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The History of Bradford Trades Council and the Future of Trades Councils

Original Citation

Laybourn, Keith (2012) The History of Bradford Trades Council and the Future of Trades Councils. In: Speech to Bradford Trades Council, 21st September 2012, Bradford. (Unpublished)

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Bradford Trades and Labour Council c. 1868 to 1926 and its guide to the future.

1) Eighteenth and nineteenth-century trade unionism was strongly opposed by the employers. There were more than 40 individual acts of parliament against the combination of working men in the 18th century before the 1800/1801 Combination Acts. They were not made legal until 1825 and could not register to protect their funds until the 1871 Trade Union Act. The 1867 Master and Servant Act still discriminated between the actions of masters and workers – actions by masters being subject to civil law and those by workmen subject to criminal law. The 1871 Criminal Law Amendment Act limited the right to strike since strikes were seen as coercion. **In effect, trade unions in Britain were generally in conflict with employers and the state and enjoyed only one good period of relations with the state between 1939 and 1979. Since Margaret Thatcher came to power in 1979 trade unions in Britain have been under attack – trade unions halving from over 13 millions.** In their heyday, though, trade unions attempted to protect the wages and conditions of workers, developed political association with Labour, and encouraged social surveys.

Focus for this lecture c. 1860s-1920s.

2) Bradford a fast growing textile town in 19th century and was associated with attempt to control child labour through the Ten-Hour Movement led by Richard Oastler.

3) Tolpuddle Martyrs in 1834.

4.) Trade union illegality removed in 1825 and provoked a textile strike in Bradford in 1825.

‘...without a union we are ruined, with it we are blessed.’

5) Weakness of textile trade unionism and the 1867 Hornby v Close case which revealed the inability of unions to protect their funds. (Case taken up in Bradford)/

6.) Trades Council developed in 1850s/ 1860s and 1890s as local parliament of trade unions.

7) 1860s saw emergence of London trade unionism, Marxism, TUC in 1868. General Council of 1921 replaced Parliamentary Committee of 1868.

8) Bradford Trades Council 1868-69 and reformed in 1872 re Criminal Amendment Act of 1872.

Attached to ILP and the Labour Party – Why?

- New Unionism of 1880s
- Field Affair of 1888/1889
- Bradford Labour Electoral Association in 1867 and Samuel Shaftoe
- Manningham Mills strike of 1890-1891
- Tom Mann and Ben Tillett came along.

- Charlie Glyde ' In the past we have had the can'ts and the won'ts. It is now time that we had a party that will;'
- E. P. Thompson ' Homage to Tom Maguire'
- Ben Tillet campaign for Bradford West in 1892 (and again in 1895)

**TO THE ELECTORS OF THE WESTERN DIVISION
OF THE BOROUGH OF BRADFORD, 1895**

GENTLEMEN,

In accordance with my pledges made three years ago to again contest the constituency at the first opportunity, I now present myself as the Nominee of the Independent Labour Party.

At the last General Election 2,749 votes were recorded in my favour, after the most strenuous opposition of both political parties. Since that time the principles I advocated have taken deeper root in the minds of the people, misconceptions have been removed, and as a result the aims and objects which I have previously advocated have become better understood. I advocate a policy of constructive Social Reform, which will include amongst other measures the following, viz. :-

1. – A legal Eight Hours Day.
2. – A drastic Employers' Liability Bill, with no contracting out.
3. – Reform of the Poor Laws, including Old Age Pensions.
4. – Measures dealing with the Unemployed, Trade Union, Conditions in Government employment and the making of the Government a Model Employer.
5. – Abolition of Tied Houses and Local Control of the Drink Traffic.
6. – A Free Breakfast Table,
7. – Adult Suffrage and every Vote of Equal Value.
8. – Abolition of the House of Lords.
9. – Self Government for Ireland.
10. – Payment of Members and Election Expenses.
11. – Reform in the Registration Laws.

The Splendid Educational work of the I.L.P. during the past three years encourages a hope that you will accord me your support. In view of the one-sided character of representation to Parliament, and the evil wrought by its undemocratic character, it behoves you to make more effective your claim for legislative consideration. My experience of workmen's organisations, and my connection with the Labour and Trades' Union movements entitles me to consideration as a practical reformer.

The workless, the wealthless, the homeless and the foodless, have first claim on my services. To the cause of the democracy in government and economic readjustment I have devoted my life, and I shall feel special pride in representing the voters of West Bradford in Parliament.

I am, Gentlemen, your faithful Servant,

BEN TILLET.



Woolcombers' Report in 1897 and 'In Darkest Bradford'

9) The Great War and control of prices through the War Emergency Committee taken up by Bradford Trades Council.

10) General Strike of 1926 – caused by an attack upon wages by a capitalist Tory government, the defeat of the General Strike was harmful but at least a warning shot across the bows of employers warned them of the dangers of forcing further reductions and strike action.

11) Value of Trades Council

Conduit for trade union concerns and united action

Close relationship with the Labour Party

Need to protect the poor and need to establish a modern, decent, society in an age when working-class and middle-class people are being denied income and pension rights by a public-school dominated and millionaire dominated and controlled Tory Cabinet who waft gently at the excessive incomes and bonuses of the rich tax-dodgers but take action to keep down the wages and benefits of the poor. Do we want a 'winner take all society' or a society which wishes to represent all its citizens.

Trades council have an important role in this.