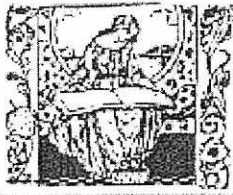


## Labour Heritage



# Labour Heritage

BULLETIN AUTUMN 2004

### Labour's True Centenary: 2006

On Tuesday 27 February 1900, at 12 noon, the founding conference of what became the Labour Representation Committee (LRC) opened in the Memorial Hall in London's Farringdon Street. However it was not until 1906 – and the first gathering after the general election which returned 29 Labour MPs – that the PLP was formed, and then, at the 1906 Party Conference, the name "Labour Party" adopted in place of Labour Representation Committee.

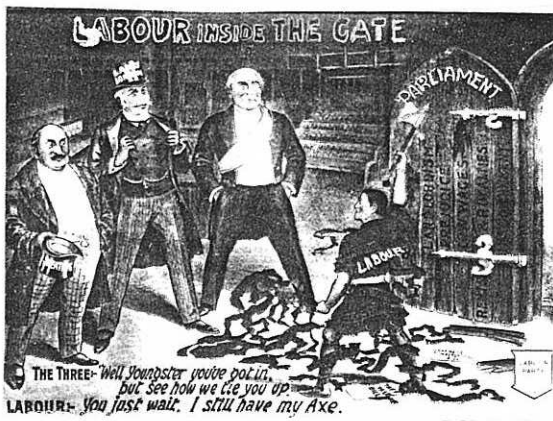
Not only was the 1906 result a great success for the fledgling party (which had but 4 MPs before), but it also represented the start of the system of campaigning we know today. 50 candidates had been officially nominated and approved by the LRC, and (unlike in the 1900 election), they had been officially promoted by affiliated organisations and selected within their constituencies. Labour's 1906 total poll, of 323,195, averaged 37% of the vote in the contested seats.

The 29 men (women had yet to join them on the green benches) represented the great trades of Scotland, Wales and England: mining, iron, steel, printing, textiles and transport. Their first task was to elect a Leader (Keir Hardie), with Ramsay MacDonald MP as the secretary of the party. The manifesto they had fought highlighted the plight of "the aged poor", slums, "underfed schoolchildren" and the second meeting of the PLP (on 13 February 1906) agreed to promote bills on a range of subjects including: Women's Suffrage, Unemployment, Mines, Taxation of Land Values, Child feeding, Old Age Pensions and a Shops Bill.

It is now time to celebrate these 1906 pioneers, but also to save, document and exhibit our history from those days. With the blessing of the Labour Party's NEC, a group of historians, journalists, academics and activists are already planning how to commemorate this important anniversary, by seeking to engage the movement in understanding and discovering its own history. We are hoping to publish a commemorative book on the stories of the Labour pioneers and to stimulate displays – whether in libraries, schools or Labour Clubs. We want to support activities at a local level, including oral history projects, to preserve the memories of the past for the generations of the future.



So we now need your involvement to create a plethora of projects, from locating and saving archives (those minute books in someone's loft!), to interviewing key players with long memories, or researching local stories. We then want to see these written, exhibited or posted on a web-site for others to enjoy. Local (amateur or professional) archaeologists, historians or archivists might like to track down the history of their CLP, branch, Labour Hall or personalities. Or look at the party's changing membership over time, and how it reflected the community's shifting employment, travel and demographic patterns. A record of trade union affiliations over the years would tell a lot about the rise and fall of different industries. Look around you for good stories and identify some enthusiasts with time to spare and a passion for old photos, record or oral history.



We had a very good Fringe Meeting at Conference this year. Our two speakers were Alan Howarth (current secretary of the PLP) and NEC member Tony Robinson. Both were excellent and the large audience was very enthusiastic.

If you would like to get involved in the 2006 project, please contact

me c/o Labour Party, 16 Old Queen Street, London SW1H 9HP.

Dianne Hayter  
Member of Labour's NEC  
and Chair of the 2006 Group

**From "Labour's early days" by John Shepherd ( a former National Agent)**

*"It was at this Conference (1906) also that a decision was taken to drop the name 'Labour Representation Committee' and to adopt the name 'Labour Party'. Many socialists have, during the years, challenged the use of the latter name, preferring as they have professed, the name Socialist Party. Wisdom however, has quite frequently come to the aid of the political workers' movement in moments of doubt and the title 'Labour Party' has been retained without difficulty.*

*No better title could have been chosen to convey to the working classes a sense of their ownership of a political party. A working man may be a Conservative, a Liberal or a Socialist, but he will always look upon those words as something additional, as something that can be discarded at will. But to be a Labour man is another matter altogether. A working man is a Labour man inevitably, and he naturally belongs to the Labour Party. He may disagree with its policy at times, but he is not tempted to leave the Party because he is a vital part of its organisation".*

Copies of "Labour's early days" by Lord Shepherd (£3) and also

*"The adventures of a manuscript being the story of the ragged trousered philanthropists" by Frank Swinnerton £5) are available post free from –*

Harold Smith  
21 Gwendolen Ave, London SW15  
5ET

### **The strike at Woolfs – Southall 1965**

In December 1965 a strike broke out over victimization of trades unionists at the Woolf Rubber factory in Southall. A couple of pamphlets published at the time give a detailed account of what happened. They are – *"What happened at Woolfs"* published by the London Industrial Shop Stewards Defence Committee and *"The anatomy of a strike – unions, employers and Punjabi workers in a Southall factory"* by Peter Marsh, published by the Institute of Race Relations. Nearly 40 years on I read these pamphlets and looked at some of the issues involving the organization of Asian workers into the trades union movement against a background of racial tension in Southall in the 1960s.

### **The company and how it recruited**

The Woolf Rubber Company attracted workers from the Punjab to Southall, an industrial suburb of West London. These workers were to form the beginnings of the largest Asian community in Britain. Woolfs had traditionally sought cheap labour and had the reputation of being an anti-union firm. In the 1930s it had employed

migrant workers from Wales, escaping long term unemployment. But after 1945 there was full employment in West London and Woolfs was not a popular workplace. Conditions in the factory working with the constant smell of rubber were deeply unpleasant. In addition to that there were long shifts, wages were low, machinery was old and worn out, the floors were pitted and dangerous, there were no proper lavatories and foremen were encouraged to humiliate the workforce. These were conditions described by some who worked in the factory.

Immigration from the Punjab began after 1949. It was prompted by the consequences of the partition of India and the division of land. Fear of becoming landless prompted many to emigrate to earn money abroad. They raised 4000 rupees for the trip to the UK – often selling everything that they had. There was also an over-supply of graduates in the Punjab with no job prospects. These who ended up working for Woolfs, as the minority of the workforce who could speak English, would often become shop stewards. The management at Woolfs saw migrants from the Punjab as cheap labour. They were willing to work up to 70 hours a week and most of them could not speak English. Management used the racist card to divide and rule in the factory, offering promotion to white workers. During the strike they also used divisions within the Asian community, recruiting Pakistani labour from as far away as Bradford.

## **The trades unions**

Racialism amongst the white working class in Southall had been on the increase in the mid 1960s. The Asian community had grown very quickly and the extreme right exploited fears over housing and education. This had spread into the labour movement. In some of the workplaces such as AEC (British Leyland) where the unions were strong, protecting a skilled workforce, quotas for the employment of Asian workers were agreed with the management. This was effectively a 'colour bar' which was vigorously opposed by Southall Trades Council at the time, together with the Ealing Community Relations Council. There were no such quotas at Woolfs – the majority of the workforce was Asian. The local and national press tried to play up racial stereotypes when the strike broke out in December 1965 – saying that this reflected "the failure of Asian workers to integrate". On the contrary the strike reflected the determination of these Asian workers to integrate into the trades union movement. The strike was about the victimization of trades union activists – a policy for which the company had a long reputation. The workforce was organized into the Transport and General Workers Union which the company was forced to recognize in January 1964.

## **Origins of the strike**

After union recognition in January 1964 anti-union practices continued provoking a number of unofficial

walk-outs at Woolfs. 452 workers had joined the union. The union pressed for wage rises, tea breaks and an overtime ban. In many cases the union officials tried to mediate to get the workers back. This is cited as evidence of different traditions within the Asian workforce. Spontaneous walk-outs and militancy were part of the tradition which they brought from the Punjab. However so-called "wild-cat strikes" were widespread in the labour movement in the 1960s in Britain with union officials effectively trying to keep them under control. (this was what "In place of strife" – the Labour Government's abandoned piece of anti-trades union legislation was supposed to deal with).

The strike began in November 1965 when a shop steward Mr Muktar Singh was suspended for reporting pilfering on the part of a chargehand to security guards and being 10 minutes late back from lunch break. It lasted 6 weeks. The strike was given official support from the TGWU but there was a problem in obtaining strike pay. This was because the union claimed that many workers were in arrears with their subs. There was also a problem with lorries crossing picket lines.

The company lost contracts. A return to work was negotiated in January by the Ministry of Labour, together with the Joint Industrial Council for the Rubber Industry for the reinstatement of the strikers but there were no guarantees about what jobs the strikers should return to. 100 workers did not return. The best jobs were kept by scabs. Activists were lost and there was a backlash against the union. Woolfs went out of business in 1967 when

it was bought for £120,000 and closed.

### **Role of the Indian Workers Association**

The Indian Workers Association in Southall had been formed in 1957 as a welfare organization. It organized films and bought its own cinema. However it worked with the trades union movement in helping to organize Asian workers. Often activists had political backgrounds in the Punjab. They spoke English and were over-educated for the jobs that they were doing. A Mr Khera the shop steward had been a teacher in India. The present MP for Southall – Piers Khabra is quoted in the pamphlet published by the Institute for Race Relations as having worked at Woolfs for a short time. The IWA helped to fight the bribery and corruption which the management promoted at Woolfs. Punjabi workers brought traditions of solidarity and militancy but there were also traditions of giving gifts or bribes to foreman and managers. This was a relic from the days of the Raj when the local colonial officialdom had to be bribed. It was commonplace for Asian workers at Woolfs and other factories in West London to give bribes to foreman to obtain jobs, overtime and promotion. Sums of £10 upwards were the order of the day. This was undermining union organization in the factory and had to be resisted. Union officials held meetings of workers in peoples' houses where oaths were taken that they would not give bribes. Recruitment to the union was conducted door to door by members of the IWA and the TGWU. All applicants for the union had to swear on their particular

holy book that they would not give bribes. This was a condition of recruitment to the union. Refusal to bribe foremen could bring dismissal of trades union activists for "insulting behaviour".

During the strike the IWA provided telephone facilities for strikers, donated £100 to the strike fund (£75,000 had been paid out to buy a cinema). There was support from the community to those on strike – landlords did not collect rents and there was a hardship fund for the strikers. This solidarity was extended to the minority of white workers who were on strike. For instance an Irish worker was offered his fare home to visit his family at Christmas.

This tradition of solidarity was seen again in the support by the Asian community for the miners in the strike of 1984/85 when generous donations were given. Marchers from the 'Peoples' March for Jobs' were also accommodated and fed in Southall.

### **The political background**

The story of the dispute at Woolfs in Southall showed how Asian workers with different cultural traditions organized themselves into the labour movement. Other factories in West London which were organized included Rockware Glass in Greenford where 165 workers were sacked and Chibnalls bakery. In both cases these were disputes over the victimisation of trades union activists. In one case they handed their strike pay back to the union – which prompted one official to say that he had never seen such loyalty to the union ever before by any of its members.

In Southall however there had been a backlash from the white working

class. Originally the Punjabi workers commuted from the East End of London. Increasingly they tried to move to Southall and found that accommodation was restricted. There was no help from either the employers or local council. (this was in contrast to the help given to workers at Hoovers, Perivale in the 1930s when the company had bought houses for their workforce. The London County Council had started building houses in Hanwell for workers moving into West London). In Southall local landlords started putting up notices "No coloureds". These housing restrictions led to overcrowding – 20-25 people in a three bedroom house. There was often "hot-bedding" - one shift went to bed as the others went to work. In the 1960s Glebe and Northcote wards in Southall had the worst overcrowding in the country. Overcrowding led to hostility from white workers who were increasingly moving out of Southall into better housing conditions. The Asian workers themselves were being blamed for their own housing problems of which they were the victims! The Southall Residents Association – a front for the racist British National Party pressed the council to evict for overcrowding and the mayor of Ealing said "abide by our standards or else"! Far from assisting Asian workers to get decently housed the local council tried to slap on a 15 year residential qualification in the borough for council house tenants which would have effectively barred Asians from applying for council tenancy. This ruling was to be subsequently outlawed by the first Race Relations Act in 1965. In May 1963 the British National Party made gains in the council

elections in Glebe and Hambrough wards. John Bean, the BNP candidate described Southall as a 'black slum', and called for a ban on non-European immigration into Southall. The Southall Residents Association effectively a front for the BNP launched a "Save our Southall" campaign. The general election in 1964 saw a serious dent in the Labour vote as voters defected to the BNP. Canvassing was unpleasant for Labour Party members as racism became an issue. Southall- a safe Labour area was in danger of becoming a marginal seat- another Smethwick? The behaviour of the Labour MP George Pargiter did not help. In 1962 he abstained on the 1962 Commonwealth Immigration Act and called for a ban on further immigration into Southall. The IWA considered standing a candidate against him in the 1964 General Election but in the end did not and he was elected on the strength of the Asian vote as the lesser of two evils. He won on a reduced poll. The lack of decisiveness in fighting racialism which could have proved fatal in the fortunes for Labour in the constituency found its echoes in the actions of 5 Labour councilors who wanted to back a 15 year residential qualification for council housing. They were expelled from the Labour Party and went on to join the BNP. The situation in the constituency was turned around by the selection of Syd Bidwell as the Labour candidate when Pargiter retired. A left-wing official from the National Union of Railwaymen, he had not been expected to become the candidate. Bidwell's position is well explained in his pamphlet "Red, white and black." He built links with the Asian community. At the same

time the population of Southall was changing and the percentage of Asians increased. In the 1966 election Bidwell won the constituency for Labour with 53% of the vote, (up 5.4% from 1964). The votes of the Tory ( Maddin) and the BNP (Bean) dropped. The BNP and the SRA declined in Southall but their activities continued on the fringes of Southall where they continued to campaign amongst white voters who had moved into the neighbouring areas of Uxbridge, Hayes and Greenford. Although the BNP had been defeated in central Southall where by 1979 49% of the population were Asian their successor the National Front still attempted to organize in some of the factories such as AEC. In 1969 they organized a 'send them back march'. This was supported by 200 workers (compared to the thousands who were to march against racialism in the 1970s) and their actions were condemned by the Transport and General Workers Union (Southall Branch). However the main threat to the Asian community came from violent attacks in the neighbouring areas. This threatened to produce a ghetto situation. When an Asian student was murdered by a racist in the center of Southall in the summer of 1976 this provoked an uprising amongst Asian youth who were not prepared to sit back and take it. A solidarity march organized by the labour movement and local community organizations turned the situation around and illustrated to the Southall community that they were not alone- they were part of the British labour movement.

Barbara Humphries

## References

- 1.What happened at Woolfs /London Industrial Shop Stewards Defence Committee
- 2.The anatomy of a strike –unions, employers and Punjabi workers in a Southall factory/ Peter Marsh, Institute of Race Relations
- 3.Southall –birth of a black community /Southall Rights and Institute of Race Relations
4. Red, white and black / Syd Bidwell

### The 1909 Fulwell Tram Strike

At the beginning of the 20th century the public transport system in West London and Middlesex was the tramways of the London United Tramways Company whose trams clattered from Hammersmith to Uxbridge and Hounslow, from Hanwell to Brentford and down to Hampton. The service was reliable and cheap and the company employed 1,200 drivers and conductors who worked a 63-hour week for six shillings a day. Sometimes men worked 10 hours without a meal break and continuous duties of 20 hours were not unknown. The company employed 'spots' whose job was to spy on employees and report breaches of regulations – like eating in the cab – and many suspensions and dismissals resulted from this system. The Amalgamated Union of Tram and Vehicle Workers was not recognised by the Company and those employees who pressed for recognition were warned off or dismissed. There were plenty of jobless men waiting to take up any vacancies.

Despite the difficulties the Union began recruiting and on Saturday,

April 3rd, 1909 Jack Burns, the full time secretary of the Union's West London branch, wrote to Sir Clifton Robinson, the Company Chairman, asking for a meeting to discuss the growing discontent among the employees. Sir Clifton refused to meet Mr Burns and said he would only meet employees of the company. Jack Burns wanted to discuss Union recognition, a six-day week, time and a quarter for rest day working, wages, reinstatement of men discharged because of Union activity, and tramcar maintenance.

At the Fulwell Depot near Hampton, when they heard that Jack Burn's request had been refused, there was talk of an immediate strike, but the men decided to approach Sir Clifton again, this time asking him to receive a deputation of 20 employees headed by Jack Burns and another Union official, Mr Watson. Sir Clifton said he would meet the 20 employees but not the officials. The drivers and conductors knew that one of the Fulwell men, who may have been the local union branch secretary, had been dismissed and they feared the consequences of a meeting with Sir Clifton.

After an angry meeting at the depot on Easter Saturday, addressed by Jack Burns, the men voted to strike immediately and pickets were despatched to the Hanwell and Chiswick Depots.

The Company, however, had acted quickly and when the pickets arrived they found that men reporting for work, who of course had no knowledge of the events at Fulwell, were required to sign a declaration of loyalty to the company. Two Chiswick men who refused were dismissed. At

Hanwell the men were offered an extra day's pay to man the trams normally run by the Fulwell men. The Company took on extra workers and immediately dismissed all the strikers. Jack Burns rushed over to Hanwell and Chiswick but it was too late and he persuaded only a few men to join the strike.

On Easter Sunday morning a large crowd of strikers and their families gathered outside the Fulwell Depot. Several local men were booed as they reported for work and the crowd grew angry when three tramcars arrived full of strikebreakers from Hanwell. As the Hanwell strikebreakers drove trams out of the depot some of the women in the crowd broke through the police lines and ran screaming at the drivers. The women supported the men throughout the struggle and joined in a march to Chiswick later that day, taking their children with them. In the evening there was trouble in Fulwell as returning trams had their windows smashed by stones from catapults and strikebreakers were pelted with orange peel.

On Easter Monday 2,000 people stood outside Fulwell Depot jeering and hooting and eventually just standing in disgust as their fellow workers ran the service for the company. Sir Clifton Robinson gave triumphant interviews to the local press and blamed the Union for misleading the men into a strike which caused their dismissal. There were, as he pointed out, two men waiting for every job that became vacant.

### **Why the strike failed**

The strike failed because the Fulwell men came out before Jack Burns had sought the support of



the men at Chiswick and Hanwell, and before the Union's Executive Council had considered the issue. The Fulwell strike was therefore unofficial and no strike pay was available. Some of the dismissed employees tried to sue the Union.

During the three weeks following the strike mass meetings were held, mainly in Hounslow, where the tram employees' grievances were aired. There was a march from Fulwell - that attracted much publicity as it passed through Hounslow, Brentford and Chiswick - of dismissed strikers to hand back their uniforms. The Union made some headway in recruiting members.

In May questions were asked in Parliament and Winston Churchill, President of the Board of Trade, said there were no regulations concerning the number of hours that a tram driver might work. Although nothing was done about the hours further questioning resulted in a new regulation that obliged the police to be satisfied with a man's driving ability before he could drive a tram. Until then the Company could put anyone from the street corner into the driver's cab.

Little was done to help those who had been sacked apart from meagre collections among the public and men still employed by the tram company. The determination displayed at Fulwell had been overwhelmed by the pressure of poverty which forced men to come forward to take the strikers' jobs.

The local press, particularly the Chiswick Times, attacked the Union for spoiling the public's pleasure over the bank holiday, and Sir Clifton Robinson was set up as a local hero who had

triumphed against great odds. The Union was a demon that had misled innocents to their destruction.

The Chiswick Times found a 'well-known local trade unionist' who was reported as saying: "Personally, I do not believe in strikes. They are a thing of the past. The fact that during the last eight years there has been a decrease in the wages of the workers of the country as a whole proves conclusively that strikes are absolutely hopeless. Trade Unionism has lost its grip, and if the workers of the country want to bring about better conditions for themselves, they must do it through the ballot box."

The 'well-known trade unionist' was in fact urging support for the newly formed Labour Party and his remarks reflected the continuing conflict in the Trade Union movement over whether industrial or political action was the best way forward.

John Grigg

### **Conrad Noel and the Thaxted Movement**

The Church of England was for centuries the bastion of the establishment in England and Wales, but during the course of the nineteenth century, the social injustices and abject poverty suffered by the majority of the population stirred the consciences of a few of the most privileged of its members.

In the period after 1848, a group of these came together in the Christian Socialist Movement; inspired by Frederick Denison

Maurice, an Anglican minister and his friends John Ludlow, Charles Kingsley (the novelist) Thomas Hughes (author of "Tom Brown's Schooldays") and, rather later, Edward Vansittart Neale, a wealthy barrister. They and their followers campaigned for working class education, better housing and the establishment of co-operative societies, which they saw as a means of emancipation for the underprivileged.

Later in the century, Steven Headlam, a curate at St Matthew's Church, Bethnal Green, established the Guild of St Matthew and, in June 1889, Canon Henry Scott Holland launched the Christian Social Union. These organisations attracted the support of a small minority of Anglicans, but, in many areas, radical ideas were unwelcome and their advocates were unlikely to gain appointments to clerical office.

This was the case in rural Essex which comprised most of the county, until one of the most elevated members of the aristocracy underwent a remarkable change of outlook. The Countess of Warwick, with stately homes at Easton Lodge in Essex and Warwick Castle, in February 1895, organised a spectacular ball at the Castle. Over 400 guests, dressed in the costume of the courts of Louis XV or Louis XVI of France consumed vast quantities of the choicest food and drink in the most extravagant circumstances and danced all night.

In studying the press cuttings, however, the Countess came across one published in the Clarion Newspaper, a socialist publication, which condemned the wanton dissipation of thousands of pounds on an extravagant masquerade

while others starved in misery. Deeply affronted, Lady Warwick caught the next train to London, located the Clarion offices and confronted the editor, Robert Blatchford. The ensuing exchange shook the Countess who thereupon embarked on a course which eventually led her to join the Social Democratic Federation in 1904 and to an ardent advocate of the socialist cause.

As the owner of 13,000 acres and the lay rector of four Essex parishes, she exercised her patronage, when vacancies occurred, to appoint socialist vicars. Thus it was in 1910, that she appointed Conrad Noel to the splendid church of St John the Baptist at Thaxted.

The new incumbent was of distinguished descent. The son of Roden Noel, who had been a Groom of the Privy Chamber and a grandson of the Earl of Gainsborough, he could trace his pedigree back to the Plantagenet monarchs. He had however, been bullied at his prep schools in Wellington and Cheltenham College and had a deep hatred of upper class education. At Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, he had overspent and had had to leave without taking his degree. At Brighton subsequently, he had been tutored in Latin, Greek and English literature by Herman Joynes, brother of James Joynes, a Marxist and son of an Eton schoolteacher.

He was nearly arrested for handing out leaflets during a visit by the Shah of Persia but attended Chichester Theological College. Here he read the Christian fathers and was struck by some of the stands that they took. St Ambrose criticised avarice. St Cyprian

argued that God's gifts are not be claimed as private property. St Gregory the Great said : "We must make them clearly understand that the land which yields them income is the common property of all men and, for this reason, the fruits of it are for common welfare."

He caught out fellow students of Conservative outlook by showing them quotations, at which they scoffed, and then supplying the biblical sources.

When he left college, the Bishop of Exeter refused to ordain him for seeking to revive forms of Church ritual which were repugnant to Protestants. Although he did not accept the Pope as head of the Church, he believed that rituals and ceremonies used since the middle ages should be restored.

After touring the country and working with Christian socialists, he helped form the Church Socialist League and became its secretary.

In 1905, he and his wife, Miriam, became tenants of his cousin, Noel Buxton at Paycocks House, Coggeshall, a historical building which was being restored. He contacted socialists among employees of Courtaulds at Halstead, found others at Braintree and Bocking and visited neighbouring villages to get in touch with more. He travelled to London to take services for the socialist vicar, Percy Dearmer at St Mary's, Primrose Hill. He spoke at a mass rally in Trafalgar Square and wrote his first book "Socialism in Church History".

### **Conrad Noel at Thaxted**

When Noel was appointed, the church was run down and another of Lady Warwick's appointees, the Rev. Edward Maxted at Tilty, hardly

assisted a smooth passage for him by holding a meeting at Thaxted, at which he declared, when heckled – "I have chastised you with whips, but there is one coming who will chastise you with scorpions."

In a bid to reassure his congregation, Conrad Noel issued a statement in which he declared that he was strongly in favour of private property, a strong navy, a nation in arms and a limited monarchy, but "the people, all of us should hold certain kinds of property publicly and use this co-operatively for the good of all.." "the whole people should own the great bulk of the land and the great industries and administer them as a public trust." He added "much of the present system of industry is anti-Christian".

Although hostile members of his congregation held their peace at this ordination by Dr Jacob, the Bishop of St Albans, opposition was expressed when he removed bible boxes used to reserve particular seats for prominent families and then he changed the times of services. He further offended by closing down the male voice choir and introducing incense.

On the other hand, he won the support of less affluent families. He and his wife introduced country dancing and Morris dancing and he greatly improved the appearance of the Church within. He also spoke out in favour of building a sewerage system and wanted cottages to be built for poorer families. His cousin, Harold Buxton, built four, but there was no other response.

Conrad Noel also organised lectures. The subjects included:-the labour unrest, Catherine of Siena, St Francis of Assisi, John Ruskin

and Benjamin Disraeli. He backed the strikes of railwaymen and miners in 1912 and the Dublin strike of the same year. In this connection he spoke at a huge London rally with George Lansbury and the Countess of Warwick.

In Thaxted, he became a close friend of the actor Franklin Dyall, the poet Charles Dalman and the composer Gustav Holst, who took up residence and involved himself with the church.

Other intellectuals or cultural figures were encouraged to come to the area by Lady Warwick including H.G.Wells and the editors of the Morning Post and the Daily Express, although the last mentioned was an enemy of Conrad Noel and Edward Maxted.

Charles Jenkinson, who was invited to come down to assist in Conrad Noel's work, became active in the organisation of farm workers around Saffron Walden. He became an official in the Essex Federation of the Union. When strikes of agricultural workers broke out in June 1914 in North-West Essex, the Christian socialists of Thaxted gave full support. Charles Jenkinson organised an Independent Labour Party branch in Saffron Walden and acted as agent for Allan Debson who stood as a parliamentary candidate. The Reverend Edward Maxton stood for the Essex County Council as a socialist in Thaxted in 1913 and received 378 votes against the Conservative Lancelot Cranmer Bing's 443 and the Liberal Colonel Rainford's 435. Socialist workers from Halstead, Dunmow and Chelmsford and students at the friends' school at Saffron Walden visited Thaxted to participate in the activities.

The outbreak of the First World War on the 4<sup>th</sup> August 1914 halted these. The Church Socialist League was split with Conrad Noel in support of the war and George Lansbury and others against. However the Easter Rising in Dublin disturbed him and he accepted the gift of a Sinn Fein flag. When the Russian Revolution occurred in 1917, Christian Socialist League members supported a solidarity meeting at the Albert Hall, chaired by George Lansbury. Soon Conrad Noel was deeply involved in new activities.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> April 1918, he and his wife held a meeting at Thaxted Vicarage to found the Catholic Crusade of the Servants of the Precious Blood to transform the Kingdom of this world into the Commonwealth of God. Despite its name and use of High Church ritual, the movement sharply differentiated itself from the Roman Catholic Church. It cited the Peasants' revolts of 1381, 1450 and 1549 as examples of the struggle for emancipation of the poor and the Vicar advertised for a missionary priest – "active revolutionary, good singing voice." Disturbances took place on Thaxted streets as opponents came to protest at his High Church practices and Thaxted was placed under an interdict.

Conrad Noel, however, continued to speak in favour of the Russian Revolution and the Irish Republic and supported the 1921 miners's strike. A new battle began when he put up the flag of St George, the Sinn Fein flag and the Red Flag in his church. Undergraduates came down from Cambridge to removed these and put up the Union Jack. Questions were asked in

Parliament. Rallies and counter rallies were held in the town.

### **Spreading the message and final years**

An attempt by Noel's opponents to gain control of the Parochial Church Council failed after a strongly contested electoral campaign and battle to oust his candidate for the position of Peoples' Warden failed. Although the Court ruled that the offending flags should be removed from the Church, Conrad Noel's campaigns did not falter. His followers spread the message to other areas some of them also supporting the labour movement.

Thus the Catholic Crusade made an important impact across the country. In the 1930s, after Labour's crushing parliamentary defeat in 1931, the Catholic Crusade published the Catholic Crusader and continued to spread its message.

Meanwhile at Thaxted, Conrad Noel, who had developed diabetes, was weakening. By 1935, he had gone blind and could only function through a sympathetic curate. This he found at first in Jack Puttrill who married his daughter, Barbara. In 1937 however Jack Puttrill left to take another appointment and David Bisborton took his place.

Conrad Noel died on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1942 aged 73. He had officiated as Vicar of Thaxted for 32 years. He was buried outside the east window and was paid tributes by churchmen up to Archbishop William Temple and socialists, who, in some cases, did not have his religious faith.

He wrote a number of books including – "Jesus the heretic", "Life of Jesus". "Way of belief", "The

battle of the flags" and his autobiography. The last of these was published after his death, The Bishop of Chelmsford, Dr Henry Wilson, said that he was "the greatest personality among the clergy in this diocese". He was undoubtedly a great campaigner in the socialist cause, in addition to being an outstanding cleric and his great work should be remembered.

Stan Newens (this was a paper given at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Labour Heritage conference in Essex, October 2003)

### **Review of "A history of struggle: commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Liberation, formerly the Movement for Colonial Freedom" by Stan Newens**

#### **A History of Struggle**



The Face of Peace - Picasso

#### **Commemorating the Fiftieth Anniversary of Liberation, Formerly the Movement for Colonial Freedom.**

**by Stan Newens**

**£3**

Anti-colonialism had deep roots in the radical tradition in Britain – the Levellers in the English Civil War issued the following comment in relation to the conquest of Ireland –

“Have we the right to deprive a people of the land God and Nature has given them and impose laws without their consent? How can the conquered be accounted rebels, if at any time, they seek to free themselves and recover their own?”

In the 1880s and 1890s members of the Independent Labour Party, the Social Democratic Federation and some Liberals challenged the imperialist foreign policy of the British ruling class. They campaigned against the Boer War. Support for the struggle of the colonial peoples within the labour movement however was not always universal with the Labour leadership often endorsing imperialism. This pamphlet gives an insight into the campaigns to obtain an independent foreign policy for Labour. In 1925 Labour Party conference passed a resolution calling for full self government for India. Some Labour activists set up to build links with those struggling against British imperialism and there was a British Commonwealth Labour Conference which met annually from 1925. In 1927 international links were established with the setting up of the League against Imperialism which had delegates from Britain, France, Belgium and the Netherlands. Much of this activity was overshadowed by the advent of fascism and war in the 1930s.

### **Liberation and the labour movement**

In 1945 Britain still had sovereignty over 500 million people. It also had for the first time a Labour government elected with a landslide majority. Labour's manifesto “Let us face the future”

had not contained a lot about foreign policy merely stating – “The Labour Party will seek to promote mutual understanding and cordial co-operation between the Dominions of the British Commonwealth, the advancement of India to responsible self-government and the planned progress of our Colonial Dependencies.”

Fenner Brockway resumed his anti-imperialist crusade setting up the British Centre Against Imperialism and the International Congress of Peoples Against Imperialism in 1948. The Movement for Colonial Freedom was founded in 1954. It attracted 300 delegates from 38 constituency Labour Parties, 23 trades union branches and 21 co-operative and peace groups. It had little support from the Labour hierarchy but by the 1960s it had the affiliation of over 100 CLPs and most of the main trades unions, and MPs such as Harold Wilson, Tony Benn and Barbara Castle. By this time some of the British colonies such as India had achieved independence so the main focus of its campaigning was on the continuing struggle in Africa. This continued into the 1960s with support for liberation movements in the Portuguese colonies. But the MCF also took up issues such as the war in Vietnam, Anti-apartheid, the Middle East, and racialism in Britain. In 1970 it was renamed “Liberation” in recognition of the fact that while most of the former colonial countries had achieved formal independence they were still economically tied to imperialism and there were human rights issues on a wide scale. As “neo-colonialism” replaced colonialism the people of the colonial world had not achieved full emancipation.

Liberation publishes a regular journal and its most recent campaigns have been on the war in Iraq and civil rights abuses in Colombia. 50 years on and these issues have not gone away.

Reviewed by Barbara Humphries

## Letters and short items

### Being interviewed for books

Anthony Seldon's biography 'Tony Blair' (Free Press, £20. June 2004) contains material about the short time that Blair lived in Fairfield Ward in Battersea Constituency in which I was active. The material was based on an interview and e-mail correspondence with me. It is of course entirely up to authors to choose what they include and what they exclude. However, this can, in the view of the contributor of the information lead to a distortion of the points they have made. Seldon sent me a draft of how he intended to use the information and I sent him a re-edited version, which he did not choose to use at all. In particular the following sections are left out:

- 'A pretty little lad' recalls one former woman activist'
- 'Following his subsequent rapid rise within the Party, his very low level activity in Fairfield was to become the source of irritation among some former fellow party members there. They feel that at the root of his failure as Party Leader to understand the Party's culture and history, has

been his lack of apprenticeship in grass-roots Party, local authority and trades union work. His own memory of this period became distorted, as he later sought to have it confirmed that he had been Ward Secretary; even though he had only been Assistant Secretary for a short while.'

- Seldon says that Blair was up very early and off to work, arriving back late, leaving little time for his political interests. I added 'though it did not prevent others with equally demanding work schedules.'

I leave it to Labour Heritage readers to decide whether I am nit-picking, or whether these omitted items give a different perspective on Blair than comes across in Seldon's book.

Sean Creighton

### Letter from Harry Shindler in Rome

Dear Bulletin Editor

I noted with interest the items in the last bulletin Spring 2004. In particular the parts dealing with west London. What I write now is based on experience for I grew up in that area.

I joined the AEU Hammersmith Branch in 1937/8 at a meeting held in a pub in King Street, Hammersmith. The Branch met in the evenings and because of the nightly bombing of London the meetings were shifted to a pub in

Brook Green and were held on Sunday mornings. Much later the Branch meetings were held at the Labour Party premises. Among the visiting speakers I recall at the Branch were D.N.Pritt MP and Phil Piratin of the Communist Party.

So these are my credentials and give me some authority to write the following.

In the report there is an important omission. There is much about the WEA but not a word about the National Council of Labour Colleges (NCLC) yet most of the local trades union branches, including my own, were affiliated to the NCLC. I, like hundreds of other trades unionists learned much from NCLC courses.

We gained an understanding of socialism that was to remain with us. Many at the head of the Labour Party and the trades unions in the 30's and 40's passed through the NCLC.

Their courses on imperialism for example allowed us to unlearn what we had been taught in school about empire, before we left at the age of 14.

I recall attending an NCLC class with other young trades unionists at the Labour Party premises, as I recall, in Goldhawk Rd, prior to the Party moving to its present offices. It is not my intention, nor would it serve any purpose to re-open a WEA v NCLC debate, but only to set out the important work done by the independent, Labour supported education body, the NCLC.

I am sure that there are many in the labour movement who like me, gained much from this organisation and it is historically correct that the role of the NCLC should be remembered and recorded.

## **Notes from Shelf Life the newsletter for the Working Class Movement Library**

The Library has now revamped its website. It has acquired the annual reports of the Steam Engine Makers Union from 1879-1904.

Their CD ROM 'Children of the industrial revolution' can be purchased for £12.50 including postage from –

Working Class Movement Library  
51 The Crescent  
Salford, M5 4WX cheques to 'Trustees and friends' of the WMML.

## **WEST LONDON LABOUR HERITAGE DAY SCHOOL**

**Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> November  
11am – 5 pm**

**at Ruskin Hall, Church Rd,  
Acton, W.3.**

**Subjects include :- enclosure and the working class in rural Middlesex 1700-1835, the 1909 Fulwell tram strike and Acton Labour councillors.**

For more information on this day school and articles for next bulletin contact -

~~Barbara Humphries~~

~~117A Uxbridge Rd~~

~~Hanwell~~

~~W7 3ST 0200 040 3445~~

~~mickandbarbara@btcp-world.com~~