

Shelf Life

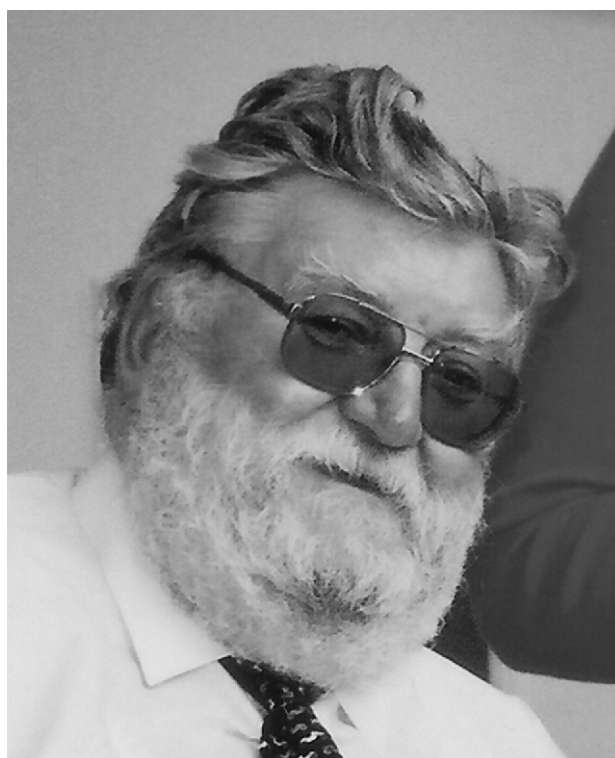


The Newsletter of the Working Class Movement Library

Issue No. 26 Spring 2010

John B. Smethurst

It is with very deep regret that we have to report the death of John Smethurst, our only remaining founding trustee. John was heavily involved with Ruth and Eddie



Frow in the setting up of the trust and indeed he and his wife Alice were co-witnesses to the signing of the first Declaration of Trust by Ruth and Eddie in 1969.

John was born in Eccles, Manchester in 1934 of working

class parents and never loses his roots. By trade he was an electrician and worked in various industries, including mining and printing. As a natural adjunct to his

working world he was very active in a number of the union strands that now make up Unite the Union. After retirement, as a victim of the great Maxwell pensions robbery he helped organise a number of compensation action groups.

Trade Union activity can't be separated from political activity. At the age of 13 John joined the Labour Party League of Youth, then the Co-op Party, and after a period in the Communist Party reverted back to the Co-op Party where he

remained for the rest of his life. The Co-op was always an important part of his life and he held many offices including director of United Co-operatives.

Still not enough to satisfy the insatiable John, he was also a

rabid collector of anything to do with the movements in which he was involved. Badges, emblems, pottery, books, you name it and you can rest assured it sits somewhere in his Eccles home.

Yet the facet of John for which he may well be best remembered is that of historian. He had a remarkable thirst for knowledge of working class history and an even more remarkable ability to retain that knowledge. He wrote many publications, and without wanting to raise the importance of one above another his colossal six volumed 'Historical Directory of Trade Unions' done in conjunction with the late Arthur Marsh and Peter Carter is a legacy of which anyone could be proud.

Frustrated by his lack of access to extended formal education when he was young, in his spare time he studied and gained a masters degree in social history at Warwick University in 1983.

Despite this very busy life John was very much a family man, His wife Alice, three children and two grandchildren always a priority.

Farewell John, you will be sorely missed. Our condolences to Alice and the family.

Sorry about this but that time of year has come around again for those individual friends of the library who pay their subs by cash or cheque. The cost is still £10 waged or £5 unwaged, although if you haven't been hit too hard by the recession a small additional

donation would always be appreciated.

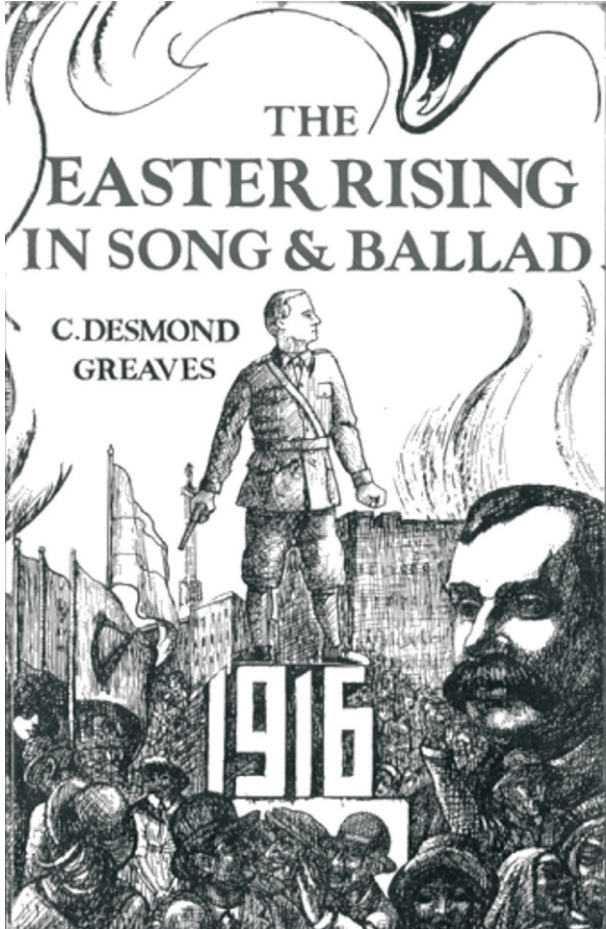
To avoid the hassle, why not join the other 200+ friends who have a standing order made out to us. Copies can be downloaded from our website, or we'll post you one on request.

Subscriptions

From
The

Collection

Our Irish Collection



The library holds an extensive collection of just over 1000 pamphlets about Ireland, both North and South and a basic record of each item is now available in the library catalogue. Each record contains the author, title, publisher and number of pages. We will be adding further details, such as subject and person keywords at a later date.

The collection is made up of pamphlets collected by Ruth and Eddie Frow and also the pamphlet collection of the late C. Desmond Greaves whose library was donated to us by his executor, Anthony Coughlan. It also contains pamphlets about Ireland that have been donated to the library over the years. They cover a variety of subjects, including the Easter Rising

and the troubles in Northern Ireland.

The pamphlets complement the selection of books we have in our Irish collection, which is made up of the books of T.A. (Tommy) Jackson as well as those of C. Desmond Greaves and Ruth and Eddie. To help library users identify items in the book collection using the online catalogue they have now all been given the geographic keyword Ireland.

To find any of the books or pamphlets search our online catalogue at www.wcml.org.uk/catalogue/adlib-catalogue/

Our CPGB Collection

**THE
DICTATORSHIP
OF THE
PROLETARIAT**
by
L. KAMENEFF.

(Former Plenipotentiary in Britain of the
Russian Socialist Soviet Republic.)

2d.

COMMUNIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN,
21a, Malden Lane, Strand, London, W.O. 2.

We have begun to add further details to the nearly 2000 Communist Party of Great Britain pamphlet records that have been added to the library catalogue. Our thanks go to Jacqueline, one of our volunteers, for ensuring that the records were in a suitable format to be imported into the online catalogue.

Almost all of the pamphlets were collected by Ruth and Eddie Frow and range in date from the Party's founding in 1920 (see left) to

1991 (see right), when the party was disbanded.

And there is a whole box devoted to the works of Harry Pollitt, who was the General Secretary from 1929-1939 and again from 1941-1956.

To find any of the Communist Party pamphlets go to our online catalogue at www.wcml.org.uk/catalogue/adlibcatalogue/

THE MANCUNIAN WAY

*A Communist Party Approach to the
Regeneration of Manchester*



by Mark Quigley

£2

Printed and Published by the
North Western District Committee of the CPGB

TUC on the Plimsoll Line 1876

We are extremely grateful to three benefactors whose donations enabled us to purchase a set of rare early TUC reports, 1873-76, and 1879-83. We already had the reports for 1877-78, and 1884 onwards, so this purchase enables us to make our set much more comprehensive. As far as we know there are no copies of these elsewhere in the region. 1874 is a curiosity as two separate reports of the Congress were produced, for some reason – one published by the Salford Steam Printing Company.

The reports will need binding, so if anyone reading this is feeling generous....

This extract from the reports relates to Henry Plimsoll's legislation which protected the lives of seamen by preventing the overloading of merchant ships. It would seem that certain elements in the government were less than co-operative. We already have an impressive collection of material relating to Plimsoll's legislation. Below is an image from his book 'Cattle Ships' published in 1890, also available for browsing at the library.

Mr. Plimsoll, M.P., who was received with loud cheers, said he heartily coincided with the terms and with the spirit of the resolution which he had just heard read for the first time. He would not occupy their time by any elaborate criticism of the provisions of the bill which passed last session, as, when the provisions of that bill were before the House, he criticised them, and said what he had to say upon them, the House being the place where there was the only hope that an expression of opinion upon the provisions of the bill would have any immediate influence. The bill seemed to him to be inadequate, and weak in most of its parts, and since it became an Act it was in his view of the greatest importance to get all the good they could out of it rather than bemoan its deficiencies. It did not appear to him that overloading could be efficiently dealt with, at any rate by a load-line, the position of which was altogether the subject of the owner's wishes. But still it might do some good.



This represents the crew of a cargo steamer in which I and my wife sailed from Constantinople to Malta, taken without any special object in view, as a souvenir of the kindly men we sailed with ; inserted to show what good men we allow to be drowned wholesale, and by men.

Jim Larkin 1876-1947
Organised by North
West Labour
History Group

If you are round and about in Salford on **Sunday 18th April at 2.00pm** call in at the library and hear Francis Devine of the Irish

Labour History Society who will be giving a talk on the charismatic but frequently controversial Irish trade unionist and socialist Jim Larkin.

Trade Union Support



An Astonishing Establishment

In January we had a visit from members of the RMT Bristol branch. In a follow up letter they very kindly sent us a cheque for £100 and said 'we have decided that we will be making an annual visit to your astonishing establishment as we realise we have barely scratched the surface of the contents you have'. You will be most welcome any time. In February it was the turn of delegates to Lancaster and Morecambe trades council to pay us their second visit, and they too indicated that they'll be back.

During the last quarter trade unions have donated almost £6,000 to the library. These include a further contribution towards our energy bill from GMB and substantial donations from FBU and NASUWT. We have also received financial support from regions or branches of CWU, GMB, NASUWT, NUJ, UNISON, Unite, and USDAW. Once again, our thanks to everyone.

Those who have visited the library will appreciate that your donations are indeed money well spent.

Happy Birthday



On 27 January volunteers and staff gathered to help celebrate the 90th birthday of our oldest volunteer, Bernard Barry, the author of our recent booklet *From Manchester to Spain*. The photo shows Bernard, his wife Vera and Chair of Trustees Maggie Cohen.

Invisible histories

In January the Library launched a new exhibition, **Invisible Histories: Salford's Working Lives**. It was developed with the support of a grant from The Booth Charities. Artist Lawrence Cassidy worked with a group of local people, discovering items from the Library which relate to Salford's labour history.

Themes include Chartism, mining in Salford, the life of Friedrich Engels, the Battle of Bexley Square and Salford Docks.

The resulting exhibition is open until late summer – everyone is welcome to drop in any time Wednesdays to Fridays 1pm to 5pm, or by appointment at other times.

Lawrence said 'The Library has done an excellent job, retaining these archives for use by future generations. Projects of this kind connect local people to archives which directly relate to their lives'.

A series of free talks on a Salford theme is taking place alongside the exhibition, every second Wednesday at 2pm. More details on our Web site.

This photo from the launch event shows local singer Albert Thompson performing

