by the viciously anti-miners and anti-trade union Bishop of Durham, Hensley Henson, and officially shunned by the Labour Party.

Ellen did not walk the March's whole 284 miles – her poor health and other commitments precluded that – but appeared frequently and presented its 11,000-signature petition demanding jobs to the House of Commons.

Tory prime minister Stanley Baldwin refused to meet the marchers who returned to Jarrow to find their unemployment benefit slashed because they had been deemed "unavailable for work" had any vacancies arisen!

Ellen's rage at Jarrow's plight hardly subsided and she next wrote a book, *The Town that was Murdered*, a scorching and deeply moving indictment of the suffering of its people historically and of capitalism,

generally, that remains relevant today. It was to be her left-wing swansong.

Though she was a fierce opponent of racism and imperialism, working closely in the League against Imperialism with the Indian nationalist leader, and later Prime Minister, Pandit Nehru, she was also an impassioned opponent of the Tory policy of appeasing Hitler.

She supported the declaration of war against Nazi Germany in 1939 and, sadly, began to cast aside the mantle of revolutionary parliamentarism that she had worn so well and, like many left-wing politicians of the time was absorbed into the war effort.

Her politics were now considered acceptable enough to chair the Labour Party and hold governmental office during the wartime Churchill government and in the post-war Labour government of Clement Attlee.

In that government, she was a distinguished if controversial Minister of Education, raising the school-leaving age to 15, providing free school milk, improvements in the school meals service and delivering an increase in university scholarships at the same time as defending the infamous "11-plus" examination.

Those things, plus the Jarrow March and *The Town that was Murdered*, are the things for which she is most remembered.

The rest? Her hatred of capitalism, her feminism, her militant trade unionism, her enthusiasm for the Russian Revolution, her revolutionary politics, her courageous anti-fascism, her anti-racism, her determined internationalism and her uncompromising support for the miners – not so well remembered.

• *The author, who is the son of a Durham miner, wishes to give full acknowledgement and recommendation of Matt Perry's powerful biography Red Ellen. Note- Ellen Wilkinson died after an illness in 1947.*

Eighteenth Essex Conference on Labour History

Attended by over 60 people this conference was held on Saturday 26th October at the Witham Labour Hall. It was opened by Charles Cochrane, chair of the Essex Labour Campaign Forum.



60 Years of the Cuban Revolution

To commemorate 60 years of the Cuban Revolution, the first speaker was Rob Miller, Director of the Cuba Solidarity Campaign. He celebrated the fact that the Cuban Revolution has survived 60 years against the world's greatest super-power, the US. The island had faced multiple attempts to topple its revolution, including the longest blockade in peacetime. Its leader Fidel Castro had survived 600 or more assassination attempts.

However there had been many difficult times for Cuba. One of these was the 'special period' in the 1990s, when Cubans had faced shortages and power cuts. As a result, government decisions were taken to diversify the economy away from sugar production, to encourage tourism and the pharmaceutical industry. Market reforms had allowed self employment and small businesses to thrive.

Two of the main achievements of the Cuban Revolution were in education and health care, where in spite of being a third world country, it had achieved first world standards and more. The island's eleven million inhabitants received free education from cradle to grave and free health care. With an emphasis on preventative health

care Cuba had a better infant mortality rate than the US and life expectancy rates on a par with much richer Western countries. Many Cuban doctors work overseas in countries affected by poverty to work in collaborative health projects. Many travel overseas to do emergency humanitarian work, often following natural disasters such as hurricanes and earthquakes.

In recent years Cuba was coming under more pressure from the Trump regime in the US which was tightening the blockade. Companies worldwide including those in the UK were penalised for trading with Cuba and faced fines from the US Government's Office of Foreign Asset Control. Banks had closed down accounts, including those of the Cuba Solidarity Campaign. This had been the policy even of the Co-operative Bank after it had been taken over by an American hedge-fund. The Open University had refused to admit Cuban students, although this had been overturned by UK courts. The Cuban exile community in Florida, whose votes were needed by political parties in the US, had provided electoral backing and financing for the blockade. Tightening the blockade by the Trump administration had also led to petrol shortages. However the Cuban Revolution would survive as it had done before.

The German Revolution 1919

The second speaker was Marilyn Moos, a specialist in German history. On the anniversary of the defeat of the 1919 German Revolution, she explained how this defeat was to lead to the victory of Hitler in 1933.

In Germany there were two very strong left wing parties - the Social Democratic Party (SPD) with over million members and 90 daily newspapers and the Communist Party (KPD) with 360,000 members. However these two parties did not work together to stop the Nazis. After Germany was defeated in World War 1, there was mass starvation. This led

to uprisings in towns and cities across the country, and mutinies in the army. Workers' and soldiers' councils were set up, like the Soviets in Russia. However this revolution was brutally repressed by a government containing politicians like Noske and Ebert from the SPD. Thousands were killed, including long standing socialists - Rosa Luxembourg and Karl Liebknecht. The government used shock troops against the revolutionaries in the form of the Freikorps, whose members were to form the backbone of Hitler's armies.



Demonstration outside the Reichstag, Berlin

The rise of the Nazi Party and fall of the Weimar Republic were directly linked to the economic catastrophe in Germany in the interwar years. The Treaty of Versailles had imposed humiliating terms on the country which had been defeated in World War 1. Reparations were demanded by the victors of the War, France and Britain, a move criticised by John Maynard Keynes in his *Economic Consequences of the Peace*. Attempting to pay these reparations the German government printed money leading to hyper-inflation in the 1920s, which ruined sections of the middle class. Businesses and savings were destroyed. When Germany defaulted on her debt, French and British troops occupied the coal and iron district of the Ruhr Valley. Having survived this, the German economy was to take a further hit from the Wall Street collapse in 1929, as banks failed.

Unemployment soared to six million, one third of the workforce.

Economic desperation led many to join parties on the right and left of politics. The Nazi Party was the beacon for the middle class, the Communist Party attracted unemployed young workers, who wanted militant action. Increasingly the survival of parliamentary democracy in Germany was under threat as big business began funding the Nazis. Between 1919 and 1933 there had been 27 different governments. In January 1933 President Hindenburg appointed Adolf Hitler as Chancellor but this was not met with anti-Nazi demonstrations or strikes led by the SPD or KPD.

One problem was that the two parties would not work with each other, the KPD seeing the SPD as 'social fascists', the SPD condemning the KPD as 'extra-parliamentary.'

Members of the SPD and KPD wanted to take action against the Nazis, but the policy of the KPD was to treat the Social Democrats as 'social fascists' and it would not work with them. The terrible defeat of the left in 1933 was to lead to the deaths of tens of thousands of its supporters.

Meryllyn asked the audience to consider the consequences of the erosion of parliamentary democracy and the consequences that it could have for us today in the UK.

After an enjoyable lunch provided by members of Braintree CLP the conference had the opportunity to watch the film *Unsung Hero: the Jack Jones Story*. This had been shown earlier in the year at the Acton Trades Union Club in West London. It was reviewed in the Spring 2019 edition of the *Labour Heritage bulletin*.

For more info see <http://www.jackjonestrust.com/projects/jack-jones-film/>

The Housing Question

The final speaker was Chris Sumner, a socialist historian, on *The Housing Question*. His talk was based on the research of Epping Forest councillor, Phillip Pennell who had died earlier in the year.

He began by talking about the philanthropic endeavours to build housing for the working class. These had included industrial villages built by employers for their workers, for instance New Lanark, Saltaire (near Bradford), Port Sunlight and Silver End, near Braintree, built for workers at Crittall.



Houses in Silver End

In the 19th century organisations such as the Society for Improving the Conditions of the Labouring Classes, the Peabody Trust and East End Dwelling Company were amongst those building homes for working people.

In the middle of the 19th century government stepped in with legislation to regulate the condition of dwellings and to offer loans to local government for housing. However this did not take off until the 20th century. At the end of World War 1, in 1919 the Addison Act laid down housing responsibilities for local authorities and made provision for some loans for local councils to build houses. The 1923 Chamberlain Act enabled local authorities to make loans to privately owned building companies. The most significant piece of legislation however was the Wheatley Act of 1924. John Wheatley was the Minister for Health in the 1924 Labour Government. This gave government loans of £9 per house to local

councils over a 40 year period, which enabled councils to embark on a programme of house-building. Although the amount per house was reduced to £7 by a later Conservative government, local authorities such as the London County Council were able to use this money to build sizable council estates such as Becontree in Dagenham. Between 1919 and 1939 2.7 million homes were built nationally and over 50% received some form of government subsidy. Many tenants had indoor bathrooms for the first time in their lives.



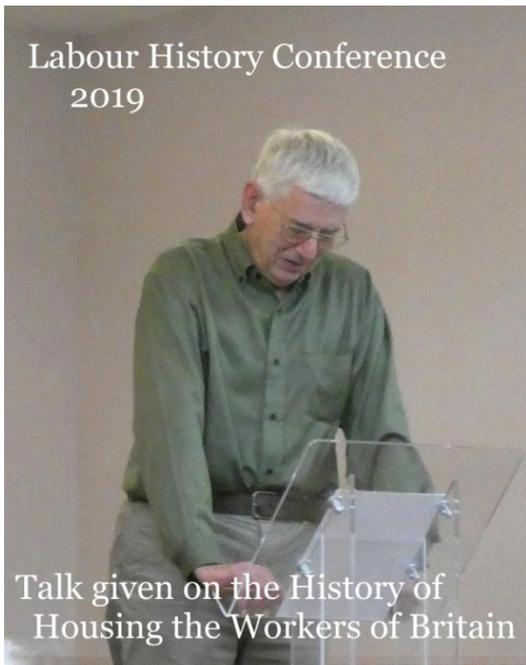
Aerial view of Becontree, Dagenham

Housing policy after World War 2 saw some resources for temporary housing (prefabs) and repair of housing damaged in wartime. Legislation was passed in 1944 and 1945. 157,000 prefabs were built, due to last for 10-15 years. Some are still in use today. In 1946 legislation was passed to allow the building of New Towns to alleviate overcrowding in cities like London. These would include schools, shops and workplaces as well as houses. Town and country planning measures were taken up as a result of the Abercrombie Report for London, and the 'Green Belt' was established.

When the Conservatives were returned to parliament in the 1950s, legislation followed which cut government subsidies to housing, relaxed rent controls and allowed the sale of council housing. This led to tower blocks which were cheaper to build. In 1964 there was still a chronic

housing shortage. The Labour government aimed to build 250,000 homes per annum and re-introduced rent controls. By 1979 government subsidies for housing had fallen as rents could provide the revenue for house building.

Chris Sumner was one of two Labour councillors on Epping Forest council in the 1970s. This council controlled by the Tories was seen as one of their flagships as they switched from building houses to subsidising mortgages. In Harlow where most housing was built with public funds, 52% is now in the private rented sector. This destruction of social housing as a shared resource has been a direct consequence of the Thatcher government's promotion of personal greed.

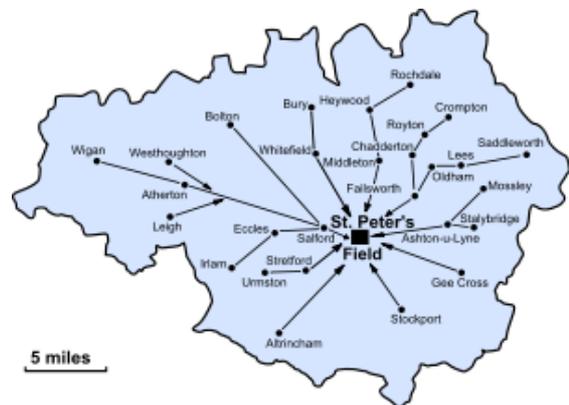


For more photos of the Essex Conference see <https://www.facebook.com/labourheritage/>

Thanks were given to the organisers of another successful conference. Stan Newens said that he and his family needed additional help if the conference was to continue in future years!

Peterloo Commemorations, August 2019

These took place on the weekend of 16th-18th August in Manchester on the site of the 1819 demonstration and massacre. On the Saturday marchers from some of the outlying villages from which those had come in August 1819 met and walked along Deansgate to the site of St Petersfields for a rally and street theatre.



The villages and towns from where demonstrators came to St Petersfields in 1819.

On the Friday more people had gathered at the site and in the pouring rain they listened whilst the names of those who had died were read out.

Socialist Fellowship and Socialist Outlook

Part two by Jonathan Wood.

Socialist Fellowship's Adoption of More Radical Positions

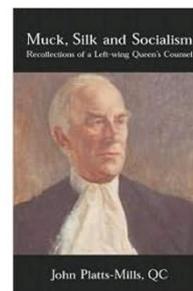
Socialist Fellowship became more radical in its policies. Its second national conference in September 1950 called for all large-scale industry to be nationalised and placed under workers' control and adopted a radical programme which was published as a pamphlet entitled *From Labour to Socialism*. Tom Braddock wrote this pamphlet in which he totally rejected the mixed economy, claiming the programme it outlined would create '100% socialist democracy' in Britain. Morgan Phillips took a very negative view of Fellowship's new programme which he said, 'has no relation to any programme which had ever been adopted by the Labour Party at its Annual Conference.' Socialist Fellowship campaigned vigorously against the Korean War and organised several anti-war rallies.

Socialist Outlook and Socialist Fellowship Face Greater Hostility within the Labour Party

As the policies advocated by *Socialist Outlook* and Socialist Fellowship diverged radically from official Labour policy, the paper and the group experienced increasing hostility from Labour's leaders and officials. The Labour Party's institutions, such as the National Executive Committee (NEC), possessed a number of disciplinary powers which could be used against party members and organisations deemed disruptive or subversive. The NEC had the power to declare an organisation ineligible for affiliation to the Labour Party. This power was known as 'proscription'. Members of proscribed organisations could not be members of or

delegates to the Labour Party. Labour Party organisations and members were not allowed to affiliate with or support proscribed groups. The NEC issued a list of groups ineligible for affiliation to the Labour Party which became known as the Proscribed List. The NEC also gained greater control over the selection of parliamentary candidates which enabled it to prevent those it considered ideologically suspect being adopted as Labour candidates.

As the Cold War between the West and the Soviet bloc intensified from 1947, there was growing concern in the Labour Party hierarchy about Labour Party members who were committed supporters of the Soviet Union. The leadership's aggressive response to the signatories of the Nenni telegram has been noted earlier. (see part 1) Those signatories who initially refused to recant were threatened with expulsion and John Platts-Mills, who was suspected of having organised support for the telegram, was expelled from the Labour Party. Three more left-wingers regarded as pro-Soviet, the MPs Konni Zilliacus and Leslie Solley and the parliamentary candidate, Lester Hutchinson, were expelled in 1949.



John Platts Mill was a socialist lawyer

Initially Labour officials were preoccupied with the pro-Soviet hard left and were much less concerned about *Socialist Outlook* and Socialist Fellowship. In June 1949, Morgan Phillips, responding to queries from Party members and trade unionists about *Socialist Outlook* and Socialist Fellowship, said there was no

official Labour view of or policy towards the journal and the organisation though he remarked that they made many criticisms of government policy and were 'more of an embarrassment than an asset.'

Labour Party officials opposed attempts by well-known former Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) members to join the Labour Party. When, in July 1949, Jock Haston, erstwhile RCP leader, applied to join Labour the NEC's Organisation Sub-Committee decided not to accept his application for membership and ruled that former RCP members should not be accepted into the Labour Party unless they provided evidence they no longer subscribed to the RCP's negative views of Labour.



Jock Haston on the campaign trail

Labour Party officials showed greater concern about the activities of *Socialist Outlook* and Socialist Fellowship. In August 1950, the NEC decided to advise local Labour organisations to discourage the sale of *Socialist Outlook*.

Tom Braddock, Socialist Fellowship's President, had lost his Mitcham seat in 1950 and hoped to be re-adopted as the constituency's Labour candidate. When the NEC interviewed Braddock in October 1950, his role in Socialist Fellowship was an issue. Braddock later claimed Morgan Phillips was misinformed but Phillips replied that Socialist Fellowship's policies and its Korean War resolution were: 'extremely embarrassing to the Party.' In November 1950, the NEC's Elections Sub-

Committee refused to endorse Braddock's parliamentary candidature in Mitcham. Mitcham Labour Party asked the NEC to reconsider this decision but the NEC were determined not to accept Braddock as candidate.

Socialist Outlook and Socialist Fellowship encountered increasing opposition in local parties. Bob Shaw, a leading figure in Nottingham's Socialist Fellowship was elected secretary of Nottingham Central Labour Party. However, important local Labour Party figures, including Tom Baxter, Labour's East Midlands Regional Organiser, were deeply antipathetic to Socialist Fellowship and actively campaigned against it. Shaw's tenure as Nottingham's secretary ended when party members passed a vote of no confidence in him in June 1949 and he resigned in September. Bob Shaw and his wife had helped to establish left-wing dominance in their local party but Nottingham City Labour Party intervened and imposed an approved council candidate and literature on the branch. In 1950 the ward's Annual General Meeting had to be abandoned and an emergency meeting was held a fortnight later. Local officials allowed branch members who had resigned because of opposition to leftist control of the branch to vote for their own readmission and elect branch officers. This resulted in left-wingers being ousted from branch officer posts. The Shaws moved to a different constituency, Nottingham East, but their application to join the constituency party was rejected. The constituency party's management committee later voted by a large majority to accept the Shaws as party members but Jim Cattermole, who had succeeded Baxter as Labour's Regional Organiser in the East Midlands, persuaded the NEC to reject the Shaws' membership application and appeal.

In November 1950, the City of Leicester Labour Party urged its members not to participate in the sale and distribution of *Socialist Outlook*. The paper's local supporters responded by saying their local

party could not do this until the NEC proscribed the paper. However, Morgan Phillips, after being contacted by Leicester Party's secretary, declared Leicester Labour Party was acting in conformity with the views of the NEC and that *Socialist Outlook's* circulation within the labour movement should be discouraged.

***Socialist Outlook*, Socialist Fellowship and Growing Unrest in the British Labour Movement**

Despite growing hostility from the Labour hierarchy, *Socialist Outlook* and Socialist Fellowship were able to contribute to and benefit from growing unrest in the Labour Party and the trade unions in the early 1950s. Rising inflation increased trade union opposition to the policy of wage restraint introduced by the Government in 1950. In September 1950 the TUC Conference voted against continued wage restraint. Order 1305, originally introduced in wartime, which imposed compulsory arbitration of industrial disputes, was deeply resented by many trade unionists. Some of the workers who defied its provisions were prosecuted, and a well-known dockers' leader called Harry Constable, who had been put on trial for organising an illegal strike, later attended Socialist Fellowship events and became a contributor to *Socialist Outlook*.



The Korean War 1950-1953

Many local Labour parties were highly critical of the government's foreign policy

and there were numerous resolutions demanding the withdrawal of British forces from Korea. Party members' concern over Britain's involvement in the Korean conflict grew markedly when China entered the war, causing a major escalation of the military conflict and prompting fears that the Korean War could become a global conflict. Many Labour Party members opposed any move which would exacerbate the conflict between Britain and China and advocated negotiations with China.

While dissent grew in the labour movement the special arrangement which had been established between *Tribune* and Transport House ended in October 1950 after the weekly paper criticised Arthur Deakin, the powerful Secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU).

Socialist Fellowship hoped to organise the rank-and-file protest and called a series of conferences as part of a campaign to change the Government's foreign policy. It organised a conference in London in February 1951 which was attended by delegates from local Labour parties and trade unions and a recall conference in March 1951 which created a Campaign Committee for an Emergency Labour Party National Conference. Two Socialist Fellowship members were elected to the key positions on this Committee. Tom Braddock became its President and Karl Westwood, a lecturer and organiser for the National Council of Labour Colleges (NCLC) and prospective parliamentary candidate for Richmond, was its secretary. Westwood sent affiliated organisations a circular letter entitled *The Labour Party is in Danger*, in which he argued that Labour lacked a proper policy for the General Election which was widely thought to be imminent, that it was necessary to have an emergency conference to devise a popular policy of peace and prosperity and that they should send Transport House resolutions demanding an emergency conference. Many constituency parties and

trade union organisations passed resolutions in favour of an emergency conference.

In April 1951, Socialist Fellowship held three conferences in London, Birmingham and Manchester to provide party members and trade unionists with the opportunity to discuss domestic and foreign policy. A resolution advocating the immediate withdrawal of British troops from Korea, immediate freedom for the colonies and the rejection of capitalism was passed almost unanimously by all the conferences.

The Proscription of Socialist Fellowship

Labour's leaders and officials were increasingly disturbed by Socialist Fellowship's activities and its criticisms of Government policy and in April 1951 the NEC proscribed Socialist Fellowship. In correspondence with party members Morgan Phillips set out the arguments for Socialist Fellowship's proscription. He alleged it had mounted 'continuous propaganda' against the official foreign policy of the Labour Party and Government and had become 'a party within a party' which pursued its own distinct policies which were often radically different from official Labour policies. He noted the organisation had formed its own groups within Constituency Labour Parties to pass resolutions opposing official party policy and claimed that in one London constituency, the local Socialist Fellowship had issued a printed whip exhorting members to attend a party meeting to support an anti-Government resolution.

Although Socialist Fellowship had no sympathy for the Soviet Union and its satellite states, Phillips and other senior Party figures accused it of links with pro-Soviet Communists, described its resolution on Korea as 'indistinguishable from the policy of Communist Party' and alleged that known Communists had participated in Socialist Fellowship's policy conference in Birmingham.

When the NEC proscribed Socialist Fellowship, the organisation's National Committee held an emergency meeting and decided to disband the group to avert disciplinary action against their supporters. A letter was sent to all the members informing them Socialist Fellowship no longer existed. Its proscription was approved by the Labour Party conference later in the year.

There had been a very close connection between Socialist Fellowship and *Socialist Outlook* and several of the leading figures in the former had also played important roles on the paper. However, John Lawrence, the paper's editor, distanced *Socialist Outlook* from the proscribed organisation to protect the paper.

Socialist Fellowship members had been active in Salford Labour Party and some of them later clashed with the party leadership. In the summer of 1951, Manchester dockers rejected an agreement negotiated by their union officials and staged an unofficial strike. The Executive of Salford City Labour Party arranged a meeting between the local Labour MPs and representatives of the dockers. They asked the Minister of Labour, Alf Robens, to intervene to secure the reinstatement of the two dockers whose suspension had caused the strike. In response, the Labour Party leadership demanded that Salford City Labour Party withdraw its resolution on the strike.

Salford City Party's General Committee reaffirmed its support for the resolution and the NEC ordered that the offending party be re-organised. Five members of Salford City Labour were accused of being responsible for the party's contentious actions and of disruptive behaviour in the City Party and the Labour Group. The five included Harry Ratner, who had been active in the local Socialist Fellowship and two Labour councillors, Councillors Williams and Burchell. Williams and Councillor Burchell were expelled from the Labour Party and Harry Ratner was suspended from holding office.

Salford East Constituency Labour Party opposed this disciplinary action and argued that the five who had been disciplined were being victimised for their opposition to official policy and their demands for a more socialist programme. The Labour Party reacted by suspending Salford East on the eve of the 1951 General Election. *Socialist Outlook* claimed that this was because of Salford East's militant reputation.

Socialist Outlook and the Bevanite Movement

Socialist Fellowship's proscription was overshadowed by the dramatic resignations of three ministers which also occurred in April 1951. Due to the military demands of the Korean War and the Cold War, the Government approved a much-expanded rearmament programme. To finance this, Labour's Chancellor, Hugh Gaitskell introduced charges on National Health Service dentures and spectacles in the April 1951 Budget. Three Ministers, Aneurin Bevan, who had established the National Health Service, Harold Wilson and John Freeman resigned in protest at the charges. Their protest against the charges quickly developed into a much wider critique of government foreign policy and the massive rearmament which it required. Bevan argued rearmament on such a scale would be socially and economically damaging.



Nye Bevan founded the NHS

The three former ministers joined forces with Keep Left, a group of left-wing MPs. This was the genesis of the Bevanite movement. The Bevanite MPs provided focus and leadership for the widespread rank and-file discontent and Bevanism won mass support in the local parties, with Bevanites winning almost all the seats in the individual members' section of the NEC at the 1952 Party Conference. Gerry Healy and the other Trotskyist entrants in the 'Club' who largely controlled *Socialist Outlook* believed Bevanism offered important political opportunities. *Socialist Outlook* moderated its policies and rhetoric to facilitate cooperation with the Bevanites and attempted to align itself with Bevanism to win more support in the labour movement. The *Socialist Outlook* of May 1951 fervently supported Bevan's decision to resign and claimed that Labour's leaders were the true splitters. In April 1952 the paper asserted that Bevan's demand for a reduction in the arms programme was supported by the great majority of workers.

The Party Leadership's Hostility to *Socialist Outlook*

The Bevanite challenge to the party leadership produced greater polarisation and antagonism within the party and Labour's leaders and officials displayed even greater antipathy to left-wing dissent. Prominent *Socialist Outlook* supporters were not allowed to become Labour parliamentary candidates. Members of Norwood Labour Party wanted Gerry Healy as their parliamentary candidate but the NEC opposed his nomination. When John Lawrence, *Socialist Outlook's* editor, was selected as the Labour candidate for Woodford in 1953 he was interviewed by the NEC's Elections Sub-Committee. It was dissatisfied with his answers to questions about party policy and vetoed his candidature. Political disputes divided the activists who sustained *Socialist Outlook*. Tom Braddock and John

Lawrence resigned from the paper's editorial board as a result of political disagreements.

The Proscription of *Socialist Outlook*

Finally, in July 1954, the NEC acted against *Socialist Outlook*. The NEC accused the paper of being the mouthpiece of a Trotskyist entrust organisation and noted that some of its contributors had been members of or associated with the Revolutionary Communist Party. It decided anyone involved in the editing or sale of *Socialist Outlook* or who contributed to the paper would be ineligible for Labour Party membership. This decision was opposed by leading Bevanites who feared they might be the next to suffer disciplinary action. At the NEC meeting, Nye Bevan and Richard Crossman called for the reference back of the proscription but were defeated. Michael Foot fulminated against the paper's proscription in a *Tribune* article entitled *I call this an outrage* declaring 'Such a decree might fittingly be issued within a Fascist or Communist Party. That it should be issued by the leaders of a democratic party is an outrage' Despite the protests, the 1954 Labour Party Conference endorsed the decision to ban the paper by a large majority. After the Conference decision in October 1954, *Socialist Outlook's* management committee decided unanimously to suspend publication of the paper.

Action against *Socialist Outlook's* Supporters in the Constituency Parties

Socialist Outlook's proscription was followed by disciplinary action against a number of its supporters, especially those considered to be Trotskyist entrists. In Leeds, twelve people were expelled from the Labour Party for refusing to pledge that they would end their association with *Socialist Outlook*.

The NEC employed stringent disciplinary action against the paper's supporters in two London constituencies, Islington East and Norwood. As we have seen, *Socialist Outlook* and Socialist Fellowship had received considerable support in Norwood and Trotskyists had been active for some time in Islington East. The members of Islington East's General Committee were sympathetic to Councillor Bill Hunter and his wife but its executive, in contrast, was highly critical of the Hunters' political activities and expelled them from the party, although this was in breach of the constitution. The NEC upheld the decision to expel the Hunters even though it was unconstitutional because the NEC considered they had disrupted the party and promoted views radically different from official party policy. The issue divided Islington East because the party's General Management Committee opposed the expulsion.

In the Norwood Constituency Party, a number of activists had given enthusiastic backing to *Socialist Outlook*. In September 1954, members of Norwood asked the NEC to carry out an inquiry into their party's officers and sent it a document which made allegations against three of their local left-wing activists, Thomas Mercer, David Finch and Edward Knight - who as we have seen had been active in sustaining and promoting *Socialist Outlook*.

The trio's critics accused them of behaviour which was unconstitutional and flouted party discipline and of conspiring to push the policies of the defunct Revolutionary Communist Party within Labour. These allegations were vehemently denied by Mercer, Finch and Knight but the NEC accepted the accusations and recommended that the three be expelled and that Norwood Labour Party be reorganised.

In November 1954, the five expelled activists from Islington East and Norwood produced a pamphlet and held a press conference at which they protested against

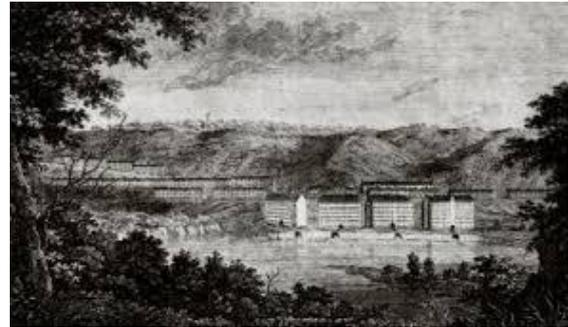
their expulsion and accused Labour's leaders of introducing 'thought control'. The NEC proceeded with disciplinary action against activists in the two constituency parties. Islington East's General Committee opposed the expulsion of the Hunters and the NEC ordered that the party be re-organised which resulted in the expulsion of several more members.

Conclusion

The demise of *Socialist Outlook* did not end Trotskyist activity in the Labour Party. Veteran Trotskyist activist Ted Grant, who had been an important figure in the Workers' International League and the Revolutionary Communist Party, was one of the leaders of a small entrust group which adopted the name Revolutionary Socialist League (RSL). In 1964, the RSL launched a new socialist newspaper called *Militant* and *Militant* also became the public name of the Trotskyist organisation which produced the paper. By the 1980s, *Militant* had become the largest and most influential Trotskyist entrust group in the Labour Party and the party's leaders and officials were alarmed by *Militant*'s activities and their detrimental effect on Labour's electoral appeal. The Labour leadership decided on tough action against the group. The *Militant* organisation was proscribed in 1982 and Ted Grant and four other members of the paper's editorial board were expelled from the party in 1983. Ironically, the Labour leader who supported these disciplinary measures was Michael Foot who, in 1954, had written such a passionate denunciation of the proscription of *Socialist Outlook*.

Part One of this article was published in the 2019 *Labour Heritage Bulletin*

The Legacy of Robert Owen- Building Communities: From New Lanark and Letchworth to Covent Garden. [first published in *the Forest & Wye Clarion 2009*] By Alan Spence

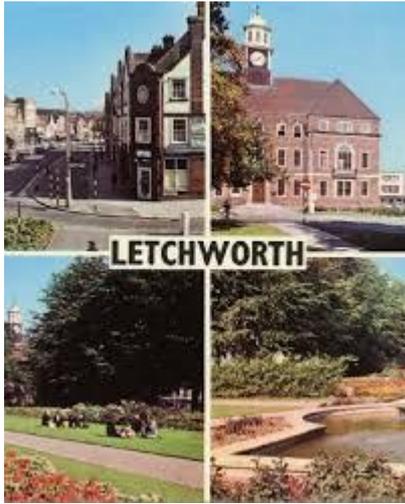


New Lanark - Robert Owen's Industrial Village

Robert Owen always saw the building of planned communities as a basis for social harmony. His ideas influenced the work of Ebenezer Howard and the birth of the 'garden city' in Britain.

Letchworth Garden City was a model. Building commenced in 1903 with the purchase of 4,500 acres of land 35 miles north east of London. In 1913 it was announced by its finance director, C.B. Purdom, that 'after ten years of strenuous activity, it shows the qualities of permanence and fair promise of a rich harvest in the way of social improvement..'. Today, Letchworth's population of 34,000 (compared to 300 at its foundation) enjoys the benefits of the income from its estates, in addition to the usual government and local authority funding.

Ebenezer Howard, who pioneered the vision of Letchworth and other such communities that followed, described the garden city as 'a town designed for healthy living and industry, of a size that makes possible a full measure of social life, but no larger, surrounded by a rural belt; the whole of the land being in public ownership or held in trust for the community.'



Postcard of Letchworth

Letchworth led directly to the 1945 Labour Government's decision to build thirty two New Towns on garden city principles. But these fell foul of the Thatcherite counter-revolution and were sold to speculators from 1979 onwards. It led inevitably to a decline in the value of publicly owned property and democratic control. Instead, money speculation and ownership are the yardsticks against which all activities are measured.

Property developers made enormous profits from building office blocks (in particular) and decanting working class communities. They came to be seen as creators of 'concrete jungles' by the concerned public.

Covent Garden

Nationwide, neighbourhood groups came together to try to protect their communities against the 'property developers'.

Amongst these were the residents and workforce of Covent Garden in central London.

This hundred acre site with a population of 3,500 and a workforce of many thousands more, was the site of the fruit and vegetable wholesale market. Traffic congestion had been growing for years and

finally it was decided to move the market to a new site at Vauxhall.

The property world saw the chance to make a killing and pressed the Greater London Council (GLC) to prepare plans to 'modernise' the area with high-rise offices, roadways and luxury dwellings for the wealthy.

Covent Garden's workforce was already highly organised and many of them lived in the area, in extended families going back generations. Together with local small businesses and professionals, they began to organise.

The Covent Garden 'Forum' gained the support of the GLC and became effectively an elected mini-borough council. In 1974 it became a subcommittee of the GLC, overlooking development plans for the area.

In 1979 a Conservative Government led by Mrs Thatcher was elected. Within weeks, the sale of New Town assets and property began, and within ten years the Garden City vision had disappeared from town and country planning. But plans for Covent Garden were already embedded – too late to be stopped on the whim of a Prime Minister.

The emphasis at Covent Garden was on development on a human scale. The layout of existing streets, with its sense of intimacy, was kept, and the central market hall was retained and refurbished as a small craft and business market.

Covent Garden, like New Lanark and Letchworth Garden City, has become a tourist attraction. But its aim of becoming a model for the 'rebuilding' of neighbourhoods in London was written out of the script by government and in local authorities' planning briefs.

Our Debt to Robert Owen

Robert Owen proved by example that an industrial village – New Lanark in Scotland – could produce enough to build houses for its workforce, educate children and adults, provide for health care and

pensions and shops selling unadulterated food. He also showed that working people had to organise and take productive capacity into their own hands. Today 800 million people worldwide embrace some form of co-operative practice. Robert Owen's New Lanark and Letchworth Garden City can provide a model for human settlement.

Morgan Jones: Man of Conscience by Wayne David (Welsh Academic Press, 2019)

Reviewed by Barbara Humphries

As a wave of patriotism and jingoism swept Britain at the outbreak of World War 1 in 1914 the labour movement was to be divided on the issue. (even worse than Brexit!). In the mining valleys of the Rhondda Valley officials from the South Wales Miners' Federation (SWMF) aided the government's army recruitment drive with gusto, with the belief that the war would be over by Christmas. Keir Hardie who opposed the war was the MP for Merthyr and he was shouted down and even stoned by those who had previously loved him. Many members of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) were outright pacifists with strong anti-war religious beliefs. Throughout the war they were to repeatedly face military tribunals and imprisonment for these beliefs. Wayne David, MP for Caerphilly traces the life of one of these - Morgan Jones, a Labour councillor on the Gelligaer Urban District Council. When the 1916 Military Service Act was passed, Jones along with many others faced conscription into the army. He refused his call up papers and had to face a military tribunal. Initially he refused alternative war-work (an absolutist rather than an alternative) and he was to be imprisoned for four months. After a further jail sentence in Wormwood Scrubs which took a massive toll on his health he accepted alternative work. For this he was criticised by members of the No-

Conscription Fellowship and the South Wales Anti-Conscription Council.

Over time there was a change of opinion regarding World War 1 and many came to feel that mass slaughter had achieved nothing. So in spite of his war record as a conscientious objector, Morgan Jones received the backing of the SWMF to become the Labour candidate in the Caerphilly by-election in 1921 at the age of 36. He defeated an older candidate. In the election he faced opposition from a wartime coalition Liberal called Rees Edmund who described Jones as 'conchie' and an acrimonious campaign on behalf of a local Communist Party candidate. Jones won the seat with a majority of over 4,000, his Communist rival came third. He went on through several elections to increase his majority to 13,000 in spite of his personal criticism of the SWMF for their tactics during the 1926 General Strike. In 1929 his wife assisted in campaigning amongst women voters, who were enfranchised for the first time.

When Labour suffered a heavy defeat in the 1931 General Election Morgan Jones retained his seat and became the party's spokesman on education. During this time he laid the basis for the policies of the 1945 government, favouring free education for all at every level. He was also chair of the Public Accounts Committee. The National Government cut unemployment benefits and introduced the unpopular 'means test' by the use of 'Henry VIII' clauses to avoid parliamentary scrutiny. (like the measures favoured by our current prime minister to get through a no-deal Brexit.) As a result Jones brought in a 'concordat' for the Public Accounts Committee to ensure that public expenditure proposals were discussed fully in the future.

Morgan Jones had an interest in foreign policy - India, Palestine and the West Indies, all at that time part of the British

Empire. As with many socialists his pacifism did not survive the rise of European fascism and in Spain, when a Republican Government was overthrown by the forces of General Franco, he fully supported the International Brigades who went out to Spain to fight Franco.

As an MP for a mining constituency Morgan Jones was fully in support of nationalising the coal mines. He died before the outbreak of World War 2 and did not therefore live to see a majority Labour government. His early death has been partly attributed to the treatment that he received as a conscientious objector during World War 1.

This book is a warm tribute to a man who was rooted in and committed to his South Wales constituency. His interest was in the lives of miners and local housing policy. He went on to play an important role in national politics.

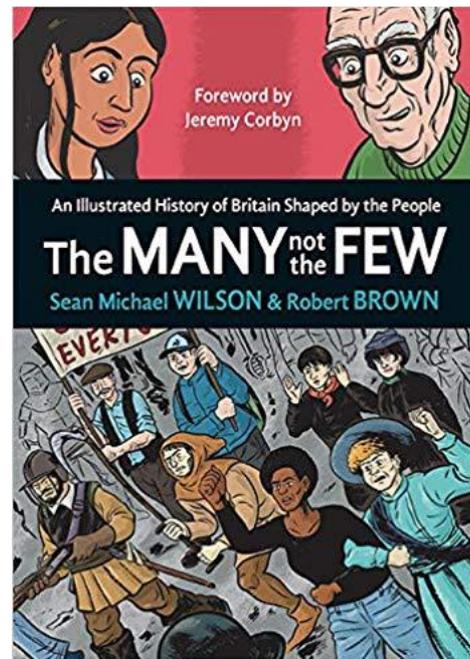


Book launch in the Speakers' House, Westminster

Morgan Jones: Man of Conscience by Wayne David is published by Welsh Academic Press, £17.

The Many not the Few: an Illustrated History of Britain Shaped by the People by Sean Michael Wilson, illustrated by Robert Brown (Workable, 2019)

Reviewed by Barbara Humphries



A novel approach to labour history as depicted in cartoons, this is essentially a conversation between a retired trades union activist, Joe and his grand-daughter Arushi. As such it aims to bring the story of the labour movement to a young generation for whom much has been airbrushed from official history. Arushi has not had the opportunity to learn about much of these events at her school.

However as it is entertaining and visual, it is also very serious and detailed. It begins with the 1381 Peasants' Revolt. Arushi had heard of the Poll Tax, but the one in the 1990s not the 1380s. It has chapters on the lesser known Kett's Rebellion in Norwich in 1549, in which 15,000 took part, the Levellers and the New Model Army in the English Civil War, the Chartists, whose 1839 petition for the right

to vote attracted the signatures of 1.3 million people, and then on to the rise of the trades union movement in the 19th century. The script does not evade some of the grim facts of history - that 3,000 people were killed when the Peasants Revolt was defeated, (peasants' lives were expendable as far as the nobles were concerned) and that young women working at the Bryant and May match factory in east London could suffer a long and tortuous death from 'phossy jaw' as a result of working with white phosphorous. Perhaps 19th century conditions of work are sadly becoming familiar to the young generation. For instance a 14 hour day and having to get permission for a toilet break. Joe asks his granddaughter : " How's it going at work anyway? Are they still not unionised?" She replies : "No but listening to you about all this history makes me think that we should be." Joe wins his granddaughter round to the view that trades unions are not just for the old generation, but vital for her friends, some of who are working for Deliveroo for instance.

In cartoons we are taken through defeats and victories for the trades union movement. The defeat of the 1926 General Strike followed a decade later by a rise in trades union support which continued after 1945 to reach a peak in the 1970s when 82% of the workforce were covered by collective bargaining agreements. Today it is down to 20%. Joe takes his granddaughter through the Miners' Strike of 1984/85, anti-trades union laws of the Thatcher government and the rise of neo-liberalism. The one issue on which they agree to differ however is on leaving the European Union. Joe explains how this was once supported by the left, but is now a largely right-wing cause. Arushi has difficulty as one of the young generation in understanding this.

A foreward to the book is written by Jeremy Corbyn.

Two Pamphlets from the Spanish Civil War by J R |Campbell and Bill Alexander. Introduction by Tom Sibley Reviewed by Mike Squires

The Civil War in Spain finished 80 years ago with the defeat of the democratically elected Republican Government. It lost, not because it was overthrown by the Spanish people, but because those who made war against it were supported with arms, men and munitions by Europe's two leading Fascist powers Italy and Germany. The Spanish people's heroic fight on behalf of their government lasted for almost three years, itself a miracle given the overwhelming odds that were ranged against them.

It is unfortunate that the main purveyor of information about the war to any kind of mass audience should be George Orwell, whose novel *Homage to Catalonia* has become almost the last word about what happened in Spain. This myth was carried on by the usually magnificent Ken Loach in his film *Land and Freedom*.

This portrayal of the war by Orwell and other left critics is the subject of a new pamphlet published by Manifesto Press Co-operative.

Tom Sibley gives a masterly overview of the situation in Spain at the time of the war and a very interesting appraisal of Orwell and his route to Spain. Unlike the 2200 volunteers who left these shores to join the Communist International created International Brigade and were motivated by a deep hatred of fascism, Orwell's main intention in going to Spain was to write a book.

Rejected by the International Brigade as 'unreliable', he joined a Trotskyite POUM (Workers Party of Marxist Unification) militia at the instigation of the British Independent Labour Party. The militia was centered at a particularly quiet part of the front and saw little action.

John Cornford, the Communist intellectual and poet who was killed in Spain on his 21st birthday was also for a while involved

with the POUM militia but left to join the International Brigade because of POUM inactivity.

For Orwell, and other left critics of the Spanish government, the main task was revolution irrespective of the ongoing situation. For the Communists, Socialists and Republicans the most important objective was the defeat of General Franco who led the revolt against the Government in July 1936.

It became increasingly apparent as the war progressed that in order to do this centralisation was necessary. A unified military command must take the part of militias operating under their own volition. Production too needed to be organised in order that people in Republican areas could be fed.

This debate over what was to be the priority, defeating fascism, or carrying out a social revolution has been debated since the war itself.

JR Campbell, then editor of the *Daily Worker* published a penny pamphlet on the subject in March 1937 *Spain's Left Critics*. Campbell, a leading member of the Communist Party of Great Britain takes to task those who want to divert the fight against fascism and overthrow the Republican government in order to start a revolution. He argues that such a move would be welcomed by Franco and would hasten the downfall of the elected government. In addition, he defends the actions of the USSR which was the only European country to help Spain.

In spite of a non-intervention agreement which denied Spain the right to buy arms, Italy and Germany tested their latest military equipment on that country and aided Franco in every way they could.

Spain's Left Critics is reproduced in the pamphlet as a later article written by Bill Alexander who was the Commander of the British Battalion of the International Brigade.

Alexander's piece 'George Orwell and Spain' first appeared in *Inside the Myth*

edited by Christopher Norris (Lawrence and Wishart 1984). Alexander later reproduced the chapter as a pamphlet of the same name. In it he deals with the same issues as Campbell but with an insight informed by his Spanish experience. For anyone interested in Spain and the struggle for democracy that went on there over 80 years ago this pamphlet is indispensable.

Not only does it contain a wealth of information about the war but it also looks at issues of strategy that have a resonance, perhaps with different connotations, that are still being discussed by the left today. The pamphlet's theme is maybe whether it was right or not to start a revolution in Spain, but the discussions about the way forward in any situation are still with us. There are still leftists who want a short cut to revolution.

Tom Sibley, JR Campbell and Bill Alexander show in meticulous detail that not only was it necessary in Spain to build a broad alliance but that it had to be defended against some of its left critics. Had these critics succeeded fascism in Spain would have triumphed three years before it did.

The booklet can be ordered from Manifesto Press Co-operative Ltd, Ruskin House 23 Coombe Road Croydon CRO 1BD. www.manifestopress.org.uk. Price £6.

For more information about Labour Heritage visit www.labourheritage.com