**BULLETIN SPRING 2012**

**Labour Heritage at 30**

It was on Saturday, April 24, 1982, that Labour Heritage was inaugurated. As evidence of the enthusiasm over the idea of starting a new society, 25 Labour Party members from all over Great Britain met to discuss the scheme. The two main objects –

1.To develop an interest and encourage education among Labour Party members in the history of their movement at a local and national level.

2.To encourage CLPs, branches and individual members to preserve their records and historical material.

In the first six months the society had grown to number more than 100 members and five Constituency Labour Parties had affiliated.

One of the activities of Labour Heritage was to arrange a fringe meeting at Labour Party conference, which it did in the autumn of 1982.

Welcome messages were received from

Sam McCluskie Chairman of the Labour Party National Executive Committee – *“The Labour Party shares, along with the whole labour and trade union movement, a rich and proud history. As its inheritors, we have a duty to preserve the records of the early years and struggles, not only for academic research, but* *because they are*

*a continuing source of inspiration in the battles we face today.”*

Jim Mortimer, General Secretary of the Labour Party *“ The British labour movement is the oldest in the world. Its history is a rich source of inspiration. The study of history can be an important and valuable guide for current policy and for action. Labour Heritage deserves support from us all.”*

Michael Foot, leader of the Labour Party *“ Labour’s history is a proud record of struggle and achievement which is known too little by the people of this country. I am sure that Labour Heritage will be able to play an important part in ensuring that the history of the labour movement is more widely understood. It is of the greatest importance that the records of the Labour Party should be preserved for future historians and I wish you every success in your exciting venture.”*

In 1982 the Labour Party had a library at its HQ in Walworth Road, and there was a Museum of Labour History in Limehouse. Both of these were to move to Manchester and are now housed in the People’s History Museum in Salford.

One of the most important tasks of Labour Heritage has been to encourage the preservation of Labour Party records, preferably in local history archives. This includes minutes, correspondence, and leaflets – key to the history of the Party at a grassroots level.

**Notes from the Essex Conference on Labour History, Witham, October 2011**

The annual Essex conference on labour history was held in October at the Labour Hall in Witham.

**Stan Newens spoke on the history of Co-operation and the formation of Co-operative Societies in Essex.**

The Co-operative movement can be traced back to the Diggers in the English Revolution of the mid 17th century. They took over and cultivated common land to share the produce until forcibly dispersed by higher authority. Co-operative ideas kept recurring and isolated co-operative enterprises were launched even before Robert Owen, 1771-1858, gave the Movement a huge boost in the early 19th century.

In the 1820s Co-operation took off in the London area and by 1833 there were 44 co-operative societies, which were seen as a means of achieving working class emancipation. In fact, the word ’socialist’ first came into use in The Co-operative Magazine published in 1827 by the first London Co-operative Society. However, the Movement declined with the rise of Chartism and the growth of trade unionism in the 1840s.

The revival came in the industrial north where Rochdale became a successful model for co-operation that was copied elsewhere.

Co-operation was slow to take off in agricultural Essex, which was dominated by aristocratic landowners and the Church of England. A Co-op was founded in Braintree in 1836 but that and several others failed to take root. The first success appears to have been at Halstead in 1860 which by 1876 had a turnover of £31,000 and was paying out £2,000 in dividends to its members.

Co-ops thrived better where industry grew up in Essex and were often formed by groups of industrial workers. Railwaymen in Stratford, iron foundry workers in Chelmsford, a silk weaver in Colchester, and chalk quarrymen in Grays formed the local co-operative societies. Other workers formed co-operatives elsewhere in the county.

Education became important in the movement. In 1896 the Stratford Society had an Education Committee and launched the influential Stratford Co-operative Magazine edited by W. Henry Brown. Many societies opened libraries and ran courses for members.

The Co-operative movement was the first to have a membership of women on an equal basis. The Co-operative Women’s Guild was founded in 1883.

Political involvement came slowly to the Co-operative movement. Many leaders of the Co-operative and Trade Union movements gave support to the Liberal Party and in 1900 the movement declined to send representatives to the conference which formed the Labour Representation Committee, the forerunner of the Labour Party, formed in 1906.

By 1914 attitudes were changing and the First World War produced a crisis leading to the formation of the Co-operative Party in 1917. In the 1920s there were agreements with the Labour Party and today the two parties are firmly locked together.

By 1912 there were a number of successful societies in London and Essex. Mergers reduced the numbers, particularly after the London Co-operative Society was established in 1920. Several societies in Essex merged with the LCS. The LCS, however, merged with Co-operative Retail Services in 1980 and, in 2000, CRS merged with the Co-operative Wholesale Society to form the Co-operative Group.

Today three societies operate in Essex – The Co-operative Group, the East of England Co-operative Society and, in the centre, the surviving Chelmsford Star Society.

**Malcolm Chase spoke on the struggle for the right to vote: The Chartist Movement.**

The six points of the Chartist Movement originated from the London Working Men’s Association which was founded in 1836: A vote for every man; a secret ballot; no property qualification; payment of MPs; equal-sized constituencies; annual parliaments.

It was the Colchester Working Men’s Association that suggested the name ‘People’s Charter’ for the document the LWMA had drawn up..

There were Chartist branches in all these Essex communities: Bocking, Braintree, Brightingsea, Chelmsford, Coggeshall, Colchester, Epping, Halstead, Harwich, Hatfield Broadoak, Maldon, Manningtree, Ongar, Rawreth, Romford, Sible Hedingham, Waltham Abbey, Walthamstow, Witham, Wivenhoe.

See Arthur Brown, *Chartism in Essex and Suffolk* (1982) for more information specifically about the movement in Essex.

Feargus O’Connor emerged as the movement’s leader and was said to have lungs of brass and a voice like a trumpet. He realised the importance of a national press and launched the ‘Northern Star’ that had a national circulation of 50,000 at its peak. In the 1840s when sales declined the Northern Star offices were moved from Leeds to London to emphasise the paper’s national character.

The Chartist Movement had its hay day from 1838 to 1850. It was never a revolutionary movement and its charter demanded the vote for all men. Its annual conventions were envisaged as a radical alternative to parliament and reflected the need to keep MPs on a short leash – hence the call for annual parliaments, the only one of the six demands not to be achieved within 60 years of the Movement’s final convention in 1858.

Best known are the huge petitions, signed by millions, that were submitted to parliament in 1839, 1842 and 1848 all of which were rejected. The government was worried about the menace of the mass movement. Spies were sent to meetings and night meetings were outlawed.

There is an obsession with the movement’s failure to achieve its objectives and its eventual extinction but its achievements are overlooked. It increased awareness of working people about what they had in common. It forced the state to legislate in favour of the population at large, for example through the Factory Acts and the repeal of the Corn Laws. The Chartists made authority more cautious of applying repression. The process of Local Government began to be opened up to working men: the first Chartist Councillors were elected in Leeds as early as 1841. Finally it equipped its members with ‘social capital’, organising skills, confidence and an awareness of the need to seek education.

**John Gyford spoke on the Life of Alfred Barnes**

Alfred Barnes was MP for East Ham South from 1922 till 1955 apart from 1931 to 1935 when many Labour MPs lost their seats. Alfred was born in West Ham in 1887, the youngest of eight children. At the age of eight he lost a leg in a fairground accident. He served a seven year silversmith apprenticeship and had his own shop until he became an MP. His Trade Union was the National Union of Gold, Silver Workers and Allied Trades that eventually merged, with 600 members, with the AEU in 1980. In 1921 he married Leila Real and they had three daughters.

He entered politics through the Independent Labour Party (ILP) and the Co-operative Movement and became chairman of the Stratford Co-op in 1915, a society whose many committees included farming, food, coal, dairy, drapery, stables and bakery. He was prominent in the creation of the London Co-operative Society (LCS) and was president of that society from 1920 to 1923.

Alfred was a tall dignified figure and was spotted by Clement Attlee in 1910 as ‘a young lad of promise’; it was he who in 1917 seconded the proposal at the Co-operative Congress in Swansea that a Co-operative Party be set up to work along with a the Labour Party. He is by far the longest serving chair of the Co-operative party holding that office from 1924 to 1945.

He was appointed a Labour Whip from 1925 to 1930 and served in government as Junior Lord of the Treasury but had to resign that post in October 1930 because parliamentary rules stipulated that a minister could not be a company director. He was an unpaid director of the National Co-operative Publishing Society and it is a measure of his commitment to the Co-operative Movement that he chose to remain on the Co-operative Board rather than continue in government office.

In parliament he concerned himself with domestic issues and his maiden speech was on The Importation of Animals Bill. He was concerned about the threat to domestic enterprise- the importation of hides for example, something he knew about through his co-operative experience.

In 1937 in a speech at East Ham he warned of the fascist threat. He described Hitler and Mussolini as gangsters and was condemned as a ‘political highwayman’ by the Nazi press. To Barnes totalitarianism was alien to the voluntary and democratic nature of the Co-operative Movement.

During the war in parliament, once again using his retailing experience, he raised issues of rationing and fruit and sugar supplies even drawing attention to the thieving of milk bottles by rival dairymen. He was concerned about post war reconstruction accepting that Churchill’s government was very good for the war but would make a timid post-war government. He called for public ownership, particularly of transport.

In 1945 Attlee appointed Barnes as his Minister of Transport, a post he held until Labour lost power in 1951. His junior minister was James Callaghan and the major achievement was railway nationalisation in 1947. In 1948 he announced a ten year programme for roads and spoke of the prospect of electric vehicles in the future.

On the occasion of the opening of the electrification of the London-Shenfield line he was invited to drive the first train. As dignitaries milled about the platform Barnes was put in the driver’s seat for instructions from the driver. “You lift your foot off the pedal,” said the driver. “Like this?” asked Barnes and the train moved off leaving the guests on the platform.

After 1951 he briefly remained shadow Transport Minister and finally retired from parliament in 1955 and moved to Walton on Naze. In 1937 he had bought land there to site the family caravan and in 1947 had bought the Eastcliffe Hotel that he converted to holiday flats. He was not done with public service and was an independent councillor on Frinton and Walton Urban District Council 1957-59. For the rest off his life he concentrated on running the caravan park which he now owned.

Alfred was not an inspiring speaker yet had administrative and reliable qualities that were admired by Clement Attlee and enabled him to be the country’s longest serving Transport Minister.

Alfred died in Walton on the Naze aged 87 in 1974.

When Attlee described Alfred as ‘a young lad of promise’ in 1910 he also applied the same description to Herbert Morrison. Alf went on to become the leader of Co-operative politics; Herbert became the champion of municipal Socialism. It is perhaps a paradox that their major achievements were to bring into being the centralised public corporation as the preferred road to socialism.

**Colin Waugh spoke**  **on the Development of Working Class Education for Adults**  
  
 After the collapse of Chartism in 1848 a section of upper class Christian Socialists thought they could avert similar working-class activity in future by using adult education to create a compliant layer from amongst working-class activists.  
 They tried various measures for doing this, including the University Extension movement. By 1900 it was clear that Extension was not holding working-class students, hence not forming such a layer.  
A worker and Anglo-Catholic convert, Albert Mansbridge proposed to solve this by introducing tutorial classes, ie recruiting selected workers to systematic courses of studies leading to qualifications and ultimately to university entry for an elite group.  
The Oxford University Extension Delegacy eagerly embraced this idea, which was supported by tutors like R. H. Tawney.

The WEA was founded by Mansbridge in 1903 with their support.  
 Meanwhile there was a rising tide of industrial militancy and a rising tide of working-class self education, including in socialist politics, economics, philosophy etc.  
 Ruskin College (in Oxford but not part of the University) was founded in 1899 as part of a larger would-be working class education network by two US socialists, Walter Vrooman and Charles Beard. In 1902 they went back to the US, taking their money with them. Meanwhile Ruskin had become in effect a labour college - virtually all the students were rank and file union activists, mainly miners, railway workers and textile workers, sponsored by their union branches. But it was not funded by the TUC / union movement nationally.  
 Many of these students had their own notion of adult education for activists, which they called 'Independent Working Class Education’ (IWCE). They had had to develop their own thinking on such matters because in this country, unlike in Europe, the universities tended not to produce intellectuals who would commit themselves to a militant working class movement.  
 By 1908, Mansbridge's tutorial strategy looked to be working, beginning to create a compliant layer. However in order for this to work properly they needed a residential college in Oxford where workers selected through tutorial classes could be prepared for doing a diploma at Oxford itself - they wanted to take over Ruskin College and use it for this.  
At the same time, the TUC finally agreed to ask unions nationally to fund Ruskin. Therefore the Extension movement saw it must take control of Ruskin now or lose the chance and a large section of the ruling class, for example in the House of Lords and in Oxford University itself mobilised to do this. They organised changes in the governance of Ruskin and changes affecting the students directly, - exams, compulsory lectures, a ban on public speaking etc.  
The students then at Ruskin organised to resist this, setting up the Plebs League, the magazine Plebs and networks of adult education classes in working-class heartlands such as South Wales, the North East etc. They thought the college should be part of the labour movement.  
The principal of Ruskin College, Dennis Hird, a socialist appointed by Vrooman and Beard, aligned himself with the students. In March 1909 the governors of Ruskin sacked Hird, on the specious grounds that he had 'failed to maintain discipline'.  
 On 26th March all 54 students at Ruskin went on strike ( a boycott of lectures other than Hird's) in an attempt to win Hird's reinstatement. This became national headlines because it was unknown for miners etc to challenge Oxford University. The strike lasted for ten days.  
During the strike the most active section of students decided to withdraw from the college and set up a Central Labour College (CLC) of their own, which would coordinate their network of regional classes. This CLC was set up in August 1909, initially in Oxford, and moved to London in 1911, surviving till 1929.  
The Plebs League – that is the regional classes - grew to have several tens of thousands of students by the mid 1920s, and survived in the form of the National Council of Labour Colleges (NCLC) till it was taken over by the TUC in 1964 and effectively absorbed without trace in their mainstream programmes of trades union education.

**West London labour history event in Chiswick, Saturday 26th November**

Over 30 people attended this event, organized by Labour Heritage members in the Chiswick Labour Party rooms, to hear two speakers.

**‘Strike a Light’: the story of the Bryant and May matchwomen’s strike 1888**

Author and historian **Louise Raw** gave an entertaining and informative account of the strike. Her book, based in part in original research in the form of oral history, is the first to give full credit to the initiative and militancy of the women workers themselves.

Previous accounts of the strike have named Annie Besant, the middle class journalist and Fabian socialist, as the inspiration for the dispute. Besant was sympathetic to the workers’ plight. She had published an article entitled, ‘White slavery in London’, but she shared the belief of the employers that the women were incapable of organising themselves to improve their conditions. For this reason she advocated a boycott of Bryant and May rather than a strike. In fact it is quite clear from Louise’s account that Annie Besant didn’t actually know when the strike started.

Conditions at Bryant and May were indeed appalling. Arbitrary fines were imposed at work for such offences as laughing. When a woman drew management’s attention to the dangers of a machine to workers’ health and safety, she was reminded, “That machine is worth more than you.” In fact a severed finger meant dismissal.

The most horrible work hazard was ‘phossie jaw’ or phosphorus necrosis, a form of bone cancer. The workers were at risk from the disease because the employers did not provide a canteen and the infection spread as poisonous phosphorus dripped on to the food they brought in and left on the bench.

When Besant’s article caused a sensation, management tried to get the workers to sign a statement saying they were happy with conditions in the factory. Nobody signed. In July 1,400 women walked out in protest against the sacking of a rank and file women’s leader, and against working conditions in the factory generally. Within two weeks they had won the right to trade union recognition and an end to the illegal fines which were the basis of the bullying foremen’s power on the shop floor. It was a total victory.

Louise has uncovered a fascinating picture of the world of working class community in late-Victorian times in the East end. The Bryant and May women were mainly Irish cockneys. Though their working and living conditions were terrible, they were not just suffering waifs. They had strong conditions of solidarity among themselves. For instance they always organised a collection for sick workers. They had already been involved in three strikes at Bryant and May in the 1880s alone.

Louise was fortunate enough to come across descendants of some of the strike leaders in the course of her research. These relatives had clear recollections of strong independent-minded working class women with a clear political awareness.

The Bryant and May dispute is widely seen as the precursor to the great wave of strikes the next year in 1889; the explosion of ‘New Unionism’ in the great London dock strike and the organisation of the gas workers at Beckton. Were the strikes connected with the Bryant and May dispute? According to Louise many matchwomen were married to dockers. They marched in solidarity with the dockers in 1889 and they were from the same working class community. As Frederick Engels commented at the time, “That immense haunt of misery is no longer the stagnant pool it was six years ago.” The East End was on the march.

**The 2nd speaker was Ivan Gibbons, who teaches Irish Studies, at St Mary’s College in Twickenham. His topic was: Ramsay MacDonald and Labour’s Irish policy**.

1912-1922 was a tumultuous period in Irish history, from the 3rd Home Rule Bill in 1912 to the outbreak of civil war in 1922. These years had seen the formation of the Ulster Volunteers Force in 1913, the Easter Rising in 1916, the first independent Irish Parliament in 1919, the Government of Ireland Act in 1921 and the Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1921.

During this time Ramsay MacDonald, Ivan said, as secretary, treasurer and leader of the Labour Party had enormous influence over its policy towards Ireland. As a Presbyterian Scot, his judgment may have been swayed by this. He had worked as an election agent for a unionist candidate in North Belfast in the early years of the 20th century. This had been because the candidate had declared himself in favour of labour causes. During these years MacDonald had witnessed the divisions that nationalism of all sorts had imposed on an industrial working class movement.

But there was another side to this. Pre 1914 Labour Party policy had been to support Irish Home Rule. But by 1918 Irish politics had become very militant and the Labour Party was on the verge of becoming a party of government. MacDonald was himself out of Parliament for some years until 1922 and this weakened his hold on policy, according to Ivan. The reason for this had been his opposition as a pacifist to World War 1, a principled position which had led to respect within the left of the Labour Party, particularly the Red Clyde-siders. When elected to Parliament again he stood for leader of the Party, narrowly defeating Robert Clynes. He was then on to a mission of revamping the Party, with the aim of obtaining middle class votes. He wanted to deny the Conservative claim that Labour, with its trades union roots, was “unfit for office”. This led to a reversal of Labour’s earlier policy in 1920 of support for Irish self-determination. Labour came to reject Irish nationalism. A Labour Committee of Inquiry was set up and a Labour Campaign for Peace in Ireland. The previous policy of self-determination was now conditional for respect for the rights of minorities (the Protestants) and “British security”.

So after partition and the Government of Ireland Act, Labour supported the Anglo-Irish treaty of 1921 and in government in 1924, opposed the anti-treaty fighters who were seen as waging a civil war. Labour had to be seen as respectable now. By the time of the second Labour Government of 1929-31, the growing economic crisis was seen as the priority over all other issues. However MacDonald, at the Imperial Conference of 1930/31 backed Dominion status for India and Egypt but not for Ireland. He was likely that he saw Ireland, not as a colony but as part of the UK.

The talk was followed by a lively discussion on the role of labour and nationalism in Ireland and its repercussions throughout the UK, which have remained until present times.

Ivan advertised a book which is due to be published by the Irish Cultural Centre in Hammersmith. Funds from the sale of the book would go to help fund the centre which is suffering from government spending cuts.

[www.irishculturalcentre.co.uk](http://www.irishculturalcentre.co.uk)

**Labour Relations on London Transport**

In October 2011 Labour Heritage members were given a guided tour of the Acton Deport of the London Transport Museum, by Martin Eady, a former London Underground worker, and RMT activist. He has written on industrial relations for Labour Heritage before and now writes in full a report of the talk that he gave at the London Transport

Museum in October.

When I gave a talk on Labour Relations at the Acton Depot of the London Transport Museum on 29th October 2011 there was not time to give a complete overview. This article can be no more than a summary as the amount of material is immense. I have referred in particular to *The Railwaymen* (a history of the National Union of Railwaymen) by Dr Philip Bagwell 1963*, Labour Relations in London Transport* by H.A.Clegg 1950, *and A Short History of the British Working Class* by G.D.H.Cole. *Radical Aristocrats: London Busworkers from the 1880's to the 1980's* by Ken Fuller has recently been reprinted and will repay study.

That there has never been a joint trade union organisation or negotiating body covering the whole of London Transport may seem surprising. From the 1910's the Underground group (known to its employees as 'the Combine') had acquired most of the Underground Railway companies (with the important exception of the Metropolitan Railway), the London General Omnibus Company (LGOC) and two of the three company tramways (London United Tramways and Metropolitan Electric Tramways). The formation of the London Passenger Transport Board in 1933 added the ten

municipal tramways, the third company tramway, the Metropolitan Railway and

all the remaining bus companies to the

Combine. Yet the Road Transport and

Railway components remained

completely separate. There have been very few examples of joint trade union or industrial action, nearly all of them unofficial. The cynic might say that trade union officialdom have an interest in keeping their empires divided the easier to control the actions of their members, but the roots lie deep in the differing histories of the road and railway components of London Transport.

**Railway Companies**

The Railway companies were renowned for their backward, reactionary and vicious opposition to trade unionism. In 1893 a leading Railway Company Director said “*You might as well have Trade Unionism in Her Majesty's Army as have it in the railway service. The thing is totally incompatible”*. (Quoted in Bagwell). Early railway trade unionists soon realised that although there were 120 separate railway companies, the interconnected nature of the railway system meant that the only effective way of organising was to have a national union. The Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants (ASRS, note the terminology) was formed in 1872, merging with two other railway unions in 1913 to form the National Union of Railwaymen (NUR), which in 1990 merged with the National Union of Seamen to form the Rail, Maritime and Transport Union (RMT).

The formation of the NUR was influenced by syndicalist ideas and it was built as one union for all grades.

The All Grades Movement of 1906 had as key demands an increase in wages, reduction in hours, and crucially recognition of the unions. Interestingly, the ASRS received official support from the Railway Clerks Association (predecessor of today's Transport Salaried Staff Association, TSSA), but no official support from the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF), although many of their rank and file supported the movement. Lord Claud Hamilton, Chairman of the Great Eastern Railway, trying to justify the Companies' refusal to recognise the unions, wrote that “*Full control by the Directors was essential for the maintenance of strict discipline and that division of control with the Union would impair both discipline and safety”* (Bagwell p.266). The ASRS responded that discipline and safety on the two railways that had recognised the Union, the North Eastern and the District, was better than on the 120 or so railways where there was no union recognition (Bagwell p.266). A strike was looming, and in 1907 the President of the Board of Trade, none other than Lloyd George, met the General Secretary of the ASRS to try to avert the strike. The General Secretary accepted a Conciliation scheme in place of recognition and called the strike off. The Railway Companies were assured that they would not have to recognise the unions. Even with Lloyd George in attendance the Railway Company Chairmen refused to meet in the same room as the union leaders (just like ACAS in the present day) (Bagwell p.269). Interestingly, of the sixteen members of the Parliamentary Committee of the TUC Richard Bell of the ASRS was alone in not having his union recognised by the employers. In this context, it appears to have been a strategic blunder to have signed such an agreement but sign it they did. They were given twenty minutes to decide whether to accept it or call a strike, without the chance to consult the members or even the Executive of the Union. (My own experience at ACAS (Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service) in 1989 was exactly similar). The lack of support from ASLEF seems to have been the crucial factor in the failure to call a strike (Bagwell p.269), again reminiscent of more recent events.

Other Conciliation schemes followed strikes in 1911 and 1919. The unions were recognised following the 1911 strike but union officials were not allowed into the Conciliation Boards except at the topmost level. Cole writes “*The scheme was a most unsatisfactory affair. The new Conciliation Boards were elected without the Unions having any recognised part in their choice. Officials of the Unions were totally excluded. It was so devised as to interpose long delays in the way of getting grievances remedied”.* The 1921 Railways Act, as well as forcing the Companies to merge into four regional conglomerates instead of being nationalised as they should have been, made it a statutory requirement for the Companies to operate Conciliation schemes. The Act required there to be a National Wages Board which *“All questions relating to pay or conditions of service.....shall be referred to and settled by*” (Bagwell p.412). By this time the unions were wholly in support of the Conciliation scheme. NUR General Secretary Jimmy Thomas said “*The scheme has been created not only in the hope of industrial peace but also of a genuine co-operation between the railway companies and the railway employees in the provision of the most efficient transport service possible*” (Bagwell p.412). It gave the unions some protection from arbitrary redundancies, but the co-determination in the running of the railways was largely illusory as management retained the right to manage and industrial action was made extremely difficult to call as all issues had to go to the top of a series of committees and then be referred to compulsory arbitration before a failure to agree could be registered. The German system of joint industry boards is comparable.

**Compromise or Independence**

J.T.Murphy, militant founder of the shop steward’s movement in the engineering industry and later to be a founder member of the Communist Party of Great Britain, campaigned vigorously against these class-collaborationist schemes (see his 1918 Pamphlet *'Compromise or Independence'*). The shop steward’s movement had grown rapidly during the First World War and there were demands for nationalisation of industry with workers control or at least participation. The Whitley Commission, recognising that workers and their representatives should hold a more responsible position in industry, sought to avert these demands through joint councils similar to the Railway Conciliation scheme (see *'Labour relations in London Transport'* by H.A.Clegg, published 1950). Syd Bidwell, a left wing militant in the NUR prior to his election to Parliament, believed that the Conciliation scheme was indeed a form of workers control (personal testimony). Incidentally, the NUR refused to sponsor him as an MP because he was too left wing for their liking and he left the NUR to join the T&GWU (Transport and General Workers Union), who did sponsor him.

These Conciliation arrangements included the Underground railway companies. The Underground Group was willing to negotiate directly with the railway unions as it did with the bus union, but as the railway unions favoured the Conciliation scheme a system of ten Sectional Councils for operating staff and four Departmental Councils for workshop staff was put in place. The craft unions (Engineers, Electricians and Vehicle builders plus other smaller unions) excluded themselves from this structure, and in 1932 formed a Joint Trades Committee (Clegg). This complex system continued until 1990. The union officials, both local and national, had rather a comfortable life in such a structure but the rank and file naturally grew more and more restive. The Sectional Council representative who recruited me into the NUR in 1973 could boast with pride that we hadn't been on strike since 1926. My reply was to the effect that maybe that explained why the wages and conditions were so poor. Similar schemes, called Whitley Councils, were established for health and local government workers.

**London Passenger Transport Board – Nationalisation?**

The formation of the London Passenger Transport Board (LPTB) in 1933 to run London Transport was not nationalization - that was to come in 1948, but it did mean the Government taking control of an increasingly chaotic situation to impose some kind of order on the Companies. It also meant taking the municipal tramways out of local authority control, which had allowed staff and users some input into policy, especially through the London County Council. Demands for worker representation on the LPTB continued to be made, and denied, until the TUC in 1944 formally abandoned the demand for worker representation on the boards of soon to be nationalised industries. Clearly, a deal was done which would benefit from closer investigation. John Cliff, Assistant General Secretary of the T&GWU was appointed to the LPTB in 1933, but not before he had resigned his union position and ceased to participate in union activities.

**Buses, trams and trolleybuses**

Road service staff enjoyed direct negotiations between their union and the employer, with no joint bodies. The Combine was generally considered to be a relatively good employer with better than average wages and conditions and a paternalistic style providing sports clubs, canteens etc to encourage loyalty to the company. However, all was not rosy. John Grigg has written an account of the 1909 Fulwell tram strike in an earlier Labour Heritage bulletin. In 1924 there was another tram strike against attempts by the employers to cut wages and in support of a counter claim for an increase. 16,000 tram workers struck supported by 23,000 bus workers. Tube staff voted to strike but were bought off with a six shilling a week increase. The TUC, supported by T&GWU leader Ernest Bevin, attempted to initiate joint discussion and action with the employers (Mond-Turner scheme) similar to the railway Conciliation scheme. But the left organised the rank and file to oppose this, and to oppose Bevin too! (Clegg). Rates of pay on the trams, however, remained less than those on buses and trolleybuses, despite socialist councils, West Ham in particular, paying above the going rate on principle.

There were several unofficial strikes between 1924 and 1926 over schedule changes and other issues. In 1932 the LGOC again tried to cut wages and staff numbers with hundreds of dismissals. The replacement of petrol engines by diesels from 1930 allowed buses to be larger and to go faster, without compensation for the staff, who opposed the speed up. The Communist Party and its Trade Union United Front organisation the Minority Movement became active on the buses, building on a rising tide of anger and frustration among the staff. Mass meetings at bus garages opposed the cuts, which had been agreed by the T&GWU. Bert Papworth, of Putney Chelverton Road garage, called a delegate meeting which elected a rank and file committee. This committee took over the *Busman's Punch*, a magazine that had been inaugurated by Communists at Holloway garage. The enviable democratic structure earlier put in place by the T&GWU facilitated a high level of organisation and gave the rank and file a considerable say in the decisions of officials. Despite the Conciliation scheme's restrictions tube workers at Morden declared in favour of a strike.

The rank and file committee went from strength to strength. They said the 'Speed Agreement' had led to an increase in takings without any increase in wages and also demanded a seven hour day. Many local unofficial actions took place, including a Green Line strike in 1935 over insufficient rest days and a strike over speed-up at Slough and Windsor country area garages which spread rapidly. See *'London Busmen: Rise and Fall of a rank & file movement'* by Pete Glatter in International Socialism No 74, January 1975, also Clegg.

**Coronation Strike**

All this agitation and unofficial action culminated finally in an official strike in 1937. Striking bus workers were accused by the press of deliberately trying to sabotage the Coronation (try to imagine King George VI on a bus!) The Tram and Trolleybus section of the T&GWU sought power to call their members out but they were outmanoeuvred by Bevin and were not able to join the strike, which weakened it considerably. It was ended by the T&GWU after four weeks with virtually no improvements made on the original offer. *The Busmens' Punch* had collapsed by the outbreak of war in 1939 but after being expelled from the T&GWU, then readmitted but banned from office, Bert Papworth and his colleague Bill Jones were finally re-elected in 1942 and subsequently served on the Executive of the T&GWU for many years (Clegg, and Glatter).

**After the War**

In 1953 London Transport employed 97,000 staff on buses and Underground but staff turnover was 12.7% so just to stand still they had to recruit more than 12,000 staff every year. Management continually cut services and the staff establishment but still could not recruit enough staff , and low pay was at the heart of it. In 1938 a bus driver's pay was 50% above the average, by 1948 it was only 17% above average, and continued to fall relative to other jobs. Despite direct recruitment in the West Indies and Ireland and the provision of low rent staff hostels, better pay and conditions elsewhere made it very difficult to obtain enough staff. A commission of enquiry (Phelps Brown) was finally established in 1963 and in 1964 its report stated “*The persistent difficulties in finding enough staff to fill its establishment we regard as evidence of the relative inadequacy of pay”.* How hard they find it to admit staff need a pay rise! (Quoted in unpublished GLC research paper). The paternalism of the 'Combine' also had a negative side. Management and supervisors often had a dictatorial style. Many of them had served in the Forces during the war and some acted as if they were still Army officers. Staff, many of whom had been squaddies, were not going to put up with this and the only surprising thing about the 1958 strike is that it wasn't called sooner. The strike lasted seven weeks and was 100% solid, yet it was ended without any significant concessions gained, not even a pay increase. Despite superb organisation and democratic structures the inability of the Road transport section to gain any advances from two lengthy all out stoppages is truly extraordinary. Was it a matter of bus staff having less industrial clout than train staff, or a particularly inept Union hierarchy? Certainly from bus drivers wages being well in excess of train drivers' before the war the reverse is now the case (in 2011 a bus driver gets around £31,000 basic while an Underground driver is on £46,000 pa). Subsequent struggles over One Person Operation of buses (introduced on single deckers in 1966 and double deckers in 1971), and privatisation (first tendered out route in 1988), ended in failure, despite again some heroic fightbacks, for example at Tottenham garage against privatisation. The impressive union organisation was all but destroyed in the wake of privatisation of bus services and is proving the devil of a job to rebuild. Some busworkers have even joined RMT, the first time ever a Union has organised across the Rail – Bus divide.

**Meanwhile, Underground**

The Underground faced the same problems of staff shortage, low pay and OPO, and frustration with the incredibly bureaucratic staff council scheme continued to grow, at least among the rank and file. There was an eleven week strike at Acton Works in 1969 which ended without any significant achievements. Acton Works was superbly organised with very effective shop stewards. The craft unions and the NUR were both strong and generally co-operated with each other, and there was a strong Communist Party presence. Yet the strike failed, primarily because a workshop doing long-term maintenance work has a negligible influence on the train service, allowing management to ignore it. From this time on there was never another engineering-based strike and the focus decisively shifted to the operating side and its Unions NUR and ASLE&F. The 1982 ASLE&F strike against flexible rostering for train drivers and the unsuccessful 1985 NUR strike against OPO were harbingers of change. No longer could the Union hierarchies through the Staff Council scheme restrain a membership increasingly frustrated by the lack of effective response to management attacks. A new “1968” generation of activists in the unions was beginning to challenge the old leadership. In 1989 a series of unofficial strikes started, soon to be made official by the NUR and eventually by ASLE&F too. These spread to British Rail and eventually to the buses, resulting in total withdrawal of unacceptable station staffing proposals and considerable increases in rates of pay for staff affected by OPO (see article by M. Eady in LH Autumn 2010).

In 1990 management unilaterally ended the Staff Councils scheme as it no longer matched their new managerial structure or style. Union officialdom tried to hold on to it but found it was totally unlamented having long ago outlived any use it might once have had. The new unified machinery swept away all the old divisions, and features direct negotiation between management and unions.

Since then there have been innumerable disputes on the Underground as a more effective Union organisation defends its members with some success. One lesson has been that you do not need ASLE&F involvement to have a successful dispute – an integrated system like the Underground is quite vulnerable to well directed action even by so-called peripheral staff. Fusion talks between the TSSA and RMT are taking place. Privatisation has been resisted by hard organising work in the private companies. Abstract demands for renationalisation have proved pointless and ineffective. Rebuilding a union on the buses remains a tough uphill task.

Martin Eady

**Janey O’Neill Buchan**

Janey Buchan, nee Kent, a generous and long-term supporter of Labour Heritage, who represented Glasgow in the European Parliament from 1979-94, died on 14th January, 2012, in Brighton. Born in 1926 to a Glasgow tram-driver and his housemaid wife, she grew up in an overcrowded tenement but passed the 11+ examination to attend a grammar school. However, she had to leave at the age of fourteen to contribute to her family’s income, and worked as a secretary.

At fourteen she joined the Communist Party, like her parents, and was very active in left-wing causes such as raising money to help the Republicans in the Spanish Civil War. It was in the Communist Party that she met her future husband, Norman, who served as a tank crew member during World War II, and afterwards took part in fierce debates at Glasgow University, where he was a student.

After their marriage and the birth of their son, Alasdair, they became widely known for their work in promoting the arts, particularly folk-song, poetry and drama. Ewan MacColl, Martin Carthy, Cisco Houston, Pete Seeger, and others, stayed at their home. They were in contact with Joan Littlewood of Theatre Workshop and promoted fringe events at the Edinburgh Festival.

Norman and Janey both left the Communist Party in 1956, when Soviet troops invaded Hungary, and became dedicated Labour Party activists. Norman was elected to the House of Commons in 1964 and served as a Minister before his untimely death in 1990. Janey was a member of Strathclyde Council before her election to the European Parliament in 1979.

They continued to support the arts and to organise and promote concerts and other events and were close to prominent performers and artists like Billy Connolly. Janey also campaigned for a wide range of causes, including anti-apartheid and gay rights. She was a fount of generosity and always dug deeply into her personal resources to help individuals and organisations in need of money.

In the European Parliament, she served as an officer in the European Parliamentary Labour Party (British Group) and supported progressive and left-wing policies. She remained a deeply committed socialist and had little sympathy for Tony Blair and New Labour.

An inveterate letter-writer and an avid reader of newspapers, she knew many journalists as well as leading politicians and artists and used her contacts to promote ideas. She donated, books, paintings and historical records to numerous friends and organisations, including Glasgow University, Glasgow Caledonian University and the Glasgow School of Arts.

She moved to Brighton several years ago to be near her son, Alasdair, who survives her along with four grandchildren, one great grandson, and her brother Enoch.

Stan Newens

**Review of “Vintage Red” by John Kotz**. **(**978-1-907464-06-5)Manifesto Press, Ruskin House, 23 Combe Road, Croydon, CRO 1BD,in association with Labour Heritage, £9.95

Most Labour autobiographies or biographies are of people who have been prominent on the national scene. Not all, but many of these, have had limited experience of the rank and file activity on which the Labour Party is based and without which it would never have come to power.

*Vintage Red* is the story of John Kotz, a life-long Labour Party activist who achieved much at the municipal level but devoted himself, above all, to organisational and electoral activity. He has worked in every general election, recurrent local elections and innumerable by-elections from 1945 to the present time. Without people like John Kotz, the Labour Party would never have survived.

Born in 1930 into an East End Jewish family, he joined Hackney Labour League of Youth in 1945 and spent most of his leisure time, even during his national service with the RAF, campaigning for the Labour Party. Deputy agent at Hackney at 21 years of age, he took over the agency at 23 and was himself elected to the Council. After serving as chief whip, he became the youngest ever Mayor of Hackney (with the exception of Herbert Morrison), in 1963, and this record has not yet been broken.

He remained on Hackney Council until 1986, serving as deputy leader and leader in his final years there. He was, however, ousted by an intolerant group of ultra-lefts, who failed in their bid to precipitate a revolution by refusing to set a rate. These eventually drifted away – some actually joining New Labour!

John Kotz was, however, consistently on the left in the Labour Party. He invited CND to hold their meetings in the Mayor’s Parlour during his term of office. He opposed the US bombing of Vietnam. He did his best to oppose the sale of council houses; and he regularly spoke out on left-wing issues.

After he ceased to be the leader of Hackney Council, he served out his term but then yielded to his family’s wishes and agreed to move out to the Essex/Suffolk border. From here, however, he threw himself into Labour activity anew – despite the very different political conditions, in which the Conservative Party dominated the scene. He was elected to Braintree District Council, stood as the Labour Parliamentary Candidate in Saffron Walden and became secretary, then chair, of the Essex County Labour Party, a position he still holds.

For John Kotz, the struggle for democratic socialism through the Labour Party has been a central mission in his life and, as he makes clear in his final chapter, he is utterly opposed to New Labour and wants a return to socialist objectives. He quotes a former Labour Party member, who told him that to be a socialist you had to be an optimist, and he clearly remains both.

This book throws a light on the forces which are behind the Labour Party’s drive. It should be read by everyone who is concerned to see Labour back in power, carrying through a democratic socialist programme. It is an inspiring story of one who never gave up his ideals.

Stan Newens

This review was originally published in Tribune, September 2011

**Review of Attlee : a life in politics by Nicklaus Thomas-Symonds, published by Tauris, 2010, 9781845117795 (£25)**

This is a sympathetic review of the life of Clement Attlee, who led the first majority Labour Government, from 1945-51. This was the government which introduced the welfare state, and nationalised key sections of the economy. It was to shape the future of the UK for over 30 years.

Comparisons are made with later Labour leaders such as Tony Blair. They both had come from Conservative backgrounds and attended public schools. But this is where the similarity ends. Attlee was clearly a convert to socialism, but Blair was not. Attlee’s wife Violet remained a Conservative all her life, but nevertheless supported her husband in his political life. Blair was (we are told) recruited to the Labour Party by his wife Cherie.

Attlee had a military career during World War 1. After he was discharged, he worked for a few years, as a lecturer in social policy at LSE, recruited by Beatrice Webb. He gave this up however when he was elected as a Labour MP. He made his a mark in opposition by his interest in India for which he joined the all-party Simon Commission.

After the election of 1931 he was one of small number of former Labour ministers to hold his seat in the Limehouse constituency. This put him in the running for the Labour leadership when George Lansbury resigned. But there was never unanimity within the Party for his leadership. He took a lot of criticism, and some described him as a “nonentity”. Herbert Morrison constantly had designs on the leadership, but was never successful. According to the author Attlee stayed at the helm with the support of Ernest Bevin who as former secretary of the transport workers union, had become a very powerful figure in the Labour Party. He went on to become Minister for Labour in the wartime coalition government.

In spite of the criticism of members of the Parliamentary Party, Attlee held it together in the face of opposition in the 1930s, rejecting calls to join a “popular front” with Liberals and Communists. He presided over the Party’s change of policy from pacifism to collective security in the face of fascist aggression. He led the Parliamentary Labour Party into the 1939-45 wartime coalition government, after Neville Chamberlain and the appeasers had departed. Never abandoning his commitment to changing society he believed that the war was as much about changing Britain, as defeating the Nazis. Never again could there be a return to the poverty and unemployment of the 1930s.

The author makes an interesting point that the two worse election defeats for the Labour Party in 1931 and 1983 were to be followed within fifteen years by landslide majorities in 1945 and 1997. In 1945 the electorate moved to accept Labour Party policies, in 1997 it was the other way round, in that Labour adapted to Conservative policies, accepting the values of capitalism. Whether this is true or not needs further scrutiny, but in 1945 Attlee correctly judged the public mood, called for an end to the wartime coalition and won a landslide majority on the most radical programme that the Party had ever put forward.

The government was not however free from problems – the UK was bankrupt, heavily dependent upon US loans and there was the question of Indian independence to be sorted out. The author credits Attlee with having a consensual style of government, based on getting agreement within the cabinet ministers proceeding. This worked for most of the time and was clearly different from what we came to see from the Blair regime. There was little major opposition from within the government and the labour movement itself, until the last few years of the 1945-1951 government , when increases in defence spending was to lead to charges being applied for some previously free health services such as dentistry.

There is much detail in this book about the dealings of the 1945 Labour Government and how policies evolved, in line with relationships between the ministers. The emphasis is very much on the career and personality of Attlee but also how he related as an outsider to the rest of the labour movement, when he became its leader.

Barbara Humphries

**LETTERS**

**John Arnott – 1799 - 1868**  
  
I found Alan Spence’s article on the Chartist Movement very enlightening. It gave me the background to my own family history. Members may be interested to know that my great-great grandfather, John Arnott, became the Secretary of The National Charter Association; he was a shoemaker by trade. I discovered John when doing some family research and there was a link to the *Tribune* web page Chartist Ancestors.  
David Shaw told his story in the *Tribune History Magazine* and he also put it into a book. I have a copy of that.  
I am sure that his grandson, Alfred Charles Arnott, my beloved Granddad was very aware of his history. Granddad was a staunch Trades Union Member (TGWU) and left-winger. I inherited his 50 years Silver Medal inscribed Brother Alfred Arnott. He helped to build the London Underground as a labourer.  
As a Labour Party Member for 67 years, you can imagine how I felt when I discovered that it was in my genes! I joined, age 17, in the 1945 General Election, after reading Oliver Lyttleton (Humph’s uncle), calling for a return to high unemployment to *“keep them in their place”.* Churchill did not deny it so I went to the Northampton Labour Party offices and offered to help. Our candidate was Reginald Paget. By the end of the week, every house in my road had his poster in the windows. I was taken out canvassing by ward members and after a few evenings I was allowed to go alone! I joined The Labour League of Youth. What happened to that?  
I am so proud of John. Sadly there are no pictures of him but David Shaw shows examples of the various anthems and songs that John wrote, all in his own handwriting. (He was affectionately called Rhymer John!) There is a sad little line signing a letter (?) “*Poor paralysed Chartist”* which I find very moving. David thinks that John had suffered a stroke. He was buried in a communal grave in Finchley Cemetery.  
There is no indication as to why he and his family moved from Chesham to London, particularly to a very poor area, Pancras. He was the only one of his siblings to do so. There was a huge clearance in that area for the building of St Pancras Station so they moved to the Caledonian Road. That was my birthplace. Not what became the posh part of Islington post WW2!  All those grand houses were multi-occupied before the war; we lived in three rooms at the top of a house. No electricity, only gas lighting and cooking. What the Americans call, a cold water apartment, I think.  
They were the REAL “good old days”. I know about them; I lived in them.  
  
Yours in comradeship  
  
Edith Davis

**The principles of the Chartists**

In the bulletin of Autumn 2011, the principles of the Chartists are set out. They clearly regarded the first one of prime importance. It is of course a basic tenet of any democracy - the right to vote.

So, more than one hundred years ago the demand was made for the vote. There were to be no exceptions.

Readers of *Labour Heritage* should know that one hundred years after the Chartists, more than one million British citizens – and I am one, do not have the vote. They have been disenfranchised.

They are the British citizens, who, for various reasons, are resident within the European Union, but not in the UK. They are denied the vote in the UK and also in the country where they reside – a new class of citizens has been created – the disenfranchised.

They are not wealthy tax dodgers. The Rome Labour Party of which I was the secretary for ten years was made up of hotel and bar workers, teachers, interpreters, bank employees, those employed in international bodies based in Rome, and pernsionsers.

The labour movement of today does well to study the work of the Chartists, but that study should lead to their acting to get the right to vote for these British people outside of the UK. That would make the study of the Chartists have some real meaning.

Harry Shindler (member of Labour Heritage in Rome).

**James Hudson MP.**

In the last catalogue of the secondhand booksellers *Left on the Shelf* run by Dave Cope (Cumbria) I saw Dave was selling a leaflet. This detailed a meeting of Hounslow Co-operative Party in 1948 to be addressed by Jimmy Hudson, Labour and Co-operative MP for Ealing West and Bob Edwards, secretary of the Chemical Workers Union, ex-chair of the ILP “*Do you want World War 3?”*

*Have you let the Government know that you don’t? It’s time you did. Come to this meeting and support the resolution which will be sent to the government protesting against the drift to war*.” I enclose a copy of the leaflet. Remember that this was in 1948.

Why did Jimmy Hudson do this? The Labour Party manifesto “*Let us face the future*” in 1945 stated *“We must make sure that Germany and Japan are deprived of the power to make war again. We must consolidate in peace the great war-time association of the British Commonwealth with the USA and the USSR. Let it not be forgotten that in the years leading up to the war the Tories were so scared of Russia that they missed the chance to establish a partnership which might well have prevented the war.”* Hopeful stuff?

As the 1945 victory parade of cars went down our road in Greenford we asked our father what it meant. He said *“if they handle it right this time we should never see a Tory government again in this* *country.”* The Rogers family, mum, dad and two sons joined the Labour Party. I was 16.

Unknown to us in 1945 Churchill and Eden had been replaced at the Potsdam Conference by Attlee and Bevin. Mr Byrnes, the American Secretary of State must have been watching to see how great would be the difference in the British attitude and position now that a socialist government had taken power. In his autobiography, *“Speaking frankly*”, he wrote:

*“Britain’s stand on the issues before the Conference were not altered in the slightest, so far as we could discern, by the replacement of Mr Churchill and Mr Eden by Mr Attlee and Mr Bevin. This continuity of Britain’s foreign policy impressed me.”*

By 1947 my father wrote to Jimmy Hudson expressing his concern about trends in foreign policy. Hudson replied that he shared my father’s concerns. In South Greenford Ward Labour Party meetings concerns about trends in foreign policy by my father and a great old socialist Joe Wood were greeted with abuse, despite the fact that the concerns were in support of the Manifesto on foreign policy. The Right Wing in the Divisional Party and Ward were led by a man called Howard Whitten, Hudson was under constant attack and we did our best to support him.

But they were determined to deselect Jimmy Hudson claiming disingenuously that Jimmy was too old: Jimmy was 73. In May 1955 the Tories took Ealing North with 246 votes: their candidate was John Barter. Hudson was deselected in favour of a trade union officer William Hilton. The Tories held the seat until 1964 when Labour regained the seat by 127 votes. The candidate was Bill Molloy.

It is a sad story of the efforts of a principled sincere man, James Hindle Hudson 1881-1962.

Fraternally

Alan Rogers (Unrepentent socialist).

This was part of a longer letter.