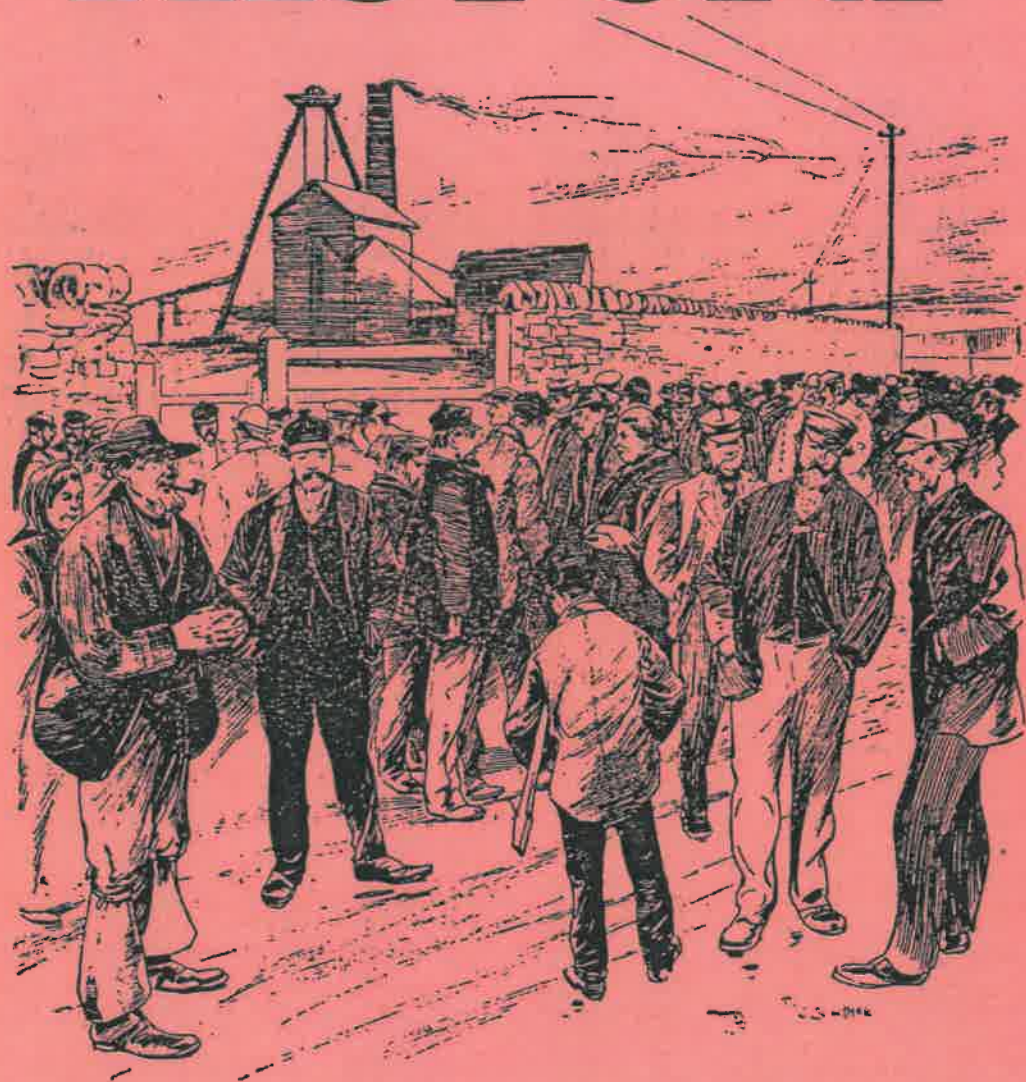


NORTH EAST LABOUR HISTORY



Mass picketing outside Hebburn Colliery
during the 1892 Durham lockout

Bulletin of the North East

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TYNESIDE COMEDIANS

Ned Corvan by Keith Gregson

Edward 'Ned' Corvan who lived from 1829 to 1865 was one of the most interesting and important personalities in the history of the early provincial music hall. Corvan was a Tynesider although he was not a Geordie in the true sense of the word. He was Liverpool Irish by birth and his family moved to the north east when he was very young. He was raised in Tyneside surroundings and was to become best known for his songs and patter in the very distinctive Tyneside dialect.

Although Corvan is remembered mainly as the first professional singer/songwriter in the north eastern halls, he was much more than this. Joe Wilson, a well known contemporary, described Corvan's all round ability in one of his witty acrostics;

C Comic at iv'rything - clivor at owt,
O Of a' the professions, - sticking at nowt,
R Real witty! as poet an' singer at gyem,
V Versatile artiste wes Corvan's reet nyem;
A As painter, fiddler, comedian, cloon;
N Ned as the maistor ov all i' the town

Fortunately a contemporary description of him has survived to back up sketches and portraits;

"Ned was a tall man, standing about five feet ten inches in height, possessing a boney, muscular frame, surmounted by a head which suggested a certain kind of rough power, and a countenance whose expression betokened infinite good nature and a rare fund of comicality. His features were rough, irregular and certainly not classical, the nose being large and prominent"

Putting it bluntly, Corvan was considered 'plain ugly'. Contemporary sources suggest that one close up portrait had to be touched up before appearing in a collection of Tyneside songs. Corvan - as nature intended - was apparently too much for the delicate Victorian public. It goes without saying that it would need considerable make-up to give a faithful portrayal of Corvan!

A great deal of Corvan's material could be examined under the heading character and characterisation. In the style of many later music hall artists, he invented characters in his songs and dressed up as them to give maximum visual effect. Take for example Pally Jones, the factory lass who appeared in a couple of his songs -



CORVAN AS "CAT-GUT JIM."

It's Pally Jones, the factory lass
 I'm fairly worth a score
 Me father and mother's keelmen
 And they live down by the shore Singing
 O, laddie O! You've never seen me before
 I'm Pally Jones, the factory lass
 And I live down by the shore.

and little Bobby Snivelnose, the truant. Corvan would come on stage in a sailor boy's suit and carrying a 'bowlie hoop' to sing a lament on the building of Newcastle Central Station;

O, dear me! What man I dee?
 I've nae pleyce noo ti play
 Wor canny forth and spital tee
 Eh, man, they've teun away.
 Nae pleyce tae bowl wor peyste eggs noo
 Te lowp the frog an run
 They're elwys buildin summet new
 They'll spoil Newcassel seun

And also as the Cullercoats' fishlass or fishwife in the song which Tyneside remembers best. Today it is often sung in serious fashion by female sopranos. The original did contain a somewhat less than comical monologue but audiences were expected to laugh as Corvan, in costume, imitated the famous fishwife's cry:

Will ye buy, will ye buy, will ye buy maw fresh fish?
 Will ye buy, will ye buy will ye buy maw fresh fish?

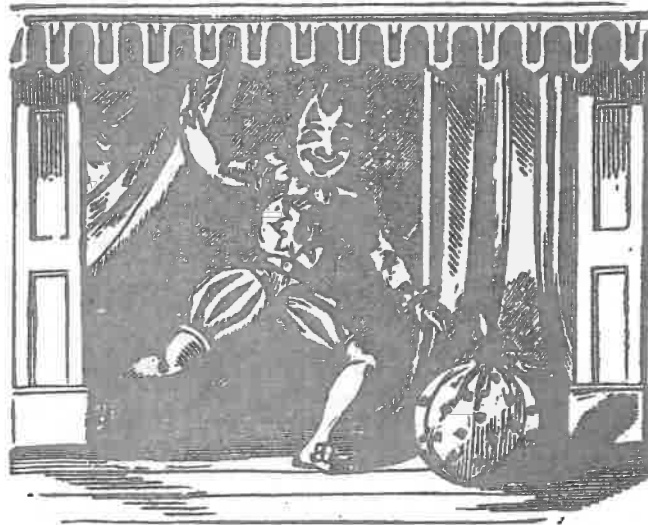
Corvan also drew upon well known local characters for his songs. One such character was Cuckoo Jack. His father had made cuckoo clocks thus the nickname but Jack was known for quite a different reason. He was - as Corvan described him "a genius of the grapplin' line" capable of finding drowned people anywhere in the River Tyne. Another was the Carlisle showman, Jimmy McKenny, who, literally, drummed up business around the fairs and races of the north west of England during the early Victorian period. Of him Corvan wrote in a song possibly commissioned by McKenny's friends;

No more at Jimmy's tricks we'll stare
 Or praise his graceful style or air
 For drumming - e'en a saint may swear
 None equalled Jimmy 'Kenny O.

The person who appeared most regularly in Corvan's songs was his mentor Billy Purvis. Purvis - like McKenny - was an old style showman. He was an entertainer who enjoyed an unrivalled reputation in north east England during the early nineteenth century and deserves fuller treatment. Like Corvan he was a man of many parts. Actor, comedian, singer, musician, magician and dancing master, Purvis played an important role in the changeover from rural to urban entertainment as Dave Harker has noted. Corvan served his apprenticeship with Billy's show although he was only in his mid twenties when Purvis died. While working with the old showman - both backstage and up front as a singer of local and Irish songs - Corvan learned the art of entertainment. His debt to Purvis is duly noted in songs which he later wrote. In some songs, references to the old showman were passing ones as in 'South Shields Corporation' -

We'll have fairs and hoppins all the go
And Billy Purvis wi' his show

And in a song about a day at Newcastle Races where the singer and his girl-friend take time to visit Billy's show. There they saw Purvis himself standing outside and inviting them to enter by 'Billy's backside'. Purvis's slightly vulgar reference to the cheap back entrance to his show was known throughout Tyneside. So too was Billy's bundle - a bundle on the end of a stick which Purvis constantly tried to steal from the stage without success. It is this bundle which Corvan mentions in his song 'Billy Purvis Turned Ranter Preacher' - a song obviously written near the end of Purvis's life when his audiences were seeing less and less of him. This song and Corvan's 'Deeth of Billy Purvis' (which is still sung today) are but two of a number of songs entirely devoted to Purvis which have survived



STEALING THE BUNDLE.

1. 'Bout Billy Purvis that famed clown ye've all heard tell nae doot, man
And in his life ye aw may read, When first he went to spout, man;
And since that time for many a year, wor canny toon he's cheered, man.
He nowther cares for dukes nor lords nor fortune never fears, man
2. Now Billy hes deceived a vast, For gox he's still alive sir
He'll live as lang as ever he can, Ye may lay yor life he'll strive sir;
Newcassel folks he's 'mused them lang, Aw'm sure they wish him weel man,
Smash, aw hope he'll live a thousand years, And still his bundle steal man.
3. Napoleon and Wellington, For killing folks did shine sir,
But Billy he outshines them byeth, Among the sons of Tyne sir;
For his men can kill, and fight, and slay, And not a drop blood spill sir,
And when they're deed, can rise agyen, And gan and heve a gill man.
4. Now everybody hes a fault, And Billy hes his te man,
But when he's gyen, his like my lads, Aw doot we'll never see man;
He's stood dame fortunes crooky ways, And mony a wintry blast man,
And still he sits and smokes his pipe, And thinks about the past man.
5. Grim deethe some day, now seun or late, Is sure to myek us halt man
Then let us live and chase all fear, And niver once find fault man;
And Billy Purvis struggles on, His best to be yor teacher,
So gan ye sons of coaly Tyne To see the ranter preacher.

Tyneside has long been famous for its sporting heroes and even in the nineteenth century provided characters suited to the type of song Corvan wrote. Throughout his material there are numerous references to pugilists, pedestrians and bowlers. Entire songs were dedicated to horse racing and boxing but, like the other great Tyneside songwriters Wilson and Ridley, Corvan seems to have had a special affection for that most popular of Tyneside sports - professional boat racing. The great solo oarsmen - Harry Clasper in the 1840's and 1850's and Bob Chambers in the late 50's and early 60's - were as revered in their time as the footballing centre forwards of our own time. Professional boat racing declined with the rise of Newcastle United but the love of the big man heading for the line has remained. Literally dozens of boat race songs can be found scattered around the book and manuscript collections of Tyneside songs. Many of these songs are about individual races and it is such a song that proves to be one of Corvan's most interesting pieces. It concerns the race between Bob Chambers and the Londoner Thomas White which took place on the Tyne in April 1859. This race took place early in Chambers' professional career when he was just beginning to gain a national reputation as 'Honest Bob' - the sportsman "honest in principle (and) considerate of his own unimpeachable standing". It was considered to be a good match. Chambers was a lithe and effortless rower while White was strong and muscular. The crowd - well in the tens of thousands as usual - packed the length of the three mile course and saw a most exciting race. The betting was heavy and the early part of the race even. Then Chambers collided with a keel boat tied to the shore and found himself stranded a hundred yards behind. The despairing local crowd began to disperse only to miss a remarkable recovery by Chambers. Powering his way forward, he caught up with White who was so shocked that he allowed the Tynesider to finish an easy winner. The story told in Corvan's song is backed up both by the local press and by Joe Wilson's works - a reflective monologue and a ballad called 'The Greet Boat Race'.

The Tyne wi' fame is ringin' on heroes old and young,
 Fresh laurels daily bringin but noo awl men hez sung
 In praise o' honest Chambers, ov Tyneside men the pride
 Who defeated White of London for one hundred pund aside

Stroke for stroke contending, they sweep on wi the tide,
 Fortune seems impending, the victor ti decide:
 At last the cockney loosin' strength, the fowlin game did steal
 He leaves his wettar ivery length, an runs Chambers iv a keel.

What a hulla baloo! ... Ivery yen thowt the race was ower (and began te)
 wawk heym before the finish o' the race. There was a chep stannin next te
 me wiv his hands iv his pockets - aw'm sartin there wis nowt else in -
 luikin' on the river wiv a feyce like a fiddle-stick. He sung the following
 lament eftor the style o' 'Thar's Nae Good Luck';

Says one poor soul aw've selled me pigs, my clocks, my drawers an
 and bed
 An doon te Wawkor a' mun wawk, when aw might a rode i'stead:

Wor Nannie, tee, she'll curse en flee, an belt me like a Tork,
 For aw've lost my money, time an spree and mebies loss maw work

For oh! dismay upon that day in ornist did begin,
 On ivry face a chep may trace (Who's forst, Bob?)
 Oh! the cockney's sure te win.

Comin doon efter awl wis ower, aw meets one i' wor cheps (an Irishman) they called Patrick but I called him Mick for shortness. He wouldn't wair for the finish, altho' he'd backed Bob. So ah hailed him;

"Hie, Mick, Whe's forst?"

"Shure", says he," the Londin man wos forst half way before the race wis quarther over".

"Had on, Mick. Did ye lay owt on Bob?"

"By my sowl I did! an' I'd like to lay this lump ov a stick on his dhirty coco-nut. The next time I speckulate on floatin' property may I be sthruck wid a button on my upper lip as big as a clock face".

"But Chambers is forst", says I

"Arrah. Didn't I tell ye he'd win afore iver he started".

Pull away, pull away, pull away, boys
Pull away boys se cliver
Pull away, pull away, pull away, boys
Chambers for ever.

The ballad of Chambers and White would have gone down well with audiences on the immediate banks of the Tyne and one of Corvan's greatest attributes was his ability to provide songs of immediate local interest wherever he performed. For South Shields audiences, he wrote about the town's incorporation and a visit paid to the port by the Royal Navy vessel 'Bulldog'. For Blyth audiences, he wrote about a disastrous fire in the town. For Newcastle audiences he sang about the building and opening of the Central Station and performed his masterpiece concerning a gigantic fire on Newcastle quay. Above all Corvan must go down in provincial history as the man who at the very least perpetuated and possibly invented the myth of the Hartlepool monkey. This he did through a song he called 'Who Hung The Monkey?' which he performed at a Hartlepool music hall in 1854 or 1855 and immediately had published as a ballad sheet. During the 1860's, a 'cleaned up' version of the song appeared under the title 'The Fishermen Hung The Monkey O' in Allan's famous collection of Tyneside Songs.

In former times midst war and strife
When French invasion threatened life
And all was armed to the knife
The fishermen hung the monkey O
The fishermen - with courage high
They seized the monkey for a spy
Hang him, says one, says another - he'll die
They did and they hung the monkey O.

They tried every means to make pug speak
They tortured him 'till he loud did squeak
That's French, says one - says another - It's Greek
The fishermen then got drunken O
He's all ower hair, some chaps did cry
He's up to something cute and sly
With a cod's head then they closed his eye
Before they hung the monkey O.

Some pug's fate they did bewail
Though speechless, he still had his tale
He'd been better off in Durham jail
For the monkey was turning funkey O.
They say that he made some curious mugs
When they shaved his head and cut off his lugs
Saying, That's the sport for French humbugs
Before they hung the monkey O.

Hammer his ribs - the thundering thief
Pummel his pate well with your neef
You know he's here for nobbut grief
He's auld Napoleon's unky O!
Thus to poor pug some chaps behaved
Cut off his whiskers some chap raved
Another bawled out - he's never been shaved
So they commenced to shave the monkey O!

Then let us hope at land and sea
We'll still retain sovereignty
May France and England aye agree
And never be turning funkey O!
And as for poor pug I've had my say
His time has gone for many a day
But in Hartlepool you'll hear men say - I say, mister - me
mother asked us, she asked us to ask you, she asked us to ask
you to tell her - I say, mister, Who hung the monkey O?

Even in songs with a generally light hearted theme, Corvan had the presence of mind to make some form of serious observation. Often this took the form of an appeal to civic or national pride as in his songs about South Shields, Blyth and, indeed, Hartlepool.

Let us hope at land and sea
We'll still retain sovereignty
May France and Britain lang agree

was written not long before the joint venture into the Crimean War. Many of his songs were far from light hearted and it is consideration of such songs that leads to a brief examination of the most controversial aspect of Corvan's career. Many references have been made during the last ten years to his role in the development of working class consciousness. Some see him as a spokesman for his class in song. Others see him as a betrayers of his class - frequently setting working men and women up to ridicule as "bumpkins on a frolic". In such an argument, I would like to use my escape clause. In my research, I have been looking at Corvan through the eyes of an entertainer and songwriter - not a social historian. Whatever he was, he was certainly for a major part of his career a canny professional and this point may form a useful base for future research. When he was in his early twenties he published ballads at his own expense to help the striking seamen. Ten years later he was still writing songs containing social comment but, somehow, they seem more polished and less passionate. How far the need to satisfy 'bread and butter' audiences affected Corvan's style and conviction is a question worthy of debate.

Towards the end of his life, the distress brought about by the American Civil War proved a fruitful source for songs. 1862, for example, brought both 'The Porterpokeman's Lament' and 'Oot O' Wark or the Year '62'. Earlier he had songs with titles like 'The Days When I Was Hard Up' and 'Jemmy Munroe's Troubles or A Hit At The Times'. In a more local vein he also produced 'The Rise In Coals' - a rousing song complaining at the high price of household coal after a bad winter and 'Work For A Thousand Men' in which he attacked the Poor Law system yet praised the local council for attempting to provide work for the unemployed. Certainly the latter included a number of phrases commonly in use in the Chartist era with references to "the lot of the honest working man" and "a fair day's wage for a fair day's work".

Of Corvan's serious songs, one of the most appealing is 'The Queen Has Sent A Letter'. It deals with the disaster at Hartley Colliery which brought about the death of 204 men and boys - a disaster which has been long remembered because of the tragic circumstances which surrounded it. The victims were trapped as a result of the collapse of the main engine down the colliery's single shaft. One large group managed to work its way up from the lowest to the highest level of the pit only to find their exit still blocked. The utter helplessness of the rescuers only served to add to the tragedy. Corvan's song is of particular interest as it concerns a letter of sympathy sent to the widows of the men killed from Victoria - herself recently bereaved. If his songs are in any sense a reflection of public feeling, his attitude towards royalty is of particular note. He was scathing about Albert and his Great Exhibition in a song entitled 'Prince Albert's Greet Big Babby Hoose' and had little good to say about the Queen when she opened the Central Station. In this song, however, there is no hint of cynicism as he depicts Victoria as the 'widow's friend'.

Oh! Bless the Queen of England who sympathy doth show
Towards our stricken widows amid their grief and woe
Old England never had her like nor never will again
Then bless good Queen Victoria, ye loyal hearted men
She sent a letter stating I share your sorrows here
To sooth the aching hearts of all and dry the widow's tear.

Above two hundred miners are numbered with the dead
Whose wives and children ne'er should want their bit of daily bread.
And while death's shadow overhangs the miner's cot with gloom,
Let us calm the widow's heaving breast for those laid in the tomb
And ye that round your glowing fires, life's comforts daily share
Think of the helpless orphans and widows in despair

We have heroes from the Redan and Inkerman as well
Whose deeds of daring on the field a nation's thanks can tell;
But did they face the deadly styth, where scarce a single breath
Held life to face eternity to rescue life or death!
Show me the page in history where deeds heroic shine
More bright than our Northumbrian men, the heroes of the mine

God speed the hardy collier, and Coulson's gallant band,
Who braved the perils of the shaft with willing heart and hand,
And ye that add to store the hive and feed the fatherless;
May he that watches o'er all things, your earthly prospects bless.
The weeping and the wailing of widows let us end,
And with the Queen let all men see we are the widow's friend.

And finally to Corvan as he may have seen himself - as 'Catgut Jim The Fiddler'. 'Catgut Jim' was not so much a song as a routine containing singing, fiddling and comedy and Corvan would come on stage dressed as a street musician in order to perform it. I have taken the liberty of altering the routine in an attempt to use the ability I have - 'Catgut Jim' thus becomes 'Whistling Will The Whistler'. I have also drawn from a number of his monologues those quips which seem to me to be the most timeless - and a line of humour does stretch from Purvis and Corvan to people like Bobby Thompson 'The Little Waster'. Today Thompson fixes his eyes on the ladies in the audience early in his act and says, 'if the women took all their catalogue stuff off, this would be a nudist colony'. Well over a hundred years before this, Corvan, dressed as widow Winks, said of her late husband, "He was in nine clubs an' the only good aw ivver got oot o' him was his

club money - besides aw got his claites - to fit my next man. It was such humour and characterisation that accounts for Corvan's popularity;

I'm Whistling Will the Whistler - a Man of great renown
I play to make a living, lads, in country or in town
At every fair and every feast with my whistle I repair
Gox! if there's any fun or sport you sure to find me there

CH FOR I DRIVE AWAY DULL CARE - YES I DRIVE AWAY DULL CARE
SO PATRONISE YOUNG WHISTLING WILL IF YOU'VE ANY CASH TO SPARE

I'll play you any tune you want - I'll play you 'Cheer, boys, cheer'
And if you're feeling thirsty then I'll play 'The Drop of Beer'
'The De'eil Amang The Tailors'? 'Peggy Pickin On The Shore'
'The Lass That Loves The Sailor' -ay - and many dozen more

Mind I only do it because I'm poor. I've been poor ever since I was a kid when the only pair of shoes I ever wore was that which was away at the menders ... And me brother and I shared a single bed, fighting all night long to see which one of us would lie in the middle. Mind, we a pillow at the top and the bottom of the bed so we could lie four heads and tails if we had visitors ... And its nae use saying I could have taken greater advantage of me education. It took me four years before I discovered that I had a pen which couldn't spell. Not that me mum was bothered. She'd rather I went out fishing for something for tea. But she did say that if I ever gat drowned, she'd kill us when I got home. But schooldays wes canny days. That's where I met my wife - Fat Hannah - 16 stone of loveliness - "Oh that this too too solid flesh would melt". So what is left to me but me music. I joined the Volunteers to learn an instrument and left with musical honours - they drummed me out. And when they drummed me out, do you know what tune the band was playing? Nowt but me favourite Harvest Home Hornpipe(play)

There's Teddy Blane and Lucy Neal and Poor Old Uncle Ned
Nanny Wilt Thou Gan Wi Me, Scots Whae Wi' Wallace Bled
I play MCleod's Reel Beautifeul - The Lass Upon The Strand
And the Keel Row aal to tatters through this happy, unhappy land.
CH.

Billy Purvis by Joe Ging



The Morn's the Fair
We'll all be there
To see Billy Purvis's lily-white hair.
And wooden horses wi' hairy tails.

Children's street rhyme, Hendon, Sunderland 1930s.

Imagine the parents' feelings as they put a child to bed in the early 19th century. And the child's thrill of anticipation, in an entertainment starved environment. Then forget it - it was not like that at all - the area was not just starved of entertainment - it was starved of adequate food, adequate shelter, and adequate clothing. In fact, it had nowt. "Less than nowt. Nowt was a luxury", says Billy Martin, a north-east comedian of today.

The only parents who could afford the luxury of self indulgence towards their children were the well-to-do, who no doubt left such flippancies to their retinue of faithful retainers, faithful out of necessity. It was an economy which dictated that six-year-olds went down the pit to ensure the family economy. Boys were valued in families as in Third World countries today. Joseph Skipsey, a miner-poet who grew up in abject poverty, wrote eloquent, moving poems about it, letting the facts speak for themselves - there was no need to underline the social injustice. "Father hid his face and sighed, mother turned and wept" at the sight of their six-year old's delight to be starting in the mine as a trapper boy. There was not a lot of room for sentiment or even sentimentality. But it's a nice thought, to imagine the family scene. The inspiration for this rhyme - Billy Purvis - was born on 13 January 1784 and died in his 70th year, about twice the national average age for dying at the time. So there was something special about Billy. He was to the North East what his contemporary Joey Grimaldi was to London. Not that he could be compared with Grimaldi, who was an innovative genius. But in his own way Billy was as loved as the London clown. When a man dies in 1853 and is still remembered in a children's street rhyme in the 1930s, he has either to be hated or loved during his life. There is plenty of evidence that Billy was loved. His autobiographical memoirs say so, but no doubt so do Atilla the Hun's. However there is plenty of other evidence to support this claim - contemporaries and local journals, such as the 'Northern Chronicle' (August 1891), testify as to his popularity. This seemed to be based on an equal measure of performing ability and personality. When Billy was born, the Industrial Revolution was just making its effect felt in the areas of the country where canals could be easily dug - London, Manchester, Birmingham. The North East, with its unsuitable landscape, had to rely heavily on shipments, mainly to London, of coal, which it has in abundance and which was produced very cheaply by bonded miners.

As Billy grew up, the threat from France became more acute, and a strong local militia was formed. Ten-year-old Billy joined as a drummer boy. Thus acquiring a skill useful to a performer. Drumming up business was part of the business, gathering pre-show crowd outside the booth was more important than what happened inside. No customers - no food. A very simple economy.

Billy Purvis was thirty-one before he became a full-time entertainer. Today this would be surprising. In his day, it was remarkable in view of the high mortality and the fact people tended to stick to the same job all their lives. It was a brave decision for a family man to take. After spending his formative years in Newcastle, where his parents had settled, moving from a village near Edinburgh, when he was two, he was apprenticed to a cabinet-maker for seven years, another useful trade to have for a portable booth proprietor. During this period he kept up his drumming and found employment at Newcastle Theatre Royal, doubling as call boy.

He taught himself dancing by acting as doorman in the Royal Assembly Rooms. He must have watched the dancers, and operated the door by remote control - a difficult feat, but Billy was very determined. During this period, he toured the locality in the evenings, performing when and where he could. The pitmen of Cowgate, near Newcastle, showed their solidarity by collectively taking offence at his monologue/patter act "The Pitman and the Magistrate." The unexpurgated version is strong stuff, and it was rather risky for an outsider to "mak gam". Leger-de-main French figures (a crude form of marionette), fiddling, playing the Northumbrian small pipes, all of these skills he slowly acquired.

Amateur dramatics were also part of his background; also clowning. In fact, his first professional engagement was as a clown in a small circus on Newcastle Town Moor, during the annual Race Week. He got sozzled with the proprietor before he screwed up his courage to defy wife and parents and debase himself in this way. When they spurned the guinea fee he received,

he used this insult as an excuse to go away touring for a few weeks. Then he was offered the job of drum major with the militia at Hexham. He probably felt he was set for life.

The time had come for Billy to settle down, and lead a quiet industrious life. Like all market towns, during the early nineteenth century, Hexham was continually visited by touring mountebanks, strolling players and other itinerants - the rogues and vagabonds of the entertainment trade. Billy was ever at hand to lend one. And learn. Each he assisted in turn, adding their repertoire to his own. When they left, he would perform their acts, practising assiduously for the benefit of his cronies and anybody else interested. There were plenty of people prepared to watch. No television, no radio, created a performer's paradise, a captive audience. And so it might have continued

In 1815 Wellington won his great victory over Napoleon at Waterloo. The threat of French invasion was finally removed. Imagine the relief. Handyman Billy made an effigy of Napoleon, and displayed it in Hexham. He needed little persuasion to tour the surrounding countryside, displaying his handywork, and no doubt slipping in the odd act or two on the way. However, on his return, his employer, who may not have heard about Bonaparte's downfall, dismissed him. Resourceful Billy opened two dancing schools, one in Hexham and one in a nearby village. This brought in sufficient to keep him and family, but another circus proprietor sought him out, as he needed a drummer and a clown. So Billy went off with him and followed this wandering career for the rest of this life, another thirty nine years.

At first, Billy travelled on foot, then a pony, and finally with a touring company. He followed the calendar of fairs and race meetings where there would be sufficient clientele to fill, not only his place of entertainment, but also those of his rivals. And there were a lot of them about. His memoirs, written for him in his later years, by J.P. Robson, a local writer, are as rambling as his way of life, but full of anecdotes and word pictures about his adventures with fellow travellers.

As the years passed, the scene changed from the rural fairs to the industrial conurbations, gradually growing around the factories of the Tyne, Wear and Tees. With the passenger railway boom, the North East quickly caught up with the other industrial centres of the country. And this was where Billy and the other entertainers gained their audiences. The living conditions were unbelievably bad. Rural habits were brought into overcrowded squalor. Typhoid and cholera were common as well as the poverty-borne diseases, such as tuberculosis and rickets. To relieve their suffering, the inhabitants turned to drink. And any light relief there was going. Circus was developed to a very high standard; the touring theatre companies and travelling showmen were also well patronised.

Until the Theatres Act, 1843, only certain theatres were licensed to perform plays, usually one in such towns as Newcastle (not a city until 1862). The ingenuity used to get round this, with music and mime, was impressive. Billy had his own method. He ignored the patents of the theatre and performed plays anyway. During one of his Scottish trips, this landed him in a Glasgow jail. But it must have been worth it, enhancing his popularity and box office appeal. In fact, toward the end of his career, he spent five years in Scotland.

Eventually, however, times became hard. He was obliged to leave his booth in Ayr, and was given free passage back to Newcastle Quayside. He never really recovered from this blow. He died, still touring, in Hartlepool, not long before his seventieth birthday, and was buried there in St. Hilda's Churchyard in Old Hartlepool. Sanger Bros., the circus proprietors, held a benefit performance, and erected a tombstone. The grave is still well-tended. He was a one-off, was Billy.

BACK TO THE ROOTS

Owenite Socialism in Darlington

by Keith Wilson

In November, 1838, Darlington became the 50th branch of the Association of All Classes of All Nations or Owenite socialists. There are two reasons for thinking that this was an unusual development. Firstly, Darlington was not, and still is not, renowned for its contribution to working class radicalism. Secondly, Owenite influence is normally thought of as having peaked with the Grand National Consolidated Trade Union of 1834. This second point is simply not true. Both nationally and locally Owenism shared its peak years with the Chartists, in the upheavals of 1838-1842, and rapidly declined thereafter. In Darlington, the number of social socialists reached an estimated 700 members by January 1841. They had established their own institution, capable of seating 400 people, which they filled at their weekly meetings.

As a Quaker town, Darlington had welcomed the Great Reform Act of 1832. It failed to gain a borough seat in the redistribution, but the tradesmen of the town were satisfied with the extension of the suffrage. In addition, Darlington's pre-eminence in the southern division of Durham county gave it a virtual monopoly on the new seat there. With an expanded middle class vote, the industrialist Joseph Pease, standing as a liberal Whig, though without a strong party identification, was able to become the first Quaker in Parliament despite the opposition of Lord Cleveland and the Marquis of Londonderry. The 1832 reform, however, did not give votes to the working class. Nor did Owen's millenaristic vision of 1834 bring about the new age of cooperation promised by the GNCTU. By the late 1830's, these disappointments were among the many factors leading to the establishment of both Chartist and socialist organisations in the town.

The Chartists, led by a well known local carpet weaver (later grocer) called Nicholas Bragg, have received some attention already and their letter in support of the Chartist Sacred Month has been reproduced in several collections of documents. Of the Owenities, however, far less has been heard. One of the reasons for this can be traced back to Marx's dismissal of Owenism as 'Utopian' rather than scientific socialism. In so far as much labour history has been produced by Marxist-orientated scholars, this has led to a neglect of pre-Marxian thought as if it were quite literally pre-historic. Thus the tradition which runs 'From Chartism to Labourism', as Rothstein puts it, almost ignores the Owenite episode which, in any case, lies awkwardly across conventional periodisation.

A second problem lies in the difficult nature of Owenism itself, particularly in relation to the role of its founder and to its religion. Owen himself was an atheist, and this led many to assume that all Owenites must be atheists too, although this was not necessarily the case. James Williams, of Sunderland, a former Quaker who still held on to many of his previous beliefs, declared that Socialism was not incompatible with Christianity because socialism was not Owenism. Others also declared a belief in socialism per se, but, in general, Owen held a father-like sway over his flock, which was disturbing both to committed Christians and to those who believed in a purer form of socialism.

Owen actually visited Darlington in 1842, but by then the movement in the town was past its peak. Its institution was defunct, and he spoke instead in the Darlington theatre in Blackwellgate. In earlier years he had visited both Newcastle and Sunderland, but Darlington had been omitted from his itinerary. He did write, however, in 1838 about Durham, Darlington, Stockton, Hexham and Carlisle: "The harvest is quite ripe and requires only the reapers and labourers to secure and gather it in." In part, his reason for not visiting Darlington in this earlier phase may have lain in the potentially hostile reception he feared he might get from the Quakers.

In Newcastle socialism flourished without, or despite, a lack of opposition. Old dissenters, however, were less keen to have infidels in their midst. When, in 1838, the Owenites attempted to secure a room for their meetings in Darlington, they were opposed by the Quaker banker, John Backhouse, and the meeting place had to be kept secret. "We expect much opposition and persecution," said their secretary R. Andrew, but they remained, nevertheless, determined to set up a cooperative shop. An open letter was sent to Backhouse:

Sir, have you ever read the history of your sect, and seen recorded in that history the persecutions its founders and adherents have suffered for their faith's sake; and even, in the present day, meeting the sneers and taunts of the uninformed; and having this in view, does it produce no other effect than to make you turn persecutor, in the nineteenth century, and interfere with the lawful pursuits of your fellow townsmen. Your sect assumes to the practice of meekness, forbearance, charity and brotherly love ... what are the objects of Socialism? They are, in few words, to make the rich man happier, and the poor man as happy as the rich; not by physical force, but by reason alone.'

Opposition to the Owenites on religious grounds was immense and well publicised. Debates between Socialists and Christians took place throughout the North East. The Primitive Methodist chapel in Darlington was the scene of four nights of debate between Campbell, the Newcastle socialist missionary, and the Reverend Barker, of Gateshead. This attracted an audience of 1,400 persons. Barker accused the Socialists of all manner of atrocities, and he subsequently went on to publish them in pamphlet form for wider consumption. As Challinor notes, he names "prominent socialists who had abandoned their wives, made love to young girls, or thrown pregnant women off precipices." According to a socialist assessment, however, Barker was himself "an atheist, a malinger, a Perverter of Truth, a bearer of false witness, a shameless profligate fibber, an abettor of persecution, and consequently a bad member of society." Emma Martin, lecturing in Newcastle, said that she "noticed Joseph Barker's pamphlet to the Gateshead Observer; she said she would not insult the audience by reading any portion of so filthy a production: to say the least of it, it emanated from a mind that was grossly vicious and wicked in the extreme." Barker's views were by no means untypical. Edward Hancock, for example, explained of the socialists that "when they met, it was customary for a member to take the first seat that was unoccupied and so on in rotation, the women sitting on one side of the table and the men on the other, no distinction made between married and single ... the consequence was that a common intimacy arose between all parties, and ... a number of illegitimate children were begotten." (quoted in Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem*, p.218).

Barker became a national figure. At a meeting of the Temperance Society, in the Darlington Friends' meeting house, in Skinnergate, he gave

a speech which was attended by (it is alleged), Feargus O'Connor (Durham Chronicle). The impact of the chapel debates reverberated throughout the region. Darlington socialists reported a one-third increase in membership as a consequence, and it became acknowledged that the principles of Socialism were making rapid progress in the south of the county. (Sunderland Herald 7.2.40). By April 1840, the Sunday meetings in Darlington were crowded with around 400 in regular attendance and missionaries, such as Rigby and Fleming, the editor of The New Moral World visited the town.

To some extent, the attack on socialist infidelity was misplaced. The Owenites were not against Christianity but 'Priestianity', and they sought the word of God direct from The Bible rather than through established religion. As Barbara Taylor notes, "It was not The Word itself which was suspect but its spokesmen." Emma Martin, for instance, received a presentation of a leather backed Bible from Richard Ayre and the Newcastle socialists. She herself was a former Baptist activist, and could answer the religious arguments of any opponent.

Eventually, the Darlington socialists became reconciled with the Quakers. By 1840 the socialists' institution was being used by 'the wealthiest friends in Darlington' at a cost of 7/6 per session, which gives some indication of how large the institution must have been.

Religious intolerance, however, was not the only source of opposition to the socialists. The Owenites had advanced views on the role of women, family life, marriage and divorce, which failed to strike a sympathetic note with accepted orthodoxy. They believed that marriage should be a contract and that divorce should be easier to obtain. Relations between the sexes should be freer with communal childrearing in the communities, which the Owenities established. In this sense, Utopian Socialism's view of gender equality was more progressive than later Marxist views. Hence the rise of the Women's Movement has led to a re-assessment of the worth of the Owenite schemes and their attempts to alter gender roles before the overall change which was to occur in society as a whole.

The Quakers, too, though standing for greater propriety, had a tradition of greater equality. It was, for example, a female Friend who gave the first address to their number in the Darlington socialist's institution. In Newcastle and South Shields, however, women, incensed by the circulation of unfounded rumours that the socialist Emma Martin had seven husbands, stormed her meetings with the intention of causing severe bodily harm. In Darlington, Fleming remarked that under the current marriage laws, women were like domestic pets such as dogs, just so much men's legal property without legal rights of their own. On this occasion, a wag in the audience replied that women clearly had more rights than dogs because a man could not be sent to prison for killing his dog.

Women's emancipation was to become a neglected issue in later working class movements. The socialists however contained within their ranks two of the most popular and powerful touring lecturers in Mrs Chappelsmith and Mrs Martin. By contrast, the Chartists had no female members of the National Convention and no major female lecturers, although there were female Charter Associations. Demands for female suffrage to be inserted alongside male suffrage in the Charter were favoured by Lovett, but dropped on the grounds that they made acceptance of the whole Charter less likely. Even the most progressive Chartists were reluctant to concede that married women deserved to hold a vote independent of their husbands.

This female emancipatory aspect of Owenism may account, to some extent, for its geographical particularism. Owenism never captured any of the Durham pit villages, nor any of the smaller towns outside Sunderland (branch 47), Newcastle (branch 43), and Darlington (branch 50). The only exception to this is Rainton, where Story, a pitman and former Chartist, tired of walking to Sunderland for each of their meetings, resolved to form a branch of his own. Chartism, on the other hand, was strong in the pit villages, yet they still looked to the large towns for leadership. If the pitmen flocked to Chartism, why did they fail to respond to Owenism?

Firstly, the pit villages had no established petit-bourgeois class among whom notions of female equality arguably took strongest roots. Allied to this was the general practice in pit villages of an extremely rigid sexual division of labour. For a variety of reasons women's place was in the home with a clearly defined domestic role which extended, in the only form of paid work which was available to women, to domestic service. Women, to the miners, were not equal, and a doctrine which proclaimed the opposite was unlikely to gain much support.

Miners, furthermore, had a political and economic outlook which precluded many of the Owenite solutions. In the North East's deep pits much capital was needed for shaft sinking. Return on capital was considerably delayed and cooperative working seemed difficult, if not impossible, to envisage. Wages and conditions, like profit, were tied to the state of the market and the volume of production. Both employers and employees stood to gain (at that time), from any agreement to restrict the output coming on to the market. Socialism failed to address itself to the practical problems of the industry. Even after Owens promised 'millenium' someone would still have to go underground to dig the coal.

A third factor militating against pit village socialism was again the religious issue. Those miners who were not under the influence of the priest or coalowner were either Methodists or God-less. The appeal of an intellectually based critique of religion was never likely to develop very far. Thus the socialists of Darlington, Sunderland and Newcastle failed to develop the kind of ties with their economic hinterlands, which proved so vital to the Chartists in this same period.

In many respects, the two bodies shared common grounds. In Sunderland "meetings held to debate the Charter were attended by nearly the entire membership of the local Owenite branch, most of whom voted in favour of the Charter" (Northern Star 26.6.41) Prominent socialists became Chartists and vice versa. When Williams and Binns were released from Durham goal, the socialists of Newcastle provided a dinner in their honour. At that time James Williams tried to impress on the socialists "the propriety of (them) joining for the Charter as the most effectual mode of attaining their own rights." (Northern Star 13.2.41) Later, at the Golden Lion Inn, Sunderland, Williams conceded to Fleming that he would support the idea of communities as experiments to see whether cooperation or competition worked best - but wholesale socialism would not work unless Parliament were first reformed by the Charter. Both Socialist and Chartist cooperative stores sprang up throughout the North East and tended to be similarly organised. Their attitude to communities, however, was very different. The Chartist Land Scheme involved private ownership of cottages and land whereas the Owenite ventures such as Queenswood were communistic in practice. Sometimes the conflict could be greater. Kipling, a Darlington Chartist, who supported the local branch's attempt to establish the Complete Suffrage Union in the town, went so far as to chair meetings called specifically to attack the socialists.

The test of a person's socialist principles was the extent to which they embraced the spirit of egalitarianism, especially in so far as it extended to women and the extent of the sacrifices they were prepared to make. The institution in Darlington was an example of this. According to John Gray, the secretary in 1839, "through the united endeavors of our Branch we have been enabled to erect an institution of our own ... we have likewise an excellent though small organ and a very good choir of singers. Each member has thrown all his books into the common stock and by this means we have been enabled to get up a very good library." (New Moral World 13.10.39)

The presence of the choir reveals the religious nature of Darlington's socialism. The Owenites had their own hymnbook. At a New Year's celebration "the 73rd hymn was sung previous to tea and the 129th at its conclusion." (New Moral World 18.1.40) When the Quakers used the hall to state that "Many have taken the names of Christians who had done true Christianity harm", the socialists agreed entirely. Problems still arose over the socialist encouragement of dancing, which was thought to encourage immorality, and the socialist practice of meeting on Sundays for purposes other than worship. By 1841, however, the secretary (now F Harrison), could state that "those who differ from us are compelled to admit that we are a sober, moral and peaceable people." Presumably, the anticipated mass pregnancies had failed to materialise.

The socialists insisted on meeting in their own premises rather than in public houses in order to encourage female participation. The resulting sobriety would again have moved them nearer to the Quakers, as arguably, their views on marriage did too. The Quakers married by a declaration in front of their congregation, and Owen argued that his own position was identical (Barbara Taylor, p221).

In March 1841 Emma Martin, of London, gave a course of lectures to Darlington in which she claimed for the movement a higher religious and moral appeal than that provided by Established Religion. Her lectures on 'the Philosophy of Religion', 'False Religions of Ancient and Modern Times', 'Responsibility to Man and God', and 'Marriage and Divorce' attracted the most attentive of audiences. In the first lecture she proclaimed that "all religion founded on particular creeds was false" and went on to argue in the second lecture that the rites and ceremonies of pseudo-Christianity were based on heathen mythology. It was, however, the lecture on Marriage and Divorce which attracted the most attention. In this lecture she "animadvert(ed) on the unequal education of the two sexes and the ridiculous distractions created in society through excess of wealth and abject poverty ... (she) laid down the only system by which the union of the sexes ought to be regulated, viz, the mental, moral and physical fitness of the parties forming such union." (New Moral World, 20.3.41)

For Darlington then it was the religious and sexual messages of socialism which were to the fore. In places such as Sunderland, the economic arguments were more prominent. Away from the paternalism of the Peases and Backhouses, the Sunderland workers could express a more direct class hostility. "The evil rests in the existence of a class doomed to labour and a class privileged to receive the profits of this labour without rendering an equivalent," wrote Gamsby, a man who had become disillusioned with Chartism. The problems of society lay not, as the Chartists had it, with institutions of government but with "the present social system - the exclusive institution of property and the gradation of classes; and as long as this system obtains, all our efforts to remove the evil through the

government will be futile." (New Moral World, 19.6.41) 'The true wrong and the true remedy', he continued was "that the poverty and toil of the poor was a necessary consequence of the wealth and idleness of the rich ... the evils could not arise from inadequate producing power ... they proceed from the principles of competition in conjunction with those of private property." (New Moral World 22.5.41)

By 1842, the Darlington branch could not manage its own finances, let alone comment on the economy in general. It owed £2.7.10d to the Society's general fund and a further £2.9.10d for goods received and not paid for. Despite the listing of the Darlington secretary's address (then W. Stubbs) as 'the Social Institution' it seems likely that this had ceased to exist. When Robert Owen finally visited Darlington in October 1842, he lectured in the theatre, whose proprietor seems to have been sympathetic to working-class causes, rather than the socialists' room, which he did not like. Ironically, Owen declared that "the branch is but in its infancy." It was, on the contrary, in terminal decline.

The reasons for the failure of socialism to establish a more permanent presence in Darlington are not difficult to trace. Individuals were afraid to join because of the threat of victimisation by employers and landlords. The contradictory approach to religion appears to have put off many potential members, while both the religious appeal and the appeal to greater gender equality remained essentially minority ones. Like many branches elsewhere, Darlington became wrapped up in the cult of the personality, deeming Owen 'the Social Father' and accepting his writings uncritically. Hence there was a lack of theoretical sophistication, as Owen's writings became regarded as the final word rather than the basis for the further development of Socialism. Nevertheless, the positive aspects of Owenism, particularly with respect to the role of women, are currently undergoing re-appraisal, and the efforts of Darlington's formerly unsung socialists may yet receive the attention they deserve.

Barney Markson - an old socialist pioneer

by Dave Neville

The years just before the First World War were a turning point for socialists in Britain. Although a fledgling Labour Party had been established in Parliament, many saw the way forward to socialism being held back by the somewhat less than progressive traditional trade unions. The Independent Labour Party, pledged to the formation of a socialist society, was split. Did they support the compromised reformist path in tag with the Liberals in Parliament, warts and all, or should they make a clean break and form a pure, truly socialist party.' And so it was in 1911 that a new organisation emerged - the British Socialist Party - and immediately it attracted great support. In Newcastle, the BSP met at rooms at the corner of Leazes Park Road and Percy Street: and one of its members was 18 year old Barney Markson.

Choral Societies entertained the people and brought financial stability to the organisation. The rooms became known as the Newcastle Socialist Centre and although nominally owned by the BSP and the Clarion Fellowship, it attracted the support of a variety of socialist and trade union organisations. Into this enthusiastic throng came a young man fired with a passion for the socialist cause - Barney Markson, just eighteen years old and this is his story.

The centre was so popular that a move was soon made to larger premises in the Royal Arcade. Willing hands converted the property into an impressive new centre. Downstairs was a meeting room, library and cafe with a new theatrical room upstairs. Those early pioneers were determined to fight for the success of socialism - these were truly days of hope. Those dreams were of course to be cruelly dashed by the tragedy of the Great War. To Barney Markson and many others, this was a capitalist war to be opposed. The first world war split the RSP. A few days after war was declared, a leading member of the party obtained an official position to represent trade unionists. The secretary stated that it was the beginning of the BSP's war effort. It caused a furore in the BSP, and as a result those opposed to the war, including Barney, severed their links with the organisation. Whilst some manned the recruitment platform alongside former political enemies, others went back to their working-class roots to organise and agitate.

Barney took work at Armstrongs' Armaments factor, and it was a period of substantial change in working practices as trade unions agreed to dilution of labour. The carnage of the Western front resulted in moves towards conscription. First came the Derby scheme. Workers who signed up were told that they would only be called up for defence if the Germans invaded. Barney refused, and his fellow workers subjected him to a terrible barrage once they knew of his anti-war views. They attempted to persuade him to fall in line to keep his job, but he told them that he would still be at the factory when they had gone. It took just two weeks for his prophesy to come true. They'd all been conned. Homeland defence now meant a trip to France, and Barney was one of the few left behind. However, the inevitable call up notice eventually arrived. Barney did the sensible thing and returned it to the authorities - who promptly posted it back. Because of his poor health, he was advised by socialist friends to report in when he would undoubtedly be discharged on medical grounds. It didn't quite work out. He was certified for service at home only, and packed off to Braintree in Essex.

On arrival, he reported sick and over the next couple of years proceeded to develop conscientious malingering to a fine art. Physical training exercises became his forte as he concentrated on making such an unholy mess of it that they gave up trying. Chronic back conditions were acted out, the ability to vomit at will perfected and the coup de grace was putting mustard power into urine samples. His acting ability wasn't the only reason why Private Markson was fast becoming a thorn in the side of the military authorities. For good measure, he was promulgating his socialist beliefs amongst the soldiers - and getting a response too. It started when their corporal got tired of giving lectures about care of the rifle and the like and allowed Barney to give a talk. The opportunity was heaven sent with the result that socialism received a platform courtesy of H M Forces. Inevitably it led to trouble. The soldiers were allowed use of a Liberal Club, and one night a great argument broke out there about war and politics. The ancient walls had never heard such dissension amongst the ranks, and neither had the club stalwarts who had their ears pressed to the doors. Next day, soldiers were banned from the club. It was clear that Markson spelt trouble, and he was soon posted back to Newcastle, where he became involved with the 'Peace by Negotiation' movement. Ironically, having avoided hostilities, Barney nearly met his end at a 'Peace' meeting which was gate crashed by 'patriots'. One of them put a Union flag on a chair next to Barney and it accidentally tore. He was accused of insulting the flag, and the rowdies descended on him. Luckily he escaped without serious injury. And so he continued agitating and campaigning until the bloody and wasteful war came to an end.

In 1920 Barney moved to Toronto, and before long he was active in Canadian trade union and socialist circles. He eventually became secretary of the Toronto branch of the 'One Big Union' - the Canadian IWW and also joined the socialist 'Workers Party'. Later an illegal underground Communist Party was formed but Barney refused to join; partly because he was very

suspicious about one prominent member who did an immense amount of work for the party. His suggestion that he could be an agent-provocateur was met with derision from the officials. Years later he read of the prosecution of the same men. The chief prosecution witness was the well thought of party worker: alias Sergeant Wexler of the Canadian police.

Eventually Barney moved to Peterborough, Ontario, where he again linked up with local unions and became involved with raising funds to send machinery and technicians to Russia. One day he received a letter in Russian from a sponsored technician which was naturally incomprehensible to him. So he had an idea - not one of his best - and took it to the local newspaper. The editor's response was to print his letter to demonstrate, as he put it, that there was 'a veritable Bolshevik in their midst'. With Barney now clearly identified as a source of possible trouble to the authorities, the scene was set for a bizarre legal case. Barney wrote an article for the Toronto-based 'Worker' newspaper about working conditions in Peterborough. The Chamber of Commerce took great exception to it and were determined to make an example of the 'veritable Bolshevik'. He was questioned by both Chief of Police and the secretary of the Chamber. Unbeknown to him, a constable was hidden behind a curtain taking notes and Barney was charged with publication of false news. At his trial, selected workers were brought forward to testify about the wonderful working conditions which prevailed in the town. A vigorous defence was put forward to demonstrate that technically Barney had only sent a letter and was not responsible for publication of the article. It was to no avail and he was found guilty and sentenced to six months in prison.

Barney came back to England. He was briefly a Labour Party member, but was expelled for opposing coal reparations. 1926 found him a member of the Communist Party. At the beginning of the General Strike, Newcastle Trades Council took a lead in publishing the 'Workers Chronicle, which became the major strike newspaper circulating on Tyneside. Barney helped produce the paper. The Jewish Tailors' Union rented a large room over a shop in Nun Street and, with Barney's assistance, were persuaded to lend the premises for production of the Workers Chronicle. Organisers were also sent by the Communist Party to help produce the paper. The first edition on the second day of the strike sold for just a halfpenny. However, they soon realised that much greater circulation could be achieved by involving the high street paper lads. The price went up to a penny with the lads taking half, and, from then on, two editions had to be produced each day to satisfy demand. As a result, a vast amount of money was coming into the office from sales and donations from wellwishers. The story of the control and destination of that money is a sorry episode in the history of the General Strike in the North East. A certain Communist Party organiser had a drink problem, and most of the funds went into his pocket and then over the ale-house counter.

Despite the internal problems, the newspaper was going from strength to strength. The need for a workers' paper was obvious when the blackleg establishment newspapers printed stories which often had only a vague resemblance to the truth. A typical example was the baton charge incident in Newcastle on May 8th, witnessed by Barney Markson. Crowds were bludgeoned by police, who attacked without provocation. However, the story which appeared in the Sunday Sun told of deliberate violent attacks by strikers on the blackleg specials, which produced the resulting baton charge.

The failure of the General Strike brought the local organisational problem to a head. The Jewish Tailors' Union were anxious to retrieve their premises, but it was a long time before the Communist Party team moved out. They didn't leave empty handed, taking furniture belonging to the union and the gas fire too. It also transpired that no money had been paid for gas or rent and, as the fire was Gas Company property, a warrant was taken out for the arrest of the tenants - the union officials.irate union members contacted Barney, and he managed to secure their release. By threatening to tell all, he got the Party to take action with the result that the Gas

Company retrieved their fire. However no-one received much money from the episode, except the shareholders of local breweries. Although he worked afterwards on behalf of the communists, speaking to miners still out on strike, the parting of the ways was near. His opponents succeeded in ousting him claiming he had put forward views contrary to party policy. Once again Barney Markson found himself to be incompatible with another socialist party and because, of his generosity during the strike, the little grocery business he ran had failed and his savings were gone.

Well known now as a socialist and potential troublemaker, the authorities took no chances when King George V came to open the Tyne Bridge in 1928. Barney was taken to the local police station and interned for the day. He eventually joined the ILP and remained a faithful supporter until its demise in recent times. He liked nothing better than to attend socialist gatherings and regularly went to the Sunday evening meetings held in the Bigg Market. Sadly his business, which had never achieved its potential because of his political activity, failed in the 1950's and he was declared bankrupt. The ILP came to his rescue as he secured a position of national organiser - just - it was the casting vote of Annie Maxton, Jimmy's daughter which gave him the job. His brief was to travel the country trying to revive branches and helping candidates at elections, but it must have been an uphill struggle as the organisation was very much in eclipse. His period as an organiser lasted about three years after which he returned to the grocery trade, his bankruptcy having been discharged.

In later years he took a great interest in humanism and regularly attended meetings of the Tyneside Humanist Society. Although his health was sometimes poor, his mind was clear and active, and he would often turn up at socialist meetings to discuss the old issues with a new generation. Barney Markson died on January 7th 1981. He knew all about fighting for socialism and although he suffered as a result, he never compromised his principles.

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Edited by M Callcott and R Challinor

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TELLING IT AS IT WAS

The struggle against Fascism in the Thirties

Here are three reminiscences of the struggle against fascism in the inter-war years.

The first is by Tom Brown. He was a lifelong syndicalist, the author of numerous pamphlets, a member of the North East Labour History Society until his death a few years ago. He came from a family with a rebel tradition. His grandfather was introduced by Joseph Cowen to Garibaldi. The meeting took place above what is now Stan Seymour's sports' shop, Pilgrim Street, Newcastle, during the 9-hours strike of 1871. His own activities, however, began in 1911, when he participated in the school-children's strike. On a programme done by Radio Newcastle, he vividly recalled his memories.

After Tom Brown's death, notes for a projected autobiography were found. Unfortunately, these were only in rudimentary form. As a result of his final illness, he was losing his memory. The following excerpt, therefore, has had to be carefully edited.

The second is by Len Edmondson. He was a member of the ILP, a close friend of John McNair, who escaped from Spain with George Orwell, and ILP Northern Industrial Organiser at the time of the 1944 Tyneside apprentices' strike. Later, he became prominent in the engineering workers' union, serving on its seven-member executive committee and on the TUC General Council. Len addressed a meeting of the North East Labour History Society on the Spanish Civil War. He described how the ILP members in Britain collected money for medical relief while others volunteered to fight on the Aragon front in the POUM regiment.

The third comes from George Hardy's book, "Those Stormy Years", and is reproduced by kind permission of the publishers, Lawrence & Wishart. The Charlie Woods referred to in the text has had a remarkably full life of struggle. It extends from becoming a militant miner in the immediate post-1918 period, writing and helping to produce the Workers' Chronicle during the General Strike, holding the post of district secretary of the Tyneside Communist Party in the 1930s through to the present day. Last year, at the age of 83, he wrote a pamphlet, highly critical of the Euro-communist line adopted by the CP leadership, and was expelled from the Communist Party.

Tom Brown

One May morning I was near the Labour Exchange on Windmill Hills*, Gateshead. A few small groups of men were chatting or waiting for their time to sign on and a few, less than a dozen, were listening to an ILP speaker. Suddenly the sound of men's voices singing the Italian Fascist song were heard. Then a party of Mosley's fascists wearing black shirts rounded the corner; giving the Mussolini salute and chanting M-O-S-L-E-Y, M-O-S-L-E-Y. In quick march with threatening voices they strode to the ILP platform.

*Windmill Hills was a well-known "Speakers Corner" at the time

Then came a rush of men as the groups and the dole queue broke up to run and defend the platform. In a few minutes the fascists were scattered. The fallen ones were begging for mercy until they were rescued by some active members of Gateshead Labour Party.

After a few weeks a small party of Blackshirts came in peace and were not molested. But some workers realised that a much stronger Fascist party would not be so peaceful and a band of them formed the Anti Fascist League in Newcastle and Tyneside. Good open air and indoor meetings were held and new members recruited. Marches showed that the older men remembered their military life in World War one.

The ancient hall of the Smith's Guild in Newcastle was hired and the people who lived nearby kept an eye on the premises at night. Many of these good people were street sellers and offered their barrows and carts to form quick barricades to keep the Fascists in if they attacked. Some of them, such as the newspaper sellers who worked in and around the Central Station, were able to keep us informed of Fascist visitors to the area.

Our meetings, especially in the Newcastle Big Market and on the Town Moor, were well attended and applauded. The Newcastle police were courteous to us, even though our support was almost exclusively working class with fifty per cent of that out of work. The Labour Party said "Don't do anything about it, just leave them to the police to deal with". The Communist Party said "Just ridicule them - shout Micky Mouse at them." This deadly weapon had been suggested by the national leadership of the C.P.: it referred to the Fascist rank and file uniform of black shirt and light gray flannel trousers.

Only two prominent members of the Labour Party supported us - they were both full time officials of the Transport and General Workers Union. Our members singly, or in pairs, interviewed fascist recruits and in most cases persuaded them to pack it in.

At first members of the Jewish Community appeared interested, but that changed when Mosley was interviewed by a Jewish delegation. They reported that Mosley had given an assurance that neither he or his party were anti-semitic. With this they were very happy.

The trade union movement, the Labour Party and the middle-class Liberals also returned to their slumbers. Only when Mosley put up New Party candidates against the Labour Party were Trade Unionists, for a short time, roused to anger. To oppose Fascism was never popular in such circles. I recall when Sylvia Pankhurst tried to awaken the public to the great danger.

The famous suffragette organised a meeting in London to arouse public interest in the danger posed by Italian Fascism. We booked the hall of the Italian Club in Soho and publicised the meeting. Two Italian MPs were to speak on the murder of Matteotti, - the socialist leader of the Italian parliament.

About two dozen people arrived at the Hall. They found that the Italian Blackshirts, who controlled Soho, had ordered the club to cancel the booking. About half our number retired to a nearby cafe where we heard our Italian visitors and recorded their speeches for the press.

Len Edmondson

I remember in 1935 when Mosley tried to address a meeting in Newcastle City Hall. On the night Mosley was speaking, I was at another meeting at the Westfield Hall, Gateshead. Then, suddenly, a man burst into the Hall and said Mosley's meeting had been smashed up after only 15 minutes. He had been howled down by the City Hall audience. Every

time he rose to speak he was drowned out. I don't think there was any violence, indeed, I don't think it was necessary. The large number of anti-fascists in the hall made the blackshirts powerless to do anything. Mosley had to close the meeting simply because it was just impossible to continue. Normally, the blackshirts used to throw people out who heckled. But the opposition was so massive that they could not start throwing people out. If they had tried to eject people, it, would have led to violence.

Before the Mosley meeting anti-Fascist propaganda was being circulated. A worker's bookshop on Westgate Road, which I think was run by the Communist Party, published an anti-fascist news sheet on the Friday before the Sunday meeting. This was a single page broadsheet called 'Mosley Unmasked'. At this time the Blackshirts had an office just off New Bridge Street. The windows of the office were covered with posters and photographs of Mosley.

Another anti-fascist demonstration happened in 1934 when the blackshirts were due to use Gateshead Town Hall for a meeting. On this march a bit of fighting and scuffling took place. The fascists marched along Swinburne Street, which was right outside the police station. At this point there was a scuffle and a friend of mine got lifted by the police.

Most of the physical opposition to Blackshirts was put up by the ILP and the Communist Party. The ILP played a very active part against the Fascists and more people joined in once a bit of leadership was given.

George Hardy

Soon after I began to work in Newcastle, a loudspeaker van came one Saturday morning along Westgate Road, where our district office was, announcing that Captain Joyce would speak on the Town Moor on the afternoon of the following day. I said to Charlie Woods, the district secretary, "Could we stop him?" We had just 24 hours to do it. We got out a leaflet - it must have been the briefest I ever drafted - and it just said: "Attention, Attention!" gave the time and place of the Mosleyite meeting and wound up with the words: "Fascists should not be allowed to speak in Newcastle." We had it printed in time to hand out to the Saturday night crowds. Next day, at 3 p.m., about 800 people turned up at the Town Moor. They began singing soon after Joyce started. He couldn't make himself heard, even over the microphone, and he retaliated by singing "God save the King." Then the crowd roared "Rat!" and sang louder than ever. Joyce had to pack up.

The Geordies were the victors. It was the last time, I believe, that this traitor's voice was heard in Newcastle until he started snarling at us as Lord Haw Haw over the Nazi radio stations early in the war. The meeting ended with only one casualty. Tom Richardson was fined for disturbing a public gathering.

We had several other brushes with the Mosley mob and came off well. I was speaking about Mussolini's Abyssinian war at an open air meeting at the Cross in Carlisle, when one of them kept shouting "Liar". He was standing near him and, turning to them, I said: "Let me tell you what these cowards did at their meeting in Olympia, London." I described how they had used coshes on interrupters, including my own son George. "I saw women hurled out of the meeting with razor blade slashes across their breasts. Ambulances were used to take the wounded to hospital" I got no further. The women of Carlisle turned on the Mosleyite and told him in unmistakable words to get away from them. He beat it quick. The meeting resolved on the spot that: "Fascists should be prohibited from speaking in Carlisle", and a deputation took this demand to the local authorities.

Two weeks later when a fascist tried to hold another meeting at the Cross, a huge crowd chased him and his band of thugs right down the city streets. When they tried to book a public hall for Mosley as a come back they were refused, and I believe that was the end of Fascist propaganda in Carlisle.

NORTHEAST LABOUR HISTORY SOCIETY

THE North East Labour History Society was formed in 1967 by people in the area with the following objectives:

➤ To bring together those interested in research into labour history in the North East

➤ To encourage and help organise such research

➤ To assist in the preservation of existing records

➤ To organise support for these aims by such means as seminars, lectures, bibliographical guides etc.

The Society publishes an annual Bulletin for its members, which it circulates widely, and has

regular meetings in various parts of the area. It is anxious that the work it set out to do be expanded and in this area with its wealth of working class history the need

for more labourers in the field is constant. The help of sympathetic individuals and organisations is also of prime importance if resources are to be adequate.

Individual membership is invited from interested persons, as are affiliations from trade unions,

co-operative societies, political organisations, libraries, educational establishments etc. Subscription is £2.50 per annum (including Bulletin supply), payable on 1 October (£1.00 for students and retired persons), £3.50 for institutions.



ESTABLISHED 1967

Details about the North East Labour History Society are available from
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The Society publishes a regular Bulletin No 17 1983 (price £1 plus 50p postage and packaging) and back issues Nos 1-16 (price on application) are available from
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Newcastle upon Tyne

Dear Dr Marx....

Letters of Joseph Cowen to Karl Marx

These letters shed fresh light on the formation of the Democratic Federation, forerunner of the Social Democratic Federation, Britain's first avowedly Marxist organisation. The early 1880s was a period fraught with troubles. The newly-elected Liberal Government, under Gladstone, faced manifold unrest: workers and middle-class radicals chafed against its limitations, miners indulged in strikes of alarming ferocity and the Government's Irish Coercion Bill met stiff opposition. There was much criticism of the Liberal caucus, excluding working-class candidates from all but the most hopeless parliamentary seats, and some saw the answer as "the direct representation".

Joseph Cowen, Member of Parliament for Newcastle, stood at the centre of this agitation. His letter to Marx, dated February 1 1881, shows he played an active part in arranging the first meeting. It also reveals he encountered the problem of procuring a suitable venue, an indication of the hostility the project aroused in certain circles. Nevertheless, the preliminary meeting took place on March 5 1881, and Cowen presided.

Both letters to Marx mention Parliament. At that time, 65 Irish Nationalist M.P.s, hell bent on destroying the Coercion Bill, resorted to plain obstruction. They were prepared to throw sand in the parliamentary machine, sabotaging all other legislation. Much to the disquiet of local Liberals, Joseph Cowen, always a fervent believer in Irish Home Rule, aligned himself completely with the forces of disruption. Professor Keith Harris says such was his close relationship with the Irish Nationalist M.P.s that it even extended to him having their letters addressed to him when they suspected police interference with their mail. (Dictionary of Labour Biography, vol. 1, p.84)

Marx hoped the treatment - or, rather, mistreatment - of the Irish people by the British Government would act as a catalyst, uniting workers in both countries in a common struggle against oppression. A jubilant Frederick Engels expressed this view when he wrote to Eduard Bernstein, a German socialist, on March 12 1881: "a proletarian radical party is now forming under the leadership of Joseph Cowen (M.P. for Newcastle), who is an old Chartist, half, if not entirely, communist and a very worthy chap. Ireland is bringing all this about, Ireland is the driving force ..."

These dreams were never fully realised. The tide of discontent receded, leaving the Social Democratic Federation, a small and isolated dogmatic sect, in a world of indifference. And as for Joseph Cowen - soon he dropped out. Although the exact reason for his departure remains a mystery, it seems probable he disliked the kind of personal leadership and discipline H M Hyndman imposed on the Federation. Even so, in his own idiosyncratic way, he remained true to his form of middle-class radicalism. Revolutionaries like the Russian anarchist, Prince Peter Kropotkin, were always welcome at his Blaydon home; his publication of the miners' case in his newspaper in 1886 resulted in the owners of South Medomsley colliery being awarded the then colossal sum of £1,200 in damages; and the columns of the Newcastle Chronicle were always open to advanced thinkers, including Frederick Engels, who wrote about the workers' triumphant advance in the German elections of 1890.

The Cowen letters are contained in the Marx-Engels Collection of the International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, and are reprinted with its permission.

23, Marlborough
Lo. Kensington, D.C.

D 869

who to be held, refused to let
it. There is now a bill of

Feb 15th, 1881.

holding a meeting in the

Dear Dr. Marx -
7230a

apartment Hall, but whether

I have just got your

letter, and I am glad to hear

from you. I trust that in

some of it can, I can, I have not

this trouble because your health

some tickets sent, and that

facilities are provided for

you getting there. When the

place meeting in N. James's

have somewhat subsided, I

will do my best, the pleasure

of fixing you, a call some

Sunday morning. I have

D 869

~~6-3,3~~

not recently heard from our
friend Harney; but I believe
he is in his usual health.

Yours very truly

J. W. Cowen.

72356

23 Onslow Square
50 Kensington, S W

Feb 1st, 1881

Dear Dr Marx

I have just got your letter, and am pleased to hear from you. I trust that in this terrible weather your health has not suffered. The contemplated meeting in St James's Hall has had to be abandoned. The persons in charge of the Hall, when they knew the object for which the meeting was to be held, refused to let it. There is now a talk of holding a meeting in the agricultural Hall, but whether it can be got or not I am sure. If it can, I will not fail to see that you have some tickets sent, and that facilities are provided for your getting there. When the present troubles in parliament have somewhat subsided, I will do myself the pleasure of giving you a call some Sunday morning. I have not recently heard from our friend Harney, but I believe he is in his usual health.

Yours very truly

Jos Cowen

1851

1-4

D 870

22, DUNSTON SQUARE,
SOUTH KENSINGTON, S. W.

An address yesterday -

Feb. 13th 1851

My dear Dr. Ham

You will have thought

me very unaccountable in

not writing you before. But

I wrote the enclosed the day

I got your letter. I do

had mislaid your address

I could not send it -

Yrs. Truly
Wm. Barry

We have had a
short fight in the House
& Commons lately

Yours truly

J. B. Conden

(7231)

J. Ham

23 Onslow Square
50 Kensington, S W

Feb 23th 1881

My dear Dr Marx

You will have thought me very unmannerly in not writing to you before. But I wrote the the day I got your letter. As I had mislaid your address I could not send it. Mr Barry gave me the address yesterday.

We have had a stout fight in the House of Commons lately.

Yours truly

Jos Cowen

Joseph Cowen



Notes

George Julian Harney - a prominent physical force Chartist who represented the North East at the first Chartist Convention in 1839. He edited the 'Red Republican' which published the first English translation of the Communist Manifesto. In 1853/54 he was co-editor of the 'Northern Tribune' with Joseph Cowen. A lifelong radical.

Maltman Barry - a friend of Marx and a founder member of the First International. Also a journalist. Involved in the Tory Gold Scandal of 1885 which provided Tory funds to SDF candidates in order to split the Liberal vote in Marylebone and Hampstead.

Letters of a Portuguese Consul, 1877-79

Translated and introduced by Dr Alan Freeland

University of Southampton

During the depression of the late 1870s the position of Portuguese consul in Newcastle upon Tyne was occupied by a man best known today as Portugal's major novelist of the 19th century, José Maria de Eça de Queirós. In the four letters published here in translation, he reports to the Portuguese Foreign Minister of the day, João de Andrade Corvo, on the industrial conflict in the Northumberland and Durham coal-fields during these years of slump, falling coal prices, and successive reductions in miners' wages. The aim of this introduction is to set the author very briefly in his Portuguese context.

Eça de Queirós was born in 1845 in Póvoa de Varzim, a small coastal town in the Minho province of northern Portugal. The son of a lawyer and public prosecutor, he himself studied law at the University of Coimbra in the 1860s and, after brief experiences of legal practice, journalism and local government, entered the diplomatic service. He was appointed consul in Havana in 1872 and transferred two years later to Newcastle, taking charge of the consulate (located in what was then Eldon Square) at the end of December 1874. In 1879 he moved to Bristol, and finally, in 1888, to Paris where he worked until his death in 1900. Although he had begun to publish before his consular duties took him abroad, it was during his fourteen years in England that he wrote most of his major realist novels, the period in Newcastle being particularly productive. Here, in addition to various works that were not published until after his death, he wrote *O Primo Basílio* (1878), expanded and revised an early version of *O Crime do Padre Amaro* for a second and then a third version (1875, 1876, 1880), and probably conceived his masterpiece *Os Maias*, written mainly in Bristol and published in 1888.² From Newcastle and Bristol he also sent two series of chronicles to Portuguese and Brazilian newspapers, perceptive pieces on a wide range of current events - from the serious issues of British policy in Ireland, Afghanistan or Egypt, to the excitement aroused in London by the arrival of Mr Pongo, the first gorilla to be brought to Europe.

In the early 1870s Eça de Queirós was closely associated with a group of outstanding young intellectuals in Portugal, among whom the other most notable writers were the poet and essayist Antero de Quental and the historian Oliveira Martins. From a 'scientific' and mildly socialist perspective formed by eclectic reading of contemporary European thinkers, this 'generation of 1870' set out to challenge the orthodoxies of a traditional society. Their interpretations of this society are permeated by the familiar biological metaphor, elaborated in Herbert Spencer's notion of the 'social organism'. Thus they locate a brief period of national vigour in the Middle Ages and early Renaissance, and regard Portugal's history since the late 16th century as a long process of decay. In the 19th century, following the crises of the French invasion, the loss of Brazil and a period of civil wars, Portugal in their view had lost the last vestiges of its identity as a nation. The potential contradiction between this pessimistic vision of Portuguese decadence and contemporary doctrines of 'Progress' was averted by diagnosing Portugal as a sick organism. The causes of the disease to be attacked were the dominant institutions and social groups, seen as obstacles blocking the 'natural' process of social evolution: the

Church, the constitutional monarch (the Republican Party was founded in the 1870s), the bureaucrats and politicians - all targets of Eça de Queirós's satirical realism.

His early novels have much in common with what became known as Naturalism, particularly in their 'scientific' assumptions about human behaviour. These works display a strong sense of social determinism: at the beginning of each novel the characters are defined as products of their social environment, and the story that follows is a predictable sequence of cause and effect triggered by the interaction of these characters. The implication, then, is that society functions according to laws which are analogous to, or perhaps even extensions of, the laws by which the natural sciences explain the physical world. Such assumptions are reflected to some extent in these consular letters, in which he seems to accept, at least initially, the inevitability of 'the natural working of economic laws', with the corollary that prices should rule wages - a position, of course, which was also that of the miners' own leaders.

It is clear from the letters, however, that in accepting the free operation of economic forces as part of the natural order of things Eça de Queirós stops far short of advocating a struggle for the survival of the fittest. On the contrary, in his social ideas there is a strong emphasis on social justice, an emphasis which stems partly from his reading of Proudhon. In a lecture delivered in 1871, part of a series of 'democratic lectures' in the Lisbon Casino, he argued that 'the spirit of the age' is Revolution and that the necessary revolutionary art is a critical realism that would help develop the idea of justice in society. What he means by Revolution becomes clearer in the protest that he published when the Government intervened to ban the series: he and his colleagues want revolution prepared in the realm of ideas and science, spread by the peaceful transition towards social justice, is very evident in these letters from Newcastle, notably in his enthusiasm for the arbitration tribunal as a mechanism for conciliation that leads to 'just' solutions and avoids class conflict. Nevertheless, there is a marked change of tone in the progression of these letters, particularly in the final two, as he becomes increasingly aware of the miners' plight, much more sympathetic towards their position and - one may perhaps infer - less sure of his own early idealistic theories of social change.

In the final novel that he wrote in England, Os Maias, Eça de Queirós abandoned the deterministic relationship between environment and character apparent in his fiction of the mid 1870s. This complex novel, an anti-Positivist in its implications, uses a story of mistaken identity and unwitting incest to reflect upon the final demise of the old Portuguese aristocracy and the rise of a vulgar nouveau riche bourgeoisie which, the novel suggests, has become the dominant social class. The sense of Portugal's decadence that he conveys in this novel may be contrasted with his admiration, at least in the previous decade and despite the depression, for the industrial strength of Britain - an enthusiasm particularly evident in a long report to his Foreign Minister that pre-dates the letters published here, 'Trade and Industry in the North of England, 1874-1875'.⁵ At the same time, he was aware of the negative side of this 'Progress', in terms of the degradation of the urban environment and of human relationships. In a personal letter of 25 February 1878 he describes, and perhaps to some extent invents, a typical Saturday in Newcastle:

If you have lived in England, in the provinces, in a typical industrial city, you know what Saturday is like: an immense brutal multitude,

rough and noisy, fills these wide streets crudely lit by the rows of harsh gas-lamps and by the shop-windows; the bars and gin-palaces are ablaze with light; cabs rattle noisily from one station to another; drunks stagger about and fight; at the corner a street-preacher, overcome by an attack of religion, howls lines from the Bible; the music-halls emit the shrill of flutes and the clatter of studded heels stamping a bestial polka; insolent prostitutes pester clients, demanding their wages; dishevelled boys, brandishing newspapers, shout furiously about Russian treachery; two enormous policemen drag away an old woman, drunk and swearing; groups of miners, pipes in their mouths, followed by their greyhounds, talk in the harsh tongue of Northumbria; couples go by, arms round each other, kissing shamelessly; the whistling of trains pierces the thick air; a damp fog, yellowish, stinking, freezing, drives one to alcohol; and in the squares and alleys, at the restaurant pianos, patriots excited by drink sing the new war song: 'We don't want to fight, but by Jingo if we do! '....

On such days, someone from Portugal can only dream of a village in the Minho, or of the peace of a convent.⁶

The final note of nostalgia here for an older, pre-industrial way of life indicates the feeling conveyed in some of his final writing from Paris in the 1890s, though he retains an ironic awareness that dreaming of rural peace does not solve the conflicts of modern society.

The translations that follow are based on texts that I have established from the manuscript letters in the Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Lisbon. The first three letters were published in the 1920s, with some omissions and inaccuracies, by Archer de Lima in Eça de Queiros, Diplomata; the final letter is still unpublished in Portuguese. In order to facilitate reference I have added the date of each letter at the beginning, in square brackets.

I

Sir,

On the 29th of May the coal-miners of this district declared a total strike. Some weeks earlier the mine-owners had notified the workers that from that date, in view of the growing depression in industry and trade, they would reduce wages by 10%, abolishing at the same time the long-established concession of free housing and coal. To justify this measure the owners showed that, with current wages and selling prices, the mines were operating at a continual loss in this period of crisis. Furthermore, the wages of the Northumberland miners were an exception to the general wage rates of the country and a heavy burden on the owners, so that while the miners of South Wales and the other coal-fields worked eight hours a day for three shillings, the Northumberland miners enjoyed wages of six shillings a day, with the privilege of free housing and weekly distributions of coal. Besides, under the present system, their working time amounted to little more than five hours of production.

In the face of this resolution on the part of the owners, the miner miners decided upon a mass strike. This decision made a deep impression, the more so because for many years all conflicts between miners and owners have been settled by an arbitration tribunal consisting of owners and workers. The arbitration tribunal has always produced very good results. Under this legislative procedure all the bitterness is immediately taken

out of disputes. Decisions are not left to the emotions, the owners have no means of enforcing their demands, the workers have no opportunity to heed revolutionary promptings, and the tribunal establishes a very proper equality between the two sides. On this occasion, however, the miners refused to submit the dispute to the arbitration tribunal.. The mine-owners then presented new proposals. Setting aside the issue of housing and free coal for later decision, they maintained only the need for the 10% reduction in wages, begging the miners in a spirit of understanding to submit to arbitration. The miners, however, refused and - against the advice of their leaders, against the principles that they themselves have established, against the spirit of all the decisions of the Miners' Union - decided to strike. In abandoning the principle of arbitration they have shown that they wish to return to the old process of struggle by means of strike, and that the agreement and harmony that used to exist years ago between miners and owners in this great mining district have disappeared, giving way to a state of mistrust and hostility.

18,000 miners are on strike - which means 50,000 people without financial support. All the mines in the district are idle. The existing coal reserves can not last more than two weeks. Shortly, therefore, there will be a repetition of what is called 'coal famine'. The first result will be that the movement of shipping on the Tyne will stop. The whole fleet of colliers that came here for cargoes of coal will now go to their men, in the expectation of a long period without work. All the industries dependent on coal in the district, especially the iron industry, will have a period of inactivity. And this stagnation, coming at a time of depression, will cause serious economic damage throughout the North of England.

Yet I do not believe that the strike will last long. Public opinion opinion, which in England is the great driving force of events, is deeply hostile to the workers' attitude, and their own leaders are making desperate efforts to bring them round to more conciliatory feelings. But what will decide them will be their own poverty. The past few years have been bad, and certainly the miners have been unable to save in order to face this crisis. The trades unions and the Miners' Union have almost empty coffers and can give little support to the strikers. The miners in the rest of the country, at this time of low wages, are barely able to help their brothers in Northumberland. Public charity, in general, will not be shown for a strike which is regarded without sympathy and which reveals on the part of the miners an unthinking spirit of revolt in which even the most liberal men see a dangerous symptom.

However, the strike is continuing, though negotiations are in progress to reach a settlement. I will inform you of what happens in this unfortunate episode in the history of mining.

The income of this Consulate is seriously affected by the strike. Even the period of apprehension and hesitation that preceded it was damaging, because since the beginning of May, or even mid-April, only six ships have been dispatched to Portugal! This represents a reduction of 80% in revenue!

Consulate of Portugal in Newcastle, June 2nd, 1877.
The Minister and Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.
I have the honour, Sir, to be your most obedient servant

Jose Maria d'Eca de Queiroz.

II

Sir,

Further to the report that I had the honour of giving you on the coal miners' strike in this district, I must now inform you that this regrettable misunderstanding between owners and workers is fortunately approaching a period of conciliation.

From the first days of the strike the workers displayed a spirit of animosity, resistance and indiscipline that came as a disagreeable surprise. They not only stubbornly ignored the intelligent advice of their natural leaders, the leaders of the trade union, but even disagreed violently with each other. There was a deplorable tendency in the working masses to accept neither argument nor reason, and a desire to avenge the wage reduction (an imposition on them which they regarded as robbery) by means of a strike that would ruin the industry of the district, thus forgetting their own interests and thinking only of their anger. The feeling of the workers at that stage might be graphically expressed thus: 'we will die of hunger, but they will go bankrupt'.

It was in this situation that two large meetings of workers took place - one in Newcastle attended by more than 6,000 miners, and another two miles outside Newcastle at which about 10,000 men gathered. Given the over-excited state of the workers, it was not difficult to predict that these meetings would be disorderly protests and would not lead to any rational solution; and that was how it turned out. The union leaders who came to preside at the meetings, from their very first words begging the miners to submit to arbitration on the question of wages, were cruelly shouted down. One worker at the Newcastle meeting explained with some logic why the men rejected the 'farce' of arbitration. The arbitration tribunal, he argued, consists of two workers and two capitalists - and the arbitrator, who in fact is the one who decides the issue by his casting vote, is always a capitalist, or at least a man whose connections, interests and education incline him towards capital rather than labour. So in every case the arbitrator's decision is invariably unfavourable to the workers, and arbitration thus becomes a hypocritical way of legalizing robbery. Against this firm opinion on the part of the men, all the logic and reason of the leaders was of course impotent. The meetings became violent. Impassioned speakers came forward, angrily expounding the traditional grievances of the proletariat. Communist views were heard, as in the worst revolutionary times. Absurd proposals were made, inspired by the anger of the frustrated crowds: that they should organize a general strike in every industry; that a hundred thousand workers should go to London to protest in front of Parliament; that the money and property of the owners should be taken from them by force, etc. When one worker began to read an ode to conciliation, he was greeted by a general cry: 'Bread! What we want is bread!' The situation was becoming serious, and the meeting was dissolved.

Certainly, in a society as strongly organized as England, these demonstrations are not a danger to the social order; but they were a regrettable symptom, because it was the first time that English workers were seen to lose confidence in legal procedures and give heed to revolutionary promptings. The union leaders understood then what they should have understood earlier: that meetings of workers are always, or almost always, disorderly and sterile. A few thousand men gathered in a field with their bands, emblems and banners, shouting, drinking and

becoming excited, tend to put more trust in strength than in reason and are more inclined to violent decision than to legal solutions. The worker who on his own is reasonable and intelligent becomes revolutionary in the enthusiasm of a meeting: an assembly of resentful men invariably leads to a display of brutal instincts. The worker who in the bosom of his family see issues in a just way, who readily listens to what reason suggests or accepts what necessity imposes, does not have the same calmness of mind in a large meeting, in the midst of infectious excitement and surrounded by rowdy hot-heads. 6,000 men gathered in the open, noisy and impulsive, naturally think the world is theirs. The leaders understood this and had a clever idea: to avoid all the emotion and to resort to the clamness of a ballot. They then held a kind of plebiscite: each of the 20,000 workers on strike received a paper with the question 'Are you in favour of arbitration? Yes or no?' The outcome was obvious; the impetuosity of the meetings had vanished; each worker, having calmed down, had to answer this decisive question: whether to vote for the strike which would mean three or four months of hunger, or for arbitration which would immediately bring work and a wage, pending the final settlement of the dispute. And so the same men in the enthusiasm of the meetings had shouted against arbitration, at home with their families and in cold blood did not dare vote for the strike, that is, for the wretchedness of their wives and children. An overwhelming majority voted for arbitration. The tribunal was set up and its work is now in progress.

One may ask if the workers are entirely right in considering arbitration a 'farce'. No. In the first place, it was they who invented it, demanded it and united to achieve it by means of appeals, newspapers, pamphlets etc. In many districts of England and Scotland the workers, despite their efforts, have still not achieved this great benefit. The first advantage of arbitration is that an owner proposing a wage reduction has to justify his demand before the arbitrators, present his books and accounts, and show the extent of his business and profits. This means that no owner can capriciously impose reductions; since he must justify them in public he does not dare request them gratuitously. Secondly, the publicity of these declarations acquaints the workers with the state of the owners' business, the profits, the return on capital, and thus enables them to relate their wages to the proportion of profit. It is true that decisions recently have been unfavourable to the workers, but only relatively unfavourable. Whenever the owners have wanted to impose a reduction in wages of ten or fifteen per cent, the arbitration tribunal has only allowed a reduction of five or ten per cent. Whereas the old method of reducing wages involved posing a notice at the pithead announcing the reduction and facing the workers with the alternatives of accepting or being dismissed, the modern method of arbitration allows the dispute to be argued for weeks between owners and workers, taking into account the laws that govern the economy, the market, and the rate of interest. Between the old method and the modern, then, lies all the difference between brute force and reason, between arbitration and law. Finally, arbitration, which in this period of commercial crisis has only served so far to decide wage reductions, one day when prosperity returns will serve to decide wage increases. The same legal process that the owners have been using to lower wages will be used one day by the workers to raise them.

Such, in broad outline, are the history and moral issues of this crisis which fortunately seems to be over, thanks to the firmness of the union leaders and their skilful understanding of the nature of the English worker.

Consulate of Portugal in Newcastle, July 10th, 1877.
The Minister and Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.
I have the honour, Sir, to be your most obedient servant

Jose Maria d'Eca de Queiroz.

III

Sir,

This is the second time in the short space of four months that I must inform you of a conflict between owners and workers in the collieries of this district. These constantly recurring struggles are undermining the wealth of the county and, what is worse, creating feelings of hostility and mistrust between the two classes and a division of interests that may lead in the future to social consequences far more serious than the economic consequences.

It used to be said that in these northern counties relations between owners and workers set a fine example of harmony and proved that attitudes and customs were becoming more democratic. However, it is now clear that this fraternity was simply the result of prosperity. When the coal industry could give the owners maximum profits and provide the workers with the highest wages in the kingdom, the comfort of the former and the prosperity of the latter produced a golden peace. But the moment the crisis came the conflict of interests led immediately to hostile relations. Concession gave way to struggle. The truce, established by the appeasement of ambitions temporarily satisfied, came to an end, and class selfishness reappeared with all its worst characteristics: mutual mistrust, the intolerant exaggeration of contradictory interests. Since the beginning of the 'coal crisis' every effort of the owners has been to reduce wages - which, as a burden on the cost of production, cut the return on capital - without giving any consideration to the well-being of the workers. The workers, on the other hand, have felt it necessary to resist what they see as base exploitation of human labour, without giving any recognition to the natural working of economic laws. Hence these successive strikes that are having such a deeply disturbing effect on this district in which coal is the great elemental force of industry. The coal business has undoubtedly been going through a severe crisis. The origins of this crisis lie in the past and are complex, but may be set out briefly as follows. Six or seven years ago when, as a result of the political and industrial state of Europe, England - especially the North (Northumberland and Durham) - had become the great, indeed almost the only coal producer and these firms gave an extraordinary rate of interest, there was naturally a rush of activity and capital into this industry. Coal production expanded at an astonishing rate; every week that passed saw the exploitation of a new mine. Such was the influx of orders that the buyers in the greatest hurry, who wanted the cargo dispatched more quickly, would offer as a premium so much per cent above the price; and, with an enormous merchant fleet, the docks on the Tyne were constantly full. The reaction was not long in coming. The great political and military upheaval of 1870-71 had passed: Europe was beginning to settle down and return to work; continental buyers were taking fright at the high price of English coal. The cost of production had risen in England but fallen on the Continent, and France, Belgium, Italy and Germany devoted themselves to exploiting their own coal deposits. America, a great customer of England, did the same. About this time and due to the same

at the very least the legal procedures should be respected and the reduction imposed by the tribunal of arbitrators, thus making it legal rather than merely arbitrary. But to say 'we are enforcing a reduction' is to adopt a system that can only lead to mistrust, hostility and class enmity. That is what the miners say.

This is the state of affairs, and the strike is continuing. The Miners' National Union is helping the Newcastle workers, giving each man six shillings a week.¹⁰ Individual donations have been received but they are insufficient. The winter weather is severe, the men have no savings, and hunger is beginning to make its appearance. Some families are emigrating, others are dispersing to look for casual labour. Since the miners have free housing and coal, some owners were of the view that this coal and housing should be taken from them. I am almost ashamed to have to write this detail, but it is indispensable if I am to represent accurately the feelings that prevail. I am certain that such an idea could never have occurred to the owners, were it not for the deep resentment and the desire for reprisals that separate the two classes. What would be the situation of thousands of families having to live without shelter in the open country at this time of year when, if it is not pouring with rain, there are driving blizzards? How could this be endured by the women, weakened by privation, or by the sick, the old and the little children? Indeed, this was the method employed during the strike last June, but that was in a mild season, dry and warm, and people could sleep in the fields.

Fortunately, no such decision has been taken so far. Who knows what fatal consequences it might bring.

Due to the strike coal exports have almost ceased. In the Consulate activity has been very slight: ten or twelve days go by without a cargo being dispatched to Portuguese ports. The little coal that is being exported comes from Durham and it is only in gas-coal that some dealing continues, though to a very limited extent.

I very much hope that I shall soon be able to inform you that this conflict is over, and to announce the reorganization of work on a basis that will ensure equity and guarantee prosperity.

Consulate of Portugal in Newcastle, January 18th, 1878.
The Minister and Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.
I have the honour, Sir, to be your most obedient servant

Jose Maria d'Eca de Queiroz.

IV

Sir,

The prolonged commercial and industrial crisis which for four years has been slowly destroying the wealth of this district is aggravated at the moment by the formidable strike of the mine-workers in County Durham. Indeed, in the industrial history of the North of England there has not been a more serious clash between capital and labour. Almost fifty thousand workers have abandoned the mines, and what makes this movement all the more regrettable is the fact that the workers - who in every previous strike over the wage issue have always shown moderation, a healthy respect for the law, an honest confidence in the legal decisions of the arbitration tribunals, an intelligent grasp of the economic laws that govern the rise

and fall of wages - these workers now seem to be possessed exclusively by a brutal instinct of revolt. For days the rich mining district of Durham was threatened by mob anarchy: there were bloody clashes between police and workers, houses were burned down, workers unwilling to take part in the strike were barbarously maltreated, and it is only with difficulty that the union leaders are managing to placate the despair of the multitude on strike.¹¹

Economically, this movement could not begin in more disadvantageous circumstances for the coal industry. In fact, this industry in the North of England is literally struggling to survive. Not only has it been suffering as a consequence of the industrial crisis that has affected the whole of Europe, but its difficulties are aggravated by the competition from other coal districts in England and by the growing development of coal-mining in Europe and America. To mention only England, districts that used to be almost unknown in the coal market and that only began to exploit their deposits seven years ago when the North of England was in the grip of the 'coal famine', now show a respectable level of production and have their own regular customers. Scottish coal, once so scorned, now occupies in the market a position of advantage that is improving all the time. This coal can be loaded on board ship at a much lower price than coal from Newcastle and Durham and, with the construction of the Forth Docks, is becoming progressively easier to sell. Above all, however, it is South Wales that is winning the competition with Newcastle. The speed with which the Welsh coal-field has been developed is without precedent in the history of English industry. The statistics show that while increasing quantities of coal are being exported from the Welsh ports, the quantity of coal leaving ports in the North of England is falling continuously. Last month 421,928 tons of coal left these ports, while in the same period 514,296 tons were exported from the Welsh ports - that is, 92,368 tons more than the combined exports of Northumberland and Durham. There is no lack of evidence that this thrusting development of the Welsh coal-fields is fatal to the coal-fields of the North. Newcastle, indeed, will always dominate the gas-coal market, but in steam-coal its market is shrinking all the time and it is unable to compete with Wales. Welsh coal is undoubtedly of superior quality to Newcastle coal: it burns less quickly, thus saving fuel; it produces twice as much heat and hence increased power; and it does not give off the thick smoke of Newcastle coal that is so particularly unpleasant in steam-ships. Furthermore, since the cost of production in Wales is lower, the selling price on board or at the pithead is more competitive than the price of Newcastle coal.

It was in these circumstances that the Durham mine-owners, in order to reduce the cost of production and the related selling price, proposed a 15% reduction in the miners' wages. Hence this formidable strike.

It is not easy to know to what extent the owners' demand is justified. It is true that the majority of mines have been working lately without much gain, some at scarcely any profit and others at a loss. It is true that in many cases the owners would have suspended production in their mines had they not drawn back at the grave moral responsibility of making idle the hundreds of workers they employ, and had they not been restrained equally by the consideration that a mine abandoned for a few months undergoes deterioration often amounting to total destruction. What remains to be discovered, however, is whether lowering the cost of production and the selling price will be enough to revive prosperity. It is a superficially established maxim these days, or one adopted in England at least, that if every business and industry reduced production costs and

prices the country would again see the return of a golden age of industry. This may be roughly true in normal times, but in the present circumstances, and in this particular case of the northern coal industry, it is very doubtful that the price reduction will produce a rise in profits. It is possible to impose a cut in the cost of production when it is certain that the market would have an influx of orders if prices were relatively low. However, what specifically characterizes this coal crisis is precisely that there is no possibility of orders coming in even when prices drop: this crisis, in essence, is one of excess of supply and lack of demand. A Member of Parliament recently explained the depression disrupting the coal industry with a phrase which, in its vivid crudeness, is the best interpretation of the crisis: 'Newcastle', he said, 'lives by selling the world coal; now just at this moment the world doesn't want coal, or if it does, it doesn't want it from Newcastle'. It does indeed prefer to look for it in Scotland, Cardiff or Swansea, or to take it out of its own coal-fields, and no amount of price-cutting will restore prosperity to a market when or orders fail to come in, systematically obeying the laws of economics.

It can be said that in their behaviour in this conflict both owner owners and workers are right in some ways: the owners are suffering from the depression in the industry, and the workers are suffering from the depression of wages. Miners, generally speaking, are a class that is badly paid in relation to the difficulty and danger of the work they do. With the 15% reduction that the owners now want to impose on them they would be absolutely unable to maintain their families. Since this reduction must be followed by another of the same order if the coal crisis continues, their situation will be reduced to organised begging.

It is impossible to believe, however, that they can continue their resistance. The Miners' Association does not have funds to sustain the strike. Seventy contos de reis a week would be needed to maintain the forty thousand workers that are idle.¹² It is not possible to count on help from workers in other industries, which are equally affected by identical crises; and, in these difficult times, middle class charity as a rule is scarce. Many miners, therefore, seeing that there is no possibility of well-paid work, are beginning to emigrate. Others are seeking refuge in the industries less severely affected by the commercial crisis. The rest, one must assume, will find themselves forced to give in to the owners' demand, and will drag out an existence of arduous work and meagre pay.

Consulate of Portugal in Newcastle, April 15th, 1879.

The Minister and Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

I have the honour, Sir, to be your most obedient servant

Jose Maria d'Eca de Queiroz

Consul (in charge of the Consulate).¹³

NOTES

1. I would like to thank warmly the following for their help in tracing Eca de Queiros's consular papers: Mr Eugenio Lisboa, Portuguese Cultural Counsellor in London; Dr Pazos Alonso, Consul-General; the staff of the Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Lisbon. I am also most grateful to Professor Norman McCord, University of Newcastle upon Tyne for his advice, and to the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon and the Arts Faculty, University of Southampton, for financial support for a research project of which the publication of these letters is a 'by-product'.
2. These novels have been translated into English as follows: *Cousin Baz Bazilio*, trans. Roy Campbell (London, 1953); *The Sin of Farther Amaro*, trans. Nan Flanagan (London, 1962); *The Maias*, trans. P McGowan Pinheiro and Ann Stevens (London, 1965). A useful study in English is Alexander Coleman, *Eca de Queiros and European Realism* (New York and London, 1980).
3. The Northumberland miners' leader, Thomas Burt, 'embraced the Liberal creed with an intellectual fervour that led him to accept all its current applications, not only to politics but to industrial problems. Hence his view on the identity of interest of capital and labour was part of that contemporary political economy which he both practised and preached'. R Page Arnot, *The Miners: A History of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, 1889-1910* (London, 1949), p.53.
4. Translated from Eca de Queiros, *Uma Campanha Alegre*, 2 vols, Lello (Oporto, n.d.), I, 94.
5. 'Comercio e Industria do Norte de Inglaterra, 1874-1875'. See Archer de Lima, *Eca de Queiros, Diplomata* (Lisbon, n.d. (1925)), pp. 105-149.
6. Translated from Eca de Queiros, *Notas Contemporaneas*, Lello (Oporto, n.d.), pp. 58-59.
7. Since Eca de Queiros's use of capitals in these MSS is inconsistent and therefore not necessarily significant, it is not clear whether 'the Miners' Union' refers to the Miners' National Union or to the county union, The Northumberland Miners' Mutual Confident Association, which was formed as a body separate from the Durham miners in 1864. See R Fynes, *The Miners of Northumberland and Durham* (Sunderland, 1873), ch. 42, and R Page Arnot, *The Miners*, pp. 52-53.
8. Portuguese orthography has changed since the 19th century. I have retained the old orthography only for the author's signature at the end of each letter.
9. Unless there is a lapse of memory here on the part of Eca de Queiros, it would appear from this opening that he wrote in September 1877 concern concerning 'a conflict between owners and workers'. If indeed there is a missing letter of September 1877, it may have referred to the Durham miners' strike at Bearpark. See E Welbourne, *The Miners' Unions of Northumberland and Durham* (Cambridge, 1923), p. 185.
10. Welbourne states that 'the utmost strike pay which the union could afford was a sum of 3s. 4p. a week'. Welbourne, *op.cit.*, p. 184.

11. According to Welbourne 'the agents issued a solemn warning against resort to violence... It was a warning scrupulously obeyed'. Welbourne, op. cit., pp. 188-89.

12. It is difficult to be precise about an exchange rate in this period. Seventy contos de reis was a sum of the order of £6,000. I am grateful to my colleague Dr Frank Colson for this information.

13. This curious detail, which does not appear in the other letters, may have some connection with Eca de Queiros's transfer to Bristol. Although he was appointed to Bristol in June 1878, it is clear from personal correspondence that he was still in Newcastle at the end of November. The apparently careful definition of his status at the end of this letter of 15 April 1879, combined with the fact that on the first page the heading Consulate of Portugal in Newcastle is hand-written rather than printed as in the other letters, may perhaps indicate that by April he had already moved to Bristol, retaining some responsibility for the Newcastle Consulate pending the arrival of his successor.

A SPOT OF BOTHER

Civil disorder in the North East between the wars by Ian Turner

Four incidents of civil disorder in the North will be examined in this study. They are: the South Shields race riots of 1919 and 1930; a clash between police and the unemployed during the 1921 depression in Sunderland; the General Strike in the North East; and, finally, a Durham City means test demonstration in 1933.

Newspapers in 1919 had reports of labour unrest, a fear of Bolshevism¹ and riots in Glasgow² and London³ mainly involving ex-servicemen demanding work. Most of the disorders in Cardiff were fights between discharged soldiers, sailors, local people and coloured men. They involved attacks both on person and property; laundries and lodging houses were damaged. Neil Evans lists the various motives from comments overheard by police and statements made in court: "We went out to France, and when we came back, we find these foreigners have got our jobs, our businesses and our houses and we can't get rid of them ... this is what one gets for fighting for the country ... we mean to clear these niggers out ... I did it for the benefit of the seamen, of whom I am one and cannot get a job because of the niggers being here. We have tried other ways and we now intend to take the law into our own hands."⁴

Employment was only one source of grievance. Evans mentions one incident where a soldier had smashed a window; a crowd gathered, thinking that an attack on a coloured man was the reason for his arrest and they tried to rescue the prisoner, exclaiming "he is one of us, and has fought for us, not like the blacks". As Evans concludes, "The idea that the coloured men had done well at the war and had not been exposed to danger ... was one of the chief grievances of the white rioters."⁵ Also on 11 June a "brake containing coloured men and their white wives was returning from an excursion and attracted a crowd. Within the small vehicle, the whites saw

a seductive explanation of the problem; they were experiencing difficulties because of the affluence (affluent enough to afford an excursion in a brake) of the blacks who were simultaneously overturning what was seen as the natural racial order in their sexual relations with white women. The white men who started the melee were pimps and the white women were former prostitutes. The pimps had been called up for military service and had returned to find the source of their livelihood allied with black men".⁶

In South Shields the fracas arose out of the selection of the ship's crew. An Arab who offered himself for service was informed that he was not wanted, as only white men were being engaged. A disturbance followed, and a large number of his 'fellow countrymen' in the vicinity joined in the fray, which soon became a full-scale riot in which the Arabs 'armed with sticks, bottles and stones' attacked anyone who happened to be about. John B Fye, a delegate of the Ships' Cooks and Stewards' Union, was charged with provoking nine Arabs, engaged to attend at the Shipping office to sign on a ship. He allegedly shouted "Don't let these -- Arabs sign on"¹⁰, and called for them to come out of the Shipping Office. However, it became clear the Arabs had runners who told engineers when they arrived at South Shields that if they could get Arabs'.¹¹ On this occasion, Arabs were engaged but this was resented by the seamen at a time when jobs were scarce. Hence, so far the motives seem to be purely racial, arising from the economic crisis. However, a man named Gilroy, a delegate of the Seamen's and Fire Firemen's Unions, asked the chief engineer of the ship where he had got his men. He was outraged when he discovered where the nine Arabs had been engaged and mentioned "it would have been better if the engineer had selected the men in the 'open market' and not previously in the Arab lodging houses." Then the engineer proceeded to pick nine white men.¹² So we do have the source of antagonisms from the coloured and white seamen. However, what one has to decide, is whether the riot occurred entirely from racial hostility or from a break in normal procedure? Probably blending of the two, especially as one seaman complained in the court proceedings "about the engagement of the Arabs when there were hundreds of demobilized men, waiting for work".¹³ It is also worth mentioning in this context a later scuffle between Arabs and soldiers in South Shields which arose when one of the former shouted, "I'll kill all the soldiers", and gave as his defence in court: "Since the recent riots, the life of the Arabs in the town was becoming intolerable".¹⁴

In 1930 the same social origins existed, there was a high level of unemployment and a substantial proportion of British tonnage was laid up. The differences between 1919 and 1930, however, lay in the change in status of Arab seamen and trade union structure and procedure. The Aliens Order Act of 1920 and, more important, Special Restriction (Coloured) Alien Seamen's Order Act of 1925 permitted the issue of a deportation order by magistrates. The order could be issued if a foreigner was receiving parish relief, or was found to be destitute. All negroes on Tyneside were British nationals but the status of Arabs was unclear. Those who could prove their birthplace as Aden were classified as British, but those who could not were alien; most Arabs on Tyneside were classed as Coloured Alien Seamen. Somalis were defined as British Protected Persons and, therefore, sometimes treated incorrectly as aliens. To confuse the situation even further, many seamen often referred to Somalis as Arabs, and the communities did mix, in a fashion, but Somalis were almost always treated as British.

Also, during the 1920s, the Seamen's and Firemen's Union and the Cooks' and Stewards' Unions amalgamated to form the National Union of Seamen. In 1926, Havelock Wilson refused to allow it to join the General Strike, so this, coupled with its support of non-political breakaway miners' union, caused its expulsion from the Trades Union Congress, which then reluctantly commissioned Ernest Bevin and the Transport and General Workers' Union to set up a seafarers' section. However, Bevin realised that any such section would be dominated by the mainly Communist Minority Movement. Hence, Bevin aimed not to oppose the N.U.S. but to assist it to rejoin the T.U.C., which subsequently paid £10,000 compensation to the T.G.W.U. when it wound

up the seamen's section. So, by 1930, a militant 'seaman's pressure group again existed inside the N.U.S. But the militants were handicapped by the 'P.C.5' and associated subscription rules of the Seamen's Union, excluding fully paid-up members from all official trade union activities. Disgruntled sailors called the P.C.5 a 'slave ticket' because no seaman could ship without it and simultaneously gave the union bureaucrats a considerable hold over the membership. Full-time officials who used pensioners to carry its votes at elections. It was described as 'a company union for the British Shipping' Federation". All Arab seamen were members of the N.U.S. and 'traditionally among the strongest supporters of the union'.

The first incident occurred 29 April when the steamer, Cape Verde, signed on a crew at New Quay, North Shields, and thirteen Somalis were brought over from South Shields (the two ports were administratively separate) to sign on as firemen, trimmers and donkeymen. This procedure was wrong under National Maritime Board rules which stated that a ship had to take a crew from seamen in the port she was staying, if any were available. The unemployed regarded the Somalis as Arabs. This incident followed a demonstration by white firemen at South Shields on 28 March 1930, caused by The unemployed had tried to prevent the Arabs from signing by blocking the way to the union office. Somalis drew knives and razors, a melee

After this, a lengthy debate began between the N.U.S. and the Minority Movement. Firstly, however, the purely racist position appeared in the press: 'The import of coloured seamen and firemen is a more serious menace to the health of the country than parrots or love birds, and should be prohibited'. The March edition of the N.U.S. magazine The Seaman attacked Arab seamen, and boarding house masters in particular, for illegally importing large numbers of British Arabs from Yemen. They were taking British jobs. The union's campaign was conducted against alien coloured seamen who came into this country, or were smuggled in, by Arab boarding house-keepers in order that 'they may become money-making machines for those same boarding house-keepers. They had no quarrel with British coloured seamen, Arab or otherwise, but with unregistered and alien seamen expressly forbidden entrance by the 1925 Act. It was a disgrace when four million tons of British shipping was laid up and 20,000 British seamen were idle that boarding house-keepers were illegally obtaining jobs for Arabs. The N.U.S. intended to eliminate them and their 'half-caste children, whose only potentialities seem to be confined to becoming dole aspirants'. The militants, however, claimed the N.U.S. were attacking Arab seamen in an effort to distract attention from the high level of unemployment among seamen. One member commented, "The Arabs should not have been imported from South to North Shields which was in breach of the labour clause of the National Maritime Board Agreement. Surely, the Arabs could not be blamed for taking a job when it was offered to them .. it is hard lines they should suffer through official action".

The minority Movement programme distinguished between coloured seamen shipping from a British port and 'Coolies and lascars' carried by some shipping combines who were only paid 30 shillings a month. The N.U.S. should have looked at this low wage question long ago; instead it was just trying to create the impression that coloured men shipping from British ports were undercutting the white men's rate. This was not true.

Minority Movement meetings on Quay Dam in South Shields on these issues coincided with the N.U.S. approved introduction of registering Arabs and other Asiatics, who now had to produce evidence of British nationality or of their presence on British ships at the time of the Coloured Seamen's Order of 1925. The union also established a 'rota system' from which men would be shipped in turn, giving it greater control over Arabs and Somalis. On 8 July, the Minority Movement stated that a 'mass meeting of Arab seamen had rejected the rota' and, 'in addition, were not prepared to be used against white seamen as strike breakers'. On 24 July, another meeting proposed that 'they were prepared to ship out, but would not accept the P.C.5.'

However, peaceful picketing proved unsuccessful and had to be replaced by forceful efforts to prevent 'scabs' from shipping out. Success was debateable. The South Shields Gazette (27 July 1930) reported that two steamships had 'no difficulty in obtaining crews' whereas the Daily Worker claimed that only eight 'scabs' had been signed on. By 1 August, things were 'hotting up' with sympathetic strikes in Liverpool and Barry, to oppose the P.C.5 in a situation which was fast becoming a 'test for the Minority Movement, and a severe challenge for the N.U.S.'

As in 1919, almost all press coverage portrayed the episode of 2 August 1930 as a race riot'. On Monday, newspapers reported 'Desperate rioting at South Shields ... stabbing and breaking of heads ... fierce fight with a crowd of Arabs' A ship had paid off at South Shields and the re-engaging crew paid off. However, when they presented themselves for re-engagement, they refused to get a P.C.5. or register on the rota. The press vaguely mentioned that the riot "was attributed to the new rota system of engaging coloured men on ships under an agreement between the Shipping Federation and the N.U.S." When two 'scabs' Bradford and Hamilton (accused by the Minority Movement of being N.U.S. plants) went forward to engage, with Hamilton taunting the men with a whip and Bradford with a razor, the Minority Movement members exclaimed they "were ashamed of being British, because the Arabs are standing at 100% and white men are still signing on(and, when the pickets moved forward to prevent the 'scabs' from reaching the office, the police baton charged. The newspapers did not lay stress on the Chief Constable's statement mentioned "today has seen the real test of the Minority Movement", rather they emphasized the fact that there was no trouble 'until three white men were making their way to the Federation office.... and an ugly rush forward of coloured men took place ... three white men then emerged from the Federation office, to proceed to the Board of Trade office and a crowd of Arabs, armed with sticks and other weapons surrounded them in a threatening manner. At the following court proceedings, the Chief Constable alleged that 'these are the men (the Minority Movement members) who incited the coloured men to riot. I must say that when the riot started these men were conspicuous by their absence'.

For the police baton charge in Sunderland, I pieced together this account from press coverage and personal eyewitness accounts. On 9 September, a large crowd had gathered in West Park, where Councillor Jimmy Lenagh had promised to lead a march to the Gaurdians' Offices. He had arranged to interview Councillor Burlinson there at 10.30 a.m. However, instead of going to West Park, Lenagh and a colleague went directly to the interview. The crowd, evidently tired of waiting in West Park, decided to march down to the centre of the town". The main body of them, surging more like a mob than a procession ...boeing and shouting. Young, irresponsible youths called out for a raid¹³ on a liquor van and grocery lorry. But the angry crowd were met by a wall of police. Yet this did not deter them. They just walked straight up and upset the police formation by surging forward. As the forces of law and order withdrew, the crowd kept advancing until another section of the unemployed emerged from another street at the rear of the police. The police baton charged, allegedly to prevent their formation being broken up, and fighting ensued. "A police officer halted the column, asking them to disperse, a scuffle started ... and the hot heads promptly started a punch-up".¹⁴ A statement by the Chief Constable afterwards said he "had informed Lenagh that it would be better for him to tell the men to move quietly away, but Lenagh had refused".¹⁵ James Conlin, a police inspector at the time, comments "Councillor Jimmy Lenagh and Wheeler, who were in charge of the unemployed demonstrations, were the cause of a lot of trouble ... when the baton charge was ordered, however, they were the first to run for it".¹⁶ The 'spark' for the riot was an angry crowd, deserted by their leader, being met by a large wall of police, who themselves feared being surrounded. "The unemployed got a bit naughty on the way to the Board of Guardians, en masse ... there were a lot of big lads amongst them ... shipyard workers, miners and the like ... it was only a one off incident ... it was usually quiet .. things went wrong on the day I

would say ... there had been minor skirmishes before that, but they did not continue as a riot situation ... they got hot headed ... worked up ... the police got sick of being on jobs of this nature ... they are only men ... people ... not super people ... they were hungry ... they were stealing off this huge long van".¹⁷

In the 1926 General Strike there obviously was great bitterness between strikers and strikebreakers. William Muckle comments, "You always get some blacklegs ... the police took them to work and brought them home at night".¹⁸ The feeling amongst the miners ran very high in regard to those who were smuggling coal out to the farms. Some small collieries were still working and the miners suspected that some coal was reaching the farms... the farmers were willing to pay fantastic prices to get coal smuggled out and the miners would do anything to prevent it.¹⁹ ... "they used to hoot and shout at the blacklegs but the police always stood there in a menacing way and succeeded in keeping people quiet. But immediately it got dark, there used to be reactions, you know, they broke the blacklegs' windows and things of this sort ..."²⁰ College students in Leeds decided that they would go and unload the boats in the docks in Hull ... when they came back, they found their cars were smashed up".²¹ Pickets were also afraid the roads were being used to carry supplies, hence there were numerous press reports of the highway being blocked by railway sleepers and trees at Garforth, Birtley²² Low Fell and Byker.²³ Milk and food wagons were also overturned through suspicion of carrying coal. "We discovered a milk lorry which was carrying coal" ... they emptied it into the road and the people gathered it up for their own use.²⁴ A farmer, who was travelling to Newcastle, was held up at Throckley and compelled to sell his eggs at one shilling per dozen and his butter at one shilling per pound".²⁵ Violence and hostility was not just confined to the miners; there were reports of attacks on buses carrying passengers, blackleg workers and being driven by 'non-union labour' by large crowds of pickets, comprising 'regular bus drivers and conductors' who were so threatening, one journalist wrote that 'the drivers ... who had done good business in the absence of transport, abandoned their vehicles'.²⁶

There were also attacks on trains, but perhaps the most well known one was at Cramlington. 'Scottish Express Wrecked ... Dastardly deed at Cramlington ... Glasgow to Newcastle Express wrecked one mile south of Cramlington, near the colliery'.²⁷ William Muckle, one of the protagonists explains his motives "Well, it was said, stop everything on wheels ... I have no regrets for what I did ... we were fighting for our right and a little bit of cake ... we were miners, content with what we had ... only if they had let us alone, but they came back for a 40% cut in our wages and that put our backs up". Muckle was sorry that it was the Flying Scotsman that was stopped "but when you come to think again, it was a General Strike and they were blacklegs running the trains .. they should not have been running ... we were fighting for our daily bread ... what with the lords and ladies and the like taking the best out of the land ... when you come to think of the wages of the Government and the Royal Family ... you could go mad ... I worked fifty-two years in the pit, to my sorrow. Our day you had very little chance of doing anything else".

Muckle concludes "The de-railing of the Flying Scotsman was not an example of violence as the press said ... we were not violent men and had the 'plus fours' train crews and blacklegs not tried to break the strike ... we would have had no need to do what we did ... we only tried to stop blackleg coal getting through".²⁸ Indeed, the press reported the act 'was deliberately planned by a gang of men and youth who unbolted the fishplates and loosened the rails ... and when the smash occurred the men were seen on

a nearby bridge laughing at the spectacle.²⁹ Despite the narrow-minded view of the press, the very fact that it was deliberately planned, is true enough. Muckle tells how, after a meeting at Cramlington Lodge, he suggested to his mates having a "railup" to stop the blackleg trains getting through. "Fifty-five years ago, and nobody knows to this day that I and three others went up the old wagon way to the North East Railway ... and broke into the cabin and stole the gear in the morning (before the meeting) to do the job in the afternoon. This never came out at the trial and we never told this to the papers ... I could count on the one hand the people in Cramlington that know the real facts today ... about what happened before that meeting". Before removing the fishplates 'they saw the blacklegs ... the plus-fours platelayers coming along the railway, so we all set out and stoned them and then took the rail up' "in record time".³⁰ This does correspond with the newspaper accounts describing statements from the engineers who 'were patrolling the main line between Benton Quarry and Plesney and left the former at 10.45 a.m. and near Annitsford Station ... The strike breakers were assaulted by a lot of pitmen and their wives, who threw missiles and used foul language. They noticed how the window had been taken out of the platelayers' cabin between Dam Dyke and Cramlington Station. They observed men running towards them, shouting, "Kill the blacklegs! Get hold of their gear", but at that time the line was in order. However, later it was found, the outside rail on the 'uproad was completely out of position and the fish-plate and bolts had been removed'.³¹ However, what the press could not report was the complete amazement of the miners when the train turned out to be the Flying Scotsmen; they expected a coal train. Yet even more interesting are Muckle's comments that "the scab platelayers ran about four hundred yards up the line and stopped the train and warned them that 'there was something likely to happen as they had been stoned'.³² This explains a press report of a passenger who said "there was no warning ... but at Cramlington the guards came along the train and requested the passengers to draw the blinds so there would be less danger of injury from flying glass, should the train be stoned."³³ The travellers did not expect they would be derailed. Muckle continues, "This lad Joe was sitting on the embankment and he waved a little white handkerchief to stop the train. I saw him myself, from where we were ... there was a signal cabin one hundred yards further down the railway ... it used to be a signal cabin, but the platelayers kept their gear in it then ... the engine went right up to that signal cabin ... when it came off it was dragging itself ... if they'd been on the engine, they could have stopped it before it got that far. The driver knew what was happening but they did not want to know. I still believe it could have been stopped ... the crew were given enough warning".³⁴

Can we accept William Muckle's account? The driver had been warned, but it was vague to say the least. As the engine driver remarked himself "he never noticed anything wrong with the track".³⁵ Why should he have been looking? It is interesting, however, to note that the driver of the train, a blackleg called Bob Sheldon, was 'one of the company's servants' but the firemen were Robert Aitken, an Edinburgh University student, and Charlie Hird, also of Edinburgh, both obviously inexperienced. Moreover, alongside the column reporting the Cramlington crash were two more similar rail crash reports.³⁶ The first one describing an accident killing three and injuring others at Edinburgh: 'The driver of the passenger train, who is understood to have escaped without serious injury, was in the company's employment, but was not a regular driver'. Secondly, a 'fatal smash' at Bishop Stortford. Although no particulars were mentioned in this report, could all three crashes have occurred due to 'inexperienced blackleg labour'?

Will Lawther and Harry Bolton noticed a grocery van in Blaydon illegally distributing goods. Harry started saying "This is illegal, ... it's against the shop laws ... it's against the Shop Act ... it's against the council byelaws". He then proceeded to 'lay down the law' to police helping the distribution. "Had they a permit from the Chopwell, Blaydon and Ryton Council of Action?" Will complemented this by saying, "You --- won't deliver that stuff ... the Emergency Regulations are nothing to me ... if you intend to --- deliver that stuff, I am going to Chopwell for two hundred men who will soon put a stop to your intentions".³⁸ This was ample evidence for the police to charge them for impeding food supplies. Another incident followed the two councillors trial in Gateshead. This started when the Chopwell and High Spennard Band acquired a 'group of rowdies' which turned a peaceful demonstration into a wild melee between miners and police. One personal reminiscence corresponds with this press account "the violence was mostly carried out by people who did not belong to the area ... it was wasn't the legal pickets ... it was generally somebody from the back of the crowd, who used to have a brick .. and, of course, with the crowd they never seemed to get hold of the people that was responsible". However, it was known that all the miners were loyal to their leaders, and if their leaders got sentenced to imprisonment ... they intended to rescue them by force ... Well, the authorities knew about this ... it was common knowledge knowledge".³⁹ It was when the crowd tried to carry out this threat, or the police thought they were going to, when the trouble started.

Some similar questions can be raised about the 1933 Durham riot that have been asked about both 1921 and 1926. After the January 'fiasco' a second attempt was made to interview the Chairman of the County Council at Shire Hall. Again, a large crowd appeared from the South Bank, Teeside, Gateshead, Chopwell, Birtley and Chester le Street, carrying banners saying 'Down with the Means Test'. This time their leader figure was a Mrs Chaytor who 'was a conspicuous figure in her red cloth hat ... This time, a deputation was allowed to interview the P.A.C. However, the riot began when the rank and file demonstrators, already refused entry by the police once to a street containing various Ministry offices, proceeded to Market Place, 'thinking they had laid a decoy for the police' and hastily returned to the street. Only to be met again by a large body of police, who again refused them entry. "Meanwhile, the marchers behind were demanding action ... and to the sound of their band they began their attack; the police drew their batons and a fierce struggle followed. After the riot, weapons such as sticks weighted with lead were seized, which perhaps proves this time the demonstrators descended upon Durham expecting violence".⁴⁰ Here is a summary of Mr Liddele's account of the incident. They converged in their hundreds on the P.A.C., headed by a warrior-like crowd, carrying banners. They were met by solid ranks of police armed with batons ... the crowd refused to retreat and the baton charge was made ... it was a bloody confrontation with many broken heads, etc ... I remember an old lady neighbour of my mother's taking in the wounded ... the crowd assembled in the Market Place chanting 'we want buses' ... the Chief Constable addressed them and made it clear that there would be no transport made available to them, and, unless they dispersed, he would command arrests to be made ... gradually the mob dispersed and the local residents, myself included, began to wonder if such a thing as a brutal baton charge could really have occurred in the calm of the cathedral city ...⁴¹

NOTES

1. Newcastle Journal 6 February 1919
2. Ibid, 1 February 1919
3. Ibid, 27 May 1919
4. Neil Evans, 'The South Wales Race Riots of 1919', Llafur, p.6
5. Ibid, p.16
6. Ibid, p.15
7. Ibid, 11 February 1919
8. Ibid
9. Ibid, 5 March 1919
10. Ibid,
11. Ibid, 11 March 1919
12. Sunderland Echo, 9 September 1921
13. Anonymous letter written to Ian Turner
14. Sunderland Echo, 9 September 1921
15. Chief Inspector James Conlin, History of Sunderland Borough Police Force, p.75.
16. Mr Williams, personal tape recording by Ian Turner, May 1984
17. Mrs Hudson, also tape recording, Ian Turner, April 1984
18. William Muckle, No Regrets
19. Gateshead Local History Collection, Memoirs of the General Strike, Mr J Armstrong
20. Andy Lawther, interviewed by Ray Challinor, April 1984
21. Gateshead Collection, Mr H Bevitt
22. Newcastle Journal, 11 May 1926
23. Sunderland Echo, 5 May 1926
24. Mr J Armstrong, op cit
25. Sunderland Echo, 5 May 1926
26. Ibid
27. Newcastle Journal, 11 May 1926
28. William Muckle op city, p.16
29. Newcastle Journal, 11 May 1926
30. William Muckle op city, p.20
31. Newcastle Journal, 14 May 1926
32. William Muckle, p.10
33. Mr Hamilton, passenger, and quoted in Newcastle Journal, 11 May 1926
34. William Muckle, op city, p.35
35. Newcastle Journal, 14 May, 1926
36. Newcastle Daily Chronicle North Mail, quoted in Muckle
37. Andy Lawther : op cit
38. Newcastle Journal, 14 May 1926
39. Gateshead Collection, op city - Tom Brown
40. Newcastle Journal, 11 April 1933
41. Mr Liddele op cit

REVIEWS

Jarrow March, by Tom Pickard. Allison & Busby, £2.95.

Nearly 50 years after the event the Jarrow March is still remembered. Armed with two banners bearing the words 'Jarrow Crusade', 207 unemployed men marched to London. They marched to petition Parliament for work, which was desperately needed in a town where more than 70% of the adult population was on the dole. But this is only half the story. The men of Jarrow marched to expose the government to the people: each step they took let more Englishmen know the town was dying and that nothing was being done about it. In the event the march brought no drop in the unemployment figures - it took the second world war and a renewed demand for ships to bring this about. Neither did it shake the deflationary resolve of Baldwin's government. But the march did embarrass the government. Marchers and ministers waged a propaganda war from the outset, and Pickard's book does well to chart the ruses used by the government to try and conceal the depth of Jarrow's plight.

The propaganda war starts with a memo to cine companies first circulated in 1934 - two years before the march. The memo, from the Metropolitan Police, asks the movie men not to film protest marches and demonstrations of the time. This, as Pickard says, is probably why there was so little newsreel footage of the march. But government warnings for people to keep away from the march often backfired in favour of the marchers. After all, a police warning usually stimulates rather than numbs curiosity. The marchers themselves were scrupulously correct in their conduct. They all realised their case could easily be damaged by charges of misconduct brought by hostile authorities. One example of the correctness of their protest lay in the handling of the 90,000 name petition destined for Parliament. Each night, at each town of call, the sealed box containing the petition was deposited at the local police station for safe keeping.

What was lacking in film coverage of the march was made up for in print. Local and National journalists walked with the marchers, and each days journey became another chapter in a marathon running story. Their work is part of the fabric of Mr Pickard's book. He uses accounts from different newspapers, personal recollections as well as police and Cabinet papers to tell the story for him. These are used with good reason for the impact of the march rested on public opinion. And what better way to see how people were making up their minds than by looking at the stories read by the public?

How to swing opinion against the march, or at least how to draw attention away from it, preoccupied ministers. Once the marchers arrived in London a story was released to take some of the bite out of the march. Sir John Jarvis, the Tory M.P. for Guildford, made a surprise announcement at a public meeting in Farringdon Street, held for the marchers. He told a crowd of 350 that he planned to start a new tube works in Jarrow. This, he said, would employ "hundreds but it might lead to thousands". Headlines the following day proclaimed the news. But only a few mentioned the vital proviso of hundreds rather than thousands of jobs. As Mr Pickard says, "the British public could be forgiven for thinking Jarrow's problems had been solved by its self appointed fairy godfather."

Unfortunately, Mr Pickard does not take the story any further. Reasons why Jarvis timed his news to coincide with the march are not given. It looks as if Jarvis was primed by ministers to make his announcement in

time to save their faces. But there is no discussion by Mr Pickard as to whether this was the case. In his account, he quotes from Board of Trade papers of a meeting between a Board official and Jarvis. But, again, this throws no light on why Jarvis should resurrect his tube mill idea at this particular time.

The collection of cuttings and extracts which make up the book are mostly fresh and lively. But several, especially those about the plan to build a steelworks on the old Palmer's shipyard site, could be axed in favour of a concise narrative account. More could be said in the book about the attitudes of the main political parties to the march. The Labour Party blacked the march on the grounds that it was open to exploitation by communists. Mr Pickard could have given more time to discussing, and possibly refuting, this charge. On this point, the book raises more questions than it answers. We learn that both Labour and Conservative party agents in Jarrow travelled ahead of the marchers to organise support for them. But nothing is said how local political parties responded to the march. It would, for instance, be interesting to hear if Labour party members at the time agreed with the views of their leadership.

Mr Pickard's book gives a vivid and at times very moving account of the March. But the last word must go to Shields Gazette journalist, Guy Waller, who summed up the story of Jarrow in one neat aphorism: "St Bede founded it, Sir Charles Palmer built it and McGowan buggered it."

John Rowland

The Legend of Red Clydeside, by Iain McLean. Published by John Donald, £18.00

As the title suggests, Dr McLean has done a debunking exercise. His conclusion is that "the revolt on the Clyde" was the product of John Maclean's mentally-deranged mind and the vivid imagination of Sir Basil Thomson, head of the Special Branch. The most revolutionary event that happened on Clydeside after the First World War was that John S Clarke's wife made David Kirkwood wash the dishes, which he had never done before. From this book, one might gain the impression that the first time anybody saw anything red was in 1983, when Roy Jenkins took a crate of claret to his Glasgow constituency.

Dr McLean's scholarship is most impressive. His work is the fruit of 14 years' labours, the reading of almost every relevant document, journal, newspaper. As a result, his case is extremely strong. It is a major contribution to knowledge, a book that must be answered if the traditional view is to be advanced again.

Before expressing my own reservations, I would like to concede Clydeside has suffered from "an over-sell". Autobiographies and biographies abound - John Maclean, Harry McShane, Willie Gilcher, Emmanuel Shinwell, David Kirkwood, Tom Bell and many others immediately spring to mind. By contrast, a region like South Wales, although experiencing similar storm and stress, remains relatively neglected. Except for autobiographies from Arthur Horner and Will Paynter, little of consequence survives. Obviously, this is liable to distort the views of historians, dependent as they are on available material. Tipping the balance still further, three important working-class papers - Forward, The Socialist and The Worker - were published on Clydeside whereas South Wales had only the much less significant Merthyr

Pioneer.

What applies to the Welsh is even more true for the Geordies; no left-wing paper was produced in this region and no leading militant wrote his memoirs. Of course, this was largely because of the much lower level of political and industrial activity that occurred here. But, in itself, that does not constitute a satisfactory answer. For, as Lyall J Watson pointed out in The Worker of 8 March 1919 - note he got his contribution published in a Glasgow journal - the two regions have much in common, particularly dependence on heavy engineering and shipbuilding. Lyall Watson tried to explain the difference in terms of the emergence of a strong shop stewards' movement on the Clyde; full-time union officials on Tyneside, largely because of the history of the area, had been able to exploit sectionalism, keeping one group of workers isolated from the rest.

Alas, Dr McLean does not discuss this type of problem. Nor does he place his highly detailed localized study firmly in a national context. Yet, as I have tried to point out in my book, The Origins of British Bolshevism, developments are closely intermeshed. Lloyd George's government behaved very wisely. Its policy of making concessions to workers when they there was no reasonable alternative while taking on organized labour in circumstances that assured it of victory paid off. The revolutionary activity was small; the revolutionary potential, as tacitly acknowledged by the cabinet's sub-committee that met fortnightly to monitor subversive organisations, was much greater. The withdrawal of British troops from Russia, the peace agreement with the Irish Nationalists and, above all, the failure of the German revolution provided the British government with the opportunity where the necessary resources could be deployed to re-establish the old order.

It could be argued that Dr McLean deliberately plays down the revolutionary conduct. Take, for example, the story about John S Clarke's wife, mentioned at the beginning of this review. He obtained this by interviewing Arthur Woodburn, MP, a close friend of John S Clarke. However, had he bothered to read (and question Woodburn about) his obituary of J.S.C. which appeared in the magazine Plebs, he may have gained a different slant. There, Woodburn describes the close ties that existed between the S.L.P.'ers and the I.R.A., conducting its armed struggle against British troops. One day, Woodburn says, a policeman entered the S.L.P. Glasgow headquarters, sat down on some packing-cases and lit his pipe. John S Clarke looked on apprehensively. He knew the packing-cases contained explosives.

It only needed a spark for there to be, in all senses, a big bang on Clydeside.

Raymond Challinor

Reminiscences of a Chartist, by Robert Gammage. Edited by W H Maehl.
Published by The Society for the Study of Labour History £2.50

Robert Gammage is best remembered for his History of the Chartist Movement, 1837-1854, written with passion and intended to pay off old scores, particularly against Feargus O'Connor. Nevertheless, while scholars today would question some of his judgements, his work remains an extremely valuable document, used by historians as a standard text.

Gammage himself was a Chartist activist. In his History he merely mentions his own involvement when it has national significance, and then only in the third person. His Reminiscences of a Chartist repairs this

omission. It is his personal account of his peregrinations, speaking for the cause and looking for employment in whichever town he happened to stop. In this manner, he covered a colossal 1,400 miles in 1840-1, almost entirely on foot.

By trade a coach-maker, Gamage's journeyings sometimes brought him to the North East. In the 1850s, as Chartism went into decline, he found himself yet again out of work and with financial difficulties. So he resolved to settle in the Tyne-Wear area. For a while, he secured a job as an agent for the Prudential Assurance Company, stationed at Sunderland. Later, he trained as a doctor at Newcastle Infirmary. Once qualified, he assisted Dr Heath, of Newcastle. Eventually, he started his own practice in Sunderland, where he remained almost until his death in 1888.

Despite his links with the region, remarkably little about it appears in these Reminiscences. They are valuable for their unbuttoned assessment of the various Chartist leaders as well as the insight they give into the trials and tribulations the Movement experienced at grassroots level.

Raymond Challinor

"TWO STEPS BACK, Communists and the Wider Labour Movement, 1935-1945."
By S Bornstein and A Richardson. Socialist Platform, 1983. £3.50
ISBN 0950842303.

There is a quasi-nostalgic trend to much recent Labour History. The interest in the rise of now respectable institutions, such as the Labour Parties, trade unions and trades councils suggest this. In institutional histories a simplified world emerges in which those who seem to contribute directly to the status quo take precedence. Opposition movements are belittled or written out. Sadly it must be said that biographies and local histories are amongst the worst offenders. And too frequently they do little to help anyone understand the political conflicts which were going on.

"Two Steps Back" ought to make anyone concerned with the Labour Movement of the late '30s and early '40s re-examine their judgements. It should challenge the 'folk hero' image of the Communist Party which has been put forward in trendy 'New Left' accounts. It reveals that the Stalinised Communist Party stood to the right of the Labour and Trade Union bureaucracy. It exposes the Party's defence of Stalin's show trials and the mass murders committed during the 'Terror'. Moreover it thrusts to the fore the Party's attacks on ILP and Trotskyist rivals.

If this little book helps renew debate in the politics of the '30s and 40s then it will have more than justified itself.

Ian Hunter

Corvan : A Victorian Entertainer and his Songs, Keith Gregson
The Kemble Press, £5.00. ISBN 0 906835 13 5

Before the review, a declaration of interest. I first met Keith Gregson when I was also doing research on Ned Corvan - in the field of nineteenth century entertainment style. Keith was painstakingly tracking down the tunes that Ned used for the songs in his music hall act. Urged on by myself and others, Keith found a publisher for his work, and we now have this quite excellent collection of thirty one Corvan songs with full texts, tune titles and music.

But who was Ned Corvan ? For the Tyneside music hall audiences of the 1850's and 1860's he was a bigger star even than the rightly famed Joe Wilson and Geordie Ridley. He was born in Liverpool, but spent most of his childhood in Newcastle. As a boy he worked for Billy Purvis, the legendary Tyneside clown, but in his late teens he signed as a singer of comic songs with the concert hall impresario George Howard. Here began a career which took him to all the well-known Newcastle music halls - Balmtra's, the Grainger, the New Tyne Concert Hall - and across the whole of northern England. He retired in his early thirties to take a pub - The Fairlees Arms in South Shields - but financial hardship and love of performing brought him back to the halls and he died in harness at the early age of 35.

In his preface, Keith states his objective as paying tribute to Corvan, the entertainer, and his hope that one or two lost songs will emerge. Specifically, he doesn't delve into Dave Harker's study of the making of the Tyneside Concert Hall (although I suspect he would want to dispute some of Harker's conclusions); nor does he get involved in the "song and history" debate. Yet what he does is establish the vital relationship of the text-performer-performance-audience in the context of social and cultural history. The comprehensive introduction covers Ned's characterisation - he was a quick-change artist who would dash into the wings to don the appropriate costume for "The Cullercoats Fishwife" (or "lass" in the later version), "Cat-Gut Jim, the Fiddler" or Bobby Snivvelnose, the Schoolboy in "The Toon Improvement Bill". The other sections, all well illustrated, fill out the detail of names, events and fashions. All of this material will be of delight and value to the historian, as will the comprehensive bibliography.

The book has been published with a view to being used by singers and musicologists, and the ring binding and large print of the music are of particular practical importance. The price - at £5.00 it works out at almost 10 pence a page - is perhaps off-putting, but local historians and songsters alike need this book, so if you can't buy your own copy, make sure it's ordered for your library or stockroom.

Vin Arthey

OBITUARY

MARGARET GIBB (1892 - 1984)

With the death of Margaret Gibb at the end of January, the Society lost not just its oldest member but one of its most active supporters. Margaret attended the majority of meetings held since she joined about ten years ago, quite undeterred by the problems of getting to and from Cambo village. She addressed a Day School in May 1974 and was one of a group of older members, sharing recall of the 1930s at the opening meeting of the 1983-1984 season. As this secretary well knows, she was also a successful recruiter of members and seller of Bulletins. She will be greatly missed by her friends in the Society.

And Margaret Gibb had many friends, as witnessed in July 1982 when some 200 people came from all parts of the country to share the celebration of her 90th birthday in the village hall at Cambo.

An account of Margaret's work as a Labour Party Organiser from 1929 until 1956 is in Bulletin 11. She remained involved and active until just before her death. A happy occasion was the 60th anniversary of the Durham Labour Women's Annual Gala on 5 November 1983 where, as a founder member, she was a guest of honour. She wrote a memory of the first Gala of 1923, which she had helped to organise when she was a young teacher from Dunston, for the 1983 Bulletin.

There are to be three memorials; the collection of a Margaret Gibb Archive; the giving of a Margaret Gibb Memorial Lecture; and the Margaret Gibb Memorial Scholarship.

The nucleus of the Archive will be formed by interviews given by Margaret for television and radio and which survive on tape, and some personal papers about her life. Additionally, anyone who knew Margaret is invited to put down on paper their memories of her, and this would be part of the Archive. Write as much or as little as you like. Send it to; Martin Bulmer, 24 King's Drive, Thames Ditton, Surrey, KY7 0TH.

The Margaret Gibb Memorial Lecture will be given in the 1984 in Newcastle upon Tyne, by a leading figure from the Labour Movement, on a subject in the field of Labour politics and history.

The Margaret Gibb Memorial Scholarship will be offered annually by the Northern Region of the Labour Party to enable a member of the Party in the region to attend a weekend school. Such a scholarship requires financial support and, in addition, the Memorial Lecture will incur certain limited expenses. Baroness Lockwood, a colleague and friend of Margaret's for many years, is to act as treasurer of the fund which will be a lasting memorial to Margaret. Anyone wishing to make a donation to the fund should send it to: Dr Gordon Adam, 2 Queen's Road, Whitley Bay.

Maureen Callcott

NORTH EAST LABOUR HISTORY SOCIETY

ANNUAL REPORT

The Committee

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Publications Sub-Committee

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

Meetings

- 31 October A.G.M. followed by 'The Thirties Recalled' - reminiscences by Margaret Gibb, Mrs Winters, Horace Green, T Dan Smith, Claude Robinson.
- 15 November 'Life and Death at Sea in the 19th Century' Illustrated talk by George Patterson.
- 21 February 'Jack Common' illustrated talk by John Mapplebeck.
- 12 March 'The Employee as Elector' - Talk by Alan Heesom
- April Reception to members attending the Anglo-Dutch Conference at Newcastle Polytechnic
- 17 May Talk on North East Chartism

Most of the meetings drew very good audiences, about 50 people attending the A.G.M. 250 copies of the Bulletin (No.17) were quickly sold. Back numbers are available from the treasurer at a cost of £1 plus postage. 'Working Class Politics in North East England (eds. M Callcott and R Challinor) was published at the end of 1983 at a cost of £2.50 to members, £4.50 retail. Copies can be ordered from the Treasurer.

The Society welcomes new members, ideas and contributions for publication or lecturers. 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)