



LABOUR HERITAGE

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Hon. President: Sir Wayne David.

Annual Birkbeck Bursary appeal in memory of Stan Newens and Linda Shampan

In 2021 Labour Heritage established a bursary at Birkbeck University to support students from refugee backgrounds who have no other means of support for they studies.

The bursary is in memory of Stan Newens, ex-member of parliament and our past chair who had a long record of campaigning for international causes, and also in memory of Linda Shampan, our past secretary who played an essential role in establishing the bursary and once worked at the Refugee Council.

Birkbeck has been awarded the 'University of Sanctuary Status' in recognition of its work with forced migrant communities.

Five students have benefitted from our bursary since 2021 including the student below who describes her experiences in Syria and how our bursary enables her to achieve her ambitions in the medical field.

Our aim is to raise £3,500 and payments can be made by bank transfer to Labour Heritage: Unity

Trust Bank sort code 608301. Account Number 20149763. Reference your surname & 'Bursary.'

Alternatively donation can be by cheque payable to 'Labour Heritage.'
Please write 'Bursary' on the back of the cheque and post to Labour
Heritage, 11 Aylmer Road, London W12 9LG.

John Grigg.

On behalf of Labour Heritage Committee.

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

When I arrived in the UK as a refugee , I had to adapt to an unfamiliar environment, learn a new language, and integrate with a new community. It was not an easy journey. But Birkbeck was made for me. It has all the modules useful in real life – not only as basic knowledge. I am enjoying every bit of it so far. Receiving this bursary helps students focus much more on our studies, and worry less about financial issues.

An Appreciation of Lord Tony Christopher. Richard Gorton

In July 2026 the death was announced of Lord Tony Christopher, who between 1976 and 1988 was General Secretary of the Inland Revenue Staff Federation (IRSF). Tony Christopher was a member of the TUC's General Committee and in 1988 served as its President. He was also the last parliamentarian to have fought in the Second World War. Tony Christopher's period as General Secretary was a time of great change for the civil service. New technology was beginning to reshape ways of working. Successive governments were much tougher over civil service pay and recruitment. I think a parallel can be drawn between the challenge trade unionists now face over the use of artificial intelligence and many of the battles fought by Tony Christopher forty years ago.

Tony Christopher was born in 1925 and following war service in the RAF, he joined the Inland Revenue. During the late 1950's, Christopher became a full-time official with the IRSF and after a sixteen year stint as assistant general secretary, Tony Christopher took charge of the IRSF in 1976. The IRSF may have been one of the smaller civil service unions, but it was well organized and effective. The Union's national conference decided policy and debates at conference could be tense and at times acrimonious. During the late 1970's I represented my Branch at IRSF conferences. On one occasion I been mandated to oppose a recommendation by the Union Executive on civil service pay. I spoke in the debate and then had to listen whilst Tony Christopher comprehensively rebutted every one of the arguments I had put forward. His years as a tax officer and union official gave Tony Christopher a knowledge of the Inland Revenue which few could equal.

In the politically charged late 1970's, Christopher's style of leadership could be unpopular with many Branch delegates and officers. Tony Christopher believed that unions should follow agreed rules and conventions when negotiating with ministers and Inland Revenue managers. He did not hesitate, however, to call for strike action during the spring of 1981 when Mrs. Thatcher's government tore-up the formula which had been used within Whitehall to calculate the

salaries of Inland Revenue staff. Christopher led a strike that lasted for almost six months. In the end the IRSF had to concede. Ministers were quite prepared to lose thousands of pounds of tax revenue rather than return to a pay formula acceptable to the union.

Tony Christopher strongly objected to the decision taken by Mrs. Thatcher in early 1984 to prohibit staff at the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) from holding union membership. He saw no conflict between national security and membership of a trade union. The ban eventually resulted in 14 members of staff being dismissed. As part of the TUC's campaign to overturn the ban, Tony Christopher led a union delegation to the European Court of Human Rights. The Court refused to intervene, and the right to hold union membership was not restored to GCHQ staff until Labour returned to office in May 1997.

Tony Christopher led the IRSF during a period of great change for the civil service. It was an era of staff cuts, recruitment freezes, cash limits on pay rises and the increasing use of technology to manage the assessment and collection of taxes. Significant amounts of work were either privatized or transferred to government agencies outside the civil service. Tony Christopher was a pragmatist, and he recognized that investment in technology was required if the Inland Revenue was to provide an efficient and effective service. For Tony Christopher and the IRSF, the application of technology had to be balanced by safeguards to protect jobs, and increased productivity merited higher pay. A decision by managers to oblige staff to switch to computer terminals to record and calculate tax assessments led to the suspension without pay of some IRSF members. Tony Christopher argued that the use of computers radically changed the character of the work and therefore was outside the contracts of employment held by his members. In 1984 the dispute went to the High Court and resulted in a ruling in favour of the Inland Revenue. The Judge held that whilst an employer could expect staff to adapt to new techniques and methods of work, training must be provided.

Any appreciation of Tony Christopher's life and work must mention that for over forty years he supported the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NACRO) and became its chairman in 1973. Tony Christopher believed that better training, better housing and better counselling would help ex-prisoners to rebuild their lives.

During his association with NACRO, Christopher served on several Home Office committees. He argued that NACRO must maintain its independence and strongly opposed an attempt to persuade NACRO to take over responsibility for the probation service.

In his last speech to the TUC Conference, just before he retired at the end of 1988, Tony Christopher urged delegates to move on from the confrontation of the Thatcher years and called for a new approach. Often described as a moderate, Tony Christopher preferred negotiation and arbitration to strike action. He disapproved of using strikes as form of political protest and instead established a fund which enabled the IRSF to take part in campaigns run by the Labour Party and the TUC.

Tony Christopher was fearless when defending his members, and an excellent negotiator who could draw on a deep knowledge of Inland Revenue regulations and procedures. Tony Christopher led the IRSF at a time when ministers wanted to cut costs and shed jobs. He stands out as commanding figure in civil service trade unionism.

1926 and the Rhymney Valley in South Wales

By Sir Wayne David

One of the 'essential' features of the General Strike and the nearly 7 months lockout in the South Wales coalfield was the 'unity' between the miners and the communities from which they were drawn. Unlike some other coalfields, in South Wales it was only towards the end of the dispute, when many miners were experiencing appalling levels of hardship, that the resolve of the miners began to weaken.

In the Rhymney Valley - from the town of Rhymney in the north, down through villages like Fochriw, Tirphil and Deri to the towns of Bargoed and Ystrad Mynach, to the villages of Llanbradach and the Aber Valley and to the town of Caerphilly - in so many ways, what happened here was not dissimilar to what occurred in other South Wales mining communities. These were almost one industry mining communities. The only small caveat I would add is that Caerphilly was originally a market town, and still maintained some of that character, and the town also had a significant number of workers associated with the railways, particularly the maintenance depot on the town's outskirts. But even here, throughout the long, hot summer of 1926 there was an amazing eruption of community activity in support of the miners and their cause and this continued into the autumn. In Caerphilly town alone, on just one Saturday in October, when the lockout had already lasted for 4 months, there was, what was called, a monster cup carnival with no fewer than 20 jazz and kazoo bands marching around the town. They were competing for the honour of being the best band in the town and by the time the bands reached Virginia Park, close to the centre of town, there was, what the local press described as a spirit of "holiday excitement". What was remarkable was that even after a summer of sunshine and solidarity, the community spirit was still strong. Indeed, similar events took place throughout the summer and into the autumn in most of the other towns and villages of the valley.

Go-as-you-please concerts were also regular occurrences and male voice choirs - some but not all drawn from the non-conformist chapels - regularly performed in village halls, miners' institutes and sometimes even on street corners. Male voice choirs also travelled to various parts of England, particularly London, singing and collecting money for the innumerable soup kitchens which were organised by the miners and which sprung up right across the valley. These soup kitchens were so important for the miners and many spent a lot of their time collecting small coal from the coaltips to allow the food to be cooked. The soup kitchens were organised and run by local women, many of whom were the wives of miners. Indeed, to a large extent, it was the determination of the women in the community which gave the miners the resolve to continue the struggle. And these soup kitchens were not only important in providing sustenance; they were also vital in maintaining the morale of the miners.

The hardship experienced by the miners and their families was immense. Many families hadn't recovered from the 3 month lockout of 1921 - a lockout which concluded with wages being cut by a half and many colliers not being re-employed. Family debt was huge in many cases. As Charles Morgan, the Labour MP for Bedwellty (which included the lower part of the Rhymney Valley) said in the House of Commons in May 1926, the colliers in South Wales were not prepared even for a week's lockout, let alone one which went on longer.

In theory, the South Wales Miners' Federation (the Fed) could pay their members strike pay but payments, although started, were quickly ended for fear of the union going bankrupt. Limited poor relief was made available by the boards of guardians. But it was limited. Slightly better support was given to the miners' dependents in the upper Rhymney Valley through the Bedwellty board of guardians than in the lower part of the valley. Here the Pontypridd board of guardians held sway and that board, run by independents rather than Labour people, was more 'cautious'. But the situation faced by all boards was dire. Even before the 1926 lockout, families were heavily in debt and central government did all it could to make a bad situation much worse.

Although by the 1920s chapel attendance was nowhere near as high as it had been, the cultural influence of the non-conformist chapels was still of significance. And the solidarity of these chapels was consistently firm, both practically and spiritually. The Communist Party, only recently formed, was growing in strength but within the mining communities of the area its influence shouldn't be exaggerated. It was in the Caerphilly constituency that the Communist Party had fought its first parliamentary by-election only 5 years earlier and had come a poor third. There was some support forthcoming from soviet trade unions and from trade unions across the UK, which served to supplement the funds which were provided locally. But the hardship that many miners felt can be evidenced by the fact that there was a serious debate amongst the miners of the area about whether the funds which had been allocated to the Caerphilly Miners' Hospital should be used to provide support for the miners. It didn't happen because it would have been illegal.

One of the most significant sources of support for the children of miners came from the local authorities in the area, all of which had a majority of Labour members. Glamorgan County Council made use of the 1921 Necessitous Children's Act to give thousands of pounds to establish and maintain canteens in local schools for children up to the age of 11. Lanbradach, a village just to the north of Caerphilly town, provides a good example of the support which was given. At the upper part of the village, the mixed school provided 3 meals a day for 32 weeks at 8.30 in the morning, 2.15 in the afternoon and 4 pm. The school canteen at the start of the lockout provided for 165 children. Later the number of children catered for, rose to 252. The meals continued throughout the summer holidays and were administered by local women, sometimes to the annoyance of the school teachers who felt that their teaching routines were being disrupted. The headmaster of the school recorded in the school log that during the lockout 130,318 meals were served at a cost to the Local Education Authority of £1,525-4s-5d.

At the lower end of the village of Llanbradach, Coedybrain boys and girls school gave similar support. Here, the school log is less comprehensive but it is recorded that by the second week of June 37,698 meals had been provided. Again, three meals a day were served. At both schools children's shoes were repaired and numerous pairs of new shoes were supplied, all free of charge.

The same happened in virtually every primary school, in every town and village throughout the length and breadth of the Rhymney Valley.

But as the lock out dragged on the hardship increased and some began to think what had been the unthinkable - a return to work on terms which had been unacceptable only a few months earlier. Morgan Jones, the Labour MP for Caerphilly, was one of those who had very real worries about the impact of the dispute on the wellbeing of so many of his constituents.

Morgan Jones had been a Conscientious Objector in the First World War and was a prominent member of the Independent Labour Party (ILP). He had won a by-election in Caerphilly in 1921 with a huge majority and was the first Conscientious Objector to be elected to Parliament. He was a devout Welsh Baptist and was widely respected in the constituency - a constituency which, at that time, covered virtually the whole of the Rhymney Valley.

Politically, Morgan Jones was what we would call today a 'democratic socialist' and was strongly opposed to the Communist Party and the Communist run Miners' Minority Movement. The Minority Movement however had growing influence in the South Wales coalfield. Many of the early members of the Communist Party in South Wales were strongly committed to the idea of workers' control and had been influenced by the syndicalists and the authors of the Miners' Next Step. At no point were these so-called 'advanced men' prepared to accept any compromise to bring the dispute to an end.

This was not Morgan Jones' view. His view was that the hardship which he saw had to be brought to an end and the government, the coal owners, and the miners' leadership had to reach an agreement to end the dispute.. This would mean compromise on all sides.

So, when the so-called Bishops' proposals for arbitration to end the dispute were brought forward in July 1926, Morgan Jones strongly supported them. The Bishops' memorandum was seen by the Miners' Federation of Great Britain (MFGB) leadership as a basis for negotiation. The executive believed that there could be a compromise on wages while defending working-time at all costs. With a recommendation to accept, the MFGB leadership, including its charismatic general secretary, A. J. Cook from the Rhondda, and with the support of a special conference, the proposal was put to a vote at pit-head meetings (as opposed to a ballot of members). Morgan Jones argued for the rank and file miners to accept. In fact, Morgan Jones even went to a number of pit-head meetings of miners in his constituency and put the case for acceptance. As it turned out, the Bishops' proposals were only narrowly rejected by the miners, but they were emphatically rejected by the Government and the coal owners. The owners and the government wanted total victory and nothing less.

For Morgan Jones the episode was a politically painful experience. He was strongly attacked by Communists and activists at the meetings he addressed and even had to face the embarrassment of being publicly criticised by his own election agent. But Morgan Jones was unbowed and his response was to reaffirm his trenchant opposition to the Communist Party which was pursuing a policy of entryism inside the Labour Party. "It was not only time", he said, "to sweep the Communist cobweb out of the district, but it was time to kill the spider as well".

Even though Morgan Jones wanted the miners to return to work with a dignified compromise, he continued to support the efforts the miners were making to sustain themselves. His support was recognised by the miners at a meeting after the lockout had ended at a gathering at the Carmel Congregational Chapel in Fochriw, in the upper Rhymney Valley. The meeting was organised to pay tribute to 9 men and 2 women who had just been released from prison after having served their sentences for public disorder. Morgan Jones paid tribute to them and along with Federation leaders, including S. O. Davies, the Vice President of the SWMF, presented the men with inscribed gold cigarette

cases and the women with necklaces and gold pendants. 1926 was, after all, a statement of coalfield solidarity.

As we know, the lockout ended in a huge defeat for the miners. The miners returned to work in a disorderly way and had to accept longer shifts and reduced pay. The limited gains which the Fed had won over many years were swept aside. There was no immediate return to work as the owners took the opportunity to victimise those who they saw as troublemakers and strong Federation men. Throughout the coalfield it was a similar story, and in Llanbradach the colliery records show that the workforce was cut from just over 2,000 before the lockout to 1,200 by the start of 1927. Similar happened to the workforce in other collieries in the Rhymney Valley.

It took a number of years for the Federation to regain its strength and it was only after a bitter struggle with the South Wales Miners Industrial Union - the employers' union or 'scab union' - that the Fed regained its influence.

Undoubtedly, 1926 was a monumental moment in the history of South Wales. The memory of that lockout, and what happened afterwards, left an indelible mark for well over a generation, if not longer. And no better is the impact of 1926 in the Rhymney Valley described than in Idris Davies' poem entitled 'Gwalia Deserta'. Idris Davies was himself a miner in Rhymney until 1926. Then, after the lockout, he trained to be a school teacher. This is what he wrote about 1926:

Do you remember 1926? That summer of soups and speeches,
The sunlight on the idle wheels and the deserted crossings,
And the laughter and the cursing in the moonlit streets?
Do you remember 1926? The slogans and the penny concerts,
The jazz-bands and the moorland picnics,
Do you remember 1926? The great dream and the swift disaster,
The fanatic and the traitor, and more than all,
The bravery of the simple, faithful folk?
"Ay, ay, we remember 1926," said Dai and Shinkin,
As they stood on the kerb in Charing Cross Road,
"And we shall remember 1926 until our blood is dry."