NORTH EAST LABOUR HISTORY

THE HOMELESS POOR.

"AH! WE'RE BADLY OFF - BUT JUST THINK OF THE POOR MIDDLE CLASSES, WHO ARE OBLIGED TO EAT ROAST MUTTON AND BOILED FOWL EVERY DAY!"

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THE CARTRIDGE MYSTERY OF 1907

by

Ron Grant

By 1907 the Stolypin counter-offensive against the revolutionary movement was under way in Russia. It was a process which British revolutionaries regarded as being aided and abetted by Western capitalists: "Western investors are actually providing fresh funds for the despotism which they nominally denounce." Thus in response, the Executive Council of the Social Democratic Federation urged: "The power of the future in Russia as elsewhere is the power of the people and we adjure you by rendering our Russian comrades all the assistance you can at this juncture, to make ready for yourselves those alliances with the democracies of Europe which shall force the dominant class in all countries to surrender to the organised army of Labour." (Justice 1 Sept. 1906).

In response to this by no means atypical fustian from the London leadership of the S.D.F., several socialists in the North-east and in the central Scotland became involved in an elaborate arrangement whereby arms and ammunition, originally purchased in Germany were stored in a variety of British hiding places before being shipped to Baltic ports when the affair came to light the S.D.F. contrasted this example of revolutionary solidarity with the aid given by "the Financiers of Western Europe - Jew and Gentile - who are supplying the authorities with the sinews of war ... we have to see to it that our Government which seizes arms and ammunition belonging to one party in the struggle, does not supplement the assistance given by the Financiers to the other party, by any sort of official alliance."

But the episode of 1907 was not the first to have taken place. If he is to be believed, S.G. Hobson claims in his memoirs that at the prompting of the veteran populist exile, N. W. Tchaykovsky he became involved in late 1904 in the smuggling into Russia of 6000 Brownings. Hobson arranged for the shipment of these guns which had originally been purchased in Boston, U.S.A. to Reval where he dealt with a fellow "of the priestly order of the Hebrew faith and a ... member of the ... Bund."

Perhaps better known is "The John Grafton Affair" of autumn 1905 aided by a Japanese military attache, Konni Zilliacus*, founder of the Finnish party of active resistance to Tsarism organised the smuggling of arms from a supply dump in London to Russia aboard a 300 ton tramp steamer, The "John Grafton". Here again Tchaykovsky acted as an intermediary. The late Fred Douglas, has referred to the involvement of Tom Edgar, a Leith cycle agent, inventor of the "Edgar Patent Bicycle," and socialist.

But Edgar was embroiled in yet another transaction involving guns and ammunition police raids and prosecutions and a revolutionary "will o' the wisp". The official S D F history devotes a chapter to the activities of Edgar and his comrades while more recently one historian has investigated the Tyneside link in the chain of events. The pages that follow attempt to add fresh perspectives to what the Press termed "The Cartridge Mystery".

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* Konni Zilliacus was father of the Labour MP of the same name, representing Gateshead East in Parliament (1945-50) and subsequently Gorton Manchester.

A comrade of Edgar's in Edinburgh socialist politics, John Leslie, claimed that aid was given by himself and "the whole-hearted assistance of about a dozen old S.D.F. comrades". A large amount of Mauser and Browning carbines and pistols, along with over one million rounds of ammunition was run into Russia before the British police uncovered the arms-smuggling network. Lee and Archbold state that while Leslie was not the most active or prominent member of the operation, he it was who introduced "Alf", agent of the Russian revolutionaries, to certain S.D.F. members.

"Alf" is referred to as a member of the Lettish Social Democratic Party and as speaking good English. But of "Alf" there is no trace in the Press reports of 1907 on the uncovered smuggling network. Instead the key figure in the affair is a man referred to variously as "a German" and as "a Pole", a character with a variety of names - "Thomas Dugger Keast", "Thomas Denvers" and "Adaphus Danvers".

Lee and Archbold make no reference to this person. Instead they refer to "Alf" being active in the autumn of 1905, in turn visiting Methil, Leith, Bo'ness, Grangemouth and the Clyde, to arrange the smuggling of cases and packages on board ships plying between these ports and Russia's Baltic coastline. Arms had already been stored in various locations on Tyneside. But, as scrutiny of the Press reveals, it was Keast who was active in these areas though perhaps at a slightly later date, in early winter 1906.

Thus the storage of the arms and ammunition intended for Russia was scattered over several dumps in various ports and the materials were in the care of a number of people not all of them, it would appear, radical socialists. It is perhaps unsurprising that the veil of secrecy was eventually lifted and with the discovery of the first place of storage in the spring of 1907 it became a fairly straight forward matter for the police to uncover the location of other repositories.

On 9 April 1907 Daniel Currie appeared on remand before the Sunderland magistrates "charged with having in his unlawful custody 1944 lbs of gunpowder". Currie had originally been charged with having stolen 35000 cartridges. But investigations had revealed the existence of another man, the owner of the cartridges, who had asked Currie to store the cartridges on his behalf. Currie was now liberated on bail and his trial for having unlawfully stored 194.4 pounds of gunpowder took place on 16 April 1907. The prosecution case was that ten cases of safety cartridges, as stated on the bill of lading, had been delivered from the S.S. Oporto to Monkwearmouth Goods Station and had then been uplifted by Currie. Currie had first stored the cases at a stationer's shop, then at a printer's before removing some of them to the home of Robert Hutchinson, 15 King Street, Hutchinson had been promised 1s 6d a week so long as they were there but his father had been suspicious of the boxes (now said to have contained "mechanical toys") and had opened one. He had gone to the police when the contents were revealed. Currie had been arrested and had then told the police that other cases were in the Villiers Street Congregational Institute (Currie was Caretaker there).

Currie's defence was that he had got the cases from "a German" who had asked him to find storage space "being informed by the German that they were mechanical toys and that he was going to open a shop."

Mr Edward Clark appeared for the exporters "who were general manufacturers in Germany" and who "would see that Currie did not suffer for acting for them". In reply to the prosecution Mr Clark stated that

the cartridges had come to England for transphipment "the object is not to let the people at the other end know where they were going."

The magistrates found Currie guilty. He was fined £20 and the gunpowder was forfeited. He had failed to convince the magistrates that he had been led astray by the devious "German". Indeed Lee and Archbold in their account talk of Currie as being a socialist but they appear to be wide of the mark when they state that it was the man's grandfather ("who grieved his grandson's connection with the socialists") who discovered the cases under the font at the Baptist (sic) Chapel and hurried to the police.

Equally wide of the target is Raymond Challinor (North East Labour History Bulletin No. 6, 1972) in his account of the Currie case, he relies on the evidence of the late Arthur Woodburn, M.P. who was friendly with John S Clarke, a Marxian revolutionary. Clarke told Woodburn that he had first met the Russian revolutionary "Charles Rosenthal" (a fine chess player) on the Hamburg to Newcastle boat, then again on the steps of the Social Democratic Club in Newcastle. Clarke had become involved in the storage of the guns and ammunition which had been discovered by chance in a Methodist (sic) hall! This account differs greatly from the press reports of the Currie case!

But even as the Currie case unfolded, police on Tyneside and in Scotland were uncovering further arms dumps. In Lee and Archbold's version of events, the police trial after the Villiers Street Institute discoveries led them to the home of Councillor Dunlop of South Shields, an active SDF member. A broken box with an Edinburgh address attached was found and the scope of police inquiries widened. Omitted from their narrative, however, is the arrest of Joseph Hogarth, a tailor, of 42 Leazes Park Road, Newcastle. Arrested on Tuesday 9 April Hogarth was remanded, but was granted bail on his second appearance to face a charge of unlawful possession of 25,000 Mauser pistol cartridges and 6500 Mauser rifle cartridges. The bench accepted his agent's assertion that Hogarth had "no interest in this thing, bad of indifferent."

On Friday 12 April 1907 a young Glasgow mason, John Fyfe Reid, was arrested and charged with unlawful possession and unlicensed storage of ten cases of cartridges, the police having been informed, it was claimed, "through the agency of a Glasgow gentleman." Reid was committed to prison. By this date the Tyneside police had seized 117,250 cartridges at Leazes Park Road and in a stable at Back Tindal Street.

But it was in Edinburgh that the police made arrests that appeared, according to Press speculation, to reveal the full extent of the smuggling organisation. The Scotsman spoke of "Keast, the Pole who is 'wanted' on a charge of keeping explosives in premises not licensed for the purpose." When Newcastle police had searched Keast's lodgings they found Edinburgh addresses. Their Edinburgh colleagues had then watched the Leith cycle store of Thomas Edgar and observed the arrival there of cases of ammunition from Leith docks. All winter a traffic in arms had been conducted between Hamburg and Leith. Initially the Edinburgh police arrested only two men who were "associated with a Democratic Federation, and it is believed that it was this connection which brought them into contact with Keast in Newcastle." The ammunition had, it was surmised, then been sent to Tyneside "where ... there are facilities for the shipment of arms to Russia."

On 1st May 1907 further criminal proceedings ensued. The tailor, Hogarth, was remanded for a week and the case of Thomas Baston, auctioneer,

was heard. Baston pleaded guilty to a charge of unlawful storage of cartridges in a rented stable. This man was almost certainly a Socialist - when renting the stable "he gave no name - and said the Socialist Institute would find him." Baston's agent, Mr E Clark who by his own account "had travelled through Russia and knew a great deal about the place" explained why the cartridges had come to be stored on Tyneside. They had come from Germany and were to be transhipped immediately on arrival in the U.K. to Russia. Bad conditions in the Baltic had prevented this and necessitated the finding of caches. In his statement to the police Baston had said little, "I know nothing about it except that I received a telephone message from 42 Leazes Park Road to send my horse and cart in charge of a man". This was the address of Hogarth. The court fined Baston £10 and ordered confiscation of the cartridges.

But on 9 May "the Cartridge Mystery", now took a fairly sensational twist. Hogarth appeared for trial but the charge against him was withdrawn and the case was heard ... of Thomas Dugger Keast. His agent was Mr E Clark who had persuaded Keast to surrender. Keast had taken a room at Leazes Park Road in November 1906, giving his occupation as "insurance agent." But to the ground-floor tenant, Hogarth, he had stated he was "a dealer in German screws." Cases had then arrived and Keast had asked Hogarth if he might store some of these "screws" for him.

Hogarth had agreed. In his evidence he stated that a letter had come to the house addressed to "Adaphus Danvers". Keast had claimed that he was agent to Danvers. In response to a comment by the prosecutor that Danvers and Keast might be identical, Mr Clark stated, "We are quite certain that Danvers does not exist." Keast did not speak at his trial but his lawyer "said his client was not posing as anything but an avowed socialist ... (who) ... had surrendered himself to get an innocent man out of trouble." On behalf of his client, Mr Clark stated that the unlawful storage had been done "with a view to preventing the police or other people further away from here from finding out anything." The verdict passed was a fine of £6 on Keast and confiscation of the cartridges.

Keast had remained silent .... but he did not yet disappear from view. Now, in the guise of "Thomas Denvers (The Cartridge Owners' Representative)" he wrote for The Keel "The Organ of Tyneside Socialism." His article is notably fluent and literate. "Denvers" began with a flourish quoting "The Merchant of Venice": "To do a great right, do a little wrong and curb this cruel devil of his will." A catalogue of tsarist brutalities followed, which, the author argued, justified the revolutionaries' resort to armed force. This required enlisting the aid of "contrabandists". The reason for not obtaining a licence for the storage of the cartridges was "not disrespect to the British people or its Government, but merely to prevent the Russian spies tracing the means whereby the goods were exported ..."

"Denvers" was concerned to play down the "delirious dreams of dynamite" of the yellow press, instead, he appealed to the traditional internationalist solidarity of radicals and socialists in the home of Joseph Cowen who had "supplied both men and money to enable the Garibaldians to fight the battle of Italy's liberation ... Why refuse to Russia help we gave to Italy?"

The following month "Denvers" visited the Fife seaport of Methil in the company of W.C. Angus and addressed the local branch of the S.D.F. Shortly after this, Angus appeared in court in Edinburgh with

Thomas Edgar, John Leslie and W McKie. "Edinburgh Gentlemen Arrested Storing Cartridges for Russia. Threatened Penal Servitude. Appeal For Legal Defence." In this dramatic manner one Socialist journal pinpointed the dangers facing the four men. But thanks to the High Tory Sheriff, Maconochie, who heaped scorn on the Liberal Lord Advocate's interpretation of the Explosive Substances Act 1883, the quartet were charged only with illegal storage of cartridges. And, in the end, only Edgar was prosecuted, being fined £1:1:6 and the cartridges were confiscated.

One case remained outstanding, that of J F Reid. As in the case of the Edinburgh men the charge of "unlawful possession" fell but Reid, too, was found guilty of unlicensed storage. He had named "Denner, a foreigner" as the person causing the cartridges to be delivered to his premises but would say no more. Commenting on the case the Glasgow Herald described Reid as "a member of the Glasgow branch of the Social Democratic Federation" who "took in the cartridges and gave them storage at the request of some brother Socialists." Ten thousand had gone from Reid's store before the police raid; these cartridges had gone from Glasgow to Falkirk and thence to Bo'ness and Methil "ports from which possibly an odd case at a time might quite readily find its way to a Baltic port in a coal-laden vessel. All that we know is that a foreign gentleman left them with men whose names he found in Justice ... later on, assisted by four foreign sailors, he carried them off in the direction of the docks."

And so "The Cartridge Mystery" came to an end ... or did it? At the time of writing the key figure of Thomas Dugger Keast, alias Denvers, alias Danvers (alias Denner?) remains a "deemed elusive Pimpernel".

The foregoing pages have attempted to shed light on an obscure episode in the history of proletarian internationalism. Along with the Anglo-Russian agreement and police surveillance of the Fifth Congress of the R.S.D.L.P. in London, the prosecutions gave rise to the question among Socialists, "Are Scotland Yard and the Foreign Office Controlled by St. Petersburg?"

For one of the participants at least the affair had taught many lessons and inspired him to verse. In "To Our Lettish Comrades" the Edinburgh socialist, W.C. Angus, hailed the emergence of the revolutionary movement in the Baltic, and compared their courage with the backwardness of the British movement.

"Aye, we who have lagged behind you,
Nor true to the promise of youth,
But lost in the Cause's bye-ways
Have missed its mighty truth."

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1. Michael Futrell - Northern Underground (London 1963) devotes a chapter to this episode. See also "The John Grafton Affair" - Script Notes of a Radio Broadcast; material provided by Fred Douglas broadcast on the Third Programme, 30 June 1965, producer Archie P Lee (BBC Archives, Glasgow).

JIMMY STEWART AND HIS REVOLTING CHILDREN

by

Raymond Challinor

The year 1911 was a time of storm and stress. Irish Nationalists and their Orange opponents grew increasingly insistent, more intransigent, better armed. Suffragettes, mainly respectable middle-class women, resorted to violent methods, including burnings and bombings, to secure their objectives. Most dangerous of all, a wave of industrial discontent swept the land. A new revolutionary doctrine of syndicalism, with its repudiation of moderate union leaders and a belief in direct action, fuelled the fires of rebellion. Confronted by a general strike on Merseyside, the Government dispatched a warship to train its guns on the disaffected city of Liverpool.

To add their little bit to the chaos and confusion, schoolchildren downed tools and flocked into the streets. This nationwide protest began in South Wales. The miners there were engaged in the bitterly-fought Cambrian Combine dispute. The killing of demonstrators by the military at Llanelly served to inflame the situation further: young and old alike in these tightly-knit colliery communities felt almost uncontrollable anger. Significantly, it was at Llanelly that the schoolchildren's strike began. Quickly other parts of Britain followed suit, partly because of the unsettled state of all industrial areas and partly because the exceptionally fine summer weather made striking much more appealing than school.

The North East was one of the most affected regions. The Northern Daily Mail (September 15 1911) stated that at Darlington strikers were demanding one hour's schooling in the morning and afternoon, in addition to payment of a shilling attendance allowance. At Newcastle the claims were more modest: "a number of boys met and as well as asking for the abolition of the cane and the establishment of a weekly half-holiday, requested that a penny should be given, out of the rates, to each boy every Friday. Socialist have apparently been at work among these young jokers." Children attending Low Felling Council School, after making their demands, added a dark threat about the dire consequence of not conceding them: "Alderman Costelloe need not hope to be Gateshead's Mayor next year."

Sometimes disturbances broke out. The Times, also of September 1911, stated that strikers at a West Hartlepool school went on the rampage: "A storage room at the back of an hotel was looted, and some bottles of stout and whisky and boxes of cigars were removed by the strikers, some of whom were arrested and will be charged in the morning. While marching through the streets, the boys stopped an errand boy who was taking some apples to a house and helped themselves freely to the fruit. The boys are also stated to have thrown stones at the windows of houses occupied by the teachers."

Mass picketing, the girls figuring prominently, was the rule. When attendance officers at Sunderland told boys to fall in line in the playground, the girls defiantly shouted "Fall in and follow me." Then they led a procession - almost all were barefooted - around the streets, carrying at the front a large tree branch which, a local paper suggested, seemed to have some mystical significance.

Eventually, however, the authorities succeeded in breaking the strike. School attendance officers were their main weapons. They pointed out it was a statutory duty of all parents to see their children attended school regularly; failure to do so rendered them liable to fines and/or imprisonment. Under the combined pressure from parents as well as the authorities, the schoolchildren soon caved in.

The involvement of socialists in the dispute may have been a feature that characterised this region more than elsewhere. This would be because the North East had, by that time, become a stronghold of the Socialist Sunday School Movement. Originally started on a religious basis in the 1890s, it had gradually been transformed, dropping its overtly Christian outlook and becoming secularised. A wide spectrum of left wingers - ILPers, SLPers, SDFers, etc. - who wanted their children not merely to be subjected to capitalist orthodoxy through the traditional educational system, supported the Socialist Sunday School. They appear to have attracted the more thoughtful, more socially-aware kind of child. Besides the regular Sunday meeting, sporting events and outings were sometimes arranged.

The Socialist Sunday School Movement seems to have come to the North East when William McMurran, a Glasgow engineer, moved down with his family from Scotland. In 1907 he started the Wallsend School in the Socialist Institute, moving it to the Cooperative Hall when the Institute was demolished to make way for an extension of the Picture Hall. The big progress, however, in the growth of the Sunday Schools coincided with the arrival of another Scot in the area. Jimmy Stewart was a baker by trade, an excellent organiser and speaker, who suffused his activities with a sense of humour. A Tyneside Union of Socialist Sunday Schools was formed, which operated on a much larger scale.

Naturally, as occurs with most children's organisation, the vast majority of the time was taken up by undramatic and unspectacular events. Yet, the occasional vignette is useful, providing a startling insight into the movement and its members. Such comes from the SLP journal, The Socialist (September 1914), which carried the obituary of Comrade Thomas McEwan, a member of the Wallsend Socialist Sunday School:

> "Although only 11 years of age, he took an active part in SLP work, both in carrying literature to meetings and distributing The Socialist to regular readers. He was always at the call of our Wallsend branch secretary, ready to do his little best for the cause.
>
> "In the Sunday School he was ever to the fore with pieces of rebel poetry, and one who heard him tell children and grown ups the story of John Davidson could never forget his opening remarks - "You will see from the story of John Davidson what we can expect from the capitalist."

Let me explain, for those without the benefit of a Socialist Sunday School education, that John Davidson was a young gardener, a radical, who worked for Sir John Dalrymple. One day his employer, disliking his politics, struck John. He retaliated, and received a nine-month prison sentence. Released from jail on April Fool's day, John came out to find a miners' strike in progress. They were told that, if they went to a certain place, they would each be given 4lbs of flour and 2lbs of cheese. This, however, proved to be a hoax. A riot ensued. Troops were brought in, and fired. John Davidson, an innocent bystander, lay dying. Tom Anderson, who wrote a pamphlet about the tragedy for the Socialist Sunday Schools, ends by drawing the following lesson: "Such, my children, is the working-class life, the life of the downtrodden under

our present form of government. It is the rich classes who rule today, but it will be the working people who must finally stop this class rule."

Another vignette, also taken The Socialist (September 1912), shows Socialist Sunday School members were not above subverting the state educational system for their own ends. A teacher at Jarrow taught a class how to write a business letter. Then they were asked to attempt writing one themselves. One pupil decided to write to Thomas McLure, SLP press Business Manager, for nine dozen copies of Eugene Debs[1] pamphlet on industrial unionism. When the reply came, he took the pamphlets down every Sunday morning to sell them at South Shields market.

With the advent of the First World War, most of the adults associated with the Socialist Sunday Schools adopted an anti-war position. Typical was Will Lawther. In a journal called The Spur (December 1914) he made a trenchant denunciation of the war: "All who believe in brotherhood today, all who would dethrone the demon of sudden death, the Moloch of Mammon and Militarism, are the salt of the earth. See to it the salt does preserve its savour." And he concluded: "We must stand firm for peace and sanity at all costs."

Will Lawther was eldest of a family of fifteen, almost all of whom were politically active. Not surprisingly, one of them - 18 year-old Edgar - was among the first conscientious objectors. He refused to go in the army. Arranged before a court in Sunderland, he denounced the war from the dock before receiving a sentence of two years' imprisonment with hard labour. The local Socialist Sunday Schools regarded him as a hero, and published his speech under the heading "Sowing the seeds for a better day". Alongside it appeared a poem by a Newcastle member, Fred Tait, also suffering imprisonment. And then there was 13 year-old John Morgan, who courageously addressed an open-air meeting in Birmingham Bull Ring, along with Jimmy Stewart and William Paul. It would take a lot of pluck, anyway, for a child to speak to a meeting of predominantly adults, particularly as some of them could be expected to be hostile. But the background to this meeting was that it was held to commemorate the death of 46 year-old Thomas Holliday, an anti-war socialist who had died in prison after asserting his right to speak in the Bull Ring. Yet, although there was a large, unfriendly police presence in the audience, as young John Morgan's speech shows, he did not allow himself to be intimidated.

His speech was reprinted in full by The Young Rebel, a monthly journal edited and produced by Jimmy Stewart from his home, 15, Woodvine Street, Wallsend. Besides material specifically written for children, it contained simple articles explaining basic socialist concepts by leading thinkers of the Movement. The appearance of a number of pieces from the pen of James Connolly, the Irish revolutionary executed after the Easter Uprising, excited considerable interest in Ireland, where much of them would otherwise be unobtainable, and consequently it resulted in the rapid growth in the journal's circulation there.

In the fraught atmosphere of the First World War, the authorities felt they must take some action against what was developing from a mere irritation into a threat. In July 1918, they prosecuted Jimmy Stewart and Mrs Kaslavsky, the editor and deputy editor of The Young Rebel, for sowing disaffection and hindering recruitment. In reply, Jimmy Stewart made a spirited defence in court both of the paper and his own conduct, refusing to retract a thing:

> "You ask us why we launch our attacks upon the rulers of this country. To us there is no national master class. To us there is, however, an international ruling class. And when we fight the British Government, we only attack that unit of the international imperialist class which is nearest to our hand. You may object to such a process of reasoning. Nevertheless, the press of this country has extolled the man who is now suffering in Germany - as I may have to suffer in England - for carrying out such a line of action. I refer to my comrade Liebknecht, whose propaganda I am now carrying out in this country."

He then went on to prove this point by quoting form Liebknecht's book, "Militarism and Anti-Militarism", recently reprinted by the SLP in Glasgow. Just like others opposing the war in other belligerent countries, Karl Liebknecht languished in jail. This, argued Jimmy Stewart, was partly because the cause of socialist internationalism and peace was winning new supporters every day:

> "When we began the children's magazine, The Young Rebel, 14 months ago the circulation was so small that I was able to write out, and by the aid of a duplicator, issue and sell the few copies then required. But the message was wanted and the demand for the paper increased, so we were fortunate to find that the fearless Socialist Labour Party Press in Glasgow would willingly print our magazine every month. Then the circulation of The Young Rebel grew large and even larger. It now circulates in every part of Britain. It is read by socialist children in Glasgow, London, Dublin and in every centre of industry throughout the land. And today there are thousands of children in different playgrounds of Britain who are seriously interested in this trial, and are anxiously awaiting your decision regarding myself."

Jimmy Stewart received a month's imprisonment while Mrs Kaslavsky was interned and then sent back to Russia.* The Young Rebel was silenced.

The authorities' repressive conduct led to repercussions elsewhere. The militant Clyde Workers' Committee took the issue up with G.N.Barnes, a trade union leader who had become a minister in the Coalition Government. On October 8 1918, he replied to a letter from Tom Bell: "You will see that there is no question of the Government preventing free expression on the part of the working-class movement. The Government merely took the only course open to it to check the activities of persons working against the interests of the nation." G N Barnes' letter reveals he laboured under a misapprehension - he thought The Young Rebel was a serial story, not a journal. The following month, when he attended Glasgow Trades Council, the matter was again raised, and Barnes received a drubbing. Wrongly briefed, he now claimed the authorities had taken action because the printers had tried to conceal their identity. Whereupon one of the delegates - Arthur MacManus, who also happened to be chairman of the National Shop Stewards' Movement - immediately stood up and declared he was the printer. To emphasise the point, the following day, he went along with two of his comrades to the police stateion to make a statement accepting full responsibility for printing The Young Rebel. But nevertheless the authorities did not lift the ban. The whole affair only served to heighten the suspicion Scottish workers already had of the Government. In other words, strange to relate, events involving schoolchildren, largely on Tyneside, helped to make a small contribution to the combustible mixture that exploded in 'the revolt on the Clyde'.

As for Jimmy Stewart, once out of prison, he resumed his activities - and police spies kept him under surveillance. In the period immediately after the First World War, amid widespread working-class anger and discontent, the cabinet received fortnightly reports from the Special Branch. Such was the highly detailed and comprehensive nature of these accounts that cabinet ministers on March 10 1919 learnt that Jimmy Stewart, of Wallsend, "has opened a shop for the sale of revolutionary literature. He is an agent of the Socialist Labour Press, and he has now opened classes for teaching Social, Economic and Industrial History. He calls his shop a Labour College. The classes are attended by a few youths from 18 to 21." (Cabinet Papers 44/GT 6976) Subsequently, throughout his entire life, he continued his educational work until he died in poverty. He was buried in a pauper's grave - No. 137, Section 23 - at Holy Cross Cemetery, Wallsend.

Yet, Jimmy Stewart has not been forgotten. The booklet, "Where the Wall Ends: Recollections of a Tyneside Town", published by Wallsend Art Centre and reviewed in North East Labour History No. 16 1982, contains an affectionate tribute to him. Of greater significance, however, was the ceremony that took place on May 10 1975. Then a group of Jimmy Stewart's former students assembled at the Holy Cross Cemetery. They had come to dedicate a headstone they had bought for the grave and to recall gratefully the work of their mentor. Among those present were two Members of Parliament, a scattering of local councillors and many activists in the Labour Movement. Reporting the ceremony across four columns under the heading "Jimmy the unsung hero". The Evening Chronicle correctly assessed the significance of the man:

> "Jimmy Stewart, a Scottish baker turned Geordie, was the workingman's professor."

The speech delivered by 13-year-old John Morgan in the Birmingham Bull Ring, as reported by The Young Rebel:-

"Chairman, Children, and Grown-Ups of the Working Class, - It is my desire to try to explain to you one of the mottoes we learn at the Socialist School. The one I will take will be: "Remember that all the good things of the earth are produced by Labour; whoever enjoys them without working for them is stealing the bread of the workers." This motto should appeal to you because you are of the working class. When you are out of work, or out on strike, we, your children, sometimes cry for bread: you, our parents, cannot give us any, or very little. Our motto explains why this is so. Someone has stolen your bread, your food, your clothing, your shelter, and if you are parents, brothers, and sisters who are worth of the name, you will see to it that this robbery is stopped at once, and for all time. We, the children of the Socialist School, do all we can to help you in your fight against the people who steal our bread. The rich who steal our bread do not like our motto because it denies that they help the workers to produce wealth. All the good things that make life worth living is the result of the labour of every member of the working class. Why, then, for your children's sake do you not see to it that you enjoy the entire fruits of your toil. If you have got tired of the fight, what about your children or your little brothers and sisters? Why not bring them to a Socialist School so that they can be taught what Socialism will mean to them when they grow up to be men and women? Would you not be proud of the child that can help you in your strikes; a child that will speak out about the wrongs you suffer, and work to help you to win more and more of the good things of life from your masters, and when you can no longer take part in the fight, your place in the ranks of labour will be taken up by your own children, and they will carry it on until the fight is won. I, a child of the working class, ask you children and grown-ups alike to "remember that all the good things in life are produced by labour, whoever enjoys them without working for them is stealing the bread of the workers." That is the message of a child of the working class.

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* Harry McShane, the veteran socialist and leader of the Hunger Marchers, told me he visited Moscow in 1922 and was taken round parts of the Kremlin not normally open to the public. He says his guide was a small Russian woman, with a coppery complexion, who said she had lived on Tyneside. This description fits Mrs Kaslavsky.

SONGS OF HORSE RACING ON TYNESIDE

by

Keith Gregson

Ask anybody with half an ear for a song which event took place on Tyneside on the ninth of June 1862 and the answer should be 'The Blaydon Races'. Yet the fame that a certain song has brought has disguised a number of interesting facts which have only come to light fairly recently. Originally a ballad 'descriptive of a journey (in prospect) by road to the ensuing Blaydon races according to the Newcastle Chronicle, the song was actually first performed four days before the 1862 meeting. The occasion, described in the last copy of this journal, was a testimonial dinner for the legendary boat racer, Harry Clasper. It was only after atrocious weather on the day that the song's author, Geordie Ridley, made the additions which gave birth to the version we would recognise today. Even then, Ridley's song was probably not all that high on the list of songs which were well known on Tyneside in the last century and it needed a revival at the hands of the comedian, J C Scatter, to set it on the road to its present popularity. In its day, 'The Blaydon Races' was but one among many local horse racing songs sung on Tyneside. The majority of these songs were centred upon the races which took place on Newcastle Town Moor, and two, at least, appear to have achieved greater recognition in their time than the song which was to become the Geordie 'national anthem'.

The first of these songs was written in the early days of the so-called Tyneside song, when the premier race in Newcastle was for the Gold Cup. Victory in the Gold Cup in 1811, 1812, 1813 and 1814 allowed the horse XYZ to stamp its name on Tyneside sporting history. Not only did this splendid animal live another eighteen years after final victory; it also left its name to a handicap which is still run annually at Gosforth Park, home of Newcastle horse racing for the past century. The exploits of XYZ led songwriter William Mitford, described as 'one of the older writers who wrote for their own amusement and sang their songs at social meetings among their friends', to compose 'XYZ at Newcastle Races'. Set to a tune called 'The Cameronian Rant', the song was reprinted on numerous occasions during the last century. Eventually the tune itself became known simply as 'XYZ' and was used by many later songwriters. Sung at a breathless pace, the first verse ran as follows;

Smash! Jemmy, let us buss, we'll off an see Newcassel races:
Set Dick the Trapper for some syep, we'll suin wesh a' wor faces.
There'll ne'er a lad iv Percy Main, be bet this day for five or ten;
Wor pockets lined wiv notes an' cash,
Amang the chaps we'll cut a dash
For XYZ, that bonny steed
He bangs them a' for pith and speed,
He's sure to win the cup, man.

That other great race, the Northumberland Plate, has also been recorded in song. By 1861, 'The Pitman's Derby', or 'The Derby of the North' as it was sometimes known, had been run annually on the Town Moor for thirty years - approximately the full life-time of Geordie Ridley, then popular as a singer of Irish songs. The victory of a horse called Joey Jones in the 1861 Plate caused Ridley to write his first local song and to set out on that very brief career, which was to lead to both 'The Blaydon Races' and 'Cushie Butterfield'. The song 'Joey Jones', set to an Irish tune, was reported as an instant success and it is easy

to understand why. Joey Jones was a local horse, and began as a relative outsider. After a poor start, it fought its way through the field to defeat the favourite. Later it won the Plate in 1857, 1858 and 1859. The first verse and chorus of Ridley's song show the appeal to local pride;

> Aw'm gan te sing te ye a sang, if ye'll but list te me,
> Aw divent intend te keep ye lang, an that ye'll plainly see;
> It's all aboot young Joey Jones; He wun the Northumberland Plate,
> He was bred right down at Deckham Hall that's just up through the gate.
>
> FOR HE JOGS ALONG, HE CANTER'D ALONG,
> HE LICKED THEM ALL SE FINE,
> HE WAS BRED AT GATESHEAD,
> HE'S THE PRIDE O' COALY TYNE.

As today, betting in the nineteenth century was as much about losing as winning - a fact wryly recognised by songwriter Joe Wilson in the 1860s. For Wilson, lost bets formed a recurrent theme. 'Ye've lost a whole half crown' was one song title 'Wor Geordie's Kallindor' contained the following entries;

> In May, te bet aw did begin
> Aw beck't a horse that diden't win.
> In June I had ne better fate
> An backt the last un i' the Plate

During the following decade, Wilson was able to pinpoint one failure more specifically in a song entitled 'If Spennithorne had won' or 'The Plate of '74'. Spennithorne had, in fact, won the Plate in 1872 but was becoming a little long in the tooth by 1874. Although the racing public did not give the horse much support, one correspondent at least felt that it was 'in with a chance'. Favourable conditions on the day left Spennithorne second in the betting, but Wilson's faith in both horse and rider proved to be unfounded. The old campaigner plodded into the also rans, leaving Wilson to bemoan his fate in this delightful song set to the Scottish tune 'John Anderson my jo'.

> 1. Aw meant te buy a chist o'drawers,
> Besides a silver watch;
> A sofa grand, te mense the hoose,
> Wi' bonny chairs te match;
> Besides a new leet suit o'claes,
> Te swagger i' the sun,
> Aw'd been new te the very beuts,
> If Spennithorne had wun.
>
> 2. Aw meant te buy me wife a dress,
> Ov silk the varry best,
> She'd been like a fat lanlady,
> The way aw'd had her drest;
> We meant te lodge at Tinmuth till
> The money wes gi' deun;
> An' promenade the Sands each day,
> If Spennithorne had wun.

3. But Spennithorne wes nearly last,
An' Lily Agnes wun,
The cheers o' winners diddent soond
Te me like ony fun;
Aw cannet tell hoo aw got hyem,
The mopr aboot us spun,
Aw started wark next day, an' sigh'd-
If Spennithorne had wun!

The general scene on the Town Moor during race week has also been captured by the songwriters. It was like 'Blackpool and Brighton and Whitley Bay rolled into one'. Families would camp on site for the entire week, and spend their spare time visiting side shows and playing quoits, bowls and other competitive games. Ned Corvan, author of 'The Cullercoats Fishlass', described his experiences at the 1853 races in his song. 'Swaggering at the races'. Included in the orginal text was a short monologue which refers to a visit paid to Billy Purvis' sideshow;

Away we went to hae threepenorth at Billy's; when we gat there asside the show, there he was as weel as iver, shootin' 'Come into maw backside!' What droll sayins Billy hes tee after all. He says to maw Nell, 'what bonny reed hair thou hes (and so she had), is that your Geordie? Eh, he is a comical fellow for sune as the actin' was dune, he shoots 'Ye can aw gat oot noo, aw've gettin yer brass, luik sharp aw want some mair in.'

Aw nip Nell an' Nell for a spree
Says thor's neyn here can disgrace us,
We're slap up swells beyth thou an' me
So we'll swagger at the races

Corvan had served his appreticeship with Purvis and shared with many of the working class on Tyneside an admiration for this remarkable clown, jester, actor and musician. The old showman's invitation to enter his show 'by the back passage' was remembered on Tyneside long after his death.

Scattered among Joe Wilson's songs too are pen pictures of the race week characters - the bookmaker - 'a jolly reed fyced man that tyeks his place amang the thrang an' myeks his tung keep going' and the card sharp who would;

'... work the cards about,

And offer punds and punds on one ye'd no find out'.

Similar characters were to appear in William Powell Frith's painting of a better known Derby Day which was completed about the same time as these songs. To William Watson, songwriter in the 1820s and 1830s, race week was nothing but 'mirth and fun' although the evenings could end in chaos;

Noo sum were singin' songs se fine;
An sum wes lyin' drunk like swine;
Sum drank porter, uthers wine;
Rare fuddlin' at the Races, O!
Sum gat hyem mid oots an' ins;
Sum had black eyes an' broken shins;
And sun lay drunk amang the whins,
I' cummin frae the races, O!

Watson's song provides a useful point for discussion. Are we to believe that race week in the nineteenth century was one long drunken brawl which reflects badly upon those who participated in it? This hardly seems likely, and some students of popular culture might convincingly argue that a number of these songwriters and their songs should be approached with caution. Watson and Mitford, in particular, belonged to a circle of writers who viewed the events of race week from a distance (or possibly from the stands!). However, the same cannot be said of Wilson and Corvan, especially when they were young men. Corvan may well have worked the race meetings with Purvis before he established himself as a music hall artist and, in his early twenties at least, was a man with a passionate sense of his own class.

On a very small scale, these few songs put into perspective one of the problems facing social historians with an interest in 'popular' song. Robert Colls, writing in 1977, described Mitford's work as 'middle class' and stylised as 'cheap Wordsworthian imitations of Goddess Tyne'. If this be the case, 'XYZ at Newcastle Races' may be of very little value (although it is a good song to sing). Yet it was of the same song that John Stokoe wrote at the end of the last century that 'the pitman's description of the racecourse and its surroundings' was 'true to life'. But is Stokoe's view simply another view from the stand?. . . Doubtless the arguments will go on as long as the bets themselves continue to go on at Newcastle Races.

Victorian Values Illustrated

THE MANORS SOUP KITCHEN.

THE 1790s AND RADICALISM IN NORTH EAST ENGLAND

by

Alan Milburn

The accession of George III to the throne of England heralded four decades of major political upheaval. His apparent absolutist pretensions, when combined with the controversies surrounding John Wilkes and the rebellion of the American colonists, inspired a renaissance of political radicalism, last publicly visible in the mid-seventeenth century. In a context of progressive economic and social change, these issues fused to produce a phenomenon new to the eighteenth century - an extra-parliamentary radical opposition.

In the North East, the Opposition became active in the cause of John Wilkes in the battle against local corruption, in the anti-war movement and in the demand for parliamentary reform. Its avowed enemies were corruption and aristocratic dominance, its leaders professional and commercial men like the proprietors of the Newcastle Chronicle, the Hodgsons, and their fellow dissenter, the Reverend James Murray. Earlier still, in the 1760s and 1770s, the Opposition had as its leaders George Grieve and Jasper Harrison, both attorneys, and others like Henry Gibson, Nicholas Tyzack, William Smith and George Guthrie,[2] who formed the radical leadership within the incorporated companies. Activated by a desire to erode the politics of loigarchy, these men and their fellow radicals strove towards the realisation of one single object - Liberty. Freedom was the object with regard to all aspects of life from economics through to religion, but the key to Liberty was political change.

The danger, of course, was that political change might open the floodgates to all manner of extremist demands. Although the Radical Opposition sought to make the House of Commons more representative, it did not offer parliamentary reform as a prelude either to political democracy or to social equality:

> The Equality contended for by the Friends of Reform is an EQUALITY OF RIGHTS ... The inequality derived from labour and successful enterprize, the result of superior industry and good fortune, is an inequality essential to the very existence of society ...[3]

The Radical Opposition sought only to admit the middle class - "the monied people and trading part of the nation"[4] - into political power, without prejudicing its members' interests as masters and men of property. Yet, those interests, and their desire to limit the extent of "radicalism", were to be severely compromised by events.

The threat came from below. It appeared most conspicuously for the first time in the 1790s. The decade had started out quietly enough for the middle-class radicals, with the centenary celebrations for the Glorious Revolution occupying much of their energies. Time went into preparing major banquets and later into the formation of branches of the Revolution Society in Durham and Newcastle. But this traditonal picture of radicalism housed in banquetting halls and small debating chambers, was about to be shattered during the course of the decade. The one thing that the propertied most feared was about to happen - sections of the working class combined to seek a redress of their grievances through political means. Such a combination had a firm base on which it could

build for the latter part of the eighteenth century had witnessed a growth in strike activity and, concurrently, a strengthening of embryonic trade union organisation amongst pitmen, keelmen, seamen and others.

The danger was that these developments might acquire a political dimension. Already 70 years before Chartism claimed its historical role as the first mass political expression of working class interests, the keelmen of the Tyne had recognised the need for independent action if those interests were to be defended. When the Newcastle magistrates undertook an investigation into the 1768 strike, and asked why the keelmen, "instead of making a stop (did not) apply to the magistrates for relief?", John Price, keelman, made out the most logical of cases for their action - "Because most of the Magistrates were Coalowners of Fitters". [5] The logical conclusion was that changes in the social and political structure were necessary.

In the Radical Opposition's struggles of the 1760s and 1770s there are scattered flashes of working class involement. In the midst of the Wilkite celebrations of 1768, for example, the Newcastle shoemakers held their annual procession to commemorate their patron, Saint Crispin. The procession was followed by a dinner at which toasts were given, "amongst them Mr. Wilkes and every true friend to LIBERTY". [6] Certainly in other parts of the country, Wilkes became the hero of the lower as well as the middle orders.[7] Equally typical of working class political involvement in this period, however, was the manipulation of two keelmen by Alderman John Erasmus Blackett to procure an assualt upon a political opponent during the course of the 1774 election.[8] Although there is little doubt that the Wilkite riots of the period were expressive of working class discontents, they had not as yet become focussed on any targets other than those defined by the propertied.

As strikes and tussles with authority became more frequent, however, the working class were brought into conflict with new social forces. While demands for "liberty" struck a common chord amongst both the middle and working class, it was given different interpretations by each. When in 1768, for example, it was reported that the keelmen "cry out Harvey and Liberty", their juxtaposition of liberty with the name of their union solicitor, suggested quite different definition from those members of the Radical Opposition who were so prone to give vent to their support for "Wilkes and Liberty" the keelmen had appropriated "liberty" for their own uses. Greater changes were afoot.

1789 brought the French Revolution; 1792 the Painite Revolution. The example of the French people's jettisoning of their chains inspired the radicals of Britain. The old Radical Opposition was revived and celebrated the French Revolution as a triumph of liberty over tyranny. Disturbing symptoms, however, quickly appeared in the new French body politic. The execution of Louis XVI, the escalation of revolutionary violence and the expansionist zeal of the French armies after 1792 were too-much for the liberal and propertied to stomach. By the end of 1792, they were seeking to throw in their lot with their aristocratic "enemies" in a common defence against a new and far more dangerous foe egalitarianism.[9]

The early years of the decade had seen a massive upsurge in a new form of radicalism, conspicuously based in the working class. Organisations like the London Corresponding Society and its compatriots in the provinces grew at a prodigious rate, supported enthusiastically by artisans and industrial workers. The common battle cry of this popular

radicalism was no longer "liberty" but the more egalitarian, "the rights of man". Its guru was Thomas Paine. By 1793, two years after initial publications, the sales of his Rights of Man had reached an astonishing 200,000.[10] Popular praise and governmental proscription were the dual responses to a work which declared its undying hostility to hereditary government, to the rule of the aristocracy and to the doctrine of passive obedience. The aristocracy should be replaced by democracy, if necessary by revolution such was the conclusion that Paine drew. His emphasis, including his strategy for social welfare paid for by progressive taxation, was on equality. All men had an equal right to political power. The adoption of this programme by the new radical societies and the abhorrence of it by the old Radical Opposition was no coincidence.

The Rights of Man were sown in a fertile soil. The decade of the 1790s was one of economic uncertainty, high food prices and popular upheaval. In the North East, the early years of the decade were a time of mass labour unrest. In 1792-3, alone, there were at least 12 strikes, including major stoppages by both the seamen and keelmen. Althoughlater analysis has tended to agree with the opinion of one contemporary commentator "that there seems nothing of a Political nature in the (1792 seamen's strike) and that the sailors appear heartily attached to the Government of the Country", other evidence points in a somewhat different direction.[11]

The volume of correspondence that bombarded the Home Office during 1792-3 from men of property, attests to their perception of something new in the air. The coalesence of political with traditional forms of popular unrest amplified their fears. Several commentators, observing the impressive solidarity evinced by theseamen's and keelmen's strikes in particular, pointed to the malevolent influence of outsiders, taking advantage of the gullibility of the working class. The strategic successes of the 1793 keelmen's stoppage were put down to the work of "men of better Education and in a higher Sphere"[12] while the seamen, it appears, were mere playthings of degenerate and devilish provocateurs :-

> There is much reason to dread that the Seamen are instigated by the Enemies of our Tranquility and that they may be made the Instruments of their abandoned views....[13]

Echoing later attempts to tar political subversion and trade unionism with the same brush so as to ensure their common suppression, the hand of property trembled at the prospect before it. Unable to conceive of the working class engaging in serious political activity, and frightened to death of such an improbable event, the authorities continued to define politics as the possession of a few. The fact was, however, that the old political nation was being overwhelmed. Politics was becoming the possession of all men. And the danger came from within the working class communities. In 1793, for example, the seamen's delegates passed a series of resolutions and although the first defended the British Constitution, the second was the language of Paine attuned to the grievances of labourism; in this case chiefly the ravages brought by the impress :-

> ...as our conduct has never been such that we ought to be deprived of those rights of personal security and protection enjoyed by the rest of our fellow Subjects, and as it is our opinion that we are deprived of an equal participation of those rights by the cruel mode of manning the Royal Navy by Impress a mode though countenanced by precedents and supposed to have been a part of the Common Law, has never been sanctioned

> by the authority of Parliament, we think ourselves justified in endeavouring to resist this species of cruelty...[14]

The prospect for the propertied looked far from promising. The apparently indissoluble rule of "precedents" was crumbling before their eyes. Ship-owner and self-proclaimed reactionary, J. Powditch feared the worst if the hand of authority was not strengthened:-

> when I look round and see this Country covered with thousands of Pitmen, Keelmen, Waggonmen and other labouring men, hardy fellows, strongly impressed with the new doctrine of equality, and at present composed of such combustible matter that the least spark will set them in a blaze, I cannot help thinking the supineness of the Magistrates very reprehensible...[15]

During the 1793 seamen's strike, a poll was erected in South Shields market place proclaiming "Liberty for ever" [16] while the cry of "No King, Tom Paine forever" frequently assailed the ears of the propertied.[17] The market for Paine's Rights of Man, according to one commentator, was impressive, for he noted that the 6d edition of the book had achieved sales of 1,000 from one bookseller alone.[18] Paine's influence, however, was felt beyond both the Tyne and the years of mass strikes. In 1793, a Durham shoemaker was convicted for contempt against the King's person and government.[19] In April, 1793 James Raith pleaded guilty at Durham Quareter Sessions for calling the press - gang "a set of oppressors" [20] while the following year, one Robert Lister, a striking keelman, was transported for uttering seditious and treasonable words.[21]

Nor was the North East immune from more organised expressions of radicalism. In the early years of the decade there was a Jacobin Club at Howdon. Led by a builder and a shoemaker, the Club attracted the attention of both local men of property and the national authorities, who sought its repression.[22] In 1794, James Smith, joiner, wrote from Newcastle to Thomas Hardy, secretary of the London Corresponding Society. Asking for advice and expressing the hope that "The Hydra of Tyranny and Imposition shall soon fall under the Guillotine of Truth and Reason", Smith gives us a valuable insight into the impact of Painite radicalism in the town :-

> "a very great Number are found here, that dare assert the natural and unalienable Rights of Man, and bear their Testimony against the tyrannical Encroachments of assumed Power on those Rights. A good number have formed themselves into Societies, and meet weekly, admitting none but known Friends, and have assumed no name but that of Newspaper Companies. There was a great Spirit whilst the British Convention continued to act, but, after their Suppression, a damp was cast upon the whole."[23]

"Suppression" drove the radical movement into anonymity. The Two Acts of 1795 had dire implications for radicals. Unable to meet, discuss and propagandise, many simply left the movement, hoping no doubt, for better days to return. Others were more obdurate. What could not be accomplished constitutionally, perhaps could be in other ways. The years from 1795-1803 are the years of the revolutionary underground. Most conspicuous in the West Riding, Lancashire and London, revolutionaries were also abroad in the North East.[24]

The United Englishmen were the most active revolutionary force after 1795. One of their chief tactics was the attempted seduction of the armed forces as a step towards revolution. There were 3 reported incidents of the kind in this area. The first, in 1795, occurred even before the formation of the United Englishmen, but was, interestingly enough, associated with a regiment of soldiers from Ireland, where the United Irishmen were busy planning the 1797 Rebellion. In September, 1795, the 23rd Ulster Regiment of Light Dragoons arrived in Newcastle having "just been raised in Ireland...and on the 9th, after various meetings of the privates, they expressed a determination not to suffer themselves to be draughted into other regiments...in the evening they assembled in various parts of the town in rather a tumultuous manner... About 5 o'clock some of them broke open the repository for the regiment stores, and took from there a large supply of powder and balls" The insurrection was attributed, in a handbill addressed to the town's inhabitants, on "some ill-disposed people in town (who) are endeavouring to foment the military."[25] Five year later, two further attempted seductions were discovered. In May, 1800, a handwritten "inflammatory hand-bill"[26] was posted in Dockwray Square, North Shields, and in October, in Newcastle, "a manuscript handbill in the shape of an address to the soldiery was posted up in St. John's Lane...It was most artfully and, indeed, neatly worded, and must have been the production of some person of no mean ability."[27]

Who this person and the others involved actually were, we will probably never know. Nevertheless, these few insights into radical strategy in the North-East accord with the national picture. The revolutionary movement was a nationwide phenomenon. It came to encompass the grievances of the working class. In this decade of mass politicisation and yet of anonymity, two beacons shine through to throw light on our ignorance about the popular appetite for revolutionary solutions. They both attest to the fact that the struggles for rights - bread, wages, good working conditions, etc - could acquire a political dimension.

In the summer of 1797, John Leveritt, North Shields seaman, uttered the following treasonable words (for which he was convicted) :-

> It is no matter to me who is King or who is Queen. Damn their eyes. I have no freehold or estate to lose. I may have a chance to get some, and it is no matter to me how soon we begin to have a revolution. Blast them, they want to starve the sailors at the Nore. Damn their eyes, they had more need to pay their wages; they have four years pay due, and the blasted government has no money to pay them; the poor fellows are all naked on board and it is high time for them to get their eyes opened, [28]

Three years later, the home of the North East's seamen, North Shields, once again played host to sedition, when the following verses were found in the market place :-

> When Kings neglect the people's good with reason we complain
> Our allegiance then is understood to be absolved again.
> To curse the King or wish their fall is language bad to use,
> Compassion in their breast were small when they Proclame such News
> Then cease to hope in Tyrants reign with Avarice in the rear
> The language now speaks very plain no better times are near.
> I have once more ventured to oppose oppressions wicked breast
> And violate the Laws of those who starve the Poor to Death.
> Then rise ye Britons claim your right your Children call for Bread
> O'erthrow the savage Monsters mieght or mingle with the Dead.[29]

Revolution was the only course open if injustice was to be stemmed, according to this anonymous muse and his fellow-traveller, John Leveritt. Their views had gained a currency and following, during the course of the previous decade, that few could have imagined when the first news of revolution arrived from France in 1789. The 1790s represented the first of several periods (1819, 1830-2, 1838-48 being others) when a number of factors -economic dislocation, political uncertainty and popular upheaval - coalesced to change the landscape of old England. The basis had now been laid for a new radicalism, based on the working class and promising something other than household suffrage and more stringent control of government expenditure. The old Radical Opposition were forced to adapt to this new state of affairs. The period from 1800-15 when economic boom once more came to England, gave it time to reappraise its strategy, in the light of the events of the 1790s. It is no coincidence that those years saw not only the passage of the Combination Acts, in reaction to popular unrest, but also the flowering of a bourgeois moral crusade that saw in persuasion and paternalism the key to hegemony. In 1796, Thomas Bigge wrote his "Considerations on the State of Parties and the Means of Effecting a Reconciliation Between Them". Clearly he set out, in a single paragraph, the road that middle-class radicals had been compelled to enter :-

> An equal Government, attached to principles of liberty, economy and peace; laws wisely framed and impartially executed; a faithful and uncorrupt expenditure of public money; a strict attention to public morals; and, lastly, a diligent regard to the comforts and education of the lower ranks, ever will content the great mass of mankind, and render them totally indifferent to political disquisition. On such a people the arguments of Mr. Paine will make no impression...[30]

Such a hope, as subsequent history proved, was not to be fulfilled.

1. cf., for example, J.Brawer "Party Ideology and Popular Politics at the Accession of George III", G.Rude "Wilkes and Liberty", J.Cannon "Parliamentary Reform, 1640-1832"
2. cf. T.R.Knox
3. Newcastle Chronicle, 15 December 1792
4. ibid, 27 February 1768
5. Tyne & Wear Record Office, 394/29
6. op cit, 29 October 1768
7. cf, for example, G.Rude "Wilkes and Liberty"
8. Northumberland Record Office, ZBL 264/3, handbill dated 12 October 1774
9. This is extensively dealt with in E.P.Thompson "The Making of the English Working Class"
10. Paine "Rights of Man" (Penguin), ed. Collins, p.36
11. Home Office, 42/22, R.Burdon - H.O., 16 November 1972. The chief article on the labour disputes of the 1790s in North East England is N.McCord and D.Brewster Some Labour Troubles of the 1790s in North East England,international review of social history,XIII,1968,pp 366-83
12. Home Office, 40/24, Rudman-Dundas, 4 February 1793
13. ibid, 2 December 1792
14. ibid, 31 January 1793
15. Home Office, Powditch - H.O., 3 November 1792
16. Op cit, Bulmer - Burdon, 18 February 1793
17. ibid, 22 February 1793
18. Home Office, 42/23, C.Blackett - F.Freeling, 22 November 1792
19. Home Office, 43/4, H.O. - Archdeacon of Durham, 23 December 1793
20. quoted in C.Emsley "British Society and the French Wars, 1793-1815", p. 28
21. Newcastle Advertiser, 23 August 1794
22. W.Richardson "History of the Parish of Wallsend"
23. Northumberland Record Office, ZR1 25/17, 24 April 1794
24. c.f. E.P.Thompson and F.K.Donnelly and J.L.Baxter, Sheffield and the English Revolutionary Tradition,1791-1820,International Review of Social History,1975,398-450 and J.R.Dinwiddy The Black Lamp in Yorkshire, 1801-2, 1974, 113-23
25. J.Sykes "Local Records ..." Vol. 1, p. 376
26. Newcastle Courant, 27 September 1800
27. ibid, 4 October 1800
28. Emsley, op cit, quoted in, p. 61
29. Home Office, 42/52, Robert Laing - h.o., 11 October 1800
30. published in London, 1796.

GEORGE HARVEY AND INDUSTRIAL UNIONISM

by

Geoff Walker

George Harvey (1885 - 1949) was born in the Durham village of Beamish. Employed as a miner, he won a scholarship to Ruskin College in 1908. There he joined the Socialist Labour Party, a Marxist organisation greatly influenced by the American thinker, Daniel De Leon. After the completion of his course at Oxford, Harvey returned to work in the Durham coalfield. He found widespread anger and frustration among his fellow workers. At the 1908 gala thousands of people had cheered a protest against John Wilson, the moderate who led the Durham Miners' Association. A group of miners' wives, dressed in big straw hats with red ribbons, carried an effigy of this hated union leader and tried to stand immediately in front of the rostrum where Wilson was speaking. The police immediately intervened, destroying the effigy. Amid music from a band and applause from many spectators, the women demonstrators left the field.

George Harvey soon started to add to the weight of criticism about John Wilson. His first article appeared in The Socialist, organ of the S.L.P., in April 1909. Its subject was the mining disaster at Stanley, County Durham, that claimed 168 lives. In the ensuing inquest, John Wilson had expressed his view that long hours of work had neither contributed to the disaster nor were they detrimental to miners' health. Harvey, on the other hand, argued that as men became tired, they became accident-prone; 59 of those killed in the explosion had been underground for more than 10 hours. Then he went on to allude to the miserable wages, not improved for 30 years: the daily rates of 4s 2d for hewers, 2s 10d for putters, etc., had not been altered since 1879; only when production exceeded the 1879 figure did miners receive a percentage extra.

A second mining disaster, this time at Whitehaven, gave Harvey another opportunity to return to the attack. Utilising company statistics that had appeared in The Times and Financial Times, his article in The Socialist showed the standards of safety left much to be desired, as did the ventilation provisions. Part of the problem, he contended, arose from sectionalism, the absence of industrial unionism, which would not allow the miners to speak with a single voice: the half million miners employed by the coal industry were organised into 54 sections, "each of which is dominated by men who strive to kill discontent."

This issue---the need to change the structure and purpose of trade unions---became George Harvey's central preoccupation. In August 1911, he published a pamphlet entitled "Industrial Unionism and the Mining Industry". It was written in clear, forceful language. Its arguments were buttressed by statistics and quotation. Of all the working-class literature published in the period just before the First World War, it must rank among the most impressive. Quickly, the pamphlet becan to have an impact. Two thousand copies were sold in the first few months after publication. From all over County Durham, Harvey received invitations to address meetings. At Chester-le-Street 3,000 turned up to hear him talk on "Industrial Unionism and Fakirdom in the D.M.A." On no occasion did he fail to subject the Durham Miners' Association leaders to withering criticism, accusing them of failing to show solidarity with the Welsh miners in the Cambrian Combine strike (1911) or to aid their own members when in dispute.

From their Red Hill headquarters, these union officials awaited their chance to deal with this growing nuisance. It came in June 1912. The Chester-le-Street branch of the International Workers of Great Britain produced a short pamphlet, "Does Dr John Wilson MP serve the working class?" Based on an article by Harvey that had appeared in The Socialist of August 1910, it had been enlarged so that comment could be made about more recent events, such as Wilson's acceptance of a conciliation board decision to cut miners' wages and his "Judas-like" denunciation of the South Wales men.

Harvey made great play of Wilson's friendship with the coalowners. Quotations from Lord Joicey, chairman and managing director of Durham's two largest colliery companies, prefaced the original article. The first revealed that His Lordship reciprocated the affectionate feelings: "My friend John Wilson....Mr. Wilson has been like a father to me--- given me sound advice." The second showed this entente cordiale had born fruit. Lord Joicey claimed it had led to "a great mitigation, if not a complete destruction, of the animus and antagonism which existed. The gulf which separated the two sides of the industrial community has been narrowed beyond the dream of possibility 40 years ago."

In his pamphlet, Harvey sought to disprove this argument by showing the rate of exploitation was increasing. He quoted figures from the London Statistical Society which revealed the gap was growing between the value of the coal produced and what the men receive in wages. The union leaders, Harvey claimed, played an essential role in allowing this to happen: "John Wilson had always looked at things through a master's telescope. He may deserve the esteem of the employer, but not of the employed. His aim has always been to bolster up capitalism, and he, more than any other leader perhaps, had swayed the miners to take that particular kind of action which is either harmless or beneficial to the capitalist class."

After reviewing alterations to production methods, Harvey complained that "all the changes have been made for the purpose of getting efficient workmen. Wilson would have us believe they had for their object the betterment of the miners' lot. They are weighed down by the argument to prove his maxim---"Reform not Revolution". They furnish the wished for material for capitalists to mask themselves. Nor is the material wasted. Like its author, it is trotted out and made good use of at charity fairs and other fetes of the capitalist class. And he rejoices in the praises of Lords Coal and Pool, and makes it publicaly known that a cheque from their hands would not come amiss... If £260 is the price, then miners' leaders are cheap and worth getting at."

The final sentence is a reference to an event happening some years previously. Lord Joicey, on behalf of the Liberal Party, presented Thomas Burt, MP, the Northumberland Miners' secretary, with a cheque for £260. John Wilson, who attended the ceremony, jokingly remarked that he was willing to be corrupted by a £260 cheque from Lord Joicey.

John Wilson considered Harvey had placed an entirely false construction on this remark. He also deeply resented being likened to Judas. Harvey was asked to withdraw these statements and apologise. When he refused, Wilson began legal procedings. In response, Harvey started to organise his defence. Without the resources of a large union bureaucracy, he had to rely upon pit-head collections and money from socialist sources. These, he hoped, would be sufficient to secure professional advice, thereby strengthening his defence, which he had resolved to conduct himself.

The case came before the Newcastle Assizes in November 1912. Wilson's counsel, Mr Short, KC, MP, and Mr Lowenthal, referred to their client's "respect and dedication", to the high esteem in which he was held in the North East, and the fact that Durham University had awarded him an honorary doctorate. Then they described Harvey inaccurately as a syndicalist. Replying, the defendant stated his intention had been to attack Dr Wilson's policies, not his reputation; the case against him, he argued was childish and flimsy. All he had done was to make fair comment on a matter of public interest. Harvey went on to cross-examine Wilson for more than an hour. Supremely confident, the union leader sought to parry the questions in a facetious manner:-

Defendant---"Are you aware that the Board of Trade figures prove conclusively that the condition of the working classess is absolutely in decline?"

Plaintiff---"I do not know to what Board of Trade return you refer. I would not have a clear head if I carried them all in it." (Laughter)

Defendant---"Are you aware of the fact that the figures prove wages have been stationary for 15 years while the cost of living has gone up 10 per cent?"

Plaintiff---"I cannot confirm or dispute your figures if you get them from the Board of Trade."

Defendant---"You would not dispute the fact that, as quoted by Lloyd George, one-third of the people of the country are almost on the verge of starvation?"

Plaintiff---"If you say it is Lloyd George, like John Bull, it must be true." (More laughter)

Local papers carried extensive reports of the proceedings. Undoubtedly, some readers thought Wilson's flippancy contrasted badly with Harvey's seriousness and knowledge. Particularly impressive was Harvey's summing up. He mentioned that while others shared his opinions of John Wilson, they stayed strangely immune from prosecution. The reason for this was quite simple: "He has taken action against me because I am a working man. He could not afford to take action against the formidable organisation which have said the same thing." The fact that the court awarded Wilson £200 damages did not prevent The Socialist (December 1912) from seeing it as a political victory for George Harvey: "General Secretary Wilson, by bringing this action, gives industrial unionism and revolutionary socialism an advertisement which will be of great value. The admissions of Wilson in 'the box' demonstrate the futility of leadership in working-class unionism, and may do much to dissipate the foolish adulation of the worker for his well-paid official, who, having nothing to lose but his fat job, naturally subscribes to the well-loved capitalist maxim---'God's in his heaven; all's right with the world."

Once the trial was over, John Wilson may have been disturbed by other developments. Indeed, he could well have come to view his legal action as a rather futile gesture. George Harvey made no serious attempt to pay the damages awarded against him. Yet, take him to court a second time, distraining against his goods, would merely serve to increase Harvey's popularity, already swollen by the case. What was more, other militant pitmen were axious to repeat---in fact, to improve by

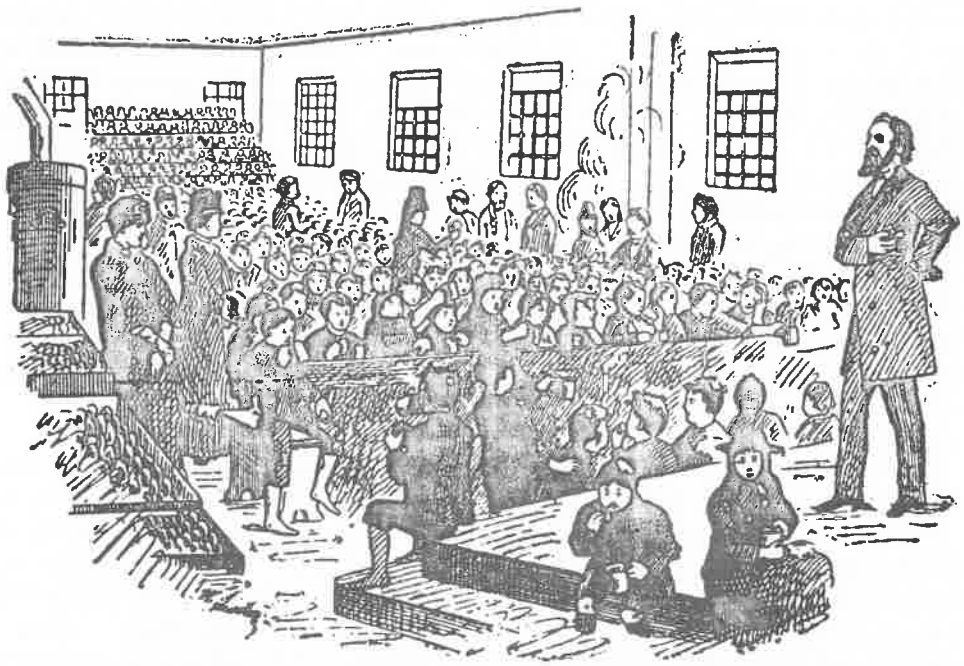
making more objectionable---Harvey's statement.

The prevailing attitude is epitomised in an article by one angry young man who declared: "It is up to us, as miners, to show George Harvey, by word and deed, that we believe what he said was true. Everyone of us believes it---I have never met anyone who took the opposite view." The young tearaway who wrote this was Will Lawther. It appeared in The Herald of Revolt (February 1913). Lawther went on to claim: "From the stand that Harvey has taken, a movement has arisen right throughout the Northern Coalfield for 'direct action' against the 'law and order' fiends. And I believe that, during the forthcoming summer, the gospel of revolt, of direct action, of anti-leadership, will spread." As if to confirm his prognostication as well as compound Wilson's problems, Will Lawther got the article reprinted in leaflet form, freely distributing at that summer's Durham miners' gala.

As for George Harvey, in 1913 his popularity helped him to secure the checkweighman's job at Wardley colliery. Over subsequent years, his militant principles stayed virtually unaltered. He remained one of the most well-read and thoughtful individuals in the union. A new and greatly expanded version of "Industrial Unionism and the Mining Industry", 221 pages long, was published at Pelaw in 1917, to be followed by another pamphlet "Capitalism in the Northern Coalfield" in the next year. After the First World War, he acted as North East secretary of what was to become Miners' Minority Movement as well as playing an important part in the General Strike and industrial disputes in his vicinity.* According to Lord Blyton, the former miner and Labour MP, George Harvey throughout his whole life remained a Marxist, an advocate of industrial unionism and a firm believer in the class struggle.

* North East Labour History, Bulletin No. 9, October 1975, contains a biographical sketch of Jack Parks, "Memories of a Militant", that mentions George Harvey several times while Dave Douglass's Ruskin History Workshop pamphlet, "Pit Life in County Durham" (Oxford, 1973) makes numerous references to his activities in the inter-war period.

Victorian Values Illustrated



SUNDAY FREE MEALS IN CROFT STREET, NEWCASTLE.

SUNDERLAND AND THE 1832 REFORM BILL

By

Keith Wilson

In 1830 Sunderland's size, together with its commercial and maritime interests, suggested its inclusion in the lists of those towns likely to benefit from any re-allocation of parliamentary seats should any reform of Parliament be enacted. In the atmosphere of expectation after the death of the king in 1830 and the election of a Whig government on a reform platform, political unions sprang up throughout the country, often based on the model provided by the Birmingham Political Union, led by Thomas Attwood, the Birmingham banker. The BPU had a middle-class leadership, together with considerable working-class support, as did many of the unions which emulated it. Sunderland's political union, however, does not seem to have been of this nature.

The Sunderland and the Wearmouth's Political Union was an example of a 'low' union, operating without the assistance of the so-called 'respectable' middle class, who had turned down an offer to hold the chair and preside over the union. Among its prominent members were a Unitarian minister, a painter, a turner and a grocer. Their social composition led historian Dr Nossiter to refer to the social basis of Sunderland's radicalism as the "shopocracy". According to him, "this class had formed the rank and file of the reform movement in the 1830's", and they often "possessed an acute political consciousness heightened by their marginality in the class structure". Thus when a joint meeting was held with the prominent personalities of the Newcastle-based Northern Political Union, it was the Newcastle men, including Thomas Attwood's brother Charles, along with Fife and Doubleday, who made most of the reported speeches praising, among other things, Sunderland's long radical tradition. Yet, by later standards, the aims of the Sunderland and the Wearmouth's Political Union were not very radical. While individuals called for triennial parliaments and vote by ballot, the majority were content with merely a step towards suffrage extension. Thus the formal aims of the Union were: the advancement of political privileges, the removal of civil and ecclesiastical abuses, the repeal of the taxes on knowledge, the preservation of peace and the protection of property in case of local disturbance, the support of the friends of the people in both Houses of Parliament on all momentous questions and, in the event of the enfranchisement of Sunderland, the support of enlightened and liberal candidates for the representation of the town.

By contrast the 'respectable' middle classes presided over their own Reform meetings without formulating a distinct programme of aims. As their contemporary description implies, they were men of a more elevated social position. They included some of Sunderland's most prominent doctors and lawyers, such as Dr. Clanny, inventor of a miners' safety lamp and one of the first doctors to diagnose cholera in England, J.J. Wright, described in his obituary as "almost Sunderland itself . . . in his prime the leading attorney and leading political agent in the whole county of Durham", and John Kidson, solicitor and clerk to the county magistrates during the Chartist disturbances.

Such people seem to have had strange backgrounds (and subsequent careers) to be considered as 'radicals', but in the absence of parliamentary representation for such an important commercial centre as Sunderland, and in the face of incomprehensible attitudes at Westminster, they were pushed to advocate reform. As the Wearmouth

Magazine put it:

> "During this period in the political history of Sunderland there was very little diversity of political opinion. No matter of what political creed all were agreed on the advantages of reform".

Thus Lord Durham's brother Lambton, speaking at one of these meetings, said that "When the Duke of Wellington declared against reform, civil war stared us in the face". On the same occasion J.J. Wright, later confidential adviser to Lord Londonderry, described His Lordship's opposition to reform as "arrogant and dogmatic".

It was, accordingly, the opponents of reform - Londonderry and the bishops - who were singled out for special treatment by the mob that heard the speeches of these 'respectable' radicals. A crowd estimated at between 8 and 10,000 carried effigies of Lord Londonderry and a bishop through the town, burning them amidst the groans and hisses of the populace.

In 1831, therefore, there were two identifiable groups of political radicals in Sunderland: an artisanal/shopkeeper group with a formal, long-term political programme, and a middle-class group without such formalities. Somewhat surprisingly perhaps, it was this latter that expressed the mood of the mass of the town's inhabitants most closely. Of even greater surprise, however, is the extent to which it provided the milieu from which subsequent forms of radicalism were to grow. Some of the men of 1831 appear, for example, in a short-lived Reform Association in 1835 while others revived their interest in parliamentary reform with a discussion of the secret ballot principle in 1837. Still others reappear in the Complete Suffrage Movement meetings of 1842-1844 and in Hume's "Little Charter" Movement of 1848. But by far the biggest regrouping took place in the Anti-Corn Law League where, once again, a parliamentary measure was seen to be of immediate and considerable importance for the town's prosperity, linked as it was to the volume of trade in and out of the port.

The members of the Sunderland and the Wearmouth's Political Union, on the other hand, seemed, by and large, to have withdrawn from active participation in politics after 1832. Despite 600 persons attending a celebratory banquet after the Reform Bill was finally passed, they were unable to maintain their momentum or enthusiasm in the post-reform period and the union quickly dissolved. The radicalism of its social location, however, did not dissolve : the heirs to its legacy became the Chartists. It was from among the artisans and shopkeepers that the Chartist leadership emerged and then widened its basis of mass support in a way the old Political Union had been unable to do.

For the Chartist leadership, however, the road from 1832 to 1838 was not a straightforward one. In 1831 Binns, then just 15 years old, had been serving his apprenticeship as a draper while Williams, four years older, was a confectioner. Their first joint ventures were the setting up of a bookselling partnership in Bridge Street at the same time as they became secretaries and librarians to the Mechanics Institute. It was the Mechanics Institute which brought them into contact with Thomas Thompson, a solicitor and one of the respectable radicals of 1831, now acting as treasurer to the Institute. The Mechanics Institute enjoyed middle-class patronage and thus the two men mingled with the respectables while at the same time becoming

increasingly involved with the dissemination of more radical literature from their bookshop, such as the sermons of J.R. Stephens and the satirical attack on the New Poor Law, 'The Book of Marcus'. The resolution of this increasing incompatibility occurred in a meeting called on the subject of the secret ballot in December 1837.

This meeting was called by a 535-name petition, most of whom were electors including "many gentlemen of great influence in the borough and its adjacent neighbourhood". It was chaired by the Mayor and its initial motion:

> "that as the freedom of election has been almost destroyed by bribery and intimidation, this meeting is of the opinion (sic) that some immediate remedy is required and that the most practical remedy is the vote by ballot"

was proposed by Alderman Lotherington and seconded by Dr. Brown, both of whom had been prominent on the 1831 platforms. Thomas Thompson then exhibited a ballot box to demonstrate to the meeting how it would work. Dissent occurred however when Binns, seconded by Williams, proposed an amendment to the effect that the ballot by itself was not enough. "The Ballot and Household suffrage ought to be unitedly asked for", said Binns, for, as Williams said, "If you insult the millions by telling them that they are not fit to be trusted with the franchise, you cannot expect them to join in your petition for the ballot".

Household suffrage clearly went further than the aims of even the old Political Union and it was certainly unacceptable to many of the so-called reformers present. Despite this the amendment was carried whereupon Thompson, desirous of healing the split in the ranks, proposed a joint committee spanning both sides of the division to supervise the petition which was to be prepared on the issue. But the respectables' attempt to constrain their prodigies had clearly failed and when next their names are mentioned they are referred to as "ultra" radicals, advocating extension of the franchise, shorter parliaments, secret ballot, abolition of the property qualifications and refraining from excisable items in rota to demonstrate to the government the size and importance of the working class. They were Chartists in all but name.

II

As a working class cultural form, Chartism in Sunderland signified a sustained peak of radical political activity between 1838 and 1843 with a continuing but lesser influence down to 1848 and beyond. For most of this time Sunderland led the county of Durham and Binns and Williams were the acknowledged leaders. As the Northern Star eulogised:

> "Within the short space of twelve months they have secured to our cause the whole colliery population of the county and extended the bond of political union into almost every town and village in Durham".

Thousands signed the Chartist petitions of 1839 and 1842 and Sunderland's relative prosperity, at least down to 1841, meant that the town was usually near the head of lists of monies subscribed to the National Rent and various Chartist defence funds.

From the pages of the Northern Star over 120 Sunderland men can be identified as having taken a prominent role in the formal organisation of Chartism - in standing for election to the council, in taking the chair at meetings, in making speeches and in proposing or seconding motions. Among them we may note Robert Knox, a 24-year old slater who was Sunderland's delegate to the first National Convention and who chaired Convention meetings in London before returning to lecture extensively in the North East, Dobbie, a cabinet maker active from 1841 to 1848 and James Taylor, a clock and watchmaker who was a lecturer to the colliery districts and active from 1840 to 1847. Perhaps the strangest Sunderland Chartist was Batchelor who was variously described as "a Sunderland ship's carpenter" and "a fellow townsman of Frost". According to Devyr, Batchelor was a "witness" to the Newport rising and this might possibly explain why Sunderland should have heard of the truth of the risings failure before Newcastle. Arrested in the purge of North East Chartists, Batchelor's was the only case to be thrown out by the magistrates after which he disappeared from sight.

The numbers following such men, on the other hand, varied considerably with the biggest meetings, measured in thousands, taking place on the Town Moor. At the Whit Monday meeting of 1839, for example, even the hostile Sunderland Herald acknowledged the presence of 10,000 people, while the Chartists themselves claimed that up to 50,000 were present. As with the Sunderland and the Wearmouth's Political Union, most of the leaders who can be identified by occupation were shopkeepers or artisans. Nominations for Sunderland's Chartist Council for 1841, for example, contained a stationer, draper, gardener, two painters, a joiner, chairmaker, millwright and basketmaker. Their followers, on the other hand, were from a wider variety of occupations. For example, the "Young Patriots" column of the Northern Star which displayed the names given to the children of Chartists reveals, in a manner similar to that in which football fans name their children after their favourite team, that Feargus Williams Binns Helm was born to a weaver of Sunderland in December 1840. By 1843 the local heroes were no more. Binns had emigrated in 1842, largely due to financial problems, while Williams alienated many of the rank and file with his support of the Complete Suffrage Union. Under these circumstances the General Council nominations for 1843 reflect the changes in the parent body with two weavers, and a labourer standing alongside the more usual candidates of a mason, butcher, rigger and engineer.

Leaving aside for a moment the later developments within Sunderland's Chartism, let us concentrate first on its character. As a political movement it sought to articulate a wide variety of grievances which included, not only the lack of political representation, but other long-standing issues such as adulterated food and poor working and living conditions. Within these general grievances, however, there came to be identified a number of specific injustices. Chief among these was the exploitation of labour and the monopoly over legislation held by those exploiters. As Thomas Thompson, caught up in Binns and Williams' enthusiasm, proclaimed: "The people (are) not only the true source of legitimate power but they (are) the only source of wealth". While few, probably least of all Thompson, regarded this as a lead to the overthrow of entrepreneurial capitalism and bloody revolution, it nevertheless provided a framework for a generalised critique of the status quo.

Two aspects of this status quo were particularly odious - the

introduction of the New Poor Law and the introduction of the New Police. Speaking at Sunderland in March 1839 Know declared that the New Police interfered with constitutional rights. Binns' hostility was declared more strongly:

> "Good God! The very idea of being a policeman ought to make us blush for very shame. What is a policeman? A man who has sold his usefulness - his honesty, his mind - his time and his industry - to hurl the death-dealing damnation of tyrants against the poor, the defenceless and the oppressed. Avoid him as you would a viper, a pestilence or a dagger!"

Not to be outdone, Williams threatened to personally stab through the heart any man who dared to become a policeman.

By Williams' own admission, talk of violence was "just so much flourish" and the political articulation of these sentiments into a peaceful petitioning form reveals a considerable political awareness and maturity for the period. Thousands travelled up to twenty miles to hear political speeches from Chartist platforms while families, and even whole villages, marched to Sunderland's Town Moor led by the town's Chartist missionaries. In Sunderland itself a Female Charter Association was formed with Mrs. Agnes Campbell as its president and Miss Williams, Mrs. Gamsby, Mrs. Porter and Miss Harrison among its leading figures. The Sunderland Herald disparagingly referred to this association as "the petticoated politicians of Sunderland", but again the existence of such an organisation reveals the depth of political interest felt by the people of the town.

But politics was not always a deadly serious business. Earnest discussions and speeches were enlivened by the occasional soiree with singing and dancing. Excuses for celebration such as the freeing of Binns and Williams from prison were the occasions of banquets and further merriment. At a Durham County radical social tea party in February 1839, for example, two sittings were needed to accommodate the 400 persons requiring a meal. In this way Chartism became a feature of cultutal life with a nature which defies any simple equation of Chartism with "Hunger Politics". The Hunger Politics thesis suggests that Chartism waxed in times of economic hardship and waned in times of prosperity. Sunderland's Chartism, however, displayed the opposite trend. O'Connor's visit to Sunderland in June 1839 led him to state of the Chartists there that "their devotion to their principles in their state of comparative affluence proves not only their love of the principles but also their sympathy for those who suffered more than themselves", while the Star of February 1840 states:

> "The principles of the Charter . . . are rapidly extending in Sunderland . . . Sunderland is, compared with other towns, and has been for some time, enjoying a high degree of prosperity, ... this . . . will be an additional puzzle to our fill-belly philosophers. There are the wants of the mind as well as the belly. Our rulers regard neither".

But by 1841 the depression which had begun four or five years earlier elsewhere finally arrived at Sunderland. That place "had been favoured with an exemption of the general misery but now the

bubble had burst".

Distress had arrived and, according to the Northern Star,"many a great ox has now dwindled to a frog" although whether this referred to people's diet or to the stature of the town's businessmen is not made clear. In other towns similar distress had tended to widen class divisions but in Sunderland these divisions narrowed as tradesmen, facing ruin themselves, sought alliance with the workers. Thus at a public meeting called to debate the problem of poverty in the town the 'respectables' recognised the expedience of including Chartists on their Unemployment Relief Committee and accordingly Williams, Bruce and Pierce were added to a committee consisting of magistrates and ministers. This committee set about establishing public works schemes such as the draining of the town moor to provide work for the unemployed and it seemed that the Chartists were taking a more immediate and practical response to the problems of the working class. Rather than this being a platform for even greater Chartist support, however, it became the start of a process which led to the fatal split in the Chartist ranks.

To trace this development it is necessary to return to the heady days of June 1839. At this time Binns and Williams and other Chartist missionaries were possibly at the height of their popularity when they were arrested on charges of making seditious speeches. Binns had in fact made such rash statements as: "The people . . . are nearly ready for the wild outbreak of sanguinary revolution" and "As for me, give me liberty or death". Even so, the case against them was not a strong one, with the chief prosecution evidence being the testimony of the Sunderland Herald reporter who had been present at the Town Moor meetings.

Their trial did not take place until the following July and the intervening period saw their business suffer as they prepared for the likely imprisonment. Their vehemence too was curtailed and their pronouncements became more cautious despite Binns' arrest and trial by the Darlington magistrates on further charges in May 1840. When the sedition trial finally took place Binns and Williams received six month sentences and they remained in Durham gaol until January 1841. While they were in prison the Sunderland organisation they had left behind flirted with Urquhart's Russophobia movement. "Oh, for Williams and Binns . . . the flowers of the Northern Wreath", cried the Star, "Who would dare to put such resolutions to a meeting at Sunderland if the shepherds were with the flock! Such namby-pamby work will ruin us". Considering that the namby-pambies at the Russo-Chartist meeting included two ex-National Convention members (Lowery the South Shields tailor and delegate for Newcastle, and Deegan the Durham missionary), along with other key Sunderland Chartists such as Hemsley, Monarch and Taylor, the praise of Binns and Williams as "shepherds" was praise indeed.

The strength of Sunderland Chartism and its leadership survived both the trial and the period of imprisonment. The bookselling partnership did not, however, and Binns' unsuccessful return to the drapery business eventually led him into financial difficulties and emigration in August 1842. With Binns gone Williams seemed unable to continue to steer an independent Chartist course in the turbulent waters of Sunderland's politics. The Unemployment Relief Committee brought him back into regular contact with the middle-class radicals and Thomas Thompson was ever on hand as a bridge between Chartism and

more respectable reforming circles.

A compromise seemed to be promised by the floating of the Complete Suffrage Union in 1842 by Joseph Sturge. This body offered an alliance of middle and working-class interests with a view to pursuing a policy aimed at parliamentary reform and repeal of the Corn Laws. As a port Sunderland had much to gain by an expansion of trade consequent upon Corn Law repeal and hence Williams shared few of the reservations held by Chartists elsewhere about the wisdom of repeal without prior reform of parliament. He was accordingly sympathetic to the Sturge declaration and became one of the key Chartist figures singled out for attack by O'Connor as behaving in a way likely to harm the Chartist movement.

The first recorded meeting of the Complete Suffrage Movement in Sunderland comprised mainly of Chartist speakers and

> "the principles of the Charter were asserted and defended by nearly all the speakers and the Chartists strongly advocated the propriety of the working classes giving their support to the Sturge movement without however abandoning the National Charter Association".

When Sturge himself visited the town, however, it was the middle-class radicals who were in attendance. Thus when the chairman called upon James Williams" as the leader of the people, as one who was capable of expressing the sentiments of the working classes of the town" to say a few words Williams' changing mood was already evident: "although he should still endeavour to keep the Charter Association . . . he should bid good speed to the Complete Suffrage Union".

James Williams and Thomas Thompson did in fact go to the ill-fated Birmingham conference of the CSU in December 1842 and their support of the CSU's Bill of Rights was the cause of their fall from grace. They returned to Sunderland to be vilified in the Chartist press and hissed by their own former supporters. Williams and his "suckling pig" followers were gradually estranged from what became known as the "whole hog" mainstream of Chartism early in 1843. This goes some way to explaining the more proletarian nature of the general council nominations of that year with Esket Riley, a weaver and one of the nominees, being particularly critical of Williams' defection. Without Williams' leadership, however, Chartism in Sunderland was a spent force, and while the whole hog brigade did keep the movement alive in the town, particularly after the formation of a branch of the Land Company, its strength never again approached that of the 1837-43 period.

The Complete Suffrage Union too did not survive by long the failure of the Birmingham conference with its last Sunderland meeting being recorded in January 1844. Williams and Thompson were both driven back into the camp of the respectables from which they had defected with both men eventually becoming councillors.

III

The respectable reformers had not, of course, been idle during the course of the Chartist fervour. Sunderland's Anti-Corn Law Society had been most active in the presentation of petitions for Corn

Law repeal in 1840, 1841 and 1842. Lists of those present and active in the various meetings reads like a Who's Who of Sunderland's nineteenth century radicals covering such names as J.J. Wright, Ogden, A.J. Moore and Dr. Brown from the platforms of 1831 alongside later key figures such as E. Backhouse, E.C. Robson and Jonasshon. These men were at pains to stress their positions of respectability in the town. At a congratulatory meeting in July 1846, for example, the Association began a letter to Richard Cobden with the statement: "We the undersigned magistrates, clergymen, merchants, ship owners and other other inhabitants of the borough . . . "

Nationally 1842 was a watershed year for the Anti-Corn Law League in the face of the Plug plots, the Complete Suffrage Union and Peel's free trade budget. 1843 therefore marked a change of League tactics away from the quest for mass petitioning support towards the wooing of voters and the registration campaign. In Sunderland the re-named Anti-Corn Law Association began to take an active part in the registration campaign, recognising fully the potential power of the forty shillings freeholder vote and forming the North Durham Reform Registration Society in response. Weekly soirées were also held while lectures continued until repeal was finally enacted in 1846 when the mayor proclaimed a general holiday in celebration.

The Anti-Corn Law League attracted a number of former Chartists such as Thomas Dickinson, "the Manchester packer" and former O'Connorite who had at one time disrupted League meetings along with others of the whole hog brigade. But voices such as Dickinson's tended to be submerged beneath the awesome weight of the middle-class presence among whose members could now be counted Thompson and Williams.

With the success of the League's campaign political radicalism in Sunderland became significantly quieter. The League held a commemorative meeting in 1849 and the Chartists enjoyed a mini-revival in 1848. 1848 also saw the setting up of a more moderate Reform Association composed of working men to press for a widening of the franchise to include all male adults with a twelve months residence qualification, secret ballot, triennial parliaments and union with the middle class. Williams and Thompson, still desirous of class collaboration, spoke in favour of this new initiative while others on the platform included the veteran reformer Hills, Edward Capper, Robson - a mill owner who was very prominent in public affairs - and Ernest Jones, possibly the most influential figure in later Chartism and a correspondent of Marx and Engels.

A petition in favour of "Hume's Little Charter", as it became known, was sent to parliament. It contained 3467 signatures comprising, according to the Sunderland Herald, 525 middle-class signatures, 2791 working class, and the signatures of 151 Southwick bottle makers! Again however, little was achieved with Humes' proposal for household suffrage suffering a defeat in parliament by 286 votes to 82.

In 1856 Louis Kossuth visited the town and his reception clearly indicates the direction in which Sunderland's politics had travelled in the intervening years. He was met by the Mayor, A.J. Moore, formerly of the Anti-Corn Law League. With him were members of the town council including, most noticeably, James Williams. Kossuth:

> "was delighted to see the sympathy which existed between the mayor and his fellow citizens and in this harmony and feeling so nobly exemplified between the people and those in authority he recognised a mutual insurance between freedom and order"

and it seems that Kossuth's speech fairly accurately summed up the languid state of radicalism in the town. Kossuth gave two lectures to packed houses of 1300 in the Bethesda Chapel, Tatham Street and among those present was Joseph Cowen. It was from Cowen that the next initiative was to come.

Cowen established his Northern Reform Union in Newcastle and sought support from likely persons in Sunderland. Williams, however, replied that he had "no hope of being able to organise and maintain a political association in Sunderland" although "a meeting to adopt a petition to Parliament . . . might be got up". By February 1859 Williams was reporting that he expected 5000 to sign the petition in favour of Cowen's proposals. By this stage the first of the Chartist demands, the abolition of the property qualification for MPs, had now been achieved and when Sunderland's reformers were re-united on a public platform they displayed a little more of their old confidence. Williams spoke once again in favour of universal suffrage and the secret ballot saying that

> "the present restrictive franchise deprives a large number of our fellow countrymen of their just electoral rights; . . . entails on the nation bad legislation, financial extravagance and an irresponsible foreign policy; and demands a radical reform in the representation of the People in Parliament based on manhood suffrage and vote by ballot".

Once again the veteran reformers Hills and Bruce were present with the latter declaring that since the Northern Reform Union "went for manhood suffrage", he "as a Chartist would support it".

Chartism, however, was not only dead in Sunderland by this time but also buried. Former Chartists chose not to dwell on that period of their life and scant mention was ever made of it. In 1884 when Sunderland was planning massive demonstrations in favour of reform the Chartist legacy was ignored. Pride of place at the front of the first section of the great reform demonstration went to the veterans of 1832, some of whom had to be taken by carriage as they could no longer march with the crowd. In looking forward to the demonstration the Sunderland Echo which, incidentally, had swallowed James Williams' Sunderland Times by this stage said that "if all things went on well at the seven places they would have the biggest demonstration they ever had in the north since 1832". But the July 1839 Chartist meetings had crowds estimated at up to 50000 with the conservative Sunderland Herald conceding that there were 10000 present. The largest meeting surrounding the 1832 Reform by contrast had between 8- and 10000 present and the question must surely be asked whether the Sunderland Echo had genuinely forgotten about the Chartists or had preferred to ignore their former influence in the town.

Whichever is the case, it is clear that radicalism in Sunderland had developed rapidly into reformism with the onset of mid-

Victorian prosperity as many key radical figures adopted pronounced liberal colours in the second half of the century. Of the more militant, whole hog Chartists, little more is heard but this is partially due to the selectivity of the local press in choosing items for publication. If, for instance, we take the number of Chartists who were active in and lived in Sunderland we find that the Northern Star's 120-plus named male Chartists contrasts strongly with only 31 named by the Sunderland Herald. The Herald was in fact very hostile to the Chartists describing them as "Chatterists" and the whole hogs as "the very fag end of society". As early as May 1834 the Herald had decreed that "the Chartist fever is past its crisis", a judgement which was to be roundly turned on its head in the ensuing months. When Binns and Williams were brought to trial in 1840 they were convicted almost entirely on the evidence of the Herald's reporter, Etherington.

Thus for reasons of hostility, as well as for reasons of selectivity, the local newspapers tended to understate the amounts of working-class political activity, particularly Chartism, which existed in this period and, with the exception of periods of crises such as those of 1831 and 1839 it is only the existence of a national working-class press which enables us to glimpse part of the fabric of this activity in the period in question. As far as Sunderland's Chartism is concerned then, its correspondence with the Northern Star has ensured that its contributions to working-class political life have not gone unrecorded and it is to be regretted that other movements did not have access to similar forms of recording information about their activities. The task of finding information relating to other political forms is therefore correspondingly harder but at least the example of Chartism shows us what to look for and supplies suggestions as to where further information might be found.

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The Lecture Room, in Nelson Street, (now just behind the Eldon Shopping Centre) was a place where many prominent radicals spoke, including Feargus O'Connor and Robert Owen, when they visited Tyneside.

SCENE IN THE LECTURE ROOM, NEWCASTLE.

LABOUR WOMEN IN NORTH EAST ENGLAND

by

Maureen Callcott

When, at the end of the First World War, it became possible for women to join the Labour Party as individual members through a change in the Party's consititution, women in the North East responded enthusiastically and probably in larger numbers than anywhere else. This most strikingly rapid and widespread grass roots movement of women in the region has largely been overlooked, yet their contribution to the growth of the Labour Party in an area which became a Labour stronghold between the two world wars, and, perhaps, most important of all, the value of their participation in relation to the quality of their own lives, are well worth examining. Ultimately, it involves not only an account of national and local organisations, but also the life-histories of large numbers of individuals so far hidden from history. This essay merely attempts to provide an introductory outline of the early participation of women in the Labour Party in the region, primarily between 1918 and 1939.

While 1918 is the take-off year, there is evidence of the existence of local branches of the Womens's Labour League, founded in 1904, although not a lot is yet known about their size and activities. By 1908 there were branches functioning in Newcastle upon Tyne, Jarrow and Crook, and in 1911 Mrs Simms from Newcastle was a member of the National Executive Committee. The Annual Report of the League of that year provides the first substantial amount of information about its growth though there is little account of activities or number of members. A list of branches and secretaries is included. Nationally there were 110 branches, thirteen being in the North East - at Birtley, Bishop Auckland, Blyth, Crook, Gateshead, Hebburn Colliery and Hebburn Quay, Jarrow, Newcastle, Shildon, North and South Shields and Sunderland. Outline reports were printed of activities at Jarrow, Newcastle and Shildon, though without membership or attendance figures. Miss Grace Lloyd, the Jarrow secretary, wrote that, "The League members' leading objective has been to educate themselves in Labour politics and with this aim in view lectures have been followed by discussion on 'Socialism and the Child', 'Evolution of Man', 'William Morris', 'Baby Clinics', 'Food Prices'. Discussion also had dealt with 'Reformation', 'Suffrage', 'the Worker's Educational Association' and 'the Minimum Wage'." League members had assisted at local elections and assisted the I.L.P. by arranging the social side of their work, as well as sending delegates to all local conferences. "Thus", wrote Miss Lloyd, "we feel ourselves more capable of taking part in Labour politics."

The Newcastle Branch, which held ten meetings in the previous year, had 25 members and had studied similarly serious and relevant subjects including 'Work on the Board of Guardians' and 'The Work of Education Committees' and also members had attended district conferences held at Hebburn, Gateshead, Crook, Jarrow as well as the national conference at Leicester. Dr. Ethel Bentham had addressed a public meeting on her pioneering work in the London Baby Clinics. Shildon reported 23 meetings.

After the adoption of the new Labour Party constitution in 1918, as soon as the Great War ended the task of mobilising women's activity began and Mrs Lilian Fenn was appointed as a member of the national Labour Party staff to organise a recruiting campaign in the north of England. Before the election on 14 December, she had visited Durham, Spennymoor, Consett, Sedgefield and Seaham. In most of these places the meetings she called were the first ever held by the Labour Party, and for many of the women who attended they marked the beginning of a greatly

widened and enhanced social experience, centred on political activity. After the election, Mrs Fenn continued to call and address meetings all over the North East, and The Labour Woman for 1919 reported the setting up of women's sections at Shildon, Houghton-le-Spring, Stockton, Chester-le-Street, Grange Villa, Birtley, Eighton Banks, Pelton Fell, Crawcrook, Dunston, Greenside, Ferryhill, Brandon Colliery,Blackhall, Crookhill, New Herrington, Ryhope, Spennymoor, Trimdon, Frosterley, Stanhope, Trimdon Colliery & Trimdon Grange. We are fortunate to have the acute recollections of Margaret Gibb, now aged 91, of her first involvement in the Labour Party during Lilian Fenn's recruiting campaign. Margaret Harrison, as she thenwas, was a teacher in her twenties, living at Dunston at the time. It was particularly her critical reaction to the length and nature of the First World War which had accelerated a political awareness which had found no outlet until she saw "a very extensive, very clear, well-produced notice of a meeting for women under the auspices of the Blaydon Divisional Labour Party....to be addressed by someone known as Mrs Anderson Fenn, B.Sc. ... to be held in the Spiritualists Hall in Dunston ... and I decided that come what may I would go to that meeting because, as far as Dunston was concerned, I knew very little of any people connected with the Labour Party. ....There were exactly four women present ... we were addressed as though we were a gathering of a thousand. .... Mrs Fenn gave a brilliant address, and at the end said, "I take it you want to join so we'll get on with it", and she immediately appointed a Mrs Thompson to be Chairman, Mrs Heslop to be Treasurer and Mrs Davidson to be Vice-Chairman and turned to me and said, "You will be secretary". That was my introduction to a place in the Labour Party'. The Dunston group grew very rapidly, soon holding fortnightly meetings with over 70 women. This peak was not maintained, but the regular membership steadied at between 30 and 40 women. This sort of progress was occuring all over the North East, but was particularly successful in Durham, where the newly appointed political agents of the Durham Miners' Association (D.M.A.) provided backing of every sort. Margaret Gibb subsequently married a Labour Party Agent, and in 1929 became a Party organiser for the North East region until she retired in 1956*

The activities of each women's section, as they were called, were soon co-ordinated and encouraged by the formation of the Durham Labour Women's Advisory Council in 1920, which comprised representatives from the federation of sections forming in each constituency. Two of the founder members of the Advisory Council are still living, Margaret Gibb, whose introduction to the Labour Party has already been described, and Bella Jolly of Stanley. Bella Jolly was a very young miner's wife at the time of the Stanley Pit disaster of 1909 when 57 miners were killed. She and her husband joined the I.L.P. after Keir Hardie's visit to the stricken town. Another founder member was Ada Lawon, wife of Jack (later Lord) Lawson, M.P. for Chester-le-Street. She had spent two years in domestic service in Oxford to accompany and help support her husband at Ruskin College. After the formation of the Durham Advisory Council (followed soon by Northumberland and Cleveland) Labour women's political activity was rapidly furthered with a dynamic new structure. The minute books of Council Meetings and Conference Reports reveal a care for the correct procedures and a regular and expanding series of activities. The main objective the women devised for themselves, assisted always by able national party staff organisers like Lilian Fenn and Dr Marion Phillips (an economist and Chief Woman Officer of the Labour Party 1918-1932), was education in political and social concerns in order that they could function more effectively in advancing the still relatively new Labour Party locally and nationally. This is evident from the programmes set

*For an account of Margaret Gibb's work see Bulletin No. 11, 1977.

for study and in the themes for meetings, conferences and 'schools'. The majority of the women involved did not work outside their homes being the wives of industrial workers, mainly miners, since they were unaccustomed to public activity, the skills necessary for conducting meetings, writing reports, keeping minute and account books, etc. had to be included in the educational activity. The enthusiasm for all aspects of this is demonstrated as early as 1922, when arrangements were put under way for the first of the Summer Schools which are still an annual feature of women's activity in the region's Labour Party. The first was held in the Lake District, and 64 Durham women applied to take a three-hour examination on two set books, Sidney Webb's 'History of the Durham Miners' and Elizabeth Gaskell's 'Mary Barton' together with questions on current affairs. The size of the response surprised the Council, which agreed to raise the number of scholarships from six to ten. By 1928 the number of awards had been increased to 32 and, in that year, 89 women took the test. Other activities organised by the Councils were half-yearly day conferences when between 300 and 500 (as at Bishop Auckland in 1928) would attend to hear lectures and discuss a wide range of topics. For example, it was reported in 1927 that "a real lively discussion took place on resolutions concerning the Miners' Lock-Out, Franchise, Birth Control, Family Endowment, Blanesburgh Report, Chinese Situation, Women's Trade Union Guilds, Widow's Pensions, Communism." In October 1927 an Emergency Resolution was passed in response to the government's punitive Trades Disputes Act of that year. "This Conference of Labour Women recognising the handicap under which the Trade Union Dispute Act is designed to place the Labour Movement, pledge ourselves to do all possible to counteract it by seeing our menfolk, husbands, sons and brothers, contract into the Politcal Fund. In addition, we will use every possible means to increase individual membership of the Party, to raise funds, and to return Labour majorities at Local Government elections next spring."

Beatrice Webb, whose husband Sidney was M.P. for Seaham 1922-1929, confirmed in her Diaries both the rapid growth of the women's participation and their anxiety to become better informed. When Sidney was adopted as candidate in 1920, she encouraged the formation of the women's sections, which were just beginning to crop up in the villages, and wrote them a fairly scholarly monthly letter to circulate. She noted that at her meetings her welcome was 'better than a tutorial class'. In 1923 she recorded the progress made. "There is far more enthusiasm than a year ago - far more voluntary work ... always a group of 60 or 70 at the meetings. Last year if there were two or three one was agreeably surprised ... There is something very touching in these few hundred miners' wives with here and there a professional women gathering around me with a sort of hero worship."

A central event for the Durham women was the Annual Gala from 1923 onwards when Labour women marched in procession through Durham City, accompanied by colliery bands and carrying their beautifully-made banners. The Galas always featured addresses by a notable Labour woman and local and national M.P.s. Individual sections held weekly or forthightly meetings which were crucial for the involvement of large numbers of women but the Advisory Councils played a further significant role. Margaret Gibb summed it up in this way,"The big thing which it set out to do and did, not only very well but very quickly, was the drawing together of the women all over the county, and women who exchanged ideas, every one of them widened their experience through it ... we did a lot of interchange, we built up panels of speakers ... in other cases people in the organisation who had gone into clinics would go and exchange views on the way their respective clients worked... In addition we got the opportunity at this time to send two women to Russia (in 1926) to state the case for

the miners' wives and children in Britain ... the fact that we got two women (Sally Johnson from Northumberland and Anne Errington from Durham) and they would come back and talk of how they went around the various centres in Russia was very, very effective indeed and aroused tremendous interest on a far wider scale than you got simply within your Party membership."

A considerable advance in self-awareness was made when Durham Labour women decided to sponsor the adoption of a woman for a Durham constituency. Unlike their male counterparts, they do not appear to have considered encouraging their own members towards Parliament. In Durham the miners made strenuous efforts to obtain mining M.P.s in every county seat; their wives remained more self-effacing. It was decided in 1925 to nominate Dr Marion Phillips, who had spoken at Galas, for either Barnard Castle, South Shields or Sunderland, and £70 taken in the street collection on Gala Day was placed towards an agent's salary in a separate Parliamentary Fund and the same sum afterwards contributed annually. Marion Phillips became M.P. for Sunderland in 1929. She would have been Durham's first woman M.P. had it not been for the unusual circumstance that Ruth Dalton won Bishop Auckland, where her husband was prospective candidate, in a by-election earlier that year, and held it until Hugh Dalton won it in the general election.

The inter-war years were notoriously difficult times, especially for families dependent on the traditional staple industries of the region and the scope of political and social activity was often curtailed. For example, the galas and the Summer School were cancelled in 1926, the year of the prolonged miners' lock-out and attempts to organise an excursion to London in 1927 and 1928 were abandoned as the Durham Conference Minutes put it, 'in view of the appalling poverty'. For some years in the 1930s the Summer Schools, often held at Cloughton, near Scarborough, during this period, moved from the Hall into huts to keep the cost down to enable the poorer sections to send members. Alderman Margaret Murray, of Newcastle, recalls that her mother attended a week's School during this period at which the total spending money between all the woman was less than £1. Events had to be organised on a shoe-string budget. The organiser described an attempt to arrange a grander than usual social evening for the Shinwells at a cost of 6d per head. But there was no possibility of charging more than 4d. Conditions, even in this severely afflicted region varied but there were many pockets of dire distress not only at Jarrow and in West Durham but also in Cleveland, where at a meeting in Lingdale of 80 women not one husband was working. A further set-back was caused by the collapse of the Labour government in August 1931 and the devastating loss of parliamentary seats in the October election. Yet the scale of activities and numbers involved continued to increase, and in 1936 two Summer Schools were held because of the large demand.

By 1939 Labour women in their organisations in North East England had gained considerable experience and some solid achievements. In Durham alone there were 126 sections and over 4,000 paid-up members. The majority of these women and, one must suppose, also their families and some of their friends, had enhanced and increased their political and social awareness. For some women, previously unaccustomed to responsibility outside their homes, sufficient confidence and conviction had been acquired to enable them to become chairman, secretary, treasurer or conference delegate. Others had found a place in local government. Yet awareness of the possibilities of public life seems to have come slowly. An admirably advanced series of resolutions on a wide range of local,

national and international affairs emerged from conferences. Labour women were quite evidently as much concerned with making policy as making tea. The reports of their meetings illustrate an intensely earnest endeavour to create a better world and also the practical ability to work for this end. The organisation of Labour women in the region appears to have been quite exceptionally vigorous and well-supported. Apart from London this was the only area to regularly organise Summer Schools for members and often, as when in 1934, over 70 women from the region attended a week's School, this was double the total from the whole of London. At conferences organised in 1927 only Ebbw Vale and Cardiff drew greater numbers of women (800 each) than those held at Ashington which 600 women attended and Durham where there were 300. The Welsh women do not appear to have consolidated these manifestations of support in the manner of the north east women. Thus the measure of the advance of Labour women in public life in the region is disappointing in the light of these other factors. In 1939 Mrs Thomasina Todd of Boldon, Secretary to Durham Advisory Council, pointed out that there were still only two Labour women County Councillors, 12 on rural councils, 63 on parish councils and 12 magistrates. Nonetheless, the access of over 4,000 women members in Durham alone meant more than this in terms of contribution to the establishment of a Labour stronghold in the region. And it must also have been the case that further immeasurable gains were in the extended horizons, experience and education of the women themselves and inevitably thereby in the quality of their impact on the lives of their families for generations to come.

Sunderland Branch of Women's Labour League Pre-1914

Memories from the Past No.1:
The First Durham Labour Women's Gala

Margaret H. Gibb

Flashback! Had you come into the Miner's Hall, Red Hills, Durham City, one early evening on February 1923 and made your way into the Board Room there you would have found a gathering of some twenty women carefully noting suggestions being put to them by a small, slight but remarkably alert woman, Lilian Fenn B.A., who was the first woman organiser for the Labour Party in the then North Eastern Region - covering Northumberland, Durham and the three Ridings of Yorkshire - in all 86 parliamentary constituencies. They were the first elected Advisory Council for the County, and were in very many cases miner's wives.

It had been decided at national level that "JUNE" should be women's month in the Labour Party Calendar. It was proposed to help develop the very quickly-growing women's organisations, helping them to play an ever increasing part in the movement. Constituencies were urged to encourage and cooperate in special events.

Durham County Labour Women's Advisory Council, following the suggestions of Lilian Fenn, solidly backed the idea of a rally to be held in Wharton Park, Durham City, on a Saturday in June and those attending would march with bands and banners through Durham City's narrow winding streets from New Elvet to the Park. Many members of the Council, year after year, with their husbands and families attended the "Durham Miner's Big Meeting" so they knew the organisational problems involved.

On matters of procession, arrangement of the park and such, the Durham Miners' four political agents, Harry Bainbridge, Jack Cape, Joe Foster and Jack Gilliland, were magnificent in the practical help given to us. They let the Council meet in the Miner's Hall room.

Sections covered the whole County, though I could not definitely quote the number. They were all asked to make a small banner for the procession - white background, the Section name in green.

The Council was splendidly assisted by either donations from the C.L.P.'s or their sending a band from their constituencies. In our first Gala there were 7 bands, Shakespeare Band leading. Joe Foster with helpers assembled those taking part. We were always led over the procession course by mounted police; the City was closed for about one and a half hours for everyone's convenience. But how many would be in that procession? Did anyone know? We had to wait and see. Were we to be disappointed or gladdened? What did each one of us secretly estimate? One member of the Advisory Council asked her son to take a point of vantage and try to count the marchers - how well he succeeded I really don't know, but that son we later came to know as the Rt. Hon Fred Willey M.P. (Sunderland). His mother represented Durham Constituency on the Advisory Council, and at a later date was for a short while Secretary to the Council. The Secretary at the first Gala was Ada Gilliland. She carried a very heavy burden for many weeks until the event was over.

Now for the platform. We decided to invite fraternal delegates from the Durham County Council, the Federation of Labour Parties, the Durham Miners, Northumberland Labour Women, Cleveland Women and every Durham Labour M.P. Who should speak? First and foremost our very splendid

Chief Woman Officer, Dr Marion Phillips (who later represented Sunderland in Parliament). Without doubt she had a warm spot for our part of the country and never missed a Gala until her death in 1932. She was an inspiration to all she contacted. Sidney Webb MP (Seaham) and Jack Lawson MP (Chester le Street), later Lord Lawson, were other speakers. The Chairman was Edith Porteous, first elected Chairman of the Council. She was from the Durham Constituency (Shincliffe). We sang lustily and heartily. Doubtless our singing, led by Shakespeare Band, wafted over the old city "open" again after we reached the park. I was a member of this Advisory Council (representing Blaydon Constituency), and since we had not very much money this gathering to me was an opportunity to help fill our coffers so I raised the matter of taking the opportunity when so many people would be together - Lilian, I think, thought this rather sordid to ask every section to give not more than four items for a gift stall, to be sold for more than 2/6. The response was marvellous, and we sold out raising £104 (perhaps not so much today but assured riches in 1923!) One section took no notice of calling for only four gifts and donated, among other things, a beautifully-made "clippy" mat. This was later raffled for £27. We gloated over our possessing £131 plus the collection plus entrance to the park - possibly threepence. Seventy banners were carried by the marchers. It had been agreed to ask Bob Richardson MP (Houghton le Spring) to propose a vote of thanks to all concerned. Bob revelled in this duty, getting more excited, he declared loudly we'd sweep away the old order, and, to stress the point, flung out his arm and swept water jugs and glasses off the table, scattering them all over the platform.

Last happening in the eventful day was tea at Fred Willey's home, with his parents and brother and sisters. After the good meal, we must count the money, and since I had been in charge of the Gift Stall I had to be in at the counting of the takings. So Louis Fenn (Lilian's husband) and I squatted in front of the Willey's fire and built up our piles of 12 pennies and 20 shillings. In sheer joy then, when we'd nearly finished, he stretched out and in one movement scattered every pile! So start again.

What a wonderful day - weatherwise quite reasonable - not too hot, not windy, (important to banner bearers) so now sixty years later one remembers much. The Gala was once (by A.G.M. vote) in South Shields and once in Sunderland, otherwise the vote always went for Durham and Wharton Park.

I left the North later in 1923, and lived in Bedford and Sheffield. But I kept in touch with Lilian Fenn and the Great Durham Gala, coming back whenever I could.

From 1930 to 1957, as regional organiser, it was my responsibility. Every year we booked the Town Hall in case of bad weather, but never once did we need to use it. Possibly the biggest assembly ever was 1947, when our guest speakers were Nye Bevan and Jenny Lee. For sixty years the Gala has been held annually. Only from 1940 to 1945 Galas could not be held because of the General Election in 1970. So the Galas between 1923 and 1983 number a total of 53, but they extend over a period of 60 years. Of these 53 occasions I have been present 49 times.

How many celebrating 60 years now were present on that never-to-be-forgotten first Gala held in Wharton Park Durham City on 9th June 1923? Much has been achieved by the Durham Labour Women's Advisory Council. It has brought to very many widened horizons and friendships of real value, greater knowledge, understanding and tolerance. So it has provided a really worthy contribution to today's society.

THE WORLD OF WORK

Supremacy and Subordination of Labour: The hierarchy of work in the early Labour movement, by Mike Holbrook-Jones (Heinemann £13-50).

For anyone interested in mining history, 'Supremacy and Subordination of Labour' provides a fascinating study which contrasts nineteenth century pitwork in the North East with that on other coalfields as well as contrasting pitwork generally with the engineering and textile industries. As such, it is a very dense and detailed book. Those who turn to it will find a wealth of material culled from, for example, 52 sets of parliamentary papers, besides trade union journals and other publications, newspapers, trade papers and various collections of other records. We find, for example, that in Derbyshire the obsession with large coals produced the practice of tub-filling by pitchfork rather than by shovel. In Wales this went even further to produce, in some pits, tub-filling by hand with no implements being used at all. In Scotland the practice of 'arresting wages' was carried out whereby local traders could apply to the pit owner to have a weekly sum paid directly to them from the wages of an indebted collier while in Derbyshire the discharge or character note would be clipped at one corner to show that the previous employer had found the man unsuitable.

The reason for making such a regional comparison is that, according to Holbrook-Jones, 'there was no such thing as 'the miner'' (p 103). Each coalfield had its own practices, themselves a product of the social origins of capital and labour and the structure of the market, which in turn influenced all aspects of the miners life. The North East, for instance operated a de facto apprenticeship system whereby putters graduated to become hewers. Hewers were the "labour aristocrats", enjoying high status, privileged access to company houses, shorter hours and higher reward. This in turn gave them a predominant influence in the community and, most importantly, in the union. To be a hewer was to be at the top of the tree - there was no where else to go. Elsewhere this was not necessarily the case. The presence of shallower pits needing less working capital, the different methods of longwall working, and the butty system of subcontracting all served to produce different sets of social relations on other fields. Hewers elsewhere might graduate to become butties but in the North East financial improvement could only be obtained by collective action.

This helps to focus attention on the ways in which the North East was unique. The importance of cavilling and the 'marra' system helped to contribute to the workers' control over conditions of work. As Holbrook-Jones puts it, 'the North East hewer, by his own activity, constructed a complex of procedures and committees designed both to reinforce his position and to entangle the employer in a web of formality'. The employers, on the other hand, were concerned primarily with labour discipline as the bond and piecework reveal. The bond, along with tied cottages, is also seen as a relic of feudalism which, in the case of the former, only disappeared with the development from localism to a modern system of industrial relations.

The experience of work and the so-called 'politics of the workplace' have in the past been neglected areas which traditional types of study such as official institutional studies of the union, community studies and individual biographies have failed to bring out. Class does, after all, primarily involve relationship to the means of production. Yet, studies of the point of production have, generally speaking, been undervalued and undersubscribed, and it is one of the strengths of Holbrook-Jones' work that

he attempts to rectify this. Furthermore, once this is done it is possible to see institutional histories in a different light. It was, paradoxically, areas which were formerly badly organised which became the champions of universalistic policies, such as the eight hour day and the minimum wage, since the unions in these areas were not as prone to sectional interest as those in which the hewers had traditionally been dominant.

It is in this context that the other two industries of engineering and textiles are discussed in a way which traces the links between their hierarchies at work and the consequent ideology of their trade unions. Unfortunately, while both of these industries were present in the North East, this is not the geographical focus of the material presented here. Nevertheless, what the material on the experience of work does provide is a contribution to the debate on the aristocracy of labour and the material basis of reformism among the Victorian working class.

What one has then is a book which is both, theoretically and empirically, weighty and makes little attempt to hide it origins as a Phd thesis. Despite this, it has many fascinating insights to offer the student of mining history, and those who enjoy mixing theoretical debates with their facts will enjoy the challenge it presents.

Keith Wilson

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The Strong Words Collective

At the Society's recent Edward Allen memorial lecture, John Saville made a powerful attack on the so-called 'revisionist' views of the 1930's. The revisionist position - that the 1930's were nothing like as black as they are usually painted - rests on a number of arguments. Among these is the observation that depression and gloom were not spread evenly across the country, but were concentrated in specific areas, leaving much of the country, or those who remained in work in many parts of the country, to enjoy real increases in their standard of living. It may be more than coincidence, argued Saville, that the areas suffering most from the depression were those which had given greatest support to the General Strike of 1926. The despair of these areas was indeed immense. The North East in 1934 had 37 per cent of its insured workforce unemployed, but, should people today still need to be convinced of the depression's impact, they would be well advised to read some of the accounts of the 30's to be found in the various Strong Words publications.

'Hello, are you working?' (price 50p) is a collection of North-Easterners' memories of the 30's that has so far sold 4,000 copies in the area and is the group's most successful publication to date. In it working people with vivid recollections of the 30's are allowed to recall their experiences. Terence Monaghan tells us that:

> 'the depression days were bitter days, never to be forgotten days, which left myself and many better equipped people with a complex which we have never shed. We were so short of things, so belittled in every way, in every aspect of life that we grew up to manhood with a complex. When you met somebody in those days the greeting wasn't 'Hello, how are you?' or 'How's the family?' Always the greeting was 'Hello, are you working?'

This specialist form of oral history/edited interview technique produces more up-to-date commentary in another of the group's publications, 'But

the World goes on the same' (90p). Here the focus is on West Durham and the continued de-industrialisation which has taken place in the area. Again, there are sharp commentaries and descriptions of the 30's, but these are then brought up to date with sections on the rise and fall of Courtaulds and the gloomy prospect facing the young unemployed today.

Some of the group's publications take a different format. 'The Bonny Moor Hen or the Battle of Stanhope' (65p) is a reprint of a booklet which was originally published in the 1880's concerning a fight between poaching lead miners and the forces of law and order. Stan Shields, Fred Ramsey, Jack Davitt (Ripyard Cuddling) and Fred Reed all have booklets of poetry available which are often historical in content. Fred Ramsey writes of the Easington disaster in which he was a member of the rescue team while Fred Reed writes in a Northumberland dialect which is almost history in itself.

Dick Beavis's story on the other hand, is told in orthodox autobiographical form in 'What price happiness. My life from coal hewer to shop steward' (90p). Dick's description of life at the Dean and Chapter pit from his start in 1929 down to its closure in 1966 and his subsequent work at Smart and Brown's is a refreshing change from the standard self-improving, self-righteous autobiography. It is to be hoped that other characters can be encouraged to tell their story in a similar manner.

Other Strong Words publications include 'North East childhoods', 'Missile Village, a portrait of Gilsland', and 'Revolt against an age of plenty' by Jack Common. Common, a contemporary of Orwell, is perhaps best known for his novels 'Kiddar's Luck' and 'The Ampersand', but this collection gathers together a number of articles written between 1930 and 1941, first published mainly in 'The Adelphi'.

As with the other publications, the production of Jack Common's work was the result of a collective effort by the Strong Words group. It is the professed aim of the group to strengthen the labour movement in the area at a time when it is under attack, by revealing the nature and depth of the movement's roots while addressing current problems. As such, the material makes little attempt at political balance. No pit overmen have been invited to contribute, for example, nor have any right-wing miners or factory hands. The role of women, however is often rescued from its previous invisibility. Pit communities are often described in terms of the arduous nature of the men's work, but in 'But the world goes on the same' (90p), Beryl Burnip reminds us that the women worked even longer hours:

> 'The men have the best life ... all right they have to go out to work, but when they come in they have their meals made and then they go out ... My impression of a pit village is of women working morning till night ... they had no social life ... it seemed all work ...'

In such ways the Strong Words publications are doing much to preserve the history and culture of the area. As such they should be essential reading for all with an interest in the North East working class. For historians their use as source materials is potentially vast.

Keith Wilson

Northern Labour History: A Bibliography. Compiled by A. Potts and E.R. Jones Published by The Library Association, 1981, £22.

A USEFUL TOOL

This is a valuable aid to research. It brings together, for the first time, a list of relevant material and where it is located. Anyone wanting, say, to delve into some aspect of coal mining has only to to consult the oracle - the books, collections, pamphlets are listed. So, undoubtedly, individuals working in the subject of Labour History will be indebted to the authors of this book. While the price makes it too costly for most of us to buy, nevertheless copies at local libraries are sure to get well thumbed over the years.

As it is meant to be a work of permanent reference, it seems a pity that it nevertheless shows some of the scars of hasty construction. In my own specialisms, such as Chartism, I note the bibliography contains gaps. Similarly, with private collections cited: it would be wrong to think that only three people in the entire Northern Region possess them.

But it would be wrong to be churlish - from personal experience I know how helpful this bibliography can be.

Raymond Challinor

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News from Keele

I am pleased to report that, with John Burnett and David Vincent, research has now been completed into 19th century working-class autobiographies and diaries, with a full bibliographical guide to over 1,000 works to be published in 1984. Such a large number, though, tends to hide the omissions. Footnoted references in recent historical studies have revealed the existence of many items that did not emerge in the process of collection and it is apparent that some works remain hidden and known only to a few people.

Despite this methodological weakness, we remain convinced of the value of such a guide and have now been permitted, through the generosity of the Leverhulme Trust, to extend our searches into the 20th century. In order to amend the 19th century guide, and to ensure that the proposed 20th century volume is as comprehensive as possible, we appeal to readers for references to any such works, whether published or manuscript, held privately or in public institutions.

Yours sincerely

Dr. David Mayall

The North East Labour History Society

Annual Report November 1982 - June 1983

The Committee

President	Professor Norman McCord (Newcastle University)
Chairman	Dr Roy Sturgess (Sunderland Polytechnic)
Secretary	Mrs Maureen Callcott (Newcastle Polytechnic)
Treasurer	Mr Tony Barrow (Newcastle College of Arts and Technology)
Members	Mr David Byrne (Durham University), Dr Ray Challinor (Newcastle Polytechnic), Mr Horace Green (Ryton) Mr Ian Hunter (Sacriston), Mr Leon Kitchen (Newcastle), Mr T P MacDermott (Newcastle Polytechnic), Mr Bryan Rees (Throckley), Mr Keith Wilson (Darlington Technical College)

Publications Sub-Committee

Maureen Callcott, Ray Challinor, Ian Hunter, Bryan Rees, Roy Sturgess.

The Committee have held three meetings and the sub-committee have had a number of meetings.

Meetings

22 October 1982	A.G.M. followed by talk: 1832 on Tyneside by Ian Hunter and Alan Milburn
2 December	Tyneside Chartism by Ray Challinor
28 January	Labour History and Television by John Mapplebeck
18 February	The 1930s - The Revisionist Case. A Critique by Professor John Saville (This was the first Edward Allen Memorial Lecture).

The programme was reduced by the absence of the May Day school which had not been well-supported in recent years. The meetings held drew very good audiences. The 'Bulletin' sold out before Christmas (200 copies) and we had a further 50 printed most of which are now sold. Back numbers from 1-16 are available from the Treasurer.

It was agreed at the A.G.M. to change the name of the society and it is now less of a mouthful.

The society welcomes new members, ideas and contributions for publication or lectures. The cost of membership includes a copy of the 'Bulletin'

Membership

Institutions	£3.50
Individuals	£2.50
Students, Pensioners and Unwaged	£1.00

M. Callcott
(Hon. Secretary)

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